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E S S A Y S

O N

Important SUBJECTS.

Intended to establish the DOCTRINE of
SALVATION by GRACE, and to point out
its INFLUENCE ON HOLINESS of LIFE.

By JOHN WITHERSPOON, D. D.

To which are added by the PUBLISHERS,

Ecclesiastical Characteristics,

O R T H E

ARCANA of CHURCH POLICY,

W I T H

A SERIOUS APOLOGY; which have
been generally ascribed to the same Author.

V O L. II.

L O N D O N:

Printed for EDWARD and CHARLES DILLY,
in the *Poultry*, near the *Mansion-House*.

M.DCC.LXV.

E S S A Y S

ON

Important Subjects

BIBLIOTHECA
REGIA
MONACENSIS.

Imprinted by the University of Leipsic
at the Press of J. J. Neumann, Neudamm
in the Kingdom of Prussia
B. JOHN, D.D.

To which are added by the Author

Historical Characters

OF THE

ANCIENT AND MODERN POLITY

WITH

A SERIES OF VIEWS, WHICH HAVE
been generally ascribed to the same Author.

VOLUME

LONDON:

Printed by J. B. Nichols and Charles Dilly
in the Strand, near the Temple Church.

MDCCLXXV.

A S E R I O U S
E N Q U I R Y
I N T O T H E
N A T U R E A N D E F F E C T S
O F T H E
S T A G E.

Being an Attempt to show,

That contributing to the Support of a
P U B L I C T H E A T R E, is incon-
sistent with the Character of a Christian



A S E R I O U S
E N Q U I R Y
I N T O T H E
N A T U R E A N D E F F E C T S
O F T H E
S T A G E.



THE reader will probably conjecture, and therefore, I do readily acknowledge, that what gave occasion both to the writing, and publishing the ensuing treatise, was the new tragedy of Douglas lately acted in the theatre at Edinburgh. This, universal uncontradicted fame says, is the work of a minister of the church of Scotland. One of that character and office employing his time in writing for the stage, every one will allow, is a very new and extraordinary event. In one respect neither author nor actors have suffered any thing from this circum-

stance: for doubtless, it contributed its share in procuring that run upon the representation, which continued for several days. Natural curiosity prompted many to make trial, whether there was any difference between a play wrote by a clergyman, and one of another author. And a concern for the fate of such a person excited the zeal and diligence of friends, to do all in their power to procure a full house, that the bold adventurer might be treated with respect and honour.

Some resolutions of the presbytery of Edinburgh seem to threaten, that public notice will be taken of this author and his associates, by their superiors in the church. Whether this will be carried on, and, if it be, whether they will be approved or censured; and, if the last, to what degree, I pretend not to foretel. But one thing is certain, that it hath been, and will be, the subject of much thought and conversation among the laity of all ranks, and that it must have a very great influence upon the state of religion among us, in this part of the nation. That this influence will be for the better, though I resolve to examine the subject with all impartiality, I confess, I see little ground to hope. There is no doubt that it will be condemned by the great plurality of those who go by the appellation of the stricter sort. With them, it will bring a
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great reproach upon the church of Scotland, as containing one minister who writes for the stage, and many who think it no crime to attend the representation. It is true, no other consequences are to be apprehended from their displeasure, than the weakest of them being provoked to unchristian resentment, or tempted to draw rash and general conclusions from the conduct of a few to the character of the whole, or perhaps some of them separating from the established church, none of which effects of late have been much either feared or shunned. However, even on this account, it were to be wished, either that it had never happened, or that it could be shewn, to the conviction of unprejudiced minds, that it was a just and commendable action.

But, to be sure, the chief danger is, that in case it be really a bad thing, it must give very great offence, in the Scripture sense of that word, to those who are most apt to take it, viz. such as have least religion, or none at all. An offence is a stumbling-block over which the weak and unsteady are in danger of falling; that is to say, It emboldens them to commit, and hardens them in the practice of, sin. Now, if the stage is unlawful or dangerous to a Christian, those who are by inclination so addicted to it that it is already difficult to convince them of their error, must be

greatly confirmed in this error, by the example and countenance of such as call themselves ministers of Christ. It has accordingly already occasioned more discourse among the gay part of the world, in defence or commendation of the stage, than past perhaps for some years preceding this event.

Nothing therefore can be more seasonable at this time, or necessary for the public good, than a careful and accurate discussion of this question, Whether supporting and encouraging stage-plays, by writing, acting, or attending them, is consistent, or inconsistent, with the character of a Christian? It is to no purpose to confine the enquiry to this, Whether a minister is not appearing in an improper light, and misapplying his time and talents when he dedicates them to the service of the stage? That point would probably be given up by most, and those who would deny it do not merit a confutation. But if the matter is rested here, it will be considered only as a smaller misdemeanour, and though treated, or even condemned as such, it will still have the bad effect (upon supposition of theatrical amusements being wrong and sinful) of greatly promoting them, though we seem to be already as much given to them as even worldly considerations will allow.

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The self-denying apologies common with authors, of their being sensible of their unfitness for the task they undertake, their doing it to stir up a better hand, and so on, I wholly pass, having never read any of them with approbation. Prudence is good, and I would not willingly lose sight of it, but zeal and concern for the glory of God, and faithfulness to the souls of others, are duties equally necessary in their place, but much more rare. How far I am sensible of my own unfitness for treating this subject, and of the reputation that is risked by attempting it, the world is not obliged to believe upon my own testimony; but in whatever degree it be, it is greatly overbalanced at present, by a view of the declining state of religion among us, the prevalence of national sins, and the danger of desolating judgments.

It is some discouragement in this attempt, that it is very uncertain whether many of those, for whose sakes it is chiefly intended, and who stand most in need of information upon the subject, will take the pains to look into it. Such a levity of spirit prevails in this age, that very few persons of fashion will read or consider any thing that is written in a grave or serious style. Whoever will look into the monthly catalogues of books, published in Britain for some years past, may be convinced of this at one glance. What

an immense proportion do romances, under the titles of lives, adventures, memoirs, histories, &c. bear to any other sort of production in this age? Perhaps therefore it may be thought that it would have been more proper to have gratified the public taste, by raising up some allegorical structure, and handling this subject in the way of wit and humour; especially as it seems to be a modern principle, that ridicule is the test of truth, and as there seems to be so large a fund for mirth, in the character of a stage-playing priest. But, though I deny not the lawfulness of using ridicule in some cases, or even its propriety here, yet I am far from thinking it is the test of truth. It seems to be more proper for correction than for instruction; and though it may be fit enough to whip an offender, it is not unusual, nor unsuitable, first to expostulate a little with him, and shew him that he deserves it. Besides, every man's talent is not equally fit for it, and indeed, now the matter seems to have been carried beyond a jest, and to require a very serious consideration.

There is also, besides some discouragement, a real difficulty in entering on this disquisition. It will be hard to know in what manner to reason, or on what principles to build. It were easy to show the unlawfulness of stage-plays, by such arguments as would appear conclusive to those
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who already hate both them and their supporters: but it is not so easy to make it appear to those who chiefly frequent them, because they will both applaud and justify some of the very things that others look upon as the worst effects of the practice, and will deny the very principles on which they are condemned. The truth is, it is our having different views of the nature of religion, that causes different opinions upon this subject. For many ages there was no debate upon it at all. There were players, but they did not pretend to be Christians themselves, and they had neither countenance nor support from any who did. Whereas now, there are abundance of advocates for the lawfulness, some for the usefulness of plays; not that the stage is become more pure, but that Christians are become less so, and have lowered the standard or measure requisite to attain and preserve that character.

But there is still another difficulty, that whoever undertakes to write against plays, though the provocation is given by what they are, is yet always called upon to attack them, not as they are, but as they might be. A writer on this subject is actually reduced to the necessity of fighting with a shadow, of maintaining a combat with an ideal or imaginary sort of drama, which never yet existed, but which the defenders of the cause form by way of supposition, and which shall appear, in

fact, in that happy future age, which shall see, what these gentlemen are pleased to style, a well regulated stage. However little support may seem to be given by this to a vicious and corrupted stage there is no attender of plays but, when he hears this chimæra defended, imagines it is his own cause that is espoused, and with great composure and self-satisfaction, continues his practice. A conduct not less absurd, than if one who was expressly assured a certain dish of meat before him was poisoned, should answer thus, All meat is not poisoned, and therefore I may eat this with safety.

It is very plain, that were men but seriously disposed, and without prejudice desiring the knowledge of their duty, it would not be necessary, in order to show the unlawfulness of the stage, as it now is, to combat it in its imaginary reformed state. Such a reformation, were not men by the prevalence of vicious and corrupt affections, in love with it, even in its present condition, would have been long ago given up as a hopeless and visionary project, and the whole trade or employment detested, on account of the abuses that had always adhered to it. But since all advocates for the stage have, and do still defend it in this manner, by forming an idea of it separate from its evil qualities; since they defend
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it so far with success, that many who would otherwise abstain, do, upon this very account, allow themselves in attending the theatre sometimes, to their own hurt and that of others; and, as I am convinced on the most mature deliberation, that the reason why there never was a well regulated stage, in fact, is because it cannot be, the nature of the thing not admitting of it. I will endeavour to shew, that PUBLIC THEATRICAL REPRESENTATIONS, either tragedy or comedy, are, in their general nature, or in their best possible state, unlawful, contrary to the purity of our religion; and that writing, acting or attending them, is inconsistent with the character of a Christian. If this be done with success, it will give great weight to the reflections which shall be added upon the aggravation of the crime, considering the circumstances that at present attend the practice.

But, though I have thus far complied with the unreasonable terms imposed by the advocates for this amusement, they must not proceed to any higher demand, nor expect, because they have prevailed to have plays considered in the way that they themselves desire, that therefore the same thing must be done by religion, and that it must be lowered down to the descriptions they are sometimes pleased to give of it. I will by no means attack plays upon the principles of modern relaxed morality. In that case, to be sure,

it would be a lost cause. If some late writers on the subject of morals be permitted to determine what are the ingredients that must enter into the composition of a good man, that good man, it is agreed, may much more probably be found in the play-house than in any other place. But what belongs to the character of a Christian must be taken from the holy Scriptures, the word of the living God. Notwithstanding therefore, that through the great degeneracy of the age, and very culpable relaxation of discipline, not a few continue to be called Christians, who are a reproach to the name, and support and countenance one another in many practices contrary to the purity of the Christian profession, I shall beg leave still to recur to the unerring standard, and to consider, not what many nominal Christians are, but what every real Christian ought to be.

In so doing I think I shall reason justly; and at the same time it is my resolution, not only to speak the sense, but, as often as possible, the very language and phrases of the Scripture, and of our pious fathers. These are either become venerable to me for their antiquity, or they are much fitter for expressing the truths of the gospel and delineating the character and duty of a disciple of Christ, than any that have been invented in latter times. As the growth or decay

of vegetable nature is often so gradual as to be insensible; so in the moral world, verbal alterations, which are counted as nothing, do often introduce real changes, which are firmly established before their approach is so much as suspected. Were the style, not only of some modern essays, but of some modern sermons to be introduced upon this subject, it would greatly weaken the argument, though no other alteration should be made. Should we every where put virtue for holiness, honour, or even moral sense for conscience, improvement of the heart for sanctification, the opposition between such things and theatrical entertainments would not appear half so sensible.

By taking up the argument in the light now proposed, I am saved, in a great measure, from the repetition of what has been written by other authors on the subject. But let it be remembered, that they have clearly and copiously shewn the corruption and impurity of the stage, and its adherents, since its first institution, and that both in the heathen and Christian world. They have made it undeniably appear, that it was opposed and condemned by the best and wisest men, both heathens and Christians in every age*. Its very
defenders

* Particularly at Athens, where it first had its birth, both tragedy and comedy were soon abolished by public authority; and among the Romans, though this and other public shews
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defenders do all pretend to blame the abuse of it. They do indeed alledge that this abuse is not essential to it, but may be separated from it; however all of them so far as I have seen, represent this separation as only possible or future; they never attempt to assign any æra in which it could be defended as it then was, or could be affirmed to be more profitable than hurtful. Some writers do mention a few particular plays of which they give their approbation. But these have never yet, in any age or place, amounted

were permitted in a certain degree, yet so cautious were that wise people of suffering them to be frequent, that they did not permit any public theatre, when occasionally erected, to continue above a certain number of days. Even that erected by M. Scæurus, which is said to have cost so immense a sum as a million sterling, was speedily taken down. Pompey the Great was the first who had power and credit enough to get a theatre continued.

The opinion of Seneca may be seen in the following passage, “Nihil est tam damnosum bonis moribus, quam in aliquo spectaculo desidere. Tunc enim per voluptatem facilius vitia sarrepunt.”

As to the primitive Christians, see Constit. Apost. lib. 8. cap. 32. where actors and stage-players are enumerated among those who are not to be admitted to baptism. Many different councils appoint that they shall renounce their arts before they be admitted, and if they return to them shall be excommunicated. Te tullian de Spectaculis, cap. 22. observes, That the heathens themselves marked them with infamy, and excluded them from all honours and dignity. To the same purpose see Aug. de Civ. Dei, lib. 2. cap. 14. “Actores poeticarum fabularum remotent a societate civitatis—ab honoribus omnibus repellunt homines scenicos.”

The opinion of moderns is well known, few Christian writers of any eminence having failed to pronounce sentence against the stage.

to such a number, as to keep one society of players in constant employment, without a mixture of many more that are confessedly pernicious. The only reason of bringing this in view at present when it is not to be insisted on, is, that it ought to procure a fair and candid hearing to this attempt to prove, That the stage, after the greatest improvement of which it is capable, is still inconsistent with the purity of the Christian profession. It is a strong presumptive evidence in favour of this assertion, that, after so many years trial, such improvement has never actually taken place.

It is perhaps also proper here to obviate a pretence in which the advocates of the stage greatly glory, that there is no express prohibition of it to be found in Scripture. I think a countryman of our own † has given good reasons to believe, that the apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, chap. v. ver. 4. by “filthiness, foolish talking, and jesting,” intended to prohibit the plays that were then in use. He also thinks it probable that the word *Καμωσις*, used in more places than one, and translated “revelling,” points at the same thing. Whether his conjectures are just or not, it is very certain that these, and many other passages, forbid the abuses of the stage; and if these abuses be inseparable from it,

† The late Mr. Anderson.

as there is reason to believe, there needed no other prohibition of them to every Christian. Nay, if they never had been separated from it till that time it was sufficient, and it would be idle to expect that the Scripture should determine this problematical point, Whether they would ever be so in any after age. To ask that there should be produced a prohibition of the stage, as a stage, universally, is to prescribe to the Holy Ghost, and to require that the Scripture should not only forbid sin, but every form in which the restless and changeable dispositions of men shall think fit to be guilty of it, and every name by which they shall think proper to call it. I do not find in Scripture any express prohibition of masquerades, routs and drums, and yet I have not the least doubt, that the assemblies called by these names are contrary to the will of God, and as bad, if not worse, than the common and ordinary entertainments of the stage.

In order to make this enquiry as exact and accurate as possible, and that the strength or weakness of the arguments on either side may be clearly perceived, it will be proper to state distinctly, what we understand by the stage or stage-plays, when it is affirmed, that in their most improved and best regulated state they are unlawful to Christians. This is the more necessary, that there is a great indistinctness and ambiguity in
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the language used by those who, in writing, or conversation, undertake to defend it. They analyze and divide it into parts, and take sometimes one part, sometimes another, as will best suit their purpose. They ask, What there can be unlawful in the stage abstractedly considered? Comedy is exposing the folly of vice, and pointing out the ridiculous part of every character. And is not this commendable? Is not ridicule a noble means of discountenancing vice? And is not the use of it warranted by the satire and irony that is to be found in the holy Scriptures? Tragedy, they say, is promoting the same end in a way more grave and solemn. It is a moral lecture, or a moral picture, in which virtue appears to great advantage. What is history itself but representing the characters of men as they actually were, and plays represent them as they may be. In their perfection, plays are as like history and nature, as the poet's art and actor's skill can make them. Is it then the circumstance of their being written in dialogue that renders them criminal? Who will pretend that? Is it that they are publicly repeated or acted over? Will any one pretend, that it is a crime to personate a character in any case, even where no deceit is intended? Then farewell parables, figures of speech, and the whole oratorical art. Is it a sin to look upon the representation? Then it must be
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be a sin to look upon the world which is the original, of which plays are the copy.

This is the way which those who appear in defence of the stage ordinarily take, and it is little better than if one should say, What is a stage-play? It is nothing else abstractedly considered but a company of men and women talking together; Where is the harm in that? What hinders them from talking piously and profitably, as well as wickedly or hurtfully? But, rejecting this method of reasoning as unjust and inconclusive, let it be observed, that those who plead for the lawfulness of the stage in any country, however well regulated, plead for what implies, not by accident, but essentially and of necessity the following things. (1.) Such a number of plays as will furnish an habitual course of representations, with such changes as the love of variety in human nature necessarily requires. (2.) These plays of such a kind, as to procure an audience of voluntary spectators, who are able and willing to pay for being so entertained. (3.) A company of hired players, who have this as their only business and occupation, that they may give themselves wholly to it, and be expert in the performance. (4.) The representation must be so frequent as the profits may defray the expence of the apparatus, and maintain those who follow this business. They must also be maintained in
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that measure of luxury, or elegance, if you please, which their way of life, and the thoughts to which they are accustomed must make them desire and require. It is a thing impracticable to maintain a player at the same expence as you may maintain a peasant.

Now all these things do, and must enter into the idea of a well regulated stage, and, if any defend it without supposing this, he hath no adversary that I know of. Without these there may be poets, or there may be plays, but there cannot be a play-house. It is in vain then to go about to show, that there have been an instance or two, or may be, of treatises wrote in the form of plays that are unexceptionable. It were easy to shew very great faults in some of those most universally applauded, but this is unnecessary. I believe it is very possible to write a treatise in the form of a dialogue, in which the general rules of the drama are observed, which shall be as holy and serious, as any sermon that ever was preached or printed. Neither is there any apparent impossibility in getting different persons to assume the different characters, and rehearse it in society. But it may be safely affirmed, that if all plays were of that kind, and human nature to continue in its present state, the doors of the play-house would shut of their own accord, because
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no body would demand access* ; unless there were an act of parliament to force attendance, and even in that case, as much pains would probably be taken to evade the law obliging to attend, as are now taken to evade those that command us to abstain. The fair and plain state of this question then is, Whether it is possible or practicable, in the present state of human nature, to have the above system of things under so good a regulation, as to make the erecting and countenancing the stage agreeable to the will of God, and consistent with the purity of the Christian profession.

And here let us consider a little, what is the primary, and immediate intention of the stage, Whether it be for amusement and recreation, or for instruction to make men wise and good. Perhaps, indeed, the greatest part will choose to compound these two purposes together, and say it is for both : for amusement immediately, and for improvement ultimately, that it instructs by

* This furnishes an easy answer to what is remarked by some in favour of plays, that several eminent Christians have endeavoured to supplant bad plays by writing good ones ; as Gregory Nazienzen a father of the church, and a person of great piety, and our countryman Buchanan. But did ever these plays come into repute ? Were they formerly, or are they now acted upon the stage ? The fate of their works proves that these good men judged wrong in attempting to reform the stage, and that the great majority of Christians acted more wisely who were for laying it wholly aside.

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pleasing, and reforms by stealth. The patrons of a well regulated stage have it no doubt in their power to profess any of these ends in it they please, if it is equally capable of them all; and therefore, in one part or other of this discourse, it must be considered in every one of these lights. But as it is of moment, because of some of the arguments to be afterwards produced, let the reader be pleased to consider, how far recreation and amusement enter into the nature of the stage, and are, not only immediately and primarily, but chiefly and ultimately intended by it.

If the general nature of it, or the end proposed from it when well regulated, can be any way determined from its first institution, and the subsequent practice, it seems plainly to point at amusement. The earliest productions of that kind that are now extant are evidently incapable of any other use, and hardly even of that to a person of any taste or judgment*. They usually accompanied the feasts of the ancients in the houses of

* This is confessed by a defender of the stage, who says, "Such of the comedies before his (that is Menander's) time, as have been preserved to us, are generally very poor pieces, not so much ludicrous as ridiculous, even a mountebank's merry andrew would be hissed, now a days, for such puerilities as we see abounding in Aristophanes." Rem. on Anderson's Positions concerning the unlawfulness of stage-plays, page 8th.

the rich and opulent*, and were particularly used in times of public rejoicing. They have indeed generally been considered, in all ages, as intended for entertainment. A modern author of high rank and reputation †, who would not willingly hurt the cause, considers them in this light, and this alone, and represents their improvement, not as lying in their having a greater moral tendency, but in the perfection of the poet's art, and the refinement of the taste of the audience. It is only of late that men have begun to dignify them with a higher title. Formerly they were ever considered as an indulgence of pleasure, and an article of luxury, but now they are exalted into schools of virtue, and represented as bulwarks against vice. It is probable, most readers will be apt to smile when they hear them so called, and to say to their defenders, This is but overdoing, preserve them to us as innocent amusements, and we shall not much contend for their usefulness. It is indeed but an evidence of the distress of the cause, for their advocates only take up this plea when they are unable to answer the arguments against them upon any other footing. It may also appear that they are de-

* Plut. de Glor. Athens & Sympos. lib. 7. quest. 8. "As for the new comedy, it is so necessary an ingredient of all public entertainments, that so to speak, one may as well make a feast without wine, as without Menander."

† Shaftsbury.

signed for amusement, if we consider who have been the persons in all ages who have attended them, viz. the rich, the young, and the gay, those who live in pleasure, and the very business of whose lives is amusement.

But not to insist on these circumstances, I think it is plain from the nature of the thing, that the immediate intention of plays is to please, whatever effects may be pretended to flow afterwards, or by accident, from this pleasure. They consist in an exact imitation of nature, and the conformity of the personated to real characters. This is the great aim, and the great perfection, both of the poet and of the actors. Now this imitation, of itself, gives great pleasure to the spectator, whether the actions represented are good or bad. And, in itself considered, it gives only pleasure; for the beauty of the imitation, as such, hath no moral influence, nor any connection with morality, but what it may derive in a distant way from the nature of the actions which the poet or actors choose to represent, or the spectators are willing to see. Every person who thinks impartially, may be from this convinced, that to please, or attempt to do so, is essential to the stage, and its first, or rather its main design; how far it pollutes or purifies is accidental, and must depend upon the skill and honesty of its regulators and managers.

Having

Having thus prepared the way, the following arguments are humbly offered to the consideration of every serious person, to shew, that a public theatre is inconsistent with the purity of the Christian profession: which if they do not to all appear to be each of them singly conclusive, will, I hope, when taken together, sufficiently evince the truth of the proposition.

In the first place, If it be considered as an amusement, it is improper, and not such as any Christian may lawfully use. Here we must begin by laying it down as a fundamental principle, that all men are bound supremely to love, and habitually to serve God; that is to say, to take his law as the rule, and his glory as the end, not of one, but of all their actions. No man, at any time or place is, or can be, absolved from this obligation. Every real Christian lives under an habitual sense of it. I know this expression, aiming at the glory of God, is called a cant phrase, and is despised and derided by worldly men. It were easy however, to vindicate it from reason; but it will suffice, to all those for whose use this discourse is intended, to say, It is a truth taught and repeated in the sacred oracles, that all things were made for, that all things shall finally tend to, and therefore, that all intelligent creatures should supremely and uniformly aim at the glory of God.

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Now we glorify God by cultivating holy dispositions, and doing pious and useful actions. Recreation is an intermission of duty, and is only necessary because of our weakness; it must be some action indifferent in its nature, which becomes lawful and useful from its tendency to refresh the mind, and invigorate it for duties of more importance. The use of recreation is precisely the same as the use of sleep; though they differ in this, that there is but one way in which sleep becomes sinful, viz. by excess, whereas there are ten thousand ways in which recreations become sinful. It is needless to produce passages of Scripture to verify the above assertion concerning our obligation to glorify God. It is the language of the whole, and is particularly applied to indifferent actions by the apostle Paul, “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*.”

If there were on the minds of men in general, a just sense of this their obligation, stage-plays, nay, and a thousand other amusements now in use, would never have been heard of. The truth is, the need of amusement is much less than people commonly apprehend, and, where it is not necessary, it must be sinful. Those who stand in need of recreation may be divided into two sorts, such as are employed in bodily labour, and

* 1 Cor. x. 13.

such as have their spirits often exhausted by study and application of mind. As to the first of these, a mere cessation from labour is sufficient for refreshment, and indeed of itself gives great pleasure, unless when the appetites are inflamed and irritated by frequent sensual gratifications; and then they are importunately craved, and become necessary to fill the intervals of work. Of this sort very few are able to afford so expensive a recreation as the stage. And even as to the other, viz. those whose spirits are exhausted by application of mind, only a very small number of them will chuse the diversion of the stage, for this very good reason, that social converse and bodily exercise, will answer the purpose much better. Indeed, if we consider the just and legitimate end of recreations, and compare it with the persons who most frequently engage in them, we shall find, that ninety-nine of every hundred are such as do not need recreation at all. Perhaps their time lies heavy upon their hands, and they feel an uneasiness and impatience under their present state, but this is not from work, but from idleness, and from the emptiness and unsatisfying nature of the enjoyments, which they chase with so much eagerness, one after another, vainly seeking from them that good which they do not contain, and that satisfaction which they cannot impart.

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From this I think it undeniably appears, that, if no body were to attend the stage, but such as really needed recreation or amusement upon Christian principles, and of these such only as were able to pay for it, and of these only such as did themselves chuse it, there is not a place this day in the world so large as to afford a daily audience. It will be immediately objected, This argument, make as much of it as you please, is not compleat, for it hinders not but that some, however few, may attend in a proper manner, and with warrantable views. But let it be remembered, that I attack not a play singly as a play, nor one person for being witness to a thing of that nature, but the stage as a system containing all the branches I have enumerated above. This cannot subsist without a full audience and frequent attendance, and therefore is, by its constitution, a constant and powerful invitation to sin, and cannot be maintained but by the commission of it. Perhaps some will still object, that this argument is too finely spun, that it seems to demand perfection, and to find fault with every practice, in which there is a probability that sin will be committed. That, if this holds, we should no more contribute to the establishment of churches than play-houses, because we have a moral certainty, that no congregation ever will meet together on earth, but much sin

will be committed, both by minister and people. But there is a great difference between a commanded duty which is attended with sin by defect, and what is no where commanded, which necessarily invites to sin by its nature, and is in substance sinful to the great majority of those who attend it.

But further, the stage is an improper, that is to say, an unlawful recreation to all without exception, because it consumes too much time. This is a circumstance which, however little impression it may make upon those who find their time often a burden, will appear of the greatest moment to every serious Christian. In proportion as any man improves in holiness of heart, he increases in usefulness of life, and acquires a deeper and stronger sense of the worth and value of time. To spend an hour unprofitably appears to such a person a greater crime, than to many the commission of gross sin. And, indeed, it ought to appear very heinous in the eyes of those who believe the representation given by our Lord Jesus Christ of his own procedure at the day of judgment, “Cast ye the UNPROFIT-
“ ABLE servant into utter darkness, where there
“ shall be weeping and wailing, and gnashing of
“ teeth*.” Mark this, ye lovers of pleasure,
ye sons of gaiety and mirth, who imagine you

* Matt. xxv. 30.

are sent into the world for no higher end than your own entertainment; and who, if you are free from, or able any how to palliate your grosser sins, never once reflect on the heavy account against you of wasted time.

Though there were no other objection against the stage as a recreation but this one, it is surely faulty. If recreations are only lawful because necessary, they must cease to be lawful when they are no longer necessary. The length and duration of regular comedy and tragedy is already fixed and settled by rules of long standing; and, I suppose, whatever other circumstance may be confessed to need reformation, all men of taste will agree, that these shall continue as they are. Now I leave to all who know how much time the preparation for such a public appearance, and the necessary attendance, must take up, to judge, whether it is not too much to be given to mere recreation.

This holds particularly in the case of recreation of mind, between which and bodily exercise there is a very great difference. For bodily exercise, in some cases, for example, when the health requires it, may be continued for a long time, only for this reason, that it may have effects lasting in proportion to the time spent in it. But giving the mind to pleasure by way of recreation must be short, or it is certainly hurtful; it gives men a

habit of idleness and trifling, and makes them averse from returning to any thing that requires serious application. So true is this, and so applicable to the present case, that I could almost rest the whole argument upon it, that no man, who has made the trial, can deliberately and with a good conscience affirm, that attending plays has added strength to his mind, and warmth to his affections, in the duties of devotion; that it has made him more able and willing to exert his intellectual powers in the graver and more important offices of the Christian life; nay, or even made him more diligent and active in the business of civil life. On the contrary, it is commonly to such length as to produce a satiety and weariness of itself, and to require rest and refreshment to recruit the exhausted spirits, a thing quite absurd and self-contradictory in what is called a recreation.

But the stage is not merely an unprofitable consumption of time, it is further improper as a recreation, because it agitates the passions too violently, and interests too deeply, so as, in some cases, to bring people into a real, while they behold an imaginary distress. Keeping in view the end of recreations, will enable us to judge rightly of this. It is to refresh and invigorate the mind. Therefore when, instead of rest, which is properly called relaxation of mind, recreations
are

are used, their excellence consists in their being, not only a pleasant, but an easy exercise of the intellectual powers. Whatever is difficult, and either requires or causes a strong application of mind, is contrary to their intention. Now it is plain, that dramatic representations fix the attention so very deeply, and interest the affections so very strongly, that, in a little time, they fatigue the mind themselves, and however eagerly are they desired and followed, there are many serious and useful occupations, in which men will continue longer, without exhausting the spirits, than in attending the theatre.

Indeed, in this respect, they are wholly contrary to what should be the view of every Christian. He ought to set bounds to, and endeavour to moderate his passions as much as possible, instead of voluntarily and unnecessarily exciting them. The human passions, since the fall, are all of them but too strong; and are not sinful on account of their weakness, but their excess and misapplication. This is so generally true, that it hardly admits of an exception; unless it might be counted an exception, that some vicious passions, when they gain an ascendancy, extinguish others which oppose their gratification. For, though religion is consistent throughout, there are many vices, which are mutually repugnant to, and destructive of each other. But this ex-

ception has little or no effect upon the present argument.

Now the great care of every Christian is to keep his passions and affections within due bounds, and to direct them to their proper objects. With respect to the first of these, the chief influence of theatrical representations upon the spectator, is to strengthen the passions by indulgence, for there they are all exhibited in a lively manner, and such as is most fit to communicate the impression. As to directing them to their proper objects, it will be afterwards shown, that the stage has rather the contrary effect; in the mean time, it is sufficient to observe, that it may be done much more effectually, and much more safely another way.

This tendency of plays to interest the affections, shows their impropriety as a recreation on another account. It shows that they must be exceeding liable to abuse by excess, even supposing them in a certain degree to be innocent. It is certain there is no life more unworthy of a man, hardly any more criminal in a Christian, than a life of perpetual amusement, a life where no valuable purpose is pursued, but the intellectual faculties wholly employed in purchasing and indulging sensual gratifications. It is also certain, that all of us are by nature too much inclined thus to live to ourselves, and not to God. Therefore, where recreations are necessary, a watchful
Christian

Christian will particularly beware of those that are ensnaring, and, by being too grateful and delicious, ready to lead to excess. This discriminating care and caution, is just as much the duty of a Christian, as any that can be named. Tho' it is immediately conversant only about the temptations and incitements to sin, and not the actual commission of it, it becomes a duty directly binding, both from the command of God, and the necessity of the thing itself. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*," says our Saviour to all his disciples; and elsewhere, "What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch †." And the apostle Paul to the same purpose, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil ‡."

If we consider the light in which the Scripture sets our present situation, and the account there given of the weakness of human resolution, the same thing will evidently appear to be our duty. It is impossible that we can resist the slightest temptation, but by the assistance of divine grace. Now how can this be expected, if we put our constancy to unnecessary trials, not only contrary to reason, and a prudent regard to our own safety, but in the face of an express command of God to be watchful. "Lord, lead us not

* Matt. xxvi, 41.

† Mark xiii, 37.

‡ Eph. v. 15.

“into temptation,” is a petition which we are taught to offer up, by him who knew what was in man. But how much do those act in opposition to this, and even in contempt of it, who make temptations to themselves. And are not stage-plays temptations of the strongest kind, in which the mind is softened with pleasure, and the affections powerfully excited? How little reason is there to hope that men in the use of them will keep within the bounds of moderation? If any expect, in such circumstances, to be preserved by divine power, they are guilty of the sin, which is in Scripture called “tempting God.”

It is this very circumstance, a liableness to abuse by excess, that renders many other amusements also ordinarily unlawful to Christians, though, perhaps, in their general nature, they cannot be shown to be criminal. Thus it is not easy to refute the reasonings, by which ingenious men endeavour to show that games of hazard are not in themselves sinful; but by their enticing, ensnaring nature, and the excess which almost inseparably accompanies them, there can be no difficulty in pronouncing them highly dangerous, lawful to very few persons, and in very few cases. And, if they were as public in their nature as plays, if they required the concurrence of as many operators, and as great a number of persons to join in them, I could have little scruple

ple in affirming, that, in every possible case, they would be sinful.

The preceding considerations are greatly confirmed by the following, That when plays are chosen as a recreation, for which they are so exceedingly improper, it is always in opposition to other methods of recreation, which are perfectly fit for the purpose, and not liable to any of these objections. Where recreations are necessary, if there were only one sort to be had, some inconveniencies could not be so strong an argument against the use of them. But where there are different kinds, to prefer those which are less, to those which are more fit, must needs be sinful. Such a tenderness and circumspection is indeed, in this age, so rare and unusual, that I am afraid, it will be almost impossible to fix a sense of its importance upon the mind of the reader; or, if it be done in any measure for a time, the example of a corrupt world, who are altogether void of it, will immediately efface the impression. But, however few may "have ears to hear it," the thing is certain, that as the progress of his sanctification is the supreme desire and care of every Christian, so he is continually liable to be seduced by temptation, and infected by example; and therefore, from a distrust of his own resolution, will not voluntarily and unnecessarily prefer a dangerous to a safe amusement. To pre-

fer a very difficult and doubtful means of attaining any worldly end, to one sure and easy; to prefer a clumsy improper instrument, to one perfectly fit for any piece of work, would be reckoned no small evidence of folly in the affairs of civil life. If one in sickness should chuse a medicine of a very questionable nature, of very dangerous and uncertain operation, when he had equal access to one entirely safe, of approved reputation and superior efficacy, it would be esteemed next to madness. Is there not then a real conformity between the cases? Is not a like care to be taken of our souls as of our bodies? Nay, is not the obligation so much the stronger, by how much the one is of greater value than the other? The different conduct of men, and their different fate in this respect, is well described by the wise man, “Happy is the man that feareth alway, but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief*.”

It ought not to be omitted in shewing the impropriety of the stage as a recreation and amusement for Christians, that it is costly and expensive, and that this cost is altogether unnecessary, since the end might be obtained, not only as well, but much better, at a far cheaper rate; perhaps, in most cases, at no expence at all. I know this argument will be treated with great contempt by those

* Prov. xxviii. 14.

who live in affluence, and know no other use of riches but to feed their appetites, and make all the rest of mankind subservient to the gratification of their violent and ungovernable desires. But though none in this world have any title to hinder them from disposing of their wealth as they please, they must be called to consider, that they have a master in heaven. To him they must render an account at the last day, and, in this account, the use that they make of their riches is not to be excepted. The great have, no doubt, the distinguished honour, if they please to embrace it, of contributing to the happiness of multitudes under them, and dispensing, under God, a great variety of the comforts of this life. But it would abate the envy and impatience of the lower part of the world, and moderate their appetite after riches, if they would consider, that the more that is committed to them, the more they have to account for. The greatest and richest man on earth hath not any licence in the word of God, for an unnecessary waste of his substance, or consuming it in unprofitable and hurtful pleasures; and, under the one or both of these characters, that must fall, that is laid out upon the stage.

