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Author: William Stephens

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IN ENGLAND \*\*\*

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AN  
**ACCOUNT**  
OF THE  
GROWTH  
OF  
**DEISM**  
IN  
**ENGLAND.**

*LONDON:*

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AN  
**ACCOUNT**  
OF THE  
GROWTH

[3]

OF  
**DEISM.**

SIR,

'Tis now three Years since you and I had a serious Discourse concerning the rise and progress of *Deism*: which is an Opinion of late Years crept into *England*, tho not so widely spread here as in other parts of *Europe*. I well remember we were both agreed, that there was no shadow of Reason why any one should suspect the *Gospels* of Forgery, since the matter contain'd in them hath not the least favour of any worldly Interest, or indirect Design, but all the Lines of them do only center in the highest Improvement Humane Nature is capable of. So that in conformity every Man may take great comfort in himself, and all Mankind live well with one another. Besides, the Preachers of this excellent Doctrine had at first all the Discouragements which an irreligious and idolatrous Age could give them, (as is confessed by their Enemies) insomuch that nothing but their own personal full Conviction of the Truths they professed could engage them to Preach 'em; and the intrinsick Goodness of the Law of *Christ*, was sufficient to gain mens hearts, after *Miracles* had born down their Prejudices, and gain'd their serious Attention. In fine, you and I could see no reason to doubt of the Truth of any matter of Fact contain'd in the *Gospels*, which relate the miraculous Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection and Ascension of *Jesus Christ*; but what would oblige us to deny the truth of all History whatsoever. And from these Considerations laid together, we concluded that the Doctrine of our Lord *Jesus Christ* was undoubtedly sent to us by God.

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This still made it appear more strange to us both, how *DEISM* (which is a denial of all reveal'd Religion) should creep in upon us where the *Scriptures* are made so publick, and where so many Learned Treaties are written, which so strongly assert their Authority to be Divine. I confess, I was as desirous to know upon what Grounds Men rejected the *Gospel*, as you your self were, and therefore I willingly undertook the Task you laid on me, *viz.* To collect and put together those Motives whereby some had been induced to lay aside all *Revelation*. For which Performance I was the fitter, because it doth not require any Learning and strength of Wit, but only Observation, and Inquiry, which I might easily make, because of the numerous Acquaintance I have contracted in Town, where (you know) I spend the Winter, and in the Country, where I bestow my Summer Visits. But all I shall do in this matter, is barely to give you a Relation of those Prejudices, and (as I think) false Reasonings, which have drawn some of my Acquaintance from *Revelation* to *DEISM*.

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1. Now, first I have observed, that some who pretend themselves *Deists*, are Men of loose and sensual Lives; and I make no wonder that they dislike the *Christian* Doctrine of Self-denial, and the severe threatnings against wilful Sinners. You may be sure they will not alledge this Reason: But having read *Spinosa* and *Hobbes*, and been taught to laugh at the story of *Baalams* Ass, and *Sampson's* Locks; they proceed to ridicule the reality of all *Miracle* and *Revelation*. I have conversed with several of this Temper, but could never get any of 'em serious enough to debate the reality of *Revelation*: But a witty Jest and t'other Glass puts an end to all further Consideration. These are meer *Sceptics*, and practical *Atheists*, rather than real *Deists*.

2. But there are others, who, although they have not a due regard to *Revelation*, are Men of Sobriety and Probity, who with great freedom have let me into their Thoughts, whereby I can very clearly and fully (as I think at least) discern the rise and progress of this their Opinion, which is this;

1. In the time of King *Charles* the First, (which confineth my longest acquaintance with Men) 'twas usual for Gentlemen to send their Sons abroad into *Italy*, *Spain*, *France*, *Germany*, &c. to accomplish themselves by Travel. But lest they should be prevail'd upon to change their *Religion*, care was taken that their Tutor or Governour, who travelled with 'em, should shew them the Idolatry and Superstition of the *Roman Religion*; and also let 'em in to see that *Popery* in all its Branches was only a device of the *Priesthood*, to carry on a particular Interest of their own; to encrease their Wealth, Honours, and Power over the Lay-people; to exalt the Head of their Order above all the Crowned Heads in the World, and equal one whole Order of their Clergy, *viz.* the Cardinals, to the Princes of *Christendom*. Nay, since all People were obliged to make their Confessions to, and receive their Absolution from the *Priest*, the meanest of which Order could create a God for the People's Worship; 'tis plain, that their Religion was calculated for the Profit, Power and Honour of the whole Order of the *Priesthood* in this World, whatsoever advantages they might find by it in the other. Now the Young Gentleman being throughly convinced of this Holy Cheat, returneth to Old *England*; where he meets with very zealous Contests about Religion (as was pretended) between the *Church of England*, headed by Arch-Bishop *Laud* on the one part, and the *Presbyterian Kirk* on the other; and having carefully read the Debate (as it appeared in the Prints) on both sides, with those very Eyes which he had so lately cleared up in *Italy* or *France*, he could not forbear to see that both these *Protestant* Parties, under the pretence of Religion, were only grasping at *Power*, and that the Controversy at bottom, was not who's Religion was best, but only what Sect of the *Clergy* should make the best Market of the *meer Lay-men*. And as this Young Gentleman had before resolved with himself not to become a Property to the *Popish Priesthood*, no longer now will he be such to the *Protestant Clergy* of any Denomination, since both pursue the same Ends. He perceiveth that our *Protestant High-Priests* do all of them rival the Sovereign Power; the *Bishop's* House like that of the *King*, must be called

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his *Palace*, he must still keep up his claim to the *Miter* and *Crosier*, to vie with the *Crown* and *Scepter*; and as the Stile of the King's Courts is *Anno Regni nostri*, i.e. In the Year of our Reign: So that of the Bishop's Court is *Anno Consecrationis nostræ*, i.e. In the Year of our Consecration; the Year of the King's Reign being unknown in the Bishop's Court: The King speaking to the People doth usually call 'em his Loving Subjects; the *Bishop* doth not make himself so familiar, but stileth the People of his *Diocese* barely his Subjects, *Jurisdictioni nostræ subditos*: The King is *Inthroned*, and the Arch-Bishop *Inthronized*; both derive their Power from a *Divine Right*; but the Bishop is the higher Power, because by the Principles of Episcopacy he can Excommunicate the King, i.e. forbid him the very Conversation of his Subjects, and thereby render them incapable to make good their Oath of Allegiance, in yielding their Aid and Assistance.

