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Teil eines Briefes von Johann Ernst Bergmann an Johann Friedrich Nebe über den Niedergang der anglikanischen Kirche in Georgia und Virginia sowie die ...

Bergmann, Johann Ernst

Ebenezer, Ga., [11.01.]1803

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Vorsetzung.

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I will leave them, and turn to that portion of my fellow-citizens by far, those and trust, the most numerous and respectable, who believe that the fear of the Lord exalteth a nation. I implore their attention, as I write with candor; let me be judged with candor; and if then the decision be against me, let no other apology soften the vigor of my condemnation except that which may be derived from the fairness with which this investigation is pursued. I shall lay before my readers such proofs as have produced a conviction in my own mind.

First - That Mr. Jefferson is an infidel. And

Secondly, - That he would be pleased with a subversion of Christianity in this country. Since I proceed I hope to be indulged in one or two remarks. When those engaged in the gospel ministry have warned the people on this subject, their motives have been condemned, because they interferred in political matters. - When another, not a minister, has proclaimed the danger, then he too has been condemned because he has used religion as a weapon in a political contest. And that has it been attempted to silence the tongue of piety; to smother the voice of truth. No man is so perfect in his conduct as to be always free from reproach. - No man is so circumstanced as to be always able to escape detection and slander. We are imperfect beings. It is a delicate task therefore for any man to call the purity and religion of others in question - and it is particularly so, because the malicious will lay and many of the credulous may believe, that it is all hypocrisy. I confess that I have been perplexed with this difficulty. But I am by at length I am relieved, I did it all unremembered, I wrote not to exalt my own piety - I knew that I am frail - but I can lay my hand on my heart, and declare that I am performing a duty which I owe to my country - I feel that I am advocating the cause of truth. Yet malice, then in dudge in secret whispers, or even calumny. Yet the unsparring spirit of piety comes forth with all its venom. - I shall have greatly powerful consolation. I shall convince many even of those whom I may engage - I shall receive the thanks of the sincere supporters of truth and religion. I support of the just position; it will be considered that Mr. Jefferson's own words may be fairly and safely relied on. His "Notes on Virginia," it may be remarked, were not, like Francis Bacon's, written with a professed intention of subverting Christianity. Still however, they contain sufficient for our purpose.

In page 43. of his work, he notices the petriæ shells which are found at the foot of the North mountain in Virginia. These shells have also been found in our own mountains; and by those who believe in spirits, have been considered as evidence of the flood. Mr. Jefferson, enquiring into the cause of these shells being on such high ground, says that it is considered by many, both of the learned and unlearned, as proof of an universal deluge. To the many considerations one adds opposing this opinion, the following may be added. - He then proceeds to adduce proofs from nature (opposing nature to scripture) that an universal deluge could never have happened - because, as he says, the sea can "be raised only 53 1/2 feet above their present level, and of course would overflow the lands to that extent only. In Virginia this would be a very formal proposition even in the Champlain, or low country. Deluges beyond this extent then, as for instance to the North mountain or Kentucky, even within the jaws of deluges. He therefore rejects the common opinion, that these shells have been produced by the flood; and after resorting to two other solutions, concludes with this remarkable expression: "We must be contented to acknowledge that this great phenomenon is as yet unresolved. Ignorance is preferable to error; and he is less remote from the truth who believes nothing, than he who believes what is wrong." From his own work then it appears that Mr. Jefferson does not believe that the whole world was ever covered with water. And the reason he gives is that it seems out of the laws of nature. Now it will be granted that the flood never was, supposed to have been a mere operation of nature; but that it was produced by a special exertion of omnipotent power. To one, therefore, who believes the scriptures, it would be no argument to say that an universal flood was a quirk of the ordinary laws of nature. He would point to his Bible, as the tale of his youth, and leave those to nature's laws who disbelieve in divine revelation. And the writers, prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail, and the mountains were covered. Gen. ch. VII ver. 19. 20.)