Let not any reader, who cannot find a satisfying answer to these objections against the stage as an unchristian amusement, from the word of God,
take

take the practice of the world as a refuge or sanctuary, and say, This is carrying matters to an extreme; if these maxims are rigidly adhered to, you will exclude from the number of Christians, not only the far greatest part of mankind, but many otherwise of excellent and amiable characters. Though this is the weakest of all arguments, it is, perhaps, that which hath of all others the strongest effect, and most powerfully contributes to set peoples minds at ease in a doubtful or dangerous practice. How hard is it to make men sensible of the evil of such sins as custom authorises, and fashion justifies? There is no making them ashamed of them, because they are common and reputable, and there is no making them afraid of what they see done without suspicion by numbers on every hand. But is there any reason to believe, that the example of others will prove a just and valid excuse for any practice at the judgment-seat of Christ? Will the greatness or the number of offenders screen them from his power? Or can that man expect a gracious acceptance with him, who has suffered his commands to be qualified by prevailing opinion, and would not follow him farther than the bulk of mankind would bear him company.

I shall close the reflections upon this part of the subject by observing, that there are two general characters of the disciples of Christ, which

will appear, if we consult the Scriptures, to be essential to them, and which seem altogether inconsistent with theatrical amusements. The first is self-denial and mortification. Tho' we should not insist upon the particular objections against the stage, there is something of pomp and gaiety in it, on the best possible supposition, that is inconsistent with the character of a Christian. The gospel is the religion of sinners, who are saved from wrath by the rich mercy and free grace of God. The life of such then, must be a life of penitence, humility, and mortification. The followers of a crucified Saviour must bear the cross, and tread in the same path of suffering and self-denial, in which he hath gone before them. In their baptismal covenant they renounce the world, by which is not meant such gross crimes as are a violation of natural light, as well as a transgression of the law of God, but that excessive attachment to present indulgence, which is more properly expressed by the pomp and vanity of the world*. It is true there are many precepts in

Scripture

* It is not improper here to consider the ancient form of baptism, and what was supposed by the fathers to be implied in it, Apost. Constitut. lib 7. cap. 41. αποτασσομαι τω σατανα, &c.
 " I renounce satan and his works, and his pomps, and his ser-
 " vice, and his angels, and his inventions, and all things that
 " belong to him, or are subject to him." Ambros. de Initiatis.
 Ingressus es regenerationis sacrarium, &c. " Thou hast entered
 " into the holy place of regeneration; repeat what you were
 " there asked, and recollect what you answered? You re-
 " nounced the devil, and his works, and his world, and his
 " luxury

Scripture which require us to maintain an habitual gratitude and thankful frame of spirit, nay, to rejoice in the Lord alway. But there is a great difference between this joy, and that of worldly men; as they do not rise from the same source, so they cannot possibly express themselves in the same way.

Another branch of the Christian temper, between which and theatrical amusements, there appears a very great opposition, is spirituality and heavenliness of mind. All real Christians are, and account themselves pilgrims and strangers on the earth, set their affections on things above, and have their conversation in heaven. Whatever tends to weaken these dispositions they will carefully avoid, as contrary to their duty and their

“luxury and pleasures.” Hieron. Com. in Matt. xv. 26. *Renuntio tibi diabole, &c.* “I renounce thee satan, and thy pomp, and thy vices, and thy world, which lieth in wickedness.” And that we may know what they had particularly in view by the pomps of the world which they renounced, they are sometimes expressly said to be the public shews. Thus Salvian de Provident. lib. 6. page 197. *Quæ est enim in baptismo, &c.* “For what is the first profession of a Christian in baptism? What, but that they profess to renounce the devil, and his pomps, his shews, and his works. Therefore shews and pomps, by our own confession, are the works of the devil. How, O Christian, wilt thou follow the public shews after baptism, which thou confessest to be the works of the devil?”

There are some who pretend, that Christians were only kept from the shews, because they were mixed with idolatrous rites: but it is to be noted, that in the time of Salvian idolatry was abolished, and the shews were no longer exhibited in honour of idol Gods. Cyril of Jerusalem also, after idolatry was destroyed, continues the charge against the shews.

interest.

interest. Is not this the case with theatrical amusements? Are they not very delicious to a sensual and carnal mind. Do they not excite, gratify, and strengthen these affections, which it is most the business of a Christian to restrain? Are not the indulgence of worldly pleasure, and heavenliness of mind, mutually destructive of each other? This is so plain, that antiently those who gave themselves up to a life of eminent holiness and piety, used to retire wholly from the commerce of the world and the society of men. Though this was wrong in itself, and soon found to be very liable to superstitious abuse, it plainly shows how much they err upon the opposite side, who being called to wean their affections from the world, do yet voluntarily and unnecessarily indulge themselves in the most delicious and intoxicating pleasures.

What is offered above, I hope, will suffice to show that the stage, considered simply as an entertainment, cannot be lawfully used by a Christian. But we must now proceed in the second place, To consider the modern pretence, that it is useful and instructive, or to speak in the language of one of its defenders, “A warm incentive to virtue, and powerful preservative against vice*.” The same author gives us

* Remarks on Anderson's Positions concerning the unlawfulness of stage-plays.

this account of tragedy; “ True tragedy is a serious lecture upon our duty, shorter than an epic poem, and longer than a fable, otherwise differing from both only in the method, which is dialogue instead of narration; its province is to bring us in love with the more exalted virtues, and to create a detestation of the blacker and (humanly speaking) more enormous crimes.” On comedy he says, “ an insinuating mirth laughs us out of our frailties by making us ashamed of them. Thus, when they are well intended, tragedy and comedy work to one purpose, the one manages us as children, the other convinces us as men.” In order to treat this part of the subject with precision, I must beg the reader to recal to mind the account formerly given of what is implied in the stage, even under the best possible regulation; because, unless this be allowed me, I confess the argument to be defective. It is not denied, that there may be, and are to be found, in some dramatic performances, noble and excellent sentiments. These indeed are much fewer than is commonly supposed, as might be shewn by an examination of some of the most celebrated plays. There is a great difference between the shining thoughts that are applauded in the world by men of taste, and the solid and profitable truths of religion. However, it is allowed, that there are
some

some things to be found in plays, against which no just objection can be made; and it is easy to form an idea of them still more pure than any that do yet exist; but the question is, Whether it is possible now to find, or reasonable to hope to find, such a number of pieces, in their prevailing tendency, agreeable to the holiness and purity of the Christian character, as are necessary to support a public theatre? Till this is accomplished, all that is done to support the theatre in the mean time, is done to support the interest of vice and wickedness; whatever it may be in itself, and singly considered. And if such an entire reformation be impossible, a partial reformation, or mixing a few good things with it, is not only ineffectual but hurtful. It makes a bad cause a little more plausible, and therefore the temptation so much the more formidable.

There is a discourse of a foreigner of some note, in which he exerts all his eloquence in commendation of plays, when used in the public schools, for the improvement of youth in action and elocution, under the direction of their masters. As this gentleman was a clergyman, his authority is often used on this subject. But it ought to be observed, that as he was a young man when he employed his eloquence in this cause, so, what he says, strongly supports the propriety of the distinction I have laid down.

He

He expressly confines the argument to such plays as were represented by youths in the schools, and rejects with great abhorrence the public stage, and such as were acted by mercenary players. Of the last sort he hath the following strong words. “ At
 “ hic vereor A. ne qui sint inter vos qui ex me
 “ quærant: Quid agis adolescens? Tune comœ-
 “ dos, Histriones, mimos, ex eloquentiæ studiosis
 “ facere paras? Egone? Histriones? Quos? An
 “ viles illos qui in scenam prodeunt mercede
 “ conducti? Qui quæstus causa quamlibet per-
 “ sonam induant? qui passim per urbes vagantes
 “ artem suam venalem habent? Qui, merito, Ro-
 “ mano jure, infamia notantur? — Absit a me
 “ absit, ut in hac impietatis schola teneros ado-
 “ lescentium animos eloquentia imbui velim.
 “ Quanticunque eam facio, tanti tamen non est.
 “ Satius esset balbutire, imo fatius mutum esse,
 “ quam non sine summo animi periculo eloquen-
 “ tiam discere*.” Which passage may be trans-
 lated thus; “ But here I am afraid some of you
 “ will be ready to challenge me, and to say,
 “ what is this you aim at young man? Do you
 “ intend to make all who study eloquence co-
 “ medians, players, buffoons? Do I indeed?
 “ What sort of players? Those contemptible
 “ wretches, who are hired to come upon the
 “ stage, and who for gain will personate any
 “ character whatever? Who go about through

* Werensfels Oratio de Comœdiis.

“ different cities making merchandise of their
“ art? Who are justly marked with infamy in
“ the Roman law?—Far, far be it from me
“ to propose, that the tender minds of youth
“ should be taught eloquence in this school of
“ impiety. However much I value it, I value
“ it not at this rate. Better it were they should
“ stammer in speech, nay, better that they were
“ dumb and incapable of speech, than that they
“ should learn the art of eloquence, by putting
“ their souls in the most eminent danger.” Now,
whether this author’s scheme was right or not,
I have no occasion at present to debate with him
as an adversary, for he rejects with abhorrence
the imputation of favouring the cause against
which I plead.

When a public theatre is defended as a means
of instruction, I cannot help thinking it is of
importance to observe, that it is a method alto-
gether uncommanded and unauthorized in the
word of God. This will probably appear a very
weak argument to many, but it will not appear
so to those who have a firm belief of, and a just
esteem for that book of life. Such will not ex-
pect, that any method will prove effectual to
make men “ wise unto salvation” without the
blessing of God, and they will hardly be in-
duced to look for this blessing upon the stage.
And let it be remembered, that it is now pleaded
for in a higher light, and on a more important
account

account than merely as an amusement, viz. as proper to support the interest of religion; it should therefore have a positive warrant before it be employed in this cause, lest it should meet with the same reception that all other human devices will meet with, “Who hath required these things at your hands?”

And that none may use a delusory sort of reasoning, and shift from one pretence to another, saying, it becomes a lawful amusement by its tendency to instruct, and an effectual instruction by its power to please at the same time; it must be observed, that a sinful amusement is not to be indulged on any pretence whatsoever, for we must not “do evil that good may come.” Nay, call it only a dangerous amusement, even in that case, no pretence of possible or probable instruction (though such a thing were not contrary to the supposition) is sufficient to warrant it. Nothing less than its being necessary could authorise the practice, and that I hope none will be so hardy as to affirm.

It can never be affirmed to be necessary, without a blasphemous impeachment of the divine wisdom. If the holy Scriptures, and the methods there authorised and appointed, are full and sufficient for our spiritual improvement, all others must be wholly unnecessary. And if they are the most powerful and the most effectual means,

means, no others must be suffered to come into rivalship and competition with them; on the contrary, they must be condemned as wrong, or laid aside as comparatively weak. The truth is, the stage can never be defended on a more untenable footing, than when it is represented as having a moral or virtuous, that is to say, a pious or religious tendency. What Christian can hear such a plea with patience? Is the “law of the Lord perfect, converting the soul? - Is it able to make the man of God perfect, throughly furnished to every good work?” What then are its defects which must be supplied by the theatre? Have the saints of God, for so many ages, been carried safely through all the dark and difficult steps of their earthly pilgrimage, with his law as a “light to their feet, and a lamp to their path,” and yet is it now necessary, that they should have additional illumination from a well regulated stage? Have there been for so long a time pastors employed bearing a divine commission? ordinances administered according to divine institution? Have these been hitherto effectual for “perfecting the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for edifying the body of Christ?” And shall we not count them among the scoffers that were to come in the last days, who pretend to open a new commission for the players to assist? If any shall say, there needs

no divine institution, all men are called to instruct one another, “the lips of the righteous should feed many,” and this way of the drama is but a mode of the instruction we all owe to one another. I answer, it is as a mode I attack it. This very mode has been shewn to be dangerous, nay sinful, as an amusement; who then can shew its necessity, in the same mode, for instruction or improvement?

If the stage be a proper method of promoting the interests of religion, then is Satan's kingdom divided against itself, which he is more cunning than to suffer it to be. For whatever debate there be, whether good men MAY attend the theatre, there can be no question at all, that no openly vicious man is an enemy to it, and that the far greatest part of them do passionately love it. I say no OPENLY vicious man; for doubtless there may be some hypocrites wearing the habit of the Christian pilgrim, who are the very worst of men, and yet may shew abundance of zeal against the stage. But nothing is more certain than, that taking the world according to its appearance, it is the worst part of it that shews most passion for this entertainment, and the best that avoids and fears it, than which there can hardly be a worse sign of it, as a means of doing good. Whoever believes the following words of our blessed Redeemer, will never be persuaded that

poets

poets and actors for the stage have received any commission to speak in his name. “ My sheep
 “ hear my voice, and I know them, and they
 “ follow me *.—A stranger will they not follow,
 “ but will flee from him, for they know not
 “ the voice of strangers † ‡.

This leads us to observe, that the stage is not only an improper method of instruction, but that all, or the far greatest number of pieces there represented, must have, upon the whole, a pernicious tendency. This is evident, because they must be to the taste and relish of the bulk of those who attend it. The difficulty of getting good authors for the theatre, I shall not insist up-

* John x. 27.

† John x. 5.

‡ It is to be observed here, to prevent mistakes, that the argument is founded on the general and prevailing inclination of the greatest part of each character, and not upon particular instances, in many of which, it is confessed, it will not hold. For, as it is difficult to know the real character of some persons, in whom there are some marks and signs of true religion, and at the same time, some symptoms of unsoundness, so it is still more difficult to determine the quality of single actions. Therefore, it is little or no argument that any practice is safe or good, because one good man, or one supposed to be good, has been known to do it; or on the contrary, ill, because one bad man has been known to do it. But as, when we retire further from the limit that divides them, the characters are more clearly and sensibly distinguished, so, whatever practice is passionately desired by wicked men in general, and shunned by the good, certainly is of bad tendency. If it were otherwise, as said above, “ Satan’s kingdom would
 “ be divided against itself,” and the God “ who keepeth covenant and truth for ever,” would fail in his promise, of “ giving” his people “ counsel,” and “ teaching them the
 “ way in which they ought to walk.”

on, but whatever the authors are able or willing to do, it is certain, that their productions in fact can rise no higher in point of purity, than the audience shall be willing to receive. Their attendance is not constrained, but voluntary; nay, they pay dearly for their entertainment; and therefore they must, and will have it to their taste. This is a part of the subject that merits the particular attention of all who are inclined to judge impartially, and it proves, in the strongest manner, the absurdity of forming chimerical suppositions of a stage so regulated, as, instead of being hurtful, to promote the interest, of piety and virtue.

Here let some truths be called to mind which are frequently mentioned in the holy Scriptures, but seldom recollected, and their consequences very little attended to. There is a distinction often stated, both in the old and new testament, between the children of God and the men of the world. These are mixed together in the present state, and cannot, in many cases, be certainly distinguished by their outward appearance; yet is there at bottom, not only a real distinction of character, but a perfect opposition between them, as to the commanding principle of all their actions. And as there is an opposition of character between them, so there must be an opposition of interests and views. Our blessed Redeemer, when he came into the world, was “despised and rejected of

“men;” and he every where tells his disciples, that they must expect no better treatment. “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets that were before you*.” And on the other hand, “Wo unto you when all men shall speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets †.” Again, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ‡.” His apostles speak always in the same language: thus the apostle Paul, “And be not conformed to this world §.” Nay, he lays it down as an universal position, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution ||.” Now I ask, Whether those who have a strong and rooted aversion to true holiness, which is not the character of the sincere Christian, will voluntarily croud to the theatre, to hear and see such performances as breathe nothing but what is agreeable to the pure and uncorrupted word of God? Will those who revile, injure, and persecute the saints themselves, delight in the stage, if honour is there put upon true

* Matt. v. 11, 12.
§ Rom. xii. 2.

† Luke vi. 26.
|| 2 Tim. iii. 12.

‡ John xv. 19.

religion, and pleased with that character in the representation which they hate in the original? This would be to expect impossibilities. And therefore, while the great majority of those who attend the stage are unholy, it is certain, that the plays which they behold with pleasure cannot, upon the whole, but have a criminal tendency.

If any alledge, that the poet's art may be a means to make religion amiable to them, I answer, that he cannot make it amiable, but by adulteration, by mixing it with something agreeable to their own taste, and then it is not religion that they admire, but the erroneous, debased, and false resemblance of it. Or even supposing, that, in a single instance or two, nothing in substance should be set before them but true religion, and this dressed to the very highest advantage by the poet's genius and actor's skill, there would be little gained; because these human arts only would be the object of their admiration, and they would always prefer, and speedily procure, a display of the same arts, upon a subject more agreeable to their corrupt minds. This indeed, we are not left to gather by way of inference and deduction from other truths, but are expressly taught it in the word of God. For "the
" natural man receiveth not the things of the
" Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto
" him, neither can we know them, because
" they

“ they are spiritually discerned *.” Experience is a strong proof of this ; for if any man will take the pains of making up a system of the morality of the stage, I do not mean the horrid profanity and scandalous obscenity that is to be found in the worst, but of that which is called virtue in the best of the pieces wrote for the theatre, he will find it exceeding different from Christian morals ; and, that an adherence to it would be, in most instances, a wilful departure from the rules of a holy life.

However plainly this is founded upon the word of God and sound reason, there are some very unwilling to think, that ever their duty as Christians should constrain them to be at odds with the delicacies of life, or the polite and fashionable pleasures of the age. And, as the mind of man is very ingenious in the defence of that pollution which it loves, they sometimes bring in criticism to their aid. They alledge that by the “ world” is understood, generally through the new testament, those who were heathens by profession ; and that the same opposition to true religion, in judgment and heart, is not to be ascribed to those who are members of the visible church. It is answered, the word did indeed signify as they say, for this plain reason, that in the early days of Christianity, when it was un-

* I Cor. ii. 14.

der persecution, few or none would make profession of it unless they did really believe it. But is not the meaning still the same? Can we suppose that the hatred of the then world was at the name of religion only, and not at the substance? Was the devil “the prince of this world,” then? And has he not now equal dominion over, and is he not equally served by those who are profane in their lives, though they were once baptised? Was he the spirit that “then worked,” and is he not the spirit that “now works” in the children of disobedience? The truth therefore remains still the same, those who are in a natural and unregenerate state, who hate true religion in their hearts, must have something very different before they can be pleased with seeing it on the stage*.”

That

* There is an excellent passage to this purpose in an essay against plays, to be found in one of the volumes published about a hundred years ago, by the gentlemen of the Port-royal in France, a society of Jansenists, of great parts and eminent piety. This essay in particular, is by some said to have been written by the prince of Conti. Section 15th of that essay, he says, “It is so true that plays are almost always a representation of vicious passions, that the most part of Christian virtues are incapable of appearing upon the stage. Silence, patience, moderation, wisdom, poverty, repentance, are no virtues, the representation of which can divert the spectators; and above all, we never hear humility spoken of, and the bearing of injuries. It would be strange to see a modest and silent religious person represented. There must be something great and renowned according to men, or at least something lively and animated, which is not met withal in Christian gravity and wisdom; and therefore, those who have
“ been

That this argument may have its proper force, we ought to consider, how great a proportion of persons under the dominion of vice and wickedness there must always be among those who attend the theatre. The far greatest number of the world in general are ungodly. This is a fact which could hardly be denied, even though the following passage had not stood in the oracles of truth. "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide
 " is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth
 " to destruction, and many there be which go
 " in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and
 " narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and
 " few there be that find it*." And as none can attend the stage, but those in higher life, and more affluent circumstances than the bulk of mankind, there is still a greater proportion of them who are enemies to pure and undefiled religion. Thus, says our Saviour to his disciples,
 " Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall
 " hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And
 " again I say unto you, it is easier for a camel
 " to go through the eye of a needle, than for a
 " rich man to enter into the kingdom of God †."

" been desirous to introduce holy men and women upon the
 " stage, have been forced to make them appear proud, and
 " to make them utter discourses more proper for the antient
 " Roman heroes than for saints and martyrs. Their devotion
 " upon the stage ought also to be always a little extraordinary."

* Matt, vii, 13, 14. † Matt, xix, 23, 24.

To the same purpose the apostle Paul says, “Ye
 “ see your calling, brethren, how that not ma-
 “ ny wise men after the flesh, not many mighty,
 “ not many noble are called*.” This does not
 at all suppose, that those in high life are origi-
 nally more corrupt in their nature than others,
 but it arises from their being exposed to much
 greater and stronger temptations. Now if, from
 the small number of real Christians in the upper
 ranks of life, we again subtract such as count
 the stage unlawful or dangerous, or have no in-
 clination to it, there will very few remain of those
 who are “the salt of the earth,” to season the
 unhallowed assembly. What sort of productions
 then must they be, which shall have the appro-
 bation of such judges? How much more proper
 to pollute than to reform, to poison than to cure?
 If such in fact the great bulk of plays have al-
 ways hitherto been, from what has been said it
 ought not to be wondered at, because it cannot
 be otherwise.

It is very possible, that some may be all this
 while holding the argument very cheap, and say-
 ing with lord Shaftsbury, “The true genius is
 “ of a nobler nature than servilely to submit to
 “ the corrupt or vitiated taste of any age or
 “ place;—he works not for gain, but despises
 “ it;—he knows, and will not swerve from the

* 1 Cor. i. 26.

“ truth of art ;—he will produce what is noble
 “ and excellent in its kind ;—he will refine the
 “ public ear, and teach them to admire in the
 “ right place.” These, though I do not cite
 any particular passage, are all of them sentiments,
 and most of them expressions, of that author so
 much admired among modern philosophers. But
 the objection is easily solved. The observation
 is allowed to be just, and to hold with respect to
 the poetic, oratorical, or any human art, because
 we know of no higher standard in any of these,
 than what human nature, in its present state,
 will most admire when it is exhibited to view.
 Accordingly the great poet and the great orator,
 though, thro’ the prevalence of a bad taste, they
 may find it difficult at first to procure atten-
 tion, yet they will procure it at last : and when
 they are heard, they carry the prize from all in-
 ferior pretenders ; and indeed, their doing so is
 the very touch-stone and trial of their art itself.
 In this case there lies no appeal from the judg-
 ment of the public or the multitude, (as David
 Hume has said for once according to truth) to
 the judgment of a wiser few.

But there cannot be any thing more absurd
 than to suppose, that the same thing will hold
 in morals and religion. The dramatic poets in
 Athens, where the stage was first established,
 improved upon one another, and refined their

own taste, and that of their audience, as to the elegance of their compositions. Nay, they soon brought tragedy, as a great critic* observes, to as great perfection as the nature of the thing seems to admit of. But whoever will from this infer, that they improved in their morals in the same proportion, or by that means, will fall into a very gross mistake. This, indeed, seems to be the great error of modern infidels, to suppose, that there is no more in morals than a certain taste and sense of beauty and elegance. Natural talents in the human mind are quite distinct from moral dispositions, and the excellence of the one is no evidence at all of the prevalence of the other. On the contrary, the first are many times found in the highest perfection, where there is a total absence of the last. And therefore, that true genius is the object of universal approbation, hinders not but that true goodness is the object of general aversion. The Scripture assures us, that all men are by nature under the power of sin, “that every imagination of the
 “ thoughts of man is only evil from his youth,
 “ and that continually †. That the carnal mind
 “ is enmity against God, and,” till it be renewed by divine grace, “ is not subject to the law of
 “ God, neither indeed can be ‡.

* Aristotle.

† Gen. vi. 5.

‡ Rom. viii. 7.

Now

Now it is utterly impossible and self-contradictory, that men should approve and delight in that which is contrary to the habitual prevailing temper of their hearts; and to bring about a change in them is not in the power of any human art, but with the concurrence of the Spirit and grace of God. In this he has given no authority to the players to act under him, nay, he has expressly told us, that he will not ordinarily, in any way whatever, make use of the perfection of human art, but of the plainest and weakest outward means. Thus the apostle Paul tells us his Master sent him, “to preach the
 “gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the
 “cross of Christ should be made of none effect*.”
 —And, “after that in the wisdom of God,
 “the world by wisdom knew not God, it
 “pleased God by the foolishness of preaching
 “to save them that believe †.” He also professes that his practice had always been conformed to this rule, “And I brethren, when I
 “came to you, came not with excellency of
 “speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the
 “testimony of God ‡. And my speech and my
 “preaching was not with enticing words of
 “man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the
 “Spirit and of power. That your faith should

* 1 Cor. i. 17.

† Ibid. ver. 21.

‡ 1 Cor. ii. 1.

“ not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the
 “ power of God * †.

It may be necessary here to obviate an objection, that in the holy Scriptures themselves we find several passages which seem to signify, that true religion, though it is not the choice of all men, is yet the object of universal approbation. Thus we are told, that “ the righteous shall be in
 “ everlasting remembrance, but the memory of the
 “ wicked shall rot.” Nay, we are exhorted by the apostle Paul to the practice of our duty in such terms as these, “ Whatsoever things are true, what-
 “ soever things are lovely, whatsoever things are

* I Cor. ii. 4, 5.

† Perhaps some will ask here, Is then human art, and artificial talents, which are the gifts of God, wholly excluded from his service? I answer, they are not. And yet the instances of their being eminently useful are exceeding rare. Such is the imperfection of the human mind, that it can hardly at the same time, give great attention and application to two distinct subjects; and therefore, when men give that intense application to human art, which is necessary to bring it to its perfection, they are apt to overlook the power and grace of God, without which all art is vain and ineffectual. Agreeably to this, when men of eminent talents have been of service in religion, it has been commonly by the exercise of self-denial, by making a very sparing and moderate use of them, and showing themselves so deeply penetrated with a sense of the important truths of the everlasting gospel, as to despise the beauties and embellishments of human skill; too great an attention to which is evidently inconsistent with the other. Well, say refined observers, this is the very perfection of art to use it with great reserve, and to keep it out of view as much as possible. And it is indeed the perfection of art to have the appearance of this, but it is peculiar to a renewed heart to have it in reality.

“ of

“ of good report, if there be any virtue, if
 “ there be any praise, think on these things.”
 But these must surely be explained in such a
 manner, as to be consistent with the clear and
 strong passages mentioned above; which it is
 not difficult to do. The matter of many good
 actions, particularly social virtues, the duties of
 the second table of the law, wicked men do
 often approve, nay, they may not only see some
 beauty, but feel some pleasure in them, from
 natural, tho’ unsanctified affections leading to
 them. But truly good actions, instances of holy
 obedience to God, in their manner, and in the
 principles from which they ought to flow, they
 neither can approve nor perform.

Nothing can be done agreeable to the will
 of God, but what hath the following properties.
 It must be done from a sense, not only of the
 unalterable obligation, but the perfect excellence
 of the law of God*; renouncing all pretence of
 merit in the actor†; depending for assistance
 entirely on divine strength‡; and with a single
 eye to the divine glory||. It is not the matter
 of an action that renders it truly holy, but the
 prevalence of these principles in the heart of the
 performer. And they are so far from being ge-
 nerally approved, that they are hated and de-

* Rom. vii. 12. † Gal. ii. 20. Phil. iii. 8. ‡ John xv. 5.
 || 1 Cor. x. 31. 1 Pet. iv. 11.

spised, and the very profession of most of them at least, ridiculed by every worldly man. The truth is, it is not easy to discover these principles otherwise than by narration. They lie deep in the heart, they do not seek to discover themselves, and the shewing them on the stage would be a sort of contradiction to their nature. I believe it would exceed the art of most poets or actors, to exhibit by outward signs, true self-denial, without joining to it such ostentation as would destroy its effect. Or if it could be done, it would be so far from being delightful to those who “thro’ the pride of their heart will not seek after God,” that it would fill them with disgust or disdain. So that all friends of the stage ought to join with David Hume, who hath excluded self-denial, humility, and mortification, from the number of the virtues, and ranked them among the vices.

From this it appears, that worldly men will bear a form of godliness, but the spirit and power of it they cannot endure. When therefore, the Scriptures represent religion, or any part of it, as amiable in the eyes of mankind in general, it is only giving one view of its excellence in itself or in its matter: but this can never be intended to make the judgment of bad men its standard or measure. And when the approbation of men is proposed as an argument to duty, it cannot
be

be considered in any other light, than as an assistant subordinate motive to preserve us from its violation; for the Scriptures will never warrant us to aim at the praise of men, as the reward of our compliance.

If there be any more than what is said above in the testimony which wicked men give in favour of religion, it is but the voice of natural conscience, that is, the voice of God in them, and not their own; and as it is extorted from them against their will, they do all in their power to destroy the force of the evidence. This we may be sensible of, if we will recollect, that it is always general, and that many speak well of something which they call religion in general, when yet there is hardly any of the servants of God, in whose character and conduct they will not endeavour either to find or make a flaw. The truth is, though some few heroes in profanity villify religion in itself directly, and in all its parts, the plurality of scoffers only tell you, this and the other thing is not religion, but superstition, preciseness, fancy or whim, and so on. But at the same time, if you take away all that by some or other is reflected on under these appellations, you will leave little behind. Which plainly teaches us this truth, that no man will cordially approve of such a scheme of religion as he does not believe and embrace, or inwardly and without dissimulation
applaud

applaud a character that is better than his own: at least, than his own either is, or he falsely presumes it to be*. For this reason, the apostle John gives it as a mark or evidence of regeneration, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren;” that is to say, a sincere and prevalent love to a saint as such, can dwell in no heart but that which is sanctified.

It will be proper here to take notice, because it has some relation to this subject, of what the

* For ascertaining the sense, and confirming the truth of this passage, it is proper to observe, That by the word [better] is not so much to be understood higher in degree, as different in kind. Tho’ even in the first sense it seems to hold pretty generally in comparisons between man and man. Men commonly extend their charity to those who have less, and not to those who have more goodness than themselves. There are very few, who, when they see others more strict and regular in their conduct than they are willing to be, do not ascribe it either to weakness or hypocrisy. Perhaps indeed, the reason of this may be, that a gradual difference as to the actions done, is considered as constituting a specific difference in the moral character; and men condemn others not for being better than themselves, upon their own notion of goodness, but for placing religion in the extremes, which they apprehend ought to be avoided. This confirms the remark made above, that every man’s own character is the standard of his approbation, and shows at the same time its inconsistency with that humility which is essential to every Christian. Wherever there is a real approbation, and sincere confession of superior worth, there is also an unfeigned imitation of it. The Christian not only knows himself to be infinitely distant from God, whom yet he supremely loves, but thinks himself less than the least of all saints; but he could neither love the one nor the other, if he had not a real, however distant likeness; if he had not the seeds of every good disposition implanted in him, the growth of which is his supreme desire, and the improvement of which is the constant object of his care and diligence.

advocates

advocates of the stage often make their boast, that before a polished audience things grossly criminal are not suffered to be acted; and that it is one of the rules of the drama, that, if such things be supposed, they must be kept behind the scenes. We are often put in mind of the pure taste of an Athenian audience, who, upon one of the actors expressing a profane thought, all rose up and left the theatre. A famous French tragedian, Corneille, also takes notice of it as an evidence of the improvement of the stage in his time, that one of his best written pieces had not succeeded, "Because it struck the spectators with the horrid idea of a prostitution to which a holy woman had been condemned." As to the case of the Athenians, it were easy to show from the nature and circumstances of the fact, that this resentment at the profanity of the poet, though it was expressed in the theatre, was by no means learned there. But it is needless to enter into any nice disquisition upon this subject, for all that follows from any such instances, is, that there are some things so very gross and shocking, that, as but a few of the most abandoned will commit them, so the rest of the world can have no delight in beholding them. There is, no doubt, a great variety of characters differing one from another in the degree of their dege-

degeneracy, and yet all of them essentially distinct from true piety.

To set this matter in a just light we must remember, that, as has been confessed above, the matter of many good actions, or a defective imperfect form of virtue is approved by the generality of the world; and, that they are very much swayed in their actions by a view to public praise. Therefore, they are mutually checks to one another, and vice is not seen on a theatre in a gross, but commonly in a more dangerous, because an engaging and insinuating form. The presence of so many witnesses does restrain and disguise sin, but cannot change its nature, or render it innocent. The purity of the theatre can never be carried farther by the taste of the audience, than what is required in conversation with the polite and fashionable world. There vice is in some measure restrained; men may be wicked, but they must not be rude. How much this amounts to is but too well known; it is no more than that we must not disgust those with whom we converse, and varies with their character. This is so far from being agreeable to the rules of the gospel, that a serious Christian is often obliged, from a sense of duty, to be guilty of a breach of good manners, by administering unacceptable reproof.

Thus

Thus it appears that, in the stage, the audience gives law to the poet, which is much the same thing as the scholar chusing his own lesson, and whether this be a safe or profitable method of instruction is easy to judge. Every one who knows human nature, especially who believes the representation given of it in Scripture, must conclude, that the young will be seduced into the commission, and the older confirmed and hardened in the practice of sin, because characters fundamentally wrong will be there painted out in an amiable light, and divested of what is most shameful and shocking. By this means conscience, instead of being alarmed and giving faithful testimony, is deceived and made a party in the cause. In short, vice in the theatre must wear the garb, assume the name, and claim the the reward of virtue.

How strong a confirmation of this have we from experience? Have not plays in fact commonly turned upon the characters most grateful, and the events most interesting to corrupt nature? Pride, under the name of greatness of mind, ambition and revenge, under those of valour and heroism, have been their constant subjects. But chiefly love: this, which is the strongest passion, and the most dangerous in the human frame, and from which the greatest number of crimes, and crimes the most atrocious, have sprung, was
 always

always encouraged upon the stage. There, women are swelled with vanity, by seeing their sex always deified and adored; there men learn the language, as well as feel by sympathy, the transports of that passion; and there the hearts of both are open and unguarded to receive the impression, because it is covered with a mask of honour. Hath this then been only the case at particular times of occasional corruption, or for want of a proper regulation of the stage? No, it is inseparable from its constitution. Such hath been the nature and tendency of plays in all former ages, and such, from the taste and disposition of those who attend them, it is certain they will for ever continue to be*.

Another

* Perhaps it will be alledged, that the whole force of this reasoning may be evaded, by supposing a stage directed by the magistrate, and supported at the public charge. In this case the performers would be under no temptation, for gain, to gratify the taste of the audience, and the managers would have a quite different intention. It is confessed, that this supposition seems considerably to weaken the arguments above used, though perhaps more in theory than it would do in practice. But I would ask any who make such a supposition, Why this inviolable attachment to the stage? Why must so many efforts be made to preserve it in some shape or other? What are its mighty benefits, that it must be forced as it were out of its own natural course in order to make it lawful, rather than we will give it up as pernicious?—It is also to be observed that, however useful an ordinance of God magistracy be for public order, there is very little security in the direction of magistrates, for sound and wholesome instruction in religion or morals. We can never depend upon them for this, unless they are themselves persons of true piety, and not always even when that is the case, because they may be guilty of many errors in judgment.