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Nor do's he find that the *Presbytery* claims any inferior Powers; each Party alledge *Scriptures* and *Fathers* on their side; and for ought I can see, (says this Gentleman) they are all in the right. Through an excess of Prejudice thus occasion'd, he makes a further step towards *Deism*, and Reasons after this manner: 'Tis not impossible (continues he) that the ancient *Clergy* might be possess'd with the same Spirit of Pride, which has prevail'd over the modern. If those Writings, which they call *Holy Scriptures* are of their side, as they all say they are, I make no doubt but they were of their own inventing; and if *Jesus Christ* their Patron, laid the Foundation of those Powers, which both *Popish* and *Protestant Clergy* claim to themselves from under him, I think the old *Romans* did him right in punishing him with the death of a Slave. After this manner I have heard it said of late, by another of the same Constitution, that as the Church of *Rome* was a modelled Faction against all other Christians, so was the Church of *England*, by Law Established, against all other Protestants, who were by Law excluded from every Office of Profit and Trust; who were made subject to the Piques and Malice of every Church-man, and became a constant Revenue to Apparitors and Spiritual Catch-poles. And though at present there be a *Toleration* by Law granted, yet 'tis full opposed by the Spirit of the Church, as appears by Sermons preached at Visitations, and the constant ordinary Discourses of the *Clergy*, in which the Church of *England* is always represented, as at this time, in greater danger than ever it was; though I should think the danger had been as great in King *James's* Time: And notwithstanding the Toleration (said he) no Man can enjoy a place of Profit or Trust, though he be ever so dutiful a Subject, and ever so able or honest a Man, unless he hath a Conscience by Law Established: By which Church-device Men are deprived of the Privileges of their Country to which they are born, and for the discharge whereof they never did in any respect incapacitate themselves; and hereby it comes to pass, that the Nation cannot act vigorously in its own defence, being debarr'd the Use of one Moiety of it self; and notwithstanding this, they have the Confidence to tell us Lay-men, that we ought to love our Neighbours as our selves. Now if this be the way of the *Christians*, (concluded he) let my Soul be with the *Philosophers*.

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2. And this brings to my Thoughts what another *Deist* said jestingly to me, viz. That since I was a Christian, 'twas lucky for me that I was of the Bishop's Church; for though you were ever so Loyal (said he) to the King, yet if you did not pay as dutiful an Allegiance to the Bishops, you could not hold the Place you now enjoy; for as certain as the *Cross* is above the *Crown*, so sure a thing is it, that the *Bishop* will be above the *King*; which he undertook would appear to me if I looked back to King *Charles's* Restoration, or King *William's* Revolution. The *Presbyterians*, though they quarrell'd with *Charles* the First, yet became the loving Subjects of *Charles* the Second; joined with the *Episcopalians* in assisting him to the Throne, and made no scruple of Swearing their Allegiance to him, and owning his Supremacy. But after all this, the King was not able to support these his Loving Subjects against the Power of the Bishops, who in two Years time outed 'em of their Livelihoods, and after that, drove 'em five Miles distance from all Market-Towns; and at last the Acts made against *Papists* were extended to them. But since King *William's* Revolution the Case is alter'd; for the *Jacobite Clergy*, though turn'd out of their Livings by Law, for refusing Allegiance to the King, yet from the Allegiance they bare to the Bishops, they find such Favour from their Lordships, that if the Livings they lose are in the Bishops gift, he shall present any Friend which the dispossessed *Jacobite* shall recommend; now what can be more by them desired, than to enjoy the Profits of their Livings, and put in what Curate they please? And after all, that they may enjoy the full Profits of their Livings, and pay their Curates another way, these *Jacobites* may hold their Conventicles where they please, nay, Preach publicly and seditiously in an open Church near *Cheap-side*, *London*, without the least offence to the Spiritual Power. And is it not plain (said this Gentleman) from all this, that on this side the Water as well as on the other, the Clergies' Zeal for their Communion, Church and Religion, is only meant to support their own Party, Dominion and Empire?

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3. Now the oldest *Deists* of my Acquaintance having conceiv'd so great a Prejudice against the Christian Faith, from the Behaviour of the Clergy, and having levened their Disciples therewith, it has fal'n out unhappily, that the late Revolution has by another way also confirmed them in this their Prejudice.

For the late happy Revolution, (which came on too soon, and was cut off too short) though it was not so highly beneficial to us, as was by some expected, was yet of very great Importance. But as there is nothing in this World ever so good, but what hath some appending disadvantage; so by meer Accident this Revolution, which has saved not only the Church of *England*, but (as I hope) the whole Protestant Interest throughout the World, has wonderfully encreased Mens Prejudices against the *Clergy*, and so by false Consequence (such as Men through Resentment will make) against the Truth of Religion it self. The old *Deists* tell those of their Pupils, who never travelled abroad, that there is now no need of going over the Water to discover that the name *Church* signifieth only a *Self-interested Party*, and that the *Clergy* have no Godliness but Gain. Have you

not (say they) for many Years together heard them Preach up the *Divine Right*, and indefeizable Authority of Kings, together with *Passive Obedience*, as the chief distinguishing Doctrines whereby their Church approved it self *Apostolick* beyond all other Churches? Nay, were not the Doctrines of *Loyalty to the King*, insisted upon more than *Faith in Christ*? and yet when their particular Interest required it, their Doctrine of *Non-Resistance* was qualify'd by *Non-Assistance*, the whole Stream of Loyalty was turn'd from the King to the Church, the indefeizable Right was superseded by a miraculous Conquest without Blood, the Oath of Allegiance to the *Divinely Rightful King James* has its force allay'd by another Oath of the same Importance made to the *de facto* King *William* and Queen *Mary*, and all this is Sanctify'd by the name of the Church, *i.e.* their own Party and Interest, for the sake whereof it is done. This is indeed keeping to the Text-*Rem rem quocunque modo rem*.

