

SKETCHES
OF
V I R G I N I A
HISTORICAL
AND
B I O G R A P H I C A L .

BY THE
REV. WILLIAM HENRY FOOTE, D. D.,
Pastor of Presbyterian Church, Romney, Virginia.

PHILADELPHIA:
WILLIAM S. MARTIEN, 142 CHESTNUT STREET.
1850.

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1849,
By WILLIAM S. MARTIEN,
In the Clerk's office of the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

did apply to the king, as soon as I was Bishop of London, to have two or three bishops appointed for the plantations, to reside there. I thought there could be no reasonable objection to it, not even by the dissenters, as the bishops proposed were to have no jurisdiction but over the clergy of their own church; and no more over them than should enable them to see the pastoral office duly performed; and as to New England, where the dissenters are so numerous, it never was proposed to settle a bishop in the country.

“You are probably no stranger to the manner in which the news of this proposal was received in New England. If you are, I will only say, that they used all their influence to obstruct the settling of bishops in the Episcopal church of England. Was this consistent even with a spirit of toleration? Would they think themselves tolerated, if they were debarred the right of settling ministers among themselves, and were obliged to send all their candidates to Geneva or Scotland for orders? At the same time that they exert this opposition, they set up a mission of their own for Virginia, a country positively Episcopal, by authority of their synod; and in their own country, where they have the power, they have persecuted and imprisoned several members of the church, for not paying towards supporting the dissenting preachers, though no such charge can, by any colour of law, be imposed upon them. This has been the case in New England. I am sorry to add, that some here, for whose characters and abilities I have due esteem, have not upon this occasion given signs of the temper and moderation that were expected from them.

“I do not willingly enter into these complaints even to you, who, I am confident, will make no ill use of them. I wish there was no occasion for them. In this wish, I am sure of your concurrence, from the love you bear to our common Christianity.

“I am, sir,

“Your most affectionate friend,

“Very humble servant,

“THOS. LONDON.”

Mr. Davies having received these communications drew up at length a statement of the condition of the dissenters in Virginia, addressed to the Bishop of London, and sent it to his friends in England, to present to the Bishop, should they, upon perusal, think it advisable. It is as follows:

“*My Lord,*

“My little name would probably never have been made known to your lordship in this manner, were I not constrained by such reasons as I humbly presume will acquit me from the censure of a causeless intrusive application. Your lordship’s

general character and the high sentiments of your candour and impartiality your valuable writings have inspired me with, persuade me your lordship is a patient searcher after truth both in matters of speculation and fact; and therefore will patiently bear the following representation, though unavoidably tedious, especially when it is intended to reflect light upon *a case*, which in your lordship's own judgment, *concerns the church abroad very much*, and help to bring it to an impartial determination. And though my being unaccustomed to such addresses may render me awkward or deficient in some of the decent and pre-cedented formalities with which I should approach a person of your lordship's dignity; yet I flatter myself my inward affectionate veneration will naturally discover itself in such genuine indications as will convince your lordship of its sincerity and ardour, and procure your indulgence to my involuntary imperfections.

“When his Honour the President of this Colony, the late Col. Lee, first informed me, that the case of the Protestant dissenters here had been laid before your lordship, I drew up a representation of it with all possible impartiality, in a letter intended for your lordship, dated August 13th, 1750. I had no suspicion that either the President or the Rev. Dr. Dawson had knowingly and wilfully misrepresented it; yet I had reason to conclude their representation was imperfect, as they were not thoroughly acquainted with the circumstances of the dissenters in these parts. This supposed imperfection I attempted to supply in that letter. But upon farther deliberation I concluded, it would answer no valuable end to send it; as I had then no opportunity of procuring the attestation of others, and I know a person's speaking in his own behalf is generally deemed a sufficient ground to suspect his veracity. Accordingly I kept it by me until about three months ago, when I sent it with some other papers upon the affair to a correspondent in London; leaving it wholly to his judgment, whether to present it to your lordship or not. I have not received any intelligence from him as yet, what he has thought proper to do; and therefore lest your lordship should not have received it, I shall as far as I can recollect lay the substance of it before you, together with such additional remarks as have been suggested to me by occurrences since that time.

“I informed my worthy friend Dr. Doddridge of the state of affairs here with respect to the dissenters, about a year and a half ago, and by his answer, I find he has laid a large extract of my letter before your lordship. I wrote it with all the unreserved freedom of friendship, as I did not expect it would have been presented to your lordship's eyes: yet I am glad you have seen it; as by comparing it with this, which it may

be presumed I write with more caution, your lordship may be convinced I do not act in disguise, but make substantially the same naked artless representation of truth to all parties.

“Dr. Doddridge has sent me a copy of your lordship’s letter to him, with the extracts of the letters from and to Virginia enclosed, as the fullest and easiest method of informing me of your lordship’s sentiments. This, my lord, will not, I trust, weaken your ‘confidence that he would make no ill use’ of your lordship’s freedom with him, since the matter is of a public nature, and the reason of his writing to your lordship was, that he might inform me of your sentiments. And as I find some misrepresentations in your lordship’s letter, and the extracts enclosed, which I apprehend I can rectify; I hope, my lord, you will not suspect I have so much arrogance as to encounter your lordship as a disputant, if I presume to make some free and candid remarks upon them. My only design is to do justice to a misrepresented cause, which is the inalienable right of the meanest innocent; and as an impartial historical representation will be sufficient for this purpose, ’tis needless to tire your lordship with tedious argumentation.

“The frontier counties of this colony, about an hundred miles west and south-west from Hanover, have been lately settled by people that chiefly came from Ireland originally, and immediately from the Northern colonies, who were educated Presbyterians, and had been under the care of the ministers belonging to the Synod of New York (of which I am a member) during their residence there. Their settling in Virginia has been many ways beneficial to it, which I am sure most of them would not have done, had they expected any restraint in the inoffensive exercise of their religion, according to their consciences. After their removal, they continued to petition the Synod of New York, and particularly the Presbytery of Newcastle, which was nearest to them, for ministers to be sent among them. But as the ministers of said Synod and Presbytery were few, and vastly disproportioned to the many congregations under their care, they could not provide these vacancies with settled pastors. And what, my lord, could they do in this case? I appeal to your lordship, whether this was not the only expedient in their power, to appoint some of their members to travel, alternately, into these destitute congregations, and officiate among them as long as would comport with their circumstances? It was this, my lord, that was the first occasion, as far as I can learn, of our being stigmatized *itinerant preachers*. But whether there was any just ground for it in these circumstances, I cheerfully submit to your lordship. The same method was taken for the same reason (as I shall observe more particularly hereafter) to supply the dissenters in and about Hanover, before my settlement

among them; and this raised the former clamour still higher. There are now in the frontier counties, at least five congregations of Presbyterians, who, though they have long used the most vigorous endeavours to obtain settled ministers among them, have not succeeded as yet, by reason of the scarcity of ministers, and the number of vacancies in other parts, particularly in Pennsylvania and the Jerseys: and we have no way to answer their importunate petitions, but by sending a minister now and then to officiate transiently among them. And as the people under my charge are so numerous, and so dispersed, that I cannot allow them at each meeting-house such a share of my ministrations as is correspondent to their necessity, the said Synod has twice or thrice in the space of three years sent a minister to assist me for a few Sabbaths. These, my lord, are the only itinerations that my brethren can be charged with in this colony, and whether they should not rather run the risk of this causeless charge, than suffer these vacancies, who eagerly look to them for the bread of life, to perish through a famine of the Word of the Lord, I cheerfully submit to your lordship.