Another argument which shews the stage to be an improper method of instruction, or rather that it is pernicious and hurtful, may be drawn from its own nature. In its most improved state it is a picture of human life, and must represent characters as they really are. An author for the stage is not permitted to feign, but to paint and copy. Though he should introduce things or persons ever so excellent, if there were not discerned a resemblance between them and real life, they would be so far from being applauded, that

judgment. Now it is not reasonable to hope, that magistrates, in any country, will be always, or even generally, persons of true piety. Such, with the other qualifications necessary to magistrates, are not always to be found. Neither is there any necessity for it; because, though doubtless, those who fear God will be the most faithful magistrates, and the most dutiful subjects, yet the greatest part of the duties of both may be performed without this, in a manner in which the public will see and feel very little difference. Magistracy has only the outward carriage, and not the heart for its object; and it is the sensible effect which the public looks for, and not the principle from which any thing is done. Therefore, as on the one hand, if a subject obeys the laws, and outwardly fulfils the duties of his station, the magistrate hath nothing farther to demand, though it be only for "wrath," and not "for conscience sake;" so on the other, if a magistrate be diligent in preserving order and promoting the general good, though the motive of his actions be no better than vanity, ambition, or the fear of man well concealed, the public reaps the benefit, and has no ground of complaint, even whilst his character is detestable in the sight of God. But this magistrate can never be safely trusted with the direction of what regards our moral or spiritual improvement, and he would be going out of his own sphere should he attempt it.—After all, it makes little difference whether the magistrate or any body else directs the stage, while the attendance is voluntary; for in that case, it must either be suited to the taste of the audience, or it will be wholly deserted.

they

they would not be suffered, but would be condemned as a transgression of the fundamental rules of the art. Now, are not the great majority of characters in real life bad? Must not the greatest part of those represented on the stage be bad? And therefore, must not the strong impression which they make upon the spectators be hurtful in the same proportion?

It is a known truth, established by the experience of all ages, that bad example has a powerful and unhappy influence upon human characters. Sin is of a contagious and spreading nature, and the human heart is but too susceptible of the infection. This may be ascribed to several causes, and to one in particular which is applicable to the present case, That the seeing of sin frequently committed, must gradually abate that horror which we ought to have of it upon our minds, and which serves to keep us from yielding to its solicitations. Frequently seeing the most terrible objects renders them familiar to our view, and makes us behold them with less emotion. And from seeing sin without reluctance, the transition is easy, to a compliance with its repeated importunity, especially, as there are latent remaining dispositions to sinning in every heart that is but imperfectly sanctified. It will be difficult to assign any other reason, why wickedness is always carried to a far greater height in large
and

and populous cities, than in the country. Do not multitudes, in places of great resort, come to perpetrate, calmly and sedately, without any remorse, such crimes as would surprize a less knowing sinner so much as to hear of? Can it then be safe, to be present at the exhibition of so many vicious characters as always must appear upon the stage? Must it not, like other examples, have a strong, though insensible influence, and indeed the more strong, because unperceived.

Perhaps some will say, This argument draws very deep, it is a reproaching of providence, and finding fault with the order which God hath appointed, at least permitted, to take place in the world, where the very same proportion of wicked characters is to be seen. But is there not a wide difference between the permission of any thing by a wise, holy, and just God, or its making part of the plan of providence, and our presuming to do the same thing, without authority, and when we can neither restrain it within proper bounds, nor direct it to its proper end? There are many things which are proper and competent to God, which it would be the most atrocious wickedness in man to imitate. Because it is both good and just in God to visit us with sickness, or to take us away by death when he sees it proper, would it therefore be lawful in us, to bring any of them upon ourselves at our own pleasure? I should

Should rather be inclined to think, that these sportive representations on the stage, instead of being warranted by their counterpart in the world, are a daring profanation, and as it were, a mockery of divine providence, and so to be considered in a light yet more dreadful, than any in which they have been hitherto viewed. Besides, it ought to be remembered that, though evil actions, as permitted, make a part of the will of God, yet hitherto, all who deserve the name of Christians have affirmed, that what is sinful in any action is to be ascribed to the will of the creature as its adequate cause; and therefore, exhibiting human actions and characters upon the stage, is not only representing the works of God, but repeating the sins of men.

The criminal and dangerous nature of such a conduct will farther appear from this, that it is by just and necessary consequence forbidden in the word of God. There we find, that though in his sovereign providence he permits the commission of sin, suffers his own people to continue mixed with sinners in this state, and makes their connection with them in some measure unavoidable, as a part of their trial, yet he hath expressly prohibited them from having any more communication with such, than he himself hath made necessary. We are warned in Scripture, that “evil communications corrupt good manners,”
and

and therefore, that we must fly the society of the ungodly. The Psalmist tells us, “ Blessed is
 “ the man that walketh not in the counsel of
 “ the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sin-
 “ ners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*.”
 Agreeably to this the characters of good men in Scripture are always represented. Thus the Psalmist David records his own resolution, “ I
 “ will set no wicked thing before mine eyes, I
 “ hate the work of them that turn aside, it shall
 “ not cleave to me. A froward heart shall de-
 “ part from me, I will not know a wicked per-
 “ son †.” The same says elsewhere, “ I am a
 “ companion of all them that fear thee, and
 “ of them that keep thy precepts ‡. Depart
 “ from me ye evil doers, for I will keep the
 “ commandments of my God §.”

But there is no need of citing passages of Scripture to this purpose; it is well known, that good men, though they will be very cautious of rashly determining characters that are doubtful, and will far less discover a proud and pharisaical contempt of any who may yet be vessels of mercy, will however, carefully avoid all unnecessary communication with sinners. They will neither follow their persons from inclination, nor view their conduct with pleasure. On the contrary, when

* Psal. i. 1.

† Psal. ci. 3, 4.

‡ Psal. cxix. 63.

§ Ib. ver. 115.

they cannot wholly fly from their society, it becomes a heavy burthen, and in some cases intolerable, and so as to require the interposition of the same kind providence that “delivered just Lot, vexed
“with the filthy conversation of the wick-
“ed.” Is there any consistency between such a character, and attending the stage with delight? Will those who “behold transgressors, and are
“grieved,” crowd with eagerness to the theatre, where the same persons and actions are brought under a review? Will what affected them with sorrow in the commission, be voluutarily chosen, and made subservient to their pleasure in the repetition.

I cannot help here calling to mind the anxious concern, which wise and pious parents usually shew for their children, on account of the snares to which they are unavoidably exposed in an evil world. How carefully do they point out, and how solemnly do they charge them to shun the paths in which destroyers go. They use this caution with respect to the world, even as under the government of God; and in so doing they follow the example of their Saviour, who, in the prospect of leaving his disciples, after many excellent advices, puts up for them this intercessory prayer;
“And now I am no more in this world, but
“these are in the world, and I am come to thee.
“Holy Father, keep through thine own name
“those

“ those whom thou hast given me, that they
 “ may be one as we are.—I pray not that
 “ thou shouldst take them out of the world, but
 “ that thou shouldst keep them from the evil*.”

Can any expect that this prayer will be heard in their behalf, who are not content with seeing the world as it is ordered by a wise and holy God, but must see it over again, in a vile imitation, by a sinful man.

It will probably be said, that this strikes as much against history, at least the writing and reading of human, commonly called profane, history, as against the writing and seeing of dramatic representations. But the cases are by no means the same; the knowledge of history is, in many respects, necessary for the great purposes of religion. Were not this the case, there would be little difficulty in admitting the consequence. Perhaps, even as it is, it had been better for the world that several ancient facts and characters, which now stand upon record, had been buried in oblivion †. At any rate it may be safely affirmed,

* John xvii. 11, 15.

† Perhaps some will be surpris'd at what is here said on the subject of history, who have not usually view'd it in this light. And indeed this is the great difficulty in the whole of the present argument, to overcome strong prepossessions, and to shew men the sin and danger of a practice which they know to be common, and have been long accustomed to look upon as lawful and safe. For this reason, it is probable, that the best way of proving that the above assertion on the subject of history is agreeable to Scripture and reason, will be by a case perfectly similar but more frequently handled. Do not all Christian writers, without
 E 2 exception,

firmed, that romances and fabulous narrations are a species of composition from which the world hath received as little benefit, and as much hurt, as any that can be named, excepting plays themselves, to which they are so nearly allied. The first are only exceeded by the last, as to their capacity of doing mischief, by the circumstances of action, and the presence at once of so many persons, among whom, by mutual sympathy, the spiritual poison spreads faster and penetrates deeper.

Lest it should be pretended, that such a turn is given to things in the representation, as that, though the greatest part of the actions represented are ill in themselves, yet vice is reproached or ridiculed, virtue set upon a throne, rewarded and honoured: let it be called to mind that, as has

exception, who treat of the government of the tongue, lay down this as a rule, that we are not to report the sins of others, though we know the truth of the facts, unless where it is necessary to some good end? Now why should there be any different rule in writing than in conversation? What is done either way is the same in substance, viz. communicating information; and writing, which may be called visible speech, is much more lasting in its nature and extensive in its effects. If any ask, How, or why the knowledge of history is necessary to the purposes of religion? I answer, it is necessary for proving the truths of natural, and confirming those of revealed religion; for repelling the attacks of adversaries, and giving us such a view of the plan of Providence, as may excite us to the exercise of the duties of adoration, thankfulness, trust, and submission to the supreme Disposer of all events. Real facts only are proper for this purpose, and not feigned stories, in the choice and dressing of which, experience teaches us, the great end is, that man may be pleased, and not that God may be glorified.

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been shewn above, the author is not left at liberty to do in this as he pleases. He must gratify the public taste, and the rules he is obliged to observe have rather the contrary effect. For he must divest his bad characters of what is most horrid and shocking, and present them less deformed than they really are. Besides, though he may conceal a part, he must not alter nature so far as he goes, but take it as he finds it. Accordingly some of our modern critics tell us, that there ought to be no particular moral in a dramatic performance, because that is a departure from nature, and so not in taste.

It ought not to be forgotten, that attending dramatic representations is not only seeing a great plurality of bad characters without necessity, and seeing them with patience, but it is seeing them with pleasure. Whether or not entertainment be yielded to be the only or ultimate effect of plays, surely it cannot be denied to be one effect sought and expected from them, and from every part of them. An actor is as much applauded, and gives as much pleasure to the spectators, when he represents a bad character to the life, as a good. Is there no danger then, that a heart softened by delight, should be more liable to infection from evil than at other times? Is there no danger that an association should be formed in the mind, between the sense of pleasure and

the commission of sin? Will any person affirm, that in such circumstances he feels that holy indignation against sin, which every Christian ought to conceive upon seeing it committed? Or, that he is able to preserve that awe and fear, which he ought to have of the just judgment of God, when he sees the crimes that merit it boldly re-acted, and finely mimicked in a personated character.

So far is this from being the case, that every person attending the representation of a play, enters in some measure himself, as well as the actors, into the spirit of each character, and the more so the better the action is performed. His attention is strongly fixed, his affections are seized and carried away, and a total forgetfulness of every thing takes place, except what is immediately before him. Can the various passions be so strongly excited as they are sometimes known to be, and no effect remain? Will not the passion of love, for example, after it has been strongly felt by the spectator in sympathy with the actor, be a little more ready to recur, especially as nature prompts, and various solliciting objects are daily presented to his eye? The author terminates his plot as he sees best, and draws what conclusions he thinks proper from his characters, but he has no reason to think that he can controul the passions which he raises in the spectators

tors in the same manner, and not suffer them to exceed the bounds of his description. Will not the passion of revenge, that right hand of a false greatness of mind, after it has been strongly excited in the theatre, be apt to rise again upon every real or supposed provocation? Some learned observers of nature tell us, that every passion we feel causes a new modification of the blood and spirits; if there is any truth in this, then every passion excited in the theatre takes possession for a time of the very animal frame, makes a seat to itself, and prepares for a speedy return.

Having thus endeavoured to shew, that the stage, whether amusement or instruction be aimed at in it, cannot be attended by any Christian without sin; there is a third general argument against it, which merits consideration. It is, that no person can contribute to the encouragement of the stage, without being partaker of the sins of others. This is proper to be attended to, as it is against a public theatre that the arguments in this essay are chiefly levelled; so that, if it be criminal at all, every person attending it, is not only faulty by his own proper conduct, but is farther chargeable with the guilt of seducing others. Besides, without this the argument, to some, would not be altogether complete, for after all that has been advanced, there may be a few,

who in a good measure yield it to be true, and yet have another subterfuge remaining. They acknowledge, perhaps, that it is a most hazardous amusement, to which others ought ordinarily to be preferred; That the bulk of plays will, much more probably, pollute than improve the far greatest part of those who attend them. Yet still they are apt to figure to themselves particular cases as exceptions from the general rule, and to suppose, there are SOME plays which may be attended, or at least, that there are SOME persons who have so much clearness of judgement, and so much constancy in virtue, as to separate the corn from the chaff. At a particular time, they suppose, a person of this kind may, without receiving any hurt, be improved by the fine sentiments contained in plays; and also learn something, to be applied to other purposes, of that force and justness of action, that grace and beauty of behaviour, which is no where seen in so great perfection as on the stage.

Upon this subject in general, it may be affirmed, that those who have this confidence in the strength of their own virtue, are far from being the persons who may be most safely trusted in a place of danger. On the contrary, those will probably be most truly steadfast, when exposed to temptation, who are most diffident of themselves, and do not wantonly run into it. Yet, since
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some may take encouragement from such apprehensions, it is proper to observe that, though there were truth in their pretence, yet would it not therefore be lawful for them to attend the theatre. They could not do so without contributing to the sins of others, a thing expressly prohibited in the holy Scriptures, and indeed, diametrically opposite to the two principal branches of true religion, concern for the glory of God, and compassion to the souls of men.

There are two ways in which the occasional attending of plays, by those who are of good character, even supposing it not hurtful to themselves, contributes to the sins of others. (1.) By supporting the players in that unchristian occupation. (2.) Encouraging, by their example, those to attend all plays indiscriminately, who are in most danger of infection.

First, It contributes to support the players in an unchristian occupation. After what has been said above, and which I now take for granted, on the impropriety of plays as an amusement, and the impossibility of furnishing a stage with nothing but sound and wholesome productions, little doubt can remain, that the occupation of players is inconsistent with the character of a Christian. Whatever occasional presence may be to some spectators, continual performing can never be lawful to the actors. On the very best sup-

position, it is a life of perpetual amusement, which is equally contrary to reason and religion. It is a mean prostitution of the rational powers, to have no higher end in view, than contributing to the pleasure and entertainment of the idle part of mankind, and instead of taking amusement with the moderation of a Christian, to make it the very business and employment of life. How strange a character does it make for one to live, in a manner, perpetually in a mask, to be much oftener in a personated than in a real character? And yet this is the case with all players, if to the time spent in the representation, you add that which is necessary to prepare for their public appearances. What foul polluted minds must these be, which are such a receptacle of foreign vanities, besides their own natural corruption, and where one system or plan of folly is obliterated only to make way for another.

But the life of players is not only idle and vain, and therefore inconsistent with the character of a Christian, but it is still more directly and grossly criminal. We have seen above, that not only from the taste of the audience, the prevailing tendency of all successful plays must be bad, but that in the very nature of the thing, the greatest part of the characters represented must be vicious. What then is the life of a player? It is wholly spent in endeavouring to express the
4 2 3 language,

language, and exhibit a perfect picture of the passions of vicious men. For this purpose they must strive to enter into the spirit, and feel the sentiments proper to such characters. Unless they do so, the performance will be quite faint and weak, if not wholly faulty and unnatural. And can they do this so frequently without retaining much of the impression, and at last, becoming in truth what they are so often in appearance? Do not the characters of all men take a tincture from their employment and way of life? How much more must theirs be infected, who are conversant, not in outward occupations, but in characters themselves, the actions, passions, and affections of men? If their performances touch the audience so sensibly, and produce in them so lasting an effect, how much more must the same effects take place in themselves, whose whole time is spent in this manner?

This is so certain, and at the same time so acknowledged a truth, that even those who are fondest of theatrical amusements, do yet notwithstanding esteem the employment of players a mean and sordid profession. Their character has been infamous in all ages, just a living copy of that vanity, obscenity, and impiety which is to be found in the pieces which they represent. As the world has been polluted by the stage, so they have always been more eminently so, as it

is natural to suppose, being the very cisterns in which this pollution is collected, and from which it is distributed to others. It makes no difference in the argument, that we must here suppose the stage to be regulated and improved, for as it hath been shewn, that it can never be so regulated as to be safe for the spectators, it must be always worse for the actors, between whom and the audience the same proportion will still remain. Can it then be lawful in any to contribute, in the least degree, to support men in this unhallowed employment? Is not the theatre truly and essentially, what it has been often called rhetorically, the school of impiety, where it is their very business to learn wickedness? And will a Christian, upon any pretended advantage to himself, join in this confederacy against God, and assist in endowing and upholding the dreadful seminary?

Secondly, Men of good character going occasionally to the theatre contributes to the sins of others, by emboldening those to attend all plays indiscriminately, who are in most danger of infection. If there be any at all, especially if there be a great number, to whom the stage is noxious and sinful, every one without exception is bound to abstain. The apostle Paul expressly commands the Corinthians to abstain from lawful things, when their using them would make
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their brother to offend, that is to say, would lead him into sin. “ But take heed, lest by any
 “ means, this liberty of yours become a stum-
 “ bling-block to them that are weak. For if
 “ any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at
 “ meat in the idols temple, shall not the con-
 “ science of him that is weak, be emboldened to
 “ eat those things which are offered to idols? And
 “ through thy knowledge shall the weak brother
 “ perish, for whom Christ died. But when ye
 “ sin so against the brethren, and wound their
 “ weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Where-
 “ fore if meat make my brother to offend, I
 “ will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest
 “ I make my brother to offend *.”

There are many who seem to have entirely forgot that this precept is to be found in the word of God, and discover not the least sense of their obligation to comply with it. If by any plausible pretences, they imagine they can vindicate their conduct with regard to themselves, or palliate it with excuses, they are quite unmindful of the injury which they do to others. I speak not here of offending, in the sense in which that word is commonly, though unjustly taken, as displeasing others. Such as are displeased with the conduct of those who attend the theatre, because they esteem it to be sinful, are not thereby of-

* 1 Cor, viii. 9—13.

fended in the Scripture sense of that word, except so far as some few of them are provoked to unchristian resentment, or induced to draw rash and general conclusions, from the indiscretion of particular persons, to the prejudice of whole orders of men. But vast multitudes are truly offended or made to offend, as they are led into a practice, which, whatever it be to those who set the example, is undoubtedly pernicious to them. Is it possible to deny, that under the best regulation of the theatre that can reasonably be hoped for, to great numbers it must be hurtful, especially as it is enticing to all? And, if that be but allowed, persons of character and reputation cannot attend without contributing to the mischief that is done.

Perhaps it will be objected to this application of the passage of Scripture cited above, that the particular danger there pointed out by the apostle, is inducing men to venture upon a practice with a doubting conscience. I think it highly probable, that this very precise case happens with many, who go to the theatre following the example of others. They are not entirely satisfied of its lawfulness, they still have some inward reluctance of mind, but adventure to gratify a carnal inclination, being emboldened by the example of those who are esteemed men of understanding and worth. But even where their im-
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PLICIT trust is so strong as fully to satisfy them, and set their minds at ease, the apostle's argument holds with equal force, if thereby they are unavoidably led into sin.

This will probably be looked upon as a very hard law, and it will be asked, Is a man then never to do any thing that he has reason to believe will be misinterpreted, or abused by others to their own hurt? The hardness of the law will wholly vanish, if we remember, that it is confined to things indifferent in their nature. In duties binding of their own nature, we are under no obligation to pay any regard to the opinions of others, or the consequences of our conduct upon them. But in things originally indifferent, which become duties, or not, precisely on account of their consequences, there we are to beware of making our brother to offend. The Scripture rule is this, We must not commit the least sin under pretence of the most important end, though it were to save multitudes from sins incomparably more heinous. But in matters of indifference, we are not to value the most beloved enjoyment so highly, as to endanger the salvation of one soul by ensnaring it into sin. And can a real believer have the smallest objection, the least rising thought, against this equitable law? Shall we value any present gratification equally, nay, shall we once put it in the ballance with the spi-
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ritual interest of an immortal soul? Now, who will be so shameless as to assert, that attending a public stage is to him a necessary duty? Or what defender of the stage will be so sanguine as to affirm, that it is, or that he hopes to see it regulated so as to be safe or profitable to every mind? and yet till this is the case, it evidently stands condemned by the apostolic rule.

Since writing the above, I have met with a pamphlet just published, entitled, *The Morality of Stage-plays seriously considered.* This author convinces me, that I have without sufficient ground supposed, that no body would affirm attending plays to be a necessary duty; for he has either done it, or gone so very near it, that probably the next author upon the same side will do it in plain terms, and assert, that all above the station of tradesmen who do not go to the play-house, are living in the habitual neglect of their duty, and sinning grievously against God. If this looks ridiculous, it is none of my fault, for I speak it seriously; and it is a much more natural consequence from his reasoning, than any he has drawn from it himself.

He considers the passage of the apostle Paul, and says (which is true) that it holds only in the case of indifferent actions, but that we are to “do good in the face of prejudice.” The way in which he shews it to be doing good, is
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pretty singular, but I pass it by for a little, and observe, that probably he is not much accustomed to commenting on such passages of Scripture, for even granting his unreasonable supposition, doing good indefinitely is not opposed to indifferent actions in this, or any similar case. An action that is good in itself, is indifferent when it may be exchanged for another; when one as good, or better, may be put in its place. Nothing is opposed to indifferent actions here, but what is indispensibly necessary, and absolutely binding, both in itself, and in its circumstances. And indeed, though he is afraid at first to say so, he seems to carry the matter that length at last, making his conclusion a little broader than the premises, and saying in the close of the paragraph upon that subject, “What they do to this purpose, either in opposing the bad, or promoting the good, is MATTER OF DUTY, and their conduct in it is not to be regulated by the opinion of any person who is pleased to take offence*.”

But how shall we refute this new and wonderful doctrine of its being necessary that good men should attend the theatre. I cannot think of a better way of doing it, than tearing off some of the drapery of words, with which it is adorned and disguised, and setting his own assertions to-

* Page 23.

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gether in the form of a syllogism, “The manager of every theatre must suit his entertainments to the company, and if he is not supported by the grave and sober, he must suit himself to the licentious and profane.”——
 “We know that in every nation there must be amusements and public entertainments, and the stage has always made one in every civilized and polished nation. We cannot hope to abolish it.”——Ergo, According to this author, it is the duty of good men to attend the stage. But I leave the reader to judge, Whether, from the first of his propositions, which is a certain truth, it is not more just to infer, that till the majority of those who attend the stage are good, its entertainment cannot be fit for the Christian ear; and, because that will never be, no Christian ought to go there.

And what a shameful begging of the question is his second proposition, “That we cannot hope to abolish it.” It is hard to tell what we may hope for in this age, but we insist that it ought to be abolished. Nay, we do hope to abolish it just as much as other vices; we cannot hope to see the time when there shall be no gaming, cheating, or lying, but we must still preach against all such vices, and will never exhort good men to go to gaming-tables, to persuade them to play fair, and lessen the wickedness of the practice. In
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short, it is a full refutation of the extravagant assertion of good men being obliged, as matter of duty, to go to the theatre, that no such thing is commanded in the word of God, and therefore it is not, and cannot be necessary to any*. And since it is evidently pernicious to great numbers, it can be lawful to none.

It would give Christians a much more just, as well as more extensive view of their duty, than they commonly have, if they would consider their relation to, and necessary influence on one another. All their visible actions have an effect upon others as well as themselves. Every thing we see or hear makes some impression on us, tho' for the most part unperceived, and we contribute every moment, to form each other's character. What a melancholy view then, does it give us of the state of religion among us at present, that when piety towards God has been excluded from many moral systems, and the whole of virtue confined to the duties of social life, the better half of these also should be cut off, and all regard to the souls of others forgotten or derided. Nothing indeed is left but a few expressions of compli-

* It is proper here to remark, how natural it was to suppose, that the argument would be carried this length, when the stage came to be pleaded for as useful in promoting the interests of virtue. And therefore I have above taken notice, that these prophets run unsent, the propriety of which remark will now clearly appear.

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ment, a few insignificant offices of present conveniency: for that which some modern refiners have dignified with the name of virtue, is nothing else but polished luxury, a flattering of each other in their vices, a provocation of each other to sensual indulgence, and that "friendship of the world," which "is enmity with God.

I would now ask the reader, after perusing the preceding arguments against the stage, Whether he is convinced that it is inconsistent with the character of a Christian or not? If he shall answer in the negative, if he has still some remaining argument in its defence, or some method, which has not occurred to me, to take off the force of the reasoning, I would next ask, Whether it does not at least render it a doubtful point? Whether, joined with the concurrent testimony of the best and wisest men in all ages against it, as it appeared among them, and the impurity and corruption that still attends it, there is not at least some ground of hesitation? And, if so much be but allowed, it becomes on this very account unlawful to every Christian, who takes the word of God for the rule of his conduct. There clear evidence and full persuasion is required before an action can be lawful, and where doubt arises we are commanded to abstain. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth: and he that doubteth

“doubteth is damned, if he eat; because he
“eateth not of faith, for whatsoever is not of
“faith is sin*.”

Hitherto we have reasoned against what is called a “well-regulated stage.” That is to say, instead of attacking the corruptions which now adhere to it, we have endeavoured to show, that from the purpose intended by it, from the present state and general taste of mankind, and the nature of the thing itself, a public theatre is not capable of such a regulation, as to make it consistent with the purity of the Christian profession to attend or support it. If any complain, that part of the above reasoning is too abstracted, and not quite level to the apprehension of every reader, let it be remembered, that it is directed against an idea so abstracted, that it never yet did, and from what we have seen, there is reason to believe it never can exist. It is indeed altogether imaginary, and is drest up by every author who defends it, in the manner and form that best pleases himself; so that it is infinitely less difficult to refute or shew the unlawfulness of a well-regulated stage, than to know what it is.

If the authors on this subject would enter into particulars, and give us a list of the useful and instructive plays with which our stage is to be served; lay down a plan of strict discipline, for

* Rom, xiv, 22, 23.

introducing and preserving purity among the actors; and shew us by whom the managers are to be chosen, and their fidelity tried, with some general rules for their conduct; it might soon be determined by plain and simple arguments, Whether such an entertainment could be safely permitted to a Christian, or not. But, when they give us no farther account of it, than by calling it a stage properly regulated, they involve themselves at once in obscurity, as to the very subject of their discourse. It is no wonder then, that they can make a parade with a few glittering phrases, as, picture of nature, moral lecture, amiable character, compassion for virtue in distress, decency of the drama, and several others. We are put to a stand what to say to such things, for if we speak of the impure sentiments of authors, or the wanton gesticulations of actors, all these are immediately given up, and yet the fort remains as entire as ever. Therefore, the method taken in this treatise, with all the disadvantages that attend it, was looked upon to be the best and the clearest that could be chosen; to show, that those from whom a reformation of the stage must come, are neither able nor willing to make it; that the very materials of which this fine system is to consist are naught, and therefore, so must the product be always found upon trial.

It may indeed be matter of wonder, that among the many schemes and projects daily offered to the consideration of the public, there has never been any attempt to point out a plausible way, how the stage may be brought into, and kept in such a state of regulation as to be consistent with the Christian character. There have been attempts to show how money may be in a manner created, and the national debt paid, or the annual supplies raised, without burdening the subject. Some, who have nothing of their own, have endeavoured to persuade the rest of mankind, that it is the easiest thing imaginable to grow rich in a few years, with little labour, by the improvement of moor, moss, or bees. But none, so far as I have heard or seen, have been so bold as to lay down a distinct plan for the improvement of the stage. When this is added to the considerations already mentioned, it will confirm every impartial person in the belief, that such improvement is not to be expected.

I hope therefore, there may now be some prospect of success, in warning every one who wishes to be esteemed a disciple of Christ against the stage, as it hitherto has been, and now is. Experience is of all others the surest test of the tendency of any practice. It is still more to be depended on than the most plausible and apparently conclusive reasoning, upon what hath never

ever yet been tried. Let us then consider, what hath been the spirit and tendency of almost the whole plays which have been represented, from time to time, upon the stage. Have not love and intrigue been their perpetual theme, and that not in a common and orderly way, but with resistance and impediments, such as rivalry and jealousy, the opposition of parents, and other things of a similar nature, that the passions may be strongly excited, and that the force of love, and its triumph over every obstacle, may be set before the audience as a lesson? Is not the polite well-bred man the hero of such plays, a character formed upon the maxims of the world, and chiefly such of them as are most contrary to the gospel? Are not unchristian resentment and false honour the characteristics of every such person?

What is the character of a clergyman when it is taken from the stage? If the person introduced is supposed to possess any degree of ability, hypocrisy is the leading part of the character. But for the most part, awkwardness, ignorance, dulness and pedantry are represented as inseparable from men of that function. This is not done to correct these faults when appearing in some of that profession, by comparing them with others free from such reproachful defects, but it is the character of the clergyman in general, who

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is commonly introduced single, and compared with the men acquainted with the world, very little to his advantage. The truth is, it seems to be a maxim with dramatic authors, to strip men of every profession of their several excellencies, that the rake may be adorned with the spoils: even learning is commonly ascribed to him; how consistently with truth or nature, and consequently with taste itself, I leave the reader to determine.

And where can the plays be found, at least comedies, that are free from impurity, either directly, or by allusion and double-meaning? It is amazing to think, that women who pretend to decency and reputation, whose brightest ornament ought to be modesty, should continue to abet, by their presence, so much unchastity as is to be found in the theatre. How few plays are acted which a modest woman can see, consistently with decency in every part? and even when the plays are more reserved themselves, they are sure to be seasoned with something of this kind in the prologue or epilogue, the music between the acts, or in some scandalous farce with which the diversion is concluded. The power of custom and fashion is very great, in making people blind to the most manifest qualities and tendencies of things. There are ladies who frequently attend the stage, who if they were but once en-

tertained with the same images in a private family, with which they are often presented there, would rise with indignation, and reckon their reputation ruined if ever they should return. I pretend to no knowledge of these things, but from printed accounts, and the public bills of what plays are to be acted, sometimes by the particular desire of ladies of quality, and yet may safely affirm, that no woman of reputation (as it is called in the world) much less of piety, who has been ten times in a play-house, durst repeat in company all that she has heard there. With what consistency they gravely return to the same schools of lewdness, they themselves best know.

It ought to be considered, particularly with regard to the younger of both sexes, that, in the theatre, their minds must insensibly acquire an inclination to romance and extravagance, and be unfitted for the sober and serious affairs of common life. Common or little things give no entertainment upon the stage, except when they are ridiculed. There must always be something grand, surprising and striking. In comedies, when all obstacles are removed, and the marriage is agreed on, the play is done. This gives the mind such a turn, that it is apt to despise ordinary business as mean, or deride it as ridiculous. Ask a merchant whether he chuses that his apprentices should go to learn exactness and frugality

lity from the stage. Or, whether he expects the most punctual payments from those whose generosity is strengthened there, by weeping over virtue in distress. Suppose a matron coming home from the theatre filled with the ideas that are there impressed upon the imagination, how low and contemptible do all the affairs of her family appear, and how much must she be disposed, (besides the time already consumed) to forget or misguide them?

The actors themselves are a signal proof of this. How seldom does it happen, if ever, that any of them live sober and regular lives, pay their debts with honesty, or manage their affairs with discretion? They are originally men of the same composition with others, but their employment wholly incapacitates them for prudence or regularity, gives them a dissipation of mind and unsteadiness of spirit, so that they cannot attend to the affairs of life. Nay, if I am rightly informed, that variety of characters which they put on in the theatre deprives them of common sense, and leaves them in a manner no character at all of their own. It is confidently said, by those who have thought it worth while to make the trial, that nothing can be more insipid than the conversation of a player on any other subject than that of his profession. I cannot indeed answer for this remark, having it only by report, and ne-

ver having exchanged a word with one of that employment in my life. However, if it holds, a degree of the same effect must necessarily be wrought upon those who attend the stage.

But folly or bad management is not all that is to be laid to the charge of players: they are almost universally vicious, and of such abandoned characters, as might justly make those who defend the stage ashamed to speak of learning virtue under such masters. Can men learn piety from the profane, mortification from the sensual, or modesty from harlots? And will any deny that hired stage-players have always, and that deservedly, borne these characters? Nay, though it could be supposed, that the spectators received no hurt themselves, how is it possible that the performances of such persons can be attended, or their trade encouraged without sin?

This shews also, that attending a good play, even supposing there were a few unexceptionable, cannot be vindicated upon Christian principles. It is pleaded for the new tragedy* lately introduced into our theatre, that it is an attempt to reform the stage, and make it more innocent or more useful. What this piece is in itself, no body can say with certainty till it be published, though the account given of it by report is not exceeding favourable. But let it be ever so excellent in it-

* Douglafs,

self, the bringing of one good play upon the stage is altogether insufficient, nay, is a method quite improper for reforming it. An author of a truly good piece would rather bury it in oblivion, than lend his own credit and that of his work, for the support of those that are bad. A Christian can never attend the stage, consistently with his character, till the scheme in general be made innocent or useful. He must not sin himself, nor contribute to the sins of others, in a certain degree, because, unless he do so, they will sin without him in a higher degree. In short, such an attempt can be considered in no other light, than as encouraging a pernicious practice, and supporting a criminal association. The better the play is, or the better the characters of those who attend it are, the greater the mischief, because the stronger the temptation to others who observe it.

There is one inducement to attendance on the stage, which hath more influence than all the arguments with which its advocates endeavour to colour over the practice: that it is become a part of fashionable education. Without it, young persons of rank think they cannot have that knowledge of the world which is necessary to their accomplishment; that they will be kept in rusticity of carriage, or narrowness of mind, than which nothing is more contemptible in the eyes

of the rest of mankind; that they will acquire the character of stiff and precise, and be incapable of joining in polite conversation, being ignorant of the topics upon which it chiefly turns. No better than these, it is to be feared, are the reasons that many parents suffer their children to attend this and other fashionable diversions. How then shall we remove this difficulty? Why truly, by saying with the apostle John, to such as will receive it, “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*.” It is certainly the greatest madness to seek the knowledge of the world by partaking with bad men in their sins. Whatever knowledge cannot otherwise be acquired, is shameful, and not honourable. How cruel then are those parents, who, instead of endeavouring to inspire their children with a holy and manly resolution, of daring to appear singular in an adherence to their duty, suffer them to be plunged in sin, that they may not be defective in politeness. Why should the world, or any thing else, be known, but in order to our spiritual improvement †? Therefore, all that is truly valuable, must

* 1 John ii. 16.

† This is not meant to condemn all human accomplishments, which have not an immediate reference to our religious improvement, but to affirm, that they ought to be kept in a just sub-

must, by the very supposition, be innocently learned, and to bear with a noble disdain the scoffs of more experienced sinners is the greatest glory.

Like to the above is another argument in favour of the stage, that men must have amusements, and that the stage is much better than many others, which would probably be put in its place. It is said, that of all the time spent by the fashionable part of the world, at present, in diversions, that which they allot to the stage is most innocently, or least hurtfully employed. Is there any more in this, than a declaration of the shameful luxury and degeneracy of the present age, an alarming token of approaching judgment? Do not such persons know, that all serious Christians condemn every one of these criminal pleasures, and will never allow it as any

subordination and subserviency, to the great and chief end of man. There are, no doubt, a great number of arts, both useful and ornamental, which have other immediate effects, than to make men holy; and because they are, by the greatest part of the world, abused to the worst of purposes, they are considered as having no connexion with religion at all. But this is a mistake; for a good man will be directed in the choice and application of all such arts, by the general and leading purpose of his life. And as he who eats for no other or higher end than pleasing his palate, is justly condemned as a mean and groveling sensualist, so, whoever has no farther view in his education and accomplishment, than to shine and make a figure in the fashionable world, does not in that respect act the part of a Christian. In short, these arts are among the number of indifferent things, which should be supremely and ultimately directed to the glory of God. When they are not capable of this, either immediately or remotely, much more when they are contrary to it, they must be condemned.

advantage to exchange one of them for another. But it is less surprising to hear such palliative arguments used in conversation: an author above referred to has been bold enough, in print, to reason in the same way. He says, “That no
 “ abuse was ever admitted on any stage, but
 “ might pass for perfect decency, when com-
 “ pared to what may have been often heard of,
 “ at a gossiping, a merry-making, or a meeting
 “ of young fellows*.” Again, after telling us, that we cannot hope to abolish the stage, he says,
 “ And if we could, we should only make way
 “ for the return of drunkenness, gaming, and
 “ rude cabals, which the more decent conversa-
 “ tion and manners of civilized times have in a
 “ great manner abolished.” I lay hold of this gentleman’s reasoning, who pleads for civilizing the world, and not sanctifying it, as a confession of the weakness of his cause, and a confirmation of all the arguments produced in this treatise against the stage. For, if he meant to show, that stage-plays were agreeable to the purity of the gospel, that drunkenness is worse (if indeed it be so) could be no evidence of it at all. He must therefore, if he speaks to any purpose, plead for the toleration of sinful diversions, because they are comparatively less sinful than others; and if

* Morality of stage-plays seriously considered, p. 19.

that

that is the case, I detest his principles, and so will every Christian.