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And the wretched Defence they make for this their Apostacy (say the *Deists*) maketh the matter worse. For notwithstanding King *James* is, as they will have it, Conquer'd; and his Throne, which was declared vacant, is legally filled by one who by Act of Parliament is declared our Rightful King; yet after all this Dr. S— will reserve a Right to King *James*, though through Success and Settlement he will allow a Right also to King *William*. And this Notion the Clergy generally adhere to, because thereby they kill two or three Birds with one stone. 1<sup>st</sup>. They preserve to themselves their ancient Right of giving Titles to Sovereignty. For though both King and Parliament have disclaimed and damned the Conquest, yet the Clergy still insist upon it. 2<sup>ly</sup>. They make fair Weather with King *James*, by keeping his Title alive, and by still asserting his Right, open him a Door to recover his Possession again. For what honest Christian can oppose a Rightful King in regaining the Possession of his Throne, which is kept from him by a Successful Usurper? and 3<sup>ly</sup>. They think they have obliged King *William* sufficiently by the formality of an Oath, and owning him in his Possession. Put all this together and 'twill prove, that

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*When all the Argument is out,  
'Tis Interest still resolves the doubt.*

Thus (cry they) you plainly see, that your Church is nothing but a Party, to which whosoever joineth, himself shall find his Account thereby, notwithstanding any Error, Heresy, Immorality or Disloyalty to the present Government whatsoever; whilst any other who is conformable to the *Rubricks* and *Canons*, whose Learning and Morals are an Honour to his Gown, and who is truly dutiful to his Majesty, shall be excluded from all those benefits his Profession would entitle him to. Thus the bold Asserters of King *James's* Right enjoy some of the best Preferments, and particularly Dr. S— sits D— of St. P— whilst honest Mr. *Johnson* is starving upon Charity.

The Church of *England* is a meer Party, (say they again) and has a Watch-word whereby they know one another, which they can vary upon occasion. *Non-Resistance* was the Word in King *Charles's* days. For though at that time you did conform to every tittle and ceremony, injoin'd by Rubrick and Canon, yet if you failed in the Point of *Non-Resistance*, you were a *Phanatick* and *Republican*, a *Rebel*, and what not? Now if this Doctrine be contain'd in the Book of Homilies, as the *Jacobites* say, 'tis a Sacred Record of the Unjustice of some of those who concurred in the late Revolution. The *Shiboleth* of the Church now is King *William's de facto* Title; And no Conformity to Homilies and Rubricks will make you owned by the present Church, if you should acknowledge the King to be otherwise said than a meer *de facto*. Now (say they) although we grant that Men will submit to the Government, upon their own particular Principles, and therefore 'tis reasonable that the King should admit the Obedience of his Subjects upon what Grounds they please, yet we know no Reason why the Church should set up the *de facto*, as the only Principle of Obedience: And when the King had better Titles to his Crown, as the Consent of the People in Parliament, and his Matrimonial Title with the Queen, yet he must be made to pay the greatest price for the weakest and worst of all Titles; and give Dr. S— Sixteen Hundred Pounds a Year, for a *Defactoship* only.

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You see, Sir, that the *Deists* want not Occasions for their Prejudices, how far soever they are from having Reason o' their side. And pray resolve me, why must this false Title be set up as 'twere by the King's Consent, to worm out the only true one? Why must none be preferr'd to Church-Dignities, but such who come in upon this Title only? And those who own the King's Right upon the Consent of the People, be still labouring under the Church's highest displeasure? and poor *Johnson*, a Man against whom no Immorality was ever objected, that is an Object even of the *Deists* Compassion, be left to starve for the Cause? Nay, they have gone so far upon the Strength of Dr. S— Convocation-Title, in Opposition to that of Parliament, that since the good Queen is dead, and the Consent of the People, according to them, null and void; they have left the King a bare Possession, without any Title at all.

4. I am acquainted with a Gentleman, who for some Years has not gone to Church, having taken offence at those Practices I was now writing upon. This Man, you must know, had an extraordinary Veneration for the profound Learning (so he thinks much reading and common-placing to be) of a certain Eminent Divine, who had a fat Bishoprick bestow'd on him by King *William* and Queen *Mary*. But he to requite their Kindness, when a Bill was brought before the Lords, declaring the King and Queen's rightful and lawful Title to the Crown, not only opposed and voted against it in the House; but when it had passed, he entred his Protestation against it in the Journal. Nay (said this Gentleman) if King *William* be only King *de facto*, then the Bishop is *de facto* only. Truly Sir, you may believe me, that I was amaz'd at this Relation; for (as I then said)

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though most Men look no further, than only to get Money *de facto*, and do not with much strictness inquire *quo jure*; yet 'twas strange that any Man should protest that he had no right to that Estate, which he openly continued in Possession of. But I was soon answer'd by this his former Admirer, that if that Bishop had strengthened his own Title to the Bishoprick from King J. I might cease my wonder.

I am indeed sorry to hear Stories of this Nature, especially when they assure me of the Truth of 'em, and when I see the ill Consequences of them. For though nothing be more certain than that the Baseness and Falshood of Man can never disprove the Truth of God; yet when Men are highly Scandaliz'd, and greatly deceived by those for whom they had Esteem, and by whose Authority they in great measure governed themselves, they will stretch their Conclusion beyond their Premises, and disown Religion in their Principle, because 'tis disregarded by some great Men in their Practice.

