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S U B S T A N C E

OF THE

S P E E C H

OF

THE REV. MR. WALKER,

AT THE

GENERAL MEETING

OF THE

COUNTY OF NOTTINGHAM,

HELD AT MANSFIELD,

On MONDAY the 28th of FEBRUARY 1780.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

MR. THOMSON'S PREFACE

TO

A SPEECH OF MR. JOHN MILTON,
FOR THE LIBERTY OF UNLICENSED PRINTING,

TO

THE PARLIAMENT OF ENGLAND.

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M D C C L X X X .

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 OF THE SPEECH OF
 THE REV. MR. WALKER,
 AT THE
 GENERAL MEETING of the County of NOTTINGHAM,
 Held at MANSFIELD, on Monday the 28th of Febr. 1780.

GENTLEMEN,

I Approach you as a plain Freeholder, on a level with the lowest in the assembly: you may think perhaps, that those who move in a higher sphere have not a perfect sympathy with you, and therefore may not be displeas'd with the address of one, whose sentiments, interests, and views must be presumed to be similar to your own; yet even in this view I should not think myself authorized to detain you, if it did not appear to me that some very material views of the question have been left unnoticed, even by Gentlemen who have so ably distinguished themselves in the defence of the petitioners cause. To these views I would confine my attention.

The wisdom and expediency of the people's interfering in the business of the state rests on the supposed abuse of the public money, and the dangerous influence which this abuse has given to a minister over the freedom and integrity of Parliament. Many striking and well selected instances of this abuse and this influence have already been exhibited to your view; but I am convinced that both the abuse and the influence are of much more alarming extent than have already been stated. In order to produce the same conviction in you, I beg leave to lay before you a few plain facts, in which the expence of the present administration in various departments will be compared with the expenditure of preceding administrations in exactly similar, or rather more urgent circumstances.

The expence of Embassies in the reign of William III. amounted to 45,000l. per annum, and during the last glorious and complicated war of George II. to 50,000l. per annum, an increase only of 5000l. but of late years this article has been increased to 98,000l. per ann. exceeding the expence of embassies in both the former reigns, and very nearly double to the higher charge in George the second's reign. This portion of doubling the expenditure of the most interesting periods on every article will be found in the sequel of comparison to constitute the lowest rule of ministerial extravagance in our days; but for what benefit to the state one embassy under the direction

direction of the present minister has tended, is beyond the power of the rack to extort from either him or his confidants. Another article of public expence is Secret Service Money, which, however invidious to the ears of an Englishman, yet, from the numberless agents that are necessary to carry on an extensive plan of policy, whether in peace or war, cannot be altogether avoided. But as it is of this delicate nature, and cannot for prudential reasons be fully subjected to account, every minister of integrity and honor will be sure to act therein with the greatest modesty, and expect to be justified by the apparent benefit of which it has been productive, and of which every one may judge. Now in this same interesting war of George II. when the arms and policy of that wonderful minister, Mr. Pitt, embraced almost the whole globe, the charge of secret service money amounted to 44,000l. per ann. while in the year 1777 this charge was swelled to 86,000l. per ann. the same near approach to double. But by what proportion shall we estimate the benefit to the state from this increased expence? Let the hiring advocate of ministry, the protefter, who has no feeling for his Country's wrongs and disgraces, say!—The Extraordinaries [an article which was explained in familiar terms to the plainest freeholder] thro' the whole extent of King William's war, of nine years duration, amounted nearly to one million and a quarter; and of Anne's war for eleven years to two millions; of George the second's first war, which was ended in nine years, to three millions and a half; and for the four first years of his second and last war to three millions six hundred thousand pounds. While the same article for the four first years of the present impolitic, inglorious, and fatal war is charged at nearly eight millions and a quarter; and for the year 1778 alone at upwards of three millions. Thus the extraordinaries of the army for one single year of the present war are very nearly equal to the whole extraordinaries for twenty years war of William and Anne, wars of the greatest extent, difficulty, and exertion, as well as glory. And the same extraordinaries of the first four years of the present war exceed all the demand for twenty-nine years war of William, Anne, and George II. by one million and an half; and are one million more than double to the extraordinaries for the first four years of George the second's last war; though the army voted by Parliament for those years of George the second's war exceeded the army voted for the same term of the present war by thirty-three thousand men; yet expence blushes to look upon the present war, while in George the second's contest with the whole house of Bourbon she proudly bore her fruits from every quarter of the globe.—The Navy Debt is what the minister dares to contract, and involve his country in, beyond the provision of Parliament, for this great bulwark of all our commerce, power, and glory; and where the national benefit answers to the debt incurred, it may perhaps be justified; but it has been reserved for our day to bear at once the most liberal grants of the public money, the boldest anticipation of future sums, and the acknowledgment of the ministers that the fleet of England is too weak to chastise the perfidy and ambition of an enemy, whom but yesterday she had driven out of the seas. This navy debt, at this moment, exceeds eight millions; while at the close of the last memorable war, when the British flag was seen triumphant in every sea of the globe, and gave a serious alarm to every power in Europe, the navy debt did not amount to six millions, and the addition to this debt in the