“But as I am particularly accused of intrusive schismatical itinerations, I am more particularly concerned to vindicate myself; and for that purpose it will be sufficient to inform your lordship of the circumstances of the dissenters in and about Hanover, who are under my ministerial care.

“The dissenters here, my lord, are but sufficiently numerous to form two distinct organized congregations, or particular churches, and did they live contiguous, two meeting-houses would be sufficient for them, and neither they nor myself, would desire more. But they are so dispersed that they cannot convene for public worship, unless they have a considerable number of places licensed; and so few that they cannot form a particular organized church at each place. There are seven meeting-houses licensed in five different counties, as the letter from Virginia, I suppose from the Rev. Dr. Dawson informs your lordship. But the extremes of my congregation lie eighty or ninety miles apart; and the dissenters under my care are scattered through six or seven different counties. The greatest number of them, I suppose about one hundred families, at least, in Hanover, where there are three meeting-houses licensed: about twenty or thirty families in Henrico; and about ten or twelve in Caroline; about fifteen or twenty in Goochland, and about the same number in Louisa; in each of which counties there is but one meeting-house licensed: about fifteen or twenty families in Cumberland, where there is no place licensed; and about the same number contiguous to New Kent, where a license was granted by the court of that county, but afterwards superseded by the General Court. The counties here are large, gene-

rally forty or fifty miles in length, and about twenty or thirty miles in breadth; so that though they lived in one county, it might be impossible for them all to convene at one place; and much more when they are dispersed through so many. Though there are now seven places licensed, yet the nearest are twelve or fifteen miles apart; and many of the people have ten, fifteen, or twenty miles to the nearest, and thirty, forty, or sixty miles to the rest; nay, some of them have thirty or forty miles to the nearest. That this is an impartial representation of our circumstances, I dare appeal to all that know anything about them.

“Let me here remind your lordship that such is the scarcity of ministers in the Synod of New York, and so great the number of congregations under their care, that though a part of my congregation have, with my zealous concurrence, used repeated endeavours to obtain another minister amongst them to relieve me of the charge of them, yet they have not succeeded as yet. So that all the dissenters here depend entirely on me to officiate among them, as there is no other minister of their own denomination within two hundred miles, except when one of my brethren from the northern colonies is appointed to pay them a transient visit, for two or three Sabbaths, once in a year or two: and as I observed they cannot attend on my ministry at one or two places by reason of their distance; nor constitute a complete particular church at each place of meeting, by reason of the smallness of their number.

“These things, my lord, being impartially considered, I dare submit it to your lordship,

“Whether my itinerating in this manner in such circumstances be illegal? And whether, though I cannot live in five different counties at once, as your lordship observes, I may not lawfully officiate in them, or in as many as the peculiar circumstances of my congregation, which though but one particular church, is dispersed through sundry counties, render necessary?

“Whether contiguity of residence is necessary to entitle dissenters to the liberties granted by the Act of Toleration? Whether when they cannot convene at one place, they may not, according to the true intent and meaning of that Act, obtain as many houses licensed as will render public worship accessible to them all? And whether if this liberty be denied them, they can be said to be tolerated at all? i. e. Whether *dissenters are permitted to worship in their own way*, (which your lordship observes was the intent of the Act) who are prohibited from worshipping in their own way, unless they travel thirty, forty or fifty miles every Sunday? Your lordship grants we would have no reason to think ourselves tolerated, were we obliged to send our candidates to Geneva or Scotland to be ordained; and

is there any more reason to think so when great numbers are obliged to journey so far weekly for public worship?

“Whether, when there are a few dissenting families in one county and a few in another, and they are not able to form a distinct congregation or particular church at each place, and yet all of them conjunctly are able to form one, though they cannot meet stately at one place; whether, I say, they may not legally obtain sundry meeting-houses licensed, in these different counties, where their minister may divide his time according to the proportion of the people, and yet be looked upon as one organized church? And whether the minister of such a dispersed church, who alternately officiates at these sundry meeting-houses should on this account be branded as an itinerant?

“Whether, when a number of dissenters, sufficient to constitute two distinct congregations, each of them able to maintain a minister, can obtain but one by reason of the scarcity of ministers, they may not legally share in the labours of that one, and have as many houses licensed for him to officiate in, as their distance renders necessary? And whether the minister of such an united congregation, though he divides his labours at seven different places, or more, if their conveniency requires it, be not as properly a *settled* minister as though he preached but at one place, to but one congregation? Or (which is a parallel case) whether the Rev. Mr. Barrett, one of the ministers in Hanover, who has three churches situated in two counties, and whose parish is perhaps sixty miles in circumference, be not as properly a settled parish minister, as a London minister whose parishioners do not live half a mile from his church?

“I beg leave, my lord, farther to illustrate the case by a relation of a matter of fact, and a very possible supposition.

“It very often happens in Virginia, that the parishes are twenty, thirty, forty, and sometimes fifty or sixty miles long, and proportionably broad; which is chiefly owing to this, that people are not so thick settled, as that the inhabitants in a small compass should be sufficient for a parish; and your lordship can easily conceive that the inhabitants of this infant colony are thinner than in England. The Legislature here has wisely made provision to remedy this inconveniency, by ordering sundry churches or chapels of ease to be erected in one parish, that one of them at least may be tolerably convenient to all the parishioners; and all these are under the care of one minister, who shares his labours at each place in proportion to the number of people there. In Hanover, a pretty populous county, there are two ministers, one of whom has two churches, and the other, as I observed has three; the nearest of which are twelve or fifteen miles apart: and in some of the frontier

counties the number of churches in a parish is much greater. And yet the number of churches does not multiply the parish into an equal number of parishes; nor does the minister by officiating at so many places, incur the odious epithet of an itinerant preacher, a pluralist or nonresident. (Here again, my lord, I appeal to all the colony to attest this representation.) Now, I submit it to your lordship, whether there be not at least equal reason that a plurality of meeting-houses should be licensed for the use of the dissenters here, since they are more dispersed and fewer in number? The nearest of those licensed are twelve or fifteen miles apart; and as, if there were but one church in a parish, a great part of it would be incapable of attending on public worship; so if the number of my meeting-houses were lessened, a considerable part of the dissenters here would be thrown into a state of heathenism wholly destitute of the ministrations of the gospel, or obliged to attend stately on the established church, which they conscientiously scruple. And indeed this will be the case with some of them if more be not licensed, unless they can go twenty, thirty, or forty miles every Sabbath. And here, my lord, it may be proper to observe, that in the Act of Toleration it is expressly provided—‘That all the laws made and provided for the frequenting divine service on the Lord’s Day, shall be in force and executed against all persons that offend against the said laws, except such persons come to some congregation or assembly of religious worship, allowed or permitted by this Act.’ So that the dissenters are obliged, even by that Act which was made designedly in their favour, to attend the established church unless they come to some dissenting congregation; and this obligation is corroborated, and the penalty increased by an act of our Assembly, which enjoins all adult persons to come to church at least once a month, ‘excepting as is excepted in an act made in the first year of the reign of King William and Queen Mary,’ &c. But how, my lord, is it possible for them to comply with this injunction, if they are restrained to so small a number of meeting-houses as that they cannot attend them? If the Act of Toleration imposes this restraint upon them, does it not necessitate them to violate itself? And if our magistrates refuse to license a sufficient number, and yet execute the penal laws upon them for the profanation of the Sabbath, or the neglect of public worship, does it not seem as though they obliged them to offend that they may enjoy the malignant pleasure of punishing them? The act of William and Mary, my lord, does not particularize the number of houses to be licensed for the use of one congregation; but only requires in general, that all such places shall be registered before public worship be celebrated in them; from which it may be reasonably pre-

