

**DISSENT UNSCRIPTURAL AND
UNJUSTIFIABLE, DEMONSTRATED IN A
THIRD LETTER TO J. PYE SMITH, BEING
AN ANSWER TO HIS "REJOINDER" TO A
"SECOND LETTER" ON THAT SUBJECT**

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SAMUEL LEE

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DISSENT
Unscriptural and Unjustifiable,

DEMONSTRATED IN

A THIRD LETTER

TO THE

REV. J. PYE SMITH, D.D.

BEING

AN ANSWER TO HIS "REJOINDER" TO "A SECOND LETTER" ON
THAT SUBJECT.

BY

SAMUEL LEE, D.D.

D. D. OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HALLE, HONORARY MEMBER OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
OF PARIS, AND OF THE LITERARY SOCIETY OF RHODE ISLAND, FERRANDIAN
OF BRISTOL, VICAR OF SANWELL, REGIUS PROFESSOR OF HEBREW
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, &c.

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A THIRD LETTER,

&c.

VICARAGE, BANWELL, SOMERSET.

June, 1835.

Rev. and dear Sir,

THE copy of your "Rejoinder" to my Second Letter to you, which you were so good as to send me, came safely to hand two or three days ago after a circuitous route through Cambridge; and, as it contains statements which, I think, call for further consideration, I now proceed to address a Third Letter to you for this purpose. Before, however, I notice those statements, you will probably allow me to offer a few preliminary remarks.

SECTION I.

Preliminary Remarks.

The second paragraph of your "Rejoinder" tells me that you "might have felt astonishment" that statements, which to yourself had appeared clear in matter and plain in expression, have seemed to fail of being intelligible; and that arguments, which, to your own mind, were

decisive of questions, are utterly powerless in my esteem. I deem it important here to remark that, as the minds of men—originally not very dissimilar perhaps in any respect—are by education or otherwise made greatly to differ, both as to the opinions which they entertain, and the modes which they adopt of considering or expressing them; it need not be matter of surprise that what one man thinks is clear and plain, another believes to be obscure and scarcely intelligible. In many cases indeed the same precise force is not attached by all men to the same words and phrases: and, in many more, a slight difference in the manner of reading a passage will supply an emphasis, and convey a sense, not intended by its author. Prejudice exercises some influence with most men; interest and party feeling, perhaps, much more than they themselves are aware of. These things, I believe, attach themselves more or less to the best of us: and hence the melancholy truth,—which needs not, indeed, be either concealed or disguised,—that perfection is no where to be expected on this side of the grave.

In controversy, particularly on questions relating to religion, some imperfections originating in one or more of these causes may very reasonably be expected. And, when the disputants are not ignorant that this may happen,—which I trust is the case with you and me,—the line of duty seems to be, when misunderstanding presents itself, kindly to point it out, and to suggest the true intention of the place so misunderstood. Had this always been done, my opinion is, many subjects which have gradually grown more and more obscure would long have ceased to be so; and much unfriendly feeling which has occasionally been found to exist would never have had a being. Well informed men do not expect perfection in any thing earthly, if we

except the pure mathematics; and even these, when applied to the purposes of art or science, instantly become subject to uncertainties not unlike those which are found to prevail in every thing else.

Revealed religion, from the circumstance of its coming to us necessarily through the unsteady medium of words, cannot but be liable to misunderstanding. But, as it is confessedly a matter of the highest possible interest, and involves consequences the most tremendous, it is highly important that we should be cautious as to how we receive it, and make up our minds upon it; never forgetting that, as perfection, or, which is much the same thing, complete unanimity on every thing connected with it is not to be expected; it is our duty as men to be satisfied with the best approximation which we can make to *its great and saving truths*, and to be thankful for every suggestion afforded by others which may have the tendency of administering still further to our spiritual light and comfort. With these considerations before us, and remembering the shortness and great uncertainty of life, we shall necessarily be anxious that no time be lost, and no stumbling block thrown in the way of a brother, in our endeavours duly to understand, and duly to propound, every thing connected with this great question.

