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POLITICAL DEBATE

ON

CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLES;

OR, THE

SUBSTANCE OF A CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN

THE REVEREND JOHN NEWTON,

Rector of St Mary, Woolnoth, London,

AND

THE REVEREND DAVID WILLIAMSON,

Author of Lectures on Civil and Religious Liberty,
Whitchaven.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR JOHN OGLE, EDINBURGH; AND
J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD,
LONDON.

1793.



As Mr Newton's Letter has for some time past been handed about, 'copied, and circulated, to a very considerable extent, the Editor, who is in possession of the original Manuscripts, with the approbation of all concerned, has been induced to lay it, together with the greatest part of the Answer, and the subsequent Reflections of both parties, before the public. Politics in this Correspondence seem to be the least concern: And he trusts that the amiable spirit which the Letters breathe will recommend them to the attention of the serious.



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Whitehaven, Price Five Shillings and Sixpence.

POLITICAL DEBATE, &c.

TO THE
REV. MR DAVID WILLIAMSON.

Dear and Reverend Sir,

THE kind present of your book, and your kind intention in addressing your sermons to me by name, deserved a more early acknowledgment. I am pleased with every mark of regard from a Christian brother, though I *could* have wished not to be held up to public notice: And Mr J——t, who likewise meant well, has made the business a little more awkward to me, by styling me *Doctor*, an honour which the Newspapers informed me (for I have no official intelligence) has been conferred upon me by the College of Princetown in America. However, by the grace of God, I am determined not to assume the title
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of Doctor, unless I should receive a diploma from a College in the New Settlement at Sierra Leone. The dreary coast of Africa was the University to which the Lord was pleased to send me, and I dare not acknowledge a relation to any other.

I need not express my approbation of your sermons in stronger terms than by saying, that I have seldom met with any thing more congenial to my own sentiments and taste. I read them with great satisfaction.

Though I have very little time for reading, had your whole volume consisted of such sermons, I should have gone through it much sooner: But your Lectures on Liberty, though ingenious and well written, were not so interesting to me. It was therefore longer before I could find leisure to finish them; and this has occasioned the delay of my Letter; for I thought it would be premature to write till I could say I had read them.

I hope I am a friend to liberty, both civil and religious; but I fear you will hardly allow it, when I say I think myself possessed of as much of these blessings, at present, as I wish for. I can, indeed, form an idea of something more perfect; but I expect no perfection in this state: And, when I consider the Lord's question, " Shall not my soul be avenged on such a na-
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“tion as this ?” I cannot but wonder that such a nation as this should still be favoured with so many privileges, which we still enjoy and still abuse.

Allow me to say, that it excites both my wonder and concern, that a minister, possessed of the great and important views expressed in your two Sermons, should think it worth his while to appear in the line of a political writer, or expect to amend our constitution or situation, by proposals of a political reform. When I look around upon the present state of the nation, such an attempt appears to me no less vain and unreasonable, than it would be to paint a cabin while the ship is sinking, or a parlour when the house is already on fire. My dear Sir, my prayer to God for you is, that he may induce you to employ the talents he has given you in pointing out *sin* as the great cause and source of every existing evil, and to engage those who love and fear him, instead of losing time in political speculation, for which very few of them are tolerably competent, to sigh and cry for our abounding abominations, and to stand in the breach, by prayer, that, if it may be, wrath may yet be averted, and our national mercies prolonged. This, I think, is the true patriotism, the best, if not the only way, in which persons in private life can serve their country. For the rest, there
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will be always dead to bury the dead. The instruments whom the Lord employs in political matters are usually such as are incapable of better employment. All things and persons serve him ; but there are services under the direction of his providence which are not good enough for his own children. *They* belong to a kingdom which is not of this world ; they are strangers and pilgrims upon earth, and a part of their scriptural character is, that they are the “ quiet in the land.”