But though to strict Reasons, such Arguments for *Deism* appear ridiculous; yet from the Promotion of these *de facto* Men, I am told, hath arisen great disadvantage to the King, and those Subjects, whose Principles and Practices have been always faithful to his Majesties Interest: [15] Since hereby it is, that it hath always been in the power of the open and professed Enemies of the King to oppress his most dutiful Subjects. For these *de facto*-men, and the *Jacobites*, were but lately the same sort of People, both of the same Principle and Temper. And though the *Jacobites* do now rail at them, for their base Compliances (as they term it) with the *P.* of *O's* Revolution; yet the *de factos* are unwilling, for old Acquaintance sake, to pass by their Railing, and underhand to shew 'em any kindness: And this they submit to, as being Self-conscious, that the *Jacobites* have a Right to reproach them; so that they are willing to appease the anger of their old Friends by their best Services. Now the *Jacobites* having always an innate Hatred to the *Whigs*, (as they now stile all those who think themselves obliged to own the King for their rightful Sovereign) and being willing to keep up their old Master's Right to the Crown, (to which the *Whigs* are irreconcilable Enemies) easily prevail upon these *de factos* to oppress those other sort of Men, which is an Office they are as willing to undertake, as the *Jacobites* can be to put it upon 'em. Thus it cometh to pass, that according as an open professed Enemy to the Government shall dictate, a Church-man shall strenuously exert that Power the King has given him, to discourage and oppress his Dutiful and Loyal Subjects. I will only (said a certain Person) make a Supposition, to shew you how this may be; suppose the King should bestow a Bishoprick upon a *de facto* Doctor, and this Doctor should there find his old Acquaintance Dr. *H.* and being a Stranger in his Diocese, should be willing to instruct himself in the Characters of Men from the good D., would it not fall out so, that the Clergy of that Diocese must be used well or ill, as the [16] most open and notorious Enemy the Government hath, shall design? And was it not possible that the E. of *N.* might oblige his old Friends in the same manner? Thus, though King *James* be at last excluded, his Subjects reign in his stead. And whether an *Oath* of *Abjuration* laid upon the *Jacobites* Proxy-men, will put an end to this Corruption, Time must tell us.

5. But to return to the Reasons, (or Prejudices I may rather call 'em) which occasion *Deism*; It hath been observed to me, that where the Notion of a Church hath been carried on with the highest Tide, there even natural Religion is at the lowest Ebb; as in *Italy* of old, and lately in *France*, where gross Immoralities and Atheism are at the greatest height. And though in our Reformation we discarded some Idolatrous and Superstitious Doctrines and Practices, which were grown scandalous among the People, yet still *Christ* was made to serve that turn, which his Holy Vicar can no longer do, *viz.* Support an Holy Order of Men in as haughty Insolences, in as proud, ambitious and malicious Designs, as those which King *Henry* (though a Son of the Church) and his Times could not bear. Now in answer to this, I bid these *Deists* only read the *Bible*, and see if the Spirit of that Book be not as good as their Thoughts can reach to; or let 'em read the Character of the Christian Religion, given by Sir *Matthew Hale* in the first of his Three Letters concerning Religion, where he saith, *It teacheth and tutors the Soul to a high Reverence and Veneration of Almighty God, a sincere and upright Walking, as in the Presence of the invisible all-seeing God. It makes a Man truly love to Honour, to Obey him, and therefore careful to know what his Will is: It renders the Heart highly thankful to him, both as his Creator, Redeemer and Benefactor: It makes a Man entirely to depend upon, to seek to him for Guidance and Direction, and Protection, to submit to his Will with all Patience, and Resignation of Soul: It gives the Law not only to his Words and Actions, but to his very Thoughts and Purposes: It bringeth Man to such a Deportment both of External and Internal Sobriety, as may be decent in the Presence of God and his holy Angels: It crusheth and casts down all Pride and Haughtiness, both in a Man's Heart and Carriage, and gives him an humble frame of Soul and Life, both in the sight of God and Men: It regulates and governs the Passions of the Mind, and brings them into due moderation and frame: It gives a Man a right estimate of this present World; and sets the Heart and Hopes above it, so that he never loves it more than it deserves. It makes the Wealth and Glory of this World, high Places and great Preferments, but of a low and little value to him, so that he is neither covetous nor ambitious, nor over-sollicitous concerning the advantages of it: It brings a Man to that frame, that Righteousness, Justice, Honesty and Fidelity, is as 'twere part of his Nature; he can sooner dye than commit or purpose that which is unjust, dishonest or unworthy a good Man: It makes him value the love of God and Peace of Conscience above all the Wealth and Honours in the World, and be very vigilant to keep it inviolably: Though he be under a due Apprehension of the Love of God, yet it keeps him humble and watchful, and free from all Presumption; so that he dares not under a vain Confidence of the Indulgence of God, commit or purpose the least injury to man: He performs all his Duties to God in Sincerity, Integrity and Constancy; and while he lives on Earth, his Conversation, his Hopes, his Treasure, and the Flower of his Expectation is in Heaven; and he entirely endeavours to walk suitably to such a* [17]