The great essentials of religion will, therefore, claim our first and most careful consideration; those of confessedly inferior moment we may consign to an inferior place in our regards. This, I think I may say, has been the course taken by the most prudent and best experienced in every age of the world, and in every profession and relation of life. The lawyer would justly be deemed a driveller who neglected the great and important points in his case, and then endeavoured to gain his cause by insisting on the smaller and less important ones. The

same would be true of the physician; and, indeed, of every one else engaged in any of the pursuits of life. All these very well know that, should they condescend to fritter away their time and strength on the inferior, the more obscure, and less profitable, parts of their avocations, life would be spent in discussions about trifles, and in the acquisition of nothing; disputes and dissension be so multiplied, good neighbourhood, friendly feeling and co-operation, be so extensively destroyed, that, not only would poverty and ruin generally ensue, but—what is still worse—nothing but battle and warfare would any where exist. In such cases—I fear I may say with truth—the children of this world have shewn themselves generally to be much wiser than the children of light; and here I do not altogether exempt the parties concerned in the present controversy. My reasons will appear in the sequel.

SECTION II.

On the Difficulties of Scripture.

I may now venture to touch on one of the most important sentiments contained in your "Rejoinder," one which I find running through most of the writings of Dissenters of the present day, and not unfrequently urged in society as a governing principle. I must be allowed also to affirm that, on my views, it lies at the very bottom of Dissent:—that it stands on no good foundation, and is as fallacious in its character, as it is ruinous in its tendency. Religion, it is allowed on all hands, is not—and the same may be said of infidelity—without its difficulties. Men will differ in their opinions on some points connected with it. From page 30 to 34, of the "Rejoinder," you dilate greatly on this fact. You press me with, "*Who is to determine this question?*"

i. e. as to which is the true form of protestantism. In page 33, you tell me that Fenelon contended for one form of christianity, John Gerhard for another, Dr. Muntinghe and Dr. Chalmers for another; and that I, as strenuously, recommend the Anglican Church as that in which all others should, for the sake of union and communion, merge. You conclude, "This is the presentation of grave and painful facts; and it introduces another question touching the eligibility of church establishments."

The inference to be deduced from all this seems to be, that, as good and great men have differed, no man, nor yet any body of men, ought to presume to determine what the true and proper form of protestant Christianity is. I think I cannot be mistaken in saying here that this is the inference intended to be drawn: for you also tell me (p. 32.) from Mr. Milner, that "Nothing can justify the civil magistrate in establishing a false religion. —Governors of states, if they support a false religion, have reason to expect the heavy judgments of God." "So said the excellent Mr. Milner," you add, "resting his conclusion upon the fact, that the evidences of the truth of Christianity are so full and clear, that they cannot be rejected without great wickedness of heart."... "But," you go on, "both Mr. Milner and Dr. Lee fail to tell us *by what means* this argument can be made to work." I cite this at length, in order to shew why I have taken the inference just mentioned to be that intended by you. Allow me now to examine this a little in detail.

In the preliminary remarks given above, I have allowed that difficulties exist in every profession and occupation of life. That of the law, for example—which consists in duly construing the statutes of the realm, in duly applying previously determined cases, and in giving

the just influence to custom,—has its difficulties. Cases innumerable arise for which no direct provision has been made; not to insist on the ambiguity of statutes, the manifest absurdity of some, and the entire disagreement and clashing together of others. Physic has its difficulties likewise. Art too has its difficulties, and science abounds with them. In these several cases too, men are found to differ in opinion; and, in some, to set up different and rival schools. This, however, generally happens in physic, the sciences, or the arts: because, perhaps, men have here to make out more by their individual exertions, than they have in the profession of the law, which presents them with some data to act upon. The law, therefore, having written documents on which to act, will afford the best parallel to our case.

Let us take this, then, and inquire how it is generally dealt with by those whose opinions are entitled to respect,—and how, to use your phrase, it is *made to work*. Here, then, after due inquiry has been made, men *do determine* what the law is; and, what is still more to our purpose, their fellow-men,—professional and unprofessional,—are found willing to acquiesce in their determinations. Hence, cases innumerable have been collected and published; and these are generally appealed to as decisive on any point, to which they can be justly applied. A few on the losing side may, and do, occasionally object; but I know of no instance in which it has been affirmed, that NO man, and NO body of men, can lay claim to the right of determining what the law really is. I may appeal to every lawyer, I believe, in practice—no matter how boisterous he may be in affirming that the case of true Christianity ought not to be determined,—in support of the sentiment, that no man in his senses ever yet thought, or dreamt, of maintaining, either that the law of the land was undeterminable, or