



Maryland Gazette

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Non enim Philosophi solum, verum etiam Majores nostri Superstitionem a Religione sepeverunt.
CICERO. de Nat. Deor.



RELIGION has Three great Adversaries; **ATHEISM**, **SUPERSTITION**, and **ENTHUSIASM**: The *First* may be shown to be **NONSENSE**; the *Second* **FOLLY**, and the *Third* **MADNESS**. I may perhaps consider each of them distinctly and at large in my future Discourses, but I shall begin with **SUPERSTITION** and **ENTHUSIASM**; because they are generally confounded with **RELIGION**, they give it a vast Disadvantage; when it is at any Time compared with **ATHEISM**, or **IRRELIGION** (its proper Opposite) by discolouring it with all the Absurdities which belong only to **THEM**. But **SUPERSTITION** being the more prevailing Extravagance of the **TWO**, I shall first take That Folly to task, and enquire into its principal Causes and Effects.

THE Causes of **SUPERSTITION** are as various as the Weaknesses and Fancies of Men are; for they are indeed those very *Weaknesses* and *Fancies* themselves. **MEN** have no Rule to judge of any Excellence or Perfection by, but what they find in their own Composition. We have no Ideas but those which arise either from our Senses or from Reflection. The Ideas of Perfection and Excellence being the Result of Reflection, they must arise out of such Qualities, as we feel within our selves. And by augmenting and multiplying these, we arrive at some Notion of the **SUPREME DEITY**. And though we know by *Reasoning*, that this Notion is but very faint and imperfect; yet it is **ALL** we can attain to in *this Life*. We can have no Conception of any Perfection in **HIM**, which we feel in no Degree within *our selves*. And though **HE** may have many Perfections of which **WE** in no wise partake; yet we must necessarily be wholly ignorant of them. On the other Hand, whatsoever we perceive in our selves, and esteem a Perfection, **THAT** we naturally ascribe to any one, whom we would *mightily* extol and honour. From this *Reasoning* it follows, that according to the good or ill Qualities of Men, their Apprehensions of a **DEITY** will differ. The **WISE** and **GOOD MAN** will naturally be led to attribute **INFINITE WISDOM** and **PERFECT GOODNESS** to his **GOD**: While the **ILL-NATURED**, the **FOOLISH**, or the **VAIN MAN**, will fashion in his Thoughts a **DEITY** like **HIMSELF**. The *Ill-natured Man* will be apt to make Him a peevish cross-grain'd Being, that takes Pleasure in the Unhappiness and Uncertainty of his Dependants, and places his Glory in **DOING** what he **WILLS**, and not in

most *unreasonable Service*; and *disdaining* to let his Subjects enquire **WHY** he demands it: In short, a **BEING** who is a Master of *Slaves*, rather than a Governour of **SUBJECTS**. The *Foolish Vain Man* will be apt to fancy that his **DEITY** takes Pleasure in what he finds himself to be most delighted with. He is ravished with *Flattery* and *sawning Addresses*; and therefore he reckons the surest Way to please his **GOD**, is by *Ceremonies*, *Compliments*, and *Cringes*. He hopes, by *such* Adorations, to soften **HIM** towards his **DISOBEDIENCE**, and to make them pass upon Him in the stead of a *real* and *Substantial* Care to perform the **DUTIES** commanded by Him. He thinks to impose upon Him as he finds himself often imposed upon by *Parasites* and *Sycophants*, even at the Time he *knows* they intend to deceive him. As his *own Vanity* makes him delight in costly Apparel, with a glaring Equipage, and love to see himself surrounded with Pomp and Pageantry; so he thinks to gain the Favour of his **DEITY** by the like Trifles. He builds him stately Palaces, makes shining Images of Him, and sets him off with all the Lustre, that dazzles the Eyes of the *Vulgar*: He provides him numerous Attendants and **MINISTERS**, *more for Show, than for any real Use*.

BUT then in order to make these ill Qualities, and Dispositions in Men a sufficient Cause to produce all the Idolatries of **SUPERSTITION**, they must be accompanied with an *uncommon* Stupidity and Inattention of the Mind. For without the Assistance of this *Degeneracy*, the other Considerations will not account for all the Follies of **SUPERSTITION**. Few Men (how wicked or vain so ever they may be) are so void of Understanding, as not to discern the Deformity of the vicious Actions they indulge themselves in, if they make use of the least Degree of Reflection. And therefore they would never ascribe their *own Defects* to the Object of their Adoration, unless they were first so weakened in their Intellects as *not* to perceive them to be *Insanious*. This Weakness and Insufficiency of Mind, (though without it no ill Disposition can bring forth **SUPERSTITION** yet may *alone* be the Cause of it, without the Assistance of any other *Irregularity*).

THE Stupidity and inattention, which soon prevailed in the World, depraved the Minds of Men to such a Degree, that they forgot not only all the *true* Notions of **DIVINITY**, but even of every Thing that was *Good* and *Excellent*; by which Means they became obnoxious to any *Absurdities* that came in their Way. When they had lost all the *natural* Notion