single year 1779 is nearly three millions, more than half of what was incurred throughout the whole progress of the last war; the last war indeed, as it was the highest of England's glory. This is a gloomy tale to tell to English yeomen; and while your petition asks the disclosing of these iniquities, an Englishman almost shudders to look into so dark and ruinous a scene.

Worthy of this profusion, this contempt of the people's distresses, as of the nation's disgrace, are a thousand other disbursements, which however singly of smaller moment, altogether form a dreadful account. Near four millions have been remitted to North America; but for what purpose, remains for the minister yet to say, as for the Parliament yet to ask of him. The drawing of bills upon the treasury by our governors abroad is but a novel business; this article in 1760, when the whole continent of North America was under the superintendance of English governors, amounted nearly to 14,000l. but so determined is the system of increase in every form in which expence can insinuate itself, that in the year 1778, when hardly one British government existed there, this demand was swelled to what? to double, to triple, to quadruple! nay, to nearly seven times the former sum! A Musterer of German troops on the home establishment is appointed at 5l. per day, and a subordinate one at 3l. per day; this might be tolerable while the levying these ready instruments of blood carried the face of duty to such officers: but they are still continued and paid at the same glorious rate, though the levies have ceased. The generosity of the present system scorrs to resume on the poor trifling ground of œconomy and the people's relief, what it has once extended to any of its favorites. Another of these muster-masters is appointed to officiate in America at 2l. per day; but the gentleman quits neither England nor his pay; he leaves it to the grave to muster them. A Superintendant of recruits is first appointed by this administration, ingenious only in the invention of expence; and this appointment, with a herd of under-agents, has cost the nation many thousands. Another new appointment is that of Inspector-general of the forces in the West-Indies at 3l. per day: this gentleman deserves so handsome a reward, as his inspecting talent extends to no less than the distance of three thousand miles from his charge, for nearer than this distance he never looked at the West-Indies nor its forces. The humanity of the minister is touched with the neglected state of the sick and wounded soldiers in America, and in 1778 he provides them a comforter in a Superintendant-general of the hospital of the grand army at the rate of 3l. per day: but the piety of the superintendant-general recollects that heaven is the best comforter of the sick; to heaven therefore he leaves the care, he quits not the English shore, and only to transmit it to heaven, receives the modest reward of so merciful an institution.—A Receiver-general of the king's revenue in Canada possesses the same wonderful faculty also of doing all his duty at home, and what he has transmitted to the treasury is yet to appear; but it already appears that he has received seven thousand pounds from the treasury to make certain payments in Canada. To these must be added an host of commissaries and under commissaries, with all their retinue of clerks and servants, altogether forming a many-headed monster which, tho' but of yesterday's birth, is grown to a formidable size, and already eats the honest bread of thousands and thousands. They are things of such undescribable nature and use, that not only a minister, but general officers and com-

missaries general, can create as many of them as they please. A cargo of about twenty were consigned to a commissary-general in America; but though he reported that he had no occasion for them, the cargo was not returned as improper for the market, and they each continue to devour their allowance from the treasury. Some judgment may be formed of their expence to the nation from the confession of the secretary at war, that by the death of only one of them, one pound ten shillings per day was saved to the treasury.

