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SERIES OF LETTERS,

OCCASIONED BY THE LATE

PASTORAL ADMONITION OF THE CHURCH
OF SCOTLAND,

AS ALSO,

Their Attempts to Suppress the Establishment

OF

SABBATH SCHOOLS,

ADDRESSED TO

THE SOCIETY FOR PROPAGATING THE
GOSPEL AT HOME.

BY ROWLAND HILL, A. M.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. Exod. xx. 16.

Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me. Acts xxiv. 13.

If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you; on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. 1 Pet. iv. 14.

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A SERIES OF LETTERS, &c.

LETTER I.

My dear Friends and Brethren,

Edin. June 18. 1799.

ON my late arrival in Scotland, I was presented with three official papers, the product of the General Assembly held in May last. The first paper, styled *The declaratory Act*, little surpris'd me. I perceived a considerable degree of jealousy had been excited by the labours of some very worthy and respectable characters from England, notwithstanding they discovered a decided partiality for the established church *; and I should' suppose, that the free and affectionate spirit manifested by many valuable ministers of the establishment, in the west, who gave me the free use of their pulpits, notwithstanding I was the servant of all who chose to accept my labours, might have increased their unreasonable suspicions; while the more frequent visits of other ministers from the South, acting in friendship with the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, confirmed them in their resolution to demolish at once the bridge of communication between their church and every other protestant communion upon earth; and in a day above all others, in which it was the most unseemly and unwise!

* Messrs Grove, Simēon, and others.

In these steps, however, the church might be at liberty to act for herself; the business was all her own. But her other papers, I must confess, have, beyond what I can express, filled me with surprise. In these also I find my own personal character plainly implicated in the general supposed guilt. It cannot therefore be deemed impertinence, at the same time to vindicate my character, together with that of yours, from the unexampled accusations produced against us, that the public may know how far we deserve to suffer *a war of persecution*, which they solemnly declare, if in their power, *immediately* to commence. Conscious, however, of our integrity, and of the simplicity of our designs, we are happy so fair an opportunity is now before us, to vindicate ourselves from the tongue and pen of slander; while we equally lament the cause given, in the groundless aspersions and unjust invectives, contained in the pastoral admonition of the church of Scotland. Had such a paper made its appearance in the illiberal days of avowed persecution, or in the cruel times, when the liberty of the press was in the possession of a party, we had read it with less surprise; or were we in the least conscious of guilt, or rather, if we had it not in our power, fully to substantiate our innocence, as also to charge our accusers either with the greatest ignorance, or wilful and deliberate injustice, our language might be less bold and confident before the public.

We happily live in a day in which men are allowed to think for themselves; and among these the question is very generally asked, By what authority could that, or any other body of people, whatever high powers they may claim, presume virtually to criminate any religious Society, however mean or contemptible in their esteem, and cruelly to charge them with the high and odious crimes of sedition

and treason, without the shadow of proof to substantiate that charge?

By what authority, it may farther be asked, had they a right to command and direct all their clergy throughout Scotland, who are under the iron hand of their jurisdiction, to be the vehicles of their wanton and cruel invectives, by reading, and notoriously against the judgments and consciences of many of them, even in the house of God itself, and in the hours of sacred worship, a paper replete with charges the most virulent and unjust.

Satisfied, therefore, of our right to claim the protection of the civil power from the dangerous censures of our ecclesiastical accusers, we could not be blamed were we to seek redress for our insulted characters, dedicated to the service of the gospel, from the laws of the land. But we wish no such methods of revenge, though, were we now silent, we should criminate ourselves. Our cause is the cause of God and truth; and while we can make it appear, that *in simplicity and godly sincerity, and not with fleshly wisdom, we have had our conversation in the world,* and while we are satisfied that it is FALSELY all manner of evil is spoken against us for Christ's sake, we will rejoice and be exceeding glad. In my next letter, I shall begin some free remarks on the pastoral admonition.

I remain yours sincerely and affectionately,

ROWLAND HILL.

L E T T E R II.

My dear Brethren,

Dundee, June 22. 1799.

WE know but of three ways whereby injured innocence in the character of an humble catechist under our protection, could have been attacked.

1st, As it respected erroneous doctrine. On this subject the General Assembly were wisely silent.

2d, By a charge of immorality. In this loose age of the world a charge of such a nature would have had as little success as that of heresy. But blessed be God, herein our brethren have been so protected, that scarce a distant hiss against them has as yet been heard. It must therefore be the charge of *sedition, treason, and designed rebellion*. They are to be registered among the vilest of miscreants, who adopt the basest principles, and support the worst of men, pretended friends of revelation, yet the associates of avowed infidels, *traitors of the lowest order, blood-suckers, levelers, regicides*. And this accusation has been most *artfully* introduced. The Pastoral Admonition presents itself before the public with a very just and proper declaration against the infidelity, and infamous policy of the French nation. The indignation of the people being thus heightened, objects of equal indignation are to be pointed at as existing at home, together with a long declamation against those vagabond itinerants, and self-authorized teachers. You are decidedly told by the Assembly, that “ much reason there is to suspect, that those who openly profess their enmity to *their* ecclesiastical establishment, are no friends to the civil constitution, and that the name of liberty is abused by them, as it has been by others, into a *cover for secret democracy and anarchy*.” Idle and absurd in the ex-

treme as the charge must sound, that all who are enemies to *their* establishment, are enemies to the civil constitution, criminating at one dash thereby, near half the serious people of Scotland, and all the people of England, yet the design was deep and dark.