Having mentioned this author, perhaps it may be expected, that I should take some notice of the other arguments brought by him in defence of the stage. It is not easy either to enumerate or comprehend them, they are thrown together in such confusion, and expressed in such vague and general terms. He says, (page 3.) “The
 “ people of this island are not inferior to those
 “ of any other age or country whatever. This
 “ will be a presumption, that if plays are a poi-
 “ son, it is at least but slow in its operation.”
 And (p. 17.) “ We may venture to ask, Whe-
 “ ther knowledge, whether industry and com-
 “ merce have declined in this city (Edinburgh)
 “ since the play-house was first opened here.
 “ It will be owned, that they have rather in-
 “ creased.” I would venture to ask, What sort
 of an argument this is, and what follows from
 it, though both his assertions were allowed to be
 true, which yet may easily be in many respects
 controverted. If the stage, as he would insinu-
 ate, be the cause of our improvement, then is
 his argument self-contradictory, for we ought to
 be greatly inferior in purity to the people of other
 countries, who have enjoyed the reforming stage
 much longer, which is contrary to his supposition.
 The truth is, the stage is not the cause, but the

consequence of wealth; and it is neither the cause nor consequence of goodness or knowledge, except so far as it certainly implies more knowledge than uncultivated savages possess, and is only to be found in what this author calls civilized nations. How easy were it for me to name several vices unknown to barbarians, which prevail in places of taste and polished manners. Should I at the same time insinuate, that these vices have contributed to improve us in knowledge and taste, it would be just such an argument as is here used in favour of the stage, and the plain meaning of both is, the abuse of knowledge is the cause of it.

It were worth while to consider a little our improvements in knowledge in this age, which are often the boast of not the most knowing writers. Perhaps it may be allowed, that there is now in the world a good deal of knowledge of different kinds, but it is plain we owe it to the labours of our predecessors, and not our own. And therefore, it is to be feared, we may improve it no better than many young men do, who come to the easy possession of wealth of their father's getting. They neither know the worth nor the use of it, but squander it idly away, in the most unprofitable or hurtful pursuits. It is, doubtless, an easy thing at present, to acquire a superficial knowledge, from Magazines, Reviews, Dictionaries,

aries,

aries, and other helps to the slothful student. He is now able, at a very small expence, to join the beau and the scholar, and triumphs in the taste of this enlightened age, of which he hath the comfort to reflect, that he himself makes a part. But, for our mortification, let us recollect, that as several writers have observed, human things never continue long at a stand. There is commonly a revolution of knowledge and learning, as of riches and power. For as states grow up from poverty to industry, wealth, and power; so, from these they proceed to luxury and vice; and by them are brought back to poverty and subjection. In the same manner, with respect to learning, men rise from ignorance to application; from application to knowledge; this ripens into taste and judgment; then, from a desire of distinguishing themselves, they superadd affected ornaments, become more fanciful than solid; their taste corrupts with their manners, and they fall back into the gulph of ignorance. The several steps of these gradations commonly correspond; and if we desire to know in what period of each, we of this nation are at present, it is probable, we are in the age of luxury as to the first, and, in the eve at least, of a false and frothy taste as to learning, and may therefore fear, that as a late very elegant writer expresses it, We shall relapse fast into barbarism.

Another argument produced by this author, is, that the apostle Paul, in preaching at Athens, quotes a sentence from one of the Greek poets, and, in writing to the Corinthians, has inserted into the sacred text a line from a Greek play which now subsists.—“This (he says) is sufficient to connect the defence of plays with the honour of Scripture itself.” The fact is not denied, though he has given but a poor specimen of the knowledge of this age, by mistaking, in the first of these remarks, the expression quoted by the apostle: for this sentence, “In him we live, and move, and have our being,” which, he says, is a very sublime expression, and beautifully applied by the apostle, was not cited from the poet, but the following, “For we are also his offspring.” But supposing he had, (as he easily might) have hit upon the true citation, what follows from it? Did ever any body affirm, that no poet could write, or no player could speak any thing that was true? And what is to hinder an inspired writer from judging them out of their own mouths? What concern has this with the stage? If it implies any defence of the stage in general, it must imply a stronger defence of the particular play and poem, from which the citations are taken. Now, I dare say, neither this author, nor any other will assert, that

that these are in all respects agreeable to the Christian character. These citations do no other way connect the defence of the stage with the honour of Scripture, than a minister's citing, in writing or discourse, a passage from Horace or Juvenal, would connect the defence of all the obscenity that is to be found in the rest of their works, with the honour of preaching.

The only thing further in this essay not obviated in the preceding discourse, is what he says on the subject of the poor. "That the expence
 " laid out on the stage does not hinder the
 " charitable supply of the poor, and that they
 " suffer no loss by it, for it comes at last into
 " the hands of the poor, and is paid as the price of
 " their labour.—Every player must be maintain-
 " ed, clothed and lodged." It does not suit with my present purpose to enter into controversial altercation, or to treat this author with that severity he deserves; and therefore I shall only say, that his reasoning upon this subject is the very same from which Doctor Mandeville draws this absurd and hated consequence, "Private vices
 " are public benefits."

The truth is, a serious person can scarce have a stronger evidence of the immorality of the stage, than the perusal of these little pieces of satyr, which have been published, in so great a variety,
 against

against the presbytery of Edinburgh, within these few weeks, because of their public admonition against it. They offer no other defence, but deriding the preaching of the gospel, blasphemously comparing the pulpit with the stage, and recrimination upon some who are supposed to live inconsistently with their character. It is not worth while to spend three words in determining whether drunkenness, deceit and hypocrisy are worse than the stage or not; but if that is the strongest argument that can be offered in its support, wo to all those who attend it. The new reformed tragedy has indeed been very unlucky in its advocates. There is an old saying, that a man is known by his company. If this be true also of a play, which one would think it should, as it must be chiefly to the taste of congenial minds, by those who have appeared in defence of Douglass, it is a work of very little merit.

It may be expected, that, having brought this performance on the field, I should add some further reflections, upon the aggravated sin of Ministers writing plays, or attending the stage. But though it is a very plain point, and indeed because it is so, it would draw out this treatise to an immoderate length. If any man makes a question of this, he must be wholly ignorant of the nature and importance of the ministerial character and office. These therefore it would be
necessary

necessary to open distinctly, and to consider the solemn charge given to ministers in Scripture, to watch over the souls of their people, as those “who must give on account unto God;” to give themselves wholly to their duty, since some of those committed to them are, from day to day, entering on an unchangeable state, whose blood, when they die unconverted, shall be required at the hand of the unfaithful pastor. None can entertain the least doubt upon this subject, who believe the testimony of Moses and the prophets, of Christ and his apostles, and, if they believe not their writings, neither will they believe my words.

Instead therefore of endeavouring to prove, I will make bold to affirm, that writing plays is an employment wholly foreign to the office, and attending theatrical representations an entertainment unbecoming the character of a minister of Christ? And must not both, or either of them, be a sacrilegious abstraction of that time and pains, which ought to have been laid out for the benefit of his people? Is it not also flying in the face of a clear and late act of parliament, agreeably to which the lords of council and session not long ago found the stage contrary to law in this country? And though the law is eluded, and the penalty evaded, by advertizing a concert, after which will be performed, gratis, a tragedy, &c.

Yet surely, the world in judging of characters, or a church court in judging of the conduct of its members, will pay no regard to the poor and shameful evasion. Can we then think of this audacious attempt at the present juncture, without applying to ourselves the words of Isaiah, “ And “ in that day did the Lord God of hosts call to “ weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, “ and to girding with sackcloth, and behold joy “ and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, “ eating flesh and drinking wine; let us eat and “ drink, for to-morrow we die. And it was re- “ vealed in mine ears by the Lord of hosts, surely “ this iniquity shall not be purged from you till “ you die, saith the Lord of hosts,” Isa. xxii.

12, 13, 14.

E C C L E.

Ecclesiastical Characteristics:

OR, THE

ARCANA of CHURCH POLICY.

BEING AN

HUMBLE ATTEMPT

TO OPEN THE

MYSTERY of MODERATION.

WHEREIN IS SHEWN,

A plain and easy way of attaining to the
CHARACTER of a MODERATE MAN,
as at present in repute in the CHURCH
of SCOTLAND.

THE SIXTH EDITION.

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Academical Characters

A Plain and Easy Way of Attending to the

MUMBLE ATTEMPT

MYSTERY OF MODERNITY

WHICH IS

A Plain and Easy Way of Attending to the
CHARACTER OF A MODERN MAN
AS APPEARS IN THE CHURCH
OF SCOTLAND

THE SIXTH EDITION

TO THE
DEPARTED GHOST,
OR
SURVIVING SPIRIT,

Of the late Reverend

Mr. ———, Minister in ———

WORTHY SIR,

DURING a great part of the time I spent in composing the following treatise, I was fully resolved to have sent it abroad by itself, and not to have dedicated it to any person in the world; and indeed, in a confined sense of the word **WORLD**, you see I have still kept my resolution. The reason of this my intended purpose was, that I find the Right Honourable the Earl of Shaftsbury, in an advertisement, or ticket, prefixed to his works, hath expressed a contempt and disdain

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dain of all dedications, prefaces, or other discourses, by way of forerunners to a book. This he seems to think a mean and cowardly way in an author, of creeping into the world, and begging the reception which he dares not claim.

Being satisfied, therefore, of the justness of this observation, and being also somewhat confident (as his Lordship seems to have been) of the intrinsic worth of my performance, I intended to have come forth in this masterly manner.

But, upon more mature deliberation, I discovered, that the only objections against dedications were the self-diffidence just now mentioned, and the suspicion of flattery for selfish ends, which is so contrary to disinterested benevolence; so that if I could frame a dedication which should be quite beyond the imputation of any of these two purposes, I should then wholly escape his Lordship's censure. This aim, I think, I have fallen nothing short of, when I have dedicated this book to you, most illustrious SHADE! as my most malignant enemies cannot but grant, that I could have no expectation of your encouraging me, either
by

DEDICATION. cxvii

by buying my book, recommending it to others, or giving it away to the poor; nay, or even so much as for my translation to a better benefice in assembly or commission.

It startled me a little, that this conduct might perhaps, by evil-disposed persons, be represented as an approach to popery, and resembling their worshipping of saints: but I hope this can scarcely be imputed to me, in the present case, since you never were esteemed a saint while you lived, nor ever thirsted after that title.

Another more material objection occurred to me, That a dedication to a dead man, is either almost, or altogether unprecedented. But I am not much concerned, though this method of proceeding should be thought bold and new, because this is the character which the incomparable Mr. — gives of his own essays upon the principles of morality and natural religion. Besides, I am not altogether destitute of authority: for the memorable Dean Swift has used the freedom to dedicate his Tale of a Tub to Prince Posterity: I have also seen a fatirical poem, called *Jure Divino*,
dedicated,

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dedicated, with great solemnity, to Prince (or rather, I believe, to King) Reason. If, therefore, one of these authors might dedicate a book to a faculty of the human mind, and the other to an abstract idea, I hope it is no great presumption in me to dedicate mine to you, though “in statu mortuorum;” especially as there is not a living man who hath so good a claim to the compliment of a treatise upon my subject.

But a more gravelling difficulty than any of these kept me some time in suspense, viz. how to get the book presented to you, as I did not find in myself any inclination to depart this life in order to transport it. After much trouble I was at length relieved, by reflecting, that Mr. Pope has assured us, that the ghosts of departed ladies always haunt the places in which they delighted while they were alive; and therefore, from analogy, it is to be supposed, that the same thing holds with regard to departed ministers. If this is the case, I look upon it as certain, that your chief residence is in the assembly-house at Edinburgh, where you have, in your life-time, both given and received so much pleasure.

For

DEDICATION. cxix

For though I will not limit you, in your unembodied state, from making circuits through the country, and visiting synods, or presbyteries, particularly in the M——se and G———y, where there are so many men after your own heart; yet, I dare say, you will not be absent from the assembly, nor any of the quarterly meetings of the commission, which hath so often saved the church from impending dangers.

It is therefore my purpose to go to Edinburgh in May next, when the assembly meets, of which I am a member, and there to lay before you my performance, hoping it will prove most delicious and favoury to all your senses, to the names of which, and the manner of their present operation, I am wholly a stranger.

It is probable you have not been accustomed, these two or three years past, to hear your own praises celebrated; and therefore I shall no farther launch out into them than to say, that there is not one branch of the character recommended in the following pages, in which you were not eminent; and that there never was one stone by you left unturned, for promoting

cxx DEDICATION.

moting the good cause.—That you may still sit upon the throne, and, by your powerful, though invisible influence, make the interest of moderation prevail, is the ardent wish, and the pious prayer of,

S I R,

Your most obedient

and admiring Servant.

P R E.

P R E F A C E

T O T H E

S E C O N D E D I T I O N .

Gratitudo obligeth me to acknowledge the kind reception which the world hath given to the following generous effort, for the honour of our church. This shews, either that panegyric is by no means so unacceptable to mankind in general, as some ill-natured authors insinuate; or that this of mine hath been executed with very uncommon skill. If this last should be the true solution, it would give me a double satisfaction. However, as the love of detraction, in some persons, is incurable, and as many have such ulcerated minds, that there is no possibility of applying to them, even in the softest and most friendly manner, without offending them; to prevent the spreading of any such baleful influence, I think it proper to add a few things upon the structure of this performance; part of which should have accompanied the first edition, if it had not pleased the publisher to print it without any communication with the author.

VOL. II.

G

From.

From the beginning I foresaw it would occur as an objection, that I have not properly denominated that party in the church which I have chosen to celebrate by the words moderation and moderate men. It is alledged, that, for these two or three years past, they have made little use of these words, and have chosen rather to represent themselves as supporters of the constitution, as acting upon constitutional principles, as lovers of order, and enemies to confusion, &c. while, at the very same time, the opposite party have taken up the title of moderation, and pretend to be acting upon moderate principles. It is also hinted, that the just severities which the times render necessary, require a different phraseology.

In answer to this I observe, that my treatise has really been a work of time (as, I hope, appears from its maturity) the most part of it having been composed above two years ago, and before this change of language was introduced. It was originally intended only to exhibit a general view of the different parties in religion and learning among us; though it hath now admitted a very particular account of the latest and most recent differences in the church, chiefly because the present seems likely to be an æra of some consequence, and to be big with some very great events, as well as persons. Besides,

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Besides, I considered, that this name of moderate men was much longer the designation of my friends, than those lately invented; and as they do not even at present allow the claim of their enemies to that character, it is probable they intend to take it up again, as soon as the designs now upon the anvil shall be completely executed. As to the name of moderation being inconsistent with a proper vigour, in support of their own measures, and wholesome severities against their enemies, it is an objection altogether frivolous, as appears from the following example: A certain minister being asked the character of a friend of his, who had come up to the assembly, and particularly, whether or not he was a moderate man? answered, O yes, fierce for moderation!

I think it proper to inform the reader, that one great reason of the uncommon choice of a patron to this work was, an opinion I had long entertained, and in support of which I could alledge very strong arguments, from the sayings of some great men and philosophers, as well as the practice of a famous ancient nation, with regard to their kings; that the true and proper time of ascertaining and fixing a man's character is when he has done his whole work; and that posterity hath as good a right to the possession and use of his fame after death,

CXXIV P R E F A C E.

as his contemporaries to his abilities during his life. At the same time, though the author had a particular hero in view, yet he chose to publish it without mentioning his name, or place of abode, or indeed any circumstance foreign to the character which might distinguish the person. The design of acting in this manner was, that in case the world should universally agree to ascribe it to the same person he had in his eye, it might be such a justification of the truth of the character, as very few modern dedications can boast of.

This invention I challenge as wholly my own; and do hereby allow and recommend the use of it to all future authors, hoping it will change the fashion among writers of character and self-esteem, from using no dedications at all, to forming them upon a plan entirely new. Let them each keep his patron in his eye, draw his character as exactly and graphically as possible, and publish it without a name, or with this inscription Detur dignissimo: then if the world do universally ascribe it to the person intended, let his name be prefixed to the second edition; and it will be more true, and sterling, and acceptable praise, than any hitherto found in that class of panegyrics. But if, on the contrary, the world shall ascribe it to a different person, let the author acquiesce in that determination,

7

rejoice

rejoice in so good an expedient for preventing a blunder, and make his court to his new patron, who will hardly refuse to admit him after so refined and delicate a compliment. I dare not recommend any thing like this method, with respect to the books already printed, because it would occasion so violent a controversy about the property of many dedications, as could not be ended but by the sword; they being most of them addressed to great men, who have agreed upon this method of revenging gross affronts, and terminating, in the last resort, all important disputes. Should any ask, why I have not followed my own rule, by now prefixing the name of my patron? they are to understand, that, for reasons known to myself, I intend to defer it till the nineteenth or twentieth edition.

If any shall think fit to blame me, for writing in so bold and assuming a way, through the whole of my book, I answer, I have chosen it on purpose, as being the latest and most modern way of writing; and the success it has already met with, is a demonstration of its propriety and beauty. The same thing also, to my great satisfaction, is a proof of the justice of a late author's scheme of Moral Philosophy, who has expelled mortification, self-denial, humility, and silence, from among the number of the VIRTUES, and transferred them,

as he expresseth himself, to the opposite column; that is to say, the column of VICES. That scheme, I dare say, will stand its ground; and, as a critic, I observe, that it was probably the single circumstance just now mentioned, that brought upon the author an adversary who, though possessed of many truly good qualities, had the misfortune to be always eminent for modesty, and other bastard virtues of the same class.

There are some, I find, of opinion, that it was neither necessary nor useful for me, to give so many examples of the conduct of the moderate, in the illustration of the several maxims; and these eminent persons themselves seem to feel some pain, from the exposing of their virtues to the public view. But is it not an established truth, that example teaches better than precept? Is there any thing more usual in moral writings, than to illustrate them by extracts from the lives of the philosophers, and other heroes, of ancient times? And since the advantage of example is commonly said to be, that it is a living law, or that it puts life into the precept, surely the best of all examples must be those of persons really and literally alive: neither should such persons themselves be offended with this conduct; since, as has been hinted above, mortification and self-denial, are no more to be reckoned among the virtues, but the vices.

How-

However, I have the comfort to reflect, that from the opposite opinions of those who have passed their judgment on this performance, I am in the middle, and consequently in the right: for there have been transmitted to me many noble instances of moderation, in expectation, no doubt, that they should be added to my collection. I thankfully acknowledge my obligations to these kind contributors, but cannot make any use of their contributions at present; for it would, at least, double the bulk of the treatise, and thereby render it less commodious for pocket-carriage. Further, I do assure them, it was not through want of materials that a greater number of examples was not produced, but from having duly weighed the proper proportion for a work of this extent; and to what hath been fixed with so much deliberation, I am resolved stedfastly to adhere.

It were indeed to be wished, that every man was left to himself, and allowed, in peace and quietness to finish his own work his own way: for I have seldom observed these things called hints and suggestions, to have any other effect than to perplex and mislead. An author's situation, when persecuted with them, seems to me to resemble that of a gentleman building a house, or planning out a garden, who, if he hearkens to the advice, or attempts to gratify the taste, of every visitor, will, in all probability,

bility, produce, upon the whole, a collection of inconsistencies, a system of deformity.

I am very sorry to be obliged thus to speak in obscurity, by returning a public answer to private observations; but cannot omit taking notice, that it has been much wondered at, that a certain very eminent person has been lost in the croud of heroes, without any particular or distinguishing compliment paid to himself. Now, this did not by any means flow from a want of respect and esteem, but from a distrust of my own abilities, and a despair of being able to do justice to so illustrious a character. Neither indeed was there any great necessity (excepting mere compliment) of spreading his fame, which hath already gone both far and wide. Besides, that his many and remarkable exploits, however strong and pregnant proofs they may be of benevolence and social affection, have some circumstances attending them, which render them more proper subjects of discourse than writing. The glare would be rather too great for even the strong eye sight of this generation to endure, when brought very near them. The sun is the most glorious of all objects in the firmament; and yet, though it were in the power of a painter to draw him in all his lustre, there would hardly be found a proper place for him in the largest palace in Great-Britain.

The

The only other objection I shall take notice of, is, that in one respect, I may be said to have drawn the picture larger than the life, in as much as I seem to suppose, that all moderate men do, in fact, possess every one of the virtues which I have made to enter into the perfection of the character. This objection, though the one most insisted upon, is evidently both false and foolish. No reader, of true discernment, can imagine any such thing. If it were so, there would be no occasion for my book at all; on the contrary, the various maxims inserted in it, and the various examples produced in illustration of them, do shew that there are different degrees of perfection, even amongst the moderate themselves. They are a body, every member of which hath neither the same abilities, nor the same office. They are also a body most firmly united, for mutual defence and support: so much, I confess, I intended to intimate; and that, on this account, they are intitled to a sort of community of goods, and mutual participation of each others excellencies. A head may very well boast of the beauty, elegance and activity of the hands, or the comely proportion and strength of the limbs belonging to it: and yet, though they are one body, it would be ridiculous to suppose, that the head or hands are always in the dirt,

CXXX P R E F A C E.

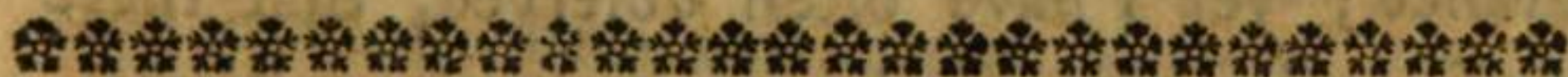
dirt, when they have the feet to carry them through it.

This metaphor of a body, however common, is one of the justest and most significative imaginable, out of which a very long allegory might be formed; but I shall prosecute it no further at this time, except to acknowledge, that it convinces me of one real omission in my plan, viz. that what hath been just now hinted, I ought to have inserted as a thirteenth maxim, and illustrated it at large*. It would have been easy to shew, that the moderate are remarkable for the most perfect union and harmony, and for a firm and steadfast adherence to each other, in the prosecution of their designs. Neither is there any instance in which there is a stronger contrast or opposition between them and the orthodox; as manifestly appeared from the conduct of both parties in the General Assembly 1753. A friend of ours called the enemy, upon that occasion, a parcel of conscientious fools: had he then read the following maxims, which prove, that they have as little conscience as wisdom, it is probable he would have bestowed on them their true and proper character.

* This was done in the third edition.



ECCLESIASTICAL
CHARACTERISTICS.



INTRODUCTION.

THE reader will doubtless agree with me, that moderation is an excellent thing, and particularly the noblest character of a church-man. It is also well known, that as all churches have usually in them a moderate, and a zealous, high-flying, wild party; so our church hath at present a certain party, who glory in, and fight for moderation; and who (it is to be hoped justly) appropriate to themselves wholly the character of moderate men: neither is it a small presage of a glorious and blessed state of the church, in its approaching periods, that so many of our young men are smit-

ten with the love of moderation, and generally burn with desire to appear in that noble and divine character.

This hath inspired me with the ambition and expectation of being helpful in training up as many as are desirous of it, in this most useful of all sciences. For however perfectly it is known, and however steadily practised by many who are adepts; and notwithstanding there are some young men, of pregnant parts, who make a sudden and surprizing proficiency, without much assistance; yet I have often observed, that there are several persons, who err, in many instances, from the right path, boggle at sundry particular steps of their leaders, and take a long time before they are thoroughly confirmed in their principles and practice. The same persons also, by an unstable conduct, or by an imprudent or unseasonable discovery of their designs, have brought a reproach upon their party, and been an obstruction to whatever work they had then in hand.

These bad effects, I humbly conceive, flow chiefly, if not only, from the want of a complete system of moderation, containing all the principles of it, and giving a distinct view of their mutual influence one upon another, as well as proving their reasonableness, and shewing, by examples, how they ought to be put in practice.

There is no work of this kind, to my knowledge, yet extant, which renders my present undertaking of it the more laudable, and will, I hope, render it the more acceptable.

I must inform the reader, that after I was fully convinced of the necessity of some such piece as what follows, but before I entered upon it myself, I earnestly entreated several of the most eminent men of the moderate stamp among us, those burning and shining lights of our church, who are, and are esteemed to be, our leaders, that some of them would set about it. However, they all devolved it upon me; and made this satisfying excuse for themselves, that they were so busied in acting moderation, that they could not have time to write upon it. This soon led me to think, what would become of many noble designs, and what advantage our discontented zealots might take, if any of the expert steersmen of this ecclesiastical vessel of ours should retire from the helm; but so long time as would be necessary to bring a work of such a nature, to the perfection in strength, symmetry, and elegance, that the reader will perceive even this of mine is arrived at.

I shall now proceed to the principal part of the work, after I have informed the reader of the plan of it; which is briefly this, to enumerate distinctly and in their proper order and connection, all the

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the several maxims upon which moderate men conduct themselves: and forasmuch as the justice of many of them, being refined pieces of policy, is not very evident at first sight, I shall subjoin to each an illustration and confirmation of it, from reason or experience, or both. N. B. I shall make but very little use of Scripture, because that is contrary to some of the maxims themselves; as will be seen in the sequel.

M A X I M I.

All ecclesiastical persons, of whatever rank, whether principals of colleges, professors of divinity, ministers, or even probationers, that are suspected of heresy, are to be esteemed men of great genius, vast learning, and uncommon worth; and are, by all means, to be supported and protected.

All moderate men have a kind of fellow-feeling with heresy: and as soon as they hear of any one suspected, or in danger of being prosecuted for it, zealously and unanimously rise up in his defence. This fact is unquestionable. I never knew a moderate man in my life, that did not love and honour a heretic, or that had not an implacable hatred at the persons and characters of heresy-hunters; a name with which we have thought proper to stigmatize these sons of Belial,
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who begin and carry on prosecutions against men for heresy in church-courts.

It is related of the apostle John, and an ugly story it is, that upon going into a public bath, and observing the heretic Cerinthus there before him, he retired with the utmost precipitation, lest the edifice should fall, and crush him, when in company with such an enemy of the truth. If the story be true, the apostle's conduct was ridiculous and wild; but Dr. Middleton has shown that the story is not true; and indeed, the known benevolence and charity of John's writings make it highly improbable. However, not to enter into that controversy, whether it be true or not, the conduct of all moderate men is directly opposite.

As to the justice of this maxim, many solid reasons may be given for it.—Compassion itself, which is one of the finest and most benevolent feelings of the human heart, moves them to the relief of their distressed brother.—Another very plain reason may be given for it: moderate men are, by their very name and constitution, the reverse, in all respects, of bigotted zealots. Now, it is well known, that many of this last sort, both clergy and common people, when they hear of a man suspected of heresy, conceive an aversion at him, even before they know any thing of the case; nor after he is acquitted,

quitted (as they are all of them commonly in our church-courts) can they ever come to entertain a favourable opinion of him. The reverse of this then is, to be as early and as vigorous in his defence, as they are in his prosecution, and as implicit in our belief of his orthodoxy, as they are in their belief of his error.

I remember, when I was discoursing once to this purpose, a certain raw unexperienced person said, he had always thought, that not moderation, but lukewarmness and indifference to truth, was the reverse of excessive zeal; and that moderation was situated in the middle betwixt the two. To whom I answered, Young man, you do not reflect, that no fierce man can be resisted but by one as fierce, nor overcome but by one fiercer than himself; if, therefore, no body would oppose the zealots, but such calm midsmen as you mention, in every such instance the balance of power must lean to their side, and the poor heretic must fall a sacrifice, to the no small detriment of the cause of moderation; which, by the bye, is commonly supported by the heretics in their stations, and therefore they deserve a grateful return.

This brings to my mind another reason for the maxim, viz. That heretics being so nearly related to the moderate men, have a right to claim their protection out of friendship and personal

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sonal regard. This serves a very noble end; for it vindicates the Christian religion from the objection of some infidels, who affirm, that it does not recommend private friendship; now moderate men having all a very great regard to private friendship, and personal connections, do, by their practice, which is the most solid way, confute this slander.

I may add to these another argument for the great character of heretics, as asserted in the maxim, which I picked up from the preaching of a seceding minister. He told his hearers, that when the devil looks out for an instrument to propagate error, he never makes choice of a weak silly man, but one able and learned; as well knowing, I suppose, that though God can support his cause by any instrument whatever, yet he needs always the best and most sufficient he can get. Now, though I hope no man will reckon me of this fanatic's principles, so far as to think the devil the source of error; yet the citation serves my purpose, as it shews that he himself was convinced of the ability and learning of heretics; and all the world knows, that the testimony of an enemy is the strongest of all evidences upon a man's side.

I shall conclude this maxim with observing, that such tenderness for heretics, however due from some, is yet, in many of the moderate character,

rafter, an instance of the most heroic and generous friendship. It is quite disinterested, as they themselves run not the smallest hazard of ever being in the like circumstances. Heretics are commonly an honest sort of people, but with all their book-learning, of no great stock of prudence or policy. They publish and assert whatever they believe upon all points, without considering the reception it is like to meet with, from those of opposite principles. They affront the public to its face, which Lord Shaftsbury tells us ought not to be done. On the other hand, men thorough-paced in moderation, discover their principles only at such times, and to such persons, as are able to bear them. By this means they preserve themselves from heresy: and indeed they cannot possibly fall into it, unless by mistake; in which case, as soon as they are challenged, (if it is like to be attended with any temporal inconveniency) they deny it, explain it away, or repent, and ask pardon.

In all this they follow the noble example of Mr. ———, who, in the assembly-debates, upon Professor Simson's affair, happening to say something that was challenged by one present as heresy, immediately replied, "Moderator, " If that be heresy, I renounce it."

M A X I M II.

When any man is charged with loose practices, or tendencies to immorality, he is to be screened and protected as much as possible; especially if the faults laid to his charge be, as they are incomparably well termed in a sermon, preached by a hopeful youth that made some noise lately, “good-humoured vices.”

The reason upon which this maxim is founded may be taken from the reasons of the former, “mutatis mutandis;” there being scarcely any of them that does not hold equally in both cases. A libertine is a kind of practical heretic, and is to be treated as such. Dr. Tillotson observes, in one of his sermons, that the worst of all heresies is a bad life: now, if instead of worst, which is an uncomely expression, you would read greatest, in that passage, then a libertine is the greatest of all heretics, and to be honoured in proportion. Even the apostle Paul (who is very seldom of any use to us in our reasonings) seems to suppose, that they are men of most knowledge, who are most free and bold in their practice; and that they are only weak brethren, who are filled with scruples. The weak man is restrained and confined by his narrow conscience; but the strong man believeth that he
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may EAT, and, by parity of reason, DRINK all things.

In order to understand the nature of “good-humoured vices,” the reader may please to take notice, that it is an observation of Lord Shaftsbury, that “the best time for thinking upon religious subjects, is when a man is merry, and in good humour:” and so far is this observation drawn from nature, that it is the time commonly chosen for that purpose, by many who never heard of his lordship, or his writings. Whatever, therefore, serves to promote merriment, and heighten good humour, must so far serve for the discovery of religious truth. But as there are many ways of making a person merry, which narrow-minded people will call vice; from thence, in compliance with common language, arises the new compound “good-humoured vices.” It is not, however, so to be understood, as if either the inventor of it, or those who love and patronize him, mean any thing by it but what is, “in their apprehension,” both innocent and laudable.

Let it also be observed, that as gravity is almost a necessary consequence of solitude, “good-humoured vices” are certainly “social pleasures,” and such as flow from, and show benevolence; and this is an affection for which our whole fraternity have the highest regard, insomuch that

no surer mark can be taken of a man's being ONE OF US, than the frequent returns of this expression in his discourses or writings.

It will serve further for the support of this maxim, that according to modern discoveries, there is a great analogy between the "moral virtues," or, if you will, the "science of morals," and the "fine arts:" and it is on account of this analogy, that most of the present reigning expressions upon the subject of morals, are borrowed from the arts, as "beauty, order, proportion, harmony, decency, &c." It is also established long since, and well known as a principle in the fine arts, that a certain freedom and boldness of manner is what chiefly constitutes grace and beauty. Why then should not approbation be founded upon the same grounds in both cases? Why should not a bold practice be as beautiful in real, as a bold hand is in imitated life? especially as all great geniuses have actually laid claim to this as their peculiar privilege, not to be confined to common forms; and that in opposition to the bulk of mankind, who through want of taste, are not able to relish the finest performances in any of the kinds.

I must not, however, omit taking notice, to prevent mistakes, of one exception that must be made from this maxim; that is, that when the person to whose charge any faults are laid, is
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reputed orthodox in his principles, in the common acceptation of that word, or comes in by orthodox influence, in that case they are all to be taken for granted as true, and the evil of them set forth in the liveliest colours. In consequence of this, he is to be prosecuted and torn to pieces on account of these crimes. But if it so happen, that he cannot be convicted upon a trial, then it is best to make use of things as they really are; that is, to express suspicions, to give ingenious and dubious hints, and, if possible, ruin him without any trial at all. There was a noble example of this given a few years ago, in the case of a settlement in the bounds of a presbytery, very many of whom are eminent in moderation. In that case, there were several faults laid to the charge of the candidate; and yet, tho' he himself very much insisted upon an inquiry into their truth, and a judgment upon their relevancy, the presbytery wisely refused to do either the one or the other, but left them to have their own natural weight in fame, rumour, and conversation.

The necessity of this exception is very evident: for, in the supposed case, all the reasons for protection to the young man fail; to satisfy himself of which, let the reader view these reasons, as they are annexed to the first maxim, and save my book from the deformity of repetition.

M A X I M III.

It is a necessary part of the character of a moderate man, never to speak of the Confession of Faith but with a sneer; to give sly hints, that he does not thoroughly believe it; and to make the word orthodoxy a term of contempt and reproach.

The Confession of Faith, which we are now all laid under a disagreeable necessity to subscribe, was framed in times of hot religious zeal; and therefore it can hardly be supposed to contain any thing agreeable to our sentiments in these cool and refreshing days of moderation. So true is this, that I do not remember to have heard any moderate man speak well of it, or recommend it, in a sermon, or private discourse, in my time. And, indeed, nothing can be more ridiculous, than to make a fixed standard for opinions, which change just as the fashion of cloaths and dress. No complete system can be settled for all ages, except the maxims I am now compiling and illustrating; and their great perfection lies in their being ambulatory, so that they may be applied differently, with the change of times.

Upon this head some may be ready to object, That if the Confession of Faith be built upon the sacred Scriptures, then, change what will, it cannot,

not, as the foundation upon which it rests, remains always firm and the same. In answer to this, I beg leave to make a very new, and therefore striking comparison: When a lady looks at a mirror, she sees herself in a certain attitude and dress, but in her native beauty and colour; should her eye, on a sudden, be tinged with the jaundice, she sees herself all yellow and spotted; yet the mirror remains the same faithful mirror still, and the alteration arises not from it, but from the object that looks at it. I beg leave to make another comparison: When an old philosopher looked at the evening-star, he beheld nothing but a little twinkling orb, round and regular like the rest; but when a modern views it with a telescope, he talks of phases, and horns, and mountains, and what not; now this arises not from any alteration in the star, but from his superior assistance in looking at it. The application of both these similitudes I leave to the reader.

