

A

SERIOUS APOLOGY

F O R

The Ecclesiastical Characteristics.

By the real AUTHOR of that Performance.



E D I N B U R G H :

Printed by SANDS, MURRAY, and COCHRAN.

For WILLIAM GRAY, in the front of the Exchange.

MDCCLXIII,



The Nobility and Gentry of SCOTLAND;

P A R T I C U L A R L Y,

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

Right Honourable, and Right Worshipful,

T Here was prefixed to the *Ecclesiastical Characters* a ludicrous dedication; there seems therefore some propriety in prefixing a serious dedication to this *Apology*. To whom it ought to be addressed, could scarce admit of a moment's hesitation. It professes to aim at promoting the interest of religion in the church of Scotland; and certainly none have it so much in their power to preserve or improve the constitution, both in church and state, as your Lordships and Worships.

I am not to flatter you with an entire approbation of your past conduct as church-members. The design of this address is rather to beseech you, in the most respectful manner, seriously to consider, whether you ought any longer to give countenance to the measures which have for some time generally prevailed. I am encouraged to this, by reflecting, that it is to you, indeed, we are obliged for setting some bounds to the attempts of the high-flying clergy. I could give several instances of this; but shall only mention one, because it is very recent. In the Assembly 1762, it was evi-

dently owing to the Honourable members, that a sanction was not given to a resolution, of inflicting censures upon ministers, merely for preaching to their own people at their desire: A thing so odious in its appearance, and so dangerous as an example, that no circumstances, or ends to be served by it, could possibly justify it.

I have already hinted, that you are most *able* to promote salutary measures in the church-courts; give me leave to add, that I firmly believe you will be first *willing* to make any change for the better. Individuals may, but, in the present state of human nature, it ought not to be expected, that the majority of any body of men will give up private benefit in wealth, power, or ease, for public good. Therefore, when once the clergy are corrupted, their reformation can be looked for from the laity only, and not from themselves. There is an observation to this purpose in the Rev. Dr Robertson's history*, which deserves to be written in letters of gold: "They" (*i. e.* the Protestants) "applied to another Assembly, to a convocation of the Popish clergy; but with the same ill success which hath always attended every proposal for reformation addressed to that order of men. To abandon usurped power, to renounce lucrative error, is a sacrifice, which the virtue of individuals has, on some occasions, offered to truth; but from any society of men, no such effort can be expected. The corruptions of a society, recommended by common utility, and justified by universal practice, are viewed, by its members, without shame or horror; and reformation never proceeds from themselves, but is always forced upon them by some foreign hand."

* Vol. I. p. 143.

I am so much of that eminent writer's opinion, that I look upon every attempt for reviving the interest of religion as quite hopeless, unless you be pleased to support it; and, at the same time, am not without the strongest expectation, that the period is fast approaching, when you will see it necessary to interpose.

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

Look into the history of this and every other church, and you will see, that the laity never lent their influence to promote the ambition and secular greatness of ecclesiastics, but they received their reward in ingratitude and contempt. I have heard many of you praised as great friends to the church. By this is meant, that you have a friendship for, and are ready to increase the revenues and worldly conveniency of those who bear the sacred office, who are also called *clergy*. I beg leave to observe, that the wisest of mankind are sometimes deceived by words, and patiently submit to gradual and insensible usurpations. Both the words *clergy* and *church* are an incroachment of the teachers upon you, and all the other hearers of the gospel. The first of them comes from *κλήρως*, which signifies inheritance,

ritance, and when appropriated to ministers, seems to intimate that they alone are God's inheritance, while surely some of the people are as much his inheritance as they. The word *church* is a scripture-phrase, and is used about one hundred times in the New Testament. But of all these, in not above one or two at most can it be pretended to signify the ministers, exclusive of the people. Therefore if you be friends to the church, take the word in its proper and genuine sense, and admit the *people* to a due proportion of your favour.

Far be it from me to blame those who shew a friendship and attachment to ministers, and wish to see them comfortably and decently provided for. This is highly necessary to free them from that anxiety and solicitude which is inseparable from a poor and dependent state. But why are they to be provided for at all? or why is it an amiable character to be a friend to the church? Surely that the great ends of their sacred function may be promoted; that, freed from the necessity of attending to secular pursuits, they may have liberty to bestow their time and pains for the spiritual benefit of those committed to their care.

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

I am, &c.

A
S E R I O U S A P O L O G Y
F O R
The Ecclesiastical Characteristics.

THE *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* is evidently a satire upon clergymen of a certain character. It is a satire too, which every body must see was intended to carry in it no small measure of keenness and severity. This was to be expected from the nature and design of the performance. A satire that does not bite, is good for nothing. Hence it necessarily follows, that it is essential to this manner of writing, to provoke and give offence. The greatest satirists, in all ages, have made just as many enemies to themselves, as they exposed objects of scorn and derision to the public*. It was certainly, on this account, easy to foresee what would be the effect of the publication of such a piece, if it was executed in a tolerable manner; and therefore I hope every impartial person will not only acquit me of blame, but confess, I acted very prudently in not setting my name to the work.

The event justified this precaution. The rage and fury of many ministers in Scotland when this pamphlet was first published, is known almost to all its readers. The most opprobrious names were bestowed upon the concealed author, and the most dreadful threatenings uttered, in case they should be so fortunate as discover and convict him. One gentleman in particular, who fell under the imputation of being concerned

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

in it, has ever since been the object of their detestation and resentment; although I think it remains yet very uncertain, what hand he had, or whether he had any hand at all, in its composition: A question which I hope the present production, by a comparison with his other works, will enable the sharp-sighted public to determine.

