

ANIMADVERSIONS

ON A

PAMPHLET,

ENTITLED

Thoughts on the Examination and Trials of
CANDIDATES for the sacred Ministry;

IN A

LETTER

TO THE

UNKNOWN AUTHOR:

By JOHN BAKER, A. M.

Minister of the Gospel at *Far Manors*

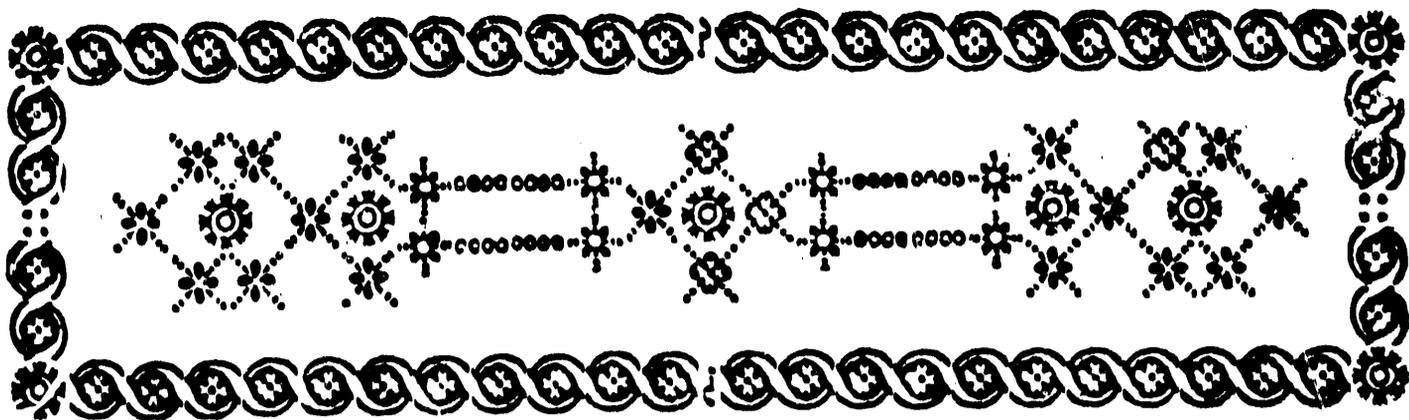
I. Tim. i. 12. *And I thank our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the Ministry.*

I. Tim. v. 22. *Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins; keep thyself pure.*

PHILADELPHIA

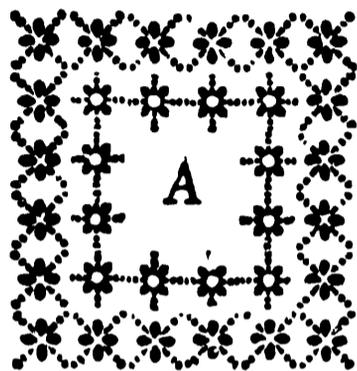
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MDCCLXVI



A LETTER, &c.

Reverend Sir,



S I am very unwilling to agitate the minds of private Christians with controversy without important necessity, and especially controversy, in which they are not immediately interested, I have not chosen to invite their attention by directing the following Remarks to them; but upon reading your Performance, I thought it proper to address a few Animadversions upon it to yourself. Though I take it for granted you are a Minister, yet, as I know not who you are in person, there needs no apology for sending this letter in quest of you in this public manner, especially as the occasion of it is public. I have read the Thoughts you have offered, with all the attention and candor I am capable of: and could I have apprehended, that the object you had in view was, to secure the succession of a holy Ministry, and for that purpose, to impress the minds of Ministers (to whom the introduction of others to the sacred office is principally entrusted) with a deep sense of the necessity of great strictness, in examining the religious character of Candidates, I would not have given you any trouble. Though I should have looked upon your prescriptions, as to the mode of trial, to be defective; yet I would have wished success to the attempt so far as it went. If the rules you propose were faithfully prosecuted, we should not hear complaints that we encouraged and easily admitted Candidates, who never afforded any reason to think they had serious practical Religion at heart; whose most intimate companions were such as made no pretensions to religion, nor had any relish for it: Candidates, who never shew'd any zeal for religion, disposition to promote spiritual conversation, nor any strictness of example---but rather appeared light and trifling---if none were admitted to the Ministry but such as

“in a tract of carriage shew something of their equableness, singleness and spirituality in [religious] duties.” Pag. 8. Spirituality would afterwards appear in their Ministry. Hearers would not so often have occasion to complain, that they could not find food for their souls in sermons; that their Minister, chiefly, insisted upon the external duties of religion and morality, and that, in so legal a manner, as to encourage their hopes of eternal life upon the performance of these; that there was little of Christ, and the way of life and salvation through him in his discourses; he seldom entered upon subjects of a spiritual experimental nature, or if he did, they were very superficially dispatched, like matters of small importance, without opening up the nature and exercises of special grace in a descriptive distinguishing manner; yea, he would flourish away upon the most evangelical subjects, as if he aimed at dealing with Deists or Heathens, instead of improving them for the edification of a christian assembly---and to urge diligence and carefulness, to prevent, as much as possible, the entrance of such Ministers as these into the Church, would have been a worthy design.

But by the time I had read a few pages, I found all your observations about the trial of Candidates, with respect to their religious characters were only a specious introduction to a misrepresentation of the sentiments and arguments of a great number of your brethren; interspersed with some very bitter reproachful invectives against them. I say, the sentiments of your brethren; for it is well enough known what denomination” it is, among the members of which this matter has been disputed. Now surely, Sir, you could not imagine we would, as it were, confess the truth of your representation by silence in the case; for you, at least, *might* have better understood the true state of the question; and if you expected a reply (which probably was one reason, why you chose to take shelter under the concealment of your name) you must have designed by this *aggression*, to bring a controversy upon the carpet, to which, indeed, you seem to invite. P. 4.

But why this controversy at present? What purpose can be answered by it? There are many who profanely mock at experiences, and those who profess or converse any thing about them. Nothing can harden these more, than to find a MINISTER publickly opposing any enquiry at Candidates
for

for the most sacred office in the Church, about their own experimental acquaintance with religion, as a most heinous crime. Carnal professors will readily infer, that Ministers are very meddling, if they enter into any close conversation with them about their spiritual estate; and alledge, they have no business to concern themselves about any thing but their outward conduct: then, it will be no great difficulty to go a step further, and alledge experiences are matters too abtruse and deep to be brought into the pulpit. To how fine a condition would this reduce the interest of religion, should it generally prevail! Is it possible you can expect to edify the Church, or promote Religion, by a debate on this subject? Disputation, too often, has the contrary effect; thereby the attention of people is diverted from the more important exercises of practical religion; they become interested 'on the one side or the other, and solicitous about the issue. Therefore, unless the faith and practice of Christians are in danger of being perverted, or attempts made to raise such prejudice against others, as tend to mar their usefulness (which latter seems to be the tendency of the piece under consideration) it is to be avoided. It is, indeed, of great importance that the officers of Christ's House should know how they ought to acquit themselves in the trial of others for the sacred office, for that respects their own practice, in a very weighty matter. But what have Christians in general to do with this? Why must they then be disturbed with this debate? When you have first unjustly represented us, as pretending to try and judge the *internal gracious state*, you call it a dangerous opinion. P. 10. But pray, Sir, (if I may venture to ask, without having it again represented as a principal argument, as you have done in P. 18) where is the danger? Does it endanger the orthodoxy of our faith? Does it threaten the purity of the Church? Does it tend to encourage careless irreligious men to enter into the Ministry? Or are men, who profess rational scriptural exercises of religion in their own souls, dangerous to the Church? If not, supposing we were really mistaken, yet if the Church is not like to sustain any damage, there is no sufficient reason for dragging us into a public dispute about it.

You have not the least pretence, at present, to any provocation to take the field, and seek an adversary. I don't know of any thing either printed or preached on the subject lately. There is not any body putting you on your own defence. There was no debate now subsisting on that head.

