

The Online Library of Liberty

A Project Of Liberty Fund, Inc.

Joseph Priestley, *Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* [1791]



The Online Library Of Liberty

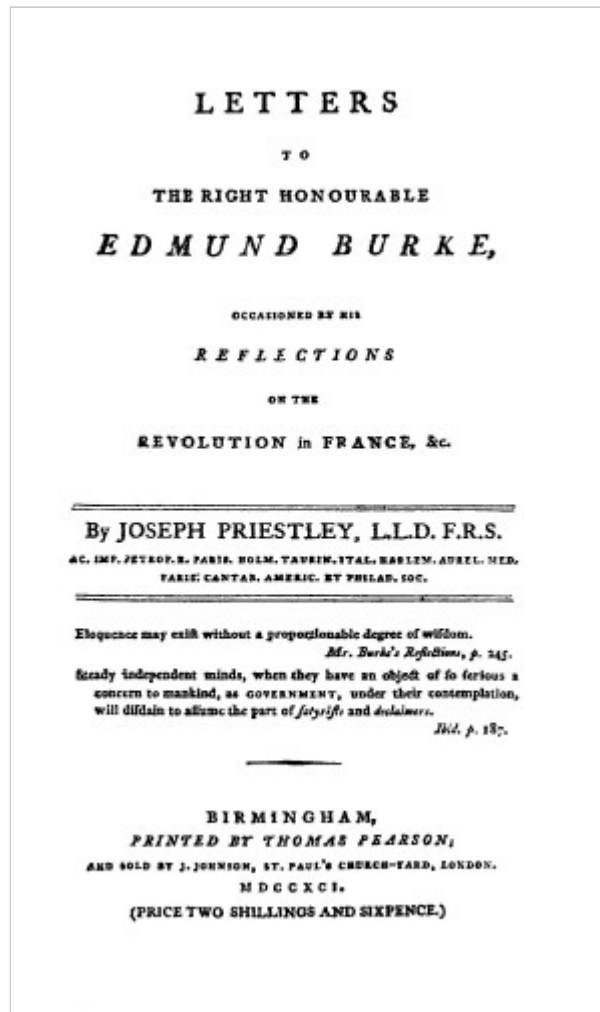
This E-Book (PDF format) is published by Liberty Fund, Inc., a private, non-profit, educational foundation established in 1960 to encourage study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals. 2010 was the 50th anniversary year of the founding of Liberty Fund.

It is part of the Online Library of Liberty web site <http://oll.libertyfund.org>, which was established in 2004 in order to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. To find out more about the author or title, to use the site's powerful search engine, to see other titles in other formats (HTML, facsimile PDF), or to make use of the hundreds of essays, educational aids, and study guides, please visit the OLL web site. This title is also part of the Portable Library of Liberty DVD which contains over 1,000 books and quotes about liberty and power, and is available free of charge upon request.

The cuneiform inscription that appears in the logo and serves as a design element in all Liberty Fund books and web sites is the earliest-known written appearance of the word “freedom” (amagi), or “liberty.” It is taken from a clay document written about 2300 B.C. in the Sumerian city-state of Lagash, in present day Iraq.

To find out more about Liberty Fund, Inc., or the Online Library of Liberty Project, please contact the Director at oll@libertyfund.org.

LIBERTY FUND, INC.
8335 Allison Pointe Trail, Suite 300
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250-1684



Edition Used:

Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France (Birmingham: Thomas Pearson, 1791).

Author: [Joseph Priestley](#)

About This Title:

Priestley supported the early phase of the French Revolution and saw it as an advance in human liberty, thus objecting to Burke's severe criticisms.

About Liberty Fund:

Liberty Fund, Inc. is a private, educational foundation established to encourage the study of the ideal of a society of free and responsible individuals.

Copyright Information:

The text is in the public domain.

Fair Use Statement:

This material is put online to further the educational goals of Liberty Fund, Inc. Unless otherwise stated in the Copyright Information section above, this material may be used freely for educational and academic purposes. It may not be used in any way for profit.

T H E	
C O N T E N T S.	
Letter I. <i>Of the general Principles of the French Revolution</i>	page 1
Letter II. <i>Of some Particulars in the new Constitution of France, and some Circumstances attending the Dissolution of the old one</i>	10
Letter III. <i>Of the Nature of Government, and the Rights of Men and of Kings</i>	22
Letter IV. <i>Of the Revolution in England, compared with that in France</i>	34
Letter V. <i>Of the Revolution Society in England, and Mr. Burke's Reflexions on Dr. Price</i>	43
Letter VI. <i>Of the Interference of the State in Matters of Religion in general</i>	49
Letter VII. <i>Of the Source of the Respect that is paid to Religion</i>	63
Letter VIII. <i>Of a civil Establishment being essential to Christianity</i>	77
Letter VIII. <i>Of the Uses of civil Establishments of Religion</i>	84
	Letter

Table Of Contents

[The Preface.](#)

[Errata.](#)

[Letters to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke.](#)

[Letter I.: Of the General Principles of the French Revolution.](#)

[Letter II.: Of Some Particulars In the New Constitution of France, and Some Circumstances Attending the Dissolution of the Old One.](#)

[Letter III.: Of the Nature of Government, and the Rights of Men and of Kings.](#)

[Letter IV.: Of the Revolution In England Compared With That In France.](#)

[Letter V.: Of the Revolution Society In England, and Mr. Burke's Reflexions On Dr. Price.](#)

[Letter V.: Of the Interference of the State In Matters of Religion In General.](#)

[Letter VI.: Of the Source of the Respect That Is Paid to Religion.](#)

[Letter VII.: Of a Civil Establishment Being Essential to Christianity.](#)

[Letter VIII.: Of the Uses of Civil Establishments of Religion.](#)

[Letter IX.: Of an Elective Clergy.](#)

[Letter X.: Of Monastic Institutions, and Mr. Burke's General Maxim That Existing Powers Are Not to Be Destroyed.](#)

[Letter XI.: Of the Sacredness of the Revenues of the Church.](#)

[Letter XII.: Of the Danger of the Church, and of the Test Laws.](#)

[Letter XIII.: Of the Prospect of the General Enlargement of Liberty, Civil and Religious, Opened By the Revolution In France.](#)

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

THE PREFACE.

OF the numerous readers, and answerers, of Mr. Burke's long expected *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, the attention of the greater part will be chiefly drawn to those passages which more immediately relate to the *civil constitution* of that kingdom. These I have not neglected. But, what I have more particularly replied to, is what he has advanced on *civil establishments of religion*, which makes no small figure in his performance, and which appears to be a subject not generally understood.

It is with very sensible regret that I find Mr. Burke and myself on the two opposite sides of any important question, and especially that I must now no longer class him among the friends of what I deem to be *the cause of liberty, civil or religious*, after having, in a pleasing occasional intercourse of many years, considered him in this respectable light. In the course of his public life, he has been greatly befriended by the Dissenters, many of whom were enthusiastically attached to him; and we always imagined that he was one on whom we could depend, especially as he spoke in our favour in the business of subscription, and he made a common cause with us in zealously patronizing the liberty of America.

That an avowed friend of the American revolution should be an enemy to that of the French, which arose from the same general principles, and in a great measure sprung from it, is to me unaccountable. Nor is it much less difficult to conceive how any person, who has had America in his eye so long as Mr. Burke must necessarily have contemplated it, could be so impressed, as he appears to be, in favour of *ecclesiastical establishments*. That country he sees to flourish as much as any other in the annals of history, without any civil establishment of religion at all. There he must see the civil government goes on very well without it. It neither stands in need of religion, nor does religion stand in need of it. For America is so far from being a country of atheists and unbelievers, that there is, I doubt not, a stronger general sense of religion there than in any other part of the world.

In America also, and indeed in every other part of the known world, except the southern part of this particular island, Mr. Burke sees all civil offices open to persons of all religious persuasions without distinction, and without any inconvenience having been known to arise from it; and yet here he joins with a bigotted clergy, in rigorously confining them to the members of the established church. But even *this* is not so extraordinary as his not scrupling to class all the enemies of establishments with *cheats* and *hypocrites*, as if our opinions were so palpably absurd, that no honest man could possibly entertain them.

Some are disposed to ascribe this change in Mr. Burke's views and politics, to his resentment of the treatment of the *coalition* by the Dissenters. And certainly so *sudden* an union of Mr. Burke and his friends with Lord North, with whom they had been in a state of violent opposition during the whole of the American war, did fill the Dissenters, but not the Dissenters only (for the shock affected the greater part of the nation) with horror. In this it is possible they might have judged wrong, listening to no

reason against the effect of the first unfavourable *impression*; but they certainly acted from the best principles, an attachment to liberty, virtue, and consistency; and they lamented the fall of Mr. Burke, as that of a friend and a brother.

However, the question before the reader, is not the propriety or impropriety of any particular man's conduct, but the wisdom of great measures of government; as whether it be right, and wise, to connect the business of *religion* with that of the *state*, in the manner in which it is done in this country, and whether the French nation is justifiable in their attempts to change their arbitrary form of government for another which they deem to be more favourable to their interests and natural rights.

The question also with respect to *them*, is not whether they have taken the very best methods possible to gain their end, but whether the thing itself was worth their aiming at, and whether they have been those *very great fools* that Mr. Burke makes them to be. After all, mankind in general will judge by the event. If they succeed in establishing a free government, they will be applauded for their *judgment*, as well as for the *spirit* that they have shewn; and if they fail, they will be condemned for their precipitancy and folly. Thus every successful revolt is termed a revolution, and every unsuccessful one a rebellion.

If the principles that Mr. Burke now advances (though it is by no means with perfect consistency) be admitted, mankind are always to be governed as they have been governed, without any enquiry into the *nature*, or *origin*, of their governments. The *choice of the people* is not to be considered, and though their happiness is awkwardly enough made by him the end of government; yet, having no choice, they are not to be the judges of what is for their good. On these principles, the *church*, or the *state*, once established, must for ever remain the same. This is evidently the real scope of Mr. Burke's pamphlet, the principles of it being, in fact, no other than those of *passive obedience and non-resistance*, peculiar to the Tories and the friends of arbitrary power, such as were echoed from the pulpits of all the high church party, in the reigns of the Stuarts, and of Queen Anne. Let them, however, be produced again, and let us see in what manner they will be treated by the good sense and spirit of Englishmen at the present day.

After the first part of these letters relating more immediately to the French Revolution were printed, I had an opportunity of seeing the *Memoir of the Com te De Lally Tollendal*, of whose account of the transaction of the sixth of October, Mr. Burke has availed himself so much, p. 109, &c. calling him "one of the most honest, intelligent, and eloquent members of the National Assembly." I have particularly compared his account of this Assembly, with that of Mr. Burke, p. 24, where he says, "I consider this Assembly as nothing else than a voluntary association of men who have availed themselves of circumstances to seize upon the power of the state, and that they have not the sanction, and authority, of the character under which they first met."

Mr. Tollendal's ideas were certainly very different from these of Mr. Burke. For, speaking of his being chosen a member of the Assembly, he says, p. 5, "it was, without doubt, a great occasion, and a great work, to concur in the regeneration of France, in founding liberty there, and in creating laws and manners*!" What, then,

has the National Assembly done, or attempted to do, more than this, which Mr. Tollendal clearly conceived to have been the design of their meeting? Though he thought proper to leave this Assembly, yet he acknowledges, p. 45, that “the majority of the persons who composed it, had the purest intentions†;” and he speaks in the highest terms of approbation concerning the *declaration of Rights*, which was their first Act. After making some objections respecting the form, more than the substance, he says, p. 125, “it contains all the great principles which are the guards of societies, which maintain the rights of man, and of his dignity, and which secure his tranquility and happiness*.” And these are those *rights of men* which Mr. Burke treats with so much ridicule.

In order to form a judgment whether the National Assembly had actually exceeded their commission, or had undertaken more than was required of them, I also looked into the King of France’s *circular letter for the convocation of the States at Versailles*, dated January 24, 1789, as it is contained in the *New Annual Register*, for 1789, p. 111. According to it, this Assembly was convened “to establish a steady, constant, and invariable order in every part of government, that interested the happiness of the people, and the prosperity of the kingdom; that an effectual remedy might be applied to the disorders of the state, and that abuses of every kind might be reformed and prevented, by good and solid means, proper to insure a permanency of the public happiness.” And lastly, it is said to be “for every thing that might concern the present and future wants of the state.”

Again, in the *King’s letter to the President of the Assembly*, dated May 28, 1789, he says, “I cannot see without pain the National Assembly, which I have called together, to be concerned with me in the new regulation of the kingdom, sunk into inaction; which if continued, would cause all the hopes which I have formed for the happiness of my people, and the benefit of the state to prove abortive.”

Certainly, therefore, in the opinion of the King, as well as that of the whole nation, there was a want of a total reform in the constitution of the French government, and this reform was expected from the National Assembly. This is the very thing which they are endeavouring to effect, and in which they have made considerable progress. What they have done gives the greatest pleasure to the friends of universal liberty, though unfortunately it gives pain to Mr. Burke, and some others.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

ERRATA.

N. B. (*b*) signifies from the bottom.

Page 1, l. 7, for *of* read *in*.

33, l. 5 (*b*) — *term* — *terms*.

41, l. 7 (*b*) — *with* — *with the*.

43, l. 4 (*b*) — *the* — *a*.

45, l. 2 (*b*) — *all* — *of*.

50, l. 5, — *at* — *as*.

61, l. 7, — *at* — *up*.

85, l. 6, — *of* — *out of*.

92, l. 6, — *unstrained* — *unrestrained*.

109, l. 7, — *of the* — *of*.

121, l. 8 (*b*) — *being* — *been*.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTERS TO THE RIGHT HONOURABLE *EDMUND BURKE*.

LETTER I.

Of The General Principles Of The French Revolution.

Dear Sir,

I Do not wonder that the late revolution of the French government, has excited *your* attention, and that of a great part of the nation. “It is,” as you justly say, p. 11, “all circumstances taken together, the most astonishing that has hitherto happened in the world.” It is, therefore, a most interesting object both to philosophical and practical politicians. It behoves them to consider the principles on which it has been made, that if the conduct of the leaders in the business has been right, and if the scheme promises to be beneficial to the country, it may, as far as their situations are similar, be imitated in other countries; and that, if their conduct has been wrong, and the result of it unpromising, the example may serve to deter others from any attempt of the like kind.

But though there is nothing extraordinary in this revolution having excited so much of your *attention*, I am surprised that you should be so much *alarmed* and *disturbed* at it. You appear to me not to be sufficiently cool to enter into this serious discussion. Your imagination is evidently heated, and your ideas confused. The objects before you do not appear in their proper shapes and colours; and, without denying them, you lose sight of the great and the leading principles, on which all just governments are founded, principles which I imagined had been long settled, and universally assented to, at least by all who are denominated *whigs*, the friends of our own revolution, and of that which has lately taken place in America. To this class of politicians, you have hitherto professed to belong, and traces of these principles may be perceived in this work of yours.

Notwithstanding “the sacredness,” as you call it, p. 29, “of an hereditary principle of succession,” in our government, you allow of “a power of change in its application in cases of extreme emergency;” adding, however, that “the change should be confined to the *peccant part* only.” Nor do you deny that the great end and object of all government, that which makes it preferable to a state of anarchy, is the good of the people. It is *better* for them, and they are *happier* in a state of government. For the same reason, you must allow that that particular form of government, which is best adapted to promote the happiness of any people, is the best for that people.

If you admit thus much, you must also allow that, since every private person is justified in bettering his condition, and indeed commended for it; a nation is not to be condemned for endeavouring to better theirs. Consequently, if they find their form of government to be a bad one, whether it was so originally, or became so through abuse

or accident, they will do very well to change it for a better. A partial change, no doubt, will be preferable to a total one, if a partial change will be sufficient for the purpose. But if it appear that all attempts to mend an old constitution would be in vain, and the people prefer a new one, their neighbours have no more business to find fault with them, than with any individual, who should think it more adviseable to pull down an old and inconvenient house, and build another from the foundation, rather than lay out his money in repairs. Nations, no doubt, as well as individuals, may judge wrong. They may act precipitately, and they may suffer in consequence of it: but this is only a reason for caution, and does not preclude a right of judging and acting for themselves, in the best manner they can.

“The very idea,” you say, p. 44, “of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror.” It is, no doubt, far from being a thing desirable in itself; but it may nevertheless be necessary; and for all the evils arising from the change, you should blame not the framers of the new government, but the wretched state of the old one, and those who brought it into that state. That some very material change was wanting in the old government of France, you cannot deny, after allowing, p. 195, that “in that country the unlimited power of the sovereign over the persons of his subjects, was inconsistent with law and liberty.” On other occasions, I believe you have expressed yourself in a stronger manner than this. If *law* and *liberty* were wanting in the old constitution, the peccant part must have been the very foundation of it; so that nothing effectual could have been done short of taking down the whole.

If these incontrovertible *principles* and *facts* be admitted, I can see no reason for your exclaiming so violently as you do against the late revolution in France. Besides, whatever has been done, and in whatever manner it has been done, if the nation itself, whom alone it concerns, do not complain, we have no business to complain for them, any farther than the interest we take in the welfare of others, may lead us to feel for the distresses which we apprehend their folly and precipitancy may bring upon them. I shall, however, briefly consider the principal of your objections to this revolution.

You consider the present National Assembly of France as usurpers, assuming a power that does not belong to them. “I can never,” you say, p. 242, “consider this assembly as any thing else than a voluntary association of men, who have availed themselves of circumstances to seize upon the power of the state. They have not the sanction and authority of the character under which they first met. They have assumed another, of a very different nature, and have completely altered and inverted all the relations in which they originally stood. They do not hold the authority they exercise under any constitutional law of the state. They have departed from the instructions of the people by whom they were sent, which instructions, as the assembly did not act in virtue of any ancient usage or settled law, were the sole source of their authority.”

Now, Sir, even allowing this to be true; admitting this National Assembly to have had no regular summons to meet, or to do any business at all; supposing them to have been men who rose out of the earth, or who dropped down from the clouds, or that no body could tell whence they came, and that, without any authority whatever, they took upon themselves to frame a new constitution of government for the French nation; if

the nation really approve of it, acquiesce in it, and actually adopt it, it becomes from that time their own act, and the Assembly can only be considered as the proposers and advisers. It is the acquiescence of the people that gives any form of government its proper sanction, and that legalizes it. Changes of government cannot be brought about by established forms and rules, because there is no superior power to prescribe those rules. There are no supreme courts comprehending these great objects. Also, the cases occur so rarely, and they are so unlike to one another, that it would be to no purpose to look for precedents.

Now, that the French revolution is justifiable on this plain principle, is evident from the single circumstance of the National Assembly having continued their sittings without molestation, and from their decrees having been actually obeyed, for something more than a year at least. This Assembly does not consist, I believe, of more than about one thousand persons, and at first they had no army at their command; whereas at present the whole force of the state is in their hands. This force could not have been transferred from the king to them, without the consent both of the army, and of the nation which supports that army. As the nation does not complain of this translation of power, it is evident they do not think themselves aggrieved, and that the change has been made with their approbation. Here, then, we see all the marks of a *legal government*, or a government that is really the *choice of the people*. I do not say what difficulties may hereafter arise (which if they do, they will probably be the effect of their former government) to induce them to change their opinion. For neither that nation, nor any other, is omniscient and infallible.