Had they a shade of evidence to substantiate the charge? could they gain it from any of the printed papers or documents of the Society? These are at all times on public sale, and their books are free for general inspection, and none who are friendly to the constitution, and of religious characters, are ever rejected when they apply for admission. Thus we lay ourselves open, by a small subscription, to be reconnoitred by every spy who chuses to be acquainted with our *rebellious pranks*. And yet we are not only told, that "in these schools the religious instruction of youth is committed to ignorant persons, altogether unfit for such an important charge," (and of the abilities of these men, by the bye, the Assembly are just as ignorant, whether they be fools, or twenty times wiser than those commissioned by themselves, as they are of the rules of justice and integrity, in these infamous accusations they have brought forward,) "who presume not only to catechise, but also to expound the scriptures," (is it not also the duty of every master of a family to expound or talk over the contents of his Bible to his children and servants, according to his ability, without asking permission from his spiritual guides?) "but to persons NOTORIOUSLY *disaffected to the civil constitution of the country*, and connecting those schools with certain secret meetings, in which, *as we are informed*," (reader, note this famous evidence), "every person is bound not to spread abroad any thing that is said or done in the meeting, to the prejudice of any of the members; into which no person is admitted without the consent of the whole of the members; and who keep

“ a correspondence with other societies in the neighbourhood.” And as a supposed confirmation of this, it seems a printed paper was produced, and read by a leading member of their Assembly *, enjoining this criminal secrecy among themselves. Now this paper we can, with the greatest confidence, entirely disown; neither fabricated nor sanctioned by us, we to this moment know nothing of its existence. We will not say it was a forgery of the man who read it, but we CHALLENGE him to produce it, and we have a right, in vindication of our characters, TO DEMAND IT. Our conjecture is, that some of the fellowship-meetings for religious conversation and prayer, once as common through Scotland in better days as now uncommon, may have ordered to be printed such an injunction of secrecy among themselves †. And this is *charitably* imputed to us as a fabrication of ours, and as *charitably* it is concluded, that if secrecy be enjoined, sedition and treason must of course be the subject of the conversation. Allowing, therefore, the full force of the evidence produced against us, to what does it amount? Shall all doors be thrown open, when persons meet to investigate private characters, before they account them as proper persons to be admitted to the communion? Or shall the same charge be urged against the meetings of presbyteries or synods, when, contrary to law, they shut the doors, and chuse to converse in private? Shall different friendly societies, and other various institutions, be thus maligned, be-

* The member here mentioned was Dr Hill of St Andrew's.

† We have been since positively informed, the fact was stated in the committee just as represented above, that the papers alluded to contained nothing of the concerns of this Society. If this can be denied, let it be denied, and we will prove the fact; and if this be proved, what language can be sufficiently strong to exaggerate their horrid crime;---an evidence was admitted and published against us at the very moment it was known to be notoriously false!!!

cause they suffer not every impertinent intruder to interrupt their debates, or retail their concerns from door to door? But as the General Assembly have made the discovery, that every person is an enemy to the constitution who is not an admirer of *their* ecclesiastical establishment, they can as easily prove, that all persons who chuse to converse in secret, are talking treason, and hatching rebellion. Such is their logic, and this their only proof; and if such arguments will not open the peoples eyes in our favour, we shall be much surpris'd.

But our cautious opponents bring forward the accusation only *as they were informed*, thereby providing themselves, as they might suppose, a safe retreat, by *craftily* observing, if necessary, that *their informer was to blame*. Can these gentlemen think they have a right to charge the worst of crimes upon a large body of innocent people, and give this charge the greatest publicity in their power, upon *a mere report*, and then, suppose in case of misinformation, to lay all the blame upon the reporter?---Did ever the world behold before, a conduct so illiberal, so ungenerous, and so unjust!

We cannot dismiss this part of our defence, without some strictures on their mean pretensions to candour and liberality. "We wish, say they, to judge charitably of all men; we are willing to hope, that among these missionaries there are several worthy well-meaning people who have been led astray by men *more artful and designing than themselves*." From this quotation we discover well-meaning men may *positively* be artful and designing, otherwise how could others be *comparatively* more artful and designing than themselves. We will leave this criticism with the wise men who fabricated this famous production, though I believe some of our *altogether ignorant and unlearned catechists* could have told them, that no such comparison could ever have been

formed; that it was preposterous and unjust, being a contradiction in terms. But to come the point.

We are informed of the Assembly's knowledge of *some artful and designing men*. We CHALLENGE them to come forward, and we will thank them heartily if they will point out the delinquents. They must know them, otherwise they could not have presumed to have said so much. Minds enlarged like theirs, scorn the tricks of a secret assassin. If in this they unhappily fail, it will rest with us to charge on them a retorted accusation equally severe,---the fabrication of an artful and designing untruth!

We know, that the state receives daily benefit by the gospel we attempt to disseminate, as we have the fullest evidence, that such as were enemies to the Bible, and enemies to the Government, are now the friends of both, and that from the best and firmest principles *, and even such as are suspected

* I happily witnessed a pleasing circumstance of this sort a few weeks before I left London. Two brothers in a large line of business, were both of them members in some of the corresponding societies. They were called by kind providence to attend at Surry Chapel, the place of worship under my care in that city. Mere curiosity, or a much worse principle of ridicule and contempt, brought them at first to hear. It pleased God to impress the word home upon their hearts, and from mere monsters they became men and Christians indeed. The joy introduced into their families was inexpressible, and the credit brought to religion very considerable. When they came to me to be admitted to the Lord's table, they freely told me, though with much compunction, what they originally were. From them I was informed, that it is the first business with these horrid hord of rebels, to seduce all their associates into the principles of infidelity, through the medium of Paine's Age of Reason. This being accomplished, their language becomes the most sanguinary, and their projects the most daring and dangerous.—Upon their conversion to God, all their former connections were immediately renounced, and a strict adherence to public and private worship was seriously attended to, and a large number of their apprentices, led on by them in the same way, were wonderfully recovered from the like snare. And yet the General Assembly can presume to tell the world, that such as promote the reading of the Bible are in league with infidels, and that teaching people the orderly conduct of the word of God will create rebels by thousands.

of disloyalty to our constitution, we can prove have been refused connection with us. This is the ground we know we can well maintain, and highly charge the General Assembly of the grossest insult on our characters; and before all the public, in the strongest language, DEMAND of them to come forward, and prove the supposed fact.