It is very true, there was a question brought into the Synod some years ago, to this purpose, “ seeing Holiness is a qualification so highly necessary in gospel Ministers, is the requiring of a Candidate a narrative of his religious experiences, a scriptural warrantable means of obtaining satisfaction in that matter ?” Some of the members urged, that whatever pains might be taken to satisfy such as were scrupulous, in an extrajudicial way, yet it should not be admitted into the Synod, for that would be to bring into judicial debate, a matter already settled in the 6th article of the plan of union ; whereby it was agreed, “ That no Presbytery shall licence or ordain to the work of the Ministry any Candidate, until he give them competent satisfaction as to his learning, and *experimental acquaintance with Religion*, and skill in Divinity and Cases of Conscience, &c.” Yet lest those who brought the question should think the Synod bore hard upon them, and with a view, if possible, to remove all uneasiness, it was agreed to consider it. Accordingly, you know, Sir, the Synod spent several days upon it, when every one, in the order of the roll, delivered his sentiments upon the subject ; in all which, the Synod only did, what they do in every case that comes before them ; every one spoke his mind freely, but without animosity. When this was done, in order to collect the sense of the Synod into a minute in their book, a question was put to this purpose (for as I have not the Synod’s minutes before me, I cannot pretend to give it verbatim) viz. Whether to require of Candidates some account of what exercises of religion they have experienced, be a rational, scriptural, and warrantable mean of obtaining competent satisfaction about their *experimental acquaintance with religion* ? And then, Whether that was the true meaning and design of the 6th article of the plan of Union ? Both which questions were answered in the affirmative, by a very large majority. Any thing that looked like animosity happened on this occasion ; the brethren on the negative side of the grand question, through mistake of the Synod’s design in these two votes (as they were called) apprehending they meant thereby, to oblige all their members actively to concur in this mode of examination, were very uneasy. One of them made a bold push for a separation of the Synod, declaring that the Union was broke, that he was no longer a member of the united Synod, but of the late Synod of Philadelphia, which,

he

he alledged, was, *itso facto*, restored.* But it is to the honor

* By this bold attempt, he endeavoured, to the utmost of his power, the violation of a solemn stipulation contained in the 2d article of the Plan of Union, viz. “ When any matter is
 “ determined by a major vote, every member shall either ac-
 “ tively concur with, or passively submit to such determina-
 “ tion; or, if his conscience permit him to do neither, he shall,
 “ after sufficient liberty modestly to reason and remonstrate,
 “ peaceably withdraw from our communion, without *attempting*
 “ *to make any schism*: provided always, that this shall be un-
 “ derstood to extend only to such determinations as the body
 “ shall judge indispensible in doctrine, or Presbyterian govern-
 “ ment.” For according to this article, if the above-men-
 tioned votes had even been designed to bind all the members in
 point of practice (which was not the case) he was not to *at-*
tempt any schism, or to make a breach in the body; he could
 only personally withdraw from membership in it, and confine
 himself to the exercise of his Ministry in his own congregation,
 if they should be satisfied with him as their Minister on that
 footing; for it is expressly declared in the introduction, that
 the design of the several articles, and consequently of that
 one, was to “ prevent future breaches of like nature.” Ac-
 cording to the plain sense of this article, if a Minister *must*
 withdraw, he is not to prejudice others, or endeavour to draw
 them off from communion with the body; his withdrawing
 can only properly affect himself, personally considered, and
 that, only with respect to communion in the judicatures be-
 longing to the body. In other respects, if his conduct should
 be such as to deserve it, he might have communion with his
 brethren. They might, consistently enough, invite him to
 their pulpits, or assist him as occasion might require. His
 people would not be irregular in continuing under his Ministry.
 They would still be members of the body; and upon his death
 or removal, would fall under the care of the Presbytery in
 whose bounds they might be; and in the mean while, if any
 member of his congregation should think himself wrong’d by
 a judgement of his session, I judge, he would still have a right
 of appeal to the Presbytery; for the Minister’s withdrawing
 from the jurisdiction of the body, in respect of himself, cannot
 deprive the people of the privilege of seeking redress if they
 should be aggrieved. Thus no schism would be made in the
 body. And if any number of members shall at any time
 withdraw, the case will still be the same. They can only
 exercise their Ministry in their respective congregations, as
 before observed. I greatly question whether they would have
 any right to assume a Presbyterian capacity, or power to act in
 it (I think there are some weighty reasons against it) or if they
 might

honor of his Brethren, that they better understood the rights of society, and more regarded the union of the Church, than to follow him. The Synod informed them, they only intended thereby to declare their sense of the matter, which every society has an undoubted right to do. And then the affair was brought to this conclusion, viz. That every member shall be left to examine in such a way as his conscience directs, and then upon the whole, in that, as in all other cases, the majority of votes must determine as to the acceptance or rejection of the Candidate. Thus the rights of conscience were safe. The Synod did not impose upon any an injunction to examine in a way, against which they professed conscientious scruples. On the other hand, none upon the affirmative side of the question, should be deprived of the liberty of examining according to *their* consciences, by the over-ruling authority of a majority in any Presbytery. And if the Synod be careful in the erection of Presbyteries, this branch of examination would, hereby, be preserved from falling into disuse. Here the affair terminated, and all parties acquiesced, and there has not been the least jangle on that point in any of our judicatures ever since. It is, indeed, no secret, that there is an uneasiness now subsisting in one of our Presbyteries; but you know, Sir, that arises altogether from another source. If you expected, by this publication, to induce people to apprehend it had its original from our difference of sentiment on this head, and by bringing on a controversy about it, you would raise a dust, by which their
attention

might, I am sure it can only be with respect to the jurisdiction of their respective congregations; and the people would still have a right of appeal from their judgement to the Synod; and upon the death or removal of any of their members, his congregation will naturally revert to the Presbytery belonging to the Synod in whose bounds they shall be. But such Presbytery will have no right to take any vacancy under their care, or any way meddle with them; consequently, no right to licence or ordain any Candidates, as they can have no place to employ or settle them in; for, to do these things, would be to make a breach of like nature with the former; and to hand down a divided state of the Church to the succeeding generation; and in that view, this article could be of no use at all; but in the view I have given, it would be of great use, for thereby union will still be preserved, and the mischiefs of schism prevented; and whoever shall withdraw in the other view, will be justly chargeable with schism, and that, in violation of a stipulation, expressly designed to prevent any such event.

attention might be diverted from the true state of that affair, you will find it a vain attempt. You very well know, Sir, we are able, if it should ever become necessary, to prove from authentic records, that our difference of sentiment on this matter, has not any, even the most remote influence on that affair; but the state of the case would be the same if this question had never been in agitation.

We must still think and practice according to our light, yet, I assure you, Sir, we shall be so far from disturbing the peace of the church, meerly for the sake of our opinion, that if you, and the brethren * on your side of this question, will convince us by your practice that you are not putting us off with a meer parade of words by way of argument, but really mean and prosecute the strictness of trial you here propose, it will give us very great pleasure. We will endeavour all in our power, to strengthen your hands, and join with you in promoting the same important design; while we prosecute the same measures, with the addition of what we still esteem a further advantage. I am persuaded this will do more to promote mutual confidence, and the edification and prosperity of the Church, than the publication of many volumes of controversy on the subject. The metaphysical distinctions, inevitably necessary in reasoning justly on this head, probably, will rather puzzle and perplex the bulk of common Christians than edify them.