Without examining into the former system of government, or the administration of it, we may take for granted, that it must have become extremely odious to the country in general, from the almost universal, and the very hearty, concurrence with which the revolution was brought about. A whole people is not apt to revolt, till oppression has become extreme, and been long continued, so that they despair of any other remedy than that desperate one. The strength of an established government, especially when it is in few hands, and has a large standing army at its command, is almost infinite; so that many nations quietly suffer every evil, and the country becomes in a manner desolate, without their making any attempt to relieve themselves. This is the case in all the Turkish dominions, and is said to be very nearly so in Spain and other countries. Whenever, therefore, we see a whole nation, or a great majority of it, rising as one man against an old government, and overturning it, we may safely conclude that their provocation was great, and their cause good.

An oppressed people do not, however, in general see any thing more than what they immediately feel. All they think of is to shake off the load which they can no longer bear; and having thought of nothing but the particular evil that galled them, they are very apt, in their future settlement, to guard against that only, without attending to the whole of their new situation, and the greater evils that may possibly arise from it. Whether the French have done so or not, time must discover. But if the people in general are well informed, and well disposed, they may make many experiments of new forms of government without much inconvenience; and though beginning with a very imperfect one, they may adopt a very good one at the last.

Was it not predicted that the Americans, on their breaking off from this country, would run into universal confusion, and immediately fall to cutting one another's throats? But though that disruption was a violent one, and was effected by a war, which drained all their resources, they never suffered for want of government. When the war was over they bore very contentedly several imperfect and disjointed forms; and now, having taken much time to deliberate on the subject, they have adopted a more comprehensive one. But of this they only propose to make a trial, and if it should not answer, they will, no doubt, endeavour to improve upon it.

Now, why may not this be the case with the French, especially as they have no enemies to contend with, and interrupt their proceedings. I do not, I own, distinctly perceive the wisdom of several parts of the frame of government, at present adopted by the National Assembly, and many of the remarks that you have made upon it, may, for any thing that I know, be very just; but not being a judge of their circumstances, and consequently of all their reasons, I presume that they could not for the present do any better. In future time, however, whatever it be that is now deficient may be supplied. And considering the apparent strength of the ancient French government, and the great numbers that depended upon it (far more, I should imagine, than upon our court and ministry in this country) I wonder that the revolution was brought about with so much ease, and so little bloodshed.

I Am, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER II.

Of Some Particulars In The New Constitution Of France, And Some Circumstances Attending The Dissolution Of The Old One.

Dear Sir,

IT is very possible that the National Assembly, having entered upon the business of reforming the whole state in a very unexpected manner, when nothing could have been preconcerted, may have acted injudiciously in more respects than one; but allowance should be made for their peculiar circumstances. The opportunity that was given them to act was sudden, and such as they might in vain have waited for, if they had done nothing till they had been prepared to make the most of it. They did right, therefore, to do the best they could, as the occasion offered.

They might, for example, have divided themselves into two houses, and, as in this country, have given each house a negative in all their transactions, and another to the king. But this might have appeared too hazardous at that time; and indeed it is very probable that, upon that plan, nothing effectual could have been done at all. But they may adopt this method if they should hereafter see reason for it. Power is more easily given than taken away.

That they have nothing of the nature of a *Senate*, as you complain, p. 287, I do not see; while they still retain a king, and allow him to appoint certain ministers of state.

They may have left too little power in the hands of the crown; but kingly power is a plant which, having once taken root, is very apt to grow too luxuriant; and this, though lopped, may sprout again. As the French kings had gradually acquired, and grossly abused, their power, it is not to be wondered at, if, in the first instance, the Assembly should have reduced it too low.

You particularly complain, p. 296, of the king not having the power of peace and war. But was ever any power more grossly abused than this has been? Infinite have been the evils brought upon whole countries, by princes having it in their power to involve them in war at their pleasure, from motives of personal resentment and ambition, or the mere caprice of those about them; and in France generally that of their mistresses.

“There is no other way,” you say, p. 296, “of keeping other potentates from intriguing distinctly and personally with the members of your assembly, from intermeddling in all your concerns, and fomenting in the heart of your country the most pernicious of all factions; factions in the interest, and under the direction, of foreign powers.” But even *this* is nothing, compared with the evils that states have suffered from the power of peace and war being in the hands of the prince, that is, of his ministers; and cannot

foreign powers intrigue with *them* as well as with the leaders of a popular assembly? Did not the court of France intrigue with the ministry of our Charles II. and is it not always done, more or less, by all ambassadors and their agents in all foreign courts? But if any people was fairly represented in a National Assembly, so that their real interests should be better consulted, causes of war would seldom occur, and consequently there would be but little temptation to foreigners to intermeddle in their concerns. For it has been peace or war that has been the chief subject of the intrigues that you complain of.

The most serious difficulty that appears to me to threaten the French government, arises from their *debts*, a difficulty brought upon them by their former government, and which indeed made it impossible to go on any farther with it. This, therefore, is a difficulty that does not necessarily attend the formation of the new government, but has been occasioned by the unwillingness of the present governors, that those who have had confidence in the state, should suffer from the errors of their predecessors. It is the case of an heir, who will put himself to great inconvenience to pay the debts of a profligate ancestor.

You cavil, among other things, at the low rank of the members of the National Assembly; saying, p. 61, "That the majority are of the inferior, unlearned, mechanical, merely instrumental, members of the profession of the law," that is, such as our attorneys. "From the moment," you say, "I read the list, I saw distinctly, and very nearly as it has happened, all that was to follow. It was not to be expected," you say, p. 63, "that they would attend to the stability of property, whose existence had always depended upon whatever rendered property questionable, ambiguous, and obscure."

I shall not call in question your gift of prophecy. It may be your peculiar talent to see all events, past, present, and to come, in their most concealed causes, nor shall I question what you assert to be a fact. But of whomsoever the National Assembly of France consists, there cannot well be a doubt of their being a truer representation of the French nation than our House of Commons, because there cannot well be a worse, being in the opinion of most people, I doubt not, as well as that of Dr. Price, a mere *mockery of representation*, notwithstanding the influence of those causes which I acknowledge to give it the effect of a much better representation.

It signifies very little out of what class of men the members of the National Assembly were chosen, since they must have been persons in whom their constituents thought they could best confide. But if your reasoning be good, that lawyers, "whose existence depends upon rendering property questionable, ambiguous, and obscure," will not attend to the stability of property, where is our policy in raising such men to the rank of judges? We do not think our property less safe in their hands, because they have always lived by what has been called the *glorious uncertainty of the law*. The first American Congress, I very well remember, was said to consist chiefly of lawyers; nor is it to be wondered at that it should be so; lawyers, who have the talent and the habit of speaking in public, being generally conspicuous characters in all places. The study of the law, moreover, leads them to understand the constitution of the country, and their profession gives them a knowledge of mankind, and the habits of business. If the lawyers of France do as well as the lawyers of America, they will soon wipe away the

reproach they may now lie under, and become the object of respect, perhaps of dread, to those who at present despise them.

It is amusing to compare the sentiments of different writers on the same subject, and to observe in how different a light the same thing appears to different minds. I cannot give a better illustration of this, than by quoting what Dr. Ramsay, in his *History of the American Revolution*, says of the first Congress, as a contrast to what you say of the National Assembly of France.

“Of the whole number of deputies which formed the Continental Congress of 1774, one half were lawyers; gentlemen of that profession had acquired the confidence of the inhabitants by their exertions in the common cause. The previous measures in the respective provinces, had been planned and carried into effect more by lawyers than by any other order of men. Professionally taught the rights of the people, they were among the foremost to decry every attack made on their liberties. Bred in the habits of public speaking, they made a distinguished figure in the meetings of the people, and were particularly able to explain to them the tendency of the late acts of parliament. Exerting their abilities and influence in the cause of their country, they were rewarded with its confidence,” vol. 1. p. 134.

The mistakes you have fallen into, with respect to the present government of France, I am informed are gross, and your censures founded on them, of course, misplaced. You particularly amuse yourself and your readers with the division of the country, p. 254, into squares, and a sub-division of squares within squares, which has no existence but in your own imagination, the actual division of the country being no more squares than our counties.

Taking it for granted, that the present members of the National Assembly are not eligible into the next, you deduce many alarming consequences from such an ill-judged measure. But the measure is your own, not theirs; the present members being as eligible as any others, and, it is generally supposed, that a great majority of them have given so much satisfaction to their constituents, that they will not fail to be re-elected. As you took so much time in preparing your publication for the press, you would have done well to have employed part of it in procuring better information. However, your mistakes will be the means of our getting more correct accounts of the real state of facts; and if any of your censures on the new constitution of France be just, they may be an useful and seasonable lesson to the great actors in the scene; who, I doubt not, will readily learn what they can, even from an enemy.

You make the most tragical representation of the degraded state of the present king of France, calling it, p. 99, “the most horrid, atrocious, and afflicting spectacle, that perhaps ever was exhibited to the pity and indignation of mankind,” considering him as a person who received his crown, with all its powers, from his ancestors, and who had himself done nothing to deserve the treatment that he met with. Admitting this, if by a succession of incroachments, the power of *the crown itself* had long been enormous, should that be continued, to the terror and distress of the country, for the sake of the innocent head that happens to wear it. And, after all, what has this king suffered? He is still the first in rank, wealth, and power of any person in France. If

you say that this power is only nominal, I answer that the power of the most arbitrary princes is little more. They are, in general, only instruments in the hands of those who are about them. As to doing what a man really wishes to do, the last king of France had very little of it; and in general, the higher any man stands in the order of society, the less power he has of doing what he really likes, and the more of his time he spends in doing what he had rather wish not to do, than other men.

You make a still more lamentable description of the indignities offered to the queen of France; and on this subject you give the most unbounded scope to your eloquence^{*}, as if you were her *knight*, pledged to defend her honour. Now, such is the natural prepossession of mankind, at least in this part of the world (in which the French nation has generally been considered as foremost) in favour of the female sex, and especially in exalted stations, that I think it will not be easy to account for the fall of this queen from the height of popularity, to the abhorrence and contempt into which, you tell us, she is sunk, without supposing something very material to her prejudice, though I do not pretend to say what that is. And if she was that intriguing woman, and that enemy to their liberties, that the French nation in general imagine her to have been, she may think herself fortunate, in such a revolution as this has been, to have escaped with life. But, after all, is the liberty and happiness of a whole nation to be sacrificed to female beauty and complaisance?

Objects appear in very different lights to different persons, according to their respective situations, and the opportunities they have of observing them. To you, Sir, seventeen years ago, the queen of France, then the Dauphiness, appeared in all her splendour, like “the morning star,” p. 112, decorating the face of heaven. To the French themselves, at that time, she probably appeared in the same light; but in the course of so many years progress, she has appeared to them to be nothing better than *a comet*, foreboding every disaster, and bringing desolation and ruin on their country. You saw nothing but the fine features, and imagined them to belong to a Venus, a Juno, or a Pallas. The French, it seems, have discovered the *snaky hair*, and find her to be a mere Medusa; and the ten thousand swords,” that you say were then ready “to leap from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult,” would now be drawn against any who would defend her conduct.

You will probably say that something, at least, should have been *proved* against the queen of France, as well as against the king. But where, Sir, was the court of law, or justice, in which such a suit could be instituted? When there are no ordinary means of redressing grievances, people who feel them, and have no other remedy, will have recourse to extraordinary ones; and if thirty millions find their interests incompatible with that of a few, they, of course, being the judges, will not hesitate to decide for themselves, and carry that decision into execution. In this they will, no doubt, proceed *irregularly*. But you, Sir, should have been upon the spot, and have told them how to proceed in that *grave and decorous manner*, in which you now say they ought to have acted on this great occasion; and at the same time have obtained effectual redress of their grievances. For without this, they would have done worse than nothing.

Kings and ministers of state are alone responsible for all the confusion and bloodshed which attend those revolutions which their abuse of power has rendered necessary.

They choak up the ordinary channels of justice, and then complain that it overflows its bounds, and that the country is deluged by it. They who first raise a storm are answerable for all the devastation that it may make.

You lay to the charge of the National Assembly what, it is evident, they never authorised, and what, I doubt not, they condemn and regret, even more than you do. “Their cruelty, you say, p. 58, has not been even the base result of fear. It has been the effect of their sense of perfect safety, in authorising treasons, robberies, rapes, assassinations, slaughters, and burnings, throughout their harrassed land. But the cause of all was plain from the beginning. This unforced choice, this fond election, of evil, would appear perfectly unaccountable, if we did not consider the composition of the National Assembly, &c.”

This, Sir, is charging upon the National Assembly every outrage committed by Frenchmen (and more, I believe, than ever were committed by them) which were any way connected with the revolution. But is this equitable? Should any thing be laid to the charge of any man, or any body of men, to which they were no way accessory, by their concurrence at the time, or their approbation afterwards? Was the execution of persons particularly obnoxious to the populace, and effected by the populace, to be ascribed to the National Assembly? Or were the insults which you have so pathetically described, as offered to your adorable queen of France, done by the orders of that body? You must know that they were as innocent of them as the parliament of Great Britain, or as yourself. When any murder is committed, is the first person that you chuse to lay hold of, the guilty person?

In the same rash and indiscriminate manner you describe Dr. Price as exulting in the above-mentioned horrid outrages, which, I dare say, give him much more serious concern than they do you, and for a very obvious reason. He wishes to recommend the revolution, and therefore is sorry for every thing that disgraces it; whereas you wish to discredit it, and are evidently not displeased with any circumstance that favours your purpose. Dr. Price rejoices in the *good*, and you most uncandidly represent him as rejoicing in the *evil* that has necessarily accompanied it.

I Am, Dear Sir, Yours, &c.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER III.

Of The Nature Of Government, And The Rights Of Men And Of Kings.

Dear Sir,

CONSIDERING how much has been written on the subject of government since the Revolution in this country, an event which more than any thing else contributed to open the eyes of Englishmen, with respect to the true principles of it, it is not a little extraordinary that any man of reading and reflexion, as you are, should depart from them so much as you have done.

To vindicate this Revolution, Lord Somers, Bishop Hoadley, Mr. Locke, and many others, have laid it down as a maxim, that all power in any state is derived from the people, and that the great object of all government, is the public good. As a consequence from these fundamental principles, they maintain that all magistrates, being originally appointed by the people, are answerable to them for their conduct in office, and removeable at their pleasure. The right of resisting an oppressive government, that is, such as the people shall deem to be oppressive, they hold most sacred.

You, Sir, do not directly, and in so many words, deny these great principles of all government, or the general conclusion drawn from them. In fact, you admit them all, when you allow, p. 87, that “civil society is made for the advantage of man.” But you advance what is really inconsistent with these leading principles, and you would tie up our hands from making any effectual use of them. You seem to have forgotten what you must have formerly learned; but it is too late for *us* to go to school again, and relearn the first elements of political science. What our predecessors took great pains to *prove*, we now receive as *axioms*, and without hesitation act upon them.

To make the *public good* the standard of right or wrong, in whatever relates to society and government, besides being the most natural and rational of all rules, has the farther recommendation of being the easiest of application. Either what *God has ordained*, or what *antiquity* authorises, may be very difficult to ascertain; but what regulation is most conducive to the *public good*, though not always without its difficulties, yet in general it is much more easy to determine. But suppose a nation should never have had a free government, or could not prove that they ever had one, are they for that reason always to continue slaves? Would it be unlawful, or wrong, in the Turks to do what the French nation has now done?

You treat with ridicule the idea of the *rights of men*, and suppose that mankind, when once they have entered into a state of society, necessarily abandon all their proper *natural rights*, and thenceforth have only such as they derive from society. “As to the

share of power,” you say, p. 87, “authority and direction, which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I must deny to be among the direct original rights of man in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil, social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention.”

But what does this *convention* respect, beside the secure enjoyment of such *advantages*, or *rights*, as have been usually termed *natural*, as life, liberty, and property, which men had *from nature*, without societies, or artificial combinations of men? Men cannot, surely, be said to *give up* their natural rights by entering into a compact for the better *securing* of them? And if they make a wise compact, they will never wholly exclude themselves from all share in the administration of their government, or some control over it. For without this their stipulated rights would be very insecure.

However, should any people be so unwise as to leave the whole administration of their government, without any express right of control, in the hands of their magistrates; if those magistrates do not give the people what they deem to be an equivalent for what they gave up for the accommodation of others, they are certainly at liberty to consider the original compact as broken. They then revert to a state of nature, and may enter into a new state of society, and adopt a new form of government, in which they may make better terms for themselves.

It is one of the most curious paradoxes in this work of yours, which abounds with them, that the rights of men above-mentioned, called by you, p. 91, “the pretended rights of the French theorists, are all extremes, and in proportion as they are metaphysically true, they are morally and politically false.” Now by *metaphysically* true can only be meant *strictly* and *properly* true, and how this can be in any sense *false*, is to me incomprehensible. If the above-mentioned rights be the *true*, that is the *just*, and *reasonable* rights of men, they ought to be provided for in all states, and all forms of government; and if they be not, the people have just cause to complain, and to look out for some mode of redress.

You strongly reprobate the doctrine of *kings being the choice of the people*, a doctrine advanced, but not first advanced, by Dr. Price, in his Revolution Sermon. “This doctrine,” you say, p. 17, “as applied to the prince now on the British throne, is either nonsense, and therefore neither true nor false, or it affirms a most unfounded, dangerous, illegal, and unconstitutional position. According to this spiritual doctor of politics, if his majesty does not owe his crown to the choice of his people, he is no *lawful* king, &c.”

On the same principle you equally reprobate the doctrine of the king being the *servant of the people*, whereas the law, as you say, p. 41, calls him *our sovereign lord the king**. But since you allow, *ibid.* that “kings are in one sense, undoubtedly, the servants of the people, because their power has no other rational end than that of the general advantage,” it is evident that it is only Dr. Price’s *words* that you quarrel with. Your *ideas* are, in fact, the very same with his, though you call his doctrine, p. 35, not only *unconstitutional*, but *seditious*; adding, that “it is now publicly taught, avowed,

and printed,” whereas it was taught, avowed, and even printed, before either you or Dr. Price were born.

Has not the chief magistrate in every country, as well as the chief officer in every town, a certain *duty* to perform, with certain emoluments, and *privileges*, allowed him in consideration of the proper discharge of that duty? And if the town officer, though having chief authority in his district, yet, in consequence of being appointed and paid for his services by the town, is never considered in any other light than that of the *servant of the town*, is not the chief magistrate in any country, let him be called *sovereign*, *king*, or what you please (for that is only a name) the *servant of the people*? What real difference can there be in the two cases? They each discharge a certain duty, and have a certain stipulated reward for it. The office being *hereditary*, makes no real difference. In our laws, and those of other nations, there are precedents enough of men’s whole estates being confiscated for crimes; and this of course excludes the heir.

If, as you expressly acknowledge, the only rational end of the “power of a king is the *general advantage*, that is, the *good of the people*, must not the people be, of course, the judges, whether they derive advantage from him and his government or not, that is, whether they be well or ill *served* by him? Though, there is no express, there is, you must acknowledge a virtual, *contract between the king and the people*. This, indeed, is particularly mentioned in the Act which implies the abdication of king James, though you say, p. 38, it is *too guarded and too circumstantial*; and what can this contract be, but a stipulation for protection, &c. on the part of the king, and allegiance on the part of the people? If, therefore, instead of *protection*, they find *oppression*, certainly allegiance is no longer due. Hence, according to common sense, and the principles of the Revolution, the right of a subject to resist a tyrant, and dethrone him; and what is this, but in other words, shocking as they may sound to your ears, dismissing, or *cashiering a bad servant*, as a person who had abused his trust?