Such are the facts which I proposed to lay before you, as exhibiting a much more alarming view both of the waste of the public treasure, and of the dangerous influence which this abuse must give to the minister, at whose will it is distributed. The saving to the public, if the prayer of your petition be granted, is not now to be estimated by thousands, nor by hundred thousands, but by millions. If the expence of the most interesting periods, when the national glory was carried to its highest, as in the last war of George II. be stated as a decent rule of expence to these feeble and exhausted times, it will on the most moderate calculation save to the kingdom two millions four hundred and one thousand seven hundred and sixty-seven pounds per ann. Which sum, by the retrenchment of unnecessary pensions, useless places, fees of office, scandalous contracts, and a thousand other wanton modes of waste, cannot be increased to less than three millions; more by a vast sum than the whole amount of the Land and Malt Taxes, those two great pillars of the national revenue.

And to what are these immense sums, which neither candour nor party can carry to the account of real use, applied? wanton as ministers are in the throwing about the public money, they have some end in view; they do not incur the curses of their country for the pure delight of being cursed; they do not give to their enemies, to their opponents in or out of Parliament, to those who set their faces against their iniquities, but to their enlisted friends, their abettors and confederates; and what the amount of this debasing, this overwhelming influence must be, is no difficulty to conceive; it is dreadfully felt, and is the most important ground of the nation's fears, of all those petitions and associations which the people who pay the price of this corruption, and are doomed to be the sacrifice of this influence, have at length thought it to be their duty to themselves, to their ancestors, and to their posterity, to engage in.

If therefore, in spite of a concealment which may well be supposed to cover a thousand other iniquities, such a scene of profusion here meets the public eye, can any one, he did not say, who had common honesty, but who had only that interest in himself as not to be delighted with ruin, hesitate a moment in interposing to stop the progress of a mischief, which, if it proceed a few steps further, will probably render all interposition vain. Is this the triste, forsooth, which a high-spirited nation must despise as beneath their notice? In the cause of country, of liberty, of repelling the ambition of an implacable foe, it is generous and worthy of a Briton to face every difficulty, to be chearful under every burthen. But a Briton is not so fond of want, as with more than a servile tameness to submit to private distress and national disgrace; to bear the hand, which, weak or impotent against the enemies of Britain, is mighty only in the spoil and plunder of his country. You must conclude therefore, that the ground of expediency and

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and necessity, on which your petition stands, is justified to every one, who will not daringly and profligately set his face against public safety, as at all meriting the attention of a wise, generous, and free people.

Thus justified in the wisdom and necessity of the measure, which with such unanimity you have adopted, you are to answer to the silly charge of faction, of being stirred and led in all your movements by a disappointed party; and this is the formidable argument which is to beat to the ground all your manliness and patriotism. Faction is a bugbear of ministers, the phantom with which they hope to fright the honest from looking with a too curious eye into their dark and wicked proceedings.

The term in its proper acceptation is certainly odious, but in the mouths of our ministers it passes into praise; not to be factious, in their judgment, is to be a partner or abettor of their crimes; it is to be a tame or interested assassin of our country. This calumny has been generously and truly disavowed by those, who were the first movers to the part which you have acted; but however voluntary and honest in them, if the measure had not found you equally convinced, equally disposed to it, their summons and their harangues would have been given to the wind. But I will venture to assert, that in all popular discontents, and even in those revolutions which have often followed the too obstinate provocation of an injured people, the faction of a few never was, nor in nature ever could be, the cause. Grant that there may be factious and interested leaders in the present instance of the people's discontent; it is not their faction which has stirred your discontent, though it may be found convenient to their faction to ally itself to you. The great body of the people can see and feel for themselves; nor do they quit their repose, and set their face against the armed hand of government, unless irritated by severe and home-felt injuries. It is rather true that they will bear too much; too much in deed, as is fatally witnessed by the overthrow of liberty in every other government of Europe: and if they should be roused by a sense of their wrongs to remonstrate, however mildly, against the misrule which galls them, they have need of all their caution, as government has infinite advantages in the contest, and one false step may subject the poor complainants to all its jealous terrors. This every people well know, the liberality even of our government does not exclude this knowledge; and therefore there is no temptation to tread on this slippery ground, unless when the last necessity calls; but, unless to such a people as this country yet boasts of, even the last necessity will call in vain. It is not therefore in human nature for the people to move at the wanton summons of a factious few, and I challenge all history to furnish one single instance of such a fact. If it should be true that men, who have no view but to their own ambition and interest, offer themselves as your leaders in the present question, which ministerial profligacy may well believe; yet it is your previous discontent that has invited them to this union, and in your strength they may hope to find an assistant to their ambition; but observe, that even to answer this crooked purpose, they must put on at least the semblance of your virtue, and it is the peculiar happiness of your cause that men, who set out with no honest, no generous intentions, are compelled to act in concert with you for the establishment of the public welfare.