I have no controversy with you about the qualifications requisite in Candidates, nor about the way of trying these, so far as you go. And, I really think, the conscience of that man, who feels the importance of these qualifications, and

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* I mean, brethren, on your side of the question, *in general*: for I hardly think, they will adopt your sentiments throughout. A friend of mine signified to me, that he thought it questionable whether you were a minister, or at least one of the brethren I refer to. For you roundly deny, that judicatures have a right to form a judgment of charity, or any good opinion of a person's real piety, though you allow it to private christians. But he remembers, and so do I, that when the matter was discussed in synod, those brethren declared it as their sentiment, "that we ought to have comfortable, yea sufficient grounds to believe or hope, that a man was acquainted with experimental religion, or was truly pious, before we would admit him to the Ministry."---But perhaps you were aware of the consequence.

with zeal and faithfulness makes the trial you here point out, needs not boggle a great deal at asking a Candidate; and in return, receiving from him an account of the principles he acts from, and the impression of divine things he is, so far as he can find, influenced by, in all this. The only debate is about a farther enquiry, which I, with many of my brethren, think highly requisite, and you look upon as exceeding criminal.--But, Sir, if you must needs oppose us, why were you not candid enough to give a fair state of the question, as by us maintained? Why did you misrepresent it? The state of the question which you have imposed upon us, you have conceived in these words, viz. "That a man's having the
 " several branches of a religious character mentioned in
 " scripture, or visible holiness, will not satisfy; but or-
 " dainers should try the *spiritual state*, and, as a proper means
 " of discovering it, require a narrative of men's conversion
 " and religious exercises; and according as *they are judged*
 " *gracious or not*, they are to be admitted or rejected." Here you represent the reality of the internal gracious state, as the matter we are for trying, and the object of our judgement. Against this all your reasonings are calculated; and upon any other footing, they fall to the ground. But did you not know better? You acknowledge what shews you might have known better, if you had been inclined to understand us. You own
 " some (and all on the affirmative side of the question are the
 " some who) say they pretend not to judge the heart; or
 " they form no positive judgment, but only a judgment of
 " charity." P. 15. This you oddly enough mention, as one of our principal pleas for the truth of our opinion. But you'll please, Sir, to recollect, that it was only a necessary distinction, whereby we rejected the above state of the case, which the reasonings of our brethren would impose upon us. You, indeed, endeavour to reduce our judgment of charity to the same thing; by saying, "Tho' they have no objection as to
 " external religion, this will not satisfy," and what else remains to be adjudg'd but the heart? nay (you violently add)
 " the very thing pleaded for is, to form a judgment, by nar-
 " ratives, of *internals*, whether the person *be gracious*, and to
 " make their judgement of his *state* the ground of admitting
 " or rejecting. They judge something, which they cannot
 " judge *positively*, but *charitably*; and is not this the *spiritual*
 " *state*? to say then, they judge not the heart is contrary to
 " fact; they are for forming a judgement of the *secret state*,
 " and dealing with men according to *this*, and not according

“ to outward appearance.” P. 15, 16. Now, do you think the world will believe you, that *we are* so plainly and explicitly inconsistent and self-contradictory? Had you but fairly given our state of the question; if then you thought you could, by fair reasoning, shew that after all, it would come to the same thing, I would not find fault with you: you should be heartily welcome to try your skill. And my business would be, to try whether your arguments were conclusive.—But to tell the public, that the *very thing pleaded for* by us, is, what we expressly say we do not plead for nor intend, is very unaccountable. And then, to get into so invidious a transport as to apply to us, one of the most blasphemous characters of the man of sin, is unpardonable treatment of Christian brethren, as remote from such impious arrogance as yourself.—But, I believe, it will appear, before I have done, that something external, and which we can as well judge of, as any visible action, is proposed as the immediate object of judgment: and no other kind of respect is had to the spiritual gracious state, than you yourself profess. Which is only consequential, and conditional, and no other than Mr. Durham pleads for, when he observes, that “ al-
 “ tho’ holiness be not simply necessary to a minister, as if,
 “ without it, he were not to be accounted so, when lawfully
 “ admitted, as is said; yet we conceive, that neither a peo-
 “ ple, nor a Presbytery should pass that qualification in their
 “ choice or admission, so as to make no *enquiry for it*, or not
 “ to respect it, where, it may be, there is nothing to sway
 “ any to that *opinion* of the man, in *well-grounded charity*, but
 “ somewhat more to the contrary.—Neither can any expect,
 “ the Lord will approve that he should be made a steward in
 “ his house, and an under-father to his children, who yet,
 “ upon no *charitable ground* can be accounted a child himself.
 “ And what confidence can there be, that a man, not *esteem’d*
 “ *gracious*, shall either christianly carry in the outward form
 “ of religion, or yet keep soundness in the faith? ” Durh.
 Expos. Rev. P. 2 9. But, perhaps, this quotation may provoke another sneer at a judicial judgment of charity.

However I am glad, Sir, your performance has furnish’d me with a number of granted principles, which, therefore, you cannot again controvert, whereby the true state of the question will be easily exhibited to view. And then it will appear how much your arguments have been to the purpose.—These I shall collect in the following propositions, with the pages where they are substantially found.

Proposition 1. Tho' real grace or holiness is not simply necessary ad esse, or the very being of a minister; yet it is necessary to the bene esse, or the *well-being*. P. 7.

That a man regularly invested with the sacred office, is in fact a minister, is not called in question by any body, that I know of; and he is to be treated as such by the church, while in regular standing. It is enough, with respect to the present question, that it be acknowledged necessary to the well-being of a minister. But in mentioning the necessity of holiness, you need not have used the diminutive term *Only*. A minister's well-being is as important to the Church as his being, yea more so.

Mr. Durham, having mentioned an objection, viz. "then there would be few ministers entered, and many congregations would be desolate;" answers, partly by a quotation from the famous Mr. Boyd of Trochrege, as follows, "when he moveth this objection to himself, (which sheweth, says Mr. Durham, that it hath been ordinary, at all times, to dispute against this duty) he answereth, that it is not so much to be respected quot, or how many be in the ministry, as quales et qui; that is, who, or of what qualifications they be. Therefore, saith he, it had been the advantage of the ministry, that they had been ever fewer, rather than that many who are in that station, should have been admitted to it." And further on in the same page, from the same author, "nec enim tam refert quot sint, hoc Ministerio fungentes, quam qui sint, et quanta cura delecti atque probati. Præstatque, plurimis abdicatis, vel unum aliquem admitti, qui sit unus ex mille, &c. quam plurimis indifferenter admissis, ex mille, vix unum, qualem cupias invenire." i. e. For neither is it so much matter *how many they may be*, who are in the Ministry, as *who they are*, and with how great care chosen and approved. It were better that very many should be rejected, and only some one, who should be one of a thousand, admitted, than that out of very many indifferently admitted, you will scarce find one of a thousand such as you would desire.—And adds himself, "we are persuaded, that whatever prophane men think of holiness, yet the people who desire to have their Souls saved, will be loth to have a blind guide, who, by falling into the ditch, may hazard others, or, one that may heal their wounds slightly, or at best, point out the way to them, but

“ but in little join with them in it. And especially ministers
 “ of the gospel, who know the esteem Christ hath of souls,
 “ and what difficulty it is for themselves to walk singly in this
 “ ministry, even tho’ they mind their own salvation ; and
 “ what native or natural sympathy is called for betwixt a
 “ minister and his flock : and who are well acquainted with
 “ the devices of the devil, who aimeth to make havock of
 “ souls by *an ungodly*, as well as by an erroneous ministry ;
 “ and also are laying to heart, and seriously minding their
 “ reckoning to Jesus Christ at his appearing, for the souls of
 “ such congregations, as they have had access to provide
 “ with ministers, whether his sheep were committed to a
 “ *friend*, or an *enemy*, to one who *lov’d him*, and so would
 “ feed the lambs, or one that *loved, and sought his own things*,
 “ as *all men in nature do*, and so would feed himself. We
 “ are persuaded, we say, that such will tremble to be acces-
 “ sary to such heinous affronting of Jesus Christ, or such cruel
 “ betraying of poor souls, in committing them to an *ignorant*
 “ or *unfaithful guide*, who may fall in the ditch with them.’