sumed, the number is to be wholly regulated by the circumstances of the congregation. It is, however, evident that such a number was intended as that all the members of the congregation might conveniently attend. But to return. I submit it also to your lordship, whether there be not as little reason for representing me as an itinerant preacher, on account of my preaching at so many places for the conveniency of one congregation, as that the minister of a large parish, where there are sundry churches or chapels of ease, should be so called for preaching at these sundry places, for the convenience of one parish? Besides the reason common to both, the distance of the people; there is one peculiarly in my favour, the small number of our ministers; on which account almost the half of the congregations that have put themselves under our synodical or presbyterial care, are destitute of settled pastors: which is far from being the case of late in the established church in Virginia. I shall subjoin one remark more: It is very common here, my lord, when a parish which has had sundry churches under the care of one minister, is increased, to divide it into two or more, each of which has a minister. And I submit it to your lordship, whether my congregation may not be so divided, when an opportunity occurs of obtaining another minister? And whether, till that time I may not, according to the precedent around me in the established church, take the care of all the dissenters at the places already licensed, and at that petitioned for, when I do it for no selfish views, but from the unhappy necessity imposed upon me by present circumstances, and am eager to resign a part of my charge as soon as another may be obtained to undertake it, which I hope will be ere long?

“I know but little, my lord, how it is in fact in England: but I will put a case. Suppose then there are fifteen families of dissenters at Clapham in Bedfordshire, fifteen at Wotten in Northamptonshire, fifteen at Kimbolton in Huntingdonshire, and fifteen in the North corner of Buckinghamshire; (if these places are not so pertinent as others that might be supposed, your lordship can easily substitute others, and your candour will overlook my blunder, as I have never seen England but in a map) and suppose, that these families not being able to form a distinct church in each shire and maintain a minister at each place, agree to unite into one organized church, and to place themselves under the care of one minister, who shall proportion his labours at sundry meeting-houses, one being erected in each shire for the conveniency of the families resident there: I humbly query, whether in this case such a congregation may not according to the act of William and Mary, claim a license for a meeting-house in each of these shires? Whether

this could justly be suspected as an artifice 'to gather dissenting congregations where there were none before, to disturb the peace of the Church?' Whether the minister of such a dispersed congregation should be stigmatized an itinerant?—or (to adapt the illustration yet more fully to the case) suppose twice the above number in five contiguous shires or counties, capable of constituting two particular churches, and maintaining two ministers; and suppose the number of ministers so small, that they can obtain but one to settle among them, may they not, in these circumstances, unite in one church, and place themselves conjunctly under the care of one minister, sharing his labours among them at meeting-houses, in five counties, in proportion to their number at each place? And would not such a minister be justly looked upon as a settled minister? Or would he be limited to one county in this case, because the Act of Toleration requires him to qualify in the county where he lives. And this, my lord, suggests to me a remark in your lordship's letter to Virginia—'They [dissenting ministers] are by the 'Act of William and Mary to qualify in the county where they live, and how Davies can be said to live in five different counties, they who granted the license must explain.' You know, my lord, it is the judgment of our Attorney General, that county courts here have no authority in such matters; and your lordship has not declared your dissent from him. The council also has published an order, prohibiting county courts to administer qualifications to dissenting ministers, and appropriating that authority to the Governor or Commander in Chief. And how is it possible, my lord, we should qualify in the county where we live, since the Governor does not live there? It is hard, if after we are prohibited to qualify in county courts as we desire, the validity of our qualifications should be suspected, because we did not qualify there. As for myself I was required to qualify by his honour the Governor, in the general court, which consists of the Governor and Council, and as the epithet *General*, intimates, it is the supreme court of the whole province, and what is done therein is deemed as valid through the whole colony, as the acts of a county court in a particular county: and consequently I look upon myself, and so does the government, as legally qualified to officiate in any part of the colony where there are houses licensed.

"To all this, my lord, I may add, that though the Act of Toleration should not warrant my preaching in so many counties; yet, since, as your lordship observes, 'the dissenters obtained a clause in the 10th Queen Anne, to empower any dissenting preacher to preach occasionally in any other county but that where he was licensed;' and since the reason of the

law is at least as strong here as in England, and consequently it extends hither, my conduct is sufficiently justified by it.

“All these things, my lord, furnish a sufficient answer to your lordship’s question, ‘How far the Act of Toleration will justify Mr. Davies in taking upon himself to be an itinerant preacher, and travelling over many counties to make converts, in a country too where, till very lately, there was not one dissenter from the Church of England?’ And it appears to have been stated upon misinformation. When impartially stated, it would stand thus:

“How far the Act of Toleration will justify Mr. Davies, in sharing his labours at sundry places in different counties among the professed dissenters, who constitute but one particular church, though dispersed through so many counties and incapable of meeting at one place?—Or, thus:

“Whether legally qualified protestant dissenters, who are dispersed through sundry counties, and cannot meet at one place, and by reason of the scarcity of ministers cannot obtain but one among them, may not legally share in the labours of that one, and have so many houses licensed for him to officiate in as that all of them may alternately attend on public worship? And were the question considered in this view, I confidently presume, your lordship would determine it in my favour, and no longer look upon me as an itinerant preacher, intent on making converts to a party.

“But I find I have been represented to your lordship as an uninvited intruder into these parts: for your lordship in your letter to Dr. Doddridge writes thus, ‘If the Act of Toleration was desired for no other view but to ease the consciences of those that could not conform; if it was granted with no other view, how must Mr. Davies’s conduct be justified? who under the colour of a toleration to his own conscience, is labouring to disturb the consciences of others.—He came three hundred miles from home, not to serve people who had scruples, but to a country—where there were not above four or five dissenters within an hundred miles, not above six years ago.’

“To justify me from this charge, my lord, it might be sufficient to observe, that the meeting-houses here were legally licensed before I preached in them, and that the licenses were petitioned for by the people, as the last license for three of them expressly certifies, as your lordship may see: which is a sufficient evidence that I did not intrude into any of these places to gain proselytes where there were no dissenters before.