We have another stricture to make on this subject. Our catechists are "ignorant persons, *altogether* unfit for such an important charge, or persons notoriously "disaffected to the civil constitution of the country." What a description is this! men little better than fools or designing knaves, compose the whole of such as are engaged among us: these "worthy and well-meaning people," it seems, who are *altogether unfit and ignorant*, are in the hands of these *designing knaves*, and the pastoral admonition tells us that these *are led astray*. By this dark and ambiguous mode of expression, can any one devise whether these originally well-meaning men are only humble catechists to this rebellious clan, or completely inaugurated into the whole of the business? When we consider, however, that these *fools* and *knaves* are all as one "in these certain secret meetings, in which every "person is bound not to spread abroad any thing "that is said or done in the meeting to the prejudice of any of the members; into which no person is admitted, without the consent of the whole "of the members; and who keep a correspondence "with other societies in the neighbourhood:" little doubt can be left, but these *fools* are now as completely wicked as the *knaves*; for if led into the secret, why revolt not from the banditti, and divulge their dark design? Is it possible that this can be equalled but by their logic, as exemplified above? There is a dignity in injured innocence, and she has

a right to treat this low cunning as beneath contempt!

Does not common sense declare, that combined traitors are all as one? and if we be indeed the monsters thus depicted by the General Assembly, let justice find us out, and at once award us all to that place of banishment we so richly deserve. Such pests of society, such vipers in human shape, should at once suffer the full demerit of their dark designs.

In a few days I mean to resume my pen, and present you with further remarks on this curious production. Wishing you much success in every attempt to disseminate the truth as it is in Jesus,

I remain yours sincerely,

ROWLAND HILL.

L E T T E R III.

My dear Friends and Brethren, *Montrose, June 25: 1799.*

I RESUME my pen for some further remarks on this pastoral admonition.

A great bustle of words is frequently intruded upon the mind, to put a face upon a design. Just for this purpose we are presented with a long parading paragraph about "a regular standing ministry as a divine institution; that our Lord Jesus acted under a heavenly commission, and that all his ministers should attend to the same." &c. not only insinuating thereby, but positively asserting, that we deny the necessity and utility of such a standing ministry; and the proof is, because their method of *manufacturing* for the ministry is less admired by us than by them-

selves ; and because we suppose we have a right to seek for good ministers, where they perchance supply us with bad ones. And mind how they lament this mighty evil : “ But all this care and solicitude concerning the ministry of the word, which we and our fathers learned from scripture, is now ridiculed as unnecessary :” they should have said, is now lamented as being ill conducted. The first phrase is utterly false ; the amendment would have been just and true. But further : “ The men who assume the character of missionaries declare, that *every man* has a right to preach the gospel, and are now traversing the whole country without any sort of authority, (that is, authority from them) ; without giving any public pledge of the soundness of their faith, or the correctness of their morals, and without the advantages of regular education, and of preparatory knowledge.” Here we are lost in such a wilderness of accusations as will render it difficult for us, without some attention, to find our way out ; however we attempt it. First, we say, “ that *every man* has a right to preach the gospel.” That the gospel ministry is open to all who have grace, gifts, and ability for the work, I suppose will be admitted on both sides of the question ; but as all this mighty clamour is made about these schools, it may be necessary to repeat to the public what the General Assembly might wish us to keep to ourselves. Whatever humble catechist presumes to go farther upon this work than to instruct and to explain, must, by the rule of the Society, first be thoroughly examined and well known before he be allowed even to explain the scriptures to his poor neighbours who wish to know what sort of person is authorised to instruct their children. However, as these seditious, treasonable, *secret* schools are so notoriously *open*, that sad complaint is made against them on this double account, being both *secret* and *open*, the public are most heartily requested

and the magistrates in particular, to see for themselves if the catechists be not men correct in their morals, sound in their faith, loyal to the government, and quite of sufficient ability to fulfil the humble sphere of erudition entrusted to them. This will bring the matter to an issue, whether the Assembly, in so liberally accusing on this score also, have not proved that *they know not what they say, nor whereof they affirm*. When people, however, have a deal of dirt to throw, it is always expected some will stick. But the grand core hid under all these mighty complaints, is evidently, lest the propriety of the present monopoly for public teaching should be suspected. Rome *wisely* locked up the Bible in the vatican; protestants may read it, but the explanation of it is to be referred to their spiritual guides. Now, we ask the plain question, whether some of their hearers may not be as clear-headed, and have as much grace in their hearts, as many of their ministers. If so, as providence calls them, by what part of scripture are they forbidden to communicate such knowledge to those who chuse to receive it? Nothing can be more evident than that the scribes and pharisees, proud as they were, had not so far monopolized the right of public speaking, as to prevent others from the like attempts with themselves. Our Lord at all times had free access to their houses erected for public instruction; nor yet was Paul, though then deemed a dissenter from their established church, excluded from their pulpits. We are told also, more immediately under the New Testament dispensation, that while the disciples were scattered abroad, and even the apostles were stationary at Jerusalem, though much given to “tra-
 “ verse the country” *up and down*, leaving the religion in which they were *bred up*, as the Assembly *elegantly* express themselves; yet these went about *preaching every where that men should repent*; and two of these Jerusalem stewards, or deacons, were

found among these *vagrant teachers*: like Peter and John, who were also, even in the days of inspiration, discovered to be *ignorant and unlearned men* *. To this also may be further added, that they kept somewhat like secret fellowship-meetings in private houses, presuming to call their *little illegal conventicles* THE CHURCH; preaching in places not "intended for public worship." And no doubt the secret whisper went against them for their disloyalty, as their Master himself was reported to be no friend to the government, yea, *a fellow that perverted the nation, and forbade the people to give tribute to Cæsar*; and for which cause he lost his life, so far as man's design went; *If thou let this man go, thou art no friend to Cæsar*, being the concluding argument, with the Jews.