Expos. Rev. P. 221.—Indeed, a man cannot be capable of
 representing the true nature of saving religion, at least ordi-
 narily, without an experimental sense of it upon his own soul ;
 nor can be expected to be faithful therein. In order to ex-
 plain and describe the nature of true religion, a man must
 understand it himself. He must understand it so as to be
 able to distinguish between true and counterfeit religion ;
 between common and saving grace : to direct distress’d souls,
 and to convince self-deceiving sinners. If religion was merely
 a matter of speculation, or consisted only in external duties,
 a speculative knowledge of it would be sufficient. But it
 consists principally in holy dispositions and exercises of the
 heart about God and divine things : and that ; such as will
 regulate and influence the whole life ; and so is of a practical
 experimental nature. Now, you may as easily make a man,
 who was born blind understand colours, by describing them
 to him, as to make a man conceive truly of the holy exer-
 cises and sensations of a pious heart, who has never felt them.
 And therefore cannot represent them to others in a descrip-
 tive and convincing manner.—Moreover, as he cannot un-
 derstand the spiritual nature of true religion, so according to
 what notions he can have, he has as little relish for it. The
 carnal mind is enmity against God. Hence he will not dwell
 upon the most important spiritual things of religion, nor deal
 with the consciences of men in solemn earnest about them.

He will encourage sinners to expect salvation on the same foundation, whereon he presumptuously builds his own hopes. Thus his doctrines may be simply in themselves true, yet will not be set in a true evangelical point of light, nor represent true vital religion. Nor will he deal plainly and faithfully with people, lest he might incur their displeasure. Therefore, thro' ignorance and unfaithfulness, he will rather destroy than save the souls of men.

Prop. 2. We cannot try or judge of the reality of grace, nor certainly know the heart of any one.

I heartily agree with you and Mr. Durham, "that no infallibility is to be expected or pretended to in judging this; for no such thing is possible; nor hath the Lord given such symptoms or evidences as may found such a judgment of another's gracious state. P. 7. &c. That to search and know men's hearts is God's unalienable prerogative." P. 14. I have no other idea of searching the heart, than looking into it, and immediately knowing what passes there, and so discerning its sincerity or hypocrisy. For such creatures, as we are to pretend to this would be arrogance indeed. But consequential and conditional judgments respecting the heart upon external evidence or discoveries, are unavoidable, nor do they come under the notion of searching the heart.

Prop. 3. Therefore they are external evidences, which we can certainly know and examine, that are the only grounds upon which we can form any judgment concerning others. Or in other words, our decisions concerning, or conduct towards others, in admitting them to sacred offices, are to be founded on such external evidences, as make them appear to us to be holy.

I own as cheerfully as you please, "that it is not the discovering and judging a man to be really holy, that gives peace in ordaining him, but the finding *such signs of holiness* in outward conduct, as the scriptures oblige ordainers to look for." P. 8. And that the grounds upon which the visible Church is to admit to ordinances and offices, "if such a *Profession and Practice* as men can certainly know and are competent judges of." P. 11.—But when you talk of men's knowing, and being competent judges of *the profession of others*, I suppose, you mean profession materially considered; viz. what it contains or amounts to; together with
its

its credibility or incredibility, as that may be collected from concurring circumstances. For sure, you don't mean to know and judge of the *sincerity* of such profession ! But,

Prop. 4. This apparent or visible holiness is to be examined, and made one ground of admission to the sacred Ministry under this consideration, viz. that it is such a probable sign of real holiness, as is sufficient to induce us in charity to respect him as truly gracious, and therefore encourage us to commit the gospel Ministry to him.

The very notion of visible holiness *must be*, that it has the appearance of that which is real and true ; so that if the man's heart correspond with his profession and practice, i. e. if he be really such from the heart as he appears, he is truly gracious, and our charity trusts he is sincere, till the contrary shall be discovered. This is what I intend by the terms *visible holiness*, wherever they may occur in these pages. And I find you consider, "an evenly course of blameless *holy* conversation, as the best evidence can be had of the *goodness of mens hearts and principles.*" P. 6. And you would have it noted, "that it is agreed on all hands, there must be trial of the person's *holiness*, and *what ground there is to esteem and treat him as gracious.*" P. 21, 22. What now, Sir, becomes of your ridicule of a judicial judgment of charity ? P. 16. I confess your metaphysicks go beyond my depth, if you can distinguish between a *judgment of charity* respecting a man's piety, founded upon external evidence ; and *esteeming and treating him as gracious.* If I don't mistake, it is to distinguish between a *judgment of charity*, and a *judgment of charity*. You distinguish with equal refinement, when you would intimate a specifick difference between a person's forming a good opinion of others appearing to be godly, such as Christian Love disposes to, as a *private Christian*, and his forming the same opinion of him as a *judge*, considering a man's qualification for the sacred Ministry. If, as a private Christian, I may, upon good ground, form a good opinion of a person, and thereupon, esteem and love him as a saint, why may I not as a judge, form the same good opinion of him, upon the same good ground, when I have critically examined it ; and thereupon, esteem him qualified for the Ministry ? Must I, as a judge, 'try the Candidate's holiness, and what ground there is for the Church to esteem and treat him as gracious,' and yet form no good opinion of him ?

Must

Must I concur in admitting him to the Ministry, without any such good opinion of him?—But to return; thus far we are professedly agreed. And will you say after all, that, when I plead for a Candidate's giving a narrative of his religious exercises, the very thing I plead for, is to form a judgment, thereby, of *internal*, whether the person be *gracious*, (i. e. whether what he relates be really true or not,) and to make this judgment of his *state*, the ground of admitting? No it is something else that is pleaded for. The matter we are in quest of is the *visibility* or *credible appearance* of the person's holiness, and "what ground the Church has to esteem and "treat him as gracious." This, you agree, is to be collected from his "*profession and practice*." P. 11. Neither of these singly, but both conjunctly, afford us the best evidence we can get, "of the goodness of his heart and principles." Now his profession contributes to this evidence, not by enabling us to judge of internals, viz. whether he is sincere in it; but whether it contains so much in it, or is such a profession of true religion, as, in case he is sincere, in favour of which, his practice must witness, he is a Christian. And without doubt, the more particular and circumstantial this profession may be, it will be the more or less credible. We think therefore, it should include, not only the person's professing to believe the truth of such and such doctrines; but also that, so far as he can discern, such and such have been their impressions on his own heart. With respect to both which, we can only have the person's own relation, either in a formal narrative, or (which will come to the same thing) in proper answers to such questions on these matters, as may be proposed to him. When this account or narrative (call it which you will) is given, we can as really know what it contains, and as truly judge of its credibility, as we can of any other human testimony, respecting any other matter. We can try its credibility *first*, by comparing it with the Scripture-account of the nature and exercises of true grace, and considering whether it contains the things wherein, according to the word of God, true grace consists; and therefore, if his account be true, he is gracious. *Secondly*, by comparing it with his conversation, so see whether that corresponds with, and supports his profession: And so upon the whole, we have ground to "*esteem and treat him as gracious*." If we find these things, we are safe, and may have peace in licensing and ordaining him, whatever the reality of his state be, or whether he be sincere or not. This view of the case we very carefully
laid

laid before you, when reasoning upon the point in Synod. And how your conscience could permit you now after all, to impose upon us so very different a state of the matter, I know not.

But, I think, according to the foregoing propositions, which shew how far we appear to agree, and upon what principles we go in trying Candidates, and what kind of judgment alone we can form about them, the only question now remaining is, whether a Candidate's giving a narrative of the impressions of divine Truths on his own heart, or the exercises of Religion in his soul, is, in conjunction with other things, any external evidence, and does afford *more light* concerning an appearance of his holiness, than we could have without it? And therefore it is the duty of the Presbytery to enquire after it, as one mean of satisfaction in a matter of so great importance? If the first shall appear, viz. that such narrative does afford external evidence with respect to visible holiness; I presume you will easily grant the latter, namely the duty of Presbyteries to enquire after it. I call it the only question. For seeing we propose this enquiry as a mean for trying, not the reality, but the visibility of the Candidate's holiness, and only in order to such a judgment about it, as, we agree, according to the foregoing propositions, alone belongs to us to form, then it can only remain to consider, whether such narrative has the proper nature of a mean for that purpose.—The only observations, in your whole performance, so far as I can see, that can be alledged as exceptions to this, are, that this mode of examination is absurd, unscriptural, and useless. Tho' you have directly attempted the illustration only of the last. If either of these can be made good, I confess, it is not a proper mean in order to the end proposed. But on the other hand, the very considerations which will vindicate it from these exceptions, will prove it to be a proper mean.