“But to give your lordship a just view of this matter, I shall present you with a brief narrative of the rise and increase of the dissenters in and about this county, and an account of the circumstances of my settling among them. And though I

know, my lord, there may be some temptations to look upon all I say as a plausible artifice to vindicate myself or my party : yet I am not without hopes that one of your lordship's impartiality, who has found it possible by happy experience to be candid and disinterested even when self is concerned, will believe it possible for another also to be impartial for once in the relation of plain, public facts, obvious to all, though they concern him and his party ; especially when he is willing to venture the reputation of his veracity on the undeniable truth of his relation, and can bring the attestations of multitudes to confirm it.

“About the year 1743, upon the petition of the Presbyterians in the frontier counties of this colony, the Rev. Mr. Robinson, who now rests from his labours, and is happily advanced beyond the injudicious applauses and censures of mortals, was sent by order of Presbytery to officiate for some time among them. A little before this about four or five persons, heads of families, in Hanover, had dissented from the established church, not from any scruples about her ceremonial peculiarities, the usual cause of non-conformity, much less about her excellent Articles of Faith, but from a dislike of the doctrines generally delivered from the pulpit, as not savouring of experimental piety, nor suitably intermingled with the glorious peculiarities of the religion of Jesus. It does not concern me at present, my lord, to inquire or determine whether they had sufficient reason for their dislike. They concluded them sufficient ; and they had a legal as well as natural right to follow their own judgment. These families were wont to meet in a private house on Sundays to hear some good books read, particularly Luther's ; whose writings I can assure your lordship were the principal cause of their leaving the Church ; which I hope is a presumption in their favour. After some time sundry others came to their society, and upon hearing these books, grew indifferent about going to church, and chose rather to frequent these societies for reading. At length the number became too great for a private house to contain them, and they agreed to build a meeting-house, which they accordingly did.

“Thus far, my lord, they had proceeded before they had heard a dissenting minister at all. (Here again I appeal to all that know any thing of the matter to attest this account.) They had not the least thought at this time of assuming the denomination of Presbyterians, as they were wholly ignorant of that Church : but when they were called upon by the court to assign the reasons of their absenting themselves from church, and asked what denomination they professed themselves of, they declared themselves Lutherans, not in the usual sense of

that denomination in Europe, but merely to intimate that they were of Luther's sentiments, particularly in the article of Justification.

"Hence, my lord, it appears that neither I nor my brethren were the first instruments of their separation from the Church of England: and so far we are vindicated from the charge of 'setting up itinerant preachers, to gather congregations where there was none before.' So far I am vindicated from the charge of 'coming three hundred miles from home to disturb the consciences of others—not to serve a people who had scruples, but to a country—where there were not above four or five dissenters at the time of my coming here.

"Hence also, my lord, results an inquiry, which I humbly submit to your lordship, whether the laws of England enjoin an immutability in sentiments on the members of the established church? And whether, if those that were formerly conformists, follow their own judgments, and dissent, they are cut off from the privileges granted by law to those that are dissenters by birth and education? If not, had not these people a legal right to separate from the established church, and to invite any legally qualified minister they thought fit to preach among them?—And this leads me back to my narrative again.

"While Mr. Robinson was preaching in the frontier counties, about an hundred miles from Hanover, the people here having received some information of his character and doctrines, sent him an invitation by one or two of their number to come and preach among them; which he complied with and preached four days successively to a mixed multitude; many being prompted to attend from curiosity. The acquaintance I had with him, and the universal testimony of multitudes that heard him, assure me, that he insisted entirely on the great catholic doctrines of the gospel, (as might be presumed from his first text, Luke xiii. 3,) and did not give the least hint of his sentiments concerning the disputed peculiarities of the Church of England, or use any sordid disguised artifices to gain converts to a party. 'Tis true many after this joined with those that had formerly dissented; but their sole reason at first was, the prospect of being entertained with more profitable doctrines among the dissenters than they were wont to hear in the parish churches, and not because Mr. Robinson had poisoned them with bigoted prejudices against the established church. And permit me, my lord, to declare, with the utmost religious solemnity, that I have been (as I hope your lordship will be in the regions of immortal bliss and perfect uniformity in religion) the joyful witness of the happy effect of these four sermons. Sundry thoughtless impenitents, and sundry abandoned profligates have ever since given good evidence of a thorough conversion, not from

party to party, but from sin to holiness, by an universal devotedness to God, and the conscientious practice of all the social and personal virtues. And when I see this the glorious concomitant or consequent of their separation, I hope your lordship will indulge me to rejoice in such proselytes, as I am sure our divine Master and all his celestial ministers do; though without this, they are but wretched captures, rather to be lamented over, than boasted of. When Mr. Robinson left them, which he did after four days, they continued to meet together on Sundays to pray and hear a sermon out of some valuable book read by one of their number; as they had no prospect of obtaining a minister immediately of the same character and principles with Mr. Robinson. They were now increased to a tolerable congregation, and made unwearied application to the Presbytery of New Castle in Pennsylvania for a minister to be sent among them, at least to pay them a transient visit, and preach a few sermons, and baptize their children, till they should have opportunity to have one settled among them. The Presbytery complied with their petitions, as far as the small number of its members, and the circumstances of their own congregations, and of the vacancies under their Presbyterial care, would permit; and sent ministers among them at four different times in about four years, who stayed with them two or three Sabbaths at each time. They came at the repeated and most importunate petitions of the dissenters here, and did not obtrude their labours upon them uninvited. Sundry upon hearing them, who had not heard Mr. Robinson, joined with the dissenters; so that in the year 1747, when I was first ordered by the Presbytery to take a journey to Hanover, in compliance with the petition of the dissenters here, I found them sufficiently numerous to form one very large congregation, or two small ones; and they had built five meeting-houses, three in Hanover, one in Henrico, and one in Louisa county; which were few enough considering their distance. Upon my preaching among them, they used the most irresistible importunities with me to settle among them as their minister, and presented a call to me before the Presbytery, signed by about an hundred and fifty heads of families; which in April, 1748, I accepted, and was settled among them the May following. And though it would have been my choice to confine myself wholly to one meeting-house, especially as I was then in a very languishing state of health; yet considering that hardly the one half of the people could possibly convene at one place, and that they had no other minister of their own denomination within less than two hundred miles, I was prevailed upon to take the pastoral care of

them all, and to divide my labours at the sundry meeting-houses.

“And now, my lord, I may leave yourself to judge, whether the informations were just, upon which your lordship has represented me as not ‘coming to serve a people that had scruples, but as disturbing the consciences of others, under the colour of a toleration to my own, and intruding into a country where there were not above four or five dissenters, &c.’” Your lordship must see if this account be true, (and thousands can attest it) that I had not the least instrumentality in the first gathering of a dissenting Church in these parts. Indeed I was then but a lad, and closely engaged in study. And I solemnly assure your lordship, that it was not the sacred thirst of filthy lucre, nor the prospect of any other personal advantage, that induced me to settle here: for sundry congregations in Pennsylvania, my native country, and in the other northern colonies, most earnestly importuned me to settle among them, where I should have had at least an equal temporal maintenance, incomparably more ease, leisure, and peace, and the happiness of the frequent society of my brethren; never made a great noise or bustle in the world, but concealed myself in the crowd of my superior brethren, and spent my life in some little services for God and his Church in some peaceful retired corner; which would have been most becoming so insignificant a creature, and most agreeable to my recluse natural temper: but all these strong inducements were preponderated by a sense of the more urgent necessity of the dissenters here; as they lay two or three hundred miles distant from the nearest ministers of their own denomination, and laboured under peculiar embarrassments for want of a settled minister; which I will not mention, lest I should seem to fling injurious reflections on a government whose clemency I have reason to acknowledge with the most loyal gratitude.