I prevail'd upon one of my Friends, a *Deist*, to read those three Letters, because therein the Substance of the Christian Religion is distinguish'd from the Circumstantials and Appendages; for want of which distinction being well understood, *Deism* has arose, as that great Man in the fore-cited Letter hath observed. *When Men* (says he) *see so much Religion placed by Professors of Christianity in these things which every intelligent Man values but as Forms, or Inventions, or Modes, or Artifices, and yet as great weight laid upon them, as great fervour and animosity us'd for or against them, as almost for any Points of Christian Religion; They are apt presently to censure and throw off all Religion, and reckon all of the same make.* Thus that Upright Judge, whose three Letters my Friend having read, did well approve of 'em, acknowledging, that with great Exactness he had distinguished between Religion and Priest-craft: And he added, If you will shew me, Sir, any Christian Church where that distinction is observed, I will become a Member of it. I recommended the Church of *England*; he presently told me that he had read the 39 Articles, and observed that 3 of them were wholly design'd to uphold the Power of the Clergy over the People. And then he had me only compare the *Design*, which has been, and still is, carrying on under the Name of the Church of *England*, with the Design of the Christian Religion, as 'tis described by Sir *Matthew Hale*; and I should find the one in all its parts a Contradiction to the other. 'Tis plain (*said he*) the Clergy do not allow of Sir *Matthew's* Notions, nor will they suffer us to take any thing for Religion, that is distinguished from their particular Interest. To what end have so many Persecutions and Penal Laws been set a foot by the Clergy in Christendom? was it to bring Men to any one Point of that full Description of Christian Religion, which you cited from Sir *Matthew Hale*? or only to bring them to that short Article of their Clergy Religion, *i.e.* to submit to their Power? Did not the Honourable Sir *R. H.* lately write a Treatise, wherein with great Learning and accurate Judgment he distinguished betwixt Religion and Priest-craft? and was he not treated for it with a true Priestly Insolence and Malice in the Pulpit at *White-hall*, by *A.* one of their Majesties Chaplains, and represented as a Scornor and an Atheist, because he scorns to submit to any Religion but what is of Christ's Institution? Suppose a Man should govern himself by the Law of *Christ*, and go no further, is there any Christian Church which would own such an one for a Member? If you will be a Son of the Church of *England* you must hold Kings and Bishops to be *jure divino*, the Apostolical Doctrine of *Passive Obedience*; you must not be indifferent to their Ceremonies, though declar'd but indifferent things; and the Reason is, because you must have a profound Respect for the Power of the Bishops, by which these Ceremonies were ordain'd: And besides this, you must shew a perfect Abhorrence of all who do not submit to the Spiritual Royalties of their Diocesan Bishops; for your Churchmanship will not appear by any Mark so well, as by the Hatred you bear to all Dissenters, in Conjunction with a deep aversion to all the ancient Rights and just Liberties of your Native Country. In fine, (*said he*) when your Clergy Preach the Law of *Christ* without turning it to any By-end, or false Interest, you shall meet me at Church. You know the Clergy love Precedency of the Laity; Let them turn Christians first, and I can follow.

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6. I have known some, who have alledged as a Reason why they have forsaken the Christian Faith, the impossibility of Believing. Many Doctrines (*say these*) are made necessary to Salvation, which 'tis impossible to believe, because they are in their nature Absurdities. I replied, That these things were *Mysteries*, and so above our Understanding. But he asked me to what end could an unintelligible Doctrine be revealed? not to instruct, but to puzzle and amuse. What can be the effect of an unintelligible *Mystery* upon our Minds, but only Amusement? That which is only above Reason must be above a rational Belief, and must I be Saved by an irrational Belief? If a Proposition be inconsistent with it self, I cannot but believe it to be false: 'Twas once to serve a Turn against the *Papists* your Church held all Doctrines necessary to save Souls, were plainly revealed in Scripture; How could you say plainly revealed unless you understood the Revelation? Besides, I cannot think that the belief of any unprofitable Doctrines, *i.e.* such as admit of no Application to Moral Duties, can be a saving Faith so much as in part; nor can I imagine that Faith tends to save a Soul, because what we believe is only *True*, (for so the belief of *Euclids Elements* might have a saving Effect upon Souls) but because our Belief is *Good*, it has a practical Effect, and tends to make us better Men. Besides, you all agree the Belief of your Trinity is absolutely necessary to Salvation, and yet widely differ in *what* we must believe concerning it; whether three Minds or Modes, or Properties, or internal Relations, or Oeconomies, or Manifestations, or external Denominations; or else no more than a Holy Three, or Three Somewhats; or otherwise only one of these Three to be God in the highest Sense, and each of the other two to be a God without Self-subsistence and Independence. I am confident, if I should be perswaded that an Explanation of the *Trinity* were necessary to save my Soul, and see the Learned so widely differing and hotly disputing what it is I must believe concerning it, I should certainly run mad through despair of finding out the Truth: But since these Doctors cannot agree which Party of 'em shall captivate my Belief in Obedience to his Faith, I will reserve it to be the Hand-maid of Truth; whenever she appears she shall command it.

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7. I remember one Gentleman objected to the Christian Faith, that it made Men insolent, quarrelsome and ill-natur'd. From whence I concluded, (as I told him) that he had never read over the *Gospels*; truly he could not say that he had read 'em carefully, but yet that in reading the History of what had passed in Christendom, he observed that most of the Quarrels in which this part of the World had been engaged, arose from Contentions among the Christian *Priesthood*. Church-History is chiefly a Relation of Church-mens Wrangles, and *D. Cave* in a late Book of his had denominated every Century from some eminent Quarrel which arose among the Clergy. But besides this, what was the Holy War, what all the holy Massacres and Croisados which filled *Europe* with Blood, but the Inventions of Holy Church? And what is holy Inquisition, but a

perpetual Series of Murthers carry'd on in barbarous Forms of Law against the common Sense of Mankind? Does History account for any Barbarities so great as those committed by the Popes? Any Cruelties so savage as those of the Holy Inquisition? Any Murthers so solemn, and religiously brutal as the Acts of Faith? Any Pragmaticalness so insufferable as that of the Jesuits? is not their Humanity extinguished by their Christian Religion? such is their Malice that no Man can eat Bread where they have to do, unless he submit his Faith to their guidance, witness the present *French* Persecution. Nor can any Sovereign Prince keep his Word or Oath, though he had only sworn to maintain those Laws by which he Reigns as King, any longer than this Spiritual Fatherhood will give him leave, as *Lewis XIV.* of *France*, and *James II.* of *England* do witness. Let these Inhumanities be considered, as supported and carried on by the name of Catholick Church, and (if the Devils believe) you may as decently say Church of *Hell* as Church of *Rome*. [22]