But besides these general reasons, there is one very strong particular reason why moderate men cannot love the Confession of Faith: moderation evidently implies a large share of charity, and consequently a good and favourable opinion of those that differ from our church; but a rigid adherence to the Confession of Faith, and high esteem of it, nearly borders upon, or gives great suspicion

suspicion of harsh opinions of those that differ from us: and does not experience rise up and ratify this observation? Who are the narrow-minded, bigotted, uncharitable persons among us? who are the severe censurers of those that differ in judgment? who are the damners of the adorable Heathens, Socrates, Plato, Marcus Antoninus, &c.? in fine, who are the persecutors of the inimitable heretics among ourselves? Who but the admirers of this antiquated composition, who pin their faith to other men's sleeves, and will not endure one jot less or different belief from what their fathers had before them! It is therefore plain, that the moderate man, who desires to inclose all intelligent beings in one benevolent embrace, must have an utter abhorrence at that vile hedge of distinction, the Confession of Faith.

I shall briefly mention a trifling objection to this part of our character, That by our subscription we sacrifice sincerity, the queen of virtues, to private gain and advantage. To which I answer, in the first place, That the objection proves too much, and therefore must be false, and can prove nothing: for, allowing the justice of the objection, it would follow, that a vast number, perhaps a majority, of the clergy of the church of England are villains; their printed sermons being, many of them, diametrically oppo-

site to the articles which they subscribe. Now, as this supposition can never be admitted by any charitable man, the objection from whence it flows, as a necessary consequence, must fall to the ground.

But further, what is there more insincere in our subscriptions, than in those expressions of compliment and civility, which all acknowledge lawful, although they rarely express the meaning of the heart! The design is sufficiently understood in both cases; and our subscriptions have this advantage above forms of compliment, in point of honesty, that we are at a great deal of pains usually to persuade the world that we do not believe what we sign; whereas the complaisant gentleman is very seldom at any pains about the matter.

What is said might suffice in so clear a case; but I am here able to give a proof of the improvement of the age, by communicating to the reader a new way of subscribing the Confession of Faith, in a perfect consistency with sincerity, if that be thought of any consequence: it is taken from the method of attesting some of our gentlemen elders to the general assembly. Many insist, that they ought to be attested, and do attest them, as qualified in all respects, if the attestors are wholly ignorant about the matter; because, in that case, there is no evidence to the contrary,
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and the presumption ought to lie on the favourable side. Now, as every new discovery should be applied to all the purposes for which it may be useful, let this method be adopted by the intrants into the ministry, and applied to their subscription of the Confession of Faith. Nothing is more easy than for them to keep themselves wholly ignorant of what it contains; and then they may, with a good conscience, subscribe it as true, because it ought to be so.

M A X I M IV.

A good preacher must not only have all the above and subsequent principles of moderation in him, as the source of every thing that is good; but must, over and above, have the following special marks and signs of a talent for preaching. 1. His subjects must be confined to social duties. 2. He must recommend them only from rational considerations, viz. the beauty and comely proportions of virtue, and its advantages in the present life, without any regard to a future state of more extended self-interest. 3. His authorities must be drawn from heathen writers, NONE, or as few as possible, from Scripture. 4. He must be very unacceptable to the common people.

These four marks of a good preacher, or rules for preaching well, (for they serve equally for

both purposes) I shall endeavour distinctly to illustrate and confirm, that this important branch of my subject may be fully understood.

As to the first of these rules, That a preacher's subjects must be confined to "social duties," it is quite necessary in a moderate man, because his moderation teaches him to avoid all the high flights of evangelic enthusiasm, and the mysteries of grace, which the common people are so fond of. It may be observed, nay, it is observed, that all of our stamp avoid the word grace as much as possible, and have agreed to substitute the "moral virtues" in the room of the "graces of the Spirit," which is the orthodox expression. And indeed it is not in this only, but in all other cases, that we endeavour to improve the phraseology, and show, that besides sentiment, even in language itself, we are far superior to, and wiser than our fathers before us. I could show this by a great many examples, but that it would be too tedious; and therefore only add, to the one mentioned above, that where an ancient orthodox man, or even an old-fashioned modern, that thinks religion can never be mended, either in matter or manner, would have said, "a great degree of sanctification," a man of moderation and politeness will say, "a high pitch of virtue." Now, as this is the case, it is plain a moderate preacher must confine his subjects

jects to social duties chiefly, and not insist on such passages of Scripture as will, by the very repetition of them, contaminate his style, and may perhaps diffuse a rank smell of orthodoxy through the whole of his discourse.

After all, I cannot refuse, that it is still a more excellent way, for those who have talents equal to the undertaking, to seize an orthodox text, explain it quite away from its ordinary sense, and constrain it to speak the main parts of our own scheme. Thus a noble champion of ours chose once for his subject, Rom. viii. 2. "For the law of the Spirit of life, in Christ Jesus, hath made me free from the law of sin and death:" which he explained in this manner; "the law of the Spirit of life," that is, the moral sense—; "in Christ Jesus—," which is the sum of the Christian religion, &c. The advantage of this way is, that it is tearing the weapons out of the hands of the orthodox, and turning them against themselves. And it may perhaps, in time, have the effect to make our hearers affix our sense to their beloved Scriptures; or at least, which is the next thing, prevent them from being able to find any other.—However, I must acknowledge, that this way of doing is not for every man's management; and therefore I continue my advice to the generality, still to adhere to the rule as first delivered.

The second rule will be easily confirmed, That duties are to be recommended only from “rational considerations.” What can be imagined more foolish than to contradict this? If there be any thing in a sermon different from rational considerations, it must be irrational, that is to say, absurd. It is in this part of our scheme that we moderate men obtain a glorious triumph over our adversaries and despisers. Who but must smile, when they hear the contemptible, vulgar, ignorant, hot-headed country-elders, or silly women, led captive by them at their will, saying, they do not love this rational way of going to heaven!

But to explain this method a little further, the rational way of preaching is sometimes set in opposition to the pathetic way of raising the passions. This last is what we greatly disapprove of: there is something immoderate in the very idea of raising the passions; and therefore it is contrary to our character: nor was it ever known, that a truly moderate man raised or moved any affection in his hearers, unless perhaps the affection of anger against himself. We leave that to your vehement bawlers, or your whining lamenters, that are continually telling, “they will spend and be spent” for the salvation of their hearers, which Lord Shaftsbury elegantly derides, by calling it “the heroic passion of saving souls.” And let any unprejudiced person
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judge, whether there is not something vastly great, something like an heroic fortitude in that man, that can talk of future judgment, heaven and hell, with as much coolness and indifference as if it were a common matter. To say the truth, indeed, we do not often meddle with these alarming themes. However, as I observed upon the first mark of a good preacher, that it is glorious to rob the orthodox of a text, and make it bend to our plan; so it is also an uncommon excellence to treat these subjects with calmness, and to prove that we ought to do so. Thus a great proficient in our way, lately preaching upon Acts xxiv. 25. where Paul made Felix to tremble by his discourse, proved from it, that ministers ought not to raise the passions of their hearers. An ignorant observer would have thought that the passion of terror was raised in Felix, to a great degree, and that he was little better than a Cambuslang convict. But mark the lucky expression our hero got hold of: "As he reasoned of righteousness," &c. as he reasoned, that is, argued, and proved by rational considerations.

This example gives me a fine opportunity of making a kind of contrast, and shewing from fact, the difference between an orthodox and a moderate preacher. I myself heard one of the first kind, upon the text just now mentioned; and his first observation was, That the apostle Paul

was a faithful “reprover;” speaking home to Felix, 1. Of “righteousness;” to convince him of any iniquity he had been guilty of in his government. 2. Of “temperance;” which he said should be translated “contenance,” and was probably intended as a reproof to him and Druffilla, who were living in adultery. His next, and main observation was, That Felix was “convicted,” but “stified” his convictions, and delayed his repentance, saying, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” Then followed a great deal of stuff, which I do not incline to transcribe; but it was just what the vulgar call experimental preaching, I suppose to distinguish it from rational.

But how contrary to this did our moderate friend? He first observed, that St. Paul was a “moral,” or a “legal preacher;” discoursing of “righteousness” and “temperance,” without a word of “faith:” and then, that he was a “reasoning preacher,” that did not strive to raise peoples passions, but informed their judgment. I was indeed a little disappointed upon consulting the original, to find that the word used, which is *διαλεγόμενος*, signifies only, “continuing his discourse,” and so might be either in the “reasoning” or “pathetic” way; but I was satisfied by reflecting, that the word

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evidently includes both; and so "reasoning" being the best, it is to be supposed the apostle preferred it.

Agreeably to this rule, Lord Shaftsbury, and after him a bright luminary in our own church, gives an advice to all moderate clergymen, not to affect that idle title of "ambassadors" or "plenipotentiaries from heaven," so fondly claimed by zealots: and I take the liberty to suppose, that the reason of the advice was the same in both, viz. "That under this character zealots put on an air of authority, and deliver their message with a pathos, to which they would otherwise have been strangers." His lordship indeed explodes the conceit sufficiently; he asks, "Gentlemen, where is your commission? how has it been conveyed? where are the letters-patent? where the credentials?" with many more questions, easier for his lordship to ask, than for SOME PERSONS to answer.

The third rule, viz. recommending "virtue" from the authority and examples of the Heathens, is not only highly proper, because they were very virtuous, but hath this manifest advantage attending it, that it is a proper way of reasoning to two quite opposite kinds of persons. One is, such as are real Christians, who will be ashamed by the superior excellence of mere Heathens, as they

call them, and whom they so much despise. The other is, our present living Heathens, who pay no regard to the Christian religion at all; and therefore will only be moved by the authority of the persons they esteem. It is well known, there are multitudes in our island, who reckon Socrates and Plato to have been much greater men than any of the apostles, although (as the moderate preacher I mentioned lately told his hearers) the apostle Paul had an university-education, and was instructed in logic by professor Gamaliel. Therefore let religion be constantly and uniformly called "virtue," and let the Heathen philosophers be set up as the great patterns and promoters of it. Upon this head, I must particularly recommend M. Antoninus by name, because an eminent person of the moderate character says, his meditations is the BEST book that ever was written for forming the heart.

But perhaps the last part of this third rule will be thought to need most illustration and defence, viz. That NONE at all, "or very little use" is to be made of Scripture. And really, to deal plainly, the great reason of this is, that very few of the Scripture motives and arguments are of the moderate stamp; the most part of them are drawn from orthodox principles: for example, the apostle Paul cannot even say, "Husbands, love your wives," but his argument and example
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comes in these words, “as Christ also loved the church.” The apostle John also speaks in a very mysterious way, of union with Christ, and abiding in him, in order to bring forth fruit, which is his way of speaking for a virtuous life. Now let any indifferent person judge, how this kind of expression, and others of the like nature, such as mortifying the deeds of the body through the Spirit, would agree with the other parts of our discourses: they would be like opposite kinds of fluids which will not compound; they would be quite heterogeneous, which is against all the rules of fine writing, and hinders it from being an uniform, beautiful, and comely whole. Horace, in his art Art of Poetry, gives this as his very first observation,

“Humano capiti cervicem pictor equinam

“Jungere si velit”—————

Which my learned reader cannot fail both to remember and understand, and which I desire him to apply to this subject we are now upon. If it be said, that sermons are not poems, and therefore not to be composed by the rules of poetry: I answer, it is a mistake; many of our sermons, especially those composed by the younger sort among us, are poems; at least they are full of poetical flights, which comes much to the same thing: not to mention that the rule agrees equal-

ly to prose and poetry. How often have I heard parts of Mr. Addison's *Cato*, Young's *Night-Thoughts*, and divers other poems, in sermons? and, to say the truth, they were none of the worst parts of them. However, I would offer my advice, as that of a person of some experience, to all young preachers, not to do Dr. Young the honour of borrowing any thing from him again, because he is a snarling, fullen, gloomy, melancholy mortal, cites a great deal of Scripture; and particularly, because he has given a vile sneer at the practice I am just now recommending, in the following two lines of his *Universal Passion*.

When doctors Scripture for the classics quit,
Polite apostates from God's grace to wit.

I have only another advice to give upon this head, and that is, That when our young preachers think proper to borrow from modern printed poems, they would be pleased to transpose them a little, so to speak, that they may not be too easily discerned by young gentlemen who read the magazines. However, I am in great hopes we shall shortly be quite above the necessity of borrowing from any body, in order to make our sermons poetry: there are some persons of genius among us, that can make very good poetry of their own; of which I could produce some
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recent instances ; but I do not think it at present expedient.

The fourth and last rule for a preacher, is, that he must be “ very unacceptable to the people.” The Spectator, I remember, some where says, that most of the critics in Great-Britain seem to act as if the first rule of dramatic writing were, “ not to please.” Now, what they make the first rule of writing plays, I make the last rule for composing sermons ; not as being the least, but the most important. It is indeed the grand criterion, the most indispensable rule of all. Though one should pretend to adhere to all the former rules, and be wanting in this alone, he would be no more than “ a sounding brass, or “ a tinkling cymbal ;” pardon the expression, the importance of the matter requireth it. I shall put a case : Suppose a man should have the approbation of the very best judges, viz. those whose taste we ourselves allow to be good, if at the same time he happens to be acceptable to the common people, it is a sign that he must have some subtile refined fault, which has escaped the observation of the good judges aforesaid ; for there is no man even of our own fraternity, so perfect and uniform in judging right, as the common people are in judging wrong.

I hope there is little need of assigning reasons for this great characteristic of the art of preach-

preaching; I suppose it will be allowed to be, if not altogether, at least next to self-evident: all the several reasons that have been given for the particular maxims of moderation, concur in establishing this; for the people are all declared enemies of moderation, in its principles and practice; and therefore if moderation be right, they must be wrong. There is a known story of a Heathen orator, who, when the common people gave a shout of applause, during his pronouncing an oration, immediately turned about to a friend, and asked him, what mistake he had committed. Now if an audience of vulgar Heathens was allowed to be so infallibly wrong in their judgment, the same thing must hold, “a fortiori,” in an audience of vulgar Christians.

From this it evidently follows, that a popular preacher essentially signifies a bad preacher; and it is always so understood by us, whenever we use the expression. If we but hear it reported of any one, that he is very popular among the lower sort, we are under no difficulty of giving his character, without having heard him preach ourselves. In this case, fame is a certain guide to truth, by being inverted; for we detest and despise him, precisely in the same proportion that the people admire him. On the other hand, the truly moderate man is not only above the applause of the multitude, but he glories in their hatred,

hatred, and rejoices in himself, in proportion as he has been so happy as to provoke and disoblige them. Of this I could give several notable examples, were it not that it must certainly offend their modesty, not only to praise them in print, but even to publish their highest virtues.

But now, upon the whole, as a great critic observes, that there is sometimes more beauty shown in a composition, by receding from the rules of art, when an important point is to be gained, than by strictly adhering to them; so, all these rules notwithstanding, it shall be allowable for any moderate man, upon an extraordinary emergency, to break them for a good end: as for instance, he may speak even in Whitefield's style, when his settlement has the misfortune to depend upon the people; which I have known done with good success. We are also well satisfied, that Mr. T——r of Norwich, and such like first-rate writers, should make pompous collections of Scripture texts, as their truly laudable intention is, by altering Christianity, to reconcile it to moderation and common sense; and to find out a meaning to words, which the writers of them, as living in the infancy of the church, had not discernment enough to intend.

To conclude this maxim, it would be too formal for me, and too tedious to the reader, to enumerate all the objections that are, by some,
raised

raised against our way of preaching: I shall therefore mention but one, and show it is false; hoping that the reader will suppose, there is no more foundation for any of the rest. It is alledged, there is no method in our discourses, but that they consist in random flights, and general declamations. Nothing more untrue. The polite reader, or hearer, knows that there may be an excellent and regular method, where there are no formal distinctions of firstly, secondly, and thirdly: but, to cut off all occasion of cavil, let the world hereby know, that one of our most famed preachers chose once for his text, John xi. 29. and of that verse the following words, "He stinketh." He observed, we had there (or thereabouts) a description of the threefold state of a bad man: first, he sickened; secondly, he died; thirdly, he stank. This I take to have been an accuracy in point of method, to which it will not be easy to find a parallel.

M A X I M V.

A minister must endeavour to acquire as great a degree of politeness, in his carriage and behaviour, and to catch as much of the air and manner of a fine gentleman, as possibly he can.

This is usually a distinguishing mark between the moderate and the orthodox; and how much

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we have the advantage in it is extremely obvious. Good manners is undoubtedly the most excellent of all accomplishments, and in some measure supplies the place of them all when they are wanting. And surely nothing can be more necessary to, or more ornamental and becoming in a minister: it gains him easy access into the world, and frees him from that rigid severity which renders many of them so odious and detestable to the polite part of it. In former times, ministers were so monkish and recluse, for ordinary, and so formal when they did happen to appear, that all the jovial part of mankind, particularly rakes and libertines, shunned and fled from them; or, when unavoidably thrown into their company, were constrained, and had no kind of confidence to repose in them: whereas now, let a moderate, modern, well-bred minister go into promiscuous company, they stand in no manner of awe, and will even swear with all imaginable liberty. This gives the minister an opportunity of understanding their character, and of perhaps sometimes reasoning in an easy and genteel manner against swearing. This, though indeed it seldom reforms them, yet it is as seldom taken amiss; which shews the counsel to have been administered with prudence.

How is it possible that a minister can understand wickedness, unless he either practises it
himself

himself (but much of that will not yet pass in the world) or allows the wicked to be bold in his presence? To do otherwise, would be to do in practice what I have known narrow-minded bigotted students do as to speculation, viz. avoid reading their adversaries books because they were erroneous; whereas it is evident no error can be refuted till it be understood.

The setting the different characters of ministers in immediate opposition, will put this matter past all doubt, as the sun of truth rising upon the stars of error, darkens and makes them to disappear. Some there are, who may be easily known to be ministers, by their very dress, their grave demure looks, and their confined precise conversation. How contemptible is this! and how like to some of the meanest employments among us; as sailors, who are known by their rolling walk, and taylor, by the shivering shrug of their shoulders! But our truly accomplished clergy put off so entirely every thing that is peculiar to their profession, that were you to see them in the streets, meet with them at a visit, or spend an evening with them in a tavern, you would not once suspect them for men of that character. Agreeably to this, I remember an excellent thing said by a gentleman, in commendation of a minister, that “he had nothing at all of the clergyman about him.”

I shall

I shall have done with this maxim, when I have given my advice as to the method of attaining to it; which is, That students, probationers, and young clergymen, while their bodies and minds are yet flexible, should converse, and keep company, as much as may be, with officers of the army under five and twenty, of whom there are no small number in the nation, and with young gentlemen of fortune, particularly such as, by the early and happy death of their parents, have come to their estates before they arrived at the years of majority. Scarce one of these but is a noble pattern to form upon; for they have had the opportunity of following nature, which is the all-comprehensive rule of the ancients, and of acquiring a free manner of thinking, speaking, and acting, without either the pedantry of learning, or the stiffness contracted by a strict adherence to the maxims of worldly prudence.

After all, I believe I might have spared myself the trouble of inserting this maxim, the present rising generation being of themselves sufficiently disposed to observe it. This I reckon they have, either constitutionally, or perhaps have learned it from the inimitable Lord Shaftsbury, who, in so lively a manner sets forth the evil of universities, and recommends conversation with the polite Peripatetics, as the only way of arriving at true knowledge.

M A X.

M A X I M VI.

It is not only unnecessary for a moderate man to have much learning, but he ought to be filled with a contempt of all kinds of learning but one; which is, to understand Leibnitz's scheme well; the chief parts of which are so beautifully painted, and so harmoniously sung by Lord Shaftsbury, and which has been so well licked into form and method by the late immortal Mr. H——n.

This maxim is necessary, because without it the former could not be attained to. Much study is a great enemy to politeness in men, just as a great care of household affairs spoils the free careless air of a fine lady: and whether politeness is to be sacrificed to learning, let the impartial world judge. Besides the scheme which I have permitted the moderate man to study, doth actually supersede the use of all other learning, because it contains the knowledge of the whole, and the good of the whole; more than which, I hope, will be allowed to be not only needless, but impossible.

This scheme excels in brevity; for it may be understood in a very short time; which, I suppose, prompted a certain clergyman to say, that any student might get as much divinity as he would

would ever have occasion for in six weeks. It is also quite agreeable to the improvements that have been made in arts and sciences of late years; for every thing is now more compendiously taught, and more superficially understood, than formerly, and yet as well and better to all the purposes of life. In the very mechanic arts, laborious diligence gives way to elegance and ease; as the lumpish, strong, old Gothic buildings, to more genteel, though slighter, modern ones. There have been schemes published for teaching children to read by way of diversion. Every year gives us a shorter method of learning some branch of knowledge. In short, in these last days the quintessence of every thing has been extracted, and is presented us, as it were, in little phials; so that we may come to all learning by one act of intuition. Agreeably to all this, have we not seen in fact, many students of divinity brought up in hot-beds, who have become speakers in general assemblies, and strenuous supporters of a falling church, before their beards were grown, to the perfect astonishment of an observing world.

I must also observe, that there is a providential fitness of that scheme, in another respect, for the present age and time. When the fees of colleges, and expence of boarding is raised; when the rate of living is quite altered, and when a
spiteful

spiteful and landed interest, and a heedless parliament, have refused to grant any augmentation to our stipends; there is no other way remains for us, but to cheapen our education, by taking less time to it, and arriving at the point designed by a nearer cut. Then there will be no need at all for the critical study of the Scriptures, for reading large bodies of divinity, for an acquaintance with church-history, or the writings of those poor creatures the Christian fathers; but all is absorbed into the good of the whole: of which I may say, seriously and soberly, what Dr. Tillotson says ironically of transubstantiation, that it is not only true, but it is all truth, and will not suffer any thing to be true but itself.

We find that moderate men have mostly, by constitution, too much spirit to submit to the drudgery of the kinds of learning above-mentioned, and despise all who do so. There is no controversy now about Arian, Arminian, Pelagian, or Socinian tenets, but only whether this good of-the-whole scheme holds. This shews, by the by, the injustice and malignity of those poor beings the Seceders, who cry out of erroneous doctrines in the church, and assert, that Arminianism is publicly taught by many. It is known, that they mean by the moderate men, when they speak so; and yet I will venture to affirm, that there are not a few young men of

that character, who, if they were asked, could not tell what the five Arminian articles are, so little do they regard Arminianism. I myself, the reader will perceive, know the number of them; but whether I know any more about them or not, I shall preserve as a secret in my own mind. It will perhaps be objected against this maxim, That the moderate party commonly set up on a pretence of being more learned than their adversaries; and are, in fact, thought to be very learned in their sermons by the vulgar, who, for that reason hate them. Now, as to their pretending to be more learned than their adversaries, it is most just; for they have, as has been shewn, got hold of the sum-total of learning, although they did not calculate it themselves. And as to their being thought learned in their sermons by the vulgar, it is sufficient for that purpose that they be unintelligible. Scattering a few phrases in their sermons, as harmony, order, proportion, taste, sense of beauty, balance of the affections, &c. will easily persuade the people that they are learned: and this persuasion is, to all intents and purposes, the same thing as if it were true. It is one of those deceitful feelings which Mr. H—, in his Essays, has shewn to be so beautiful and useful. These phrases they may easily get in books not above the size of an octavo; and if they incline to be very deep, they

they may get abundance of citations from the ancient Heathen authors in Cudworth's Intellectual System, and mostly translated to their hand.

I shall now subjoin a short catalogue of the most necessary and useful books, the thorough understanding of which will make a truly learned moderate man: Leibnitz's Theodicee, and his Letters, Shaftsbury's Characteristics, Collins's Enquiry into Human Liberty, all Mr. H——n's pieces, Christianity as old as the Creation, D——n's Best Scheme, and H——'s Moral Essays*. The two last are Scots authors: and it is with pleasure I can assure my countrymen, they are

* It hath been suggested to me, that another author of our own country ought to have been added to the above catalogue; but I judged it improper, for two reasons. One is, that I do not find that author in so high esteem among the moderate, as to deserve a place in so very nice and chosen a collection. But the other, and principal reason, is, that the author here intended, professeth himself a sceptic; the meaning of which, if I understand it right, is, either that he does not believe there is any such thing as truth, or that he himself is but seeking after truth, and has not yet found it. Now this is by no means the case with the moderate, who are already in possession of the "ne plus ultra" of human knowledge. For tho' some of their doctrines are changeable, by reason of the essential difference of persons, things, and times; yet, during the period of any doctrine, I have no where known stronger, or severer dogmatists; as appears from their neglect of farther enquiry, and sovereign contempt of all opposers. In a certain university, about seven years ago (how it is now, I cannot so certainly tell) if a man had spoken honourably of Dr. Samuel Clarke, it cannot be conceived with what derision he was treated by every boy of sixteen, who was wiser than to pay any regard to such a numskul, an enemy to the doctrine of necessity, and wholly ignorant of the moral sense.

by

by far the most perfect of them all, carrying the consequence of the scheme to the most ravishing height. As to poetry, it will be sufficient to read “the Pleasures of the Imagination,” and “the Tragedy of Agis,” if it be published; because in it dramatic poetry is carried to the summit of perfection: and it is believed, by the author’s friends, that there never will be a tragedy published after it, unless by somebody that is delirious. But whether the knowledge of this effect, and the compassion thence arising to future authors, may not, in a person of so much humility and self-denial, and of so consummate and disinterested benevolence, as that theatrical divine, wholly prevent the publication, I cannot tell; and therefore must leave it to be brought forth by the midwife Occasion, from the womb of Time*.

But to give a still higher proof of my deep concern for the improvement and edification of ingenuous youth, I have taken the pains to extract very faithfully the sum and substance of the above library, and do here present it to the world, under a name which is not without a meaning, though not intelligible to all, viz.

THE ATHENIAN CREED.

I believe in the beauty and comely proportions of Dame Nature, and in almighty Fate,

* Agis, a tragedy, was published in the year 1758.

her only parent and guardian; for it hath been most graciously obliged (blessed be its name) to make us all very good.

I believe that the universe is a huge machine, wound up from everlasting by necessity, and consisting of an infinite number of links and chains, each in a progressive motion towards the zenith of perfection, and meridian of glory; that I myself am a little glorious piece of clock-work, a wheel within a wheel, or rather a pendulum in this grand machine, swinging hither and thither by the different impulses of fate and destiny; that my soul (if I have any) is an imperceptible bundle of exceeding minute corpuscles, much smaller than the finest Holland sand; and that certain persons, in a very eminent station, are nothing else but a huge collection of necessary agents, who can do nothing at all.

I believe that there is no ill in the universe, nor any such thing as virtue absolutely considered; that those things vulgarly called sins, are only errors in the judgment, and foils to set off the beauty of Nature, or patches to adorn her face; that the whole race of intelligent beings, even the devils themselves, (if there are any) shall finally be happy; so that Judas Iscariot is by this time a glorified saint, and it is good for him that he hath been born.

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In fine, I believe in the divinity of L. S——, the faintship of Marcus Antoninus, the perspicuity and sublimity of A——e, and the perpetual duration of Mr. H——n's works, notwithstanding their present tendency to oblivion. Amen.

M A X I M VII.

A moderate man must endeavour, as much as he handsomely can, to put off any appearances of devotion, and avoid all unnecessary exercises of religious worship, whether public or private.

I fully intended, upon this part of my subject, to have been at some pains in shewing the great indecency of a grave and apparently serious carriage, or of introducing any religious subject of conversation into promiscuous company: but when I consider how successfully all visible religion was attacked, both by wits and preachers, immediately after the restoration of King Charles II. how constantly any disposition of this sort hath been borne down by all men of taste ever since that time, which is now near a whole century; as also how seldom any religious discourse is to be met with at this day, either among clergy or laity, I shall only rejoice in myself, and congratulate my reader, upon the purity of the times, and proceed to the other part of the maxim.

Now, as to the public exercise of religious worship; although a certain measure of them is reasonable enough, and though the office by which we have our bread, obliges us to be often engaged in them; yet a truly moderate man, without renouncing his calling, has it in his power to pare off a great many superfluities with which the orthodox clergy are apt to overload religion, and render it unpalatable to the polite world.

Being members of church-judicatures, and, we hope, the majority in most of them, the moderate party can discourage and stifle all motions for extraordinary fasts or thanksgivings; which experience has taught us serve only to promote idleness, and discourage industry. Upon the day that Henry V. fought at Agincourt, a solemn fast was kept in England for his success; and some historians are pleased to say, that the prayers of the nation had some share in procuring the victory; but later histories have disproved this; and now it can be demonstrated upon paper, that a fast-day in Scotland loses 50,000*l.* to the nation, while no body can make any calculation what it wins. For this reason, it was very refreshing to hear, as we did lately, that even in the most distant and northerly corners of this country, there is a set of clergy of an heroic spirit, who are resolved to reform
their

their people, and beat them out of that unpolite and barbarous inclination, which many of them still retain, of hearing sermons.

With a view to the same good end, we can curtail our business at home, both as to the number and length of our pulpit performances. In our own families, though it would not perhaps yet be convenient to imitate the beau monde so very quickly, in discarding the worship of God altogether; yet we may, by degrees, sometimes omit it, through hurry of business, at other times be dropping, now and then at least, some parts of it: and in gentlemens families, take care to give discreet intimations that we do not incline to put them out of their ordinary way, or occasion the least interruption to the mirth of the company.

Sometimes indeed it may happen, by a concurrence of circumstances, that one of us may, at bed-time, be unequally yoked with an orthodox brother, who may propose a little unseasonable devotion between ourselves, before we lie down to sleep: but there are twenty ways of throwing cold water upon such a motion; or, if it should be insisted upon, I could recommend a moderate way of complying with it, from the example of one of our friends; who, on a like occasion, yielded so far, that he stood up at the back of a chair, and said, "O Lord, we thank

“ thee for Mr. Bayle’s Dictionary. Amen.” This was so far from spoiling good company, that it contributed wonderfully to promote social mirth, and sweetened the young men in a most agreeable manner for their rest.—Whatever is forced is unnatural, and ought to be avoided; and therefore, what the Puritan said of square caps, we may apply to many modes of devotion, “ That he would not wear them, because his head was round.”

The necessity of such a conduct cannot be denied, when it is considered what effect the length and frequency of public devotion has had in driving most of the fashionable gentry from our churches altogether; and that even such of them as still vouchsafe their company sometimes, are yet driven away from the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, where the service is expected to be more tedious and tiresome. Now, the only way to regain them to the church, is to accommodate the worship, as much as may be, to their taste: the manner of doing which is so well known, that I will not spend time in explaining it.

I confess there has been sometimes an ugly objection thrown up against this part of my argument, viz. That this desertion of public worship by those in high life, seems, in fact, to be contemporary with, and to increase, in a pretty exact proportion, to the attempts that have been, and

and are made to suit it to their taste. It is alledged, that they are led to such a conduct, not by the dictates of their reason, but by the depravation of their hearts; and therefore make use of the behaviour of the clergy, as an excuse and justification of their conduct. In answer to this objection, I shall not pretend to say what use gentlemen may sometimes make of our conduct, for I have known them often very preposterous in their judgment, condemning others for what they freely indulge in themselves, and no less unthankful, rendering evil for good. But still I say, there remains no strength in the objection to a man of moderate principles: for it plainly comes much to the same thing at last, whether the mountain comes to the mouse, or the mouse to the mountain. If I should meet a friend half-way, that had got at a distance from me, though he should not move a foot, I am sure we should be nearer one another, than if I had kept my place as well as he.

But whatever be in this, I must acknowledge, that to be constantly whining and praying, looks so extremely orthodox-like, that I cannot help conceiving a prejudice at it, for this very reason; and I doubt not but every moderate man, will have the very same fellow-feeling. In truth, a great abundance of devotion has such a tendency to inflame one with zeal, that any man who

would maintain his moderation, had best keep out of the reach of such insnaring influence. Besides, it has been an old remark, and I begin to suspect there is some ground for it, that let one embrace what system of divinity he will, it is impossible to pray but according to the orthodox system. And whatever laudable pains had been taken, by some of our friends, to avoid this inconvenience; yet, from what I have observed, in the most successful of them, I must own, I can at present see no other remedy but to deal as little that way as possible.

M A X I M VIII.

In church-settlements, which are the principal causes that come before ministers for judgment, the only thing to be regarded is, who the patron and the great and noble heritors are for; the inclinations of the common people are to be utterly despised.

That this maxim is invariably observed by all moderate men is certain, and may be attested by all that ever were present at a General Assembly of this national church. The case is not now as formerly, when presentations were held a grievance; for a presentation is "all in all" to a moderate man; and when there is no presentation, the greatness and nobility of the heritors upon
one

one side. I was witness once to a cause (which indeed unhappily miscarried) but there was a noble stand made for it by the moderate party, because there was a lord upon the side of the minority, although he had no interest at all in the parish, but a small bit of ground which he had got from a neighbour, in order to run a dike straight. This appearance greatly rejoiced me, as being a token to what perfection the spirit of moderation was arrived.

There are many reasons upon which this maxim is founded; as the implacable hatred we bear to the elders and common people, and their constant wrong judgment, which has been illustrated above. As this is so very evident, I cannot pass it, without expressing my grief and astonishment, that so clear-sighted an author, and in all respects so agreeable to our sentiments, as Lord Shaftsbury, should have said, in his Essay on the freedom of Wit and Humour, that, “it be-
“ longs to men of slavish principles to affect
“ a superiority over the vulgar, and to despise
“ the multitude.” This hath made me doubt the truth of an assertion of Mr. G. L. one of our own disciples, “that perfection is attainable
“ in this life;” for, if ever any one attained to perfection, surely Lord Shaftsbury was the man. But, to lessen the difficulty a little, it is probable he had something in his view, quite diffe-

rent from settling of kirks, when he wrote in this manner; for had he lived to our times, and been an heritor in Scotland, I can hardly allow myself to think, that ever he would have appeared on the side of the Christian people; though, without all question, he would have been chosen an elder, and sent up, "duly attested," to the General Assembly.

But to return: The natural respect we owe to those in great and high stations, claims from us the testimony of it required in the maxim. There is an original and essential difference between gentry and common people, which ought to be particularly kept up here. For this, we have the authority of a certain worthy laird in the country, who always maintained upon his mind a sense of his dignity, not as a man, but as a gentleman. Of this disposition he gave the following laudable instance: being a member of the kirk-session in his parish, the excise-officer happened to come before them for fornication; and besides the ecclesiastical censure, it was thought proper to apply to the civil magistrate to get him fined according to law: but as the law appoints different fines for men in different stations, when some proposed he should be fined at the rate of a gentleman, the worshipful member above-mentioned, though known to be very zealous against vice, strenuously opposed his hav-

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ing so much honour, and gave the following excellent reason for it: "Since God Almighty has
" been pleased to make a distinction between
" gentlemen and other men, why should not we
" keep up this distinction in all cases?" and so he was fined only as a commoner.

Another thing strongly pleads for gentlemen having the chief hand in settling kirks, that now-a-days very few of our principal gentry attend ordinances, or receive any benefit by a minister after he is settled, unless perhaps talking of the news at a private visit, or playing a game at back-gammon; and therefore it is but fair, that in lieu of the edification of the common people, they should have the honour or profit of conferring the benefice. I shall only further add, that having no view of attending upon him for ordinary, they must be the best judges of his preaching gifts, as being most disinterested: for which reason, non-residing heritors, instead of deserving to be cut out altogether, as the stupid and undiscerning orthodox would have it, are by much to be preferred to those that reside.