So fascinating is the situation in which our kings are placed, that it is of great importance to remind them of the true relation they bear to the people, or, as they are fond of calling them, *their people*. They are too apt to imagine that their rights are independent of the will of the people, and consequently that they are not accountable to them for any use they may make of their power; and their numerous dependents, and especially the clergy, are too apt to administer this pleasing intoxicating poison. This was the ruin of the Stuarts, and it is a danger that threatens every prince, and every country, from the same quarter. Your whole book, Sir, is little else than a vehicle for the same poison, inculcating, but inconsistently enough, a principle of *respect for princes*, independent of their being originally the choice of the people, as if they had some natural and indefeasible right to reign over us, they being born to command, and we to obey; and then, whether the origin of this power be divine, or have any other source independent of the people, it makes no difference to us.

With the superstitious respect for kings, and the spirit of chivalry, which nothing but an age of extreme barbarism recommended, and which civilization has banished, you seem to think that every thing great and dignified has left us, “Never, never more,”

you say, p. 113, “shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, that kept alive even in servitude itself the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprize, is gone. It is gone; that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated serocity, which enobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil, by losing all its grossness.”

This is perhaps the most admired passage in your whole performance; but it appears to me, that in a great pomp of *words*, it contains but few *ideas*, and some of them inconsistent and absurd. So different also are men’s feelings, from the difference, no doubt, of our educations, and the different sentiments we voluntarily cherish through life, that a situation which gives you the idea of *pride*, gives me that of *meanness*. You are proud of what, in my opinion, you ought to be ashamed, the idolatry of a fellow creature, and the abasement of yourself. It discovers a disposition from which no “manly sentiment, or heroic enterprize” can be expected. I submit to a king, or to any other civil magistrate, because the good order of society requires it, but I feel no *pride* in that *submission*; and the “subordination of my heart,” I reserve for *character* only, not for *station*. As a citizen, the object of my respect is *the nation*, and *the laws*. The *magistrates*, by whatever name they are called, I respect only as the confidential servants of the nation, and the administrators of the laws.

These sentiments, just in themselves, and savouring of no superstition, appear to me to become men, whom nature has made equal, and whose great object, when formed into societies, it should be to promote their common happiness. I am proud of feeling myself *a man among men*, and I leave it you, Sir, to be “proud of your *obedience*, and to keep alive,” as well as you can, “in servitude itself the spirit of an exalted freedom.” I think it much easier, at least, to be preserved *out* of a state of servitude than *in* it. You take much pains to gild your chains, but they are chains still.

If, Sir, you profess this “generous loyalty, this proud submission, this dignified obedience, and this subordination of the heart,” both to *rank and sex*, how concentrated and exalted must be the sentiment, where rank and sex are united! What an *exalted freedom* would you have felt, had you had the happiness of being a subject of the Empress of Russia; your sovereign, being then a *woman*? Fighting under her auspices, you would no doubt, have been the most puissant of knights errant, and her redoubted champion, against the whole Turkish empire, the sovereign of which is only a *man*.

“It is to no purpose to say,” as you do, p. 19, “that the king of Great Britain reigns at this day by a fixed rule of succession, according to the laws of his country, and that he holds his crown in contempt of the choice of the Revolution society, which has not a single vote for a king among them, either individually or collectively;” when you acknowledge that “all the kingdoms of Europe were, at a remote period, elective,” and that “the present king holds his rank no longer than while the legal conditions of the compact of sovereignty are performed by him.” This, Sir, is granting all that we, seditious as our doctrine is, contend for. Here is, according to yourself, a certain

condition on which kings reign. If, therefore, that condition be not performed, the obligation of allegiance is discharged.

Though we do not chuse any particular king, the nation originally chose to be *governed by kings*, with such limitations, with respect to their duty and prerogatives, as they then chose to prescribe. And whether the departure from the original and proper duty of a king be made at once, or by degrees, which has generally been the case; and though the people may have been restrained by their circumstances from checking the incroachments of their kings, the *right* of doing it must ever remain inherent in them. They must always have a power of resuming what themselves gave, when the condition on which it was given is not performed. They can surely recal a trust that has been abused, and reinstate themselves in their former situation, or in a better, if they can find one.

If there be, what you allow, a *compact of sovereignty*, who are the *parties*, but the *people* and the *king*; and if the compact be broken on his side, are not the rank and the privileges, which he held upon the condition of observing the term of the compact, forfeited? “The rule of succession,” you say, “is according to the laws of his country.” But what, according to yourself, is the origin of both our common and statute law?

“Both these descriptions of law,” you say, p. 28, “are of the same force, and are derived from an equal authority, emanating from the common agreement, and original compact of the state (*communi sponsione reipublicæ*) and as such are equally binding on king and people too, as long as the terms are observed, and they continue the the same body politic.” Laws, then, not coming down from heaven, but being made by men, may also be changed by them; and what is a *constitution of government*, but the *greater laws* of the state? Kings, therefore, as well as the people, may violate these laws, by which they are equally bound, and if other violators of law be punishable, by degradation or otherwise, why should kings be excepted? Are *their* violations of the law or the constitution, less injurious to the commonwealth than those of other transgressors? Let the punishment of kings be as *grave* and *decorous*, p. 23, as you please, but let justice, substantial justice, be done.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER IV.

Of The Revolution In England Compared With That In France.

Dear Sir,

IT is impossible to consider the late Revolution in France without having in our eye that which took place in England in 1688. This has had so much of the cordial approbation of all classes of people here, at least all those who are denominated *whigs*, that you found yourself under the necessity of approving of it. But you wish to distinguish between the principles on which the great actors in that memorable event proceeded, and those of the National Assembly in France. The promoters of the English Revolution, you would have us understand, were not guided by any view to the *natural* (or, as you affect to call them, the *chimerical*) *rights of men*, but were influenced by a regard to rights sanctioned by *ancient possession*, and consequently that their example furnishes no authority for any people to chuse their own governors, or to dismiss them for misconduct.

You appeal to *Lord Somers*, p. 27, for the principles of the English Revolution. Let his writings, then, explain his sentiments on the nature of government. Now the very title page of a tract generally ascribed to him, entitled, *the Judgment of whole Kingdoms and Nations concerning the Rights, Power, and Prerogative of Kings, and the Rights, Privileges, and Properties of the People*, asserts, that “all magistrates and governors proceed from the people.” This he proves at large in the course of the work, in which he shows, as an inference from this great principle, that the people, when oppressed, are justifiable in relieving themselves by a change of their governors, or of their government; exploding, in a variety of lights, the slavish doctrine, to use his own terms, of *passive obedience and loyalty*.

One of the most extraordinary of your assertions, with respect to the Revolution in England, is the following, “So far,” you say, p. 27, “is it from being true, that we acquired a right by the Revolution to elect our kings, that if we had possessed it before, the English nation did at that time most solemnly renounce and abdicate it for themselves, and for all their posterity, for ever.” But could they seriously mean to bind their posterity from ever doing again what they themselves then did? Did they not by changing the natural succession of the kings of this realm, actually *exercise* the right of chusing kings, declaring what description of persons should from that time succeed to the crown? And what any one parliament did, a succeeding one might, no doubt, undo.

But that no such thing as a renunciation of a right to do any thing of this kind, was really meant by the legislature of that age, is evident from the Act of the sixth of Queen Anne, pointed out to Dr. Price, by Lord Stanhope, from which it appears that

your assertion is even nothing less than *high treason*. The words of the Act are as follows, “If any person shall, by writing or printing, maintain, and affirm, that the kings or queens of this realm, with and by the authority of Parliament, are not able to make laws and statutes of sufficient validity, to limit the crown, and the descent, inheritance, and government thereof, every such person shall be guilty of high treason.”

Far am I from wishing to bring you into any serious inconvenience by representing you as having offended against the laws of your country; but I wish it may serve as a hint, to pay more attention to the great principles of our constitution, as well as to the universal principles of government, and the *rights of men*, offensive as the term may be to you, for the future.

You say, p. 31. “The gentlemen of the *society for revolutions*” (as you contemptuously call it) “see nothing of that in 1688, but the deviation from the constitution; and they take the deviation from the principle, for the principle.” Let us then consider the simple *fact*, that we may discover the true *principle* of the proceeding, and examine the justice of your complaint. A king had abused his trust, and, in the construction of the remaining governing powers of the country, had virtually *abdicated the government*. According to the established rule of succession, his son should have succeeded him, but they apprehended the same evils from the son, which they had experienced from the father, and likewise from all princes of the same description with the father, that is, all who should profess the Roman Catholic religion. They therefore, made a law to exclude all such princes, and fixed the succession in the nearest Protestant line. But, in conjunction with the first of this line, they chose a person entirely foreign to it, who had no legal pretensions to the crown at all, being only the husband of Queen Mary, as Prince George of Denmark was of Queen Anne.

Here, then, was a *choice* made, both of a particular king *pro tempore*, and also of a *new line of succession* for future kings. Certainly, therefore, if the conduct of our ancestors in that period be any precedent for future proceedings, it authorizes the people of this country not only to make any change in the rule of succession to the crown, but to do whatever they shall think necessary for the redress of their grievances. This was unquestionably the proper *reason, motive, principle, or rule*, of their conduct; and to act upon it in any future time cannot with propriety be called taking “the deviation from their principle for the principle.” To do any thing else that shall be deemed necessary to remove any present evils, and to prevent the recurrence of them, would be doing no more than they would have done in our circumstances.

Considering the reverence that is always paid to whatever is *ancient*, it is certainly wise in any nation to preserve old institutions as long as they are tolerable, because the people will bear with them better than with new ones. This principle no doubt, influenced our ancestors at the Revolution, and at other times. They contented themselves with removing the pressing grievance, and kept as near to the ancient system as they could. At the Revolution, there was no occasion for any thing more, at least the country would not bear any thing more, than a deviation from the line of

succession to the crown, leaving the Popish, and adopting the Protestant line. But if more had been wanted, they would certainly have done more.

You call the Revolution, p. 24, “an act of necessity.” But, what was it that made it necessary? On what *political principle* was the necessity founded? Was it not deemed necessary because the people apprehended that their liberties, and consequently their happiness, were endangered by the measures of the king; and therefore, though, as you justly say, p. 44, “a revolution is the last resource of the thinking and the good,” it was what they found themselves driven to. It was the less of two evils which they had in prospect; and what they did they thought to be necessary for the removal, and prevention, of the evil. And on the same *principle* that they changed the order of succession, they would have changed the whole frame of the government. Had they apprehended *government by kings* in general to be as great a grievance as that by Popish kings, they would have abolished kingly government altogether, and this country would now have been a republic.

When ever circumstances have been favourable to greater changes, wise nations have not failed to adopt them. When America was driven, as you will allow (for at that time you were very active in the business, and many a time have I, with singular satisfaction, heard you plead the cause of American liberty) by the oppression of this country, to break entirely from it, the Americans, sensible of more evils attending their former government, than our ancestors at the revolution, ventured to do a great deal more, and set a glorious example to France, and to the world. They formed a completely new government on the principles of *equal liberty*, and the *rights of men*, “without nobles,” as Dr. Price said, “without bishops, and without a king,” which, indeed, the Dutch, after their separation from the Spanish monarchy, did in a great measure before them. If arbitrary princes tremble at these great *examples* (at the very idea of which you yourself, as if you were a part of royalty, and appertaining to it, tremble) it is time that they who so long have made others tremble, should, in their turn, tremble themselves. But let the *people* rejoice. It will either make their princes keep within bounds, or encourage them to hope that the time of their deliverance is at hand.

That all persons have not the same dread of revolutions which has seized on you, and that the genuine principles of the Revolution are still preserved, and taught in this country, will appear from the following extracts from *Mr. Paley's Principles of Moral and political Philosophy*, with which I shall close this letter.

“*Government may be too secure.* The greatest tyrants have been those, whose titles were the most unquestioned. Whenever, therefore, the opinion of right becomes too predominant and superstitious, it is abated by *breaking the custom*. Thus the Revolution broke the *custom of succession*, and thereby moderated both in the prince and people, those lofty notions of hereditary right, which in the one were become a continual temptation to tyranny, and disposed the other to invite servitude, by undue compliances and dangerous concessions.” p. 411, Quarto Edition.

“The true reason why mankind hold in detestation the memory of those who have sold their liberty to a tyrant, is, that together with their own, they sold commonly, or

endangered, the liberty of others; which certainly they had no right to dispose of.” p. 77.

“No usage, law, or authority whatever, is so binding, that it need or ought to be continued, when it may be changed with advantage to the community. The family of the prince, the order of succession, the prerogative of the crown, the form and parts of the legislature, together with respective powers, office, duration, and mutual dependency of the several parts, are all only so many *laws*, mutable like other laws, whenever expediency requires, either by the ordinary act of the legislature, or if the occasion deserve it, by the interposition of the people. These points are wont to be approached with a kind of awe, they are represented to the mind as principles of the constitution, settled by our ancestors, and being settled to be no more committed to innovation or debate, as foundations never to be stirred; as the terms and conditions of the social compact, to which every citizen of the state has engaged his fidelity, by virtue of a promise, which he cannot now recal. Such reasons have no place in our system: to us, if there be any good reason for treating these with more deference and respect than other laws, it is either the advantage of the present constitution of government which reason must be of different force in different countries) or because, in all countries, it is of importance, that the form and usage of governing be acknowledged and understood, as well by the governors as the governed, and because the seldomer it is changed the more it will be respected by both sides.” p. 426.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER V.

***Of The Revolution Society In England, And Mr. Burke'S
Reflexions On Dr. Price.***

Dear Sir,

YOU are exceedingly offended at the conduct of the Revolution Society in England, for sending congratulations to the National Assembly in France. "I should think it," you say, p. 6, "at least improper and irregular, to open a formal public correspondence with the actual government of a foreign nation, without the express authority of the government under which I live." You think it was done "under an equivocal description, which to many, unacquainted with our usages, might make the address appear as the act of persons in some sort of a corporate body, acknowledged by the laws of the kingdom, and authorised to speak the sense of some part of it. It is the policy," you say, p. 7, "that has very much the complexion of a fraud."

But what occasion could there be to ask leave of the government of one country to send an address to that of another, unless it had been *affected* by the correspondence; and in *this* case the English government had nothing more to do with the transaction than any private individual in the country. Was any thing said by the Revolution Society, *in the name* of the government of this country, or was the latter at all pledged to do one thing or another in the business?

As to such a respectable body of men as the National Assembly of France noticing the address of those who compose the Revolution Society in England; it is nothing new or uncommon, either for small bodies of men to address large ones, or for large societies to notice such addresses; and what material difference is there, whether the persons addressing, and those addressed, be of the same country, or of different countries? The only question is, whether the address, or the notice, were proper or improper.

The National Assembly of France could not be so ignorant of the constitution of England, as to suppose that the *Revolution Society* was a body authorized by the state, or that it had any connexion with the government of the country; so that there could be no *fraud* or *imposition* in the case; and it may be easily supposed, that, being the founders of a new system of government in France, which has hitherto been considered as the *natural enemy of England*, they might think it wise to embrace the first opportunity of shewing that they were disposed to be our *friends*, and that they took it kindly, that any number of respectable individuals in this country should approve of their proceedings. As far as the transaction went, it afforded a prospect of future good neighbourhood.

The members of the French Assembly would judge of the *extent* of the friendly disposition of this country towards them, by the names of the persons who promoted

the measure; and when they saw that of *Dr. Price*, so well known, and so favourably known, for true patriotism, disinterested benevolence, and public spirit, both in France and America, they would naturally, and justly, conclude, that, though no great part of the English nation was present, those who were spoke the sentiments of great numbers, and those the most respectable in the country. The good will of such men as Dr. Price (in whatever part of the globe, or for whatever purpose assembled) even the National Assembly of France might conceive to be no inconsiderable sanction to their proceedings.

Where is the great impropriety of a nation receiving even advice, and much more accepting congratulations, from single men of eminent wisdom and of virtue? And in this light thousands regard Dr. Price, and notwithstanding the odium which you, in vain, endeavour to throw upon him, and which only recoils upon yourself, his name will be known, and respected, as long as respect for religion, for virtue, and for the just rights of mankind, shall exist.

The discourse which gives you so much offence, was indeed delivered from a *pulpit*, and is commonly called a *sermon*; but this is all the impropriety that belongs to it, and therefore affects the *title* only. It was delivered to a number of political friends, on a week day, destined to a political purpose, and might perhaps as well have been delivered in the room in which the company dined. No preacher, I will venture to say, more scrupulously adapts his usual discourses to the real occasions of a christian audience, than Dr. Price does; and had you, Sir, been one of his stated hearers (though you may shudder at the idea of going into a *Conventicle*) you would, I doubt not, have been both a wiser and a better man than you now are, wise and good as you, nevertheless, may be; for I do not judge of your usual temper and disposition from the strain of this most intemperate publication. I know you, and I know it to be unworthy of you.

Besides, the pulpit has not been thought profaned by all subjects of a *political*, if of a *generally useful*, nature. If so, certainly the conduct of the clergy must be severely censured for the usual strain of their preaching on the 30th of January. If they preach in defence of *arbitrary power*, which they generally have done on that day, why may not we preach in defence of the great principle of *equal liberty*, and the most important *right of resistance* to such governments as they recommend?

You seem to take particular pleasure in comparing *Dr. Price* to *Hugh Peters*, who expressed himself in the same language with respect to the death of king Charles, that Dr. Price has made use of with respect to the glorious prospect of things that has opened upon us by the late Revolution in France. No doubt, a very handsome face may have some features resembling those in a very ugly one, and therefore Dr. Price may, without any reflexion upon him, resemble Hugh Peters in his abhorrence of tyranny, though very different from him in other respects. Bishop Burnet calls Peters “a sort of enthusiastic buffoon preacher, and a very vitious man,” and he represents him as dying in the most cowardly manner*. But will this character apply to Dr. Price, a man whom the President of the National Assembly of France has styled, and justly styled, the *Apostle of Liberty*, though you call him the *Doctor of Politics*, p. 17, the *Political Divine*, p. 20, and load him with every other epithet of contempt that

your exuberant imagination, unrestrained by any regard to decency, can supply; at the same time that you acknowledge, p. 13, that he has “the best intentions in the world,” though as an enemy to civil establishments of religion, you deny him, p. 155, a place among *honest enthusiasts*, and class him with *cheats and deceivers*.

According to you, this Hugh Peters rode in a kind of triumph on the bringing of king Charles a prisoner to London, and he may have triumphed in an indecent and an improper manner; but, in my opinion, there was sufficient cause for triumph. The *thirtieth of January* was (to use a phrase of Admiral Keppel’s) a *proud day* for England, as well as the *fourteenth of July* for France, and it will be remembered as such by the latest posterity of *freemen*. Let all tyrants read the history of both, and tremble. Good princes will read it without any unpleasant emotion.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER V.

Of The Interference Of The State In Matters Of Religion In General.

Dear Sir,

IT was the devout wish of Job, who, with exemplary patience, had borne much calumny, as well as sufferings of other kinds, that his *adversary had written a book*. The favour which this good man could not obtain, the despised and oppressed Dissenters have at length been indulged with from you, at least so far as relates to the cause of your strong attachment to the established church of this country, which, no doubt, induced you to enter so warmly as you did into the opposition to our late claims in the House of Commons. We are now happy in having an opportunity of viewing, and examining, the true springs of your conduct, and are not obliged to collect your arguments from uncertain report, or the mutilated, and, no doubt, very often false, accounts in the newspapers. We have now the reasoning of the senator from the senator himself.