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

In entering upon this task, I take the liberty to affirm, that what first induced me to write, was a deep concern for the declining interest of religion in the church of Scotland, mixed with some indignation at what appeared to me a strange abuse of church-authority in the years 1751 and 1752*. The reasons of its particular structure will be given afterwards: in the mean time, the reader may rest assured, that this defence shall be wholly serious, and shall not contain a single proposition which, in its plain and literal meaning, the author does not believe to be true. Not so much as attempting to borrow any assistance from wit and ridicule, he submits his cause

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

to be tried by calm dispassionate reasoning, and only begs the impartial attention of the reader.

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

I. Let us consider the subject in general, *viz.* attacking and exposing the characters of clergymen. While I am speaking upon this head, I must take it for granted, that the faults are real; that the satire and reproofs are just. An objection against the performance has been often made to this purpose: "Supposing the things censured to be true, what end does it serve to publish them? If tenderness for the reputation of the offenders could not prevent such cruel treatment, ought not a regard for the edification of others, and the success of the gospel in their hand, to have disposed a good man to throw a veil over their infirmities? Is not religion wounded through their sides, and occasion given to infidels to triumph?"

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

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

That irreligion and infidelity has made a rapid progress among us for some time past, is a certain, and a melancholy truth. Well! perhaps I shall be told, That I have contributed to strengthen the cause of infidelity among the quality and gentry, by giving them such a representation of the clergy. I answer, That gentlemens forming a bad opinion of clergymen contributes to promote infidelity, I will by no means deny; so far from it, I affirm; that without this, all other causes put together would not be able to produce it in any great degree. The great, as well as the vulgar, are always more influenced in their regard for, or contempt of religion, by what they see in the characters and behaviour of men, than by any speculative reasonings whatever. This is what they themselves make no scruple, on many occasions, to confess. Bishop Burnet, in his *Discourse of the Pastoral Care*, acquaints us, that, “having had much free conversation with many that have been fatally corrupted that way, they have very often owned, that nothing promoted this so much in them as the bad opinion which they took up of clergymen. They did not see in them,” says he, “that strictness of life, that contempt of the world, that zeal, that meekness, humility, and charity, that diligence and earnestness, with
“ relation

“ relation to the great truths of the Christian religion,
 “ which they reckoned they would most certainly have,
 “ if they themselves firmly believed it; therefore they
 “ concluded, that those whose business it was more
 “ strictly to inquire into the truth of their religion,
 “ knew, that it was not so certain as they themselves,
 “ for other ends, endeavoured to make the world be-
 “ lieve it was.”

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

Many wrong opinions arise from confounding things
 that have some relation to one another, but are, not-
 withstanding, essentially distinct. Thus what ought
 really to be imputed to the crime, is frequently imputed
 to the punishment. Because a bad opinion of the clergy
 leads men to infidelity, therefore, say some, cover their
 ailments, and palliate their crimes; to expose them is doing
 hurt to religion. On the contrary, I reckon it is fur-

more

more conclusive to say, Because the bad characters of the clergy are extremely hurtful to religion, let them be told, that the greatest strictness and purity of manners is expected from them; and if any will not comply, let the guilty *persons* be chastised, that the honour of the *order* may be preserved. I was never better pleased with a story than one I have read of the late Duke of Orleans, Regent of France. It happened, that, during his regency, one of the French Princes of the Blood was convicted of committing robbery on the highway. Great intercession was made with the Regent, to save him from the ignominy of a public execution, which, it was alledged, would be an indelible stain upon the Royal blood. To this the Duke replied, The Royal blood is indeed deeply stained, but it was stained by the commission of the crime; the punishment will only serve to wash out the stain, as far as that is now possible.

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

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

learning, I could easily shew, from almost every writer renowned for piety and worth, with what boldness and severity they treated the corrupt clergy of their own times. And what is remarkable, though their characters have now received a sanction from their anti-quity, and indeed a lustre from this very zeal and fidelity; yet while they lived, their invectives were constantly complained of by the indolent or vitious of their cotemporaries, as injurious to the interests of religion. That this was the case at the reformation, may be easily seen by any who will look but a little into the writings of that age.—In our neighbour country, when Mr Richard Baxter wrote his *Gildas Salvianus, or, Reformed Pastor*, which contained a very plain and very severe reprehension of his brethren the clergy, the same objection was made against the publication of it, at least in the English language, by some prudent softeners. To this he answers, among other things, as follows. “ When
 “ the sin is open in the sight of the world, it is in vain
 “ to attempt to hide it; and such attempts will but ag-
 “ gravate it, and increase our shame. If the ministers
 “ of England had sinned only in Latin, I would have
 “ made shift to have admonished them in Latin; but if
 “ they will sin in English, they must hear it in English.
 “ Unpardoned sin will never let us rest, though we be
 “ at ever so much care and cost to cover it. Our sin
 “ will surely find us out, though we find not it. And
 “ if he that confesseth and forsaketh be the man that
 “ shall have mercy, no wonder then if he that covereth
 “ it prosper not. If we be so tender of ourselves, and
 “ loth to confess, God will be less tender of us, and in-
 “ dited our confessions for us.—Too many that have set
 “ their hand to this sacred work, do so obstinately pro-
 “ ceed in self-seeking, negligence, and pride, &c. that
 “ it is become our necessary duty to admonish them.
 “ If we could see that such would reform without re-
 “ proof, we could gladly forbear the publishing of their
 “ faults; but when reproofs themselves do prove so in-
 “ effectual, that they are more offended at the reproof
 “ than at the sin, and had rather that we should cease
 “ reproving,

“reproving, than themselves should cease sinning, I think it is time to sharpen the remedy.”