The reader will easily perceive, that I have here given much better reasons for this conduct than those commonly assigned, viz. the law, in the case of patrons; and the payment of the stipend, in the case of heritors. For, as to the first of these, it is quite from the purpose; for the law

maintains its own ground as far as it goes, and is irresistible: the only question is, How we shall act as to what is left to us to determine? if the law hindered us to determine on any side we pleased, such causes never would be pleaded before us. As to the other, about the heritors paying the stipend, it is not just; for the whole nation pays it: the heritor gets his lands with that burden upon them at first; and when one buys land from another, he never pays for the stipend: so that really an heritor is never a penny the poorer of the stipend, except that happening commonly to see the money first, he may perhaps be sorry that any body should get it but himself. However, though these reasons be not sufficient at bottom, I deny not but it may be very proper to assign them to such as are ignorant enough to yield to them, or who have so squeamish stomachs as not to be able to digest the solid reasons upon which I have grounded my maxim. It is with the mind as with the body, it must be fed with such things as it is able to bear, and as will best agree with its frame and constitution.

M A X I M IX.

While a settlement is carrying on, the candidate against whom there is a strong opposition from the people, must be looked upon, and every
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where declared to be, a person of great worth, and remarkable abilities; provided always, that if ever the same person, after he is settled, be at pains, and succeed in gaining the people's affection, he shall then fall as much below the ordinary standard in his character, as before he was raised above it.

Both parts of this maxim will appear very reasonable to all that see with our eyes. The people being against a man, is a certain sign of his being a good preacher, as has been formerly proved: it is also a pretty sure sign of his being of moderate principles, "which make the comers thereunto perfect;" and these two things are sufficient to justify us in raising his character. It is indeed often absolutely necessary, when a process is in agitation, that it may help him out with a scanty concurrence, and have an influence upon the church-courts, which are composed of a mixed multitude. Nor is it easy to conceive, how excellent and well-invented a weapon this is, the giving a man an extraordinary and high character. It necessarily imprints a kind of veneration of him on the minds of his judges; and hath this peculiar advantage, that there is no parrying of it; for whatever some few of different principles may think, they dare not plainly contradict it. Every man has it in his power to speak
well

of one another, but no-body must take the liberty to speak ill of a man in a public court, unless he can also venture to give him a libel. Many a time have I heard young men highly extolled in church-courts, when their settlement was in dependence, who, in strict truth, were but middling kind of men, and some of them very heavy, who afterwards poved no small incumberance upon the moderate body.

As to the other part of the maxim, taking away their character for ability when they apostatise to orthodoxy, this will be easily accounted for, if it be remembered how they came by it. It was freely given them; and therefore it may be taken away at pleasure: it was given to bring them in as an additional strength to the moderate interest; and therefore, when they forsake that interest, it is but just to deprive them of it. If any shall object, that this is not agreeable to the strict rules of veracity, I desire it may be remembered, that the present fashionable scheme of moral philosophy is much improved in comparison of that which prevailed some time ago. Virtue does not now consist in “acting agreeably to the nature of things,” as Dr. Clarke affirms; nor in “acting according to truth,” which an old school-master, one Woollaston, once wrote a book to prove; but in “the good of the whole;” and therefore an illustrious and noble

noble end sanctifies the means of attaining it. Our sentiments, in this respect, are described by an anonymous poet, who, I believe, meant no good to us; however, it points out the character pretty plainly thus:

“ To second him rose surly PETER,
 “ An angry bigot for good-nature:
 “ That truth should valued be by measure,
 “ And weight, he thought;
 “ That inch of truth, in courtesy,
 “ To span of interest should give way?
 “ And pound of gain, for ounce of lie,
 “ Is cheaply bought.”

If it be farther objected, That still this only satisfies ourselves, whereas, in the case in hand it is necessary to satisfy the world. As to this, we can freely say, that the man was good, but now he is bad: and that is no contradiction; for though the Confession of Faith maintains the infallible perseverance of the saints in grace, yet we never affirmed the necessary perseverance of men in moderation, these two things being entirely distinct the one from the other. Some of our friends do fall away now and then: our strength, for ordinary, consists in young men; for there are several who, in old age, through the decay of their faculties, begin to incline a little to orthodoxy, and then we term them, not

“old men,” but “old wives.” However, there are also some, who not only persevere, but gloriously improve in moderation to the latest old age, and to their dying-day; of which number was the late Rev. Mr. J. R. in K. whose name I have thought proper to record in this immortal work, that it may be had in everlasting remembrance.

M A X I M X.

Whenever we have got a settlement decided over the belly perhaps of the whole people in the parish, by a majority in the General Assembly, the victory should be improved, by appointing some of the orthodox opposers of the settlement to execute it, especially those of them that pretend to have a scruple of conscience at having an active hand in any such settlement.

They do not deserve a victory who know not how to push it, or to improve the advantage they have gained. A sentence of the General Assembly, even as of any other court, signifies nothing, if it be not executed. To rest satisfied with the victory we have gained, by the bare decision, would indeed be yielding it back again, and losing in fact, what we gained in appearance. This is self-evident. But the next point is, Who shall be employed in executing it; those who appointed,

pointed, or those who pretend a scruple of conscience at doing what appears to their disordered intellects to be what they call sinful? Now, as to this, allow me only to ask a few plain questions. Is not every society divided into the governing and the governed, the masters and the servants? What is the subject of any debate in the Assembly that ends in a vote, but to determine who is the one, and who is the other? When once a vote has made us masters, does not the same vote make the minority servants? And do I need to ask further, If there is any piece of drudgery to be performed, who it belongs to, the masters or the servants? Apply this then to the case in hand: Who would hazard his own life in fording a river, if he had a servant to try the depth of it before him? Who would chuse to go to a pulpit under a shower of stones from an enraged populace, if he had others under his authority, whom he could send upon the same ungracious errand?

Now, the usefulness of this conduct is very evident: for it is plain, they will either obey or disobey. If the first is the case, then we shall have the honour of bringing them, and they themselves the profit and advantage of being brought, into the hatred and abhorrence of the common people; in commendation of which state, enough has been said already. If they disobey,

obey, they must be deposed, and cast out as incorrigible, to make way for those that are better than themselves. This will be to the advantage of the church; for young men, “*cæteris paribus*,” are much better than old.

As this method of purging the church of corrupt members is like to be a prevailing measure in our days, I shall endeavour to support it by a few, but these demonstrative arguments; in most of which, indeed, I shall have little more than the honour of recording the sentiments and reasoning of some eminent men that were members of the two last General Assemblies.

In the first place it is certain, that the command of a proper authority is sufficient to make any action not only innocent and lawful, but perfectly right, and strictly obligatory; insomuch that if an executioner should be commanded to hang his father or son, for praying to God, or reading his Bible; nay, if one of Jesus Christ’s disciples had happened to have been a Roman soldier, and should have been commanded to crucify his master, he should have betrayed the most egregious ignorance of the Christian religion, had he made the least difficulty in executing such orders.

It is to no purpose here to object the immutability of moral laws, and the supreme authority of God: for if obedience to human authority be one of his laws, as it plainly is, then all his
other

other laws must be submitted to such alterations and suspensions as our superiors think proper. The apostles do indeed sometimes speak of “obeying God rather than man;” but we can explain this as easily as we do another text, in the third chapter of the Romans, which seems to teach, that “we should not do evil that good may come:” for as, in the one case, whatever promotes good cannot be evil; so, in the other, if human authority be once duly interposed, it is obeying God to comply with whatever is enjoined thereby; and therefore it is impossible that ever there can an interference happen. Besides, some allowance must, no doubt, be made for the difference of times, and disadvantages which all the ancient writers lay under, the late fine improvements in the science of morals not having then been excogitated. But I can assure the reader, the principle which I have laid down, is now the doctrine of this church, wherein both divines and lawyers who are members of our Assemblies, are entirely agreed, and will not suffer any body to call it in question. And what an obvious beauty has moral virtue gained from the delicate and skilful hands that have lately been employed in dressing her ladyship! She was once stiff and rigid, like ice or cold iron; now she is yielding as water, and, like iron hot from the furnace, can easily be beaten into what shape you please.

And

And here I must say, I think it some pity that so fine a genius as Grotius did not flourish somewhat later, or that the moral sense was not started a little earlier, and so that great man preserved from falling into so great a blunder as the maintaining, that “even military authority may be resisted; and that a case may be given, when a soldier ought to disobey orders:” for now it is a settled point, that even ecclesiastical authority (which, if there were any difference, I allow ought rather to be the milder of the two) is sufficient to bear down before it what were once called the “eternal,” no less, and “immutable laws of morality;” and, by divine authority, “is paramount to divine authority itself.”

I shall only observe two very plain and clear advantages in this principle, whereby it will appear, how happy it is that the church hath fallen so entirely in with it, and proceeds so uniformly upon it.

The first is, that in case of necessity, an action which no body would chuse perhaps to take the weight of upon them, may yet be done without the least hazard of any body’s being called to account for it in the other world. If the doer of an action were to be the judge of its lawfulness, he might be damned perhaps for doing it, in case it were found to be wrong; but upon this principle of implicit obedience to his superiors, there

there is no repelling his defence: it was not his province to judge whether it was lawful or unlawful; and the Assembly or Commission who gave the order, being bodies politic, are, by that time, all dissolved, and appear only in the capacity of individuals.

The other advantage is this, that if the supreme court of any kind, were allowed to be the only proper judge of the lawfulness of its own appointments, it would be impossible, in the nature of things, that ever there could be a separation in the church, or a rebellion in the state. The justness of this consequence is so evident, that I shall not spend any time in illustrating it, but heartily wish the principle from which it flows, were universally embraced.

In the second place, the disobedient brethren have but one pretence for their conduct, which is groundless, viz. a "scruple of conscience:" as to which, hear Dr. Goodman, a noble English writer: "A tender conscience is nothing else
" but an ignorant and uninstructed mind; or a
" sickly, melancholy, and superstitious under-
" standing." I could easily shew, that there is no such thing as a real scruple of conscience: the lawyers in the General Assembly, who are men of as great penetration as any in the land, have most of them plainly declared, that they do not conceive it possible. A certain learned gentleman

tleman of this court hath assured us, that taking away ministers stipends would enlighten their conscience. The renowned author of Hudibras is known to be of the same opinion: from which two authorities I will endeavour to amend Dr. Goodman's definition; for a "tender conscience" is not an "ignorant mind," but a "full stomach." This accounts for appearances better, and particularly for the epithet of tender, commonly given to it, as all physicians are agreed, that a wound upon a full stomach is very dangerous. Having thus rooted up the very foundation of this pretence, it is needless to go through the several particulars insisted upon by the disobedient as straitening to them; and therefore I shall but in a word mention one of them. They pretend it is a profane farce to confer, in a solemn manner, the care of the souls of a certain people, when nothing is really conferred but a legal title to a benefice: as also, that the candidate cannot conscientiously answer several of the questions commonly put on those occasions. But is it not extremely strange, that any body can be so dull as not to regard these questions in their only true and proper light, as a necessary piece of formality, without which a charge of horning for the stipends could not be raised? And as to the other part of the objection, whether it be not much more a mock ceremony, to ordain a man to a congregation,

congregation, when a title to the benefice cannot be conferred, I shall leave the reader to determine, as if the case were his own.

The third principle upon which our conduct is founded, is of such undoubted verity, that the bare mentioning of it is sufficient to convince all the world how little it stands in need of any proof: accordingly no moderate man views it in any other light than as an axiom, or self-evident truth; namely, That if any excuse for disobedience were once admitted, or any indulgence granted to these tender-conscienced inferiors, there would be an end of all government in an instant; neither commands nor obedience could proceed one step further, but every individual instrument of power, in that fatal society, astonished at the monstrous phænomenon, would stare at one another; all the wheels of the political machine would stop at once; nay, would split into ten thousand pieces; every relation and connection of their parts would be instantly dissolved, and the beautiful whole would rush into a wild chaos of anarchy and confusion. The reader will easily believe, I am too wise to offer a proof of an axiom or self-evident truth*; however, I think it but fair to inform

* I desire that this general assertion may not be misunderstood, as if I intended a reflection upon some late discoveries in moral philosophy: for though an axiom, or self-evident truth,

form him, that such is the nature of paper and ink, that they have not the power of doing it all the justice even in narration, of which it is capable elsewhere. Whoever has heard the demonstrative tone, or beheld the infallible air, and gesture of certainty, with which it has been asserted by an Assembly-orator, would be ashamed that he ever stood in need to be put in mind of it: for my own part, I am so entirely influenced by it, that if the most faithful, diligent, and useful servant should, in the humblest manner represent to me, that he had a scruple about executing any of my orders, and beg to be excused, suppose from shaving me on Sunday morning, and I should unfortunately be so far off my guard, as for once to indulge him, I would immediately dissolve my whole family, and never more think of lodging with a living soul under the same unhappy roof.

Against this principle, however, some have presumed to object particular instances in Scripture-history of such excuses being actually admitted, without any apparent dissolution of the constitution; such as Gideon's passing from his

truth, cannot be proved; yet a great genius, who can do any thing, may take a view of these same axioms, dignify and adorn them, by writing an essay round about each of them, and prove that they ought to be called Feelings. This is greatly to the advantage of the commonwealth of learning, as experience hath shewn,

order

order to his son to kill the two princes of Midian, and slaying them himself; and that of Saul, who, when his guards refused to fall upon the priests, committed that affair to another, without any farther noise. Now, not to mention the difficulty of arguing from facts of an antient date, cited only by one author, and that very courtly, I humbly conceive these instances produced, make directly against the objection; for it appears to me very evident, that the kingdom was taken from Saul, and given to David, for this very reason, he being unfit to govern, by thus allowing his authority to be trampled upon. Nor will it be easy to assign any different reason, why none of the posterity of Gideon were ever permitted to rule Israel. There are some later instances of that sort, nearer home, thrown up by shallow politicians; as that of the hangman at Ayr, who refused to execute the Whigs in King Charles the II'd's time; and that which happened a few years ago among ourselves, when the civil government overlooked the disobedience of a set of refractory clergymen who refused to read the act of parliament against Captain Porteous. In the first of these cases, the judges acted in a laudable manner; for they deprived the man of his benefice: and, for the crime of his disobedience, I am persuaded he died childless, for I have never heard of any of his posterity in

that part of the country. In the other case, I confess the government was much to be blamed; and have long been of opinion, that their detestable lenity, at that time, was the cause of the late rebellion, which followed so soon after it. It is to be hoped they will take warning for the time to come; for I am persuaded, one other instance of the same kind would effectually seat the Pretender upon the throne of Britain.

The last principle which I shall mention, and which, with the rest, I am sure is abundantly sufficient to support the maxim laid down for our conduct, is, That the best method of conviction, and of all others the most proper for a church-court, is that of authority, supported in its highest rigour by censures, which may be felt by men of the dullest capacities, as deposition, and suspension from benefice as well as office. If the goodness of an argument, or the excellency of a method, is to be measured by the frequency of recourse that is had to it, I think none can dispute precedency with this. It must be allowed to be, of all others, the most Christian method; it reigned over the whole church without a rival, for many ages; and though protestants, for a while pretended to find fault with it in the hands of their enemies; yet, which of them all, when they became able to make use of it, have not tried it in their turn? And whether

ther we consider the majority, by whose hands this weapon is to be wielded, or the minority, upon whom the weight of it must fall, it will plainly appear to be admirably suited to the present times. As to the beasts of burden, who fall to be driven by this method, they are known to be such dull and lifeless animals (as they are most of them past the vigour of youth) that no other argument can make any impression upon them. However a horse might be managed, who is a generous creature, no body could think of another method to make an ass move, but constantly to belabour its sides. There cannot be a clearer evidence of the dulness and stupidity of these obstinate beings we have to do with, than the expence of rhetoric that has been thrown away upon them, to persuade them of a thing as clear as the sun, viz. that if they had any conscience they would depose themselves, and yield their place to more pliable successors. They even pretend conscience here again; and tell us they are placed in a station which they dare not desert, unless they be thrust out of it. Now, let the reader judge how incapable of persuasion one must be, to find difficulty in so plain a case; and therefore how unnecessary it is, that a more effectual method should be tried.

On the other hand, the majority in Assemblies and Commissions seems, at present, to be peculiarly

cularly adapted to such a method of conviction as I have mentioned. One part of our strength lies in the laity who attend our judicatures; these, as they possess no benefice in the church, they are out of the reach of this sort of censure, and therefore are only capable of inflicting, but not of suffering it; and as they are not much accustomed to solving cases of conscience, what other method can occur to them, when things of this nature are thrown in their way, than the more gentleman-like method, for which Alexander the Great is so justly celebrated, viz. cutting the troublesome knot, which they would find tedious and difficult to untie? The rest of our side consists in clergy of the youngest sort; who, as they are imitators of the manners of gentlemen, may be supposed to act with the same spirit in public judgment. Though they can give flourishes of rhetoric enough; nay, though of one of them in particular, I may literally say,

—————He cannot ope

His mouth, but out there flies a trope;

yet as for logic, it is well known this part of education is fallen into great contempt; and it is not to be expected, that such brisk and lively spirits, who have always hated every thing that looked scholastic-like, can bear to be tied down to the strict methods of argumentation. But
though

though we were greater masters in this method of conviction, yet our blood may be easily supposed too warm for any thing that is so slow, and at best so uncertain in its success. No; we are now the majority, and our power, as a late acquisition, is the more agreeable for being new; we must taste the sweets of authority, which can only be by compelling our inferiors to obey us. If our sentences are executed, it is the same thing to the new incumbent, the same thing to the church in general, and the same thing to us, whether the executors are willing or unwilling; for, as to that whole matter of conscience, about which so much noise is made, I have already related our sentiments; from whence it is evident, that such nonsense, as laying a violent temptation in mens way to act against the light of their own mind, is nothing but words without a meaning. And as to the expression of the apostle Paul, about church-power, which he uses over and over again, that it is “for edification, and not for destruction;” it is no secret, that there is a various reading; and if once we had, “for destruction, and not for edification,” established as the true reading, which, if we were dealers in criticism, might perhaps be easily done, we should not only get rid of this troublesome text, but make an acquisition of it on our side of

the question, to the confusion of our greatest enemies.

M A X I M XI.

The character which moderate men give their adversaries, of the orthodox party, must always be that of “knaves” or “fools;” and, as occasion serves, the same person (if it will pass) may be represented as a “knave” at one time, and as a “fool” at another.

The justness of this proceeding may be easily made appear. The principles of moderation being so very evident to reason, it is a demonstration, that none but unreasonable men can resist their influence: and therefore we cannot suppose, that such as are against us can be so from conscience. Besides, setting aside the superior intrinsic excellence of the one set of principles above the other, there are much stronger carnal motives, to speak in their own style, to act in their way, than in ours; and therefore there is great ground to conclude, that they act from hypocrisy, but not so of us. They please the people; we please, at least endeavour to please, those of high rank. Now there are many remarkable advantages they gain by pleasing the people; whereas it is evident, “*ex post facto*,” that we gain nothing by pleasing the gentry; for they never trampled upon us so much as of late; and
 have

have entirely defeated our application to parliament for augmentation of stipend. So far are we from being in any respect the better of the gentry, that we have really great reason to complain of them; for when we have endeavoured to ingratiate ourselves with them, by softness and complaisance, and by going considerable lengths with them in their freedom, they oftentimes most ungenerously despise us but the more: nay, many of them have first taught us to live at a high rate, and then refuse to give us any thing to keep it up. Now, as we men of reason could not but foresee this, it is plain nothing but the most disinterested virtue could lead us to act as we have done. Whereas, on the other hand, the orthodox have gained, and do possess the esteem of the common people; and so, it is plain, they could have no other view in their conduct but to attain it. However, to shew our charity, we allow there are some on their side who are indifferently honest; but these are men of very weak intellectuals, as is evident from their not thinking as we do.

The other part of the maxim is abundantly reasonable, but not so easily put in practice, viz. representing the same individual person sometimes as a knave, and sometimes as a fool. This affair is sometimes unluckily managed, when it is incautiously attempted. In order to its being

done successfully, therefore let the two following rules be observed.

1st, Let a man be represented as a knave and a hypocrite to one sort of people in the world; and let him be represented as a fool, not to the same, but to another sort: let the first be chiefly your better sort of people, particularly those among them that hate much profession of religion, and are apt to call all strictness hypocrisy: the other, it is plain, must be the simple and credulous.

The second rule is, That, if possible, there should be different persons employed in spreading these different calumnies of the same man. By this apparent consistency in every one's opinion with itself, they will be the more easily maintained, and be the less liable to discovery: and thus, as the several wheels of a watch, by opposite motions, promote the same end; so the several members of the moderate body, by seemingly different and opposite means, conspire in promoting the good of the whole. The principle upon which these two rules are founded, is, That probability ought to be studied in every falsehood we would have believed; which principle is laid down, and finely illustrated, in the Art of Political Lying, said to be wrote by one Dr. Arbuthnot.

It will not, I hope, be reckoned wandering from my subject, when I observe, that the very same principle

principle of studying probability is to be applied to the celebration of the characters of our friends, as well as the defamation of our enemies. These two designs indeed have a very strong connection, and do mutually support and promote one another. Praising one character is, by necessary and manifest consequence, a defamation of its opposite: and, in some cases, which may easily be conceived, it is the most eligible, and the most effectual way of doing it. I have been present at a conversation, where the chief intention of one of the speakers, and what he had most at heart, was to ruin the character and reputation of a certain person who happened to be mentioned, with his hearers; but he could not well know, whether they were able to bear a large quantity of unmixed reproach, he chose the wiser and safer method, of celebrating another character, and drawing it with all his art, in such a manner, as the strongest opposition possible might appear, in some of its circumstances, to that of the person intended to be wounded by reflection.

But in this, as in the former case, great judgment and prudence must be used; nothing must be said, the contrary to which is, or may be easily known to be true; and particularly all the antiquated orthodox phrases, in giving a minister's character, are to be religiously avoided. The necessity of this direction will best appear from

an example: Suppose I should say of Momus, he was a youth of early, and continues to be a man of eminent piety, walking with God, and spending many hours every day in secret devotion; has a deep and strong sense upon his mind, of the worth and value of time, and lays it out wholly in fitting others and himself for eternity; has so sacred a regard for truth, that he never tells a lye, even in jest; has a most humble deportment, and is perfectly free from that prevailing fault of triumphing over the weak or shamefaced by raillery or impudence; has been frequently heard to express his displeasure at all lenity of carriage, and frothy unprofitable discourse, in persons of the sacred character; and as he was always himself remarkable for a purity of conversation, so he cannot allow the most distant allusion to obscenity to pass without a reproof: in short, his whole behaviour commands both the reverence and love of all who have the happiness of his acquaintance.—I say, if I should draw the character of Momus in this manner, as some authors do those of the Puritan clergy about an hundred years ago, it is probable he would give me no thanks: and indeed, he would owe me none; for it would have much more the air of a satire than of a panegyric.

It is, however, possible to draw a character of the same person, which shall have some truth,
and

and much probability in it; and which, as being the character of a modern, shall be much more in the modern commendatory style.—He is a man of a most sprightly and lively fancy, of an inexhaustible fund of wit and humour, where he pleases to display it, though the iniquity of the times has, in some measure, checked its indulgence. He is, notwithstanding the grimness of his countenance, entirely free from any sourness or moroseness of temper, so that in his conversation a man may enjoy all manner of ease and freedom. He is a most genteel and elegant preacher and poet; and, to my knowledge, a man of a warm and good heart*.

M A X I M XII.

As to the world in general, a moderate man is to have great charity for Atheists and Deists in principle, and for persons that are loose and vicious in their practice; but none at all for those that have a high profession of religion, and a great pretence to strictness in their walk and conversation.

This maxim seems to be pretty strongly laid; and yet, upon a strict inquiry, it will be found

* This expression, “a man of a good heart,” is much in fashion among the moderate, and of great significancy and beauty; but it is only to be used in speaking to persons of some degree of taste; for I knew a particular instance in which it disobligeed the person it was intended to gain.

hat we follow it very exactly. That we have charity for the first-mentioned sort of persons, is evident; for we endeavour to accommodate ourselves to them, and draw as near them as possibly we can, insisting upon nothing in our sermons but what may be said to be a part, or an improvement, of the law of nature. And as to our having no charity for the other sort, it is as evident; witness the odious idea we have affixed to the name of a professor (unless when it is meant of a professor in a college); and witness our ironical way of speaking, when we say of a man, he has a “grave sanctified air.” Nay, even holiness and godliness are seldom taken by us in a very good sense: when we say, “One of the holy brethren,” or, “A good godly lady,” they would mistake us very much that would think we had a high opinion of any of these persons.

This our conduct a certain young man of the orthodox side, reflected very severely upon, as he thought, in a sermon, which he afterwards printed, in words to this purpose: “They can indeed talk very fluently of universal benevolence, and a charitable candid disposition—; but their charity is confined to those who favour their opinions, or perhaps are indifferent about religion altogether; while the least appearance of serious devotion, or fervent-zeal
“ for

“ for God, is enough to forfeit it. Indeed this
“ charity is as mysterious as the faith of the
“ most bigotted Catholic; it is equally full of
“ contradictions; and seems resolved to found
“ itself, not upon evidence, but upon the want
“ of it. Where every thing has the worst ap-
“ pearance, there they will believe well; but
“ where the outward conduct is blameless, they
“ candidly suspect that nothing but hypocrisy
“ lies at the bottom.” But, with the leave of
this smart youth, what he says of us is very
true, and we maintain it to be right: for the very
meaning of charity is to believe without evi-
dence; it is no charity at all to believe good of
a man when we see it, but when we do not see
it. It is with charity in sentiment, as with
charity in supplying the wants of the neces-
sitous; we do not give alms to the rich but to
the poor. In like manner, when there are all
outward appearances of goodness, it requires no
charity to believe well of the persons: but when
there are none at all, or perhaps very many to
the contrary, then I will maintain it is charity,
and charity in its perfection, to believe well of
them. Some object to this, Well, since it is
your will, have charity for them; but have cha-
rity also for such as are apparently good. Oh!
the stupid world! and slow of heart to conceive!
is it not evident to a demonstration, that if the
appearance

appearance of wickedness be the foundation of charity, the appearance of goodness, which is its opposite, must be the foundation of a quite contrary judgment, viz. suspecting, or rather believing ill of them? If any still insist, That if not charity, yet justice should incline us to believe well of them? as I have seemingly confessed: I answer, That we have no occasion for justice, if we have charity; for charity is more than justice, even as the whole is more than a part: but though I have supposed, “argumentandi gratia,” that justice requires this, yet it is not my sentiment; for the persons meant being usually great enemies to us, are thereby cut off from any claim in justice to our good opinion; and being also, as has been proved, improper objects of charity, it remains that we should hate them with perfect hatred, as in fact we do.

M A X I M XIII.

All moderate men are joined together in the strictest bond of union, and do never fail to support and defend one another to the utmost, be the cause they are engaged in what it will.

This maxim I do not insert so much for the instruction of the ignorant, as for the perfection of my own plan, and the honour of the whole body; for I have hardly ever known it fail in any instance whatever. And as this character belongs,

belongs, without controversy, to all the moderate, so it belongs to them by an exclusive privilege; for they do most loudly complain of, and load with most opprobrious epithets, any of the orthodox who attempt to imitate them in it, as has been sometimes known. Nothing indeed can be more just and reasonable than these complaints; for such conduct in the orthodox is a plain desertion of their own principles, a robbery and invasion of the property of others. Conscience, upon which they pretend to act, is, of all things, the most stiff and inflexible; and cannot, by any art, be moulded into another shape than that which it naturally bears: whereas the whole principles of moderation are most gentle and ductile, and may be applied to almost all purposes imaginable.

If any, through an envious infidelity, entertain a doubt of the truth asserted in the maxim, they are referred, for satisfaction, to the history of the proceedings of this church for these twenty years past, which I take to have been the true reforming period; and are hereby defied to produce an instance in which any moderate man, wise or unwise, old or young, grave or sprightly, failed to concur in supporting one of his own side, whatever was his cause, active or passive, a project for advancement, or the danger of a prosecution. Let but one of us start a scheme,
in

in which he may find his account, or become candidate for an office, the whole, upon the first impulse, as the concordant strings of a musical instrument answer to the touch, return and reverberate the sound. If Momus unwarily makes a sally into the territories of "good-humoured vice," and is unhappily betrayed by those who ought not to have been trusted; how powerfully is he upheld by the gravest of the party, and the uncharitable malevolent enemy stung and destroyed, like the bear in the fable, for disturbing the hive of industrious bees? Nay, as a yet stronger instance, (being more against nature) I could shew, in the records of a certain presbytery, declarations signed by the most moderate hands, and yet containing as high and ranting expressions in favour of the rights of the Christian people; as ever were used by the most orthodox writer; because, by a wonderful concurrence of circumstances, they served, at that time, to promote the settlement of a moderate man.

Every eye must immediately perceive the beauty and excellence of this part of our character. What more amiable than union? or what more necessary to the support of any society? and what more hateful and horrid than discord and division? Is it not also, by this very means, that we have obtained the victory, and do still pre-
serve

serve our superiority over the orthodox party? They are wholly ignorant of the laws of society, as they have been lately well explained by some of our brethren in print; and know not that all who enter into it, give up their rights as individuals, and are bound “to follow what they disapprove;” to see with the eyes, and act for the interest of the whole body.

It must be no small commendation of such conduct, that in so doing we either follow, or are followed, by the most eminent and illustrious characters in this nation. It is probable there may be several controverted elections tried before the parliament in a short time; and I dare say, any wise man will foretel their issue in each case, much more certainly from the character of the person, than from the merits of the cause. And it is with some pleasure I observe, that whoever begun this practice first, we have carried it to the greatest perfection; for amongst us, the characters of men have been openly pleaded in defence of their cause, which, if I am not mistaken, hath hardly ever been done in any civil court.

How admirably does this principle fall in with the scheme of philosophy upon which the present generation is formed! It illustrates the truth of Mr. H——n’s doctrine, That virtue is founded upon instinct and affection, and not upon reason; that benevolence is its source, support,
and

and perfection; and that all the particular rules of conduct are to be suspended, when they seem to interfere with the general good. In short, it shews, that the moderate are a transcript in miniature, and do most distinctly exhibit the order, proportion, and unity of design in the universal system.

Time would fail me, if I should go through all the excellencies of this crowning maxim; and therefore I shall only further observe, that it excels all the known principles of action for clearness and perspicuity. In order to determine which side to chuse in a disputed question, it requires no long discussions of reason, no critical inquiry into the truth of controverted facts, but only some knowledge of the characters of men; a study much more agreeable, as well as more common, than that of books. To speak more properly, it requires no study at all of any kind; for, as to the gross, or general tendency of a character, common fame communicates the impression, and seldom or never deceives us. This is probably the reason that the maxim, as has been observed at the beginning of the illustration, is constantly and unerringly followed by the moderate of every age and condition: on which account I give it as my opinion, that it be added to the number of the feelings, which are at present so much upon the growing hand.

Thus

Thus I have laid down and illustrated these excellent maxims, not without labour and expence of thought; and, I think, carried them so far as to make a complete system for the education and accomplishment of a moderate clergyman, for his guidance in public judgment, and his direction as to private practice. And now, courteous reader, as a traveller, after having gone through the different parts of a country, ascends some eminence to review the whole, let us stand still and rejoice over the happy state of our mother-church of Scotland, in which moderation so greatly prevails; and let us rejoice in hope of what improvements she may yet arrive at, by adhering to these maxims, now digested into such admirable form and order. O what noble, sublime, and impenetrable sermons shall now be preached! what victories and triumphs shall be obtained over the stupid populace, by forced settlements, which never have such a beautiful and orderly form, as when finished by soldiers, marching in comely array, with shining arms; a perfect image of the church-militant! and what perfectly virtuous and sinless lives shall be led by these clergy, who, with steady eye, regard the good of this vast whole, which never yet went wrong! There is nothing indeed that any way tarnishes the beauty of this prospect, but the miscarriage of the augmentation-scheme; over which I could now lament in elegiac strains, but that

that my hope is not yet quite extinct; for who can tell whether, when we shall have brought moderation to perfection, when we shall have driven away the whole common people to the Seceders, who alone are fit for them, and captivated the hearts of the gentry to a love of our solitary temples, they may not be pleased to allow us more stipends, because we shall have nothing to do but to spend them?

I would now propose, that the next ensuing General Assembly would appoint (what indeed I might not without some reason expect, whether they appoint it or not) that all the professors of divinity in the nation shall lecture one day every week upon this system of moderation, that our youth may be trained up from their infancy in a taste for it. This, I am sure, will be much more profitable than any of the antiquated systems of divinity, as Pictet or Turretine: nay, I am persuaded, it is more exactly calculated for the present times, than even the more modern authors, Epictetus and Marcus Antoninus, which last, in Mr. Foulis's translation, hath, by many young divines, in their first year, been mistaken for Markii Medulla Theologiæ.

If this my treatise shall meet with the success and acceptance that it justly deserves, it is my intention to offer to the public a still more minute and particular delineation of the moderate character, either in another book of a different
form

form from this, or perhaps in a second edition of the same; which shall, in that case, be the text, and to which I will add large explanatory notes, containing much private history, and referring to many particular facts, in order to render it the more grateful, as well as the more instructing to the reader. I have also by me the “*stamina vitæ*” of many useful and edifying treatises, which shall be produced in due time, as the muses shall give assistance; such as, The art of making a flourished sermon with very little matter, by a proper mixture of similies, and by repeating every paragraph over again in the form of a soliloquy: One resolution of all cases of conscience, from the good of the whole scheme: A directory for prayer, upon the same scheme: The horrid sin and danger of ministers spending too much time in catechising and visiting in country-parishes; I do not make any mention of towns, to avoid giving offence; as also, lest it should prove true what I have heard, that the practice is scarcely known in any of our great towns, in which case, my reasonings would look like beating the air. These, with many others, I am with assiduous care purchasing materials for completing, by observation and conversation, that our church may go on in a progressive motion toward the zenith of perfection and meridian of glory.

I shall now shut up this work, by acquainting the reader with a secret, which perhaps he would
not

not otherwise advert to, viz. that I enjoy the pleasure of having done a thing seemingly quite impracticable. I have given the moderate, and those who desire to be instructed in that science, a complete view of the maxims and principles of moderation, without, at the same time, prostituting or giving them up to the possession of every common reader. Perhaps some will ask, how I imagine I have effected this? I answer, that I have so framed the whole of my book, that it is really intelligible only to persons duly qualified; and to every such person it is transparent as the spring-water. I have given only moderate reasons for moderate principles, so that however strongly they may convince some, viz. those of our kidney, others they will be so far from convincing, that they will be thought to operate a quite contrary way. I have managed this so carefully, that I could venture to lay a wager of all that I am worth, that this treatise shall be taken, by very many, to be the work of an orthodox pen, and to be intended as a banter upon moderate men and their way. They will be tempted to laugh at us, whom they will imagine to be exposed by this revelation of our mysteries: but how ingeniously are they deceived? for, by that very means, every properly prejudiced mind is furnished with a complete system, upon which to form his sentiments, and regulate his conduct.

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A S E R I O U S
A P O L O G Y

F O R T H E
Ecclesiastical Characteristics.

By the real A U T H O R of that Performance.

THE HISTORY OF THE
LIFE OF JOHN DE Witt

A LETTER TO
THE PEOPLE OF
NEW YORK

FOR THE

REPUBLICAN CHARACTER

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE POLITICAL

TO THE
 NOBILITY AND GENTRY
 OF
 SCOTLAND,

PARTICULARLY

Such of them as are ELDERS of the
 CHURCH, and frequently Members of
 the GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

Right Honourable, and Right Worshipful,

THERE was prefixed to the Eccle-
 siastical Characteristics a ludicrous
 dedication; there seems therefore some pro-
 priety in prefixing a serious dedication to
 this Apology. To whom it ought to be ad-
 dressed, could scarce admit of a moment's
 hesitation. It professes to aim at promoting
 the interest of religion in the Church of
 Scotland; and certainly none have it so
 much in their power to preserve or improve
 the constitution, both in church and state,
 as your Lordships and Worships.