Now all these arguments for this sort of preaching undoubtedly must be evaded. The narrative is plain, and directly to the point. All instructed who had ability; and this might be done without destroying the standing order of the ministry. But this is encroaching too far upon the priestly policy of the times. When argument fails, *supposition and conjecture* are wonderfully fertile; hence it has been concluded, that these *vagrant itinerants* were some of the ordained seventy, or that they *might* have been ordained by the apostles, still resident at Jerusalem. Thus men find out for themselves witty inventions; but the most witty and wise is still behind. The people were then all heathen; but now, since Christianity has been *established by law*, and we have *established churches*, we are all Christians; acts of parliament

* In a former publication, I noticed an expression from Acts iv. 13. as it respected two itinerant fishermen, Peter and John: they were certainly in bad hands; the scribes were the authors, the learned, the pharisees, the righteous of the day, and they discovered, notwithstanding the divine influence then vouchsafed, that they were *ιδιωται και αγραμματοι*.

have made us so. If fabricated into Christianity alone by such a power, we wonder not we find a nation of government Christians, as far from real Christianity, as the north is from the south.

Is it to be supposed, therefore, that a mere act of parliament can decree, that people shall be Christians, properly so called? As well might the legislature attempt to cure fevers and consumptions, as to establish real Christianity, and to heal the diseases of the mind by a law. However, therefore, we should be thankful when the law runs in favour of the Christian dispensation, yet Christianity itself will want something further than a civil power to bring it into existence. Are we to wonder, therefore, if we discover hords of these political Christians and their political ministers with them by thousands, in every country, not a whit better, even in common morality, than heathens themselves * ?

To speak the plain truth, therefore, we strongly object to the present method of educating for the ministry, and are grieved at the perversion from the original design. Being frequently drawn from a very humble situation by the lure of gain, they are sent to be made up for an office, while a mere clerical education is the substitute attempted for real religion. These men, ill at ease in a spiritual office, with their carnal hearts submit to the drudgery of religion, while their souls abhor the hated tasks.

Now, under the pressure of these evils, abounding more or less in all establishments, notwithstanding the excellent characters which may be found among them, are others to be debarred the liberty of pro-

* No reflection is hereby meant against establishments. In a former publication I have been their apologist. Though to make the Christian, rests with God; yet to defend the Christian religion, is the province of the Christian magistrate. Why cannot establishments be supported by the state, without being blended with the state, and at the same time toleration granted to all?

viding better things among themselves? Supposing this maligned Society should esteem it their duty to reconnoitre the abilities and characters of some of these *altogether ignorant catechists*, and find in them a natural ability or aptitude to teach, where would be the want of wisdom, or what proof could be deduced, that they were friends to barbarism, or enemies to a standing ministry, if such should receive a proper education for that very office, though not in those seminaries which are now decreed to be the only places which are to stamp the just character of learning in a Scottish divine? Allowing, therefore, the Church of Scotland, as in the voice of her present General Assembly, the entire possession of all her own encomiums so plentifully bestowed on herself, we shall leave the falsehood of this charge also to contradict itself. *Fibs* are short-lived things; we shall therefore give them full liberty to charge us with folly and ignorance as long as they please: but the charge of treason we highly and pointedly resist. They have, therefore, to remember, that from a variety of quarters they are called to make good their charge, and their characters are RUINED if they shrink from the challenge; and we set them no hard task. Things which are NOTORIOUS, are discoverable of course; for these rebels are NOTORIOUSLY disaffected. If, therefore, they are not brought forward; the General Assembly will be suspected of being NOTORIOUSLY disaffected themselves, in secreting *these monsters*; or that they can utter or forge the most NOTORIOUS falsehood, without the least shame or remorse.

For a few days I shall be prevented from continuing the subject, as my different engagements will occupy the whole of my time.

I remain yours affectionately,

ROWLAND HILL.

L E T T E R I V .

My dear Friends,

Aberdeen, June 29. 1799:

HAVING reconsidered the subject of my last letter, it struck me with some force, what avails that ministers should teach others, if these afterwards may not communicate their knowledge in return. From the cobbler to the philosopher, is not this admitted? yet in the business of religion it is supposed to be the highest infringement upon the sacred office. The objection is, if this liberty be granted, every ignorant pretender will presume to be a preacher, and error and enthusiasm will universally abound. Look then at those who are regularly *bred to the trade*, and ask if we are better furnished through *this monopoly*. If *monopolies* be injurious in other branches, why less so in this? Now, I have really found so much good sense among officers of the army and navy, tradesmen, manufacturers, and others, who have made the word of God the subject-matter of their serious study and meditation, that I have delighted to hear them, according to their natural ability, discourse from the word of God, while the dry artificial *manufacturer of a text* frequently has left me hungry and unfed; and I seriously believe we do a great injury to the church of Christ, by admitting any into the boasted standing ministry, till, by more private exertions, they prove their natural ability to the work. No one should be deemed fit to preach before many in a town, till he has first preached to a few in a village. Thus brought forward by degrees, he becomes *an able minister of the word of life*. Is not the work of the minister that of a public speaker? How then does common sense direct us

to act, that we may acquire the end designed? Or is every public speaker in religion to be deemed a madman, an enthusiast, an invader of the sacred office, because he follows the same steps with others? Let people consider these simple thoughts, and then revert to the pastoral admonition, and see if they have not been throwing mere dust in the air in all their pompous declamations about themselves and their church.