The reasoning for a more equal representation in parliament is specious ; but, while infidelity and profligacy abound among rich and poor ; while there is such a general want of principle and public spirit among all ranks ; I apprehend, that, whatever changes might take place in this business, no real benefit will follow. The consequence would rather be the introduction of perjury, bribery, drunkenness, and riot, into towns, which have hitherto been more exempted from them than the boroughs. As the numbers of buyers increased, so would the number of those who are willing to be sold. And I know that many judicious people in Birmingham and Manchester are so sensible of this, that they would be sorry to have elections among them, though there are exceptions. I have so poor an opinion of the *bulk* both of the
electors

electors and the elected, that, I think, if the seats in the house of commons could be determined by a lottery, abundance of mischief and wickedness might be prevented, and perhaps the nation might be represented to as much advantage by this as by any other method ; but these are not my concerns.

The position, that, if the body of a people are aggrieved, they have a right to redress themselves, must be much limited and modified before I can reconcile it to Scripture. I am not fond of despots ; but I think, if ever there was one upon earth, Nebuchadnezzar was a despot. Whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive ; whom he would he set up, and whom he would he put down ; Dan. v. 18, 19. Yet Jeremiah declares, that the Lord had given him this despotic power, and had commanded all the nations to serve him. Surely, if you and I had been there, (knowing what we know now), we should not have disputed this command, nor have excited the people, however oppressed, to shake off the yoke which God himself had put upon them : And if, for our sins, the Lord should put us under the power of the Russians, I should rather look to him than to man for deliverance.

I think a heathen said, “ The day which deprives a man of his liberty, robs him of half
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“ his virtues.” If I was a heathen I should say so too. But the Gospel teaches me otherwise. The apostle expected that believing servants, who at that time, I suppose, were chiefly bond-servants or slaves, would act from nobler principles, and aim at a more sublime end, than the conception of philosophers had ever reached to. That they would act from a regard to the glory of God our Saviour, and to the honour of his Gospel; Tit. ii. 10.; 1 Tim. vi. 1.; and elsewhere he says, 1 Cor. vii. 21. “ Art thou called, being such a servant? care not for it: If thou mayest be free, use it rather.” If Divine Providence offers you a manumission, accept it with thankfulness; if not, it is but a trifle to you, who are already the Lord’s freedman; and, in your most servile employments, if submitted to for his sake, you are accepted of him no less than if you were placed in the most honourable and important stations. The Christian, however situated, must be free indeed, for the son of God has made him so. On the other hand, you and I, dear Sir, know how much they are to be pitied who are frantic for what they call liberty, and consider not that they are in the most deplorable bondage, the slaves of sin and Satan, and subject to the curse of the law, and the wrath of God. Oh! for a voice to reach their hearts, that they may know themselves, and seek
deliverance

deliverance from their dreadful thralldom. Satan has many contrivances to amuse them, and to turn their thoughts from their real danger ; and none seem more ensnaring, in the present day, than to engage them in the cry, “ Great “ is the Diana Liberty !” May you and I labour with success to direct them to the one thing, which is absolutely needful, and abundantly sufficient. The Socinians are rather the most forward in this cry ; which I fear will have a baneful influence upon the power of religion among the more evangelical dissenters. An agreement in political sentiments produces much cordiality and intercourse between those who, in point of doctrine, have stood at the greatest distance. And already, in some pulpits, (proh dolor !) a description of the Rights of Man occupies much of the time which used to be employed in proclaiming the glory and grace of the Saviour, and the Rights of God to the love and obedience of his creatures.

As to the Revolution in France, I suppose no human person was sorry when the Bastile was destroyed, and the pillars of their oppressive government shaken. The French had then a great opportunity put into their hands. I pretend not to judge of the political merit of their constitution ; but, if I approved it in other respects, I durst not praise it so strongly as you do ; while

I knew it was planted in atheism, and has been watered with deluges of human blood ; while I knew it began in insult to Christianity, and aimed at its abolition.

However, their first admired constitution is now at an end, and has no more force than the repeated oaths by which they bound themselves to maintain it. And now, not content with pleasing themselves, they are aiming to force their schemes upon the surrounding nations. I should call this Quixotism in the extreme, if I did not consider them as saws and hammers in the hand of the Lord. So far as they are his instruments they will succeed, but not an inch farther. Their wrath shall praise him, to the full extent of its acting, and be subservient to his designs ; the remainder of it he will restrain. And, when he maketh inquisition for the blood they have wantonly shed, and for their defiance of his great name, neither their phantom liberty, nor their idol Voltaire, will screen them from his notice.