But the proof of Mr. Jefferson's infidelity, may be considered conclusive, not only because he declares his utter disbelief in a great and important fact, established by sacred history; but because the reason which he gives for this disbelief, may easily and with equal propriety be used to justify a disbelief of all the facts which form the genuine work of Christian doctrine. For once admit that we ought to believe nothing but what seems within the laws of nature - or in other words, that nothing can be true,

which cannot be comprehended by our limited intelligence, and the basis of Christianity is destroyed. Out of a multitude I will advert but to two facts: the miraculous conception and the resurrection. These are out of the favor of nature — and if Mr. Jefferson's reason for disbelieving the flood can justify him in that case, it will justify him for disbelieving in this. Yet it is further considered that Mr. Jefferson's argument against the flood comprehends the sum total of all the objections that have ever been made to Revelation for any person at all conversant with this subject, know that the truths of the Bible are disputed because they are out of the common course "of the laws of nature." — Indeed the person who will embrace this portion of scripture by such an argument must, if still consistent, use the same in all similar cases.

In page 238. of the same notes on his writings, Mr. Jefferson says, "it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty Gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." "If in common life such a position should be advanced by an individual, he would certainly be set down for a confirmed infidel. Is it then the opinion of Mr. Jefferson a matter of no concern, whether the nation should believe in twenty Gods or no God? Has philosophy then a magic in it which can make atheism so innocent? Will a heathen — will he who is jealous and faithless in the vineyard — who is anxious for the prosperity of the work speak thus? No — his Bible will restrain him. It will teach him that "the fear of the Lord excelleth in a nation" — that only "the fool sayeth in his heart there is no God." Speaking of the first propagation of Christianity, Mr. Jefferson says, (page 238.) "Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced." Here certainly Mr. Jefferson is historically incorrect: a man so prominent in Christian history must have known that the first martyrs were under the Roman government and in great numbers. — that the Christian doctrine urged their way in defiance of fire and sword. (an man of Mr. Jefferson's learning mistake in so clear a case? Or have I perverted facts to suit his purpose? But in compliance to the learned writer let us meet him on his ground. Had not the Roman government permitted free enquiry, Christianity could never have been introduced. The rashness which could take this ground is only astonishing! He brings Christianity at once down to Mahometanism, and Paganism — He ascribes its introduction to human, rejecting divine means, as if its efficacy at this day was to be traced rather to a Roman Emperor than to the special interposition of its omnipotent author? Could a Christian justify — or is it precisely the language of infidelity. There can be no mistake here.

Thus far go the proofs which I have thought it useful to adduce from Mr. Jefferson's own writings. — Further comment might weaken the conviction which they must inevitably produce. The most subtle sophist cannot recede such declarations with a belief in sacred writ. —

Extract of a letter from an American gentleman in France.

Stavre de - France, Aug. 28, 1802.

"All of us have a desire to see celebrated characters, even though they are noted only for misdeeds. But the gratification is rather of a different nature from that of meeting with men eminent for benevolence and philanthropy.

"I tell my can of dry saturated in having seen Thomas Paine. I have several times dined and supped at the same table with him for that purpose. He is a drunken braggart animal, the most slovenly and dirty in his person of any man I ever met with. — His face is drunkenness personified, and one would almost suppose a candle might do let at his long beak nose, the effect of brandy. He can, however, appear like a man of sense in company and has a strong memory. He is on his way to America, if he can find here a country man who will disgrace himself so much as to convey him to our shores. However, I expect he will be there shortly, by some means or other. The present government in France does not let him, and informs, that on his offering to dedicate some work to Buonaparte he decline it (telling him know at the same time that he did not choose to receive that honor from so vile a calamity, actor of Washington." From the Baltimore Federal Gazette. Dec. 7, 1802. ^{Baranaga's Liberator infected.}

A young man who lately died on board of a ship in consequence of a mortification from a gun bursting in his hands, and who belonged to Christian parents in one of our principal cities, but who had studied the writings of Paine in France, said to his companions before he died, "You think perhaps that I am afraid to die — You are mistaken if you think so, I believe neither in God nor Devil — a Heavens Hell. — have therefore nothing to fear, and exposed. —