I shall adduce but one example more, to which I beg the attention of those who have been inadvertently taught to think that one who endeavours to expose the characters of the clergy cannot be a good man. Does not all history bear testimony to the learning, piety, and worth of the gentlemen of the Port-Royal, a society of Jansenists, who, a little more than a hundred years ago, made a most violent attack upon the Jesuits in France; particularly M. Pascal, in his *Provincial Letters*, which are written almost entirely in the way of wit and humour. These pieces are still universally admired; nor are they, at this time, counted any objection to his character for piety and integrity. At the time of publication, however, the very same objections which are now made to the *Characteristics*, were made to his writings.*

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

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

the fidelity of a part of that order, from at least a professed concern for the honour of the whole? Does not this tempt men to say, as was said an age ago by *Moliere* in France, or by some there, on occasion of a play of his called the *Tartuffe*, That a man may write what he pleaseth against God Almighty in perfect security; but if he write against the characters of the clergy in power, he is ruined for ever.

Another reason why I suspect the sincerity of the enemies of the *Characteristics*, when they pretend a regard for the interest of religion as the ground of their displeasure, is, that it hath often happened, that both speakers and writers have charged another party of the ministers of the church of Scotland with hypocrisy and deceit, the most villanous of all characters; and yet it never occurred to these gentlemen, that such a charge was hurtful to the interest of religion. I am now to let the reader into a secret. What very much contributed, or rather, indeed, what chiefly brought me to a resolution of publishing the *Characteristics*, was a pamphlet published a few months before it, called, *A just view of the constitution of the church of Scotland*. This universal uncontradicted fame attributed to the late Dr H——n; and the express purpose of it is, to represent a certain set of ministers as agitators of the people, and, in general, as not acting upon conscience, even where they pretend it, but from a love of popularity. Besides this, he tells a story, which he calls a *scene of iniquity*, with the initial letters of the names of the persons supposed to be guilty. Was ever this pamphlet charged by my enemies as contrary to the interest of religion? It will not be pretended. Now, I should be glad to know, what it is that makes the discovery of a scene of iniquity, when committed by some whom I must not name, contrary to the interest of religion, but the discovery of a scene of iniquity committed by certain others, no way contrary to it at all? I am not able to find any reason for this difference of judgment, but one, which is not very honourable to them, *viz.* That perhaps scenes of iniquity supposed to be committed by them, are more probable in themselves, and actually obtain more credit, than those which they alledge
C
against

against others. I do not affirm that this is the reason: but I think, since they had been the aggressors, both in censuring ministers for scrupling obedience to their unconstitutional decisions, and attacking their characters in print; if some nameless author thought fit to retaliate the injury in the last kind, and did it with so great success, they ought to have lain as quiet under it as possible, both from equity and prudence: from equity, because they had given the provocation; and from prudence, because, in fact, their conduct tempted many to say, The charge must have been just, or it would have been treated with contempt; the stroke must have been well aimed, the wound must have been very deep, since the scar continues so long, and is never like to be either forgotten or forgiven.

This, however, is, in itself, but of small moment. It would be of little consequence whether their conduct had been reasonable and consistent or not, if the objection itself were just. But I hope it appears very clearly, from what I have offered above, that supposing the conduct of the clergy to be unbecoming their profession, a regard to religion not only permits, but loudly calls for a severe reprehension of it. This is agreeable to the sentiments and practice of the wisest and best men in every age. There have been, indeed, a few exceptions: but the lenity which some excellent persons have shewn to the vices of the clergy, has been generally reckoned among their weaknesses, and not their virtues. I mention this, lest it should come into any person's mind, what is related of Constantine the Great, *viz.* that when he had received a bundle of papers, which, he was told, contained accusations against the vicious part of the clergy, he publicly burnt them, after having taken an oath, that he did not know what they contained; and added, that though he should see a bishop in the very act of a crime that shall be nameless in English*, he would cover him with his purple. If the account be true, and this be the charity which some plead for with so great earnest-

* *Alienum torum labefactantem.*

ness, one can hardly help crying out, O Emperor, great was thy charity!

II. According to the distribution I made of my subject, the next point is, To account for the *Characteristics* being written in an assumed character, and ironical, style. "If concern for the interest of religion prompted you," say some, "to attack the characters of the clergy, why was it not done in a serious way? Would it not have been better, gravely to have convicted them of their sin, and warned them of their danger, than to set them in a ridiculous point of light, and expose them to the public scorn?" This objection, I am sensible, made an impression on some well-meaning persons; and therefore it will be necessary to consider it with care. A very good man, when he first read the *Characteristics*, expressed himself thus: "Alas! if there was occasion given for it, would it not have been better to have had recourse to prayer than to satire?" In general, I humbly apprehend, there is no opposition between these two means; and therefore, in many cases, it is proper to employ both. Let me therefore intreat the attention of the reader, while I briefly consider, first, the lawfulness of employing ridicule in such a cause; and, secondly, what particular circumstances concurred to render it the most proper method, if not, in a manner, necessary, in the instance before us.

That it is a lawful thing to employ ridicule in such a cause, is evident from the very highest authority. There are many instances of irony in the sacred writings. In the 3d chapter of Genesis, vers. 22. we have an expression used by God himself, which interpreters do generally suppose to be in irony: and as it is of the most severe and penetrating kind, in a most deplorable calamity, so I cannot well imagine what other rational meaning can be put upon the words: *And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil.* It must be remembered, that Adam had broke his maker's command, from a foolish expectation, upon the devil's promise, of becoming like God. On this, an ancient interpreter says, "Adam deserved to be derided in this manner; and he was made more deeply sensible

“ of his folly by this ironical expression, than by any other that could have been used.” The conduct of Elijah, and his treatment of the prophets of Baal, is another known example of the same kind. It is recorded 1 Kings xviii. 27. *And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god, either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.*

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

After these examples, none will be surpris'd when I say, that the most grave and venerable of the fathers have both used this manner of writing, and asserted its necessity and use. To be convinc'd of this, let any man only read St Jerom, in his letters, and his writings, against Jovian and the Pelagians; Tertullian, in his apology against the folly of idolaters; Augustine, Ireneus, and Bernard, and many others of the most approved characters. It is indeed founded upon the plainest reason. There is commonly a pride and self-sufficiency in men under the dominion of error, which makes them deaf to advice, and impregnable to grave and serious reasoning: neither is there any getting at them till their pride is levelled a little with this disinaying weapon. But lest the reader should be less willing to yield to my reasoning than to that of greater men, I shall beg leave to translate three passages from

from three different writers in distant ages, which could not be more applicable to the times in which they lived, than they are to my present purpose.