If it be futile and absurd, the charging upon a factious few the discontents,

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ments, the resentment, the interposition of the people; still more ridiculous is the plea of being ill-timed, of your petitions and interference tending to distress and weaken government, to divert and unnerve its application to a most interesting war. Yes! in truth they are ill-timed, and for ever will be ill-timed to the guilt which dreads a review, to the prodigality and corruption which will never be sated but with the last penny you have to give. And shall you leave it to them to judge of times and seasons, who have thought the time of war, of the most arduous and complicated war, and stripped of half your means and resources, to be the time of waste and expence, beyond all experience of the most united and prosperous periods? Is it for them to promise the time from whom the idea of a reform would never have originated at all; who have so driven you to the verge of destruction, that it is difficult to say, if the time of retreat and recovery be not for ever gone? It was an unanswerable argument, which has been already urged to this evasive plea, that economy in all superfluous expence will give strength to useful exertions, that it is the only nerve of necessity; but I beg leave to observe to you, that this mighty plea, which is to turn aside your attention to your last interests, is refuted by their own concessions. They allow your petition to be just. Where then is the opposition? Agreed as you and they are in the wisdom and necessity of your demands, from whence is the disturbance to come, which these anxious combatants for your country's glory so piously dread? You and they are at length, by their own confession, met upon the same ground, and have nothing now to do, but with harmony and zeal to move onward in the only road which remains for the rescue of your common country. But alas! the attention to this reform, by all confessed to be expedient, will rob them of those hours, those sacred hours, which these tender-hearted patriots cannot spare from the national safety in this hour of danger. And have they no hours of lounging, of dissipation, of revelry and debauchery, which their patriotism might give to the most patriot purpose? But if their arduous stations have already left them no such hours of mirth and jollity, and all their time be devoted to careful council, and anxious planning of their dear country's good; why, a few honest unpensioned gentlemen, in or out of parliament, will ease them of all this trouble, extricate them out of this dreadful dilemma, answer the people's wishes, and leave to these painful watchmen at the helm, all the hours which are so fully and usefully employed. But the truth is, they mean not one tittle of what they say; I should insult your understandings, if I supposed that you had any faith in their concession of the wisdom and virtue of your petitions. This is an age of wonderful conversions; but if your virtues and necessities had not obtruded this reform upon them, the last hour of Britain might have come, before any reform would have disturbed their repose. They hate, they dread reform; but it is so cordial to every other mind, it comes so home to the honest wishes, to the pressing wants of the people, that they dare not frame in words a direct opposition to it. If they knew how with any decency to express a flat denial, they would; but, thanks to human nature, that effrontery and profligacy, which we have seen extended to every other length, are yet unequal to this.

Go on then, ye people of England, in the course which you have set out, and turn not to the right, nor to the left, for all the shadowy phan-

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toms which those, who wish you no speed, may dress up to beguile or awe you. As from you originated the good work, on your constancy and firmness entirely depend the bringing it to a happy issue, the obtaining all your wishes. Every art, every sophistry, every false alarm, and hypocritical jealousy will be tried to disunite, to unman you; but if you suffer yourselves to be over-reached, to be intimidated, you have made your last attempt for your country, for yourselves, and for your children, and you will fall below the level of other slaves; the character of Englishmen, the very character of men will not be left you. But I look for better things, I see no room to fear, for any thing but the most reviving, animating hope. The line of the people's sufferance is past, and ministerial rapacity and oppression shrink before you. For as there is no power which ought, so there is no power which can withstand you, if you be not wanting to yourselves. See! the tide is turned, the ebb of Britain is over; and fair integrity, and generous, unbought patriotism, and decent, manly liberty, and all your truest glory, are revisiting this favoured island. Welcome them, seize them, hold them: and may that Being, who is propitious to honest and good designs, bless the British people with all success!

To which unexpected prayer an hundred voices founded back, Amen, Amen!