I am sorry for your severe censures on the present administration. For, when I compare the state of the nation in the year 1783, or at the time of the King's illness, with what it is now, I cannot but think that the providence of God raised up Mr P—t for the good of these kingdoms, and that no man could do what he has
done

done unless a blessing from on high had been upon his counsels and measures. I speak simply; having nothing to hope, or, as I think, to fear, from men in power, I am not concerned to vindicate the conduct of ministry in the lump; but I believe, though it be easy to draw up theories and schemes in the closet, which may look very pretty and plausible upon paper, difficulties will occur, in the administration of a great people, which can scarcely be conceived of by persons in private life. And, with respect to Britain at present, I believe, if the prophet Daniel was at the head of our affairs, or if all our ministers were angels, the corruption and venality of the times would labour hard to counteract their designs.

There is no new thing under the sun. When I read Salust's account of the Jugurthan war, I seem to read (*mutatis mutandis*) our own history. The wealth and luxury which followed the successes of Lucullus in Asia soon destroyed all appearance of public spirit in Rome. Our acquisitions in the East have had a similar effect. I know some persons who, after giving full proof of their incompetency to manage their own private affairs, after having ruined their families by dissipation, and stained their characters by fraud and bankruptcy, have presently set up for national reformers. I am very sorry they should
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seem to have the sanction of such a name as your's.

I know not even the names of the gentlemen who compose the Society of "The friends of the people," and consequently have no prejudice against their characters. But you yourself are sorry, and seem surpris'd that they should adopt a eulogium upon Mr Paine. I am sorry likewise, but I am not surpris'd. Ex pede Herculem ! I rely more upon this feature, than on all their declarations. When you say that, allowing them to be men of penetration, nothing more is necessary to establish the purity of their intentions, it sounds very strange to me, when I consider it as the sentiment of the author of the two sermons which I have read with so much pleasure. Surely it cannot accord with your knowledge of human nature !

When our Lord was upon earth, he refused to be a judge or a divider. And he said afterwards, " My kingdom is not of this world ; if it were, then would my servants fight." I should think, as Peter thought, that, if any thing could have justified resistance in a disciple, that was the time when Jesus was apprehended by wicked men, to be condemned and crucified ; but his Master rebuked his zeal. I think that, as Christians, we have nothing to expect from *this* world but tribulation, no peace
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but in him. If our lot be so cast that we can exercise our ministry free from stripes, fines, imprisonment, and death, it is more than the gospel has promised us. If Christians were quiet when under the government of Nero and Caligula, and when persecuted and hunted like wild beasts, they ought to be not only quiet but very thankful now. It was then accounted an honour to suffer for Christ. Of late, the Rights of Man are pleaded as a protection from the offence of the cross.

Had I been in France some time ago, and if by going between the contending parties I could have reconciled them, I certainly ought to have done it. But, to take a part in their disputes myself, and to become openly and warmly a Jacobin or a Feuillant, would be ridiculous in me, if all my connections and interests were in England, and I expected in a few weeks to leave France forever. In this view I consider myself now. If I had wisdom or influence to sooth the angry passions of mankind, whether Whigs or Tories, I would gladly employ them; but, as to myself, I am neither Whig nor Tory, but a friend to both. I am a stranger, and a pilgrim. My Πολιτευμα, my charter, my rights, my treasures, are, I hope, in heaven, and there my heart ought to be. In less than a few weeks I may be removed, (and perhaps suddenly,) into
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the unfean world, where all that caufes fo much buſtle upon earth at preſent will be no more to me than the events which took place among the Antediluvians. How much then does it import me, to be found watching with my loins girded up, and my lamp burning, diligently engaged in my proper calling. For the Lord has not called me to ſet nations to right, but to preach the Goſpel, to proclaim the glory of his Name, and to endeavour to win ſouls. Happy is that ſervant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, ſhall find ſo doing! In the hour, when death ſhall open the door into eternity, many things which now aſſume an air of importance, will be found light and unſubſtantial as the baſelefs fabric of a viſion.

I know not whether the length and freedom of my letter may not require an apology, as much as my long ſilence. But, as I give you full credit for what you ſay of your candour towards thoſe who differ from you in ſentiment, I am the leſs apprehenſive of offending you. From the peruſal of your ſermons, I have conceived a great reſpect and affection for you. Though we may not meet upon earth, I truſt we ſhall meet where all are perfectly of one mind. In the mean time, I ſet you down in my heart as a friend and a brother. As I was forced to write, both duty and love obliged
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me to be faithful and free in giving you my thoughts.