I am not to flatter you with an entire ap-
 probation of your past conduct as church-

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members. The design of this address is rather to beseech you, in the most respectful manner, seriously to consider, whether you ought any longer to give countenance to the measures which have for some time generally prevailed. I am encouraged to this, by reflecting, that it is to you, indeed, we are obliged for setting some bounds to the attempts of the high-flying clergy. I could give several instances of this; but shall only mention one, because it is very recent. In the Assembly 1762, it was evidently owing to the honourable members, that a sanction was not given to a resolution, of inflicting censures upon ministers, merely for preaching to their own people at their desire: a thing so odious in its appearance, and so dangerous as an example, that no circumstances or ends to be served by it, could possibly justify it.

I have already hinted, that you are most “able” to promote salutary measures in the church-courts; give me leave to add, that I firmly believe you will be first “willing” to make any change for the better. Individuals may, but, in the present state of human nature, it ought not to be expected, that the majority of any body of men will give up private benefit in wealth, power, or ease, for public good. Therefore,

D E D I C A T I O N. ccxix

Therefore, when once the clergy are corrupted, their reformation can be looked for from the laity only, and not from themselves. There is an observation to this purpose in the Rev. Dr. Robertson's history*, which deserves to be written in letters of gold: "They" (i. e. the Protestants) "applied to another Assembly, " to a convocation of the Popish clergy; " but with the same ill success which hath " always attended every proposal for re- " formation addressed to that order of " men. To abandon usurped power, to " renounce lucrative error, is a sacrifice, " which the virtue of individuals has, on " some occasions, offered to truth; but " from any society of men, no such ef- " fort can be expected. The corruptions " of a society, recommended by common " utility, and justified by universal prac- " tice, are viewed by its members with- " out shame or horror; and reformation " never proceeds from themselves, but is " always forced upon them by some fo- " reign hand." I am so much of that eminent writer's opinion, that I look upon every attempt for reviving the interest of religion as quite hopeless, unless you be pleased to support it; and, at the same time, am not without the strongest expec-

* Vol. I. p. 143.

ccxx D E D I C A T I O N.

tation, that the period is fast approaching, when you will see it necessary to interpose.

Will you indulge me in adding a fanciful reason for my hope. Many of you have been bred to the study of the law. Now, I have observed in reading the New Testament, that it was a lawyer who took care of the body of our Saviour, after it had been crucified at the instigation of the priests. His name was Joseph of Arimathea, "an honourable man, and a counsellor," and the fact is recorded by all the four evangelists. Who knows therefore but the gentlemen of the same profession among us may be the instruments of delivering the church, which is Christ's mystical body, from the tyrannical impositions of churchmen in power?

Look into the history of this and every other church, and you will see, that the laity never lent their influence to promote the ambition and secular greatness of ecclesiastics, but they received their reward in ingratitude and contempt. I have heard many of you praised as great friends to the church. By this is meant, that you have a friendship for, and are ready to increase the revenues and worldly convenience of those who bear the sacred office, who are also called Clergy. I beg leave to observe,
that

DEDICATION. ccxxi

that the wifest of mankind are sometimes deceived by words, and patiently submit to gradual and insensible usurpations. Both the words Clergy and Church are an incroachment of the teachers upon you, and all the other hearers of the gospel. The first of them comes from κληρος, which signifies inheritance, and when appropriated to ministers, seems to intimate that they alone are God's inheritance, while surely some of the people are as much his inheritance as they. The word Church is a Scripture-phrase, and is used about one hundred times in the New Testament. But of all these, in not above one or two at most can it be pretended to signify the ministers, exclusive of the people. Therefore if you be friends to the church, take the word in its proper and genuine sense, and admit the people to a due proportion of your favour.

Far be it from me to blame those who shew a friendship and attachment to ministers, and wish to see them comfortably and decently provided for. This is highly necessary to free them from that anxiety and solicitude which is inseparable from a poor and dependent state. But why are they to be provided for at all? or why is it an amiable character to be a friend to

the church? Surely that the great ends of their sacred function may be promoted; that, freed from the necessity of attending to secular pursuits, they may have liberty to bestow their time and pains for the spiritual benefit of those committed to their care.

For this reason, I humbly intreat you, who, by your exalted stations, only can do it with success, to frown upon the luxurious and aspiring, to encourage the humble and diligent clergyman. The interest of religion in this nation, is an object of the highest value in itself, and inseparable from our temporal prosperity. On both accounts I hope it will be the object of your most tender care; and, in return, may it please God to make you know to your happy experience the truth of his own word, “Them that honour me, I will honour; but they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.”

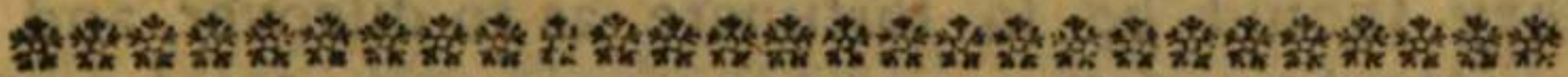
I am, &c.

A S E-



A S E R I O U S
A P O L O G Y

F O R T H E
Ecclesiastical Characteristics.



TH E Ecclesiastical Characteristics is evidently a satire upon clergymen of a certain character. It is a satire too, which every body must see was intended to carry in it no small measure of keenness and severity. This was to be expected from the nature and design of the performance. A satire that does not bite is good for nothing. Hence it necessarily follows, that it is essential to this manner of writing, to provoke and give offence. The greatest satirists, in all ages, have made just as many enemies to themselves, as they exposed

objects of scorn and derision to the public*. It was certainly, on this account, easy to foresee what would be the effect of the publication of such a piece, if it was executed in a tolerable manner; and therefore I hope every impartial person will not only acquit me of blame, but confess, I acted very prudently in not setting my name to the work.

The event justified this precaution. The rage and fury of many ministers in Scotland when this pamphlet was first published, is known almost to all its readers. The most opprobrious names were bestowed upon the concealed author, and the most dreadful threatenings uttered, in case they should be so fortunate as to discover and convict him. One gentleman in particular, who fell under the imputation of being concerned in it, has ever since been the object of their detestation and resentment; although I think it remains yet very uncertain, what hand he had, or whether he had any hand at all, in its composition: a question which I hope the present production, by a comparison with his other

* History informs us, that Horace, for his admired satires, had many private enemies in Rome; and it has been said, that our countryman Mr. Pope durst hardly walk the streets of London, some years before his death, through fear of being attacked or pistoled, even when he met with the highest encouragement from the public.

works, will enable the sharp-sighted public to determine.

But though I had by good management provided myself a shelter from the storm, it is not to be supposed but I heard it well enough rattling over my head. The truth is, I have listened with all possible attention to the objections raised against this performance; and found, with much concern, that the great endeavour of its enemies has been to represent the general design of it as contrary to the interest of religion; and the spirit and manner of it, as inconsistent with the Christian temper. The common cry has been, “The author must be a man of a bad heart——
“No good man could write such a piece.” This has given me an irresistable inclination, upon notice that a new edition of it is intended, to send into the world, at the same time, a serious apology for it, not only for my own vindication, but that if it hath any capacity of doing good, this happy purpose may not be defeated by the implicit credit given to so heavy an accusation.

In entering upon this task, I take the liberty to affirm, that what first induced me to write, was a deep concern for the declining interest of religion in the church of Scotland, mixed with some indignation at what appeared to me a strange abuse of church-authority in the years 1751

and 1752*. The reasons of its particular structure will be given afterwards: in the mean time, the reader may rest assured, that this defence shall be wholly serious, and shall not contain a single proposition which, in its plain and literal meaning, the author does not believe to be true. Not so much as attempting to borrow any assistance from wit and ridicule, he submits his cause to be tried by calm dispassionate reasoning, and only begs the impartial attention of the reader.

To free the question from ambiguity, it will be necessary to consider the performance distinctly, under the three following heads. 1. The subject of it in general; which is confessed to be an attack upon the principles, manners, and political conduct of certain clergymen. 2. Why it is written in an assumed character and ironical style. 3. What occasion was given for it by those to whom it was evidently applied, viz. the ministers of our own church.

I. Let us consider the subject in general, viz. attacking and exposing the characters of clergymen. While I am speaking upon this head, I

* This refers to the rebuking and deposing ministers who did not think themselves at liberty to join in the ordination of a pastor without a people. The first was done in the case of Mr. Adam and the presbytery of Linlithgow, who declined being present at the settlement of Torphichen; the second, in the case of Mr. Gillespie, in the settlement of Inverkeithing.

must take it for granted; that the faults are real; that the satire and reproofs are just. An objection against the performance has been often made to this purpose: “Supposing the things censured
 “to be true, what end does it serve to publish
 “them? If tenderness for the reputation of the
 “offenders could not prevent such cruel treat-
 “ment, ought not a regard for the edification of
 “others, and the success of the gospel in their
 “hand, to have disposed a good man to throw
 “a veil over their infirmities? Is not religion
 “wounded through their sides, and occasion giv-
 “en to infidels to triumph?”

In answer to this, I confess myself to have very different views of things from those who speak in this manner. Nay, I believe, that tho’ there are some who speak as they think, yet it is much more frequently the language of those who with nothing so much as the undisturbed indulgence of themselves in sloth, luxury, or grosser crimes. I am altogether at a loss to know what is the argument in reason, or the precept in Scripture, which makes it criminal to censure ministers when they deserve it. That their station, like that of all other persons of influence, or in public employment, should make men very tender and cautious how they take up an evil report against them, and careful never to do it but on good grounds, I readily allow; but where the

character is really bad, I hold it as a first principle, that as it is in them doubly criminal and doubly pernicious, so it ought to be exposed with double severity. This is so far from being contrary to the interest of religion, even when done by a clergyman, that nothing can be more honourable to it, than to show that there are some so bold as to reprove, and so faithful as to withstand the corruptions of others. How far secret wickedness should be concealed, or scenes of iniquity not laid open, and so sin turned into scandal in ministers, is a matter that would require a very careful and accurate discussion, and admits of many exceptions: but if, in any case, erroneous doctrine, or degeneracy of life, is plain and visible; to render them completely odious, must certainly be a duty. When it is not done, it provokes men to conclude, the clergy all combined together, like "Demetrius and the craftsmen," and more concerned for their own power and credit, than for the interest and benefit of those committed to their charge.

That irreligion and infidelity has made a rapid progress among us for some time past, is a certain, and a melancholy truth. Well! perhaps I shall be told, That I have contributed to strengthen the cause of infidelity among the quality and gentry, by giving them such a representation of the clergy. I answer, That gentlemen's

men's forming a bad opinion of clergymen contributes to promote infidelity, I will by no means deny; so far from it, I affirm, that without this, all other causes put together, would not be able to produce it in any great degree. The great, as well as the vulgar, are always more influenced in their regard for, or contempt of religion, by what they see in the characters and behaviour of men, than by any speculative reasonings whatever. This is what they themselves make no scruple, on many occasions, to confess. Bishop Burnet, in his *Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, acquaints us, that, "having had much free conversation with many that have been fatally corrupted that way, they have very often owned, that nothing promoted this so much in them as the bad opinion which they took up of clergymen. They did not see in them," says he, "that strictness of life, that contempt of the world, that zeal, that meekness, humility and charity, that diligence and earnestness, with relation to the great truths of the Christian religion, which they reckoned they would most certainly have, if they themselves firmly believed it; therefore they concluded, that those whose business it was more strictly to inquire into the truth of their religion, knew that it was not so certain as they themselves, for other

" ends

“ neds, endeavoured to make the world believe
 “ it was.”

But the great, or rather the only question yet remains: Did the publication of the Characteristics give the first occasion to such reflections in Scotland? Was the first information gentlemen had of the characters of the clergy drawn from that performance? This, which must be the very foundation of the objection we are considering, is not true; and indeed, it is not possible in the nature of things, that it should be true. If there be any such thing as corruption among the clergy, by neglect of duty, luxury in dress or table, laxness in principle or licentiousness of practice, it can be no secret to people of figure and fashion. It is commonly in their society, that the most free conversation and unclerical carriage is found among gentlemen of the sacred order. And tho' some of the laity who regret such indecencies, may have so much good manners as to forbear upbraiding them openly, and others may perhaps not be displeas'd at the removal of all restraints, either from the discipline or example of ministers; yet it is well known how little to their advantage persons of both sorts have talked, long before the Characteristics had a being. So that, instead of any public rebuke being the occasion of gentlemen's forming a bad opinion of the clergy, the last, on the contrary, gave a manifest
 occasion

occasion for the first, if it did not make something of that kind indispensibly necessary.

Many wrong opinions arise from confounding things that have some relation to one another, but are notwithstanding essentially distinct. Thus what ought really to be imputed to the crime, is frequently imputed to the punishment. Because a bad opinion of the clergy leads men to infidelity, therefore, say some, cover their failings, and palliate their crimes; to expose them is doing hurt to religion. On the contrary, I reckon it is far more conclusive to say, Because the bad characters of the clergy are extremely hurtful to religion, let them be told, that the greatest strictness and purity of manners is expected from them; and if any will not comply, let the guilty persons be chastised, that the honour of the order may be preserved. I was never better pleased with a story than one I have read of the late Duke of Orleans, regent of France. It happened, that during his regency, one of the French princes of the blood was convicted of committing robbery on the highway. Great intercession was made with the regent, to save him from the ignominy of a public execution, which, it was alleged, would be an indelible stain upon the royal blood. To this the Duke replied, The royal blood is indeed deeply stained, but it was stained by the commission of the crime; the punishment

nishment will only serve to wash out the stain as far as that is now possible.

Christians may, if they please, learn what ought to be their own conduct, by observing the contrary conduct of infidels, who generally understand what is the real interest of that unhappy cause. It is of no consequence to an infidel to make it appear that there are some ministers bad men. His great business is, to transfer the faults of particulars to the whole order, and to insinuate, that, "priests of all religions are the same." This appears from the general strain of their writings and conversation. Neither is it uncommon to see infidels, who on all occasions discover the most rancorous malice against ministers of the gospel in general, maintain the greatest intimacy with some particulars of that denomination. Whether their friendship is an honour or disgrace to the persons so distinguished, I think is not difficult to determine. However, in opposition to this conduct, every real Christian, while he maintains upon his mind the deepest sense of the importance and usefulness of the sacred office, should, at the same time, hold in detestation those who, by an unworthy behaviour, expose it to contempt.

That I am not singular in this opinion, appears from the history of the Christian church in every age. Were it not that it might be considered

sidered as an unnecessary ostentation of learning, I could easily shew, from almost every writer renowned for piety and worth, with what boldness and severity they treated the corrupt clergy of their own times. And what is remarkable, though their characters have now received a sanction from their antiquity, and indeed a lustre from this very zeal and fidelity; yet while they lived, their invectives were constantly complained of by the indolent or vicious of their contemporaries, as injurious to the interests of religion. That this was the case at the reformation, may be easily seen by any who will look but a little into the writings of that age.—In our neighbour country, when Mr. Richard Baxter wrote his *Gildas Salvianus, or, Reformed Pastor*, which contained a very plain and very severe reprehension of his brethren the clergy, the same objection was made against the publication of it, at least in the English language, by some prudent softeners. To this he answers, among other things, as follows. “When the sin is open in the sight of the world, it is in vain to attempt to hide it; and such attempts will but aggravate it, and increase our shame. If the ministers of England had sinned only in Latin, I would have made shift to have admonished them in Latin; but if they will sin in English, they must hear it in English. Unpardoned sin will
 “ never

“ never let us rest, though we be at ever so
 “ much care and cost to cover it. Our sin will
 “ surely find us out, though we find not it. And
 “ if he that confesseth and forsaketh be the
 “ man that shall have mercy, no wonder then
 “ if he that covereth it prosper not. If we be
 “ so tender of ourselves, and loth to confess,
 “ God will be less tender of us, and indite our
 “ confessions for us.—Too many that have set
 “ their hand to this sacred work, do so obstinately
 “ proceed in self-seeking, negligence, and pride,
 “ &c. that it is become our necessary duty to ad-
 “ monish them. If we could see that such
 “ would reform without reproof, we could glad-
 “ ly forbear the publishing of their faults; but
 “ when reproofs themselves do prove so ineffec-
 “ tual, that they are more offended at the reproof
 “ than at the sin, and had rather that we should
 “ cease reproofing, than themselves should cease sin-
 “ ning, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy.”

I shall produce but one example more, to which
 I beg the attention of those who have been inad-
 vertently taught to think that one who endeavours
 to expose the characters of the clergy cannot be
 a good man. Does not all history bear testimony
 to the learning, piety, and worth of the gentle-
 men of the Port-royal, a society of Jansenists,
 who, a little more than a hundred years ago, made
 a most violent attack upon the Jesuits in France;

par-

particularly M. Pascal, in his Provincial Letters, which are written almost entirely in the way of wit and humour. These pieces are still universally admired; nor are they at this time counted any objection to his character for piety and integrity. At the time of publication, however, the very same objections which are now made to the Characteristics, were made to his writings*.

The reader may possibly recollect, that I hinted above a suspicion, that many are not sincere in offering this objection. One reason for this suspicion I am almost ashamed to mention, for the reproach which it brings, in my apprehension, upon many members of the church of Scotland; but as it is well known, it is unnecessary to conceal it, and in my own defence I am intitled to repeat it. There have been, within these few years, writings published in Scotland directly levelled against religion itself, taking away the very foundations of morality, treating our Redeemer's name with contempt and derision, and bringing in doubt the very being of a God. Writings of this kind have been publicly avowed, and the names of the authors prefixed. Now, where has been the zeal of the enemies of the Characteristics against such writings? Have they moved for the exercise of discipline against

* This any man may see, who will look at his eleventh letter, and some of the subsequent ones, as well as the notes on them, which are generally ascribed to Mr. Arnauld.

the writers? Have they supported the motion when made by others? Are not books in opposition to the gospel, and abusing all clergymen, as such, more contrary to the interest of religion, than one which only impeaches the fidelity of a part of that order, from at least a professed concern for the honour of the whole? Does not this tempt men to say, as was said an age ago by Moliere in France, or by some there, on occasion of a play of his called the Tartuffe, That a man may write what he pleaseth against God Almighty in perfect security; but if he write against the characters of the clergy in power, he is ruined for ever.

Another reason why I suspect the sincerity of the enemies of the Characteristics, when they pretend a regard for the interest of religion as the ground of their displeasure, is, that it hath often happened, that both speakers and writers have charged another party of the ministers of the church of Scotland with hypocrisy and deceit, the most villainous of all characters; and yet it never occurred to these gentlemen, that such a charge was hurtful to the interest of religion. I am now to let the reader into a secret. What very much contributed, or rather indeed what chiefly brought me to a resolution of publishing the Characteristics, was a pamphlet published a few months before it, called, A just view of the constitution of the church of Scotland. This universal uncon-

uncontradicted fame attributed to the late Dr. H——n; and the express purpose of it is, to represent a certain set of ministers as agitators of the people, and in general, as not acting upon conscience, even where they pretend it, but from a love of popularity. Besides this, he tells a story, which he calls a “scene of iniquity,” with the initial letters of the names of the persons supposed to be guilty. Was ever this pamphlet charged by my enemies as contrary to the interest of religion? It will not be pretended. Now, I should be glad to know, what it is that makes the discovery of a scene of iniquity, when committed by some whom I must not name, contrary to the interest of religion, but the discovery of a scene of iniquity committed by certain others, no way contrary to it at all? I am not able to find any reason for this difference of judgment but one, which is not very honourable to them, viz. That perhaps scenes of iniquity supposed to be committed by them, are more probable in themselves, and actually obtain more credit, than those which they alledge against others. I do not affirm that this is the reason: but I think, since they had been the aggressors, both in censuring ministers for scrupling obedience to their unconstitutional decisions, and attacking their characters in print; if some nameless author thought fit to retaliate the injury in the last kind, and did

did it with so great success, they ought to have lain as quiet under it as possible, both from equity and prudence : from equity, because they had given the provocation ; and from prudence, because in fact their conduct tempted many to say, The charge must have been just, or it would have been treated with contempt ; the stroke must have been well aimed, the wound must have been very deep, since the scar continues so long, and is never like to be either forgotten or forgiven.

This, however, is in itself but of small moment. It would be of little consequence whether their conduct had been reasonable and consistent or not, if the objection itself were just. But I hope it appears very clearly, from what I have offered above, that supposing the conduct of the clergy to be unbecoming their profession, a regard to religion not only permits, but loudly calls for a severe reprehension of it. This is agreeable to the sentiments and practice of the wisest and best men in every age. There have been indeed a few exceptions : but the lenity which some excellent persons have shewn to the vices of the clergy, has been generally reckoned among their weaknesses and not their virtues. I mention this, lest it should come into any person's mind, what is related of Constantine the Great, viz. that when he received a bundle of papers, which he was told contained accusations against the vicious part

of the clergy, he publicly burnt them, after having taken an oath that he did not know what they contained; and added, that tho' he should see a bishop in the very act of a crime that shall be nameless in English*, he would cover him with his purple. If the account be true, and this be the charity which some plead for with so great earnestness, one can hardly help crying out, O Emperor, great was thy charity!

II. According to the distribution I made of my subject, the next point is, To account for the Characteristics being written in an assumed character and ironical style. "If concern for the interest of religion prompted you," say some, "to attack the characters of the clergy, why was it not done in a serious way? Would it not have been better, gravely to have convicted them of their sin, and warned them of their danger, than to set them in a ridiculous point of light, and expose them to the public scorn?" This objection, I am sensible, made an impression on some well-meaning persons; and therefore it will be necessary to consider it with care. A very good man, when he first read the Characteristics, expressed himself thus: "Alas! if there was occasion given for it, would it not have been better to have had recourse to prayer than to satire?" In general, I humbly apprehend, there is no opposition between

* *Alienum torum labefactantem.*

these two means; and therefore, in many cases, it is proper to employ both. Let me therefore intreat the attention of the reader, while I briefly consider, first, the lawfulness of employing ridicule in such a cause; and secondly, what particular circumstances concurred, to render it the most proper method, if not in a manner necessary, in the instance before us.

That it is a lawful thing to employ ridicule in such a cause, is evident from the very highest authority. There are many instances of irony in the sacred writings. In the third chapter of Genesis, ver. 22. we have an expression used by God himself, which interpreters do generally suppose to be in irony: and as it is of the most severe and penetrating kind, in a most deplorable calamity, so I cannot well imagine what other rational meaning can be put upon the words: “ And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is
 “ become as one of us, to know good and evil.”
 “ ” It must be remembered, that Adam had broke
 “ ” his Maker’s command, from a foolish expectation,
 “ ” upon the devil’s promise, of becoming like
 God. On this, an ancient interpreter says,
 “ Adam deserved to be derided in this manner;
 “ and he was made more deeply sensible of his folly
 “ by this ironical expression, than by any other
 “ that could have been used.” The conduct of
 Elijah, and his treatment of the prophets of Baal,
 is

is another known example of the same kind. It is recorded, 1 Kings xviii. 27. “ And it came
 “ to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and
 “ said, Cry aloud: for he is a God, either he
 “ is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on
 “ a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and
 “ must be awaked.”

There are several instances of the same manner of speaking in the prophetic books; particularly, the prophet Isaiah, in an admirable manner, and at great length, exposes the sottish folly of idolaters. The passages are well known; as are also some in the apostolic writings; and therefore I omit them for the sake of brevity: and only mention an expression of our Saviour himself, who, though a man of sorrows, and in a state of humiliation, yet in some places uses a language plainly ironical; as in John x. 32.
 “ Many good works have I shewed you from
 “ my Father; for which of these works do ye
 “ stone me?” It was certainly making them very
 ridiculous, to ask them, for which of his good
 works they proposed to stone him, as well as it
 was the strongest way of signifying that he had
 never done any works among them but such as
 were good.

After these examples, none will be surpris'd when I say, that the most grave and venerable of the fathers have not only wrote in this man-

ner themselves, but asserted its necessity and use. To be convinced of this, let any man only read St. Jerom, in his letters, and his writings against Jovian and the Pelagians; Tertullian, in his apology against the folly of idolaters; Augustine, Irenæus, and Bernard, and many others of the most approved characters. It is indeed founded upon the plainest reason. There is commonly a pride and self-sufficiency in men under the dominion of error, which makes them deaf to advice, and impregnable to grave and serious reasoning: neither is there any getting at them till their pride is levelled a little by this dismaying weapon. But lest the reader should be less willing to yield to my reasoning than to that of greater men, I shall beg leave to translate three passages from three different writers in distant ages, which could not be more applicable to the times in which they lived, than they are to my present purpose.

The first is from Tertullian: “ That which
 “ I have done, is nothing else but a play be-
 “ fore the real combat. I have rather pointed
 “ out the wounds which might be given you,
 “ than given them in effect. If there are places
 “ which oblige people to laugh, it is because the
 “ subjects themselves are ridiculous. There are
 “ many things which ought to be treated with
 “ contempt and mockery, through fear of giving
 “ them

“ them weight, and making them important by
 “ seriously debating them. Nothing is more
 “ justly due to vanity than derision; and it
 “ belongs to the truth to smile, because it is
 “ chearful, and to despise its enemies, because
 “ it is assured of victory. It is true, we ought
 “ to be careful that the raillery be not low, and
 “ unworthy of the truth; but if that be attended
 “ to, and one can use it with address and deli-
 “ cacy, it is a duty to do so.”

The second passage is from St. Augustine, in
 the following words: “ Who will dare to say,
 “ that the truth ought to remain defenceless
 “ against the attacks of falshood? That the ene-
 “ mies of religion shall be permitted to terrify
 “ the faithful with strong words, and to entice
 “ or seduce them by agreeable turns of wit; but
 “ that believers ought never to write but with
 “ such a coldness of style as to lull the reader
 “ asleep?”

The third passage is from Pascal, in the ele-
 venth of his Provincial Letters: “ As the truths
 “ of the gospel are the proper objects both of love
 “ and respect, so the errors which are opposite to
 “ them are the objects both of hatred and con-
 “ tempt. There are two distinct qualities in
 “ the first, a divine beauty which renders them
 “ amiable, and a sacred majesty which renders
 “ them venerable; there are also in the last, a

“ guilt and impiety which renders them horrible,
 “ and a delusion and folly which renders them
 “ silly and contemptible. Wherefore, as the
 “ saints have always, for truth, the united affec-
 “ tions of love and fear; so, for error, they
 “ have also the correspondent sentiments of ha-
 “ tred and contempt. Their zeal equally dis-
 “ poses them to resist the malice of bad men with
 “ boldness and courage, and to discredit their
 “ folly by derision and scorn.”

That it is lawful in some cases to use ridicule,
 I hope is now sufficiently proved. The truth is,
 though it is common and natural for men to
 cry out, That this is an unbecoming manner of
 handling the subject, when their own mistakes
 are exposed; yet I have met with very few con-
 troversial writers, who do not, in proportion to
 their skill, endeavour to enlist ridicule in the ser-
 vice of reason. It is often indeed a sorry and
 motley mixture of grave and comic; but it suffi-
 ciently shows the natural sense men have of the
 propriety, not only of contradicting what is false,
 but smiling at what is absurd: I might there-
 fore very justly rest my defence here. It was, in
 the first place, my business to judge, whether there
 was sufficient occasion given for such an attempt,
 as well as, whether I was endowed with proper
 talents for the execution. After this, it fell of
 course

course to the readers to determine, how far I had judged right in either, or both of these particulars.

But as, in fact, it was not merely the lawfulness of the thing in general, nor any confidence of my own untried ability in that way of writing, that determined me to make choice of it, but some particular circumstances that seemed to render it necessary. I shall now take the liberty of laying them before the reader. The first of them is the reigning taste of the age. Nothing is more plain, than that a certain levity of mind prevails at present among all ranks; which makes it very hard to fix their attention on any thing that is serious. The very title of a grave discourse is sufficient to disgust many, and to prevent them from ever inquiring what it contains: so that though I resolve to adhere to my promise at first setting out, I am this moment writing with but little hope, that above one twentieth part of the readers of the former treatise will vouchsafe it a perusal. Nay, it is ten to one that many will deny this to be the work of the former author; and affirm, that it is greatly inferior in point of style; that is to say, no style appears to them just or pure, but that which is humourous and poignant.

Besides levity, or an aversion to what is serious, there is another characteristic of the present age, which is perhaps the child of the former; I mean sloth, or an unwillingness to bestow great or long

application of mind upon any subject, be it what it will. This disposition has been wonderfully gratified, and wonderfully increased, by the generality of writers among us for some time past. The authors of periodical publications, such as reviews, magazines, and even common newspapers, for their own interest, have long vied with one another in the variety and liveliness of the pieces which make up their several collections. From perusing these, it is so easy to get a little superficial knowledge of every subject, that few look any further for the means of forming their opinions in religion, government, or learning. Another species of composition, proceeding upon the same principles, is novel-writing. What an inundation of these we have had these twenty years past in Great Britain, is sufficiently known. It would even be an entertainment to enumerate them by their titles, and see what proportion they make of the whole new books in any given period of time.

From these circumstances, it is easy to see what an intending author must have before his eyes. Those who have long had their appetites quickened by variety of dishes, and the most pleasing sauces, are not able to relish plainer, though, to those who can use it, far better and more solid food. This made it necessary for me to fall upon a method of composition which might have some
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chance to procure the attention of the public; and I could think of none more proper than irony; which, when well executed, is almost universally pleasing. Besides, I must acknowledge, that the conduct of the prevailing party did often appear to me in a very ridiculous light; and never more so, than when the Characteristics were published. Moderation had been long a fashionable or cant phrase among them; and yet they were running headlong into the most violent and tyrannical measures. They made great pretences to charity, and a large manner of thinking; and, as a testimony of it, very modestly supposed, that all who did not form the same opinions in religion and government with themselves, were weak silly fools, except two or three knaves who had the direction of the rest. This, I do affirm, was not barely hinted, but openly and confidently asserted; so that I never knew greater bigots, in the proper and genuine sense of that word. How far my attempt would be successful, could only be guessed at; but I imagined, that if I could exhibit them to the public in the same light in which they appeared to myself, they would make a pretty comical figure: and so it happened in fact. My first intention was only to have published, in May 1753, a half sheet, containing the maxims themselves, under the title of, “A list of self-evident truths:” but that having been

neglected, upon the provocation hinted at above, the illustrations were added, and sent abroad a few months afterwards, in the form they now bear.

Another circumstance which seemed to render this way of writing necessary, was the little regard that had been paid to several well-written treatises of a serious kind. The persons chiefly pointed at in the Characteristics had greatly relaxed discipline in point of morals; had, by a course of decisions, planted the country with useless ministers; and though the whole office of ordination proceeds upon the supposition of a call from the people, gravely admitted them without any call at all. This, when done as a part of the public worship of God, as it always is, must be considered by every impartial person, not only as a piece of gross absurdity, and mocking of the people, but a piece of flagrant impiety, and mocking of God. Conscientious ministers absented themselves from these pretended ordinations, till at last it came into the heads of their enemies to force them to be present under pain of the highest censures of the church. They had the hardiness all the while to affirm, that this was absolutely necessary to support the constitution; although every man must agree, that if any of our fathers, who lived about fifty years ago, were to rise up out of his grave, he would say, it was the constitution turned upside down. Many attempts

tempts had been made to reason with them, and clear appeals to the history and standing acts of the church; but all were trodden under foot by the decisions of the annual assemblies, in their judicative capacity. Nay, they at last became so confident of their own power, and so deaf to all reasoning on the subject, that they refused even to read what was written by those of different sentiments; and when they did read it, disdained to make any answer to it, or attempt to convince them any other way than by the unanswerable argument of deposition. This induced me to write in a manner that has obliged them to hear whether they will or not; and though it has not been so happy as to bring them to conviction, I am sure it was no more than well merited correction.

One other reason I shall mention for making choice of this way of writing, was drawn from the modern notions of philosophy, which had so greatly contributed to the corruption of the clergy. The great patron and advocate for these was Lord Shaftsbury, one of whose leading principles it is, that "Ridicule is the test of truth." This principle of his had been adopted by many of the clergy; and there is hardly any man conversant in the literary world, who has not heard it a thousand times defended in conversation. I was therefore willing to try how they themselves could

stand the edge of this weapon; hoping, that if it did not convince them of the folly of the other parts of their conduct, it might at least put them out of conceit with this particular opinion. The last of these, I do really think the publication of the Characteristics has, in a great measure effected; at least within my narrow sphere of conversation. It is but seldom we now hear it pretended, that ridicule is the test of truth. If they have not renounced this opinion, they at least keep it more to themselves, and are less insolent upon it in their treatment of others.

I hope the reader will not imagine, that, by wresting this principle out of the hands of my adversaries, I intend to adopt it myself. There may be truth in it in an equivocal sense; for to be sure nothing that is true can be really ridiculous: but there are few things more pernicious than this principle, as it is commonly understood and applied. It is most certain, that many things both true and excellent may, by a person possessed of the talent of humour, be made apparently ridiculous: and this will have its full effect upon the bulk of mankind, who are not able to discover where the fallacy lies. Dr. Brown, in his Essays on the Characteristics, says with great propriety, That ridicule is not fitted for the discovery of truth; for, so far as it is distinguished from reasoning, it “is only putting imagination
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“ in the place of reason ;” than which few things are more ready to lead us astray. But he allows, that it is very proper to “ disgrace known falsehood :” and as the application of it to this purpose is warranted by the judgment and example of the best and wisest men in all ages, there was nothing to hinder me from making use of the same privilege. In the mean time, if there has been any character of real worth, or any measure truly commendable, ridiculed in the treatise now under consideration, let this be shown by clear and plain deductions of reason, and I am ready to repent of it, and renounce it.

III. This leads me to the third and last part of my defence, viz. To show what occasion was given for such a treatise among us. This I confess to be absolutely necessary, as it is plainly applied, in the title-page, to the church of Scotland. It will be in vain to have shown, that there is nothing sinful or hurtful in attacking the characters of clergymen, where they act in a manner unworthy of their office, or that this may lawfully be done even in the way of ridicule. The question will still be, Have the ministers of the church of Scotland really deserved it? Very great difficulties, however, present themselves in this branch of the subject. There are many things demonstrably true, which it is dangerous to affirm, at least in some places. Upon the sup-

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position,

position, that the prevailing party in this church is of the spirit and disposition painted in the Characteristics, one would think, a man who should upbraid them with their faults in a direct manner, would be in a sorry situation if ever they should be his judges. The “*veritas convitii*” would do him very little service, or rather would only serve to envenom their resentment. Have they been already so enraged against me for a little pleasant raillery? and am I so mad as to hope to defend myself, by bringing against the same persons a serious and deliberate accusation? However formidable this difficulty may appear, I am not without hopes, that such of them as have any measure of impartiality and candour, after weighing what is now to be offered, may be more inclined to forgive the attack already made; and, by breaking their attachment to the most corrupt members, recover the merit and dignity of the general body.

With this view let me make a preliminary remark. Many from the beginning either really did, or at least affected to suppose, that all who joined in the measures carried on by the majority in our general assemblies, were represented in the Characteristics, as infected with every bad principle or practice satirized through the whole. Nothing was farther from the writer’s mind. An answer to that objection, such as the nature of the

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the performance would admit, was inserted in the preface to the second edition of the book itself; and I shall now deliver my judgment upon the point, without the least ambiguity. The political measures which have been carrying on for these thirty years past in the church of Scotland, appear to me to be ruinous to the interests of religion. At the same time I am sensible, that there are many worthy and good men who join in most of those measures; and one great end of the Characteristics was, to open the eyes of such persons, both on their employment and company.

A train of circumstances, not always in our own power, sometimes leads good men themselves to support the most corrupt part of a church in their public measures. The boundaries of prudence and zeal are not easily fixed. Union of opinion in politics, often establishes a connection between men of very opposite principles in religion and morals: and there are few greater instances of the weakness of human nature, than the readiness of men to give protection and countenance to those who are worse than themselves, because they are staunch friends to their party views. Such complacency do some take in this, as an exertion of Christian charity and tendernefs, that it is wonderful to think what they will do, and much more wonderful that they

are

are not ashamed of it, but openly, and to all appearance honestly, defend it.