Some strictures on their ideas of the church, and their coercive methods of government, next demand a portion of our attention. One would suppose, according to them, *the church* existed not but under *their* establishment. Another church claims the same exclusive character,---the church of Rome. Scotland has now followed her *holy* example; she now owns and communicates with no church on earth. In her retired corner, she sits as a queen; she also chuses to keep no faith with heretics, and so dresses them, as to make them pass for *devils* * in the public eye. We still grant she shall pass for *the church*, admitting at the same time, the meaning the New Testament gives of that word, when mere mobs of Jews and Gentiles were also called *the church* †; so that all the unhappy *mobbish* appearances, which are at times exhibited in different *church-courts*, wherever they meet, is still THE CHURCH. But she should remember also, that the church, in a richer sense of the word, is a company of holy people, collected in the name of the Lord Jesus, though in an upper room, or in a private house, or even in the open fields; and the church still, though not established by law.

Now, how far the church established by law has a right to persecute the poor church which has not been indulged with civil power, must be left with

* A reference is here meant to the tricks of Papists, who painted the resemblance of devils on the martyrs, when taken to the stake.

† Acts xix. 32. in the original.



her to decide, both as it respects her determination concerning heresies, and how far these heretics should be corrected*. If *the church* of the General Assembly will but first *clear their brains* by reading Lock on the Human Understanding, and afterwards the same invaluable author on Toleration, perhaps they will be led into a little more *moderation* than as yet they enjoy. People who are red-hot with a persecuting spirit, are apt to lose their reason, and then they will be fanatics and enthusiasts of course. Besides a little good reading of this sort under present circumstances, might be of considerable advantage, as moral philosophy has a wonderful tendency to calm the mind; and strong fears, whether real or imaginary, are known to be very prejudicial to the constitution. And strong indeed their fears must be, if they apprehend general ruin both of church and state to be so near at hand. Whether these fears, therefore, be the *hobgoblins* of the imagination, or the justly-dreaded evils of the day, ought to be considered. Surely she cannot suppose that a set of *altogether ignorant vagrant teachers*, either among themselves, or from England, concerning whom it has been *politely* hinted, "it is not known whence they be †," will ever

* The Church of Scotland should never forget what she in her chaster days suffered from papists and prelates, before she was established by law!

† *Whom we know not whence they be*, seemed to me to be such an ill-set phrase in the Pastoral Admonition, that I was for a while at a loss what the Assembly meant, or how they came by it; when lo! the discovery was made, that it was a quotation from the speech of Nabal, (1 Sam. xxv. 10, 11.) that wretched churl, that son of Belial, whose name was *folly*; and this was found to be the fittest language for the Scottish Sanhedrim. Nor could any quotation throughout the Bible, taking the connection at large, better have suited for the present purpose.—Is not the cry revived, Who is David? who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants, now-a-days that break from their masters, (who go up and down, and leave the religion in which they were bred up!) "Shall I then take my bread and my water, and my flesh that I have killed for my shearers," (shall we allow any of these English vagrants to have any of our Scottish livings,) "whom we know not whence they

be able to overfet a body of clergy fo correctly tutored, and fo generally admired, and a church alfo, fo firmly eftablifhed by law ; and efpecially as all the adherents of thefe ignorant vagrants are now completely cut off from making any of their fly inroads into the church, by a late holy bull, ftyled The Declaratory Act : though there may be fome danger left the peoples curiofity fhould be the more excited to run out of doors, that they may hear what thefe *terrible defigning vagrants* can have to fay, fo as to merit fuch an inftance of the marked difapprobation of this moft cautious and loyal Affembly. And again, refpecting the little army we are about to raife, to overthrow the king and conftitution, it fhould be con-

“ be ?” As for the other quotations from fcripture, they appear fo much “ like jewels of gold in a fwine’s fnout,” it would be much more to the credit of the Church of Scotland, not to pretend to dabble with fcripture, when they again presume, through the medium of their pastoral admonitions, to flander their neighbours.

The language adopted by the General Affembly, bears alfo a ftriking refemblance to the fpeech of the Pharifees refpecting Chrift : “ We know that God fpake by Mofes, but as for this fellow, *we know not whence he is.*” On another occafion they triumphantly afked, “ Have any of the rulers or pharifees believed on him ?” And then immediately follows their insulting defcription of all others : “ But this people, who know not the law, are curfed.” One of thefe, however, whom they held to be ignorant and accurfed, a fimple illiterate man, who had been born blind, knew whence Jefus was. He proved in the moft irrefiftible and conclufive manner, by the miracle which Jefus had performed, that “ this man was “ of God.” He confounded the Jewifh docters, for they could find no argument againft him, except abufive language and excommunication. “ Thou wafte altogether born in fins, and doft thou teach “ us ? And they caft him out.”

Is there not a wonderful fimilarity between the way in which the poor blind man was treated by the haughty pharifees, who boafed of their learning and fandity ; and the conduct of the General Affembly towards itinerant preachers and catechifts ? The former have paffed fentence upon the latter, as ignorant and accurfed men. But have they proved the juftice of their fummary decifion ? Is it not, on the contrary, very eafy to perceive, that their declamations tend to difplay their own grofs ignorance and pervation of divine truth ?

sidered, that the children in these *schools of sedition* are on the average only from six to twelve years of age, consequently they will not be able to take the field, at least these ten years, and half of these being girls, unless we raise an army of Amazons, with a virago Joan at the head of them, we shall be sadly short of soldiers to accomplish the design. I had not attempted to confute these strange suggestions by the language of irony, if it were possible a serious argument could have been produced against suppositions so preposterous and absurd.