“It is true, my lord, there have been some additions made to the dissenters here since my settlement, and some of them by occasion of my preaching. They had but five meeting-houses then, in three different counties, and now they have seven in five counties, and stand in need of one or two more. But here I must again submit it to your lordship, whether the laws of England forbid men to change their opinions, and act according to them when changed? And whether the Act of Toleration was intended to tolerate such only as were dissenters by birth and education? Whether professed dissenters are prohibited to have meeting-houses licensed convenient to them, where there are conformists adjacent, whose curiosity may at first prompt them to hear, and whose judgments may afterwards direct them to join with the dissenters? Or

whether, to avoid the danger of gaining proselytes, the dissenters, in such circumstances, must be wholly deprived of the ministrations of the gospel?

“For my farther vindication, my lord, I beg leave to declare, and I defy the world to confute me, that in all the sermons I have preached in Virginia, I have not wasted one minute in exclaiming or reasoning against the peculiarities of the established church; nor so much as assigned the reasons of my own non-conformity. I have not exhausted my zeal in railing against the established clergy, in exposing their imperfections, some of which lie naked to my view, or in depreciating their characters. No, my lord, I have matters of infinitely greater importance to exert my zeal and spend my time and strength upon;—To preach repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ—To alarm secure impenitents; to reform the profligate; to undeceive the hypocrite; to raise up the hands that hang down, and to strengthen the feeble knees;—These are the doctrines I preach, these are the ends I pursue; and these my artifices to gain proselytes: and if ever I divert from these to ceremonial trifles, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth. Now, my lord, if people adhere to me on such accounts as these, I cannot discourage them without wickedly betraying the interests of religion, and renouncing my character as a minister of the gospel. If the members of the Church of England come from distant places to the meeting-houses licensed for the use of professed dissenters, and upon hearing, join with them, and declare themselves Presbyterians, and place themselves under my ministerial care, I dare say your lordship will not censure me for admitting them. And if these new proselytes live at such a distance that they cannot meet stately at the places already licensed, have they not a legal right to have houses licensed convenient to them, since they are as properly professed dissenters, in favour of whom the Act of Toleration was enacted, as those that have been educated in non-conformity? There is no method, my lord, to prevent the increase of our number in this manner, but either the prohibiting of all conformists to attend occasionally on my ministry; which neither the laws of God nor of the land will warrant: or the Episcopal ministers preaching the same doctrines which I do; as I humbly conceive they oblige themselves by subscribing their own articles; and had this been done, I am verily persuaded there would not have been one dissenter in these parts: or my absolutely refusing to receive those into the community of the dissenters, against whom it may be objected that they once belonged to the Church of England; which your lordship sees is unreasonable. 'Tis the conversion and salvation of men I aim to promote; and genuine

Christianity, under whatever various forms it appears, never fails to charm my heart. The design of the gospel is to bring perishing sinners to heaven, and if they are but brought thither, its ministers have but little cause of anxiety and contention about the denomination they sustain in their way. Yet, my lord, I may consistently profess, that as I judge the government, discipline and modes of worship in the dissenting church more agreeable to the divine standard than those in the Episcopal, it cannot but afford me a little additional satisfaction to see those that agree with me in essentials, and are hopefully walking towards the same celestial City, agree with me in extraneous things too; though this ingredient of satisfaction is often swallowed up in the sublimer pleasure that results from the other more noble consideration.—And here, my lord, that I may unbosom myself with all the candid simplicity of a gospel minister, I must frankly own, that abstracting the consideration of the disputed peculiarities of the established church, which have little or no influence in the present case, I am verily persuaded (heaven knows with what sorrowful reluctance I admit the evidence of it) those of the Church of England in Virginia do not generally enjoy as suitable means for their conversion and edification as they might among the dissenters. This is not because they are of that communion; for I know the gospel and all its ordinances may be administered in a very profitable manner in a consistency with the constitution of that church; and perhaps her ceremonies would be so far from obstructing the efficacy of the means of grace, that they would rather promote it, to them that have no scruples about their lawfulness and expediency; though it would be otherwise with a doubtful conscience: but because the doctrines generally delivered from the pulpit, and the manner of delivery, are such as have not so probable a tendency to do good, as those among the dissenters. I am sensible, my lord, ‘how hard it is,’ as your lordship observes, ‘not to suspect and charge corruption of principles on those, who differ in principles from us.’ But still I cannot help thinking that they who generally entertain their hearers with languid harangues on morality or insipid speculations, omitting or but slightly touching upon the glorious doctrines of the gospel, which will be everlastingly found the most effectual means to reform a degenerate world; such as the corruption of human nature in its present lapsed state; the nature and necessity of regeneration, and of divine influences to effect it; the nature of saving faith, evangelical repentance, &c.* I cannot, I say, help

* “I do not intend this, my lord, for a complete enumeration of evangelical doctrines, as I intimate by the &c., annexed.—For your lordship’s farther satisfaction, I must refer you to Dr. Doddridge’s Practical writings,

thinking that they who omit, pervert or but slightly hint at these and the like doctrines, are not likely to do much service to the souls of men: and as far as I can learn by personal observation or the credible information of others, this is too generally the case in Virginia. And on this account especially, I cannot dissuade persons from joining with the dissenters, who are desirous to do so; and I use no other methods to engage them but the inculcating of these and like doctrines.

“I beg leave, my lord, to subjoin one remark more to vindicate the number of my meeting-houses, and as a reason for the licensure of that in New Kent: that in a large and scattered congregation, it may be necessary the minister should officiate occasionally in particular corners of his congregation for the conveniency of a few families that lie at a great distance from the places where he stately officiates for the conveniency of the generality. This, my lord, is frequently practised, in the parishes in the frontier counties, which are very large, though not equal to the bounds of my congregation. ’Tis no doubt unreasonable, that the minister should consult the conveniency of a few rather than of the majority; and therefore I preach more frequently at one of the meeting-houses in Hanover, where the dissenters are more numerous, than at all the other six. But, my lord, is it not fit I should so far consult the conveniency of a few families, who live in the extremities of the congregation, at a great distance from the place where I stately officiate, as to preach occasionally among them four or five times a year? Though one or two of a family may be able to attend at the stated place of meeting, yet it is impossible that all should; and why may not a sermon be preached occasionally in their neighbourhood, where they may all attend? Again: though the heads of families may be capable of attending on public worship at a great distance themselves, yet it is an intolerable hardship that they should be obliged to carry their children thirty, forty, or fifty miles to be baptized. And is it not reasonable, my lord, I should preach among them occasionally, to relieve them from this difficulty once in three or four months? And may not houses be legally licensed for this purpose? The meeting-house in New Kent was designed for such occasional meetings: and when I have given an account of the affair, I doubt not but your lordship will justify the procedure of the County Court in granting a license for it. Some people in and about that county, particularly two gentlemen of

particularly his Rise and Progress of Religion, his Sermons on the Power and Grace of Christ, and on Regeneration; which I heartily approve as to matter and manner, and would imitate, as far as my inferior genius will admit.

good estates and excellent characters, who had been justices of the peace and officers in the militia, told me, that as they lived at a great distance from the nearest place where I stately officiate, and therefore could not frequently attend there, they would count it a peculiar favour, if I would preach occasionally at some place convenient to them, though it were on week-days. I replied, that though I was wholly unable to perform ministerial duties fully to the people at the places already licensed, yet I should be willing to give them a sermon now and then, if they could obtain a license for a place. Whereupon they presented a petition to the County Court, signed by fifteen persons, heads of families, and professed Presbyterians, which (as your lordship has been informed) was granted; but afterwards superseded by the Council. Hence, my lord, you may see what was the occasion and design of this petition; and that it was not an artifice of mine as an itinerant, 'to gather a congregation where there was none before;' but wholly the act of the people, professed dissenters, for their own conveniency.