And as Devotion, continu'd our *Deist*, to holy Church is the center upon which all things turn on the other side the Water, so is it the same thing here. Do not our Priesthood of *England* make as high Pretences to dispose of all Offices and Trusts in the Kingdom, to those of their own Faction, as those of *Rome*? Have they not long since got their Bill of Exclusion to be passed into a Law, whereby no Man can enjoy a Place of Profit or Trust in the State, but whom they qualify at their Altars? where Men were capacitated to be Bumbails, keep Gaming-houses and sell Ale. What was it but the Insolence of the Priesthood that brought about Father *Laud's* and Father *Peter's* Revolutions? Besides (said he) do you not observe what a keen Edge Christian Faith puts upon the ill-nature of Divines, when they are disputing about matters of Religion? 'Tis common for Philosophers, Lawyers, Physicians, &c. to differ about matters which concern their Professions, and write one against another: But you will find some Temper and Decorum observed in their Writings. But let the Controversy be about any Branch of Christian Faith; and then see the *Odium Theologorum*, the Malice of Divines in the late Writings of two of your Church Doctors against each other; at least this shews that Christian Faith doth not improve the Temper of such Men who are of mean Birth, and narrow Education. And I cannot but observe, that your *Protestant* Malice is under a worse Management than the *Popish*; they only thirst for the Blood of Protestants, but you are for sucking one anothers Blood; as when for the Service of King *Charles* the II. (who was Head of your Church) and his Popish Brother, the Blood of the best Protestants in *England*, (and some of them of your own Church) was to be spilt, the Court Blood-suckers, viz. Attorney general, and Judges, besides Juries and Evidence, were all of 'em chosen Men out of your own Church; and the *Posse* of the Clergy was raised to hold their Heads to the Block, by Preaching the Doctrine of *Passive Obedience*. [23]

But in requital, it must be confessed, that your Clergy require the King to do their Persecuting Journey-work with the same Insolence as the Popish Priesthood use; For must not the Sovereign Monarch of *England*, *Scotland*, *France* and *Ireland*, by his Authority Royal, execute the Decrees and Anathema's of the Arch-deacons and Bishops Chancellors, by Imprisoning his loyal and useful Subjects, for not conforming to their Ceremonies? If a King will submit to this Drudgery, he shall have the *vox Cleri* of his side, and be as great as Noise and fulsom Flattery can make him; but in the mean time is really King but of one Moiety of his People, whilst the danger which the other half apprehend from the Secular Arm directed by Spiritual Power of Necessity, weaneth their Hearts from the Government. Thus *Charles* the II. who for two Years after his Return, reigned in the Hearts of all his People, was by the Act of Uniformity reduced to be King of the Church-party; and at last, whilst the *Popish* and *Protestant* Priesthood zealously contended whose Property he should be, (like the Truth among Controversial Divines) he was lost in the Scuffle.

He instanced in likewise the late King *James*, who (said he) had it in his power to be universally beloved and obey'd, beyond any King of *England* this Age has produced. His Right to the Crown was owned by all; his Wilfulness had passed upon the Church of *England* Party for Magnanimous Resolution, which struck such an Awe upon them, that they were coming to a Temper, and would have consented to a Toleration of Protestant Dissenters, and *Roman* Catholicks too, provided their Maintenance might be continued to them. Thus the Heart of all *England* had been set upon the King; but the Popish Priesthood would be content with nothing less than delivering the whole Nation to Satan, and their King must execute the dreadful Anathema, though 'twas manifest that he must thereby lessen himself to the size of one of the 7 Kings of *Kent*; for he could be Sovereign of no more than the Two hundredth part of the People. For King *Charles* in numbering the People, had found that the Proportion between *Papist* and *Protestant* was as 1 to 200: whereas had his own Priesthood been so favourable to him, as to have excused him from executing that Satanical Power, which by a Right purely Divine was vested in Sacred Majesty, his Reign might have been happy, and his Memory precious. What an unhappy Effect had the Spirit of Father *Laud* upon King *Charles* the First? And what hath brought *Lewis* the XIV. to the present Diminution of his Glory, but that haughty Insolence and unnatural Cruelty in Persecuting his own Subjects, which Father *la Chaise* has inspired him with? What Figure will this Grand Monarch make in Story? His Name will pollute the Annals of this Age, and his cowardly Conquests be the Scorn of Posterity. Now from all that he had said, he concluded, that for Luck-sake, as well as to preserve his good Nature, he would be cautious of being (at least) a zealous Christian. [24]

8. 'Twas not long since I met one of my old Acquaintance, who told me that he had lately cast off these Prejudices he had conceived against the Christian Faith, by the Assistance of a Book called, *The Five Letters of Inspiration*. By the last of those Letters he was convinced of the reality of reveal'd Religion, from the Intrinsic value and Excellency thereof; and he was fully confirmed in his Judgment by a late Book called, *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as delivered in the Scripture*. Upon this, he had read over the *Old-Testament* once, and the *New* several times, with great attention of Mind. Indeed he always thought the Moral part of the *Bible* very good; but then [25]

he also thought, that by the strength of his own Reason, he could have written as good a Moral himself. But by the last of these Books he was convinced, that he was indebted to *Revelation* more than he thought of, and considering how long the Ceremonial Law had obtain'd among the *Jews*, and what a profound respect they paid to the Scribes, Pharisees, and Spiritual Guides and Rulers; he plainly saw that there was need enough of Miracle to bear down their Prejudices, to make 'em leave their Ceremonies, and listen to that excellent Moral which Christ gave 'em; nay, he was convinced that no Miracles were strong enough to prevail over the Priest, or a Priest-ridden People, to become Proselytes to the Doctrine of universal Love and Charity; for (said he) if a Teacher should now be sent from Heaven with this Message, that all the Protestant Parties in *England* should be reconciled and live well with one another, making nothing necessary to their religious Communion, but what Christ had appointed, and such Circumstances as Time and Place, and what in the nature of the thing was needful, and if this Teacher's Mission were confirm'd by Miracle, it would have (as he thought) no better effect upon our several Sects of Clergy, and those who are bigotted to their Parties, than it had upon the *Pharisees* and their Disciples of old.