I wish not to trouble you or the public with another letter on this famous admonitory epistle. I therefore briefly notice, her cuckoo-note observation, five times repeated, that she is *the established church*. The Pagan, the Mahometan, and the Papist, can just assume the same boast: and this pastoral letter tells her dearly beloved simpletons, that they were baptized in the same religion, and that it is where their forefathers went before them, directing them, like the pharisees of old, to worship God according to the tradition of their fathers; and this is their reason why they should continue with her. Can this be called reason? are these the arguments deduced by protestant divines in the present day? or will all this satisfy any minds which are capable of reflection? Can any thing further be concluded by it, than that the Church of Scotland has schismatically revolted from Rome, and that to Rome she ought to return?

But against whom is this urged? why, against a Society, avowedly established upon the most liberal principles; who enjoin all connected with her to cast no reflections upon any party whatever, while they are open to all parties, and are happy at all times to shew every mark of respect to such ministers of the established church, whose lives and doctrines are consistent with their profession; and yet, this very Society, established on the most peaceable principles, is to meet with the most out-

rageous abuse, while all positive and avowed secessions, which have hitherto left the church, not only lifted up, what they call a solemn testimony against her, but pointedly levelled their artillery of public invectives as her direct opponents. This, according to their consciences, in a land of liberty, they had certainly a right to do. Is the church better now, than then? are not the liberties of her members abridged by her courts from year to year? Might not others then act like those who have gone before them, without being followed by the most vehement and unjustifiable accusations?

I take my leave of this clumsy ill-written production, by noticing yet a farther inconsistency.

The tautological doctor, whoever he might be, who was the original fabricator of this production, having so plentifully referred us to *the church*, which is first placed as our unerring guide, at length condescends once to mention *the Bible*, and advises to consult the scriptures as *the supreme rule*; then the poor church becomes a subordinate rule in course, and if one should perchance contradict the other, what is to become of the church? or how is a man to be guided between these two contradictory guides? Like all other vindicators of their own establishments, it is taken for granted that the church and the Bible are in unison*. It would not have done, therefore, to have observed, that the church was only to be attended to, so far as is consistent with the word of God. This was the old protestant heresy, that knocked up in this country the finest established church that ever existed; and if people were to

* Mr Daubeny of England has lately favoured the world with his guide to the English church; he has the Bible also to prove, that *his church* is the only true one, and all but Episcopalians, in his esteem, are under a damnable heresy. Now, who is to settle the matter between the Presbyterians and Mr Daubeny? which has the greatest claim to the Bible as his guide?

be left too much at liberty to examine the Bible for themselves, and all religions by that Bible, it might lead them to discover that the Church of Scotland herself, once sound and good, and the glory of the land, is now sadly worm-eaten and rotten.

As the hour of preaching is at hand, I must refer my further remarks till a future opportunity.

I remain very affectionately yours,

ROWLAND HILL.

LETTER V.

My dear Friends,

Aberdeen, July 1. 1799.

WE have now to consider the third paper, the product of this famous Assembly, by which it will appear, that they design, if in their power, to *commence an immediate persecution.*

A committee was actually appointed to rake up every obsolete law recorded in the annals of persecution, entirely with a design to attempt, even in the present day, to inflict pains and penalties on all who presume upon any methods of education, unless sanctioned by their established church. And this committee actually produced its report, even from the wretched days of Charles II. They bring forward an act for the coercive establishment of Episcopacy; and presume to tell you, they have a right to persecute, unless you permit them to educate your children for you in the established Presbyterianism of the land: and yet conclude by

blindly quoting for us, the very law which defends us from the rage of their hard designs; a law that only and very justly demands, before protection be granted, an oath of allegiance to the state. We gain this double advantage by this cruel attempt. First, All our catechists are directed to take the justly required test, that they may confirm their *loyalty upon oath* *. Secondly, We now rest secure, being mercifully protected from the vengeance and cruelty of their high-priestly designs, by the mild and happy laws of our excellent constitution.

Whatever power the General Assembly may have assumed, or has a right to assume within their own jurisdiction, is no question with us: But even without their church, they mean to procure for themselves an exclusive and coercive power over the education of youth. Could Rome herself, even in the most wanton days of her tyrannic claims over the consciences of mankind, have presumed to grasp a larger stretch of power? Secessions of every denomination, according to them, are to forfeit their right to educate their own children, where, and how they please, when they chuse to demand it from them. Quakers, Papists, and every other sectary, are no longer to be dealt with by argument, but by force; the in-

* I request all my readers to prove their gratitude to God for the merciful protection of the civil power, from the first usurpations of the church of Rome, to these last efforts of the church of Scotland, both attempting the same power, and exactly using the same arguments. Who would wish to be governed by a political priest-hood, in preference to the chartered government of the nation, and under the protection of a King, who promised, when he first ascended the British throne, and has ever abided by that promise, *to maintain toleration inviolate*? And for the ease of peoples minds, I quote the act of parliament of 10. Ann, ch. 7. as it immediately respects toleration in Scotland. "It shall be free for "all the subjects in Scotland, to meet for divine service without "any disturbance, and to settle their congregations in what places "they shall think fit, except parish churches."

fructors of their children are to be tolerated no more ; the laws of parental authority are to be violated in the extreme, and the rights of conscience shall again be dragged to the altar of persecution, to bleed afresh, by the *unanimous* voice of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in the mild and merciful days of George the Third.