"I am surprised, my lord, to find any intimations in the letter from Virginia about the validity and legality of the licenses for seven meeting-houses granted by the General Court, especially if that letter came from the Commissary. These were granted by the supreme authority of this colony; and cannot be called in question by the Council without questioning the validity of their own authority, at least the legal exercise of it in this instance. And the Rev. Dr. Dawson himself (whom I mention with sincere veneration) sat as a judge in the General Court (for he is one of his majesty's Council here) when the licenses were granted, and did not vote against it. Whether I have since forfeited them by my public conduct, I dare appeal to himself; and whether there be any limitations of the number of meeting-houses for the conveniency of one congregation, in the Act of Toleration, or his majesty's private instructions to the Governor, I dare submit to any one that has seen them.

"What I observed above concerning my preaching occasionally on working days, and the reason of it, reminds me, my lord, of an unexpected charge against me in the letter from Virginia, expressed in terms contemptuous enough—'I had almost forgot to mention his *holding forth* on working days to great numbers of poor people, who generally are his only followers. This certainly is inconsistent with the religion of labour, whereby they are obliged to maintain themselves and families; and their neglect of this duty, if not seasonably prevented, may in process of time be sensibly felt by the Government.' Here, my lord, imaginary danger is traced from a very distant source; and I might justify myself by an *argumentum ad*

hominem: my people do not spend half as many working days in attending on my holding forth the Word of Life, as the members of the Church of England are obliged to keep holy according to their calendar. But I know recrimination, though with advantage, is but a spiteful and ineffectual method of vindication. I therefore observe, with greater pleasure, that as I can officiate but at some one of my meeting-houses on Sundays, and as not any one of the seven is tolerably convenient to the half of my people; many of them cannot have opportunity of hearing me on Sundays above once in a month or two; and I have no way to make up their loss in some measure but by preaching in the meeting-house contiguous to them, once or twice in two or three months on working days. And can this, my lord, have the least tendency to beggar themselves and families, or injure the Government, especially when such meetings are chiefly frequented (and that not oftener than once a fortnight or month) by heads of families and others, who can easily afford a few hours for this purpose, without the least detriment to their secular affairs? I can assure your lordship a great number of my hearers are so well furnished with slaves, that they are under no necessity of confining themselves to hard labour; and that they redeem more time from the fashionable riots and excessive diversions of the age than they devote to this purpose: and I wonder there is not an equal clamour raised about the modish ways of murdering time, which are more likely to be sensibly felt by the Government, and, which is worse, to ruin multitudes forever. *The Religion of Labour* is held sacred among us; as the temporal circumstances of my people demonstrate; which are as flourishing as before their adherence to me, except that some of them have been somewhat injured by the fines and concomitant expenses imposed upon them for worshipping God inoffensively in separate assemblies. But this hardship, my lord, I will not aggravate, as I very believe it was not the effect of an oppressive spirit in the Court, but of misinformation, and the malignant officiousness of some private persons.

“I am fully satisfied, my lord, were there a pious bishop resident in America, it would have a happy tendency to reform the church of England here, and maintain her purity: and therefore upon a report spread in Virginia, some time ago, that one was appointed, I expressed my satisfaction in it; and my poor prayers shall concur to promote it. I know this is also the sentiment of all my brethren in the Synod of New York, with whom I have conversed. I am, therefore, extremely surprised at the information your lordship has received concerning the reception of this proposal in New England, and ‘that they used all their influence to obstruct it.’ I never had the least intimation of it before, though some of the principal ministers there

maintain a very unreserved correspondence with me; and I have also the other usual methods of receiving intelligences from a country so near. If it be true, I think with your lordship, that it is hardly consistent with a spirit of toleration, but it appears so unreasonable, and so opposite to the sentiments of all the dissenters whom I am acquainted with (and they are many, both of the clergy and laity) that the informers must be persons of undoubted veracity, before I could credit it. However, my lord, I am not concerned: the Synod of New York, to which I belong, I am confident, have used no means to oppose it: but would rather concur to promote it, were it in their power; and therefore, if your lordship deal with us *secundum legem talionis*, we expect favourable usage. The same things I would say concerning the prosecution and imprisonment of sundry members of the church in New England. I never heard so much as an uncertain rumour of it; and I am sure it is neither approved nor practised in the bounds of the Synod of New York. Were your lordship acquainted with the members of that Synod, you would own them as strenuous advocates for the civil and sacred rights of mankind, and as far from a bigoted intolerant spirit, as perhaps any in the world. And here, my lord, let me correct a small mistake (the effect of imperfect or false information, I suppose) in your lordship's letter to Dr. Doddridge; your lordship takes the persons in New England, who have been accessory to those prosecutions, to be members of the Synod, which sent me as a missionary to Virginia; whereas I am a member of another synod two or three hundred miles distant; and do not in the least act in concert with, or subjection to the ministers in New England.

“Your lordship huddles me promiscuously with the methodists, as though I were of their party. I am not ashamed to own that I look upon Mr. Whitefield as a zealous and successful minister of Christ; and as such to countenance him. I love him, and I love your lordship, (the profession, I hope, will not be offensive) because I hope you are both good men: and if my affection to him proves me one of his party, I hope your lordship will conclude me one of your own too: yet I am far from approving sundry steps in Mr. Whitefield's first public conduct; and I am glad to find by some of his late writings that he does not approve of them himself. The eruptions of his first zeal were, in many instances, irregular; his regulating his conduct so much by impulses, &c., was enthusiastic, and his freedoms in publishing his experience to the world, in his journals, were, in my opinion, very imprudent. As to the rest of the methodists, I know but little of them; and, therefore, must suspend my judgment concerning them.

“Our loyalty to the Government is so well attested and uni-

versally known, that I presume none have ventured to surmise the contrary to your lordship; and this renders it needless for me to offer anything to demonstrate it.

“Thus, my lord, in the simplicity of my heart, I have laid before your lordship an impartial view of the state of affairs relating to the dissenters here, as it appears to me; and made some remarks on your lordship’s letter to Dr. Doddridge, and the letters from and to Virginia. I please myself with the persuasion that I have not indulged the contradictory, angry humour of a contentious disputant; nor the malignant partiality of a bigot: and it will afford me peculiar satisfaction, if it should be equally evident to your lordship. All the apologies I could make could not atone for my tediousness, were it impertinent or avoidable; but as one that has not naturally a concise method of communicating his thoughts, could not fully represent the matter in fewer words, I promise myself your lordship’s forbearance.