I recommend you to the care and blessings of of the Great Shepherd and Saviour, and remain for his sake,

Reverend Sir,

Your affectionate friend and brother,

J. N.

London, Coleman Street Buildings, }
November 28. 1792. }

TO THE

REV. MR JOHN NEWTON.

Reverend and Dear Father,

I received your letter in the ordinary course of post, and I could not answer to my own mind, had I delayed acknowledging my obligations to you a moment longer than the immediate duties of my station required me to do it. I very well knew that your political sentiments differed extremely from mine; but that difference never, for a moment, abated my respect for you as a Minister of the Gospel, or my regard

regard for you as a Christian. I do not pretend to infallibility; and, as my own judgment has often been wrong, I have no reason at all to quarrel with those who think it what I have often found it to be. I shall, in answer to your letter, as briefly as I can, state the particulars in which I differ from you; and, as the whole difference is about politics, I hope it will not deprive me of your instructions in matters of infinitely more value, nor in the least lessen that warm affection I have borne to you ever since I became acquainted with you as a Divine. In the first place, you seem to think it inconsistent with the character of a Minister of the Gospel to write upon politics. There I ought to differ from you with very great modesty, as my differing may be thought to be in my own defence. Were I a solitary instance of a Preacher of the Gospel meddling with subjects of that kind, I should certainly have had reason to suspect that I had wandered from my proper place. But you cannot be ignorant, that a zeal for true Religion, and the love of liberty, have seldom, in the History of the Reformation, been found separate. I might quote Luther, Calvin, and almost all the reformers, to prove the fact. In England, the Puritans were long the zealous friends of evangelical truth, and likewise the only supporters of political and civil

vil liberty; whereas Laud, and almost all the other enemies of the Gospel, were the preachers of passive obedience, and the divine right of Kings. Dr Owen wrote upon politics; and in the present century I might mention, among several others, the celebrated Mr Bradbury. These were zealous for what they accounted liberty; and you will allow that they are to be ranked among the best writers in theology. From the remainder of corruption in the hearts of good men there is much danger, I allow, of their having their affections drawn away from things of vastly more importance, when they write upon those which are not immediately connected with the Gospel of Christ. I hope, I feel, what the apostle calls the body of sin and death; for, to be insensible of it, is to be completely under its power; and that there is no exercise in which I engage from which the evil heart of unbelief will not bring the materials of temptation; but I am not convinced that it is inconsistent with the character of a Minister of the Gospel to offer his sentiments to the world, concerning what he thinks to be the best method of providing for the present happiness of mankind, in so far as that happiness is affected by civil government. If politics become the principal part of a minister's business; if, while he discusses the rights of men and of nations,

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his flock be neglected, and the rights of those whom Christ hath purchased with his own blood sacrificed, I grant he acts a most unfaithful and unrighteous part. But I hope this has not, though I am conscious of much unworthiness, been altogether my case. The judgments of God, we have indeed much reason to fear, will come upon us as a nation, for our innumerable violations of His law, and our contempt of His Gospel; and therefore, we have much reason to *grieve* and to *cry* for all our *abominations*, and to stand in the breach by prayer, that our sins may be forgiven, and our mercies may be prolonged. But I do not see that our trust in God ought to make us negligent, even about the natural means of our prosperity as a nation; I would not think that farmer a better Christian than his neighbours because he spent his time wholly in prayer, and neglected to improve his farm in that manner which experience points out to be necessary; though, were he to labour without trusting in God for his success, I should not consider him as a Christian at all. As the Gospel of Christ requires diligence in business, as well as fervour of spirit, I think a man may serve God by them both. I believe that in ordinary cases, that, kingdom will prosper best in which there is most political wisdom in the rulers; and that that quality is often
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found where there is none of the wisdom that is from above. I acknowledge that all depends upon God, and that he often taketh the wise in their own craftiness; but still I cannot think that he has given men reason as a talent they ought to bury. I wish its improvement had been confined to politics, and those other sciences which are its proper subjects. But I proceed to take some notice of those things in which our political sentiments differ; and here, I do not mean to enter into controversy, but to state my sentiments with the same plainness which you have used.