As to your imputation of impiety to this mode of examination, and high charges of blasphemous usurpation of the Throne and Office of God, so liberally exhibited against us on account of it; I apprehend, by this time, it is plain enough, they fall to the ground. For they can be levelled only at that wrong state of the question you have put; and which, it is sufficiently clear, we absolutely reject.—Nor are persons any more exposed, hereby, to horrid tyranny, than upon the footing of judging their visible holiness, by
 C evidences

evidences drawn from their outward actions only. Judges, under the base influence of pique, or carnal interests, might as easily puzzle and perplex with respect to matters of practice, in order to serve their vile purposes, and perhaps more so. It is not very difficult for a perverse man to magnify some foible, or some single instance of imprudent conduct, into a great matter; and then “shrug up the shoulders, and say, I am not satisfied.” While on the other hand, if judges be carnal, they are as slightly in examining the outward life, as they are averse to enquiring about experiences. If a Candidate has not too much warmth about internal Religion in the course of his conversation, he will be pretty safe as to such. Tho’ he should be but vain, trifling, and without any favour of serious practical Religion, yet if he be not openly vicious, they can smooth matters over pretty well. So that you see, one way may be abused as readily, or perhaps, more readily than the other, if Ministers who are to judge, be not candid and upright. To prevent this, we must have respect to certain principles, derived from the word of God, with respect to the nature and exercises of true grace, by which our judgment must be regulated, upon whatsoever evidence we found it. Hence, tho’ a person’s account of his religious exercises should be obscure, or not so satisfactory as could be wished, yet if it contain such things, as the scriptures make the essence of true Religion to consist in, it cannot be rejected, provided a serious conscientious strictness in Religion, prevailing in his life, appear in his favour. But if it should be essentially defective, or betray a notion of Religion inconsistent with the gospel, even tho’ sundry things should appear amiable in his outward carriage, yet his judges will be able to prove, from the nature and characters of true grace as represented in the word of God, that they are right in not admitting him to the Ministry.

Surely, Sir, you will not alledge, it will be impious in Candidates to give an account of their religious exercises, when required for the purposes abovementioned. You acknowledge it is a common thing among Christians, to use such voluntary freedom, as to tell experiences. Yea, it is often their duty, in order to direct, warn, and encourage others. P. 18.—Can it be a crime for a man to relate that to a judicature, which he might lawfully, yea it might be his *duty* to tell to others, meerly because they as a judicature require it, not in order to judge his state, but his profession:

profession ; whether it be such a profession of holiness, as may encourage them to commit the sacred Ministry to him ? An office, to which, his general christian character gives him no claim, but he is only to be invested with, when those, to whom Jesus Christ has committed the matter, shall judge they have found him competently qualified for it ? An office, in which, the directing, warning, and duly encouraging of others is so extensively interested ? May it, indeed, be a Candidate's *important duty* to refuse answering such an enquiry ? Does it belong to him to prescribe what trials he shall pass through ? It is well, however, that a Presbytery are not obliged to obey his dictates ; nor to proceed further, if he refuse to sustain such parts of trial as they shall judge necessary. I confess, to act such a part, would be an instance of wisdom in a Candidate, who is conscious he has no experience to tell, however imprudent it would be in him to offer himself for that office at all.

If after all, you will insist upon it, this mode of examination is the same thing with searching and judging the heart, I am confident, you can attempt to make it appear by no reasonings, but such as will involve yourself as much as me : And may be retorted with equal strength. You are for forming an opinion of the "*goodness of mens hearts and principles,*" and for *esteeming and treating them as gracious.*" I plead for no more. But you would found these conclusions on less direct evidence. You found them upon a general profession, and outward practice of Religion, From hence, without more to do, you leap into an opinion of the goodness of the heart and principles. But because, I know, the same outward conduct may flow from very different principles, I am for enquiring what views of things and principles Candidates profess to have, and to be influenced by : And so by a further step, affording evidence more direct to the point, I come to the same conclusions, which you also form on a less degree of evidence. . You take for granted, what I want evidence of : Such evidence as the nature of the case admits.

What has been said, sufficiently shews, that your arguments taken from the nature of the visible Church, and the difference between the key of doctrine, and the key of discipline, are nothing at all to the case in hand. I fully agree with what you and Mr. Durham have said on those points, and yet am perfectly consistent with myself.

I therefore look upon the exceptions aforesaid, as only capable of any way affecting the question, as now fairly stated. And accordingly, shall proceed to consider them.

1st. You say this mode is absurd. I suppose your principal reason for this assertion, was the supposed pretension, by narratives, to discern and judge a person's internal real state. Therefore, as it is now evident, that is altogether out of the question, this allegation evanishes. I cannot see upon what other ground, any absurdity can be apprehended in the case. Tho' we know not the hearts of others, yet a person who will reflect must be conscious of what passes in his own heart. And there can be no absurdity in his relating it upon a proper occasion, and for a weighty reason.

It has been alledged to be absurd to require a man to bear witness concerning himself. But if it be so, it is an absurdity constantly and universally practised, as often as qualifications for offices come to be examined.---You can certainly know a man's knowledge so far as you try it, but you must take his word for his orthodoxy, which yet, is a matter of great importance. You can't know whether he really believes such a system of doctrine. There have been designing hypocrites, who have professed and subscribed sound articles of faith, who have not believed them; and I wish that were not a too frequent case. Yet, it is necessary that a Candidate should profess orthodoxy, before we entrust him with the public instruction of the Church: and we must acquiesce in *his profession*, while nothing appears to the contrary. Don't we from time to time set persons free from censure, and restore them to good standing, upon their serious profession of repentance? The mere implication of their penitence by their outward carriage will not satisfy; we insist that they shall add to that, their explicit profession.

2d. You further plead, it is unscriptural. To this purpose, you observe, that "a religious life is the *only scripture-evidence of our faith* to others;" and quote Jam. ii. 18. to confirm this. The terms, *religious life*, are ambiguous, and may be very justly extended so far as to include such a profession, as, I contend, should be enquired after in the case in question: yea, it must imply it, otherwise I can have no idea of *a religious life*. And why it may not be explicit as well as implicit, I cannot conceive. You should, however, have wrote with
precision

precision here, that we might take the true force of your argument; and know how to answer you. You seem, indeed, to acknowledge it includes "*profession and practice,*" P. 11. and it is plain enough, if you don't include both here, but by a religious life, mean only the regular performance of the external duties of Religion, the text you have quoted would have been the most unhappily chosen for your purpose: For the very subject the apostle treats of in that passage, is, the vindication of our profession of Religion, as credible before men. And yet to admit this (which, notwithstanding, you can't help admitting) quite destroys all the use you would make of it; for then the only consequence is, that the most splendid profession of Religion, if it be not accompanied with works of holiness as its native fruit, is by no means credible.---You know, Sir, the apostle is here reasoning against certain Libertines, who were turning the grace of God into wantonness; alledging, that seeing we are justified, not by works, but by faith in the righteousness of Christ, therefore the obligation of the law was dissolved; so that here was a profession, not merely of the truth of gospel doctrines, but of experiences; *they said they had faith;* they had embraced Jesus Christ, trusted in his righteousness, and hence were safe for eternity. The apostle does not blame the making of such a profession, but only labours to convince them of their mistake about the matter they professed; for this purpose he introduces the sincere Christian as making the same profession (he don't boggle at it, because some hypocrites had done so) and vindicating it's greater credibility by the fruits of holy obedience, which discovered the faith he professed to be genuine. How rare an argument this, to prove that it is quite unscriptural for a Presbytery to require any such profession of a Candidate for the Sacred Ministry! But you seem to be dextrous in quoting texts nothing at all to your purpose. In Mat. vii 20, our Lord shews how false Prophets, appearing *already in the character* of Prophets, might be detected, viz. "By their corrupt doctrines and practices." And he himself having *publicly professed* an extraordinary character and mission, appeals to the holiness of his doctrines; and John x. 32. To his miracles, many of which were miracles of mercy to the distressed, such as his curing the blind man, as the *vouchers for his profession.* Therefore, it is unscriptural to ask Candidates any thing about experiences, or their religious exercises, when trying their qualifications for so sacred an office as the ministry! Whether your application of these passages