“I am persuaded, my lord, were you convinced the representation I have given is just, your lordship would turn advocate for the dissenters here, that the matter might be determined in their favour, I am therefore anxious to take some method to convince your lordship it is so; and I can think of no better method than to give those that may look upon themselves concerned to refute me, an opportunity to make the experiment, by publishing this letter to the world. This I should undoubtedly have done, and sent your lordship a printed copy, had I not been scrupulous of making so free with your private letters without your consent. If your lordship approve of this expedient, I shall, upon the first information of it, send it to the press.

“May the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls shed the richest blessings of his providence and grace upon you; and long continue your lordship to be consumed in pious services for the Church of God!—whatever reception this letter meets with, this shall be the ardent wish and perpetual prayer of,

“My Lord,

“Your Lordship’s

“Most dutiful servant,

SAMUEL DAVIES.

“Hanover, in Virginia, Jan. 10, 1752.

“POSTSCRIPT.

“I am heartily sorry, my lord, that the character I gave of the clergy and laity in Virginia, in my letter to Dr. Doddridge, has given your lordship great concern. I have no doubt of its

sincerity, though I am uncertain whether it was occasioned by a suspicion of calumniating partiality in me, or of truth in my account, or both. There was no part of your lordship's letter that afflicted me so deeply as this; yet, I thought to have passed it over in silence, and accordingly made no remarks upon it in the preceding letter; because, as I have not been so happy since as to see reason to retract my former account, I could not relieve your lordship from your pious anxiety; and as it is a tender point, and the information comes with a poor grace from me, I thought the mentioning the many unwelcome evidences of its justice, which force themselves upon me all around, would but increase your lordship's concern, and confirm the suspicion of my partiality, which you intimate in your letter to the Dr., though with tenderness. But considering that I write to one that will not officiously spread the account, to the disgrace of religion; and who may be able to administer remedies to so deplorable a case, if seasonably informed of it; and that your lordship's correspondents here may be under as strong a temptation to extenuate such matters, as I may be supposed to be to aggravate them; and consequently a medium between the two may appear to your lordship to be most just: considering also that it seems necessary for my own vindication, though I do not desire to build my reputation on the infamy of others: I have determined to give your lordship the following brief account, which I am willing should pass under the severest scrutiny.

“I am sensible, my lord, ‘how hard it is not to suspect and charge corruption of principles upon those who differ in principles from us;’ and how natural it is to a party spirit (and alas! parties are generally animated with such a spirit) to magnify the practical irregularities of other denominations. Sensible of this, and how inconsistent such a temper is with the generous religion of Jesus, I have conscientiously kept a peculiar guard upon my spirit in this respect: and yet (with shame I confess it) I have not been entirely a stranger to its malignant workings; though I am conscious that my prevailing and habitual disposition is candid and generous: otherwise I should be self-condemned in pretending to be a minister or even follower of the Lamb of God. At present, my lord, I feel myself calm and impartial; and could I make my letter the transcript of my heart, your lordship would believe me. I solemnly profess I am conscious of no indulged party spirit; however, I am so sensible of my own weakness, that I may implicitly suspect I may be imperceptibly tinctured with it; and therefore your lordship may, at the venture, ‘deduct some things from the general character.’ I shall say but little of the differences in speculation betwixt me and the clergy and others

here: both because such errors may not be so pernicious as vicious practices and the neglect of religious and moral duties; and because these are more disputable, and I may be more liable to mistakes about them. But, my lord, I cannot indulge an implicit suspicion of my partiality so far as to rush into universal skepticism about plain, public, indisputable facts, obvious to my senses. I can see, I can hear, with certainty. I cannot be so infatuated with prejudice as to be incapable of distinguishing between a religious and profane life, between a relish for divine things, and a contemptuous neglect of them, between blasphemy and prayer, drunkenness and sobriety, &c. And I shall chiefly take notice of such obvious facts, about which there is no dispute between the church of England and the dissenters. I would also have it noticed, my lord, that I would not have this account looked on as a history of the state of religion in Virginia in general; but only in those counties (and they are not very few) where I have had opportunity of personal observations: and these, if I may believe general fame, are not more degenerate than the rest.

“I confess, my lord, with pleasure, that there are sundry of the laity in the sphere of my acquaintance in the Church of England, who are persons of good morals and have a veneration for religion; and some of them, I doubt not, are sincere Christians, whom I cordially love: and that with more ardent affection than those of my own denomination, who appear destitute of real religion; and alas! there are many such, I fear. These pious conformists can witness, that I have not been officious in endeavouring to proselyte them to my party; and that, when conversant with them, I rather choose to dwell on those infinitely more important and delightful subjects in which we agree, than those little angry peculiarities in which we differ. I also cheerfully own (nor is the concession forcibly extorted from me) that sundry of the established clergy are gentlemen of learning, parts and morality, and I hope honestly aiming at the salvation of men; though I cannot but disagree with them in some doctrines, and humbly conceive their public discourses generally are not well adapted to promote their pious end. But, my lord, notwithstanding these concessions, religion may be in a very languishing situation and vice triumphant in this colony. There may be a few names even in Sardis, who have not defiled their garments; and yet the majority have at best but a name to live, while they are dead. I must therefore now lay before your lordship the disagreeable part of the character; and if I expatiate more largely upon it than the former, it is not because I take a malignant pleasure in so doing, but because my present design urges me on to the unwelcome task.

“If I am prejudiced in favour of any church, my lord, it is

of that established in Scotland; of which I am a member in the same sense that the Established Church in Virginia is the Church of England: and therefore, should I give your lordship an account of the state of religion there, you would not suspect it of excessive severity. Now, my lord, suppose I had resided four years in Scotland, preached frequently, and obtained a pretty extensive acquaintance in five different counties, gone sometimes as a hearer to the established kirk, and been occasionally at courts and the like public conventions; spent a week at sundry times in the metropolis, and a day or two in some of the principal towns; lodged in private families frequently in various parts of the country; and (which I may mention as of some weight in conjunction with the other opportunities of personal observation) received frequent and well attested informations from multitudes from various parts, and of different denominations; your lordship would grant that I had sufficient opportunities to make some observations on the state of religion, and could not suspect that my partiality would render me so implicitly confident that religion was in a flourishing state, as that I should take no notice of obvious public facts, that obtruded themselves upon my senses; or so pervert my judgment as to conclude all was well in spite of the most glaring evidence.—Suppose then, my lord, that by all the discoveries I can make in these circumstances, I find the generality grossly ignorant of the nature of living Christianity and many of the most important doctrines of the gospel: if I find a general unconcernedness about their eternal states discovered in their discourse and practice, and no religious solemnity, no relish for divine things, no proper anxieties about their spiritual state intimated by those genuine indications which nature gives of such dispositions: if concern about such things, and a life of strict holiness even in a member of the established church, be generally ridiculed as a fanatical singularity: if the Sabbath is prostituted by many to trifling amusements or guilty pleasures; and if worldly discourse be the usual entertainment without the sanctuary before and after divine service: if by far the greatest number of families call not upon God, nor maintain his worship in their houses: if in parishes where there are many hundreds of adults, there be not above fifty or sixty communicants; and sundry of these too, persons of abandoned characters: if multitudes, multitudes toss the most sacred and tremendous things on their daring tongues by profane oaths and shocking imprecations; and beastify themselves with excessive drinking, as though it were a venial sin: if I get me to the great men, and find that these also generally have burst the bonds, and broken the yoke; that they discard serious religion as the badge of the vulgar, and abandon themselves