I rather wonder, however, at this conduct in *you*, when I find you lamenting, p. 136, that “it has been our misfortune, and not, as these gentlemen think it” (meaning, no doubt, myself as well as others) “the glory of this age, that every thing is to be *discussed*.” For certainly such a publication as this of yours, you could not but think, must lead to much discussion. If, therefore, you thought this to be a dangerous process, with respect either to *Church* or *State*, you certainly ought not to have entered upon it, by publishing any thing on the subject; unless, indeed, you had thought (which perhaps may have been the case) that your publication would effectually deter all opponents; your reasoning being so forcible as to preclude, and be an effectual bar to, all farther discussion on the subject; nor do I much wonder at your entertaining this idea, from the exhibition you have given us of the state of your own mind with respect to it.

“Our church establishment,” you say, p. 136, “is the first of our prejudices. It is,” you say again, “the first, the last, and the midst in our minds,” that is, it occupies the whole capacity of them, so that they cannot admit any thing else, at least any thing of an opposite nature. Of course, the maxims on which you proceed must to *you* appear incontrovertible. You, therefore, very naturally add, “it is not a prejudice destitute of reason, but involving in it profound and extensive wisdom.” For such is the opinion that we all entertain of prejudices deeply rooted in our own minds; though it is no uncommon thing for what appears to be *profound and extensive wisdom* to one man, to appear the extreme of *folly* to another; and unfortunately (owing perhaps to the difference of our educations, and early habits) this is precisely the difference between you and me. What you admire I despise, and what you think highly useful, I am persuaded is very mischievous.

However, notwithstanding the great difference in our *conclusions*, we have, I perceive, some great and leading *common principles*; so that it may not be difficult to discover which of us has departed the farthest from them. I shall endeavour to shew our readers, that with these common principles, your conclusions are wholly discordant; and I flatter myself that, differently as we think on a variety of subjects, we have more common principles than you have given sufficient attention to, and more than you really act upon. You cannot, for example, have that dislike to *discussion* which you profess, because, in this and in other publications, as well as in your speeches in the House of Commons, you have entered largely into many discussions; and you must also agree with me in thinking, that the more important any subject is, or the more interesting it is to men, either as individuals, or members of society, the greater call there is for an accurate discussion of every thing relating to it; because, in things of this nature, mistakes are the most dangerous, and you are far from supposing *religion* to be a matter of indifference, either to individuals, or to society. And how can we guard against, or indeed be apprized of, any mistakes, without due examination, or discussion?

That our readers may see at one view what it is that you maintain with respect to civil establishments of religion, I shall, before I enter upon the discussion of them, give our readers a summary view of all your positions. Confounding, as you evidently do, the idea of *religion* itself, with that of the *civil establishment* of it, you say, "It is the basis of civil society, and essential to every state," insomuch that you even question whether it be *lawful* to be without one. So far, you think, is the church from having any dependence upon the state, that the state has not even "the property, or dominion," of any thing belonging to the church, being only the "guardian" of the revenues of the church, and holding them in trust for its use. You, therefore, hold that the property of the church is unalienable, and not to be touched in any emergency of state whatever. Religion, you maintain, derives its estimation and effect, from the riches and magnificence of its establishment; that such establishment is calculated for the multitude, that it is peculiarly useful both to the poor and the rich, and, though necessary to all states, is more proper for a democratical, than any other form of government.

Now, Sir, strange as it may appear to you, my ideas, in all these respects, are the very reverse of yours. Religion I consider as a thing that requires no civil establishment whatever, and that its beneficial operation is injured by such establishment, and the more in proportion to its riches. I am satisfied that such an establishment, instead of being any advantage, is a great incumbrance to a state, and in general highly unfavourable to its liberties. Civil establishments of christianity were altogether unknown in the early ages, and gained ground by very slow degrees, as other corruptions and abuses in the system did. I am clearly of opinion, that the state has a right to dispose of *all* property within itself; that of the church, as well as of every thing else of a public nature, and that religion has naturally nothing at all to do with any particular form of civil government; being useful indeed to all persons, the rich as well as the poor, but only as individuals.

Let us now trace our very different ideas to their proper source, and compare them with our common principles; and I am happy to find that we agree with respect to the

proper use and advantage of government in general, which is a very material circumstance in our discussion. "Government, you say, p. 88, is a contrivance of human wisdom, to provide for human wants, and men have a right that these wants be provided for by this wisdom."

You will not, however, say that *all* human wants are to be provided for by government; for it is manifestly only *some* of them that its great power can reach, and therefore much must be left to the individuals themselves. This you allow, when you say, p. 87, "whatever each man can separately do, without trespassing upon others, he has a right to do for himself." Since then I can *eat* and *drink* whatever suits my appetite, without trespassing upon any body, you will allow that the state has no business to prescribe what I shall eat or drink, or when, or in what manner, I shall do it. I imagine, also, you will allow that my neighbours have no right to complain of me, if, when I am indisposed, I treat myself as I think proper, taking whatever advice, or whatever medicines, I please. They may do the same, and I shall not complain of them. Pray then, what right, on this plain and obvious principle, advanced by yourself, has any man to complain of me if I *worship God* in what manner I please, or if I do not chuse to worship God at all? Does my conduct in this respect injure them? What, then, has the state, or my neighbours, to do in this business, any more than with my food or my medicine?

In this, and many other things, government has taken a great deal too much upon it; and has by this means brought itself into great and needless embarrassments. In many things besides the article of religion, men have busied themselves in *legislating* too much, and when it would have been better if individuals had been left to think and act for themselves.

This, you will say, amounts to nothing more than a plea for *toleration* in matters of religion, which you are ready to allow. As a foundation for a *civil establishment* of religion, you say that "man is by his constitution a religious animal;" for all that follows in defence of establishments, is immediately connected with *this*. Now, admitting this, which however is not true (because we may easily conceive of a Being, possessed of all the essential properties of *human nature*, without any knowledge of religion at all) government can have no more right to interfere with respect to *this* constitutional property of man, than any other constitutional, or essential property; and with respect to many of these, you must allow that men should be left to themselves. For example, man is constitutionally and necessarily an *eating* and a *sleeping* animal; but does it therefore follow that civil government has any thing to do with his eating or sleeping? And if not, neither has it any right to prescribe to him in matters of *religion*, merely because he is by constitution a *religious animal*. Man is a *thinking* and *reasoning* animal; but must all his thinking and reasoning be subject to the control of the state? Man has also been defined to be *animal risibile*, but must we therefore never laugh but when our grave and wise governors shall give us leave? We often indulge ourselves even in laughing at them.

As you do not deal much in *definitions*, or *axioms*, I am obliged to collect your idea of the *principle* on which church establishments are founded, from casual expressions, and the general scope of your declamation. Systematical divines, in this country, have,

in different circumstances of their affairs, advanced two very different principles, as the basis of civil establishments of religion. At first it was universally asserted that christianity, and some particular form of it, ought to be established, maintained, and protected, by the civil power, because it was *true*; that it became the civil magistrate, as the *vicegerent of God*, to stand up for the honour of God, and of his truth; so that it was of no consequence at all what was the religion of his subjects. It was his duty to enforce *truth*, and to bring them as soon as he could to the profession and due maintenance of it.

But when it was urged that civil magistrates were not always the best judges of religious truth, that they had often little leisure for the study of religion, and were apt to be imposed upon by priests, and others whose interest it was to mislead them; besides that, upon this plan, the religion of every country, would be liable to be changed with every change of governors, as was the case in our own country, in several successive reigns after that of Henry VIII. or rather Henry VII. this old ground was shifted; and of late it has been maintained by our high church divines, and by yourself, who must be classed with them, that the civil magistrate has nothing to do with the *truth* of religion, being obliged to provide for that which is professed by the *majority* of the subjects, though he himself should be of a different persuasion. Thus they say the king of Great Britain, must maintain episcopacy in England, and presbyterianism in Scotland, whether he be a presbyterian as king William, a Lutheran as George I. or a true churchman as his present Majesty.

You, Sir, appear to defend church establishments on the latter of these principles. "The christian statesman," you say, p. 151, "must first provide for the multitude, because it is the multitude, and is therefore, as such, the first object in the ecclesiastical institution, and in all institutions." But how does this apply to the case of your country of Ireland. For the very same reason that episcopacy ought to be established in England, and presbyterianism in Scotland, the Roman catholic ought to be the established religion of Ireland, because, as I apprehend, it is unquestionably the religion of a very great majority of the inhabitants. As to the great mass of the oppressed Irish, if they be asked whether it be *their* religion, that which they really approve, that they are obliged to maintain, they will say it is a *foreign* one, one that they disbelieve and detest, and yet are compelled to support, whilst from genuine zeal, they think it their duty to maintain their own. It is not supposed that more than one in ten of the inhabitants of Ireland are of the church of England, and yet the iron hand of power compels them to maintain it. Is this, think you, the way to recommend your religion? Judge by the effect. What converts have been made to it in the last two centuries? The zealous members of your church, in the reign of the two Charles's of blessed memory, imposed episcopacy also upon Scotland, when not more than one in a hundred of the Scots would attend the service; but the generous spirit of that nation at length threw off the oppressive yoke. The Irish also have the will, but, alas, not the power.

If you will have an establishment, and act upon the principles that you profess, viz. to provide for the *multitude*, or the great mass of the people, do you, of your own accord, change the established religion of Ireland, to one more consonant to the genius and wishes of the nation; and let it not be said that the church of England would have the

impudence, if it had the power, to collect its tithes from every country in christendom, though every parish should be a *sinecure*, and all their bishops be denominated *in partibus*. Let there be an appearance at least, which now there is not, of some regard to *religion* in the case, and not to mere *revenue*. Often as I have urged this subject, and many as have been those who have animadverted upon my writings, hardly any have touched upon *this*. They feel it to be tender ground. They can, however, keep an obstinate silence, they can shut their ears, and turn their eyes to other objects, when it is not to their purpose to attend to this.

Admitting that religion must be *established*, or supported by civil power, in order to its efficiency, will *any* species of religion answer the purpose; the heathen, or the Mahometan, as well as the christian, and one species of christianity as well as another? Must we have no *discussion* concerning the nature, and influence, of the different kinds of religion, in order that, if we happen to have got a worse, we may relieve ourselves by substituting a better in its place? Must every thing once established be, for that reason only, ever maintained? This is said, indeed, to be your maxim, openly avowed in the House of Commons, and, it is perfectly agreeable to every thing advanced in this publication. For you condemn the French National Assembly, for innovating in *their* religion, which is Catholic, as much as you could do the English Parliament, for innovating in *ours*, which is Protestant. You condemn them for lowering the state of archbishops, bishops, and abbots, though they have improved that of the lower orders of the clergy; and therefore you would, no doubt, be equally offended at any diminution of the power of cardinals, or of the pope. We may therefore presume, that had you lived in Turkey, you would have been a mahometan, and in Tartary, a devout worshipper of the grand lama.

It is amusing to see with what confidence, and with what various expression, you deliver your sentiments on the subject of these civil establishments of religion, without distinguishing one from another. "This principle," you say. p. 147, "runs through the whole system of their" (the British) "policy. They do not consider their church establishment as convenient, but as essential to their state, not as a thing heterogeneous and separable, something added for accommodation, what they may either keep at or lay aside, according to their temporary ideas of convenience. They consider it as the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which, it holds an indissoluble union. *Church* and *state* are ideas inseparable in their minds, and scarcely is the one ever mentioned, without mentioning the other. It is on such principles," you say, "that the majority of the people of England, far from thinking a religious national establishment unlawful, hardly think it lawful to be without one. In France you are wholly mistaken if you do not believe us above all other things attached to it, and above all other nations."

Now you cannot be so little read in the history of England, as not to know that the *church* and *state* were as much connected before the Reformation as they have been since, and while the establishment was presbyterian, as well as now that it is episcopalian. You must know also that the inhabitants of this country, were at one time as zealous papists as they now are protestants, and yet they were brought to make a change in their established religion, and that this was done without making any material change in the system of civil government. You must know that the

presbyterians in Scotland, and the episcopalians in England, have at this very time the same king and the same parliament. But how do these facts agree with your favourite idea of the inseparable union of church and state? What, then, is the foundation of the dread you have entertained of any *future* change in the religion of our country, when no harm, but, as all protestants think, much advantage, has been derived from *past* changes in it?

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER VI.

Of The Source Of The Respect That Is Paid To Religion.

Dear Sir,

THAT you make no difference between christianity and the civil establishment of it, is evident from many parts of your performance, and that you consider the *respect* which it commands, as intirely derived from the circumstances of its establishment, is equally evident. After representing the importance of christianity, as opposed to infidelity, you say, in a peculiar strain of eloquence, p. 135, “If in the moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium, from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously boiling, we should uncover our nakedness, by throwing off that christian religion, which has hitherto been our boast and comfort, and one great source of civilization among us, and among many other nations, we are apprehensive (being well aware that the mind will not endure a void) that some uncouth, pernicious, and degrading superstition might take place of it. For that reason, before we take from our establishment the *natural human means of estimation*, and give it up to contempt, as you have done (and in doing it have incurred the penalties you well deserve to suffer) we desire that some other may be presented to us in the place of it. We shall then form our judgment. On these ideas, instead of quarrelling with establishments, as some do who have made a philosophy, and a religion, of their hostility to such institutions, we cleave closely to them. We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater.”

It is evident from this passage (the whole of which is so sublimely rhetorical, that I could not help transcribing it, though not absolutely necessary to my purpose) that you consider the christian religion as having no *respectability*, or *effect*, without being *established*, and that the *natural human means of the estimation* in which it is held, is the splendour and riches of such an establishment; and this will be still more evident from some passages that I shall have occasion to quote hereafter. Let us now consider how this idea accords with the *principles* of christianity, and the authentic *records* of it, which you will allow to be contained in the books of the New Testament, and also with its well known subsequent *history*.

Did our Saviour give his apostles any instructions about connecting his religion with civil power, as if it would ever stand in need of such aid; or did the apostles, more fully instructed after his death and ascension, give any intimation of this kind? On the contrary, our Saviour declared that *his kingdom was not of this world*, which must mean that it did not resemble other kingdoms, in being supported by public taxes, and having its laws guarded by civil penalties. The apostles, and all christian ministers, for many centuries, lived on the voluntary contributions of their respective churches, and they had no means of enforcing their censures besides exclusion from their societies; and can you say that christianity wanted any proper *estimation*, or *respectability*, in

that period? Did it not abundantly recommend itself to every attentive candid observer, and to every impartial inquirer; and did it not by this means continually gain ground, notwithstanding it was opposed both by all the temporal powers of the world, and by whatever was most splendid and fascinating in the established systems of heathenism? It was the *virtue*, it was the well known piety and extensive benevolence, of the primitive christians, and not wealth or power, that procured respect to themselves, and to their cause. Read only the letters of the Emperor Julian, and you cannot but be sensible of this. To this, and to this alone, *he* ascribed the respect that was then paid to christianity, and the progress it had made in the world.

If you suppose, as you really seem to do, that christianity is now destitute of these proper *means of estimation*, you know little of its nature or power. The *truths* and the *promises* of the gospel are the same now that they ever were, nor is its *evidence* at all diminished; and *human nature*, on which it operates, you will not doubt, is also the same. And if you could look at any thing out of an establishment, you might see that christianity even now produces as disinterested and heroic virtue as ever it did. It forms men alike for the most active usefulness, or the most patient suffering. But amusing yourself with the *shadow* you wholly neglect the *substance*. Looking at *religion*, you see nothing but the civil establishments of it. Thus have I sometimes seen an aged *oak* so completely covered with a luxuriant *ivy*, that it required some attention to discern any thing else.

That wealth and splendour have not the charms that you ascribe to them with the bulk of mankind, is evident even from the history of *Monachism*, one of the corruptions of christianity. The first monks were not attracted by magnificent monasteries, and highly ornamented churches, but were most numerous, when they had nothing but the deserts to retire to. Then also were they the most respected; and they did not sink into contempt till they had acquired what you call the *natural human means of estimation*. The same has been the case with the secular clergy, in all countries. They were infinitely more respected, even by the rich and the great, while they were poor, than they have ever been since they have got their present splendid establishments; nor is it difficult to see the cause of this, and how it operates. Ease, affluence, and power, attract persons who have no sense or knowledge of religion; and when mere *men of the world* get ecclesiastical preferment, they will, of course, disgrace their profession by their vices. It was the unbounded luxury, profligacy, and arrogance, of the court of Rome, possessed as you think of every natural human means of estimation, that was one of the principal causes of the reformation.

According to your maxims, a rich establishment should make its clergy more respected than a poor one. But does this appear to be the case, on the comparison of the state of the clergy in Scotland, and those in this country? Dr. Adam Smith, who well knew them both, was of a very different opinion; and the most superficial observer must be sensible that he is in the right. Nay, so unfortunate is the situation of the clergy in this country (for it cannot be any thing, but their *situation, men* being the same in all countries) that, by the confession of many persons in the establishment itself, there are no clergy in christendom more negligent of their proper duty, less strict in their morals, and consequently *more despised*, than they are. Bishop Burnet, who had been much abroad, and who was an attentive observer, was decidedly of this

opinion; and the character of the clergy in general, is little, if it all, improved since his time.

The manner in which your imagination is struck with a splendid church establishment, makes you even exceed yourself in *eloquence*; and, as I always admire you in this field, though not in that of sober *reasoning*, I cannot forbear quoting a pretty long paragraph to this purpose, as it is particularly excellent in its kind. “He,” you say, p. 146, “who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue, willed also the necessary means of its perfection. He willed therefore the state. He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection” (meaning, no doubt, *the church*, equally the archetype of all perfection in Indostan, in Turkey, in Italy, in England, and even in Scotland) “They who are convinced of this his will, which is the law of laws, and the sovereign of sovereigns, cannot think it reprehensible that this our corporate fealty and homage, that this our recognition of a signiory paramount, I had almost said this oblation of the state itself, as a worthy offering on the high altar of universal praise, should be performed, as all public solemn acts are performed, in buildings, in music, in decoration, in speech, in the dignity of persons, according to the customs of mankind, taught by their nature; that is, with modest splendour, with unassuming state, with mild majesty, and sober pomp. For those purposes they think some part of the wealth of the country is as usefully employed as it can be in fomenting the luxury of individuals. It is the public consolation. It nourishes the public hope. The poorest man finds his own importance and dignity in it, whilst the wealth and pride of individuals at every moment makes the man of humble rank and fortune sensible of his inferiority, and degrades and vilifies his condition. It is for the man in humble life, and to raise his nature, and to put him in mind of a state in which the privileges of opulence will cease, when he will be equal by nature, and may be more than equal by virtue, that this portion of the general wealth of his country is employed and sanctified.”

