

A DEFENCE of
NATURAL and REVEALED
RELIGION:
BEING AN
ABRIDGMENT
OF THE
SERMONS

Preached at the LECTURE founded by
The Hon^{ble} *Robert Boyle*, Esq;

V O L. III.



L O N D O N:

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T O

Richard DuCane, Esq;

S I R,

THE many Favours I have received from you, ever since I had the Honour and Happinefs of being esteemed one of your Friends, make me take this Opportunity of a public Acknowledgment.

And if this Way of expreffing my Gratitude be not difagreeable to you, who take more Pleasure in doing Good, than in having it known; I am under no Apprehenfion, that I need make any Apology, for placing your Name in a Defence of Chriftianity: For you are not become fo fashionable as to be afhamed of the
Reli-

DEDICATION.

Religion you profess, but look upon
the Knowledge of it as the truest
Learning, and its Practice as the
greatest Accomplishment.

I am, SIR,

Your Most Obedient,

Obliged, Humble Servant,

GILBERT BURNET.

Dr. *I B B O T*'s

BOYLE'S LECTURES

A B R I D G ' D.

VOL. III.

B

The true NOTION of the

EXERCISE

O F

PRIVATE JUDGMENT,

O R

FREE-THINKING.

THESS. V. 21.

Prove all Things ; hold fast that which is good.

IN prosecuting this Subject, I shall observe the following Method :

I. To enquire what the Apostle here means by proving all Things : To state the true Notion of Private Judgment or Freedom of Thought.

II. To consider what that *Free-thinking* is, which is falsely so called.

III. To prove that Free-thinking, properly so called, is every Man's Right and Duty.

IV. To shew what Cautions are necessary to be observed in the Use of it.

V. Shew that true Religion is not an Enemy to true Free-thinking.

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VI. Shew the Dangers which Men expose themselves to, by indulging that Humour which they falsely call *Free-thinking*.

I. I shall enquire what the Apostle here means by *proving all Things*: To state the true Notion of that Private Judgment, or Freedom of Thought, which every Man ought to exercise in religious Matters; and to show wherein it consists.

The Apostle's Precept is directed to all Persons; and the Trial, which every Man is to make, is to be extended to all Points, both of Doctrine and Practice; for the Matters of Religion, of all others, ought not to be taken on Trust; there is nothing wherein we are more concern'd to exercise our Reason and Understanding, because our greatest Interest lies at stake; if through a wilful Neglect of using our own Judgment, we fall into a wrong Way, it may lead us to our eternal Ruin.

Now when the Apostle bids us *prove* all Things, he plainly supposes, that there is some Rule in Being, whereby we may judge of what is thus proposed to us.

This Rule can be no other than *Reason* or *Revelation*. And even when there is a Revelation, we are to judge of its Meanings and Proofs by *Reason*.

That we think, and that we have not the Liberty to do otherwise, is evident; but to think on this or that Subject, as long or as attent as we please, is also in our Power.

And this Liberty we are enjoined to use in religious Matters to make them the frequent Subject of our Thoughts, and to reason with ourselves about them.

Without this it is impossible for us to know any thing, but in Matters of Sense and Intuition.

Matters of Sense are out of the present Question.

And *Matters of Intuition*, where the Agreement and Disagreement between two Ideas are
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immediately visible, without the Intervention of others, in Religion are very few.

So that in religious Matters we ought to exercise our rational Faculties, where the Agreement or Disagreement of our Ideas cannot be found out without the Help of other immediate Ideas, and disposing them in a proper Order, in which the Faculty of Reasoning consists.

In this Proceeding several Rules are to be observed, without which we cannot *think justly* or *freely* upon any Subject.

1. We must have a sincere Love of Truth for its own Sake.

This Love of Truth very few have, as may appear more especially in religious Matters, where they will not be satisfied with such Proofs as the Nature of the Thing is capable of, and make those Objections they would be ashamed of in other Cases. Indeed the Evidence which we have for the Truth of any thing is always to be the Measure of our Assent; and whoever goes beyond this Measure, does not so much believe any thing to be true, because it is so, as because he is willing to have it so. But as our Assent is not to rise higher than the Proofs, so neither ought it to fall lower. And therefore whenever any thing has all the Proofs of its being true, which it could have, were it actually true, we ought to give it our Assent; and if we do not, we have not a general Love for Truth, but are prejudiced; and then our Enquiries will be cool or partial, and our Examinations will be made with little Care. To avoid which Inconveniences we should learn to love Truth for itself.