The first is from Tertullian: " That which I have done, is nothing else but a play before the real combat. I have rather pointed out the wounds which might be given you, than given them in effect. If there are places which oblige people to laugh, it is because the subjects themselves are ridiculous. There are many things which ought to be treated with contempt and mockery, through fear of giving them weight; and making them important by seriously debating them. Nothing is more justly due to vanity than derision; and it belongs to the truth to smile, because it is chearful, and to despise its enemies, because it is assured of victory. It is true, we ought to be careful that the raillery be not low, and unworthy of the truth; but if that be attended to, and one can use it with address and delicacy, it is a duty to do so."

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

The third passage is from Pascal, in the eleventh of his *Provincial Letters*: " As the truths of the gospel are the proper objects both of love and respect, so the errors which are opposite to them are the objects both of hatred and contempt. There are two distinct qualities in the first, a divine beauty which renders them amiable, and a sacred majesty which renders them venerable; there are also in the last, a guilt and impiety which renders them horrible, and a delusion and folly which renders them silly and contemptible. Wherefore, as the saints have always, for truth, the united affections of love and fear; so, for error, they have also the correspondent sentiments of hatred and contempt. Their zeal equally disposes them to resist the
" malice

“ malice of bad men with boldness and courage, and to discredit their folly by derision and scorn.”

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

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

Besides levity, or an aversion at what is serious, there

is

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

From these circumstances, it is easy to see what an intending author must have before his eyes. Those who have long had their appetites quickened by variety of dishes, and the most pleasing sauces, are not able to relish plainer, though, to those who can use it, far better and more solid food. This made it necessary for me to fall upon a method of composition which might have some chance to procure the attention of the public; and I could think of none more proper than irony; which, when well executed, is almost universally pleasing. Besides, I must acknowledge, that the conduct of the prevailing party did often appear to me in a very ridiculous light; and never more so, than when the *Characteristics* were published. *Moderation* had been long a fashionable or cant phrase among them; and yet they were running headlong into the most violent and tyrannical measures. They made great pretences to charity, and a large manner of thinking; and, as a testimony of it, very modestly supposed, that all who did not form the same opinions in religion and government with themselves, were weak

filly fools, except two or three knaves who had the direction of the rest. This, I do affirm, was not barely hinted, but openly and confidently asserted; so that I never knew greater bigots, in the proper and genuine sense of that word. How far my attempt would be successful, could only be guessed at; but I imagined, that if I could exhibit them to the public in the same light in which they appeared to myself, they would make a pretty comical figure: and so it happened in fact. My first intention was only to have published, in May 1753, a half-sheet, containing the maxims themselves, under the title of, *A list of self-evident truths*: but that having been neglected; upon the provocation hinted at above, the illustrations were added, and sent abroad a few months afterwards, in the form they now bear.

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

capacity. Nay, they at last became so confident of their own power, and so deaf to all reasoning on the subject, that they refused even to read what was written by those of different sentiments; and when they did read it, disdained to make any answer to it, or attempt to convince them any other way than by the unanswerable argument of deposition. This induced me to write in a manner that has obliged them to hear whether they will or not; and though it has not been so happy as to bring them to conviction, I am sure it was no more than well-merited correction.

One other reason I shall mention for making choice of this way of writing, was drawn from the modern notions of philosophy, which had so greatly contributed to the corruption of the clergy. The great patron and advocate for these, was Lord Shaftsbury, one of whose leading principles it is, that *Ridicule is the test of truth*. This principle of his had been adopted by many of the clergy; and there is hardly any man conversant in the literary world, who has not heard it a thousand times defended in conversation. I was therefore willing to try how they themselves could stand the edge of this weapon; hoping, that if it did not convince them of the folly of the other parts of their conduct, it might at least put them out of conceit with this particular opinion. The last of these, I do really think the publication of the *Characteristics* has, in a great measure, effected; at least within my narrow sphere of conversation. It is but seldom we now hear it pretended, that ridicule is the test of truth. If they have not renounced this opinion, they at least keep it more to themselves, and are less insolent upon it in their treatment of others.

I hope the reader will not imagine, that, by wresting this principle out of the hands of my adversaries, I intend to adopt it myself. There may be truth in it in an equivocal sense; for to be sure nothing that is true can be really ridiculous: but there are few things more pernicious than this principle, as it is commonly understood and applied. It is most certain, that many things, both true and excellent, may, by a person possessed of the talent of humour, be made *apparently* ridiculous: and

this will have its full effect upon the bulk of mankind, who are not able to discover where the fallacy lies. Dr Brown, in his *Essays on the Characteristics*, says, with great propriety, That ridicule is not fitted for the discovery of truth; for, in so far as it is distinguished from reasoning, it “is only putting imagination in the place of reason;” than which few things are more ready to lead us astray. But he allows, that it is very proper to “disgrace known falsehood:” And as the application of it to this purpose is warranted by the judgment and example of the best and wisest men in all ages, there was nothing to hinder me from making use of the same privilege. In the mean time, if there has been any character of real worth, or any measure truly commendable, ridiculed in the treatise now under consideration, let this be shown by clear and plain deductions of reason, and I am ready to repent of it, and renounce it.