Big with these ideas, you say, p. 153, “as the mass of any description of men are but men, and their poverty” (namely that of the clergy) “cannot be voluntary, that disrespect which attends upon all lay-poverty will not depart from the ecclesiastical. Our constitution has therefore taken care, that those who are to instruct presumptuous ignorance, those who are to be censors over insolent vice, should neither incur their contempt, nor live upon their alms; nor will it tempt the rich to a neglect of the true medicine of their minds. For these reasons, while we provide first for the poor, with a parental solicitude, we have not relegated religion, like something we were ashamed to shew, to obscure municipalities, or rustic villages. No; we will have her to exalt her mitred front in courts and parliaments. We will have her mixed throughout the whole mass of life, and blended with all the classes of society. The people of England will shew to the haughty potentates of the world, and to their talking sophisters, that a free, a generous, and informed nation, honours the high magistrates of its church, that it will not suffer the insolence of wealth and titles, or any other species of proud pretension, to look down with scorn upon what they look up to with reverence, nor presume to trample on that acquired personal nobility which they intend always to be, and which often is, the fruit, not the reward (for what can be the reward) of learning, piety, and virtue. They can see without pain or grudging an archbishop precede a

duke. They can see a bishop of Durham, or a bishop of Winchester, in possession of ten thousand pounds a year," &c. &c. &c.

Pray, Sir, on what part of the New Testament is this a comment? Alas, it is the *wisdom of the world*, which is *foolishness with God*, and even with serious and sensible men? The wealth of the clergy, of which you are so proud, and the temporal power with which you have invested them, is the natural source of their corruption, and what must ever sink them, and religion, into contempt. Has the splendour of the ecclesiastical establishment in France, which is much superior to any thing of the kind in this country, prevented the spread of the Reformation on the one hand, or of infidelity on the other? By your own account, France is almost a nation of infidels, at least their National Assembly, in your idea, consists chiefly of them. Have the remains of this splendour, respectable still in your eyes, prevented the rejection of christianity altogether *here*? If you know the world, and even what passes at home, you must know the contrary. Infidelity has made considerable progress in this country, and especially in the upper classes of life, persons to whom you imagine the wealth of the clergy would naturally recommend their religion. But these men do not frequent your churches, and they regard your establishment no farther than they can avail themselves of its emoluments, as it is a means of providing for their younger sons and brothers. If the Houses of Lords and Commons were fairly polled, after voting according to their *real opinion*, whether, think you, would the majority be in favour of christianity, or against it? Many, and those not inattentive observers, think the latter.

If riches and power have the charms which you ascribe to them in the business of religion, how came the *reformation* to take place? The power and splendour of the church of Rome was at its height in the time of Luther and his followers; yet, without any aid of this kind to oppose to it, in Germany, in this country, or in Scotland, it gave way to the efforts of men who had no advantage but what they derived from reason and piety. Surely, Sir, the bulk of mankind do not see with your eyes. If they did, how can you account for the great number of Dissenters in this country, from the time of Queen Elizabeth, who had the same ideas that you have on these subjects, down to the present time; and what can be the cause of the amazing increase of methodism? Neither their ministers nor ours are rich. We have not the style of *my lord*, nor have we seats in parliament. But, destitute as we are of all these advantages, I will venture to say, that our ministers, as a body, are much more respected by their congregations than yours, possessed, in your idea, of all the *natural human means of estimation*.

Judging of us by yourselves, you naturally suppose, that it is only through *envy* and *malignity*, that we declaim against the wealth and the power of the clergy. "In England, you say, p. 155, "most of us conceive that it is envy and malignity towards those who are often the beginners of their own fortune, and not a love of the self-denial and mortification of the ancient church, that makes some look askance at the distinctions, and honours, and revenues, which, taken from no person, are set apart for virtue. The ears of the people of England are distinguishing. They hear these men speak broad. Their tongue betrays them. Their language is in the *patois* of fraud, in the cant and gibberish of hypocrisy. The people of England must think so when these praters affect to carry back the clergy to that primitive evangelic poverty, which, in

the spirit, ought always to exist in *them* (and in *us* too, however, we may like it) but the thing must be varied, when the the relation of that body to the state is altered, when manners, when modes of life, when indeed the whole order of human affairs, has undergone a total revolution. We shall believe these reformers to be then *honest enthusiasts*, not, as now we think them, *cheats* and *deceivers*, when we see them throwing their own goods into common, and submitting their own persons to the austere discipline of the early church.”

This, Sir, is a paragraph of which it is to be hoped you will some time hence be ashamed. You do not give us the alternative of being either *knaves* or *fools*. You will not allow us any place in this more respectable, or rather less contemptible, class of men. None of us who disapprove of establishments, Dr. Price, or myself, can have the honour of being ranked with *honest enthusiasts*. We are all absolutely, and without a single exception, *cheats* and *deceivers*, who are saying one thing, and, at the same time, meaning another. But we are happy in an appeal from your judgment, as you are from ours; though, judging from myself, we are by no means disposed to censure you with so much severity as you do us. I do not say that we are so mortified to the world, as that the good things with which you tempt us, have no charms for us. We are *men*, and have the feelings of men, as well as yourselves. But if they struck our imagination as forcibly as they do yours, and if we were the *knaves* and *hypocrites* that you suppose us to be, why do we not make greater efforts to obtain them? The market is open, but we do not chuse to give the price. If these things be accessible to *some*, they are no doubt to *others*, in proportion to their ability or interest, or whatever it be that assists their preferment.

As to subscription to your articles, &c. if I be such a person as you have described, why might not I declare my *unfeigned assent and consent* to them, as well as others? Besides, if the advantages of an establishment were the things that we are aiming at, why are we labouring at the subversion of *all* establishments, exposing their inutility, and even their mischievous nature and tendency? If the tree be cut down, how are we to live upon the fruit of it? And there are now, I believe, very few Dissenters, who, if the present establishment was overturned, would wish to substitute any other in its place.

Your idea of the state of things in the primitive church, is altogether founded on mistake. It was not, from the first, materially different from what it is, or at least ought to be, at this day, and therefore did not require any great difference in the condition of its ordinary ministers. There never was any obligation on christians to *throw their goods into common*. Whatever was done of this kind, appears from the history of Ananias and Sapphira, to have been perfectly voluntary, and could not have been universal; and we read of no such thing in any of the Gentile churches. These, from the first, consisted of *rich* and *poor*, and the rich among them made contributions to relieve the poor christians at Jerusalem, which could not have been wanted, if all the rich, even there, had given their *all*. As to the *discipline* of the primitive church, it was such as I should have no objection to, but have strongly recommended in my *Essay on Church Discipline*; nor was it more strict than is actually exercised in several christian churches, though not in that of England, at this day. But of these things you, Sir, seem to speak altogether at random, without any particular knowledge of the subject.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER VII.

Of A Civil Establishment Being Essential To Christianity.

Dear Sir,

IF a civil establishment be so essential as you represent it, to the estimation and effect of christianity, you must, no doubt, imagine that it never existed without one, that it has *grown with its growth, and strengthened with its strength*. Hence your apprehension that, if any thing affect the one, it must in proportion affect the other, and that they must both stand or fall together. Now, being yourself nothing more than a *Lay divine* (as you contemptuously characterise a person of eminence, who has presumed to *hint* at some improvements in your favourite system, not calculated to overturn, but to strengthen it) I, whom, together with Dr. Price, you will class, p. 13, among *political theologians*, and *theological politicians*, shall give you a little information on the subject. Your talents, no doubt, are great; but what are talents, or powers of reasoning, and combining particular facts into systems, if a man have no facts to combine, no proper knowledge of his subject? In this case his greater ingenuity will only serve to mislead him, and fix him in error. And it is very evident that, whatever has been the compass of your studies, *ecclesiastical history* has not been within its range; and facts, notorious facts, such as lye upon the very face and surface of it, unfortunately overturn your whole system.

You have not been pleased to give us the definition of an *established church*, though you enlarge so much in your encomiums upon it; but in this we cannot much disagree. In its full extent, it is a church defended, and even regulated, by the state, which either wholly proscribes, tolerates, or barely connives at, other religions. Now, what was the situation of the christian church with respect to the State in the primitive times? You must know that, so far from being supported by the civil powers (which were then either Jewish or Heathen) it was srowned upon by them, and violently persecuted, itself being at that time nothing more than a *sect*, or a *heresy*, sometimes connived at, but never openly tolerated; and yet in these circumstances it existed, and flourished, gradually gaining ground by its own evidence, till it triumphed over all opposition, and the Roman empire itself became christian.

What was it these christian emperors then did for their religion? They did little or nothing towards its *support*, because they found it sufficiently supported by the voluntary contributions and benefactions of its friends. They did, however, *what they ought not to have done*; they influenced the decisions of councils, and enforced them by temporal pains and penalties. The State also protected property given or bequeathed to the church, as well as that which was appropriated to other uses; but there was nothing like a *tax* levied for the support of religion for many ages, nor is there any such thing at this day in a very great part of the christian world. Tithes are comparatively but a modern invention, the payment of them being first voluntary, and afterwards obligatory; and the compulsory payment of tithes did not take place in the

whole of this country till the time of King John, of *glorious and immortal memory*, on that account. There are now no tithes paid in the ecclesiastical states of Italy, or in Sicily, and though, as I have been lately informed, there is what is called tithes in some parts of Lombardy, it does not in general exceed one thirtieth part of the produce, and is never one tenth.

Another important article in *our* ecclesiastical establishment, is the right of our kings to the nomination of bishops*. But it is well known, that the right of chusing the bishops was originally, and for many centuries, in their respective churches, the metropolitans shewing their approbation by joining in their ordination; and that even the emperors themselves, after they became christians, never assumed any such authority. It was first usurped by the popes, in the plenitude of their power, and by the feudal princes of Europe, in consequence of their investing bishops with their *temporalities*, and making them *lords of territory*. The National Assembly of France have, to their immortal honour (though they should be dissolved to-morrow, and never meet again) restored to all the christian churches in that country, their original right of appointing their own pastors, both the ordinary clergy and the bishops.

As to the claim of our princes to be the *heads of the church* (which is an usurpation from an usurper, the pope) and that of our parliament, to enact what shall be deemed *articles of faith*, and to give a form and constitution to the whole church, it is a thing not so much as pretended to by any other temporal power in the world, and a greater absurdity and abuse than any thing subsisting in the system of popery, where at least the judges in ecclesiastical affairs are ecclesiastical persons.

The whole system of the civil establishment of religion had its origin at a time when neither *religion* nor *civil government* was much understood. It was the consequence of the feudal states of Europe becoming christian in an age where we find little of Christianity, besides the *name*; its genuine *doctrines* and its *spirit* having equally disappeared.

Every article, therefore, within the compass of the civil establishment of christianity, is evidently an *innovation*; and as systems are reformed by reverting to their first principles, christianity can never be restored to its pristine state, and recover its real dignity and efficiency, till it be disengaged from all connexion with civil power. This establishment, therefore, may be compared to a *fungus*, or a *parasitical plant*, which is so far from being coeval with the tree on which it has fastened itself, that it seized upon it in its weak and languid state, and if it be not cut off in time, will exhaust all its juices, and destroy it.

Writing to an orator, I naturally think of metaphors and comparisons, and therefore I will give you two or three more. So far is a civil establishment from being friendly to christianity, that it may be compared to the animal, called the *Sloth*, which, when it gets upon any tree, will not leave it till it has devoured even the leaves and the bark, so that it presently perishes. Rather, it is the animal called a *glutton*, which falling from a tree (in which it generally conceals itself) upon some noble animal, immediately begins to tear it, and suck its blood; and if it be not soon shaken off (which sometimes every effort fails to effect) it infallibly kills its prey.

Now, when I see this *fungus* of an establishment upon the noble plant of christianity, draining its best juices; when I see this *Sloth* upon its stately branches, gnawing it, and stripping it bare; or, to change my comparison, when I see the *Glutton* upon the shoulders of this noble animal, the blood flowing down, and its very vitals in danger; if I wish to preserve the tree, or the animal, must I not, without delay, extirpate the fungus, destroy the Sloth, and kill the Glutton. Indeed, Sir, say, or write, what you please, such vermin deserve no mercy. You may stand by, and weep for the fate of your favourite fungus, your Sloth, or your Glutton, but I shall not spare them.

In your idea, a civil establishment is the very *basis*, or *foundation* of religion. But when any structure is to be raised, the foundation is the first thing that is laid; whereas this was evidently the very last. Instead, therefore, of its being the *foundation*, or even the *buttress*, it may rather be said to resemble the heavy *stone roof*, pressing with an enormous weight upon the walls, which on that account require many buttresses to support it, and after all proves to be so heavy, and is now become so ruinous, that it will be found absolutely necessary to take it all down, if the building is to be preserved. Nay, as in the late taking down of the stone roof of the cathedral, I think, of Hereford, if the greatest care be not taken, the attempt to meddle with this cumbrous roof will be hazardous, both to those who remove it, and those who stand near it.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER VIII.

Of The Uses Of Civil Establishments Of Religion.

Dear Sir,

YOU certainly magnify the benefits derived from religion itself too much, valuable as I allow it to be, when you say, p. 134, “We know, and what is better, we feel, that religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort.” Here, surely, is more of the *rhetorician* than of the *reasoner*, even supposing you not to mean, what you evidently do, the civil establishment of religion, but religion itself. Is there no good, or comfort, in any thing but religion, or what flows from it? Will religion feed or cloath us; or is there no comfort in food or cloathing? Is it not possible to make many wholesome laws to prevent men from injuring one another, and is it not possible to execute those laws, so as to preserve the *peace of society*, which I conceive to be the proper end of civil government, without calling in the aid of religion; or cannot religion operate in aid of good laws, without the help of the magistrate?

Civil establishments of religion, must, however, be imagined to be of *some use* to society, or it will be of little consequence to defend them at all. If the church, or the king, have nothing but *divine right* to stand upon, the people, seeing their own interest to be of the question, would not, at this day, shew much zeal in their support. They must, if possible, be made to believe, that a system supported by their money, and the sweat of their brows, is, in some way or other, directly or indirectly, for their advantage. Accordingly, you, Sir, have found it necessary to urge the *utility* of these establishments, and according to you, this utility is threefold. They are of use to the poor, and to the rich, and though they suit all governments, they are more particularly necessary in democratical ones.

“The christian statesmen,” you say, p. 151, “of this land have been taught, that the circumstance of the gospel’s being preached to the poor, was one of the great tests of its true mission. They think, therefore, that those do not believe it who do not take care it should be preached to the poor.”

Here, Sir, your argument, as far as there is any thing of argument in it, is, that since the poor cannot afford to pay for religious instruction, the state should provide it for them. A very pious and charitable design, no doubt; but at whose expence is this provision made? If it were at the expence of the rich only, there would be something of charity in it; but is not all property, that of the poor as well as that of the rich, taxed alike for this purpose? Do not the clergy exact the payment of *small tithes*, and often with the utmost rigour, from their poorest parishioners? Do we not sometimes hear of their being actually turned out of their little tenements, by a distress levied by their spiritual instructors; and are not the poor Irish, some of the most destitute and

miserable of mankind, driven into almost annual rebellions, by oppression from the exaction of tithes?

This, I am told, is the true cause of the rise of those who are called *White Boys*, among the poor catholics of Ireland; and nothing but the terror of military execution, can compel them to pay for that instruction which you would give us to understand is so charitably afforded them. Thus, to be compelled to pay for the instruction which they detest, and receive no advantage from, and to be at the same time under another kind of necessity of paying for the instruction which they really value, is, indeed, a hard case. But this, according to you, is *preaching the gospel to the poor*.

The gospel was, in its proper sense, preached to the poor by our Saviour, the apostles, and other primitive christians, who were themselves poor. In those times, all the contributions for the maintenance of public worship, were made by the rich, and they were as ample as they were voluntary. Those who were less opulent gave as they thought proper, and could afford, and the poor gave nothing; for small tithes were then unknown. The same is the case with us Dissenters. All our places of public worship are open to the poor, as well as to the rich; and not only are the poor accommodated *gratis*, but their wants are attended to as far as the funds of the congregation (and in all of them there is one for this purpose) can go towards their relief.

The instruction of the poor is more attended to by the Methodists than by any other class of christians in this country. They not only make them welcome, but they seek out, they invite, and press them to receive instruction; and if those of them, who are comparatively poor, tax themselves for the maintenance of their preachers, and the building of their places of worship, it is in such a manner as promotes industry, and checks profligacy and extravagance. By this means, becoming more sober, and more frugal, they grow comparatively rich, and are better able to contribute their penny, their two-pence, or their six-pence a week, to supply the wants of others. I honour their wisdom and œconomy, and think most highly of those persons whose education and habits dispose and enable them to adapt themselves to the instruction of the lowest and poorest of the vulgar. They are civilizing and christianizing that part of the community, which is below the notice of your dignified clergy, but whose souls, as the common phrase is, are as *precious in the sight of God*, as those who are called *their betters*. Such men will have their reward in heaven. I only wish they had more knowledge, and more charity along with their zeal; and *these* also will come in due time.

You think it equally necessary, that public provision should be made for the instruction of the *rich*, and that, in order to engage their attention and respect, the civil establishment of religion should be splendid. “Such sublime principles,” you say, p. 137, “ought to be infused into persons in exalted situations, and religious establishments provided that may continually revive and enforce them. The people of England,” you say, p. 152, “know how little influence the teachers of religion are likely to have with the wealthy and powerful of long standing, and how much less weight with the newly fortunate, if they appear no way assorted to those with whom they must associate, and over whom they must even exercise in some cases something

like an authority. What must they think of that body of teachers, if they see it in no part above the establishment of their domestic servants?"

On the effect of splendid establishments on the minds of men I have enlarged before, and shall now only observe that, through gross inattention to the principles of human nature, you have neither considered the effect of the situation in which you have placed the clergy of this country on their own minds, or on those of the rich and the great, to whom their ministry is adapted. Is it not a fact, that, so far from the former being independent of the latter, in consequence of having great emolument in continual prospect (which is the case of all the clergy, the bishops themselves not excepted) that they must continually look up to them, and court them, in order to advance themselves? Is not their attention to the great in general extremely servile and debasing? Have you never heard of their conniving at, rather than reproving them for, their vices and extravagancies, while they have the care of their education at home, and abroad. Is not almost every clergyman, whose talents or connections encourage him to aspire to a bishopric, or any other great preferment, ready to adopt the maxims, and court the favour of the great, in whose power alone it is to aid their views? Is it not notorious that the bishops in general fall in with the measures of the court, whatever they are, evidently because they cannot rise higher, or provide for their dependants, by any other means? For whenever the maxims and measures of the court change, the conduct of the bishops almost universally, and even instantly, changes with them.

When, after the Court was disposed to favour us, the dissenting ministers waited by appointment upon an archbishop, in order to get his vote and interest for relief in the matter of subscription, which was then under consideration in parliament, after both himself and his brethren had voted against us upon a former occasion, he assured them that, though their bench had concurred in rejecting their application before, it was no measure of *theirs*, but that they had been *put upon it* by the king's ministers. This he evidently thought a sufficient apology for his own conduct, and that of his brethren. So valid did this excuse appear to him, that he had no feeling of the dishonour which such conduct reflected upon the whole bench, and what a despicable idea he was giving of himself, and of his brethren to us Dissenters, who are used to think and act for ourselves, and not as we are *put upon* by others. Can such conduct as this, which the situation of your dignified clergy necessarily leads them into, inspire persons of high rank, or of any rank, with sentiments of *respect*? I will venture to say it is impossible. Pretend what you will, you must, and you do, hold them in contempt, as much as we do ourselves. It is the feeling of indignant honour. It is the natural sentiment of man towards his degraded fellow creature, which in some measure reflects dishonour upon himself, as being of the same species.