We should consider that 'tis what we were made to discover and entertain; that it perfects our Nature, and 'till we are bias'd by some inordinate Passion, 'tis the most grateful Thing to the Mind.

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We should make it our Business to renew this Love for Truth, and never to depart from it.

2. If we be thus in Love with Truth, our Fears will never hinder us in our Enquiries after it ; for nothing can follow from Truth but Truth, and the more we shall have of it, we shall be the better able to discern and pursue our true Interest.

Let us therefore never decline this Trial, nor dread any Consequences of any Truth, but push it as far as it will go.

As *Things* will not comply with our *Opinions*, our *Opinions* should comply with them.

For great is Truth. Tho' she is not always welcome, 'tis always wise to hearken to her, because she is faithful and impartial in her Counsels, and will give us Warning that we may take Care to prevent our Danger.

We often build upon a false Foundation, we receive many Things for true without examining them ; and then we dare not examine them, for fear we should find our Mistake ; but this is preposterous. We should receive nothing for Truth but what we have found to be so ; or if we have taken Things for true, without examining them, this should not make us afraid to search into them afterwards ; because Things will be just what they are, and we shall find them so, however we may think of them at present ; and tho' we may receive Mischief from Error, we cannot be hurt by Truth.

3. This being the Case of Truth, we must examine into it with the utmost *Sincerity and Impartiality* ; we must divest ourselves of *Prejudice* ; we must lay aside all *receiv'd Hypotheses*, and *Opinions*, and *Passions* ; we must not *wish* one Side should be more true than the other, but only that we might find on which Side Truth lies, and have no other Ends in View but that.

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And in our Enquiries after Truth, we should proceed upon Principles of Reason, coolly and fairly debate the Matter, and give all the Proofs the Weight they are capable of, and deal with all the Objections in the same Manner.

We should have no Regard to *Party* or *Passion*; not regard *Men* but *Truth*; we should not *rail*, but *reason*; and when our Arguments are at an End we should submit.

4. In trying *religious Matters*, we should make use of all the Helps God has given us.

If we enjoy the Benefit of Revelation, and the Question be concerning a Truth contain'd in any *particular Place of Scripture*; or whether the *Collection* of those *Truths* propos'd to us for divine Truths be contained in Scripture, we are not to think ourselves obliged to interpret Scripture according to what some Men call the *Analogy of Faith*, which is only their own particular System of Christian Doctrines:

Nor are we to imagine that our own natural Reason, without other Helps, will find out the true Sense of Scripture. No, we must make use of other Helps, such as the Languages the Scriptures were wrote in, the Idioms thereof; and of every particular Writer, the Manners, and Customs, and Opinions of those People they were writ to. These are necessary Helps to a right Understanding of Scripture; and without these whoever pretends to understand and criticise upon the Scriptures is a Fool. Where Men have no other Guide but Reason, they must make the best Use of it, and free themselves from whatever might hinder it from exerting its Force. And whatever appears upon a due Examination of their rational Faculties to be true, they must *believe*; and whatever appears fittest to be done, they are bound to practise.

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5. The last Thing necessary in our Enquiries after *Truth*, is a firm Resolution to embrace it, whenever it is found, and to be governed by it.

If this is not our Design, our Enquiries will want that Sincerity and Industry which is absolutely necessary to find out Truth.

There are some Truths that serve only for Amusement ; but the Truths I am now speaking of must influence our Practice, and if we are not resolved to be governed by them, we shall never be desirous to know them. Any religious Truth will make us uneasy as long as we hold it *in Unrighteousness* ; and this will make us shun the Knowledge of it, or endeavour to be of a contrary Opinion.

The Consequence of our Unwillingness to obey the Truth will be, that we shall require stricter Proofs of the Truth than are possible to be had, which will lead us to *Scepticism*, and so to *Infidelity*.

The Apostle supposes, and all Men generally agree, that there is *Truth* and *Falshood*, *Right* and *Wrong*, *Good* and *Evil*. Now that which after our best Enquiries appears to us to be the *Right* and *Good*, we are to submit to it, and to be govern'd by it.

This may suffice for the first Thing proposed, *viz.* to inquire what is meant by *proving all Things*. I proceed,

II. To consider what that *Free-thinking* is, which is falsely so called.

The present *Free-thinking* differs widely from what is properly so called, *viz.* from *fair Examination* and *just Reasoning*.