passages be owing to "ignorance or wilful perversion," you yourself can best determine. You suggest another thought, which, though not adduced directly in support of this allegation, yet, you seem to depend upon as an argument to this purpose; "When (say you) a general end is commanded, but the means of accomplishing it left to Christian prudence, there is room to consider of fit and expedient means: but when all is directed that is to be done, there is no room for human inventions; and such is the case in question." P. 18. But pray, Sir, what *all* is in this case directed? Is any more done, than laying down the characters, constituting visible holiness, which we are to look for; with a general direction, 1. Tim. v. 22. to try these? They must first be proved, even in a Deacon, 1. Tim. iii. 10. But is there any particular direction, how these shall be tried? Is there then no room left for the exercise of Christian prudence, in considering of fit and expedient means for this purpose? Nor was there any necessity of more particular directions. The nature of the characters to be tried, easily leads Christian prudence to discern what means are adapted to this end. The person designed for this office is to be faithful, a lover of good men, just, holy, &c. In a word, all the characters taken together, as collected from the several passages where they lie, compose an entire frame of *visible holiness*; *visible*, because the *appearance of real holiness*. These are to be considered as the "marks and characters of the good man." In examining this holiness, we must consider its reference to that which is *real*; therefore we must consider the nature or proper idea of *real holiness*, otherwise we shall never know when we have its true appearance. Now, true holiness does not consist only in external acts of homage or worship towards God, and morality towards our neighbour and ourselves; but primarily and essentially, in a holy temper, in spiritual dispositions and affections, under the influence of gospel-truths apprehended by a lively faith.—Therefore, external actions materially religious and moral (however thus far good) do not sufficiently exhibit the appearance of real holiness. We may see a Deist, not only strict in performing moral duties, but also prayer to God, and attending public worship; for though he don't believe christianity, yet he owns that God is to be worshiped, and that publickly. Yea, the Socinian goes farther, though not a whit nearer true holiness; he attends, not only the preaching of the word, but the sacraments too, and several ordinances of external worship. Now will you call this visible holiness?

holiness? I am sure you would not be willing to abide by the necessary consequences if you did. But you will say, the person makes a profession of the orthodox faith, i. e. he professes to believe the true Christian system of doctrine, and hence is induced to this practice of religion. Very well. Then a man's words, as well as his outward actions, are necessary in order to the appearance of true religion. No man, I presume, does appear to you to be a true Christian, in whom an orthodox profession as to fundamentals, and an outward regular practice of religious duties do not concur. But will any kind of profession do? You know there is a meer speculative faith, Jam. ii. 19. and this accompanied with an obviously careless indifference and coldness in the performance of duty. But you say, we must observe "his spirituality in duties." But how is this to be done? Why he must appear serious and affectionate in the performance of duty.---Very well. But there may be much affection in duties (Isa. xlvi. 1.) where there is no true religion. Affections are only holy, when they flow from right views of the gospel by the illumination of the mind, and a lively faith, whereby Jesus Christ is embraced, and the gospel is acquiesced in with complacency. Does not then, a person's appearing to be holy include a profession of such sentiments, and such impressions of these truths, as have led him to such a faith, at least such exercises as look like this? And that in this way, he finds his affections raised, and he is hereby determined to serve the Lord? Would you take an appearance that imports less than this, for an appearance of real holiness? Now, is it not a man's profession, in conjunction with his practice, that gives him this appearance, and consequently is evidential thereof? And a candid enquiry after this, is the very thing for which I contend. You include "a professed belief of the gospel," in your idea of visible holiness, P. 10. pray what do you mean by a professed belief of the gospel? Do you intend only a professing that the gospel is true? Is such a belief true and saving faith? And has such a profession, simply, an appearance thereof? Or must it not be a profession of embracing the gospel-way of salvation, and thereon building the hopes of eternal life? But when about to commit so solemn a trust as the sacred Ministry, ought not the credibility of this profession to be tried? Now, I can think of no means of trial, besides comparing, after strict enquiry has been made, the Candidate's knowledge of the gospel-scheme, and the impressions he professes to have felt from evangelical truths upon his

his own soul, with the word of God; and considering, whether this profession contains what substantially answers to the scripture-notion of true religion, and whether it be supported by an answerable life and conversation. Now do not all these, taken together, exhibit an appearance of holiness, which we could not have from any of them singly? And therefore, this profession of experiences and exercises in Religion, is a visible external evidence, discovering the marks and characters of the good man, and so affording an appearance of holiness, which we could not have without it. As to the sincerity of this profession, we know no more of it, with respect to one part of it than another. If any profession at all is necessary to the appearance, or visibility of holiness, the more full and comprehensive it is, the more appearance it exhibits.

These observations serve to refute your 3d exception, which I have quoted above, viz. That this mode of examination is useless. Your chief reason is, that a Candidate, "who can justly represent the exercises of Religion, and speak to various cases of conscience, can certainly, *if he pleases*, give such a narrative of conversion and exercises, and so answer any questions about these, as will satisfy his judges, whatever be his real state.---Therefore, his narrative affords not the least further light." P. 19. But I have already shewed that a profession of heart-exercises, is an evidence of holiness, which simple knowledge does not afford, therefore does give more light as to the visibility of several of those characters, or that holiness which ordainers are to look for, whatever be his real state. To give weight to your remark, you must suppose that Candidates who have not true grace, are also destitute of common honesty and a regard to truth, and therefore, to serve a turn, they will very deliberately and seriously lie, and pretend to exercises which they know they have not had. A supposition with respect to Candidates for so sacred an office, which I think, bad as the world is, charity forbids, unless some very suspicious circumstances should appear. If this is to be taken for granted, then, as we know not who are hypocrites, no regard is to be had to a man's profession in any respect; for he who will impose upon others in one instance, will in another. And thus our condition in life will be much more wretched than I ever imagined. For the same reason, outward sobriety and religious practice may be all only a mask, to impose upon judicatures, until a man may get into office (and such instances of imposition

position there have been) therefore no stress can be laid on that, and thus we have no visible holiness at all, but must admit men to the holy ministry without any respect at all to their holiness. I know you will not chuse to admit this consequence; but you may try how you will get rid of it. There have been, indeed, very gross impositions; but these have obtained as much by outward conduct, as by professions of heart-exercises. If therefore on this account no respect is to be had to the latter, so neither to the former. But, I judge, the only consequence is, that hence we see what wickedness and deceit some are capable of. Your fear of our excluding all doubting Christians, is quite groundless. We don't enquire so much after a man's opinion of himself, as his exercises in Religion; much less his assurance of his gracious state. Many an honest, perplexed soul, has by his very fears, afforded not the less satisfaction to those concerned in his licensure and ordination. Thus, I apprehend, I have not only vindicated our practice from the aforesaid exceptions, but in doing so, have shewed it to be a fit and expedient mean of trying whether a Candidate has the characters of visible holiness mentioned in the word of God, i. e. Whether he has the visible or external appearance of that holiness, which, if he is sincere, is true and real.

I would just further observe, that our practice in this matter, is of great use to preserve in the Church some suitable sense of the importance of holiness in Ministers, and consequently, more carefulness to purge out such as should behave unworthy of their character, after they are in. Ministers under this impression, will be proportionably less disposed to screen or palliate, instead of thoroughly examining into Fame that may be prevalent, with respect to the immorality of other Ministers. Of use also, to make such as design the sacred Ministry, more careful to look to themselves, and examine their preparation for it, in this respect; and make such afraid to venture upon it, as are conscious they are destitute of this so necessary and important qualification. I have known instances of this.