MR. THOMSON'S PREFACE
TO
A SPEECH OF MR. JOHN MILTON,
FOR THE
LIBERTY OF UNLICENSED PRINTING.

THERE is no need of a *Preface* to recommend this admirable defence of the best of human Rights, to any one who has ever heard of the Divine MILTON; and it is impossible to produce better arguments, or to set them in a more convincing, awakening light.

Is it possible that any free-born Briton, who is capable of thinking, can ever lose all sense of religion and virtue, and of the dignity of human nature to such a degree, as to wish for that universal *ignorance, darkness, and barbarity*, against which the *absolute freedom of the press* is the only preservative? For what else spreads light or diffuses knowledge through the world? But it seems, as a sense of the value of health is sometimes lost in the midst of its full enjoyment, so men, through a habit of liberty, may become insensible of its inestimable worth; otherwise would not every one awake, arouse himself, and say, when the most dear and valuable of all the privileges, that government is designed to protect, is menaced, *That he will sooner part with life itself, than with that liberty without which life is not worth the having; that he will sooner suffer his eyes to be put out, than his understanding to be extinguished?* We are told in history of a * people that, after they had been inured to slavery, were in a panic fear when their liberty was offered to them. And this *terrible* effect of slavery ought to make every lover of mankind tremble at the thoughts of any steps or approaches towards the diminution of liberty. "For without it, as Homer has told us, men soon cease to be men; they soon cease to be rational creatures."

Now without the absolute unbounded freedom of writing and publishing there is no liberty, no shadow of it; it is an empty sound. For what can *liberty* mean, if it does not mean *the liberty of exercising, improving, and informing our understandings?* "A people have liberty, said a truly good † king of England, when they are free as thought is free. What is it that makes a city (said the good Alcæus, a poet, whose muse was always sacred and faithful to the best of causes) it is not walls and buildings; no, it is being inhabited by men; by men who know themselves to be men, and have suitable notions of the dignity of human nature; by men who know what it is alone that exalts them above the..."

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Can we be either virtuous or religious without the free use of our reason, without the means of knowledge? And can we have knowledge if men dare not freely study, and as freely communicate the fruits of their studies? What is it that distinguishes human society from a brutish herd, but the flourishing of the arts and sciences, the free exercise of wit and reason? What can government mean, intend, or produce, that is worthy of man, or beneficial to him as he is a rational creature, besides wisdom, knowledge, virtue, and science? Is it merely indeed that we may eat, drink, sleep, sing, and dance with security, that we choose governors, subject ourselves to their administration, and pay taxes? Take away the arts, religion, knowledge, virtue (all of which must flourish, or sink together) and in the name of goodness, what is left to us that is worth enjoying or protecting? Yet take away the liberty of the Press, and we are all at once stripped of the use of our noblest faculties; our souls themselves are imprisoned in a dark dungeon; we may breathe, but we cannot be said to live.

If the end of governors and government is not to diffuse with a liberal, unsparing, equal hand true rational happiness, but to make the bulk of mankind beasts of burden, that a few may wallow in brutish pleasures, then it is consistent politics to root out the desire and love of light and knowledge. Certain Scythian slaves, that they might work the harder, had only their eyes destroyed; but to extinguish human understanding, and establish a kingdom of darkness, is just so far more barbarous than even that monstrous cruelty, as the mind excels the body, or as understanding and reason are superior to sense. Cardinal Richieu says, in his *Political Testament*, "That subjects with knowledge, sense, and reason are as monstrous as a beast with hundreds of eyes would be; and that such a beast will never bear its burden peaceably. Whence he infers, it is impossible to promote despotic power, while learning is encouraged and extended; the people must be hood-winked, or rather blinded, if one would have them tame and patient drudges. In short, you must treat them every way like pack-horses or mules, not excepting the bells about their necks, which by their perpetual jingling may be of use to drown their cares." Now this is plain dealing and consistent politics. But to talk of liberty and free government, public good and rational happiness, as requiring limitations on the Press, and licensers of books, is as absurd as to speak of liberty in a dungeon with chains on every limb. Hobbes too was consistent with himself, and advises those who aim at absolute dominion to destroy all the Greek and Latin authors; because if those are read, principles of liberty, and just sentiments of the dignity and rights of mankind must be imbibed. But can there be more glaring barefaced nonsense than to say, "That the very support of a free constitution requires the extinction of the Press?" that is, the extinction of knowing what we are as *men* and *christians*; what our natures are capable of; what is our just happiness, and how we ought to be treated by our governors; that is, by those whom we have entrusted with the management of our interests and concerns.