to lawless pleasures, to gaming, cock-fighting, horse-racing, and all the fashionable methods of killing time, as the most important and serious business of life: if public worship be frequently neglected, or attended on with trifling levity; and yet the most build their hopes of heaven on these insipid formalities, regardless of the manner of their devotion: in a word, if the trifles of time and sense engross all the thoughts and activity of the generality; and the infinite concerns of eternity be neglected, or attended on as matters by the by:—if, my lord, I should find this to be the state of affairs in Scotland, could my prejudice in favour of that church so far bias me, as that I could not see religion to be in a most deplorable situation in her? Or would my character of Virginia in my letter to Dr. Doddridge be too satirical in such a case?

“This, my lord, is the just character of the generality of the laity here; my senses tell me so; and I cannot doubt of it more than of my own existence. I do not mean that all the parts of this character are generally complicated in one person; but that one part of it is the character of some, and another of others, and that the whole promiscuously is the character of the generality of the laity here: and were I as much prejudiced in favour of the church established in Virginia as I may be supposed to be of that established in Scotland, I could not conscientiously give a better account of it.

“Further; suppose, my lord, on observing religion in so melancholy a situation in Scotland, I have opportunity of observing also what measures are taken by the established clergy there for its revival, and to promote a general reformation, and find to my sorrowful surprise, that the generality of them, as far as can be discovered by their common conduct and public ministrations, are stupidly serene and unconcerned, as though their hearers were crowding promiscuously to heaven, and there were little or no danger;—that they address themselves to perishing multitudes in *cold blood*, and do not represent their miserable condition in all its horrors; do not alarm them with solemn, pathetic and affectionate warnings, and expostulate with them with all the authority, tenderness and pungency of the ambassadors of Christ to a dying world, nor commend themselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God; that their common conversation has little or no savour of living religion, and is not calculated to excite thoughtfulness in the minds of the unthinking creatures they converse with;—that instead of intense application to study, or teaching their parishioners from house to house, they waste their time in idle visits, trifling conversation, slothful ease, or at best, excessive activity about their temporal affairs;—that sundry of them associate with the profane, and those that are infamous for the neglect of religion, not like

their professed Master, to reform them, but without intermingling any thing serious in their discourse, or giving a solemn check to their guilty liberties; nay, that some of them are companions with drunkards, and partakers in their sottish extravagances;—that they are more zealous and laborious in their attempts to regain those that have joined with other denominations, or to secure the rest from the contagion by calumniating the dissenters, than to convert men from sin to holiness; if, my lord, I should find this to be the general character of the clergy in Scotland, how could I avoid the unwelcome conclusion, that such are not likely to be the successful instruments of a general reformation? And who that has not sacrificed to bigotry all his regard to the immortal weal of mankind, would not rejoice in this case to see a reformation carried on in Scotland by a minister of the Church of England? For my part, I solemnly profess I would; for though by this means sundry would fall off from the established church, yet there would be a greater probability of their escaping eternal destruction, and being made members of the church triumphant in the regions of bliss; which would be infinitely more than a reparation of that little breach of a party.

“What I now suppose, my lord, in Scotland, is evident matter of fact in Virginia, unless my eyes and my ears deceive me, and I see phantoms instead of men. The plain truth is, a general reformation *must* be promoted in this colony by some means or other, or multitudes are eternally undone: and I see alas! but little ground to hope for it from the generality of the clergy here, till they be happily changed themselves; this is not owing to their being of the Church of England, as I observed before: for were they in the Presbyterian Church, or any other, I should have no more hopes of their success; but it is owing to their manner of preaching and behaviour. This thought, my lord, is so far from being agreeable to me that it at times racks me with agonies of compassion and zeal intermingled: and could I entertain that unlimited charity which lulls so many of my neighbours into a serene stupidity, it would secure me from many a melancholy hour, and make my life below a kind of anticipation of heaven. I can boast of no high attainments, my lord; I am as mean and insignificant a creature as your lordship can well conceive me to be: but I dare profess I cannot be an unconcerned spectator of the ruin of my dear fellow mortals: I *dare avow* my heart at times is set upon nothing more than to snatch the brands out of the burning, before they catch fire and burn unquenchably. And hence, my lord, it is, I consume my strength and life in such great fatigues in this jangling ungrateful colony.

“Hence, my lord, you may collect my sentiments concerning an absurdity your lordship mentions in your letter to Dr. Doddridge, that I should attempt to make converts in a

church which I acknowledge in the meantime to be a church of Christ. I freely grant the Church of England to be a church of Christ: but when I see multitudes ready to perish, and no suitable means used for their recovery, can it comfort me to think they perish in a church of Christ? The articles and constitution of the established church are substantially good, and her ceremonies are little or no hinderance, as I observed before, to the edification of those that do not scruple them; but her members in this colony are *in fact* generally corrupted; and I think, were I one of her ministers, I should rather ten thousand times see men pious dissenters, than graceless conformists. It is true, had I no other objection against conformity but the present degeneracy of the members of the church, it would be my duty to endeavour to promote a reformation in her communion: but as I cannot conscientiously conform on some other accounts, the only practicable method for me to attempt the reformation of her members is that which I now pursue.

“I shall only add, my lord, that I humbly conceive the informations or personal knowledge upon which your lordship has characterized a great part of the clergy in Virginia, may afford you equal concern with my character of them. I dare avow a more noble spirit than to catch at it with a malignant satisfaction as a confirmation of mine: and therefore I humbly request, nay, demand as a piece of justice, that your lordship would not look on my remark on it as the language of such a disposition. I only remind you of it for my own defence, and it shall never be officiously propagated by me. If, as your lordship observes, ‘of those that come from England,’ (and the most of them come from thence), ‘*a great part* are of the Scotch or Irish, who can get no employment at home, and enter into the service more out of necessity than choice;’ if ‘others go abroad to retrieve either lost fortunes or lost characters;’ how can it be expected, my lord, that persons who enter into holy orders, or come to Virginia from such sordid views as these, should deserve a better character than I gave of them to the Dr. or than I have now given your lordship? But I forbear—your lordship will forgive the inaccuracies of this postscript, as I have written it in unavoidable haste.”

This letter, an evidence of the honesty and simplicity of Davies’ heart, rather than his worldly wisdom, was never submitted to the Bishop’s inspection.

In September 1751 the Synod of New York met at Newark, New Jersey. From the minutes of the meeting is the following extract—“A motion being made to the Synod by Mr. Davies of the necessity of sending to England an account relating to the dissenting interest in Virginia, the Synod does order that a representation of the circumstances of the Presbyterian congregations in that colony be made and signed, in the name of