Having heard him speak so sharply against the Clergy after his old way, I could not but tell him that I perceived he was but almost a Christian; for he who loveth the Institution of Christ, cannot but respect those who are the Ministers thereof; at least, I hoped that he would pay a respect to the Clergy of the Church of *England*, which was the best Reformed Church in the World; and therefore I expected that he was already a Member of our Church: He reply'd, that he should always be ready to pay his respect to every good Man of what Order or Degree soever; he should always be willing to hear a good Minister Preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ to him, and exhort him to the sincere Practice of it. That he was ready to contribute his share to the Maintenance of such Ministers, and to join with that Church-of-*England* Congregation near to which he liv'd, in publick Worship; but yet he could not condemn the Worship of other Congregations, nor exclude himself from joyning with them as occasion should serve him. So that as to Church-membership he could be a Member of any Church, which would own him upon the terms of Faith and Practice, contained in the Book he mentioned, concerning the Reasonableness of the *Christian Religion*, &c. But still he conceiv'd, that Church-Communion in holy Offices was designed only to raise his Devotion towards God, not towards the Clergy, which made him admire the unparallell'd Impudence of the *Roman* Priesthood, who measure the Religion of all Christians by their Devotion to the See of *Rome*, i.e. indeed to themselves; and he doubted whether any Church were sufficiently Reformed from Popery, which made any Doctrines of Faith necessary to Salvation that were not declared so in the Gospels, and where the Clergy would always distinguish between Church and State, and give the Precedency to themselves. But yet he would join with any Church as far as it promoted the Honour of God, and separate from it, wherein on pretence of Religion, he saw, that it aimed at a By-end of its own.

Here I urged him again to joyn to our Church, which had no other design but God's Glory. To this he said, that he should be glad that the Church of *England* would own him, though he could not be of their Party: He would willingly pass as a Church-man for his Credit-sake; for (said he) though a Man doth ever so firmly believe Jesus Christ to be the Messiah whom God had of old promised, and in due time sent to give us a perfect Rule of Life, in order to make us truly religious here, and ever happy hereafter; and though a Man should shew forth his Faith by an agreeable course of Life, in doing Justice, loving Mercy, and an humble walking with God; yet if he were not owned as a Member of some Church, he would by all Churches be accounted, if not an Atheist, yet a Sceptic, a Man of no settled Principle, but own who has his Religion to choose. For if you look over the State of Religion as it standeth in Christendom, there is no Church whatsoever which will accept you as a Member of its Communion, but upon some particular terms of Belief, or Practice, which Christ never appointed, and it may be such as an honest and a wise Christian cannot consent to. I am not more able to give up my Reason to the Church of *England*, than to give up my Senses to the Church of *Rome*; it looks like a Trick in all Churches to take away the use of Mens Reason, that they may render us Vassals and Slaves to all their Dictates and Commands. But what greater slavery than to force on Men a Belief of such things as necessary to Salvation, of which 'tis not possible to form any Idea? Though I am satisfied there is no such thing as a change of Bread into the Flesh of Christ, yet I can form an Idea, that such a thing may be, that the same Power which changed Earth into a Man, may change Bread into Flesh: But I can frame to my self no Idea of what your Church Teacheth in the Sacrament, that the Body and Blood of Christ are *verily and indeed taken and received of the faithful*: And when I ask how can this be understood by a Protestant, who believeth that there is no other Body but that of Bread? I am told that the Church meaneth it in a Spiritual Sense. Now I have try'd, and find it impossible for me to form to my self an Idea of a Body verily and indeed in a Spiritual Sense.

And therefore I must say 'tis an unwise and a hard Thing for any Church to impose absurd or unintelligible Notions (especially such Speculations, which tend to make no body the better) as necessary to Salvation; for Wise Men, and such who will take Courage to examine what they Believe, will not submit to such an Usurpation; and weak Men are kept all their Life long in Fears and Doubts of their Eternal State, as being always uncertain whether they firmly believe such Doctrines, or no.

Besides this (said he) your Church will require me to believe other Absurdities as bad as these, as that Kings and Bishops have a Divine Right to that Power, which they exercise over us, whereas with my own Eyes I saw our Great and Gracious King accept the Crown of *England*, as the Gift of the People. And I see as plainly, that Bishops are an Order of Men of their own (not of Christ's)