•You moreover alledge, our Judgment and practice in this matter is novel, “unthought of for ages in the Church,” and that you have the authority of Mr. Durham and others against us. But while the Bible is not against us, I

am not so very solicitous what other authorities you can produce. However, I pay a very great respect to Mr. Durham's judgment, therefore have closely observed him : and have the pleasure to find he does not say any thing against the examination I contend for. And I am persuaded, if he was now living, he would not debate the matter with me upon the true state of the case I have here given. He largely urges the necessity of holiness in Ministers : And that both people and Ministers should have particular respect to this, in their choice of a person for this office. I wish your performance had aimed at the same design with him. He observes his design is not " that search, in *extraordinary* ways, should be " made for knowing mens conversion, or, that infallibility " should be expected in this ; or that any particular evidences " in such a measure or degree, should be pitched on, without " which nothing is to be satisfying. (And neither do we.) " But seeing there can be no ground to expect the right im- " provement of gifts, by one not supposed to be gracious ; " therefore trial would be, 1st. To clear that he be not pro- " phane, and that nothing can be charged on him. 2d. That " there are some things making him look holy-like, & giving " ground, in a discerning charity, to esteem so of him. That " whatever afterwards he proves, they may have peace in " what they have done. And lastly that some fit time *and* " *way* be taken purposely for trying of this." Expos. Rev. P. 219. And the next page he says, " I am not speaking of " the *manner of proceeding*, but of the *thing* whatever *way* a " judicatory, or person in christian prudence, shall *take to* " *satisfy themselves in the particular* ; that I conceive can be " regulated by no certain directions." Therefore, what he afterward says, respects the *matter* to be tryed ; but not the *manner of trial* And as a variety of things are to be tried, a circumstantial variety of method in trying them may be necessary.—Yea he gives us, with approbation, the following quotation : " Tho' that reverend forecited author, Mr. Boyd, " be every way most moderate ; yet P. 1108, doth he cen- " sure the preposterous moderation of some good men, who " are too charitable in the matter of admission to the Ministry ; " and directly asserteth, that in tryal of *Spirits* for such an " end, not only the doctrine, sed et animorum motus, con- " filia, conatus, (i. e. The motions, councils or designs, and " the endeavours or tendencies of their souls) are also to be " proven. And if nothing satisfying appear, which may

" hold

“ hold forth God’s call, altho’ it were for many years, it is to be
 “ forborn.” Expos. P. 221 & in P 222. From whence you have
 quoted sundry things he gives us a quotation from the judicious
 learned Mr. Wood, who asserts, “ that there are some more
 “ eminent outward works & actings in Religion and piety, by
 “ which men (so far as is competent to men to judge) may be
 “ warrantly judged *positively gracious*. And sheweth how
 “ this is to be attained, & in these words, there is requisite
 “ some seemingness of *spiritual sincerity in a man’s profession*,
 “ i. e. that he doth it from a *spiritual principle, upon spiritual*
 “ *motives*, and for a *spiritual end*: But a meer, sober, not
 “ macking, serious profession without more, is not a *positive*
 “ *appearance of spiritual supernatural sincerity*.”

In “ the tenor of the advice of the brethren, depute for
 “ penning the enormities and corruptions in the ministry,
 “ and remedying thereof, allowed by the general assembly
 “ (of the Church of Scotland), Anno Domini 1596.” We
 have the following particulars, viz. “ that the intrant shall
 “ shall be *posed upon his conscience*, before the great God, and
 “ that in most grave manner, *what moveth him to accept the*
 “ office and charge of the Ministry upon him.—That the
 “ tryal of persons to be admitted to the Ministry hereafter,
 “ consist not only in their *learning and ability to preach*, but
 “ also in *conscience, and feeling, and spiritual wisdom*.” Vide
 Coll. of confes. Form of process. P. 32, 33.

In overtures of the commission of the General Assembly,
 1719, and afterwards approved by the Assembly. “ Con-
 “ sidering that nothing, &c.—Therefore, the Assembly
 “ hereby *enjoins* all Presbyteries punctually to observe the acts
 “ of Assembly concerning probationers. Particularly, &c.—
 “ Article 2, That Presbyteries be accurate and exact in the
 “ trial of probationers, not only of their learning, but of
 “ their piety, prudence, and godly life and conversation;
 “ and for that end, Presbyteries are enjoined to take none
 “ upon trials in order to preach, but such as have testimonials
 “ from the Ministers and Kirk-sessions where they have lived,
 “ and a letter from some known person to the Presbytery,
 “ attesting their sober, grave, religious and peaceable beha-
 “ viour, and good affection to the government of the Church;
 “ and produce a testimonial from the Professor of Divinity
 “ under whom they have studied, bearing his knowledge of

“ the persons recommended, as to their Piety and Christian
 “ carriage, their peaceable principles and dispositions, their
 “ progress in their studies, their promising parts, and their
 “ good affection to the Church and State; and that he truly
 “ judges them fit for the service of the Church.—In Article
 “ 4, That before any Presbytery receive a Student upon trials
 “ in order to his being licensed; or grant a recommend-
 “ ation, or desire to another Presbytery for entering a Stu-
 “ dent of Divinity, they appoint three or four of their num-
 “ ber to converse with him privately, and to take trial of his
 “ orthodoxy, his knowledge of Divinity, particularly the
 “ modern controversies, and of the other necessary qualifica-
 “ tions for the Ministry, and *what sense and impressions he has*
 “ *of Religion on his own soul*, and to give their report to the
 “ Presbytery, before he be admitted to probationary trials,
 “ or get a recommendation to another Presbytery.” By
 these quotations, Sir, it appears, that our sentiments and
 practice are not so great a novelty as you would insinuate;
 nor “ had their origin among the distractions and enthusiasms
 “ of that time,” viz. of the Protector’s usurpation. We see
 here, not only the sentiments of particular authors, but the
 deliberate judgement of the general Assembly of the Church
 of Scotland. Hence it also appears, in part, with how little
 justice you interpret, in P. 21, what is said in the West-
 minster directory. I think, I have made it appear that Mr.
 Durham is far from “ *maintaining opposite principles.*” I judge
 you must find stronger arguments, before you make it appear,
 that *enquiring* touching the grace of God in the soul, is
 not to *ask* or word at the Candidate about the matter, but
 only to infer it from external behaviour. I believe you would
 require a nearer connection between your premisses and con-
 clusion in any other matter.

You give another specimen of your candor, in the repre-
 sentation you give of our “ weak pleas” for our opinion. If
 our defence of this mode of examination was to be judged of
 according to your account, it must, indeed, appear weak
 enough. You mention, and but partially mention a meer
 distinction, used in order to the more just apprehension of the
 true state of the question, as one of our principal pleas in fa-
 vour of our sentiment. You acknowledge, we say, that we
 do not pretend to judge the heart. P. 15. But you saw fit to
 pass over our telling you, that what we proposed as the im-
 mediate

mediate object of our judgment, was the narrative or profession itself, with respect to its credibility, and whether it contains such things as answer to the Scripture-characters of true grace. But to have taken in that, would have spoiled your fine attempt to convict us of falshood.

You would make the world believe, that another main plea is, that *it will do no hurt*. In answer to which, you weakly and baldly enough beg the question, or at best take for proved, what I think, I have disproved.—This thought was proper enough to shew that the ardent zeal of our brethren in opposing us, was unnecessary: which was indeed the real design. But will the world believe you, we meant it as an argument to prove the truth of our opinion?

We do indeed, urge that carnal ministers are a plague to the Church, which shews that it is a matter of great importance, that we should be very strict in trying persons, and use every mean that may tend to discover whether they be godly, before they are admitted. But do you expect, people will be so easily persuaded, upon your authority, to imagine we have nothing more to say in consequence of this, than only to beg what we should prove; viz. “that trial of conversion and exercises may be help to judge, and therefore should be used?” These considerations will, indeed, serve as a solid foundation for more direct reasonings. But it suited your design, it seems, better to detach them from this connection.