And as a Man is never the more a *Free-Agent*, because he can break loose from the Conduct of Reason, so no Man is ever the more a *Free-Thinker*,

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Thinker, because in thinking he is under no Rule and Order.

As 'tis no Restraint, but the true Use of our Liberty to determine our Choice by wise Motives; so it is no Restraint of our Freedom of thinking to think justly, and not to deny and affirm any thing at Pleasure.

But the present Freedom which some have used in their Thoughts and Writings is not Freedom, but a Licentiousness of Thought; 'tis babbling and prating *against Religion* with *malicious Words*, more than making any sober Enquiries about it. 'Tis an unaccountable Medley of Humour and Fancy, Mirth and Malice; it consists in Boldness and Presumption, and is full of Prejudices and Mistakes.

This seems to be the *Free-thinking* so much boasted of, and this I will make good by several undeniable Instances.

But because the great *Defect* of the present *Free-Thinkers* is a Neglect of the proper Rules of true *Free-thinking* and *fair Examination*, and because I have laid down some of these Rules, I shall now apply them to the present *Free-thinking* in order to lay open the *Falseness* of it. The first of these Rules was this, That every one who seriously sets upon the Search of Truth, ought to prepare his Mind with a Love of Truth for its own Sake.

Whether we thus love Truth, we may know, by our entertaining, or not entertaining, any Proposition with greater or less Assurance than the Proofs it is built upon will warrant.

The Strength of the Proofs of any Proposition is always to be the Measure of our Assent to it.

And therefore if our present *Free-Thinkers* do either refuse to give that Credit to *some Things*, which the Proofs they are built upon will warrant;

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rant; or give it to *others*, which have less Evidence, they have not a Love for Truth.

And this will lead me to examine some of their chief Arguments.

Now suppose there was a Question started, whether God did afford Men any other *Light* than that of Nature, any other Means of coming to the Knowledge of the Truth than their own Reason? Let us think freely upon it, and try which Way we can determine it.

Here, I presume, no Free-Thinker will affirm that God has tied up his Hands from affording us the Light of Revelation, in those Things which we could not otherwise know; he cannot deny the Possibility of it. But it is not only possible, but highly probable, as I shall show hereafter.

Therefore if God may reveal his Will to any one, he certainly can empower that Person to communicate it to others, and enable him to do such wonderful Things, as are sufficient to convince Men that what he delivers is from God.

This being the Case it is by no Means just Reasoning to infer that because there have been false Pretences to Revelation, that therefore there is no such Thing; on the contrary, if any Argument can be drawn from hence it is this, *viz.* because there have been many Pretences to Revelation, that therefore this is a Proof of the Reality of the Thing.

How then shall we know the *Pretence* from the *Reality*? I answer, by some external Sign; because, without this, the Revelation would never convince others, or be satisfactory to whom it was reveal'd. Accordingly we find that God observ'd this Method in Scripture, with those who were sent with Revelations from him to other People.

Thus we read of *Moses*, *Exod. iii. that he saw the Bush burn without consuming, and heard a Voice*

Voice out of it. Which Miracle, tho' sufficient to satisfy him, yet he could not look upon it as sufficient to authorize him to go upon that Message, till God, by turning his Rod into a Serpent, assured him thereby of a Power to satisfy his Mission, by the same Miracle repeated before them.

From the Consideration of the Possibility of a divine Revelation in *general*, let us, in particular, examine whether the Christian Religion is founded on divine Revelation. How shall we be resolved in this important Point? The Way to do this, a *Free-Thinker* tells us, is to renounce all Guides, and to think freely for ourselves about this Matter *.

But if by Free-thinking be meant *bare Reason*, and *metaphysical Speculations*, 'tis impossible for us this Way to come to any Certainty in this present Case; for Revelation in *general*, and that which Christianity is founded upon, does resolve itself into plain Matter of Fact: Whence the Evidence of the Truth of the Christian Revelation can be only a *moral Evidence*, arising from *ancient Testimonies* and authentick History of plain Matter of Fact.

So that if I should propose to inform myself whether the Christian Revelation be true, I must enquire whether the History of the Gospel be true; for if that be true, the Christian Revelation is so too.

Now 'tis impossible to determine this in our Thoughts only, we must take in the Witness of others, who lived at, or near those Times; and examine all the *Evidences* and *Monuments* of *Antiquity* relating to these *Facts*.

And whoever takes this Pains, will find the History of the Gospel stands upon a firmer Bottom than any other History.

And

* See *Discourse of Free-thinking*, pag. 24.