I was extremely sorry to see some observations in your *Meñiah* which I thought were too favourable to the old doctrines of passive obedience, and non-resistance. They are the only sentiments in all your works to which I cannot subscribe; in your letter you repeat them. I do not see, upon the principles you have laid down, how the Revolution in 1688 can be justified; for, if the people have no right to resist tyranny in what manner they please, our ancestors certainly did wrong, when they banished one family, and called another to the throne. The present Constitution in Church and State must likewise be built upon rebellion, and every friend to it is a rebel against the laws of God. If the instance of Nebuchadnezzar has any relation

lation to the ordinary state of human affairs, the Revolution I formerly mentioned was the most unjustifiable thing in the world ; for James was not, by many degrees, either so absolute or so tyrannical as the Babylonian Prince. I shall not, at present, spend time in examining what is the precise meaning of the word *command* in the passage of Scripture you have quoted. In whatever sense we take it, it does not appear to me conclusive reasoning to say, that because God some thousand years since commanded, in one instance, all nations to serve a despot, therefore passive obedience and non-resistance are his universal commandments to all men in every age. I acknowledge that those nations to whom it was given were bound by it ; and if that tyrant were alive, the obligation might still continue. I need not observe to you, that there were many commandments given under the Old Testament dispensation which made no part of God's moral law to men ; but you cannot be ignorant that there are many instances of men resisting similar tyranny, and doing it by the commandment of God himself. The whole Book of Judges is full of them. The moral law of God cannot contradict itself ; but God may at different times give positive commandments to men which are opposite

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The arguments you take from the 'obedience, the first Christians gave to Nero, &c. I have endeavoured to answer in the lectures on civil and religious liberty, by shewing, that a contrary conduct would have been destructive of the rights of men and of nations.

We ought no doubt to pity those who are frantic about liberty, and are themselves the slaves of sin and Satan; but, surely our pity should be extended equally to those who are frantic for passive obedience to the laws of men, or rather of a man, and yet boldly trample on the laws of God.

You say you are sorry for my severe censures on our administration; I assure you, my worthy Father, I have found many persons who think I am partial to it, and that this is one of the greatest faults of my book.

I respect the rights of the French nation to choose a government for themselves, though they should choose what I reckon the most absurd one in the world; and therefore, so far as the rights of nations are concerned, I must wish well to the independence of that people, so long as I am a friend to justice. Though my neighbour be a Socinian, or even an Atheist, I could not wish to see him robbed, because God has commanded me to love him; and I should, I confess, think it extremely hard if any person
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told me, when I pled his cause, that I must certainly approve his principles, or his actions, otherwise I would not stand up in his defence. It is sufficient to justify me, that he is a man, and has a right to his property by the laws of God.

I must beg to set you right in one particular. If you look again to the conclusion of the lectures and reflections, you will find that it is not the Society of the Friends of the People who have adopted a eulogium on Mr Paine, but the Society for Constitutional information, which is quite another society, and seems to be actuated by very different views. When I speak of the purity of the intentions of the former society, I am a little surpris'd that you should suppose me to mean purity in the Gospel sense of the word. By purity, I meant nothing more, in the place you mention, than the correspondence of their intentions with their professions of being friends to a mixed government; nor did I at all mean that this purity was produced by their penetration, but that, in the present case, penetration was a sufficient test of it; because, were their intentions hostile to the government of their country, they must immediately see that they were defeating them.

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Here then, I leave politics. I assure you I took in perfect good part the letter you wrote me; and, though I am forced to differ very much from your political sentiments, I respect you in the character of a divine, as much as ever, and love you even more. As you entered on the subject, I thought I could not use you well without writing my sentiments freely. I have done it; and as I hope you will write me again when you can find leisure; as we both understood one anothers sentiments on political subjects, and are not likely to agree; and as we have an inexhaustible subject, the exceeding riches of God's grace, in his kindness to us through Christ Jesus, in the celebration of which we are agreed; I wish to hear from you on this, and to let the other subjects drop.

I must conclude this letter by thanking you for the poem you sent me: I have derived far more pleasure from it than the best political writer in the world could give.