You, who are a *lay divine*, farther teach us, that civil establishments of religion are peculiarly useful in free governments. "The consecration of the state," you say, p. 137, "by a state religious establishment, is necessary also to operate with an wholesome awe upon free citizens, because, in order to secure their freedom, they must enjoy some determinate portion of power. To them, therefore, a religion connected with the state, and with their duty towards it, becomes even more necessary, than in such societies where the people, by the terms of their subjection,

are confined to private sentiments, and the management of their own family concerns. All persons possessing any portion of power, ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust, and that they are to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great master, author, and founder, of society. This principle ought even to be more strongly impressed upon the minds of those who compose the collective sovereignty, than upon those of single princes. Without instruments, these princes can do nothing. Whoever uses instruments, in finding helps, finds also impediments. Their power, therefore, is by no means complete, nor are they safe in extreme abuse.—But where popular authority is absolute and unstrained, the people have an infinitely greater, because a far better founded, confidence in their own power.—It is therefore of infinite importance that they should not be suffered to imagine that their will, any more than that of kings, is the standard of right and wrong, &c. &c.”

In all this, Sir, you, as usual, confound *religion* with the *civil establishment* of it, and hence the manifest inconclusiveness of your whole argument. Religion, no doubt, is useful to all men, of all ranks, in power, or subject to it, as it furnishes an additional motive to good behaviour in every situation. But what has this to do with any civil establishment of it, with its being maintained by the state, the officers of which state, will, of course, have the sole power of ecclesiastical as well as civil preferment? How will the members of a popular assembly be overawed by the admonitions of men whose salaries are settled, and whose places are disposed of, by themselves, any more than a single arbitrary sovereign? Will not the clergy always look up to that power, which has preferment at its disposal, in whatever hands it be lodged? Are not the established ministers in Holland advocates for their republican government, as much as the English bishops of this day for the limited monarchy of England, and as the bishops of Charles I. and II. were for absolute monarchy, passive obedience, and non-resistance?

The clergy, or any other set of men, in the pay of a state, soon perceive what are the maxims of the governing powers in that state, and readily adopt them. Are not the aspiring clergy of the present reign, advocates for higher maxims of government in church and state, than those of the two preceding reigns? The fact is evident, and the difference is to be looked for in the different dispositions of the courts. The former were liberal, and favourable to dissenters, and the present is less so. This alone accounts for the whole. If the governors of any country in which religion is established, have no motives to stand in awe of the ministers of religion, which they evidently have not (as they always see the ministers of religion standing in awe of *them*, and courting them) it is of no use to them that it is established at all. If it be of any use, it is simply as *religion*, as a principle operating upon conscience, and influencing individuals, independently of any civil establishment of it.

Indeed, Sir, you see this whole business in a very wrong point of light. The civil establishment of religion is so far from making it respectable, that it is the very thing that makes it contemptible; because it naturally tends to debase the minds of those who officiate in it, those to whom men will commonly look for examples of its proper spirit and tendency, and by whose principles and conduct they are too apt to form their opinion of it.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER IX.

Of An Elective Clergy.

Dear Sir,

THE dread you express of the clergy of this country becoming *elective*, is extreme, and the consequences which you imagine to flow from a regulation of this kind in the constitution of the church, you exhibit in the most alarming light. I shall select the following, as some of the strongest passages in your publication upon this subject, and I shall then make a few remarks upon them.

“The present ruling power” (viz. of France) “has,” you say, p. 217, “made a degrading, pensionary establishment, to which no man of liberal ideas, or liberal condition, will destine his children. It must settle into the lowest classes of the people. As with you, the inferior clergy are not numerous enough for their duty, as these duties are beyond measure, minute, and toilsome; as you have left no middle classes of clergy at their ease, in future nothing of science, or erudition, can exist in the Gallican church. To complete the project, without the least attention to the rights of patrons, the Assembly has provided in future an elective clergy; an arrangement which will drive out of the clerical profession all men of sobriety, all who can pretend to independence in their function or their conduct, and which will throw the whole direction of the public mind into the hands of a set of licentious, bold, crafty, factious, flattering wretches, of such condition, and such habits of life, as will make their contemptible pensions (in comparison of which the stipend of an exciseman is lucrative and honourable) an object of low and illiberal intrigue.”

“In short,” you say, p. 218, “it seems to me, that this new ecclesiastical establishment, is intended only to be temporary, and preparatory to the utter abolition, under any of its forms, of the christian religion, whenever the minds of men are prepared for this last stroke against it, by the accomplishment of the plan for bringing its ministers into universal contempt. I hope,” you add, p. 219, “their partizans in England, will succeed neither in the pillage of the ecclesiastics, nor in the introduction of a principle of popular election to our bishoprics and parochial cures. This, in the present condition of the world, would be the last corruption of the church, the utter ruin of the clerical character, the most dangerous shock that the state ever received through a misunderstood arrangement of religion.”

Now, Sir, had you reflected ever so little on the nature of the case, had you read ecclesiastical history, or had you opened your eyes to existing facts, such as almost obtrude themselves upon the most careless observer every day, you must have perceived that an *elective clergy* must have, always has had, and at this present time actually has, effects the very reverse of those with which your imagination (for here *judgment* is totally out of the question) is haunted.

Is it not true that, in all cases of a *civil* nature, every person, who receives a salary for any duty whatever, will be more attentive to that duty, when the person who pays the salary, and who is interested in the proper discharge of the duty, has the power of appointing and dismissing him? The reason is obvious. It then becomes the interest both of the person who performs the duty, and of the person who is benefited by it, that it be *well done*. And can it make any difference, whether the duty be of an ecclesiastical, or a civil nature, when both are discharged by *men*, beings of the same passions, and subject to the same influences? Every man will do his duty best when he has the eye of a master immediately upon him. Please, Sir, to make the trial. Let your domestic servants, or your domestic chaplain, be appointed not by yourself, but some other man, or body of men, and let it be as difficult and as slow a process, to obtain a change of them, as it now is for a parish to get rid of a minister whose conduct disgraces them, which is but too often the case. I do not believe that, upon this plan, you would have much expectation of being well served.

You dread a scene of *faction*, and low *intrigue* among the clergy who should be candidates for places in the church. But what was the fact for more than a thousand years in the christian church in general, when all the bishops and clergy were elective, when *men* were the same as they are now, and, when whatever you imagine of peculiar zeal, and disinterestedness, in the primitive times of the church, was certainly abated? Or what is now the case with the Dissenters in this country, and through all the states of North America, where the officiating clergy of all denominations are now, and ever have been, elective. In ancient times, where the emoluments were great, as in the churches of Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Rome, the election of bishops was sometimes attended with factions, and dangerous ones; but even there cases of this kind were rare, and in the ordinary sees they seldom or never happened. There are more than a thousand dissenting ministers in this kingdom, and they are all elected by their respective congregations; but any great inconvenience attending an election of this kind very seldom occurs. It is probable that you, though living in the country, never heard of any such thing, any more than in America, or among the dissenters in Ireland.

So far is there from being any cabal, or intrigue, to obtain places with us, that the person chosen seldom hears of it, till his invitation is sent to him; and any thing like *canvassing* would be an effectual bar to his election. Indeed, it very seldom happens that there is more than one candidate named at one time, and the members of any congregation are considered as very imprudent if they admit of two.

You say, that no person liberally educated, or any other than those in the lowest classes of life, will be candidates for church preferment. This, Sir, goes upon the idea that no person will officiate in a christian church but for the sake of the temporal emolument which he receives from it, which is a most unjust and ill-founded reflection on christianity, and the ministers of it. It may be the case with a church, the articles of which men of sense cannot subscribe, and the stated duty of which is against their consciences. For such services as *these* men must be *paid*, and very well paid too; and in general it will be done for nothing but the pay. But this is not the case with *us*, nor was it so in the early ages of the church. Though few of our salaries will more than half maintain us, there are never wanting persons of independent fortune,

and the most liberal education, who voluntarily devote themselves to the work of our ministry. From unbiassed choice they give their time, and their fortunes, to an employment which they deem to be most honourable and important, in whatever light it may appear to *you*; and our situation is such, that few besides persons of some ability and piety will think of the profession.

So respected is the character of a minister with us, though the case may be different with you, that whatever was his original rank in life, it places him on a level with the most opulent of his congregation; and it rarely happens but that, in all our congregations, there are some persons of as good fortunes, and as polished manners, as any others in the town or neighbourhood. On this account, as well as from a principle of genuine piety and benevolence, the situation of a dissenting minister has many attractions, especially to a person of a serious and studious turn of mind. We think it greatly preferable to that of the generality of the established clergy, with all their prospects of preferment, which often produce a cringing and servile disposition. And I will venture to say, that, independent of the private fortunes which many of our ministers have, their character and conduct render them as truly respectable, and independent in mind, as any set of clergy in the world; far more so, I am confident, than yours, with all the advantages you boast.

In consequence of the bishops in France becoming elective, you imagine that nothing of *science*, or *erudition*, will henceforth exist in the Gallican church. But did nothing of this kind exist in the christian church before the bishops ceased to be elective, which was a change made of late years in comparison? History shews the very reverse to have been the case. The dignified clergy, whom the court makes independent of the people, are not those who, in any country, produce learned theological works, but generally men in the lower orders, and who have no motive to chuse their profession besides an attachment to the duties and studies peculiar to it, and who wish to distinguish themselves in it. Very few of the bishops of your church have been writers, at least after they were made bishops. The greatest works your church has to boast of were the productions of obscure clergymen; and, despicable as our situation may appear to you, who certainly know very little about us, an application to the studies suited to our profession, appears, by the number of our writings, to be much greater than among the clergy of the established church. The relation we stand in to our congregations insures a respectable private character, and in a manner obliges us to devote the leisure we have to literature, to science, and to professional studies. How strangely, Sir, must you be blinded by your high church prejudices not to perceive that this both is, and necessarily *must be* the difference between the clergy of the established church, and ministers with us; a difference greatly to our advantage; and it arises wholly from our people having the choice of their ministers, and of course a power of dismissing them when, on any account, they do not approve of them.

You insinuate that the scheme to render the clergy of France elective, is preparatory to an intended abolition of christianity, as if christianity did not exist, and exist in infinitely greater purity, before any of the clergy were otherwise than elective. On the contrary, it is the system of church establishments that always has produced, and that ever must produce, unbelievers. You make it a mere engine of state, a source of *wealth* to some of the clergy, and of *power* to those who have the nomination of them;

and in both cases the proper interests of *religion* are never thought of. In consequence of this, it is notorious that the superior clergy in France and Italy, have long been generally considered as unbelievers, as well as those who procure them their preferment. That the church of England is not exempt from the same censure, I have actually known myself; and it is highly probable that, from similar causes, it still exists in a degree which I have now no opportunity of knowing. Yet though you clearly see that a splendid church establishment, with bishops appointed by the court, actually makes many of the clergy mere *men of the world*, so that they have nothing of the *christian minister*, besides the name, and the consequence of this has been the disbelief and utter contempt of christianity in men of rank and fortune, you would pretend that the abolishing of christianity would be the consequence of their dissolution. Indeed, Sir, both the nature of the case, and facts, which are obvious to the most careless eye, shew that christianity cannot be preserved along with them. They are a disease that must be extirpated, or the subject will be destroyed.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER X.

Of Monastic Institutions, And Mr. Burke'S General Maxim That Existing Powers Are Not To Be Destroyed.

Dear Sir,

YOU enlarge much, p. 234, &c. on the ill policy of the National Assembly of France, in dissolving the *monastic institutions* of that country, acknowledging, at the same time, that “they savour of superstition. This,” you say, “ought not, however, to hinder them from deriving from superstition itself any resources which from thence may be furnished for the public advantage.” You do not say what uses, religious or political, you would have made of the funds of these societies; but as you acknowledge that “the body of all true religion consists in obedience to the will of the Sovereign of the universe, in a confidence in his declarations, and in an imitation of his perfections,” it is sufficient, I should think, for a state to provide for *this*. If the state give the *body*, let the individuals themselves provide the *cloathing*, and to what better use can public lands and funds be applied, than to liquidate the debts of a state?

Monastic institutions have, no doubt, had their uses, and very great uses, when there was no other retreat for letters, or from the bustle of a barbarous age. But as literature and piety do not now want that asylum, and every purpose of useful religion may be gained as well, and even better, without it, what reason can there be for its continuance? Why preserve an old and inconvenient road, when a better is actually gained? Rather convert it into good arable or pasture land.

It is, besides, impossible to encourage superstition, but at the expence of true religion, as the experience of every age demonstrates. The duties of superstition are better defined than those of religion. Men know precisely when they have recited a certain number of prayers, or when they have received a certain number of lashes; but the great duties of benevolence (which, indeed, can only be discharged in society) are indefinite, and withal require an attention to the *inward temper of mind*, which is far more difficult than any of the injunctions of superstition. Will it not be natural, then, for men to attach themselves to the one, and neglect the other, especially when they are taught that the same end may be gained by either?

The very *principle* upon which monachism is founded, is false and delusive. It is that men, capable of performing the duties of life, may become fit for heaven by solitary meditation and prayer, without mixing with the world at all. While monasteries are kept up, this idea is encouraged. I cannot help thinking, therefore, that the National Assembly acted very wisely, when, in order to relieve themselves from the difficulties which the folly and extravagance of a former government had brought upon the country, they adopted the measure of abolishing their monasteries, making however a sufficient provision for the inhabitants of them.

You will not pretend to say that monastic institutions are any necessary part of the christian system, since no mention is made of any such thing in the New Testament, since such establishments as you lament the fall of, are, in fact, but recent things, and since christianity has not been found to suffer any thing by the demolition of them in this, or any other protestant country.

But “in monastic institutions,” you say, p. 232, “in my opinion, was found a great power for the mechanism of politic benevolence. There were revenues with a public direction; there were men wholly set apart and educated to public purposes, without any other than public ties, and public principles; men without a possibility of converting the estate of the community into a private fortune; men denied to self interest, whose avarice is for the community; men to whom personal poverty is honour, and implicit obedience stands in the place of freedom. In vain shall a man look to the possibility of making such things when he wants them. The winds blow as they list. These institutions are the products of enthusiasm; they are the instruments of wisdom. Wisdom cannot create materials, they are the gifts of nature, or chance; her pride is in the use. To destroy any power,” you say, p. 233, “growing wild from the rank productive force of the human mind, is almost tantamount in the moral world, to the destruction of the apparently active properties of bodies in the material. Had you no way of using the men, but by converting monks into pensioners?”

Upon this principle, of no *power* being to be *destroyed*, but only to be *regulated*, the greatest abuses may be perpetuated; because, in many cases, there is no preventing the abuse, without destroying the power itself. Such, for example, is the claim of the Popes to universal dominion over the christian church, and even over temporal princes; in fact, the assumption of *all power in heaven and in earth*. Such, also, is the power of a priest to give absolution of sins. To you it signifies nothing to allege, that these were altogether, and from the beginning, *innovations* and *abuses* in the christian system. You answer that they were *great powers, which cannot be created at pleasure*, and therefore that a wise statesman would be an advocate for their preservation, and not for their destruction.

To adopt your mode of reasoning, such deep rooted opinions, as formerly prevailed in all the christian world, of an immense power lodged for the wisest purposes in one visible head of the church, the sublime idea of one *spiritual father of all christian princes*, who had no other bond of union, and who stood in great need of one, and the confidence that all christians once had in the absolving power of their priests, authorised to give advice and direction in all cases in which *conscience* was concerned; such opinions as these, you will say, cannot be produced at pleasure, they were the slow growth of ages, and a foundation of *great powers*, which, if once destroyed, will never rise again. It was, therefore, nothing else than madness, you would say, in the first reformers, to aim at the subversion of these powers, by refuting the opinions on which they were founded. They should have contented themselves with preserving these powers, sacred and inviolable, and have contrived how to make a right use of them.

For the same reason, had you, in any country, as in Morocco, found the idea of the absolute power in the prince, the sacredness of his person, and the happiness of dying

by his hand, you would have been careful not to destroy that *power*, which you might not be able to re-produce; but, being happily in possession of it, would have made it subservient to the good of the country.

I am glad, however, to find that, though all powers are to be *continued*, you allow of some improvement in the *application* of them, which implies some change for the better. This is also implied in what you say by way of apology for the old church establishment of France, p. 206, that “it was an old one, and not frequently revised,” as if some *revisal*, at least, would have been proper. And if a revisal of *this* establishment would have been proper, why not that of *ours* also? Has the church of England acquired any prescriptive right, to stand in no need of any farther revision; or are you, Sir, authorised to say to reformation, *Hitherto shalt thou go, and no farther*? If not, why your sneers, p. 14, at a certain *lay divine*, who only proposed a revisal of the English liturgy and articles, which, in the opinion of many serious and thinking persons, though not in yours, very much want revision? Why, also, did you oppose the petition of a number of conscientious clergymen, to be released from their present obligation to subscribe to the thirty-nine articles, many of which you must yourself, surely, think are not absolutely essential to christianity? Why, then, might not clergymen, as well as others, have been at liberty to speculate freely, and think as they saw reason to do, with respect to them?

On the same principles on which you opposed a revision of the church establishment of *this* country, you would, no doubt, have opposed a revision of that of France, of Turkey, or of Indostan. However, the spirit of reformation, which is now gone forth, is *another great power*, as well as the *existing systems* to be reformed by it; and it is a power which grows stronger as they grow weaker; so that there can be no doubt which of them will finally prevail, notwithstanding the aid that your potent arm may give them.

You boldly avow your attachment to old establishments, because they are old. “In this enlightened age,” you say, p. 129, “I am bold enough to confess, that we are generally men of untaught feelings, that, instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them.”

On this principle, Sir, had you been a Pagan at the time of the promulgation of christianity, you would have continued one. You would also have opposed the reformation. You would, no doubt, have cherished the long and deep rooted prejudice of the earth being the center of our system, and every notion that was *old*; the creed of your nurse, and of your grandmother, in opposition to every thing *new*.

Cherish them, then, Sir, as much as you please. Prejudice and error is only a *mist*, which the sun, which has now risen, will effectually disperse. Keep them about you as tight as the countryman in the fable did his cloak; the same sun, without any more violence than the warmth of his beams, will compel you to throw it aside, unless you chuse to sweat under it, and bear the ridicule of all your cooler and less encumbered companions. The spirit of free and rational enquiry is now abroad, and without any

aid from the powers of this world, will not fail to overturn all error and false religion, wherever it is found, and neither the church of Rome, nor the church of England, will be able to stand before it.

Instead of your chimerical idea of *destroying no existing powers*, but of converting them to some *use*, which may answer no better than an attempt to tame a lion, or a tiger, adopt a plainer maxim, infinitely better adapted to the weak faculties of man, viz. to *follow truth wherever it leads you*, confident that the interests of truth will ever be inseparable from those of virtue and happiness, and equally so to states, as to individuals.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER XI.

Of The Sacredness Of The Revenues Of The Church.

Dear Sir,

YOUR opinion of the *sacredness*, and *majesty*, of an established church, is most conspicuous in what you say of its *revenues*. On this subject you appear to have adopted maxims, which, I believe, were never before avowed by any Protestant, viz. that the state has no power or authority over any thing, that has once been the property of the church.

“From the united consideration of religion and constitutional policy,” you say, p. 150, “from their opinion of a duty to make a sure provision for the consolation of the feeble, and the instruction of the ignorant, they have incorporated and identified the estate of the church with the mass of private property, of which the state is not the *proprietor*, either for *use* or *dominion*, but the *guardian* only, and the *regulator*. They have ordained that the provision of this establishment might be as stable as the earth on which it stands, and should not fluctuate with the Euripus of funds and actions.”