III. This leads me to the third and last part of my defence, *viz.* To show what occasion was given for such a treatise among us. This I confess to be absolutely necessary, as it is plainly applied, in the title-page, to the church of Scotland. It will be in vain to have shown, that there is nothing sinful or hurtful in attacking the characters of clergymen, where they act in a manner unworthy of their office, or that this may lawfully be done even in the way of ridicule. The question will still be, Have the ministers of the church of Scotland really deserved it? Very great difficulties, however, present themselves in this branch of the subject. There are many things demonstrably true, which it is dangerous to affirm, at least in some places. Upon the supposition, that the prevailing party in this church is of the spirit and disposition painted in the *Characteristics*, one would think, a man who should upbraid them with their faults in a direct manner, would be in a sorry situation if ever they should be his judges. The *veritas convitii* would do him very little service, or rather would only serve to envenom their resentment. Have they been already so enraged against me for a little pleasant raillery? and am I so mad as to hope to defend myself, by bringing against the same persons a serious and deliberate accusation? However

formidable

formidable this difficulty may appear, I am not without hopes, that such of them as have any measure of impartiality and candour, after weighing what is now to be offered, may be more inclined to forgive the attack already made; and, by breaking their attachment to the most corrupt members, recover the merit and dignity of the general body.

With this view let me make a preliminary remark. Many, from the beginning, either really did, or at least affected to suppose, that all who joined in the measures carried on by the majority in our General Assemblies, were represented in the *Characteristics*, as infected with every bad principle or practice satirized through the whole. Nothing was farther from the writer's mind. An answer to that objection, such as the nature of the performance would admit, was inserted in the preface to the second edition of the book itself; and I shall now deliver my judgment upon the point, without the least ambiguity. The political measures which have been carrying on for these thirty past in the church of Scotland, appear to me to be ruinous to the interests of religion. At the same time I am sensible, that there are many worthy and good men who join in most of those measures; and one great end of the *Characteristics* was, to open the eyes of such persons, both on their employment and company.

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

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

Another very considerable difficulty lies in my way. The more the complaint of degeneracy in the church of Scotland is just, the more difficult, in one respect, it will be to carry a conviction of it to the minds, either of those who are guilty of it, or those who observe it. The corruption of a church always implies, a light sense of the evil of sin; and therefore, however plainly I may make it appear, that such and such facts are done, it will be hard to convince many that they are wrong, at least in any great degree. Many a clergyman will not yield the one half of those things to be sins, that were admitted to be so a century ago; nor do they see the one half of the evil of sin, either in clergy or laity, that was once taken for granted. Those who have not the same ideas of morality, can never be supposed to have an equal impression of the insufficiency of the same degree of it. Those who look upon family-worship, for instance, as an unnecessary piece of devotion, will never be brought to imagine, that an Assembly is one whit worse for consisting of so many members who habitually neglect that duty, if I may be permitted to use so old-fashioned a phrase. On the other hand, though I should produce the names and surnames of those clergy who, mounted upon their courfers at the public races, join the gentlemen
of

of the turf, and are well skilled in all the terms of that honourable art; though I should name those who are to be found at routs and drums, and other polite assemblies of the same nature, and can descant with greater clearness on the laws of the gaming-table than of the Bible, instead of being commanded to adduce a proof of the facts, I should expect to find many who denied the relevancy of the crimes,

For this reason, before we go farther, perhaps it will not be improper to introduce a general observation. If we consider the circumstances of the church of Scotland, we may, from a knowledge of human nature, and the experience of past ages, safely affirm, she is in a lax and degenerate state. If it were not so, it would be a miracle. Nay, I will venture to go further, and to say, it would be such a miracle as never happened before. We in this church have enjoyed uninterrupted outward prosperity for more than seventy years; and during all that time, have not only been free from persecution, but have enjoyed the favour and protection of the civil power. If this long course of temporal prosperity has had no effect in bringing on a depravation of our manners, it must needs be a miracle; because it is contrary to the natural course of things: And he that will pretend to find a period, when any such thing happened before, will, I am confident, be unsuccessful. The primitive church was never long without persecution during the three first centuries; yet they had a trial how they could bear prosperity, in the interval between the ninth and tenth persecution, immediately before that dreadful one which they suffered under the Emperor Dioclesian. And history informs us, that though they had not then any civil establishment, yet the ease and prosperity which they enjoyed had a most fatal influence upon their manners. So long as a minister is only in the post of greatest danger, there will be less hazard of worldly men endeavouring to push themselves into that situation: but as soon as that office begins to be considered as a quiet and safe settlement for this life, how can it be, but many, from no higher end than worldly interest, will get and keep possession of it? Therefore,

though

though I were living in Japan, and knew nothing else about the church of Scotland, but that she had enjoyed such a course of outward prosperity, I would as certainly conclude, that a corruption of manners was affecting even the clergy, as I would, that iron which had been long out of the furnace, and had not been rubbed or scoured, would be growing rusty.

After all, it is somewhat strange, that this performance should stand in need of an apology, or that the accusation against it should be so often repeated, That the author must be a bad man; and that it is hurtful to the interest of religion. This is certainly the clamour of the guilty, and not the judgment of the candid. There is no such apprehension of the thing being criminal among those who are certainly the most unprejudiced and impartial judges; I mean, the laity. It is well known, with how much approbation it was read by them, when first published; and, notwithstanding the love of defamation, which is natural to mankind, I am persuaded its admirers would have been of quite a different class than they generally were, if it had been against the interest of religion; and that it would have had no admirers at all, if it had been a satire without an object.

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

understood it backwards? Whereas, in the present case, there was a testimony given to the truth and justice of the characters drawn, by the assent and approbation of almost every reader.