You have, it is true, taken notice of two or three passages of Scripture, from whence arguments, more directly tending to prove the point in hand, have been drawn. But without considering the arguments deduced from them, you have only glossed the texts themselves; and think you have shewed, they are not any way applicable to our purpose.—You seem considerably skill'd in the art of emptying Scripture Texts of their sense. For according to your rules of interpretation, I question whether we shall find any spiritual exercises spoken of by the saints in Scripture at all. Generally, their most vehement breathings after God, are upon the occasion of some signal distress, from which they are seeking deliverance; and their strongest expressions of joy and praise, upon the occasion of some remarkable interposition of
divine

divine Providence in their favour. Now, it seems, according to you, we must not understand them to say a word about any religious exercises in their own souls on these occasions; but only of the external acts of Providence.

Tho' the antient apologists did not relate their personal experiences, when defending a common cause, as that did not afford a proper occasion for it, yet you acknowledge, Christians professed to hope for salvation in the way the Christian scheme proposes, and were to give a reason why they entertained that hope. And do you think the apologists did not assert the power and influence of Gospel-Truths upon the hearts, and thence, upon the lives of Christians, in order to shew that their hopes were not vain and groundless? Would they not have given a very maimed representation of the nature and excellency of the christian Religion, if they had not? Were they not to defend it as the *hope that was in them*? And was not *this* to speak of exercises or experiences in such a way as argumentation would admit? Now if persons cannot truly defend Christianity, without vindicating the experiences of Christians from all the ridicule and reproach cast upon them by enemies for professing such things; surely, such as are appointed, by office, to be the public defenders and teachers of this Religion, ought to be themselves acquainted with the experiences of Christians. Is it not therefore, reasonable that judges, when trying their qualifications for that office, should enquire into their acquaintance with experiences in Religion, and that Candidates should satisfy such enquiry?

Tho' the Psalmist, in Psal. 66, speaks in the name of the Church, and celebrates a public and glorious deliverance; does that forbid him to say any thing of a personal nature on that occasion? But if he personates the Church in all he says, he, in her name, professes great fervency and access to God in prayer; sincerity, and universal opposition to sin in heart and life; and God's answering her prayers. From verse 16, to the end. And was there no experience in all this?—But tho' the application of this passage to the case in hand puts you so much out of humour, yet, you confess all that, for which it was alledged; viz. that it is “a common thing, among Christians, to tell experiences;—yea often their duty.” And what reply do you make? Why you repeat your misrepresentation of the question, and then, like a *bold beggar,*

beggar, you take for granted that candidates may think it their important duty to refuse satisfaction to a judicature on this head, when enquiring about the matter in order to the better discerning their fitness for so sacred an office as the Gospel-Ministry : A case as important as any other, which you can suppose might render it their duty to tell their experiences. If we were to go over St. Paul's narrative, we might perhaps find matters of experience there too : But the observations I have already made, may suffice to shew how like a divine you interpret Scripture.

Had our arguments on the subject been lying before the public, you would have been very excusable in only referring your reader to them, by as superficial hints as you pleased ; provided, that in your reply, you fairly examined their force. But as that was not the case, and yet, you thought proper to propose a refutation of our arguments, you ought not to impose meer distinctions, and incidental thoughts, upon the world as such ; and the few you have hinted at, you should have produced in their proper form and strength ; nor was it ingenuous, when you had only hinted at one or two out-lines, to tell the public, these were all worth notice we had offered ; but to have dealt thus uprightly, would not have answered your purpose. You aimed at making our cause appear contemptible, by putting so weak and silly a defence into our mouths ; and indeed your answers are very correspondent, for they do not excell in strength. Supposing I had first published on this point, and had told the public that some of the principal objections to this mode of examination we plead for, are such weak ones as these, viz. Some say, it will make the door so narrow that parents will be discouraged from giving their children learning ; or after they have obtained their education, they will go off to another church ; that we can give men learning, but we can't give them grace ; and what will you do with them if they are unconverted ? will you turn them to the plough ?---how would you have taken it ? Yet these things were really offered.

You have indeed furnished me with a fair enough opportunity of entering more fully upon the subject, and of offering a number of arguments, as I easily could, in support of our opinion as above stated. But as the matter properly belongs to church-offices, with respect to their own practice, and does not concern the faith or practice of Christians in general

general, I can see no propriety in disturbing the peace of the Church, and calling upon the world to witness our disputes, by carrying on a public controversy about it. I really think as much had been done by way of argument as was like to answer any valuable end; and the Synod laid a sufficient foundation for preventing farther altercations on the point. Still to agitate the matter only tends to promote animosity and a party spirit; and, by begetting prejudices in the minds of people, marr their profiting by the means of grace, and alienate their affections from each other. I have therefore, determined to do nothing that might tend to continue the controversy; but have contented myself with freeing the question from your misrepresentations, and a few necessary remarks on your reasonings. A regard to justice required this. If I must hereafter be dragged further on, I cannot help it. I owe my life to the service and defence of truth. If you, whoever you are, or any other, shall see fit to renew the attack, I desire you may speak to the question precisely, according to the state of it which I have here given. If you do this, and offer any thing worthy of notice, I shall impartially consider it, and candidly own myself convinced, if I shall be so, or offer my reasons why I am not, unless some better hand shall prevent me. But if any other state of the question shall still be put, or only loose reasonings be used which plainly enough suppose a different state, though you should write large volumes, I shall refer you to any opponent you can find, and not look upon the cause I maintain to be at all concerned. But to cultivate peace and mutual confidence, by uniting our warmest zeal for the conversion of sinners to God, and edifying his people; by living the religion we profess to preach; by a candid, just and impartial exercise of discipline in judicature; and by uniting our most zealous endeavours, each according to his light, to prevent the entrance of persons destitute of the scripture-characters and qualifications into the sacred office, and so to promote the succession of a godly Ministry would be much more agreeable to, Sir,

Your real friend, and fellow-labourer
in the gospel-ministry,

Fog's-Manor,
August 27, 1766.

J O H N B L A I R.

P. S. Mr. Durham supposes this question to be put
 “ what reason can there be more to enquire thus in reference
 “ to Ministers, than in reference to [private] members ?
 “ And if the one will not follow upon the grounds that are
 “ laid down for inferring the other ? Answers— There
 “ want not palpable reasons for this difference : As, when
 “ a member is admitted, he is received to be trained up in
 “ Christ’s House or School ; and therefore if he profess
 “ himself docile, and subject himself to ordinances, it can-
 “ not be expected that he will be, or can be accurate before
 “ he has learned :—It is not so in the admitting one to
 “ be a Minister : For, he is to be entered to be a teacher ;
 “ therefore more must be required of him.”—

“ 2d. When a Professor seriously desireth entry to the
 “ Church or Baptism, he doth it by pleading a title or right
 “ thereto according to Christ’s warrant, wherein a church
 “ judicatory is obliged, in justice, to decide, and that le-
 “ gally according to his title and right, &c.—But in
 “ trying of a man for the ministry, there is no such title and
 “ right which can be pleaded : For 1st. This is no man’s
 “ particular privilege, which he, as a Saint, or Professor,
 “ may claim by virtue of the Covenant, or Christ’s institu-
 “ tion, as he may do the Sacraments ; for many have right
 “ to these, that have none to this. 2d. A particular person
 “ may be kept from the Ministry and not be wronged, even
 “ although he be honest ; because, in admitting thereto,
 “ Church-officers are to walk according to the general
 “ ground of the edification of the Church, &c.—Lastly,
 “ This difference may be observed, that in deciding the
 “ first, viz. the man’s right, Church-officers must decide
 “ according to what *judicially is made out* ; for, a person that
 “ giveth in his title, looking like a serious Professor, he cannot
 “ be refused, though men have only a negative knowledge of
 “ his sincerity ; yet this cannot be admitted in a Minister,
 “ where want of *clearness and positive satisfaction* is enough
 “ to keep a man from positive deciding for the admission of
 “ a Minister.” *Expos. Rev. P. 225.*

Whoever will consider these things, need not be put hard
 to it to guess, how it may come to pass, that a person might
 be brought over to Mr. Stoddard’s sentiments about admission

to the Lord's Table, and yet not be convinced in the other case. After all, were I never so fully in Mr. Stoddard's mind in the former case, I should still think it horrid unfaithfulness in examining person's for the Lord's Table, to neglect conversing and dealing with them about their spiritual estate.

F I N I S.