Brethren and fellow-subjects, happy as yet in the peaceful enjoyment of the liberty of our consciences, you have been told by one of their body, at the very same Assembly, that if the present Pastoral Admonition will not suffice to prevent, not only itinerant preaching, but the education of children, voluntarily committed to our charge by their parents ; the Legislature itself is to be addressed, that the natural unalienable rights of parents over the education of their children may be taken from them, and the teachers themselves persecuted by the civil sword.

And has that man sufficient vanity to suppose, that upon his requisition the British Legislature will attend a single moment to a design so dangerous and cruel ; to presume upon an attack so formidable on the consciences of millions, and so detrimental to religion itself ? Is it not notorious, that public seminaries, supported by the state, are too frequently the most neglected, because the most secure in their emoluments ? Do we, therefore, any injury to the one, if we establish the other ? Has not England possessed the unlimited privilege, ever since the Revolution ? and do we hear the bishops and clergy of their established church, clamorous to have the same power in their hands ? or is England to enjoy the liberty, and Scotland alone to be in slavery to the power of her priests ? Shall a large and highly respectable body of gentlemen and merchants of the first con-

fequence, collected from every denomination *, promote the very same design in England upon the liberal principles of universal toleration ; and on the very same subject, shall Scotland be intolerant, and shall her General Assembly, who should be the first to promote, be the first to persecute ? Shall every honest brick-layer, barber or blacksmith in the South of the kingdom, be at liberty to deal with his poor neighbours about their souls as he thinks fit, and as they shall chuse to receive him, provided he gives the justly-demanded security to the state ; and in the North, shall they, who hunt for souls, find him out, and persecute him for his well-designed zeal † ? Lo

* The committee of the Sunday schools in London, whose office it is to patronize the same institutions through England and Wales, leave the people entirely at liberty to conduct these schools, according to their own discretion, provided the children are taught to read their Bibles, and directed to some Protestant place of worship. It is well known, that children, finding the Sabbath evening the only time, being liberated from their labour, for their pastime and idleness, generally pervert that season for purposes the most destructive to their morals : And seeing how kindly and generally the same plan is adopted in England, I am beyond expression astonished at the designs of the Church of Scotland to abolish them, even by force of law. If she says, she only wants to have them under her jurisdiction, why should she expect such an exclusive monopoly, more than the Church of England ? If ignorant and bad men conduct them at present, is she not at liberty to set up better whenever she pleases ? And of this I am persuaded, that if these schools were not diligently promoted by some public institution, they would, both through England and Scotland, be brought into shameful and general neglect.

† I here refer to the Wesleyan Methodists, a large body of itinerant lay-preachers, so called, though unpopular in Scotland, yet widely extended in England ; and though I mean not to vindicate either the deficiencies of their learning, or all their religious sentiments, yet on all hands it is acknowledged, that very great and general good has been done by them. Yet we do not hear a single whisper that they, or any others, should be persecuted for some supposed premature excrescences of zeal, as will appear among all religious persons through the weakness of the human mind, notwithstanding the sincerity of the heart.

we hear that among our Southern brethern, decretals are issued forth, crying down a set of plain innocent men by public order throughout all their churches, as weak and ignorant enthusiasts, even as traitors and rebels, without a single proof produced? Are these the pure and holy attempts of the meek and humble followers of the Lord Jesus? or shall these be called the friends of candour and liberality, who, when stripped of every outward evidence, dare to judge the heart itself? or shall such be esteemed the advocates of humanity, and lovers of their king and country, who can presume on advice so dangerous to the peace and happiness of the nation? And yet how inconsistent are these men! While they even flatter themselves as being the children of persecuted parents, giving their forefathers the honourable title of “confessors and martyrs,” they now threaten, as far as starvation and banishment may terminate in death, to whet the glittering sword, to make confessors and martyrs in return*. And if any thing is to be understood by their own words, even several “worthy and well-meaning people” are to fall under the vengeance of the law. Thus they bear witness against themselves, that the righteous are to be persecuted by them; and if instructing the ignorant, detached from every sinister or vile design, be a righteous act, they are to be *persecuted for righteousness sake*.

* Before it pleased God to turn the fate of war against the French nation, it was supposed, that these wretched plunderers of mankind might have driven the poor persecuted old Pope to have sought an asylum in Great Britain, and that Holy-wood-house might have been appointed for him, as the place of his residence: If this event had taken place, how it would have charmed his Holiness to have visited the General Assembly, that he might have had the satisfaction to have discovered, in this liberal, rational, and enlightened age, how nearly the church of Scotland is concordant with the ancient mother-church of Rome, in whose faith our ancestors were all baptised and *bred up* in the *delightful* doctrine of persecution! As to their boast about confessors and martyrs, see Luke xi. 47, 48.

Is the civil sword then so weak as not to have within itself sufficient power to correct the seditious, and to prevent undue behaviour, without infringing on the laws of toleration? or can we suppose, that the mild spirit at all times manifested in the present day towards the consciences and conduct of every dissentient denomination, shall give way to the bitter inflammatory advice of a Scottish high-priesthood? Is it probable, that they ever will be able so to prevail with the magistracy of the land, as that less mercy shall be shewn to us than even a common thief, when accused, has a right to demand. *As we are informed*, may be a sufficient proof of guilt with them; but with us it will rest in return, as we have before challenged them to produce their printed paper against us, so now also to produce the *informer*. Let us see him face to face. We dare our adversaries to bring him forward. The requisition is reasonable and just. We are willing to meet him, or a thousand of them, at any hour, or before any magistrate, the law has appointed to protect us, in our peaceable and loyal deportment before the public.

In a few days from hence, you may expect another letter from

Yours sincerely,

ROWLAND HILL.