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

Is it to be supposed, that such persons, eminent for worth and penetration, would have approved a thing so evidently criminal as some are pleased to think this tract? Or are there indeed persons of the characters there represented in the church of England, and none in the church of Scotland? Shall the persons above named openly affirm, there are many such in England; and must the man be condemned, without hearing, and without mercy, who is suspected of hinting there are some such in her sister-church? I have often indeed reflected, with some surprise, on the different situation of affairs in Scotland and in England. I have seen many books printed in England, with the names of the authors, which plainly, and without ambiguity, affirm, that there are some of the clergy proud, ambitious, time-servers, and tools of those in power; some of them lazy and slothful, lovers of ease and pleasure; some of them scandalous and dissolute in their manners; some of them wholly ignorant and insufficient;

ficient; and that all are tolerated by those who preside. These things they affirm, without the least danger, or apprehension of it. But were any man to publish a book that had the tenth part of such severity in it, in Scotland, he ought, at the same time, to have a ship hired to fly to another country.

But the strongest of all general proofs of the justice of the satire in the *Characteristics*, is the behaviour of those who are supposed to be aimed at. The lamentable outcry they made at first, the malice and resentment they have ever since discovered against the author, prove to a demonstration, that his reproofs are well founded. We shall reduce the argument to this short form: Either there was ground for this satire, or there was none. If there was none, neither surely could there be for one half of the complaints that have been made against it, for it would have been perfectly harmless. Many, even of the present clergy of the church of Scotland, do not find themselves touched by it in the least degree. If the characters of the rest lay no more open to the strokes of raillery, why should they have been so much disconcerted by it? If they were not hit, it is impossible they could be hurt.

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

1. Let us consider our present state in point of Doctrine. It is certainly hinted, that there are many who have departed from the old Protestant principles contained in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms. And is it possible to deny this fact? Is it not the general complaint of the people through the whole kingdom, that from many pulpits there is little to be heard of the peculiar

peculiar doctrines of the gospel? or, if they be mentioned at all, it is no more than an awkward and cold compliment to save appearances, while something very different is chiefly insisted on? If I am not mistaken, the leading doctrines, both in the holy scriptures, and in the confessions of all the Protestant churches, are, *The lost and fallen state of man by nature*; — *The absolute necessity of salvation through Jesus Christ*; — *The pardon of sin by the riches of divine grace, through the imputed righteousness of the Saviour*; — *Sanctification and comfort by the Holy Ghost*. These doctrines are of so great moment, and have to extensive an influence on the whole of practical religion, that where they are firmly believed, they will not only be often brought directly in view, but the manner of speaking upon every other subject will be such, as to leave no jealousy of an intended omission; yet certain it is, that many are the complaints upon this subject from every quarter; and therefore I am warranted to infer, either that the doctrine is corrupted, and something else intentionally taught, or that the persons complained of are utterly incapable of expressing themselves in such a manner as to be understood.

I shall now put the argument in another form. There is, unquestionably, a great difference, in point of doctrine, between some ministers and others. If the one sort, therefore, preach the doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, undoubtedly the others either contradict or omit it. I am persuaded, there are some who would be ashamed to have it thought, that they preached this doctrine; and nothing is more plain, than that those who are known to do so, in the most clear and explicit manner, are usually the objects of their jealousy or hatred. It is probable I shall be told here, Why do you make these general complaints? name the particular persons, adduce your evidence, and prove the charge; they will, in that case, be immediately laid aside. To this I answer, That it is a very easy thing for a man to preach erroneous doctrine in such a manner that it shall be impossible to convict him by a legal prosecution in a free country. Every day shews, that men may print sedition, treason, and even blasphemy, in such a way, that no hu-

man law can take hold of it. What then should hinder men to preach heresy under the same prudent disguises? Besides, what would a prosecution signify, if it must come before a court, of which, between clergy and laity, perhaps a plurality of members differ little in opinion from the pannel.

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

But there is no occasion of entering further into this subject; for the ridicule in the *Characteristics* turns not so much on the truth or importance of these doctrines, as the gross absurdity of mens subscribing what they do not believe. However firm a persuasion I may have of any system of opinions, the right of private judgment and freedom of inquiry I would wish to remain sacred and inviolable. Those who use this liberty with courage, and with candour, ought to be held in the highest esteem by every one who differs from them. But for men, at their entrance on the sacred office, solemnly to subscribe to the truth of what all their lives after they endeavour to undermine or destroy, is at once so criminal and so absurd, that no reproof given to it can possibly exceed in point of severity. I take the liberty here of transcribing a passage from a printed sermon, preached at the opening of a synod in Scotland: where, speaking of these subscriptions, the author says, " This is so direct a violation of sincerity, that it is astonishing to think how men can set their minds at ease in the prospect, or keep them in peace after the deliberate commission of it. The
" very

“ very excuses and evasions that are offered in defence of
 “ it, are a disgrace to reason, as well as a scandal to religion. What success can be expected from that man’s
 “ ministry, who begins it with an act of so complicated
 “ guilt? How can he take upon him to reprove others
 “ for sin, or to train them up in virtue and true god-
 “ ness, while himself is chargeable with direct, premeditated, and perpetual perjury? I know nothing so
 “ nearly resembling it, as those cases in trade, in which
 “ men make false entries, and at once screen and aggravate their fraud, by swearing, or causing others swear,
 “ contrary to truth. This is justly reputed scandalous,
 “ even in the world; and yet I know no circumstance in
 “ which they differ, that does not tend to show it to be
 “ less criminal than the other.*”

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

What is above, may suffice, as to doctrine in general. The particular strictures in the *Characteristics* against a false taste in composition, may well enough answer for themselves without any defence. That there have been many instances of strange incongruity in this particular, is beyond all question. A cold, heartless, indifferent manner of speaking on those subjects, in which both speaker and hearer have so great, nay, no less than an infinite concern; an ostentatious swell of words, or a pointed ornamented foppery of style, so ill suited to the gravity of the pulpit; an abstracted, refined, or philosophical disquisition, which, if it has any meaning at all, perhaps not three in the audience can possibly understand; are these imaginary, or are they real characters? If they are characters drawn from real life, where is the sin or danger

* Mr Witherpoon’s synod-sermon.

of exposing them? For my own part, I am grieved to see so little learning among the generality of the ministers of this church, which is probably owing to their poverty. But I am, in a good measure, comforted with this reflection, that the weakest commonly do as much service as the wisest; because, though they were ever so willing, they are not able to fill the audience with any admiration of themselves, and therefore their attention must be fixed upon the truths delivered, and not the parts and manner of the speaker.