Whatever unites them with one party, alienates their affection from, and interrupts their correspondence with the opposite: hence extremes are produced on both hands. Persons of fierce and violent tempers, in their zeal, throw out indiscriminate reflections; and those engaged in another interest, turn a deaf ear to every accusation, as the mere effect of party-malice and resentment. Nay, it has been observed, that it is somewhat natural for clergymen, to be more easily irritable at such of their brethren as rise above them in apparent concern for religion, and zeal for promoting it, than at those who fall below them. The first are a reproach to their own conduct and character, the other are a foil to it. So that every one who espouses any bold or vigorous measure, may lay his account with a sensible coldness, even from such of his brethren as are in the next immediate degree below him.

Another very considerable difficulty lies in my way. The more the complaint of degeneracy in the church of Scotland is just, the more difficult, in one respect, it will be to carry a conviction of it to the minds, either of those who are guilty of it, or those who observe it. The corruption of a church always implies, a light sense of the evil of sin; and therefore, however plainly I may
make

make it appear, that such and such facts are done, it will be hard to convince many that they are wrong, at least in any great degree. Many a clergyman will not yield the one half of those things to be sins that were admitted to be so a century ago; nor do they see the one half of the evil of sin, either in clergy or laity, that was once taken for granted. Those who have not the same ideas of morality, can never be supposed to have an equal impression of the insufficiency of the same degree of it. Those who look upon family-worship, for instance, as an unnecessary piece of devotion, will never be brought to imagine, that an assembly is one whit worse for consisting of so many members who habitually neglect that duty, if I may be permitted to use so old-fashioned a phrase. On the other hand, though I should produce the names and surnames of those clergy who, mounted upon their courfers at the public races, join the gentlemen of the turf, and are well skilled in all the terms of that honourable art; though I should name those who are to be found at routs and drums, and other polite assemblies of the same nature, and can descant with greater clearness on the laws of the gaming-table than the Bible, instead of being commanded to produce a proof of the facts, I should expect to find many who denied the relevancy of the crimes.

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For this reason, before we go farther, perhaps it will not be improper to introduce a general observation. If we consider the circumstances of the church of Scotland, we may, from a knowledge of human nature, and the experience of past ages, safely affirm, she is in a lax and degenerate state. If it were not so, it would be a miracle. Nay, I will venture to go further, and to say, it would be such a miracle as never happened before. We in this church have enjoyed uninterrupted outward prosperity for more than seventy years; and during all that time, have not only been free from persecution, but have enjoyed the favour and protection of the civil power. If this long course of temporal prosperity has had no effect in bringing on a depravation of our manners, it must needs be a miracle; because it is contrary to the natural course of things: and he that will pretend to find a period, when any such thing happened before, will, I am confident, be unsuccessful. The primitive church was never long without persecution during the three first centuries; yet they had a trial how they could bear prosperity, in the interval between the ninth and tenth persecution, immediately before that dreadful one which they suffered under the Emperor Dioclesian. And history informs us, that though they had not then any civil establishment, yet the ease and prosperity

prosperity which they enjoyed had a most fatal influence upon their manners. So long as a minister is only in the post of greatest danger, there will be less hazard of worldly men endeavouring to push themselves into that situation: but as soon as that office begins to be considered as a quiet and safe settlement for this life, how can it be but many, from no higher end than worldly interest, will get and keep possession of it? Therefore, though I were living in Japan, and knew nothing else of the church of Scotland, but that she had enjoyed such a course of outward prosperity, I would as certainly conclude, that a corruption of manners was affecting even the clergy, as I would, that iron which had been long out of the furnace, and had not been rubbed or scoured would be growing rusty.

After all, it is somewhat strange, that this performance should stand in need of an apology, or that the accusation against it should be so often repeated, That the author must be a bad man; and that it is hurtful to the interest of religion. This is certainly the clamour of the guilty, and not the judgment of the candid. There is no such apprehension of the thing being criminal among those who are the most unprejudiced and impartial judges; I mean, the laity. It is well known, with how much approbation it was read by them, when first published; and, notwithstanding

standing the love of defamation, which is natural to mankind, I am persuaded its admirers would have been of quite a different class than they generally were, if it had been against the interest of religion; and that it would have had no admirers at all, if it had been a satire without an object.

Let us suppose any person had taken into his head to write a satire against the ministers of the church of Scotland, and had thought proper to represent them in an opposite light: suppose he had represented them as having arrived to such a degree of bigotry, as to believe, that no person could be saved who had the least doubt of any thing contained in the large systems of Pictet and Turretine; as so severe disciplinarians, that they were continually harrassing gentlemen and noblemen, and summoning them before their sessions, for but walking out in their gardens a little after sermon on the Lord's day, or sitting half an hour too long at their bottle after dinner on other days; as so rigid and mortified in their own lives, that they were in danger of bringing back the monkish austerity of the church of Rome. Whether would the author of such a pamphlet have been reckoned sound in his judgment? Would any body have been so idle as to read it? or, if they did, would they not have understood it backwards? Whereas, in the present case, there

there was a testimony given to the truth and justice of the characters drawn, by the assent and approbation of almost every reader.

The laity were not the only witnesses of its propriety : many of the most eminent and respectable of the clergy of our neighbour-country, gave evidence in favour of the Characteristics. I have been well informed, that the Bishop of L——n, in conversation with a nobleman of our own country, gave it a high commendation; and added withal: “ It seems only directed against a
 “ certain party of the church of Scotland; but
 “ we have many in England to whom the cha-
 “ racters are very applicable.” It is also said by those who deserve credit, that the Bishop of O——d spoke much in the same way; and said, He wished their own clergy would read it for their instruction and correction. And several have seen a letter from the present Bishop of G——r, then Dr. W———n, one of the most eminent authors of this age, to a minister in Scotland; in which he commends the performance, and, particularly uses these words: “ A fine piece of
 “ raillery against a party to which we are no
 “ strangers here.”

Is it to be supposed, that such persons, eminent for worth and penetration, would have approved a thing so evidently criminal as some are pleased to think this tract? Or are there indeed
 persons

persons of the characters there represented in the church of England, and none in the church of Scotland? Shall the persons above-named openly affirm, there are many such in England; and must the man be condemned, without hearing, and without mercy, who is suspected of hinting there are some such in her sister-church? I have often indeed reflected, with some surprise, on the different situation of affairs in Scotland and in England. I have seen many books printed in England, with the names of the authors, which plainly and without ambiguity affirm, that there are some of the clergy proud, ambitious, time-servers, and tools of those in power; some of them lazy and slothful, lovers of ease and pleasure; some of them scandalous and dissolute in their manners; some of them wholly ignorant and insufficient; and that all are tolerated by those who preside. These things they affirm, without the least danger, or apprehension of it. But were any man to publish a book that had the tenth part of such severity in it, in Scotland, he ought, at the same time, to have a ship hired to fly to another country.

But the strongest of all general proofs of the justice of the satire in the *Characteristics*, is the behaviour of those who are supposed to be aimed at. The lamentable outcry they made at first, the malice and resentment they have ever since discovered against the author, prove to a demonstration

stration, that his reproofs are well founded. We shall reduce the argument to this short form: Either there was ground for this satire, or there was none. If there was none, neither surely could there be for one half of the complaints that have been made against it, for it would have been perfectly harmless. Many, even of the present clergy of the church of Scotland, do not find themselves touched by it in the least degree. If the characters of the rest lay no more open to the strokes of raillery, why should they have been so much disconcerted by it? If they were not hit, it is impossible they could be hurt.

These general arguments, of themselves, might satisfy any impartial person; but let us now go a little further, and consider particularly the present state of the church of Scotland, and how far it might give occasion to the satire. It would be tedious to mention every single stroke of raillery contained in that performance; but so far as it carries a censure of principles or characters generally prevailing, they may be reduced to the three following classes, Doctrine, Discipline, and Government. We shall examine each of these distinctly and separately.

I. Let us consider our present state in point of Doctrine. It is certainly hinted, that there are many who have departed from the old protestant principles contained in our Confession
of

262 A SERIOUS APOLOGY for the
of Faith and Catechisms. And is it possible
to deny this fact? Is it not the general com-
plaint of the people through the whole kingdom,
that from many pulpits there is little to be
heard of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel? or,
if they be mentioned at all, it is no more than
an aukward and cold compliment to save appear-
ances, while something very different is chiefly
insisted on. If I am not mistaken, the leading
doctrines, both in the holy Scriptures, and in
the confessions of all the protestant churches,
are, “ The lost and fallen state of man by na-
“ ture;— The absolute necessity of salvation
“ through Jesus Christ;— The pardon of sin by
“ the riches of divine grace, through the im-
“ puted righteousness of the Saviour;— Sancti-
“ fication and comfort by the Holy Ghost.”
These doctrines are of so great moment, and
have so extensive an influence on the whole of
practical religion, that where they are firmly be-
lieved, they will not only be often brought di-
rectly in view, but the manner of speaking up-
on every other subject will be such, as to leave
no jealousy of an intended omission; yet certain it
is, that many are the complaints upon this sub-
ject from every quarter; and therefore I am
warranted to infer, either that the doctrine is
corrupted, and something else intentionally
taught, or that the persons complained of are ut-
terly,

terly incapable of expressing themselves in such a manner as to be understood.

I shall now put the argument in another form. There is unquestionably a great difference in point of doctrine, between some ministers and others. If the one sort therefore preach the doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, undoubtedly the others either contradict or omit it. I am persuaded there are some who would be ashamed to have it thought, that they preached this doctrine; and nothing is more plain, than that those who are known to do so, in the most clear and explicit manner, are usually the objects of their jealousy or hatred. It is probable I shall be told here, Why do you make these general complaints? name the particular persons, produce your evidence and prove the charge; they will, in that case, be immediately laid aside. To this I answer, that it is a very easy thing for a man to preach erroneous doctrine in such a manner that it shall be impossible to convict him by a legal prosecution in a free country. Every day shews, that men may print sedition, treason, and even blasphemy, in such a way, that no human law can take hold of it. What then should hinder men to preach heresy under the same prudent disguises? Besides, what would a prosecution signify, if it must come before a court, of which, between clergy and laity, perhaps a plurality

264 A S E R I O U S A P O L O G Y for the
plurality of members differ little in opinion from
the pannel.

My subject does not oblige me to say any
thing upon the excellence and importance of the
neglected truths, yet I will take this opportunity
of delivering my opinion in a few words. These
doctrines I am persuaded are not only true in
themselves, but the great foundation of all prac-
tical religion. Wherever they are maintained
and inculcated, strictness and purity of life and
manners will be their natural effect. On the
contrary, where they are neglected, and a pre-
tended theory of moral virtue substituted in their
room, it will immediately and certainly intro-
duce a deluge of profanity and immorality in
practice. Of this the present state of our own
church and nation, compared with that of former
periods, is a strong and melancholy proof.

But there is no occasion for entering further
into this subject; the ridicule in the Charac-
teristics turns not so much on the truth or im-
portance of these doctrines, as the gross absur-
dity of men's subscribing what they do not be-
lieve. However firm a persuasion I may have of
any system of opinions, the right of private judg-
ment and freedom of enquiry, I would wish to
remain sacred and inviolable. Those who use
this liberty with courage, and with candour,
ought to be held in the highest esteem by every

one who differs from them. But for men, at their entrance on the sacred office, solemnly to subscribe to the truth of what all their lives after they endeavour to undermine and destroy, is at once so criminal and so absurd, that no reproof given to it can possibly exceed in point of severity. I take the liberty here of transcribing a passage from a printed sermon, preached at the opening of a synod in Scotland: where, speaking of these subscriptions, the author says, “ This is
 “ so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is
 “ astonishing to think how men can set their
 “ minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in
 “ peace after the deliberate commission of it.
 “ The very excuses and evasions that are offer-
 “ ed in defence of it, are a disgrace to reason,
 “ as well as a scandal to religion. What suc-
 “ cess can be expected from that man’s ministry,
 “ who begins it with an act of so complicated
 “ guilt? How can he take upon him to re-
 “ prove others for sin, or to train them up in
 “ virtue and true goodness, while himself is
 “ chargeable with direct, premeditated, and per-
 “ petual perjury? I know nothing so nearly re-
 “ sembling it, as those cases in trade, in which
 “ men make false entries, and at once screen
 “ and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or
 “ causing others to swear, contrary to truth.
 “ This is justly reputed scandalous, even in the
 Vol. II. N “ world;

“ world; and yet I know no circumstance
 “ in which they differ, that does not tend to
 “ show it to be less criminal than the other*.”

There may be some of the laity who have themselves an inward aversion to the system of doctrine contained in our Confession and Catechisms, and who, for that reason, are pleased with such of the clergy as preach in a different strain: but sure I am, whoever will reflect upon the circumstance of their having all subscribed to it, can never have a high opinion of their conduct upon the whole, but must condemn the insincerity, let the propositions subscribed be in themselves either true or false.

What is above, may suffice as to doctrine in general. The particular strictures in the Characteristics against a false taste in composition, may well enough answer for themselves without any defence. That there have been many instances of strange incongruity in this particular, is beyond all question. A cold, heartless, indifferent manner of speaking on those subjects, in which both speaker and hearer have so great, nay, no less than an infinite concern; an ostentatious swell of words, or a pointed ornamented foppery of style, so ill suited to the gravity of the pulpit; an abstracted, refined, or philoso-

* Mr. Wither'spoon's Synod-sermon,

phical disquisition, which, if it has any meaning at all, perhaps not three in the audience can possibly understand; are these imaginary, or are they real characters? If they are characters drawn from real life, where is the sin or danger of exposing them? For my own part, I am grieved to see so little learning among the generality of the ministers of this church, which is probably owing to their poverty. But I am in a good measure comforted with this reflection, that the weakest commonly do as much service as the wisest; because, though they were ever so willing, they are not able to fill the audience with any admiration of themselves, and therefore their attention must be fixed upon the truths delivered, and not the parts and manner of the speaker.

2. Let us consider a little the state of the church of Scotland with respect to Discipline; that is to say, the inspection of the morals of ministers and people. Upon the most deliberate review, all I can find intimated in the Characteristics upon this subject, is, that there is far less strictness and tenderness of conversation, less of the appearance of piety and devotion, in persons of the spiritual function, than formerly; and less severity, in the exercise of discipline, upon those who offend.

What shall I say in defence of this, but that the thing appears to me to be manifestly true?

There are no particular crimes charged, but, in general, levity and worldly conversation, with a neglect of the duties of the sacred office. And would to God there were not the greatest cause of charging, not merely some few disorderly persons, not merely the younger sort in general, but all without exception, as in some measure guilty. If there is a remarkable increase of corruption among the worst, there will also be a visible declension in zeal and piety among the best. This is what the natural course of things teaches us to expect. It is also what our Saviour himself hath forewarned us of; "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold*."

The present age is a moving example of this, both with respect to the clergy and laity. As there is an alarming degree of infidelity and impiety among many of every rank, so even those who preserve some regard for religion, fall very far short of that eminent and exemplary piety which some alive have seen in Christians of the last age, and of which our fathers have told us.

I am very sensible, that the degeneracy of their own times has been the constant and uniform complaint of religious and moral writers in every age, and that they may be liable to some deception in this particular: but at the same time, the records of history put it beyond all

* Matt. xxiv, 12.

question, that there have been many instances, among all nations, of local and temporary reformation, of local and occasional depravation. Perhaps (though I see no reason for affirming it) the quantity of human virtue, through the whole earth, may be nearly the same in every age; yet certainly it often changes its residence, and leaves one nation, to settle in another. Nay, it seems very reasonable to believe, that as human things are never at a stand, a church and nation, in a quiet and peaceable state, is always growing insensibly worse, till it be either so corrupt, as to deserve and procure exterminating judgments, or in the infinite mercy of God, by some great shock or revolution, is brought back to simplicity and purity, and reduced, as it were, to its first principles.

They are much to be blamed therefore, who, because the complaints of some moral writers are exaggerated, and their comparisons not always well founded, treat every thing of this nature as foolish and visionary, refusing so much as to examine whether the charge brought against themselves is just or groundless. On the contrary, I cannot help being of opinion, that it is every man's duty, to do all in his power to retard the progress of corruption, by strictness and tendernefs in his own personal walk, fidelity and vigilance in the duties of a public station, and a

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bold and open testimony against every thing
contrary to the interest of true and undefiled
religion.

But because we have now chiefly to do with
the clergy, let us return to them. If it were
proper, I could easily produce examples of inde-
cency and impiety in clergymen, sufficient to fill
every serious person with the deepest concern ;
and which the most relaxed moralist would not
be able to defend ; but as I would fain believe,
that things very gross are yet but seldom com-
mitted among us, and are not commonly known,
I shall confine myself only to things more open-
ly practised by many, and too easily tolerated by
all. This is the more proper, that the book I
am defending can scarcely be charged with dis-
closing hidden scenes, but dwells on such devia-
tions from duty, as are epidemic and general,
and rather smiles at the ridiculous, than exposes
the guilty part of every character.

There is one circumstance which I am afraid
betrays many into a mistake. The world in ge-
neral expects a great “ comparative” sanctity in
those who bear the sacred office ; therefore, when
ministers take a little liberty, others think them-
selves warranted to take a great deal more.
These sentiments, which are universal, contri-
bute to keep the proportion between the clergy
and laity always nearly the same. When there-
fore

fore clergymen see the distance still remaining between them and others, they are ready to forget how far they are both from the place where they ought to have been.

Many things are faults in a minister, which, if not innocent, are certainly far less criminal in other men. There is also a species of faults which I apprehend do render a minister justly contemptible, upon which no law, either civil or ecclesiastic, can lay hold; and which, for that reason, are the proper objects both of serious and satirical reproof. If one set apart to the service of Christ in the gospel, manifestly shews his duty to be a burden, and does no more work than is barely sufficient to screen him from censure; if he reckons it a piece of improvement, how seldom, or how short, he can preach; and make his boast how many omissions he has brought a patient and an injured people to endure without complaint; while at the same time, he cannot speak with temper of those who are willing to do more than himself; however impossible it may be to ascertain his faults by a libel, he justly merits the detestation of every faithful minister, and every real Christian.

That such is the case with not a few amongst us, there is the greatest reason to believe. The heavy and general complaints of the people from some quarters, and their gross ignorance in others,

prove it beyond contradiction. Those whose conduct is not liable to this imputation, will not find, that they have suffered the smallest injury, in point of character, by the publication of the *Characteristics*, excepting such as feel the wounds given to their friends as sensibly as those given to themselves. In this case, however, they have an easy remedy: Let them “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”

I am unwilling to enter farther into the characters of ministers; and therefore shall only add, let the impartial but consider what happened a few years ago, and then say, whether we are not greatly relaxed in point of discipline. Did not several ministers think themselves at liberty to attend the entertainments of the stage? I am sensible, many will immediately pass sentence upon me as a person of very narrow principles, for introducing this as a mark of our depravity. I must however insist upon it, from the united testimony of the best and wisest of the Heathen writers, the uniform sentiments and practice of the primitive church, and the pieces written for the stage in modern times, which any man may peruse, that the performances of hired players have never yet been conducted with so much decency as to deserve the countenance and presence of a minister of Christ. The General Assembly did indeed

indeed judicially disapprove of that liberty taken by ministers; but the censure inflicted on the offenders is so gentle, that it was then the opinion of many, it would have a greater tendency to encourage, than to prevent the repetition of the offence. It now appears they judged right; for, if I am not greatly misinformed, the offence has been repeated since that time with absolute impunity.

If the morals of the clergy themselves are corrupted, there is all the reason in the world to expect, that the reins of discipline will be slackened as to the disorders of others. This indeed is so notorious, that it would be idle and unnecessary to attempt a proof of it; and therefore I shall only make a reflection or two upon the reception given, not long ago, to a proposal for censuring those writers who had published and avowed irreligious and immoral sentiments. It is well known what violent opposition this proposal met with; nor will it soon be forgot, what sort of reasoning was used against it; and nothing can show, in a clearer light, that low and languid state to which our discipline is now reduced. It was generally represented as a species of persecution, and as flowing from a persecuting spirit. Upon this I shall lay before the reader one or two very short reflections.

1st, What is ecclesiastical censure? Is it any more than a judicial declaration, that such and such things are contrary to the spirit of the gospel, and inconsistent with the character of a Christian? No civil penalties follow upon it among us, and no civil penalties ought to follow upon it in any nation. From this it is very plain, that such censures, as they are in their nature just and necessary, so they carry the evidence of their justice in themselves. If in any case they are misapplied, and a person is condemned for what is laudable, such condemnation can reflect no dishonour but upon those who pronounce it.

2dly, Whether should we be most ready to be provoked at the impudence of professed unbelievers, desiring to retain the name of Christians, or to smile at the absurdity of calling it persecution to deprive them of it? If infidelity were a principle, properly speaking, or implied a system of real and positive opinions, all of that persuasion would reckon themselves bound as honest men, to renounce their baptism, and every apparent relation to the deluded believers. Instead of desiring admission to what Christians call their privileges, they would consider the imposition of such things as a great hardship, and beg that they might have nothing to do with them; and, in such a case, certainly due regard would be paid to their tender consciences. As to the charge
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of persecution, it is the most ridiculous imaginable. They themselves are the aggressors; and though they are our open enemies, think proper to be greatly offended, when we say, they are not our friends.

3dly, What can be the meaning of those professing Christians who desire to retain in their communion the enemies of the gospel? Can they, or will they do us any service? Is it possible that they can bring us any honour? Can it be of any benefit to themselves? None of all these. But it must visibly lessen the sanctity of the Christian character in the apprehension of mankind in general, and give the unhappy persons themselves more reason than any other circumstance whatever, to say, the whole is nothing at bottom but deceit and imposition.

3. It now remains only to consider the present state of the church of Scotland with respect to its government. This, so far as it is different from the former, or at least so far as it is touched upon in the Characteristics, relates chiefly to the admission of ministers, with a few hints upon the qualifications and attestation of elders who sit as members in the supreme court.

The admission of ministers into vacant congregations is indeed a matter of the highest moment, and the opposition of sentiments among us upon this subject, probably lies at the bottom

of all our other differences. I am also of opinion, that the continuance of what have been commonly called “violent settlements” will have the most certain and powerful influence in banishing religion and decency, and bringing us into a situation of which I charitably believe many who prosecute these measures have not the least suspicion. Willingly therefore, were it in my power, would I contribute to open the eyes of some of my brethren, on the pernicious consequences of their own conduct. But I have the discouragement to reflect, that the force of custom, and the power of prejudice, will probably shut their ears against any thing I have to offer.

In order, if possible, to procure some attention, let me intreat the reader not to imagine, that I have embraced, or am about to plead in favour of such ridiculous and absurd notions, as through ignorance or malice are commonly imputed to me and others of the same sentiments, such as, That every Christian, as such, has a right to call a minister upon an establishment; and that Christ hath purchased this right for them by his death; and therefore that they ought to assert this right, though in the most seditious and disorderly manner. We know perfectly well, that it is a question, not of right, but of fact, Who has a title to call a minister to enjoy the public maintenance? and that none have any
title

title to it at all, excepting those to whom the law gives it. Neither would we contend, that every man ought to have such a right, though we had it in our power to make new laws upon that subject. Such a seeming equality would be a real inequality. The sum of my belief in this matter is contained in the following propositions. Every man hath a natural right, well secured to him in this happy island, to judge for himself in every thing that regards religion, and to adhere to any minister he pleases, on the establishment, or in opposition to it. The legal stipend, levied originally from the public, was certainly intended to provide a sufficient and useful pastor to the people within the bounds of a certain parish. He cannot be of much service to them, if they be upon ill terms with him; he can be of none at all, if they will not hear him. No man ought to be compelled, by ecclesiastical or civil penalties, to submit in such a case; and though he were, such forced religion would be worse than none. The only inference I draw from these principles is, that decency, and our indispensable duty as church-courts, requires us to make no such settlements, without the deepest regret, and never without a real necessity. Perhaps I might go a little farther, and say, that nothing can excuse us from making them at all, while
our

our office of ordination continues in its present form.

The question then rests precisely on this single point: Does the law, as it now stands, compel us to make all these settlements without exception, and without expostulation? If it does, what is the benefit, and what is the meaning of the separate independent jurisdiction of our courts, to which the decision of such causes is committed by law, and secured by the treaty of union? It is in vain to dissemble it, we have brought a great part of the hardships upon ourselves; and those who in their hearts are averse from parochial elections, only pretend the law as a colour for their conduct. Were settlements refused when highly inexpedient, and patrons treated with decency, we should have little trouble from them. At any rate, as the persons presented, whether probationers or ministers, are entirely in our power, by authority exerted here, every remaining difficulty would be removed.

I believe this is the first instance that ever happened, of churchmen surrendering the power and influence which the law gave them, into other hands, without resistance, and without complaint; nay many of them zealously contending for it, and establishing it by their own repeated decisions. It would be no hard matter to point out the real cause or causes of this conduct;

duct; but at present I forbear, and leave it to every man to assign them for himself: only I cannot help lamenting, that our noble, venerable, republican constitution, seems to be so near its period. Whether it is likely to undergo any outward change is of little moment: when the spirit is gone, the remaining name and form is not worth being contended for.

But that I may not wholly yield to despondency, since an alteration of measures is yet possible, I shall now lay before the reader a few of the certain consequences of our continuing in the same. When it comes to be a settled point, that a presentation, alone and unsupported, infallibly secures a settlement, they will be openly and scandalously bought and sold. This is the case in England, notwithstanding the strongest laws against simony, and a tremendous oath, which the incumbent himself must take before his induction. And it will always be the case in every country, in the present state of human nature. Our own experience may teach us this. Within these few years, there have been several complaints of simony in this church, and very great zeal has been shewn to make laws for preventing it. That zeal is highly commendable: but, alas! it will be quite ineffectual. To strengthen the power of presentations, and yet prevent simony, is just as hopeful an attempt, as to open the
windows,

windows, and keep out the light. The art and invention of interested persons, to find a way of evading laws after they are made, is always far superior to the foresight of the wisest men, in providing against cases which have not yet happened.

There is one distressing circumstance in this prospect, that simoniacal pactions among us will be hurtful and reproachful in an uncommon degree. The settlements in Scotland are generally small; they will be every year of still less value by the improvements of the country, and increasing wealth of other classes of men. In what a beggarly condition then will those be who have been obliged to pay dear for so scanty a provision? Perhaps the reader will say, Happily few of the purchasers have any money to give. I believe so: but this will not mend the matter; for the most mean and fordid, perhaps scandalous, compliances must come in the place of money. I am ashamed even to mention some of the ways by which it is undoubtedly certain presentations will be, because they have been procured. Can any minister think of this without the deepest concern?

Such a ministry must fall into the lowest and most contemptible state, through poverty and ignorance. We differ much from the church of England. In that church, tho' there are many of the inferior clergy in the most abject condition,

dition, there are also many dignified persons, as they are called, who enjoy ample revenues and great ease. These have noble opportunities for study, and are enabled to distinguish themselves by works of literature. By this means the church of England derives a lustre from the characters and writings of particular members, which she does not deserve for the general frame of her constitution. But what must be the case in Scotland? Shall we venture to look a little further into futurity? Have our countrymen so little spirit as to submit to so much misery and scorn? No; it is more than probable some of them, at once stimulated by ambition, and compelled by necessity, will gradually alter the constitution. They will introduce sine cures and pluralities, that they themselves may live in splendor and dignity, while the remaining part shall be thrust down to a state more despicable than ever. It is in vain to think, that the equality of votes in a General Assembly will hinder this: for as power follows property, a very few persons enriched by additional salaries, with the faithful assistance of those who are dazzled with the same expectations, will easily govern the rest. The truth is, many of them, despairing of success, and ill able to bear the expence of travelling, will stay at home, and let them do just as they please.

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The above is no doubt a very melancholy prospect, and will in time have a most malignant influence upon the morals of the clergy. But the truth is, the settlement of parishes by presentations, is directly and immediately hurtful to the characters of those who are training up for the sacred office. When they know that their future settlement does not depend upon the apostolic qualification, their being “of good report,” but upon interest with the great, it must necessarily introduce, in many cases, licentious and irregular practices, as well as habituate them to fawning and servility. There is more danger in this than many apprehend. On consulting the history of the church, we shall find few characters more odious in clergymen, than ambition, and open solicitation of ecclesiastical preferment. I am sorry that so much way has been given to this already, without having been observed. Small changes in forms and language, do often introduce great changes in manners and characters. In ancient times men could hardly be persuaded to take on them the weighty and important office of a bishop. In times not very distant, in our own church, the minister or probationer called, was never considered as a party, but as the subject concerning which the process was carried on by the callers or refusers. But they have been for some time past declared to be parties :

ties: they begin to attend the cause, to appear at the bar, to urge their claim, to consider the people who are to be under their charge as their adversaries, and too often to treat them with contempt and disdain.

I know some treat with great neglect the danger of a lax and immoral ministry, from the present method of settling vacancies. So long as they are of this mind, it is no wonder they continue in the practice; for it can be of very little consequence how men are chosen, if they are fit for the office. They tell us, an edict is served before admission, where every man has access to object against the life or doctrine of the presentee. The effect of this will be very small. Judicial processes of that kind are always expensive and invidious, often difficult, and sometimes dangerous. How few then will be so public-spirited as to undertake them? The example of England may satisfy us of this. It is as competent to prosecute a man for error or immorality in England as in Scotland; yet what person or parish ever thinks of making the experiment?

Others tell us, "It is all in your own power: why do you license improper men? it is impossible to present any man who has not a regular licence." How surprising is it, that persons of ever so little reflection should make use of this argument? It proceeds upon a supposition, which

which the least knowledge of human nature must show to be unreasonable, viz. That every presbytery, through the whole kingdom, will be unalterably faithful and vigilant. If there be but a corrupt or negligent majority in any one of them, the licence will operate over all. Nay, let them be supposed ever so faithful, they may be deceived by an hypocrite, or not able to find such proofs of what they strongly suspect, as to found and support a sentence of refusal. The more we consider the matter in every possible view, we shall find, that a parochial election of ministers would be a better security for regularity and decency in the clergy, than all the laws that ever were framed on the subject. Frequently men cannot, and sometimes they will not, execute the laws; but this rule would operate uniformly and powerfully, and would execute itself.

I add only one other unhappy consequence of continuing the present method of supplying vacancies. If a presentation must supersede all judgment of the church-courts, as to the propriety of an ordination, and even the expediency of a translation, we may expect to see some of the weakest, and most contemptible ministers, settled in the most conspicuous and important charges. Persons of this character are not always free from vanity and ambition, nor always destitute of interest by male or female connections. We
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have had some instances of this kind already; but much greater and more shameful may be expected, so soon as presentations have acquired an irresistible power. It will be said, perhaps, They have had all the force in law, for above forty years, that it is likely they ever will have. I answer, that is very true; but every one knows their very different effect in practice at the beginning and at the end of that period. Patrons continued long to pay a regard to the opinion of the heritors, according to rank and character in the congregation concerned. As they found their own strength increasing, however, they paid gradually less and less; they now pay very little; and the time seems just at hand, when they will pay none at all.

This argument will, I hope, have the greater weight, that I have known instances of different persons, both among the clergy and laity, who had concurred in supporting presentations in other cases, but who were both alarmed and provoked when they themselves came to be treated in a tyrannical manner. The heritors in general indeed have been long made instrumental in bearing down the common people; and this being finished, they themselves, as is almost constantly the case in political struggles, must feel the weight of that authority which they have established. The
evil

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evil hath taken so deep root, that it is somewhat un-
certain whether a remedy be now possible; nay, it
is still more uncertain, whether any resistance will
be seriously attempted. The consequences however
are like to be so terrible, that they may well justify
complaint, and, in particular, be my excuse for
endeavouring to expose the conduct of those whom
I considered as betraying the liberties of the public.

As to the censures inflicted on ministers who
refused to be present at the ordination of ministers
to nobody, I shall say but little, because that se-
verity seems to have ceased. Several ministers
have absented themselves, in like cases since
the deposition of Mr. Gillespie, and yet have
escaped with impunity. The reason probably is,
the thing is now so common, that the odium at-
tending it is become inconsiderable, and not
worth the pains of an endeavour to divide it. But
as that measure was once like to become univer-
sal, may I not observe, that it remains in the his-
tory of our church an example of what, alas!
appears but too plainly in the history of every
church, That, in proportion as authority is re-
laxed in enforcing the laws of God, it is common-
ly stretched and carried to excess in support of the
unnecessary, doubtful, or pernicious command-
ments of men. Let any man produce a period in
which there was less rigour in punishing mini-
sters for neglect of parochial duties, or irregularity

rity in private practice, than when they were threatened with deposition if they refused to join in these not very honourable settlements. Nay, though we should look upon the preservation of church-authority as a matter of great moment, it was not obedience to the standing laws, on which the welfare of the whole depends, that was so strictly required, but compliance with or approbation of the decisions of the annual Assemblies in their judicative capacity. It hath often surprised me to hear the plea of conscience, in such cases, treated as a mere pretence. What sentiments must those persons have, who look upon it as a thing incredible, that a man should scruple being present at an ordination, where some of the answers to the questions put to the candidate, though joined with in a part of divine worship, are either directly false, or wholly absurd?

This part of the Apology has been so much lengthened out, that I wholly omit the attesting unqualified and admitting unattested elders into the church-courts. There is indeed so manifest a breach of truth in the one case, and of law and order in the other, that if men do not see it themselves, it must be owing to such invincible prejudice as it is in vain to contend with.

Thus I have laid before the reader, in a serious and candid manner, what I hope will appear

pear a sufficient apology for this offensive performance. Nothing could have induced me to the attempt, but the unwearied endeavours of many to represent it as an evidence of a bad temper and unchristian disposition, which the particular structure of the book made some undiscerning persons rashly assent to. I have not the smallest reason to repent of it on account of its nature, its design, or its effects upon the public. If there was any mistake, it was in point of prudence, which should have directed me to avoid bringing such a load of malice and resentment upon myself. This has afforded me one observation not very honourable to human nature, viz. That the rage of enemies is always more active and more lasting than the affection of friends. It often happens, that some who are very much pleased to find one stand forth as a champion for their political opinions, and ready to go, as it were, to the front of the battle; when their enemies, smarting with the wounds he has given them, traduce and vilify his character, these esteemed friends often, in a great measure, give it up, and discover much satisfaction with themselves, that they had acted in a wiser and more cautious manner.

I conclude the whole, with beseeching all who are convinced, that the present state of the church of Scotland is such as I have represented, to exert

ert themselves with zeal and activity for her preservation and recovery. There is a wonderful, though a natural union, among all worldly men, against the spirit and power of true religion, where-ever it appears. I am sorry to add, that this is one of the instances in which the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. There are many whose conduct shows them to be actuated by an equal mixture of sloth and despair. They are unwilling to act with vigour, and defend themselves, by alleging, that nothing can be done with success. How much better would the old Roman maxim be, “*Nunquam desperandum est de republica?*” and how much better reason have we to adopt it? Nothing is impossible to the power of God. I add, that the most remarkable times of the revival of religion, in this part of the united kingdom, immediately succeeded times of the greatest apostacy, when “*truth*” seemed to be “*fallen in the street, and equity could not enter.*” This was the case immediately before the year 1638. Corruption in doctrine, looseness in practice, and slavish submission in politics, had overspread the church of Scotland: and yet, in a little time, she appeared in greater purity and in greater dignity than ever she had done before, or perhaps than ever she hath done since that period.

riod. Let no Christian, therefore, give way to desponding thoughts. We plead the cause that shall at last prevail. Religion shall rise from its ruins; and its oppressed state at present should not only excite us to pray, but encourage us to hope for its speedy revival.

THE END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