I hope it will never be this nation's misfortune to fall into the hands of an administration, that do not from their souls abhor any thing that has but the remotest tendency towards the erection of a new and arbitrary

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way, than as the greatest impiety, the cruelest, the wickedest, the most irreligious thing that can be imagined. Would it not be sacrilegiously robbing God of the only worship he delights in, *the worship of the heart and understanding*? Can there be any religion or virtue without reason, thought, or choice? or can reason, thinking, knowledge, and choice subsist without the only conceivable means of making men wise and understanding, rational and virtuous? What is the kingdom of Christ? Doth not our Saviour delight in calling it *light*, and a *kingdom of light*? And what did he come to destroy but the kingdom of darkness? And can there be a kingdom of light, without the liberty, the unconstrained liberty of diffusing light and knowledge? What is the *Reformation*, or what does it mean but the liberty, the absolute and perfect liberty of correcting and refuting errors, and of undeceiving mankind? What is it that we call *PROTESTANTISM*, but a resolution stedfastly and undauntedly to oppose all encroachments upon rational liberty, the liberty of the judgment and understanding; and to maintain it as our most valuable treasure, our greatest and noblest privilege, in comparison of which all other rights are mean and trifling, and hardly deserve the name of blessings and advantages? A free Protestant country, without the liberty of the Press, is a contradiction in terms; it is free slavery, or chained liberty. Light and darkness are not more opposite than liberty and the deprivation of the means of being rational.

Who, that loves mankind, is not sorry that any thing is ever published tending to confound mens understanding, mislead their judgments, or deprave their morals? But is there any more likely method for sense to prevail against absurdities, than leaving her at full liberty to paint them in her native colours? Can truth be better armed against error than with the *mighty blade of uncontrolled reason*? Or virtue more surely triumph over immorality, than by the vigorous execution of the truly wholesome laws purposely framed for her support?

I hate all *calumny* and *defamation*, as I hate the corruption of heart from which alone it can proceed; and do with the utmost zeal detest those prophaners of *liberty*, who, pretending to be friends to it, have recourse to such black diabolical methods. But I take the laws already in force amongst us to be a more than sufficient preservative (at least as far as human prudence is able to provide) against all the abusive overt-acts I am now expressing my abhorrence of; and as such we have reason to esteem them very valuable securities of our liberties and reputations. But because wicked things are published, must there be no publishing? I know it is objected that there is a medium between an *absolute liberty* of the Press, and an *absolute suppression* of it; which I admit; but yet aver the medium (by which either licensing, or nothing at all is meant) is far worse on all accounts than either extreme. For though we are indeed told, that licensers would serve us with wholesome goods, feed us with food convenient for us, and only prevent the distribution of poison, sure such cant was never meant to impose on any, but those who are asleep, and cannot see one inch before them. Let no *true Briton* therefore be deceived by such fallacious speeches, but consider the necessary consequences which must follow, and he will soon find that it is as the flattering language of the strange woman (in the book of Proverbs) who with her fair smooth tongue

beguileth the simple, and leadeth them as an ox to the slaughter. That plausible and deceitful language leadeth indeed into the chambers of darkness and death. I will only propose to the consideration of all lovers of religion, virtue, science, and mankind, the few following queries; and every one ought methinks to propose them to himself every day of his life, as making a fundamental catechism: for if the truths, which these contain, are not fundamental, man is not man, but a beast; religion and virtue are empty names.

1. What is our most valuable part, or what is it that maketh us capable of religion, virtue, and rational happiness? Is it not our reason or understanding?

2. What then is the noblest privilege that belongs to man? Is it not the free exercise of his understanding, the full use of all the means of advancing in virtue and knowledge?

3. What is it then that is, and must be, the chief end of government to encourage and promote? Is it not knowledge, virtue, and religion?

4. And can knowledge, virtue, or religion be promoted, if the only means of promoting them are taken away? For what are the means of promoting them, but the liberty of writing and publishing, without running any risk but that of being refuted or ridiculed, where any thing advanced chances to labour under the just imputation of falshood or absurdity?