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

What shall I say in defence of this, but that the thing appears to me to be manifestly true? There are no particular crimes charged, but, in general, levity and worldly conversation, with a neglect of the duties of the sacred office. And would to God there were not the greatest cause of charging, not merely some few disorderly persons, not merely the younger sort in general, but all without exception, as in some measure guilty. If there is a remarkable increase of corruption among the worst, there will also be a visible declension in zeal and piety among the best. This is what the natural course of things teaches us to expect. It is also what our Saviour himself hath forewarned us of: *Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold* *. The present age is a moving example of this, both with respect to the clergy and laity. As there is an alarming degree of infidelity and impiety among many of every rank, so even those who preserve some regard for religion, fall very far short of that eminent and exemplary piety which some alive have seen in Christians of the last age, and of which our fathers have told us.

* Matth. xxiv. 12.

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

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

But because we have now chiefly to do with the clergy, let us return to them. If it were proper, I could easily produce examples of indecency and impiety in clergymen, sufficient to fill every serious person with the deepest concern; and which the most relaxed moralist would not be able to defend: but as I would fain believe, that things very gross are yet but seldom committed among us, and are not commonly known, I shall confine my-

self only to things more openly practised by many, and too easily tolerated by all. This is the more proper, that the book I am defending can scarcely be charged with disclosing hidden scenes, but dwells on such deviations from duty, as are epidemic and general, and rather smiles at the ridiculous, than exposes the guilty part of every character.

There is one circumstance which I am afraid betrays many into a mistake. The world in general expects a great *comparative* sanctity in those who bear the sacred office; therefore, when ministers take a little liberty, others think themselves warranted to take a great deal more. These sentiments, which are universal, contribute to keep the proportion between the clergy and laity always nearly the same. When therefore clergymen see the distance still remaining between them and others, they are ready to forget how far they are both from the place where they ought to have been.

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

That such is the case with not a few amongst us, there is the greatest reason to believe. The heavy and general complaints of the people from some quarters, and their gross ignorance in others, prove it beyond contradiction. Those whose conduct is not liable to this imputation,

putation, will not find, that they have suffered the smallest injury, in point of character, by the publication of the *Characteristics*, excepting such as feel the wounds given to their friends as sensibly as those given to themselves. In this case, however, they have an easy remedy: Let them *have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*

I am unwilling to enter farther into the characters of ministers; and therefore shall only add, let the impartial but consider what happened a few years ago, and then say, whether we are not greatly relaxed in point of discipline. Did not several ministers think themselves at liberty to attend the entertainments of the stage? I am sensible, many will immediately pass sentence upon me as a person of very narrow principles, for introducing this as a mark of our depravity. I must however insist upon it, from the united testimony of the best and wisest of the Heathen writers, the uniform sentiments and practice of the primitive church, and the pieces written for the stage in modern times, which any man may peruse, that the performances of hired players have never yet been conducted with so much decency as to deserve the countenance and presence of a minister of Christ. The General Assembly did indeed judicially disapprove of that liberty taken by ministers; but the censure inflicted on the offenders was so gentle, that it was then the opinion of many, it would have a greater tendency to encourage, than to prevent the repetition of the offence. It now appears they judged right; for, if I am not greatly misinformed, the offence has been repeated since that time with absolute impunity.

If the morals of the clergy themselves are corrupted, there is all the reason in the world to expect, that the reins of discipline will be slackened as to the disorders of others. This indeed is so notorious, that it would be idle and unnecessary to attempt a proof of it; and therefore I shall only make a reflection or two upon the reception given, not long ago, to a proposal for censuring those writers who had published and avowed irreligious and immoral sentiments. It is well known what violent opposition this proposal met with; nor will it soon be
forgot,

forgot, what sort of reasoning was used against it; and nothing can show, in a clearer light, that low and languid state to which our discipline is now reduced. It was generally represented as a species of persecution, and as flowing from a persecuting spirit. Upon this I shall lay before the reader one or two very short reflections.

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

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

3dly, What can be the meaning of those professing Christians who desire to retain in their communion the enemies of the gospel? Can they, or will they do us any service? Is it possible that they can bring us any honour? Can it be of any benefit to themselves? None of all these.

But

But it must visibly lessen the sanctity of the Christian character in the apprehension of mankind in general, and give the unhappy persons themselves more reason than any other circumstance whatever, to say, the whole is nothing at bottom but deceit and imposition.

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

The admission of ministers into vacant congregations is indeed a matter of the highest moment, and the opposition of sentiments among us upon this subject, probably lies at the bottom of all our other differences. I am also of opinion, that the continuance of what have been commonly called *violent settlements*, will have the most certain and powerful influence in banishing religion and decency, and bringing us into a situation of which I charitably believe many, who prosecute these measures, have not the least suspicion. Willingly, therefore, were it in my power, would I contribute to open the eyes of some of my brethren, on the pernicious consequences of their own conduct. But I have the discouragement to reflect, that the force of custom, and the power of prejudice, will probably shut their ears against any thing I have to offer.

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

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

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

— I believe this is the first instance that ever happened, of churchmen surrendering the power and influence which the law gave them, into other hands, without resistance, and without complaint; nay, many of them zealously contending for it, and establishing it by their own repeated decisions. It would be no hard matter to point out the real cause or causes of this conduct; but at present I forbear, and leave it to every man to assign them for himself: only I cannot help lamenting, that our noble, venerable, republican constitution, seems to be so near its period. Whether it is likely to undergo any outward change, is of little moment: when the spirit is gone, the remaining name and form is not worth being contended for.