If the state be not the *proprietor* of the church lands, they must be the absolute *unalienable property* of the *church*, that is of *churchmen* only, and without their consent no alienation of them is lawful. Consequently, if all the members of the House of Commons, the king, and all the temporal lords, should vote the alienation of any part of them, it would be mere *robbery* without the consent of the bishops, or perhaps that of the whole convocation assembled for the purpose; perhaps not even then, the present clergy being only *trustees*, or having a *life estate* in a revenue which belongs to their successors. But, surely, if I have any knowledge of the British constitution, this doctrine is absolutely new to it, and certainly not deduced from the actual conduct of parliament, which has disposed of a very great proportion of what was once the property of the church. I even question whether the principle you here avow, would at this day be acknowledged at St. Omers. The Catholics of France had evidently no idea of the kind, and indeed it is for this that you reproach them.

The Dutch, and other protestant states, have confiscated all the old church property, and pay their clergy from the same public treasury, out of which the officers of the army and navy are paid; and they, no doubt, think themselves justified in so doing. A great proportion of the tithes in this country, and, as I am informed, the whole of them in Scotland, is now in the hands of lay proprietors, who, in your opinion, must all be guilty of *sacrilege*, though their conduct be sanctioned by the law of the land.

If the right of the church to its revenues is not to be affected by any act of a civil legislature, if this right be not derived from any *ordinance of man*, it must come to them from the *ordinance of God*. But where, Sir, do you find any record of this? There is no mention made of tithes, or of any permanent church property, in the New

Testament; and if it has been by the ordinance of God in any period subsequent to the writing of those books, it is incumbent upon you, Sir, and other advocates for the unalienable property of the church, to shew when the grant was made, and by what miracle (for nothing else can answer the purpose) it was confirmed. But every thing relative to the revenues of the church, is easily traced in history. We very well know *when*, and *whence*, every branch of it arose. It was altogether the ordinance of *men*, and generally of weak, superstitious, and priest-ridden men. And surely the mischiefs which have been found to arise from the folly of one age, ought to be removed by the wisdom of a subsequent one. In one passage, indeed, you allow all that I contend for, when you say, p. 154, “When once the common-wealth has established the estates of the church as property;” for this implies that the estates of the church are the gift of the common-wealth, or state; and what the state has *given*, it may surely *take away*. This is one, among many inconsistencies, in your work.

Such, I flatter myself, is the light of the present day, that, confident as you are of your maxim, and of the members of our legislature acting upon it, you will some time or other find yourself mistaken. “The Commons of Great Britain,” you say, p. 156, “in a national emergency, will never seek their resource from the confiscation of the estates of the church and poor. Sacrilege and proscription are not among the ways and means of our committee of supply. The Jews, in Change-alley, have not yet dared to hint their hopes of a mortgage on the revenues belonging to the see of Canterbury. I am not afraid that I shall be disavowed, when I assure you, that there is not *one* public man in this kingdom whom you would wish to quote, no not one of any party or description, who does not reprobate the dishonest, perfidious, and cruel confiscation which the National Assembly has been compelled to make, of that property which it was their first duty to protect.”

I am surprized, Sir, that you should not be sensible that this declaration is by no means true in fact. It is in my own power to quote many persons in public life, who greatly approve that conduct of the National Assembly of France which you so strongly condemn. You forget that *Salus Reipublicæ est suprema lex*; and if ever the circumstances of this country should be such, as that either the interest of the *church* or the *state* must be abandoned, I have no doubt but the former would be readily sacrificed to the latter.

You have made the provision for the *poor* as sacred as that for the *church*. But certainly this was the institution of *man*, or rather of *woman*; for it took its rise in the time of queen Elizabeth, in this country, and is not known in any other. To many persons, as well as to myself, our method of providing for the poor, is no proof of the wisdom of our ancestors. It takes from man the necessity of *foresight*, and instead of being the most provident, makes him the most improvident of all creatures. So far are our poor laws from encouraging industry, that they encourage idleness, and of course profligacy. Such is the state of this country, burthened with taxes to support the church, and the poor, and to pay the interest (the principal is out of the question) of debts contracted by the folly of our ancestors, that its ability to support itself under them, is very problematical* .

“It is,” you say, p. 149, “from our attachment to a church establishment, that the English nation did not think it wise to intrust that great fundamental interest of the whole, to what they trust no part of their civil or military public service, that is, to the unsteady and precarious contribution of individuals. They go farther. They certainly never have suffered, and never will suffer, the fixed estate of the church to be converted into a pension, to depend on the Treasury, &c. The people of England think that they have constitutional motives, as well as religious, against any project of turning their independent clergy into ecclesiastical pensioners of state. They tremble for their liberty, from the influence of a clergy dependent on the crown; they tremble for the public tranquility, from the disorders of a factious clergy, if it were made to depend upon any other than the crown. They therefore made their church, like their king, and their nobility, independent.”

There are several positions in this paragraph, that appear to me rather extraordinary. The clergy, to be as independent as the crown, or the nobility, should have a negative in all proceedings in parliament. But the clergy are, in fact, dependent upon the crown, and must necessarily be so, while the crown has the disposal of all bishoprics, and other great preferments; and the effect of this is seen by their voting with the crown. It is also no compliment to the general disposition of the clergy, that you should tremble for the effects of their *factions*, if they were to depend upon any other than the crown. I should think, however, that, if they be so dangerous a body of men, you might make yourself rather easier if they were made to depend on the *whole legislature*, and not upon the crown only, to which they now give a dangerous accession of power.

But, Sir, only take away the emoluments of the clergy, and leave them to subsist, as we dissenting ministers do, and as the apostles and bishops in primitive times did, on the voluntary contributions of those who are benefited by their ministry, and you will effectually remove all cause of trembling on their account. Let them be naturally as quarrelsome as dogs, they will be as quiet as lambs, if no bone of contention be thrown among them. What danger arises from *our* divisions, or those of the many discordant sects which have ever existed in North America? Be they ever so great, we never trouble the state with them, and we are unanimous and hearty in every common cause, respecting either christianity or public liberty.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER XII.

Of The Danger Of The Church, And Of The Test Laws.

Dear Sir,

THE cry of the *church being in danger*, is almost as old as the church itself, and has been kept up by its friends, and physicians, whenever it has suited their purpose, from the earliest times to the present day. This has served as an excuse for every outrage upon others; as if nothing was ever meant by them, but to secure itself. And thus the most bloody and *offensive* wars are often made under the cover of being merely *defensive* ones, which are always held to be lawful. Now, had this church of yours, whose fears and cries have always been the signal of alarm to all its neighbours, being made of proper materials, and constructed in a proper manner, it would never have had any thing to fear. The *church of Christ* is built upon a rock, and we are assured that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. Had your church been built upon this rock of truth, it would have had nothing to fear. Its own evidence and excellence would have supported it. Should the *state* itself be overturned, the people would, of themselves, and from predilection, reinstate their favourite *church* in all its former rights and privileges. But you are sensible it has not this hold on the minds of the people, and you justly suspect that, if any misfortune should happen to it, they would never rebuild it, but, if left to their own free choice, would adopt some other plan, more useful and commodious.

Time was when your church pretended to *fear where no fear was*, and being then vigorous, her cries were heard as the roaring of a lion. Of late she has been so feeble, that we only amuse ourselves with them; and now the danger is really transferred from us to herself.

As you, Sir, are so *tremblingly alive all over*, for the fate of this dear church of yours, I will tell you two real causes of apprehension with respect to it, the one from without, and the other from within.

I. Be afraid of war, or any thing that shall add to the public burdens. For whenever the time shall come that the interest of the national debt cannot be paid (and that time certainly approaches) sacred as the property of the church might be in your pious hands, in whose mind, as you say, p. 147, “a continued and general approbation of the church establishment is so worked, that you are not able to distinguish what you have learned from others from the result of your own meditations;” other persons, having had a different education, may be able to make this distinction, and without any dread of divine judgments, may, while you stand aghast with horror, and expiring with dismay, apply the hallowed treasure to some unhallowed use. Had our present minister actually entered into the war that some suppose he did not do wisely to provoke, and the consequence had been, as it probably would, the addition of another hundred millions to our debt, though *you* might not tremble for what you consider as

the *ark of God* in this country, other persons, whose faith was not so strong, certainly would.

You, Sir, appear not to be insensible of the new and critical situation into which immense public debts have brought most European nations, our own not excepted. The apparent stability of these governments has encouraged them to venture upon a system, which, by calling forth the powers of future generations in aid of the present, has enabled them to make extraordinary exertions on particular occasions. Had there been wisdom in these exertions, posterity, being benefited by them, would have reason to thank their ancestors. But exertions of this kind exceeding the natural powers of the state, have resembled those convulsive motions of the muscles which exhaust their force, and debilitate them with respect to future exertions. And if this system be pursued, as in all probability it will, the time must come when even these extraordinary resources will fail, and we shall then find ourselves in the very same difficulties in which the French are involved at present.

In this case (which it behoves us to be looking forward to, that we may collect all our wisdom in order to lessen the danger with which it threatens us) do you imagine, Sir, that we shall be able to preserve our present government in all its forms, civil and ecclesiastical, any more than the French have been able to preserve theirs? Do not flatter yourself so much. That great crisis will be the touchstone to our government, as well as to that of France. Whatever shall be then thought to be *unsound* in the constitution, and to have contributed, directly or indirectly, to bring us into our difficulties, will be marked for excision, and if we must, as it were, *begin again*, as the French have found themselves under a necessity of doing, we shall, no doubt, endeavour to begin upon a better plan, and retain as few as possible of the imperfections of which we now complain, and shall then complain of more.

Is it not our immense public debt, that has in various ways contributed to the increased *power of the crown* (of which you, Sir, among others, not long ago complained) and is it possible, then, that *this* should continue the same, when this debt, which now supports it, can no longer be supported? Is not our present shamefully *unequal representation* another circumstance connected with the power of the crown, giving it a decided majority in the House of Commons? Can this, therefore, be continued, when the power of the crown is diminished; and will not these great changes in the civil constitution be followed by many others?

In this necessary reformation of the *civil* government, will it be possible, think you, to prevent all enquiry into *ecclesiastical* matters, which are now so closely connected with things of a civil nature? In this case, is it a certainty that *any* church establishment will be continued; or if there be, will it be precisely that which now subsists? Will the bishops retain their seats in Parliament? Will the spiritual courts be continued? Will the clergy be maintained by tithes? Will the doctrines of the church undergo no change? Will the subscription to all the thirty-nine articles be still enforced? Will the universities remain shut to the Dissenters, who cannot subscribe to them? Will the test laws remain in force, to exclude us from all civil offices, &c. &c. &c.? If this be your opinion, *great*, indeed, Sir, *is your faith*, greater, I imagine, than that of many an archbishop. Though however, it should be equal to the *removing* of

all these *mountains*, you will, I doubt not, imagine this favourite church of yours to be rather safer in times of *peace*, and without any farther encrease of our national debt, than with a *war* that might double it.

II. This danger from *without* is uncertain, and may be warded off; but not so that from *within*. I mean the growing light of the age, in consequence of which we are more and more sensible of the absurdity of the doctrines, the insufficiency of the discipline, and the oppression of the revenues, of your church. The people of this country will at length discover that what they have paid so dearly for, as a *benefit*, is really a *nuisance*, that it is hostile to the clearest truth, and subversive of rational liberty, that very liberty for which you, Sir, profess to be a warm advocate.

Dissenters of one denomination or other, are very much increased of late years, and many of them are avowedly hostile to every establishment. The methodists are by no means attached to it. Few of them ever trouble your churches, and frequently in great bodies become dissenters; and the far greater part of the nominal churchmen only hold to the church from form and custom; the more serious and intelligent of them earnestly wishing for a change, but desirous of promoting it without noise or risk. Few persons of rank attend your worship, or any worship, and are only attached to the church for secular purposes. But this and every thing else, short of a real approbation and predilection, are uncertain and poor props for so old and decayed a building as yours is.

The increase of dissenters is a fact that you and your clergy are either wholly ignorant of, or are strangely inattentive to. I shall mention only one instance. I have resided in Birmingham only ten years, and there are now building the eighth, ninth, and tenth, new places of dissenting or methodist worship, besides another building converted into a place of worship, in this town, all within this short period, nine of them for new congregations, and the others for increased ones. Another is talked of, and many have been built in the neighbourhood; and in this time there has not been one additional church, or chapel, for the members of the church of England. The increase of the dissenters and methodists in Sheffield, in Leeds, and, I have no doubt, in other manufacturing towns, has been nearly in the same proportion.

Every controversy in which churchmen have meddled has been to their disadvantage. The heads of the church therefore now wisely discourage all controversy, but even this policy will not avail them long. Every clergyman is not wise, and *fools*, as they say, *will be meddling*; and every meddling is to their hurt, and that of their cause.

Let thinking people, then, judge what must be the fate of a church, whose fundamental doctrines are disbelieved by men of sense and inquiry, whose articles are well known not to be subscribed *bonâ fide* by those who officiate in it, while the truly enlightened and serious either keep out of the church, or relinquish their preferment in it. And this is very much the case with the church of England at present.

The alliance of any state with so weak and tottering a church as yours must either be dissolved, or both must fall together. And, astonished as you are at “the steady eye with which” you say, p. 85, “we are prepared to view the greatest calamity that can

befal this country,” the dissolution of this fatal alliance is still the object of our most ardent wishes. By the calmest representations, and the most earnest remonstrances, we are endeavouring to bring about a peaceable separation, attended with no calamity. We have therefore nothing to blame ourselves for, if that calamity, which we foresee, and deplore, but which the obstinacy of others may put it out of our power to prevent, should come. Happy is such a country as America, where no such alliance as that of church and state was ever formed, where no such unnatural mixture of ecclesiastical and civil polity was ever made. They see our errors, and wisely avoid them. We also may see them, but when it will be too late.

You, Sir, who with many others have lately joined in the cry of the church being in danger, have thought to guard it by *laws and tests*, excluding Dissenters from all places of trust and profit. Paying our full share to the public taxes, and having always distinguished ourselves by our industry, in manufactures and commerce (all our trading towns abounding with Dissenters) we thought it not unreasonable to request a right of admission, at the will of the crown, or the election of our fellow subjects, to such advantages as arise from that flourishing state of the country to which, it is not denied that, we have eminently contributed. Thrice we have made the application, and twice you, Sir, made no opposition to us. We therefore flattered ourselves that, having been in other respects a friend to *equal liberty*, especially in America and Ireland, and Scotland also, where no such tests are known, you would have been a friend to *us*. But it seems that, after deeply ruminating on the subject, and having, no doubt, prayed for, and as you thought obtained, more light than you had before, you most unexpectedly, and with peculiar warmth and fierceness, opposed us* .

As you have given some attention to the case of the dissenters, and, in your speech in our favour, complained of the hardship of our being obliged to subscribe to the articles of the church, from which we derive no emolument, I wonder that you do not likewise see the unreasonableness of our being subjected to any other hardship on the same principle. As we derive no *advantage* from the established church, we ought not to suffer any unnecessary *disadvantage* from our nonconformity to it. But we certainly do so, if we be excluded from all civil offices and emoluments on that account. Must the members of this favourite church of yours, engross all the good things of *this life* as well as those of *another*, and must we unfortunate Dissenters partake of neither?

That there is danger threatening your church, I clearly see. But the method you have adopted has no tendency to lessen, but only to increase that danger. The old adage, which you had forgotten is *divide et impera*; but by holding us all out as equally objects of exclusion from places of trust and power, you give us a common interest, and a *bond of union*, which we hardly thought of before. Far from being discouraged by our repulses, we shall not fail to renew our application with more confidence than ever, seeing nothing but justice on our side, and jealous bigotry on yours.

Had you admitted us to an equal participation of civil rights, we might have thought less of our religious ones. Indeed, persons who are candidates for *civil offices* are not apt to be zealous in matters of *religion*; or if they were, the Dissenters in office being greatly out-numbered by the members of the established church, in the same or

similar offices, and divided among themselves, their power of hurting the state would have been nothing. A child in politics might have seen this, but you, Sir, did not.

You also did not see that, what we most of all wish, and what you have the greatest reason to dread, is not any temporal power, or influence, that we have any chance of acquiring. This we think little about, but *discussion*, the free discussion of every thing relating to religion. For, distant as they may appear in idea, all religious subjects have a relation to each other, the doctrine of the test and that of the trinity, the power of a justice of peace and that of a bishop or archbishop. Touch but any extremity of the web, and the vibration will be felt to the center, and to every other extremity.

Your clergy themselves force this upon us. For they cannot rail at us as Dissenters, but they must needs glance at our *opinions*, and especially such as they imagine will render us most obnoxious, never forgetting *unitarianism*. Consequently, when we defend ourselves, not being apt to entertain doubts of the goodness of our cause, we pursue our antagonists through the whole field of their argument. We boldly assert the *unity of God*, and the purity and simplicity of his worship. We exclaim against all usurpation of the rights of our only law-giver Jesus Christ, by priests or kings, by councils or parliaments. On these topics we are always ready to *cry aloud and not spare*. In this manner, Sir, you raise a storm the force of which you and your church will not be able to stand.

It is amusing to observe how very differently the same things strike different persons, according to their previous educations and habits of thinking. Dr. Price advises those who object to the religion prescribed by public authority, and who yet cannot altogether approve of any other, that is openly professed in their country, to set up a separate worship for themselves. To me nothing appears more reasonable than this conduct; and yet you, Sir, endeavour, p. 15, to turn it into ridicule; no doubt, because to you it really appears in a ridiculous light. But *ridicule is not the test of truth*, and if reason and common sense is to be heard, it must surely appear even to yourself, if you reflect a moment on the subject, that upon any other principle than that of Dr. Price, no reformation can be justified. Because, upon the very same principle, whatever it be, that any person is authorised to dissent from a mode of worship set up by the state, he is authorised to dissent from any that may be set up by private persons; and if he think the public profession of religion in the form of *public worship* to be a duty, he is obliged in conscience to set up one of his own, whether more or fewer persons, or any besides his own family, will join him in it. And where, Sir, would be the great inconvenience of masters of families, of whatever rank, being *priests* as well as *kings* in their own household? What is there in the duty of a teacher of christianity, that you, Sir, are not qualified to discharge? And this age furnishes abundant helps for those who are not qualified. If any thing else be an obstruction to this scheme, it must arise from the influence of mere fashion, or superstition.

You, Sir, seem to dread a *number of sects* among christians. But what serious inconvenience would arise from their being increased even ten fold? It would be much better for the state, than if there were only two. Religious bigotry would also be diminished by this means, and the members of these sects would sooner learn to exercise charity for each other, distinguishing the great things in which all christians

agree, from the comparatively smaller things in which any of them differ. In this way, also, they would sooner arrive at a *rational uniformity*; the points of difference being freely canvassed, and truth prevailing, and establishing itself, as, no doubt, it will in the end.

I am now, Sir, about to relieve your attention, and that of our readers, to the subject of the *connexion*, or, as it is called, the *alliance*, between the church and the state, but I cannot wholly conclude without expressing my earnest wish that it may be thoroughly considered in every point of view.