Politics have been, and may yet be, my amusement; but divinity is my business, and I hope God is my portion. I will thank you, if you have another copy of the poem, to send me it: I wish that others may peruse it, and be encouraged to taste and see that God is good, and that they who trust in him are blessed. I hope, if God spare me, to see you in London some
time

time next summer : Indeed I would rather see you, and spend some time with you, than any minister of state or prince in Europe. I hope the freedom of my letter will not displease you : I will not disguise my sentiments when I am called upon to explain them ; but there is not a man in the world I would be more sorry to offend than you : I shall love and respect you while I live ; and I hope to spend an eternal sabbath with you in heaven, where all our politics will be to adore the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by his blood. And, now my father, and my friend, I will not press you for a letter ; but so soon as you have leisure to write me one, it will, I hope, revive me. Though I cannot subscribe to the political part of your's, the religious part of it was as cold water to a thirsty soul. May God long preserve your life as a blessing to his church ; and, when your labours are finished, may you enter into rest, and sleep in Jesus. This is, and will, so long as we both live, be the daily and fervent prayer of My Reverend and Dear Father,

Your respectful and affectionate

D. W.

Mr

Mr Newton's Remarks on the preceding Letter.

I. WHETHER the revolution in 688 was right or wrong, is no affair of mine; I had no hand in bringing it about: My business is only with the *powers that be*; and to them I would yield peaceful obedience, if I lived in Russia. In matters of conscience, if I could not obey, I would pray for grace to enable me to *suffer* as a Christian; 1. Peter 4.

* 2. The strain of the duke of B———k's manifesto might lead one, without the spirit of prophecy, to expect that the Lord would probably pour contempt upon such a haughty worm. But I do not think his failure a proof that the Lord fights for the French: He can humble the duke of B———k, and call them to an account likewise. My heart aches with the forebodings I feel for that unhappy nation: They have set the Lord of hosts himself at defiance; and, though his mercy is infinitely beyond the bounds of my scanty apprehension, as they have presumed and put it to issue with him whether he be the governor of the earth or not, I cannot but believe he will plead his own cause, and make them know that he is the Lord.

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* This relates to a part of the above letter, which is omitted in the publication.

3. I cannot believe that an assembly of atheists and libertines (such were the majority at least, and especially the leading men in it) should sit down seriously to intend a plan, supposing them able to contrive it, for the real good of mankind, or of nations. My knowledge of what human nature is, when left to itself, warrants me to think, that pride, avarice, and revenge, had a large share in their councils. One instance is come to light : They put the bust of their great Mirabeau on high ; they have now taken it down.

4. Dr Owen, Dr Goodwin, and latterly Mr Bradbury, were great and good men. But I have always thought, and still think, that their interference with politics was a great blemish on their character. If Martin's account be true, that Dr Owen being invited to a political meeting, after beginning the business with prayer, said with a loud voice, of Richard Cromwell, *He must down, and he shall down!* I think it was a very rash and indecent speech for a gospel minister. Mr Neale says, " the writer of Dr Owen's life discredits the story, though, in my opinion, it is very probable, for the Dr inclined to a commonwealth." Mr Bradbury's political zeal likewise led him to join in singing songs in a tavern, a place in which I would not chuse to be seen upon such an occasion.

caſion. I hope I have profited by theſe great men, but I would not copy their faults. You plead their example; and I am afraid others will plead your's. We have one perfect pattern, even Chriſt, and his apoſtles drank deeply into his ſpirit. But I am afraid there are but few examples out of the New Teſtament that we can ſafely follow without caution and diſcrimination. But, if I may follow any frail man, I chooſe Leighton for my guide; of whom it is recorded in his life, that when blamed by ſome, for not preaching *to the times*, he answered, if all the brethren have preached according *to the times*, may not one poor brother be ſuffered to preach *to eternity*.