making. I was told that our Bishops Order was founded in that of the 12 Apostles, and the Presbyters Order in the 70 Disciples: Upon this I resolved to see if the 12 and the 70 were different Orders, or no, and read over the 10th Chap. of *Matthew*, the 3d and 6th of *Mark*, and the 9th of *Luke*, in which places the Power which Christ gave to the 12 is set forth, which amounteth to this, *viz.* a Charge to Preach the Gospel, a Power to work Miracles in casting out Devils, healing the Sick, &c. And I also read in the 10th Chapter of *Luke*, that the 70 were sent forth for the same Reason, and with the same express Power as were the 12, *viz.* To preach the Gospel, heal the Sick, and cast out Devils, *vers.* 2.9.17. And he telleth the 70 at the 16th Verse, *That he who heareth them, heareth him; and he who despiseth them, despiseth him*, as he had said to the 12, in *Matthew* 10.40. Indeed they were only added to the number of the 12, *Because* (as 'tis said there) *the Harvest was great, and the Labourers few*, i.e. because Multitudes followed Christ, and were disposed to become Christians, therefore he encreased the number of his Apostles, or Teaching Disciples. I can find no Footsteps of any Jurisdiction given to the 12 over the 70, or indeed over any body else; and in the 18th Chapter of *Matthew*, where Christ speaketh of binding and loosing, 'tis manifest from the first Verse, that his discourse was made to his Disciples. So in the 20th of *John*, the Holy-Ghost and Power of remitting and retaining Sins, was given to the Disciples which met together after Christ's death, *vers.* 19. in which meeting, there might be some of the 70 as well as some of the 12: 'Tis certain the 70 received the Holy-Ghost, and if Baptism be a Key of Admission into the Church, they had it: If binding or loosing be declaring wherein we are bound in duty, and wherein we may use our liberty; if remitting and retaining Sins be declaring what Iniquity God will forgive, and what he will not; the 70 shared this Power with the 12. As for delivering up to Satan, and inflicting Diseases; since 'twas a miraculous Power, which we read not that Christ appropriated to the 12, we have no reason to think 'twas detained from the 70. If then Christ appointed but one Order, *viz.* that of Teachers, the Order of Rulers dignified themselves above, and distinguished themselves from their Brethren, yet I am willing to submit to those Powers, which the Laws of *England* have given to the Bishops, though what they claim by Divine Right, I esteem as an Usurpation. [29]

Moreover (says he) although I am become a Christian, I have not ceased to be an *English-man*, and for that reason cannot be in party with the Bishops, who by their false-prerogative Doctrines, and other shameful Assistances, so lately betray'd the Charters and Liberties, Rights and Privileges of their Country, were setting up an absolute irresistible Power in K. *Charles* II. which being demised to K. *James*, endangered not only the Liberty and Property, but Body and Soul of the Nation. Nor can I so soon forget how their long debates, about admitting the *P.* of *Orange*, our Good and Great King, to the Sovereignty, was the occasion of spilling so much Protestant Blood in *Ireland*; nor the late Protestation of some of the chief of their Party against his Majesties Right to the Crown; nor how careful they have been since, that (as it now falls out) he should have no pretence to any rightful Title. If any Clergy-man was so honest as to Preach up his Right, as justly grounded on the Consent of the People, (as Mr. *Johnson* for instance) he must lie under pain of the Church's highest displeasure, though otherwise ever so Orthodox and Conformable; so that since the beloved Title of Conquest is burnt by the Parliament, and the Matrimonial Title is (to the great grief of all good Men) dead and buried with the Queen; it remaineth according to Holy Church, that he hath no Title at all, but only bare Possession; and this they mean when they call him *de facto*. [30]

But I cannot find that they will allow him to be King of the Clergy so much as *de facto*. Alas! his Livings, whereby alone he is capable to oblige them to call to mind their now forgotten Loyalty, which of late years they preached up, as the summ of the Law and the Prophets; Alas! these good Things are taken out of his hands by the Conquering Bishops, that the Clergy may have a separate Interest from the State on this side the Water, and be led to pay an intire Allegiance to the holy Order. When *Hen.* VIII. came to know that his Bishops swore Allegiance to the *Pope*, he began to think of some ways and means how to make himself King of his Clergy, which he saw could not be done but by casting out the *Pope's* Power; and hence sprung that King's Reformation of his Politicks, rather than Religion. And if our good King were sensible of the Reasons why an *English* Papacy is settled in a Committee of Six, *viz.* to fix the Obedience of the Clergy on themselves exclusively, (for no Man can serve two Masters) I doubt not but he would think fit to demand what is so much wanted, *viz.* the Allegiance of the Clergy to their King; if he dissolves this Committee he may ask and have, for where their Treasure is, there their Hearts will be also. For these Reasons (said he) I shall be cautious how I enter into Church-membership, since I plainly see that every Party of Christians embodied, organized, clergy'd and modelled into a National Church, casteth an awe upon the Sovereign Power, and suffereth it not to provide equally for the Common Good of the Subject; but will appropriate the *salus publica*, and influence the Government to serve its own particular, its own private Ends. [31]

Thus, Sir, I have given you an account of those Prejudices, which have brought forth *Deism*. But yet these very Prejudices without a strong assistance of Passion, could never have wrought upon Men to cast off Revelation; for you see the same Prejudices remain in the *Deist* turn'd Christian. Whosoever therefore, upon the fore-mentioned Reasons turneth *Deist*, cannot be excused, tho' I could heartily wish all these Pretences could be taken away from 'em. I am far from begrudging the Bishops and Clergy that small Maintenance, which by Law is settled upon them; and, I hope, they have no other aim in discharging their Offices, but to save our Souls, by imprinting on our Hearts the Reason, the Excellency and Advantages of the Law of Christ. I hope also, that they comport themselves to the Common Interest of their Native Country, and of the Protestant Religion throughout the World. Truly I could wish that Notional Divinity were laid aside for Practical; and that unintelligible Mysteries were not insisted on, as matters of necessary Belief. He, who lately wrote his Thoughts of the Causes and Occasions of Atheism, might have [32]

consider'd, that he, who cloggeth the Notion of God with Absurdities, mis-leadeth Men beyond *Deism*. I pray God give me his Grace, by which I may sincerely conform my self to the Law of Christ, and I will never concern my self with the Speculative Drs. in Divinity. And I heartily join with our Church in that Petition, *Give grace, O heavenly Father, to all Bishops and Curates, that they may both by their Life and Doctrine, set forth thy true and lively Word, and rightly and duly Administer thy holy Sacraments*. By this they would bring Souls to Heaven, gain the Love of all good People, secure their own Temporal Interests, stop the Mouths of their Adversaries, and compel the Deists to become Christians.

*I am, Sir,  
Your Affectionate, &c.*

*FINIS.*

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If your Curiosity should lead you to be an Ear-witness of such Discourses I have here Written to you, when I come to Town, which will be as soon as the Parliament Sits, I will endeavour to give you that Satisfaction.

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\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ACCOUNT OF THE GROWTH OF DEISM  
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