It certainly opens a field of very important discussion for philosophers, politicians, and divines; and it is not to be treated in an authoritative dogmatical way. That christian ministers should be paid by the state, rather than by those who chuse to be instructed by them; that they ought to have temporal courts, with the power of inflicting civil penalties; that princes should have the nomination of them; that some of them should be equal in rank and power to temporal peers; and that articles of faith should have the sanction of a temporal legislature, are by no means *axioms*, or self evident truths, in a system of civil policy. There must, therefore, be more *simple principles*, from which, if they be proper expedients in government, their necessity, or expedience, may be deduced. Let us then see what those principles are, and in what manner the deduction is made.

It cannot be said, that the necessity, or expedience, of this mixture of civil and ecclesiastical power is to be taken for granted; these things having never been found asunder; because, for many centuries, as I have shewn, all the particulars mentioned above were unknown in the christian world, and some of them are comparatively of very late date. Let us then examine their real origin, and consider the circumstances in which they arose; and let us see whether our present circumstances really *require* any such institutions.

It is time, however, to draw the attention of politicians to the subject, and to compare all the consequences which either actually have attended, or which may probably attend, each of the two schemes.

Infinite, as every person acquainted with history must acknowledge, have been the evils that have resulted to mankind, and especially the christian world, from the interference of civil power in matters of religion. Hence all persecution in every age, and almost all the hatred and animosity that has arisen among the different sects and parties of Christians, for which there would have been very little food, or exercise, if civil magistrates had not interfered in the disputes of theologians. Hence a great additional cause of taxation, and generally in the most inconvenient form; and hence the introduction of a totally *new power*, which it has been thought necessary to combine with the old ones in the system of government, and which has generally been placed on a par with all the rest; the *church* and the *state* having become correlative terms. And as nothing is found more difficult to balance than *two powers*, the one necessarily gaining what the other loses, the struggle between these two was incessant, and productive of the worst effects, for many centuries, in all parts of christendom. At the reformation the power of the church was very much broken, but

still too much of it remains in all countries, and more of it in this, than in any Protestant state whatever. For in no other of them have ecclesiastics a seat in the supreme legislature of the nation.

But though the power of the church was derived from the feudal system, this most absurd of all its parts still remains, when many other parts of it, far less exceptionable and inconvenient, have been abolished. But as the church cannot now subsist of itself, as it did formerly, when it overawed the whole of the state; it gives a vast additional power to the crown, on which it is now wholly dependent; our princes having assumed that *supremacy over the church*, which had been usurped by the popes.

Here, then, is an ample field of argument; and why may not the discussion be as cool and amicable as any other? You, Sir, have made it a subject of popular declamation, rather than of dispassionate reasoning; but that need not hinder others from taking it up in a different and better manner: and if you will please to change your style, and assume the character of a *philosopher*, and not that of a mere *rhetorician*, it will be very agreeable to us to have you of the party. You are now of an age in which I should have imagined, that the powers of the *imagination* would have been more checked by those of *reason*. On this subject, the *passions*, as well as the *imagination*, should be absolutely silent, and the friends and enemies of church establishments should simply *reason together*.

It is time that we no longer *halt between two opinions*, so very important and opposite to each other, as, whether religion should be left to every man's free choice, like philosophy, or medicine, or it should be imposed upon men, whether they chuse it or not; whether any man, or body of men, have a right to prescribe articles of faith to others, or whether every man should be left to think and act for himself in this respect, accountable only to God, and his own conscience. Let us come to a serious *issue* in this business, and if christian states have gone upon wrong and erroneous principles, neither agreeable to truth, nor favourable to the interests of society, let them by all means be reformed, and as speedily, and with as little inconvenience, as possible. Or, if the constitution we complain of be a good one, or *the best all things considered*, let it appear to be so, in fair and open discussion, and we shall acquiesce in it.

In these *Letters*, I have by no means exhausted this subject. Much more remains to be said, and much more I have myself advanced in other publications, especially in my *Essay on the principles of civil government*, the second edition, which includes what I have advanced on *church authority*, in reply to Dr. Balguy; and in my *Familiar letters addressed to the inhabitants of Birmingham*.

To shew that I am not singular in my opinion of the impropriety of civil establishments of religion, I would more particularly recommend to your notice, and that of my readers, an excellent tract of Mr. Berrington's, intitled, *The Rights of Dissenters*; nor is he the only Catholic who sees this business of the *alliance of church and state* in the same light that I do. Different as are our systems of religion, in a variety of important respects, we are equally willing that they should stand or fall by their proper evidence, and we ask no aid of the civil power to support them.

I shall close this article with an extract from *Dr. Ramsay's History of the American Revolution*. Speaking of the new forms of government which were framed after the emancipation of the Americans from their subjection of this country, he says, Vol. I. p. 355, "It was one of the peculiarities of these forms of government, that all religious establishments were abolished. Some retained a constitutional distinction between christians and others, with respect to eligibility to office; but the idea of supporting one denomination at the expence of others, or of raising any one sect of protestants to a legal pre-eminence, was universally reprobated. The *alliance between church and state* was compleatly broken, and each was left to support itself independent of the other. The world," he says, Vol. II. p. 317, "will soon see the result of an experiment in politics, and be able to determine whether the happiness of society is encreased by religious establishments, or diminished by the want of them." It is an experiment, I will add, on a sufficiently large scale, and in a very reasonable time, we may expect to see the result of the process.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Yours, &C.

[\[Back to Table of Contents\]](#)

LETTER XIII.

Of The Prospect Of The General Enlargement Of Liberty, Civil And Religious, Opened By The Revolution In France.

Dear Sir,

I CANNOT conclude these *Letters*, without congratulating, not *you*, Sir, or the many admirers of your performance, who have no feeling of *joy* on the occasion, but the French nation, and the world; I mean the liberal, the rational, and the virtuous part of the world, on the great revolution that has taken place in France, as well as on that which some time ago took place in America. Such events as these teach the doctrine of *liberty*, *civil* and *religious*, with infinitely greater clearness and force, than a thousand treatises on the subject. They speak a language intelligible to all the world, and preach a doctrine congenial to every human heart.

These great events, in many respects unparalleled in all history, make a totally new, a most wonderful, and important, æra in the history of mankind. It is, to adopt your own rhetorical style, a change from darkness to light, from superstition to sound knowledge, and from a most debasing servitude to a state of the most exalted freedom. It is a liberating of all the powers of man from that variety of fetters, by which they have hitherto been held. So that, in comparison with what has been, now only can we expect to see what men really are, and what they can do.

The generality of governments have hitherto been little more than a combination of *the few* against *the many*; and to the mean passions and low cunning of these few, have the great interests of mankind been too long sacrificed. Whole nations have been deluged with blood, and every source of future prosperity has been drained, to gratify the caprices of some of the most despicable, or the most execrable, of the human species. For what else have been the generality of kings, their ministers of state, or their mistresses, to whose wills whole kingdoms have been subject? What can we say of those who have hitherto taken the lead in conducting the affairs of nations, but that they have commonly been either *weak* or *wicked*, and sometimes both? Hence the common reproach of all histories, that they exhibit little more than a view of the vices and miseries of mankind.

Hitherto, also, infinite have been the mischiefs in which all nations have been involved, on account of *religion*, with which, as it concerns only God and men's own consciences, civil government, as such, has nothing to do. Statesmen, misled by ignorant or interested priests, have taken upon them to prescribe what men should believe and practice, in order to get to heaven, when they themselves have often neither believed, nor practised, any thing under that description. They have set up idols, to which all men, under the severest penalties, have been compelled to bow; and the wealth and power of populous nations, which might have been employed in great

and useful undertakings, have been diverted from their proper channels, to enforce their unrighteous decrees. By this means have mankind been kept for ages in a state of bondage worse than Egyptian, the bondage of the mind.

How glorious, then, is the prospect, the reverse of all the past, which is now opening upon us, and upon the world. Government, we may now expect to see, not only in theory, and in books, but in actual practice, calculated for the general good, and taking no more upon it than the general good requires; leaving all men the enjoyment of as many of their *natural rights* as possible, and no more interfering with matters of religion, with men's notions concerning God, and a future state, than with philosophy or medicine.

After the noble example of America, we may expect, in due time, to see the governing powers of all nations confining their attention to the *civil* concerns of them, and consulting their welfare in the present state only; in consequence of which they may all be flourishing and happy. *Truth* of all kinds, and especially *religious truth*, meeting with no obstruction, and standing in no need of heterogeneous supports, will then establish itself by its own evidence; and whatever is *false* and delusive, all the forms of superstition, every corruption of true religion, and all usurpation over the rights of conscience, which have been supported by power or prejudice, will be universally exploded, as they ought to be.

Together with the general prevalence of the true principles of civil government, we may expect to see the extinction of all *national prejudice*, and enmity, and the establishment of *universal peace* and good will among all nations. When the affairs of the various societies of mankind shall be conducted by those who shall truly represent them, who shall feel as they feel, and think as they think; who shall really understand, and consult their interests, they will no more engage in those mutually offensive *wars*, which the experience of many centuries has shown to be constantly expensive and ruinous. They will no longer covet what belongs to others, which they have found to be of no real service to them, but will content themselves with making the most of their own.

The very idea of *distant possessions* will be even ridiculed. The East and the West Indies, and every thing *without ourselves* will be disregarded, and wholly excluded from all European systems; and only those divisions of men, and of territory, will take place, which the common convenience requires, and not such as the mad and insatiable ambition of princes demands. No part of America, Africa, or Asia, will be held in subjection to any part of Europe, and all the intercourse that will be kept up among them, will be for their mutual advantage.

The causes of *civil wars*, the most distressing of all others, will likewise cease, as well as those of foreign ones. They are chiefly contentions for *offices*, on account of the power and emoluments annexed to them. But when the *nature* and *uses* of all civil offices shall be well understood, the power and emoluments annexed to them, will not be an object sufficient to produce a war. Is it at all probable, that there will ever be a civil war in America, about the presidentship of the *United States*? And when the chief magistracies in other countries shall be reduced to their proper standard, they

will be no more worth contending for, than they are in America. If the actual business of a nation be done as well for the small emolument of that presidentship, as the similar business of other nations, there will be no apparent reason why more should be given for doing it.

If there be a superfluity of public money, it will not be employed to augment the profusion, and increase the undue influence, of individuals, but in works of great public utility, which are always wanted, and which nothing but the enormous expences of government, and of wars, chiefly occasioned by the ambition of kings and courts, have prevented from being carried into execution. The expence of the late American war only would have converted all the waste grounds of this country into gardens. What canals, bridges, and noble roads, &c. &c. would it not have made for us? If the *pride of nations* must be gratified, let it be in such things as these, and not in the idle pageantry of a court, calculated only to corrupt and enslave a nation.

Another cause of civil wars has been an attachment to certain persons and families, as possessed of some *inherent right* to kingly power. Such were the bloody wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, in this country. But when, besides the reduction of the power of crowns within their proper bounds (when it will be no greater than the public good requires) that kind of respect for princes which is founded on mere superstition (exactly similar to that which has been attached to priests in all countries) shall vanish, as all superstition certainly will before real knowledge, wise nations will not involve themselves in war for the sake of any particular persons, or families, who have never shewn an equal regard for them. They will consider their own interest more, and that of their magistrates less.

Other remaining causes of civil war are different opinions about modes of government, and differences of interests between provinces. But when mankind shall be a little more accustomed to reflection, and consider the miseries of civil war, they will have recourse to any other method of deciding their differences, in preference to that of the sword. It was taken for granted, that the moment America had thrown off the yoke of Great Britain, the different states would go to war among themselves, on some of these accounts. But the event has not verified the prediction, nor is it at all probable that it ever will. The people of that country are wiser than such prophets in this.

If *time* be allowed for the discussion of differences, so great a majority will form one opinion, that the minority will see the necessity of giving way. Thus will *reason* be the umpire in all disputes, and extinguish civil wars as well as foreign ones. The empire of reason will ever be the reign of peace.

This, Sir, will be the happy state of things, distinctly and repeatedly foretold in many prophecies, delivered more than two thousand years ago; when the common parent of mankind will *cause wars to cease to the ends of the earth*, when *men shall beat their swords into plough-shares, and their spears into pruning books; when nation shall no more rise up against nation, and when they shall learn war no more.* Is. ii. 4. Micah iv. 3. This is a state of things which good sense, and the prevailing spirit of commerce, aided by christianity, and true philosophy, cannot fail to effect in time. But

it can never take place while mankind are governed in the wretched manner in which they now are. For peace can never be established, but upon the extinction of the *causes of war*, which exist in all the present forms of government, and in the political maxims which will always be encouraged by them. I mention this topic in a letter to *you*, on the idea that you are a real believer in revelation, though your defence of all church establishments, as such, is no argument in favour of this opinion; the most zealous abettors of *them*, and the most determined enemies of all reformation, having been unbelievers in all religion, which they have made use of merely as an engine of state.

In this new condition of the world, there may still be *kings*, but they will be no longer *sovereigns*, or *supreme lords*, no human beings to whom will be ascribed such titles as those of *most sacred*, or *most excellent majesty*. There will be no more such a profanation of epithets, belonging to God only, by the application of them to mortals like ourselves. There will be *magistrates*, appointed and paid for the conservation of order, but they will only be considered as the first *servants of the people*, and accountable to them. Standing armies, those instruments of tyranny, will be unknown, though the people may be trained to the use of arms, for the purpose of repelling the invasion of *Barbarians*. For no other description of men will have recourse to war, or think of disturbing the repose of others; and till they become civilized, as in the natural progress of things they necessarily must, they will be sufficiently overawed by the superior power of nations that are so.

There will still be *religion*, and of course *ministers* of it; as there will be teachers of philosophy, and practitioners in medicine; but it will no longer be the concern of the state. There will be no more *Lord Bishops*, or *Archbishops*, with the titles, and powers, of temporal princes. Every man will provide religion for himself; and therefore it will be such as, after due enquiry, and examination, he shall think to be founded on truth, and best calculated to make men good citizens, good friends, and good neighbours in this world, as well as to fit them for another.

Government, being thus simple in its objects, will be unspeakably less *expensive* than it is at present, as well as far more *effectual* in answering its proper purpose. There will then be little to provide for besides the administration of justice, or the preservation of the peace, which it will be the interest of every man to attend to, in aid of government.

They are chiefly our vices and follies that lay us under contribution, in the form of the *taxes* we now pay; and they will, of course, become superfluous, as the world grows wiser and better. It is a most unreasonable sum that we now pay for the single article of *government*. We give, perhaps, the amount of one half our property, for the secure enjoyment of the rest, which, after all, for want of a good police, is very insecure.

However, the enormous debts which our present systems of government, and the follies of our governors, have intailed upon us, like all other *evils* in the plan of providence, promise to be eventually the cause of the greatest *good*, as necessary means of bringing about the happy state of things above described. And the

improvement of Europe may serve as an example to the rest of the world, and be the instrument of other important changes, which I shall not dwell upon in this place.

By means of *national debts*, the wheels of several European governments are already so much clogged, that it is impossible they should go on much longer. We see our taxes, even without war, continually increasing. The very peace establishment of France could not be kept up any longer, and the same must soon be the situation of other nations. All the causes which have operated to the increase of these debts, continue to operate, and with increased force; so that our approach to this *great crisis* of our affairs, is not equable, but accelerated. The present generation has seen the debt of this nation rise from a mere trifle to an amount that already threatens ruin. And will not the next generation, if not the present, see this ruin?

If the present change of the French government, brought on, to use a phrase of yours, by *fiscal difficulties*, has been attended with such an interruption of their manufactures, such a stagnation of their commerce, and such a diminution of their current specie, as has greatly added to the difficulties of that country; what are we to expect, in a similar crisis, in *this* country, which depends so much more upon manufactures and commerce than France ever did, and which has far less resource within itself?

If you, Sir, together with your old or your new friends, can steer the ship of the state through the storm, which we all see to be approaching, you will have more wisdom and steadiness than has yet been found in any who have hitherto been at the head of our affairs. And if, in these circumstances, you can save the *church*, as well as the *state*, you will deserve no less than *canonization*, and St. Edmund will be the greatest name in the calendar. But great occasions call forth, and in a manner create, great and unknown ability, as we have lately seen in the history of the American revolution. A good providence also governs the world, and therefore we need not despair.

If the condition of other nations be as much bettered as that of France will probably be, by her improved system of government, this great crisis, dreadful as it appears in prospect, will be *a consummation devoutly to be wished for*, and though calamitous to many, perhaps to many innocent persons, will be eventually most glorious and happy.

To you, Sir, all this may appear such wild declamation, as your treatise appears to me. But speculations of this kind contribute to exhilarate my mind, as the consideration of the French revolution has contributed to disturb and distress yours; and thus is verified the common proverb, which says, *One man's meat is another man's poison*. If this be a dream, it is, however, a pleasing one, and has nothing in it malignant, or unfriendly to any. All that I look to promises no exclusive advantage to myself, or my friends; but an equal field for every generous exertion to *all*, and it makes the great object of all our exertions to be the public good.

I Am, Dear Sir,
Your Very Humble Servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Birmingham, Jan. 1, 1791.

[*] C'étoit, sans doute, une assez grande occasion; c'étoit un assez grand travail, que de concourir à régénérer la France, à y sonde la liberté, & à y créer des lois & des mœurs.

[†] Une très petite portion d'individus pourroit rendre inutiles les intentiones pures de la majorité.

[*] Il est cependant vrai de dire, que tous les grandes principes, tous ces principes tutélaires des sociétés, conservateurs des droits de l'homme, & de sa dignité, protecteurs de son repos & de son bonheur, y sont renfermés. Je crois que cette declaration pourra être applaudie, le jour où les troubles qui s'élevoient, pendant que nous la rédignons, seront calmés.

[*] I am informed by a gentleman who was at Paris during the whole of these transactions, that there is no truth at all in what Mr. Burke says of the queen's bedchamber being broke into, or the centinel killed. Nothing of the kind, he says, was ever heard of till a considerable time after the event, and the report arose from the Aristocrates.

[*] This title of *sovereign lord*, derived from the Feudal system, given to a king of England, is by no means agreeable to the nature and spirit of our present constitution, which is a *limited monarchy*, and not *unlimited* as that title implies. Our only proper *sovereign* is the parliament.

[*] Neale says, that after the execution of his companion Mr. Cooke, who suffered with the greatest heroism, he resumed his courage, and said to the sheriff, "Sir, you have slain one of the servants of the Lord, and made me behold it, on purpose to terrify and discourage me; but God has made it an ordinance for my strengthening and encouragement."

[*] This is done in England by the king issuing a *Conge d'Elire* to the chapters of each cathedral, empowering them to chuse such persons only as are named to them; but in Ireland it is done without this form.

[*] Would it not be reasonable to fix some time, beyond which it should not be deemed right to bind posterity? If our ancestors make a foolish *law*, we scruple not to repeal it; but if they make foolish *wars*, and incur foolish *debts*, we have, at present, no remedy whatever.

[*] Let Mr. Burke's conduct with respect to the Test Act, be compared with the following passage in his present pamphlet. "You do not imagine that I wish to confine

power, authority, and distinction, to blood, and names, and titles. No Sir, there is no qualification for government but true virtue and wisdom. Wherever they are actually found, they have, in whatever state, condition, profession, or trade, the passport of heaven to human place, and honour. Woe to the country which would madly and impiously reject the service of the talents and virtues, civil, military, or religious, that are given to grace, or to serve it, and would condemn to obscurity every thing formed to diffuse lustre and glory around a state.” p. 74.