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

There is one distressing circumstance in this prospect, that simoniacal pactions among us will be hurtful and reproachful in an uncommon degree. The settlements in Scotland are generally small; they will be every year of

still less value by the improvements of the country, and increasing wealth of other classes of men. In what a beggarly condition then will those be who have been obliged to pay dear for so scanty a provision? Perhaps the reader will say, Happily few of the purchasers have any money to give. I believe so: but this will not mend the matter; for the most mean and sordid, perhaps scandalous, compliances must come in the place of money. I am ashamed even to mention some of the ways by which it is undoubtedly certain presentations will be, because they *have* been, procured. Can any minister think of this without the deepest concern?

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

The above is no doubt a very melancholy prospect,
and

and will in time have a most malignant influence upon the morals of the clergy. But the truth is, the settlement of parishes by presentations, is directly and immediately hurtful to the characters of those who are training up for the sacred office. When they know that their future settlement does not depend upon the apostolic qualification, their being of *good report*, but upon interest with the great, it must necessarily introduce, in many cases, licentious and irregular practices, as well as habituate them to fawning and servility. There is more danger in this than many apprehend. On consulting the history of the church, we shall find few characters more odious in clergymen, than ambition, and open solicitation of ecclesiastical preferment. I am sorry that so much way has been given to this already without having been observed. Small changes in forms and language, do often introduce great changes in manners and characters. In ancient times men could hardly be persuaded to take on them the weighty and important office of a bishop. In times not very distant, in our own church, the minister or probationer called, was never considered as a party, but as the subject concerning which the process was carried on by the callers or refusers. But they have been for some time past declared to be parties: they begin to attend the cause, to appear at the bar, to urge their claim, to consider the people who are to be under their charge as their adversaries, and too often to treat them with contempt and disdain.

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

prosecute

prosecute a man for error or immorality in England, as in Scotland; yet what person or parish ever thinks of making the experiment?

Others tell us, "It is all in your own power: why do you license improper men? it is impossible to present any man who has not a regular licence." How surprising is it, that persons of ever so little reflection should make use of this argument? It proceeds upon a supposition, which the least knowledge of human nature must show to be unreasonable, *viz.* That every presbytery, through the whole kingdom, will be unalterably faithful and vigilant. If there be but a corrupt or negligent majority in any one of them, the licence will operate over all. Nay, let them be supposed ever so faithful, they may be deceived by a hypocrite, or not able to find such proofs of what they strongly suspect, as to found and support a sentence of refusal. The more we consider the matter in every possible view, we shall find, that a parochial election of ministers would be a better security for regularity and decency in the clergy, than all the laws that ever were framed upon the subject. Frequently men cannot, and sometimes they will not, execute the laws; but this rule would operate uniformly and powerfully, and would execute itself.

I add only one other unhappy consequence of continuing the present method of supplying vacancies. If a presentation must supersede all judgment of the church-courts, as to the propriety of an ordination, and even the expediency of a translation, we may expect to see some of the weakest, and most contemptible ministers, settled in the most conspicuous and important charges. Persons of this character are not always free from vanity and ambition, nor always destitute of interest by male or female connections. We have had some instances of this kind already; but much greater and more shameful may be expected, so soon as presentations have acquired an irresistible power. It will be said, perhaps, They have had all the force in law, for above forty years, that it is likely they ever will have. I answer, that is very true; but every one knows their very different effect in practice at the beginning and at the end of that period.

Patrons continued long to pay a regard to the opinion of the heritors, according to rank and character in the congregation concerned. As they found their own strength increasing, however, they paid gradually less and less: they now pay very little; and the time seems just at hand, when they will pay none at all.

This argument will, I hope, have the greater weight, that I have known instances of different persons, both among the clergy and laity, who had concurred in supporting presentations in other cases, but who were both alarmed and provoked when they themselves came to be treated in a tyrannical manner. The heritors, in general, indeed, have been long made instrumental in bearing down the common people; and this being finished, they themselves, as is almost constantly the case in political struggles, must feel the weight of that authority which they have established. The evil hath taken so deep root, that it is somewhat uncertain whether a remedy be now possible; nay, it is still more uncertain, whether any resistance will be seriously attempted. The consequences, however, are like to be so terrible, that they may well justify complaint, and, in particular, be my excuse for endeavouring to expose the conduct of those whom I considered as betraying the liberties of the public.

As to the censures inflicted on ministers who refused to be present at the ordination of ministers to nobody, I shall say but little, because that severity seems to have ceased. Several ministers have absented themselves, in like cases, since the deposition of Mr Gillespie, and yet have escaped with impunity. The reason probably is, the thing is now so common, that the odium attending it has become inconsiderable, and not worth the pains of an endeavour to divide it. But as that measure was once like to become universal, may I not observe, that it remains in the history of our church an example of what, alas! appears but too plainly in the history of every church, That, in proportion as authority is relaxed in enforcing the laws of *God*, it is commonly stretched and carried to excess in support of the unnecessary, doubtful, or pernicious commandments of *men*. Let any man
produce

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

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

Thus I have laid before the reader, in a serious and candid manner, what I hope will appear a sufficient apology for this offensive performance. Nothing could have induced me to the attempt, but the unwearied endeavours of many to represent it as an evidence of a bad temper and unchristian disposition, which the particular structure of the book made some undiscerning persons rashly assent to. I have not the smallest reason to repent of it on account of its nature, its design, or its effects upon the public. If there was any mistake, it was in point of prudence, which should have directed me to avoid bringing such a load of malice and resentment upon myself. This has afforded me one observation not very honourable to human nature, *viz.* That the rage of enemies is always more active and more lasting than the affection of friends. It often happens, that some who are very much pleased