5. I have no right to contradict you, when you ſay you can amuſe yourſelf with politics without ſuffering detriment. I am almoſt certain I could not. Long experience has taught me, that I cannot be comfortable, either in my public work, or my private walk, unleſs I am as much as poſſible *totus in illis*. You will allow me however to hint, though you know it, that we are not proper judges in our own cauſe, and are liable, through the deceitfulneſs of our own hearts, even when we mean well, to be drawn ſooner and farther from the right path than we are aware. The moſt upright have reaſon to maintain a jealouſy of themſelves, with regard
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to their favourite pursuits. But, admitting that your mind is so strong, and so powerfully impressed with the life and influence of divine truths, that you can in this way amuse yourself, without suffering loss yourself, perhaps some who look up to you as their guide, and follow you as their pattern, may not be so well established; and, for want of your spirituality, what is amusement to you, may be hurtful and ensnaring to them. Upon the apostle's principles, 1. Cor. 8. 13. I would not openly and warmly meddle with politics while the world standeth, lest I should cause my weak brother to offend.

*Mr Williamson's Observations on Mr Newton's
Remarks.*

1. You tell me that it is no business of your's to determine, whether the Revolution in 1688 was right or wrong, as you had no hand in bringing it about. Here I must beg leave to differ from you. In the decision of this question,

tion, the controversy about passive obedience and non-resistance is settled. If that revolution be defensible on the principles of scripture and reason, you must either abandon *your* principles with respect to civil government, or retain them, which, I am sure, you would not wish to do in opposition to the highest authority. On the other hand, if you believe passive obedience and non-resistance to be the precepts of christianity, you must certainly condemn every action which is inconsistent with them, and, by consequence, you must pronounce the conduct of the English nation at that period to have been a rebellion against both God and their prince.

2. You say your business is only with the powers that be, and that to them you would give obedience, if you were in Russia. I must take the liberty to observe, that here you have entirely departed from the original question about which we differed in our sentiments. That question was, as you yourself stated it, whether, when the body of a nation is injured, the people have a right to redress themselves in whatever manner they please, i. e. whether, in such a case they have a right to depose their rulers, and to change the form of their government. To prove that they have not this right, you quoted a passage of scripture, in which all nations were com-
manded

manded to serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. But you have dropped that controversy, and brought in another subject, which has not the smallest connection with the original one, and which I will never dispute with you. I readily allow that passive obedience is due from every individual to those institutions which have the sanction of the majority of that society of which he is a member, in every instance in which such institutions do not interfere with the commandments of heaven; and I have been at some pains in the lectures on civil and religious liberty to shew that this is a principle on which the very existence of society depends. I have always observed that the advocates for passive obedience, either from inattention or something worse, (I am confident that the first only can be your case), apply those passages of scripture, in which individuals are required to submit themselves to the laws of their country, to the duties which nations owe to their rulers; as if the apostle's letter to the Romans had been a manifesto directed to all the subjects of the empire, and not an epistle to a handful of Christians at Rome. This is just as absurd as if any man would argue, that because the gospel forbids private revenge, and requires the forgiveness of injuries, it prohibits the magistrates of every Christian country from punishing those persons who

violate

violate its laws, and so turn those precepts which are designed for the support of society to its destruction. Were I in Russia, I would give obedience to the civil magistrates as readily as you would do ; and I would do it, *not only for wrath, but for conscience sake*, as the apostle speaks. However tyrannical and absurd the government of that country is, the body of the people are satisfied with it, and indeed have no notion of any thing more perfect. So long, therefore, as this is the case, I am as much bound by its laws as if they were those of the best constituted government in the world. When the precepts of Christianity require that obedience from one, they require no more than what I am antecedently bound to give by the very constitution of society itself. Here Christianity only confirms the law of nature. Though it brings in a new motive of action, and requires me to obey for the Lord's sake, it does not enlarge the extent of the obedience I owe to the commandments of men. But let me turn the supposition of your living in Russia to the point in dispute between us. I shall suppose that you were now in that country, and that the people in general had their views sufficiently enlarged to discover the true end of government, and the absurdity of their present form of it ; that they were struggling with an arbitrary court for that liberty which the sub-

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jects of Britain enjoy ; having made the supposition, let me ask you, what part you would consider yourself bound to act in these circumstances ? If you say you would take no part at all, I must observe, that I cannot possibly see how you could remain neutral. If you believe, as I do, that every nation has a right to enjoy liberty, you could much less be an unconcerned spectator, when millions were robbed of their best temporal inheritance, than when an individual was robbed of his property. You must consider the act of violence as the more atrocious in proportion to the extent of the mischief it occasions. Should you, on the other hand, consider passive obedience to princes and rulers as one of the doctrines of Christianity, I do not understand how you could in conscience avoid teaching what you must reckon a duty particularly necessary at such a conjuncture.

Allow me to observe, that the answer which ought to be given to the question I have put decides the whole controversy between us. If an arbitrary government may be resisted by the body of the people, much more, in a limited one such as our's, may they, when the compact between them and their rulers is broken, exact the forfeiture. What you say of living in Russia, brings to my mind a sentence in your former letter : You say, that should God, for our
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sins, bring this country under the power of Russia, you would look more to him, than to men for deliverance. We are perfectly agreed in the case you have put; as our whole hope of forgiveness must depend on the mercy of God, so our whole hope of success against our enemies ought to be fixed on the blessing of his providence. And, yet I am afraid there must be some difference of opinion between us. I would reckon that, in this case, we were wanting in our duty, both to ourselves and to our posterity, did we not levy the most numerous army, and equip the most formidable fleet, that the circumstances of our condition would allow us to do, and animate one another to the combat. *Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God; and let the Lord do that which is right in his fight.*

But, to return to that submission which individuals owe to the voice of a nation: Should the parliament of Great Britain place the king above the laws, and render him absolute as the Grand Signior; if they did it with the general consent of the nation, I maintain that you and I, and even the most respectable minority, are as much tied down to non-resistance as we are at present. The laws which are ordained with the consent of the majority of any society, so

long as they are equal, constitute the whole of the rights of every individual. Had the National Convention of France acted upon this principle, which is the very basis of all political liberty, they would not have corresponded with factious clubs in this country, whose professed intention is to subvert a constitution revered by the great body of the people.

3. That God fought for the French when that nation was invaded by the armies of the Emperor and the King of Prussia, both you and I must believe, as we are firmly persuaded that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without his care and superintendance. The French atheists, indeed, believe nothing of this, and therefore they must ascribe their victory to chance, or to their own discipline or courage. What judgments the infidelity and wickedness of that nation may draw down on them, I confess myself utterly unable to determine. But, if *they* suffer, and *we* escape, it is certainly, as you acknowledge, much more than we deserve. I ever was an enemy to the levelling principles of the French government; I reprobated their introduction into this country; and I was always afraid they would throw the people who adopted them into a state of anarchy and discord. But I always thought, and still continue to think, that the French had a right to choose the form of government

ment under which they were to live ; and that, though every individual of the human race might examine their political principles, yet all the nations of the world put together could never, consistently with justice, pretend to choose a government for them. Had the people of France continued to treat the rights of other nations with the same veneration which they challenged to their own, though their cause had been attended with no better success than that of Poland, I would still have considered it as the cause of justice and moderation. When they invaded the Austrian Netherlands, they were received by the natives as friends and deliverers. In that character I wished them success : But, the moment I was convinced, (I paid but little regard to the first vague reports circulated in the Newspapers), that they attempted to force their principles of liberty and equality upon those provinces, I could only recognize them in the character of oppressors. Such men, whatever their professions are, I am never sorry to see humbled. When the National Convention, in the accumulated characters of accusers, judges, and witnesses, without law, and in opposition to one of the first maxims of liberty and justice, passed the sentence of death on their degraded monarch, when they suffered that sentence to be executed with a barbarity shocking to the feelings of human nature,

nature, their conduct struck me with indignation mingled with horror. The murders perpetrated by Marat, Roberfpierre, &c. excited my detestation ; but, as they were the arts only of a desperate faction, I thought it unjust to charge them to the account of the people in France. The murder of their prince was the act of the nation ; and, so soon as I knew that it was committed, I believed the day of retribution was not far off. I have not been surpris'd to hear that disgrace and defeat have attended every measure they have adopted since that time. With regard to their domestic concerns, I have only one thing to observe. If the principles of atheism be so generally received as we are taught to believe they are, it is a matter of very little consequence under what form of government they shall choose to live. Were it the best in the world, so soon as the belief of a God and his providence is exploded, society, by the natural course of things, as well as by the judgments of heaven, must be on the very point of some violent disruption. Here therefore we are agreed. The sum of my principles, with respect to the French, is this : So long as they fought only for the enjoyment of their own opinions, I wish'd them success : So soon as they fought to impose them on others, I hop'd they would be disappointed.

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