P. S. I cannot but remark the curious way these men have of quoting scripture; they suppose these catechists mean to claim a *lordly dominion* over the peoples faith. If they could turn the tables upon the General Assembly, and were about to persecute them in return, somewhat of *lordly dominion* would be conspicuous enough. They have also found out, that "a spirit of ambition and vanity" actuates these people. Vast scope, truly, for ambition and vanity in the style in which they go forth! but the General Assembly are a wise people, and they can see into a heart, as easily as they can look through a glass-window.

LETTER VI.

My dear Friends,

Huntly, July 3. 1799.

AS the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, have given us so fully to understand their own good opinion of themselves, and have concluded that others have no shadow of complaint, and that all complainants are their enemies, and consequently that they who act otherwise than she allows, ought to be persecuted for their delinquency; it is rendered necessary, upon the principles of self-defence, to throw, what otherwise might appear as an ill-natured retorted weapon; and after she has said so much against us, she should exercise her patience for a while to hear what we now conceive respecting her. There was, however, a time when the Scottish church shone with a peculiar lustre, and her beauties were all her own; she was an excellent nurse to thousands in her better days; the grace and glory of God was over her, and the "shout of a king was in the midst of her." Such as love her should lament how much she is fallen from her primeval beauty. Let none vauntingly triumph over her, but pray for her recovery. She was once warm for God; would that we could say no farther than that she is now neither cold nor hot. She manifests the mark of the worst of churches, and a state completely corrupted. She now draws her sword, and declares avowedly, she will persecute.

Some time, however, may still be allowed, to consider the justice of her fears, as the children now educating, as has been already mentioned in a former letter, will scarcely be permitted to take the field, at least till twelve years from hence. We are at liberty, however, in the room of all her own imaginary dangers, to point out those we conceive to

be real, as discovered in her own defects, and if many are driven to a distance from her, I believe they retire with regret, and wait for the better day, when she shall be restored to her primitive simplicity, and blessed with that returning day of grace, in which it shall be said among many thousands of the Scottish Israel, This and that man was born therein. But can she yet say, she now is what she once was. Doubtless her excellent Catechisms and Confession of Faith, still abide as the standard truths her ministers are engaged to defend ; but, by a too general departure from them, how little of the pure genuine doctrines of the gospel are known, at least in their influence and power, throughout this once highly-favoured land ! The fact is not less notorious, than the subterfuges are ridiculous, whereby many attempt to evade the charge.

We believe, notwithstanding, that there are many holy and good men connected with her, though for the present swallowed up in the vortex of the *unanimous* voice which is gone forth against us. We speak, therefore, only in the general. Is the pure and holy nature of God and his law, duly enforced ? As a wretched substitute for this, have we not a poor thin system of bare-weight morality ? Is not sin thereby made to sit easy on the conscience, and the great doctrine of inward holiness neglected ?

Is the fall of man now enforced as formerly ? The wound is slightly probed, and the daughters of Zion are slightly healed.

Is now the total inability of man, the doctrine in general heard from the pulpits of the Established Church ? Arminianism, once, and indeed till of late, the abhorred doctrine of Scotland, is now the too general subject, leading the deluded multitude to a confidence in themselves, and to a neglect of a divine assistance in the great salvation.

Is justification by faith alone in the blood and

righteousness of Christ, now brought forward as the only hope for the dependence of a ruined sinner? Salvation, by a partial obedience to a broken law, directly or indirectly, is made the general hope of the misguided multitude, at times covered with some apparent gospel expressions, which, notwithstanding, convey no gospel knowledge to the mind.

Are the almighty, the invincible operations of the Holy Spirit upon the souls of men purely and decidedly held forth, without the vile mixtures of human reason, natural conscience, and other wretched substitutes of man's inventing, supposing that a strange and inconsistent co-operation can take place between God and man in his completely fallen state?

Is the Godhead of Christ, and the doctrine of the Trinity, solemnly abided by? Many, even in these most essential points, are known to be defective, and these defects are connived at by the governors of the Church.

Is the doctrine of our eternal election in Christ, and the infallible perseverance of the saints, independent of any works, foreseen or foreknown in the creature, the doctrine held forth in the generality of their pulpits, though so avowedly the doctrine the Church of Scotland binds her ministers to support?

Are not, therefore, the ears of all ready to bear witness with us, that this departure from the truths of the gospel is very awfully, and generally to be lamented?

Is not her discipline still more corrupted than her doctrine? Is not the accustomed work of ministerial visiting shamefully neglected? Are not families by thousands living without family-prayer? Are not her communicants admitted to the Lord's table without any, or scarce any examination? Do we not see, therefore, those whose lives are loose and ungodly, permitted to attend? and does the dispensing of tokens answer any other end, but as it may witness

against those who slovenly give them away to any who may ask for admiffion ?

Are not the elders of the church oftentimes, like others, completely men of the world ? Is there, in general, any thought or confideration, whether they are men of prayer, or in any wife fit to affift the minifter in examining and admitting to the Lord's table ?

As the church of Scotland alfo has given her free remarks refpecting her fears, left we fhould intrude upon the church, men unfound in their faith, and incorrect in their morals ; in return, we ask, Has ſhe no minifters, notoriously men of the world, and who differ not from the characters of thofe who are altogether ſecular ? Is it to be confidered as a matter of furprife, that when the life is fo little correſpondent with that deadnefs to the world, that devotednefs to God, which ſhould fo eminently characteriſe the minifter of Chriſt, that the pure and holy doctrines of the goſpel are neglected by them, and a ſyſtem introduced, made compatible with the vices of the human heart ? And, laſtly, Is there any probability that any reform will take place in the diſorderly conduct of multitudes, who attend even upon the moſt ſolemn occaſions of the adminiſtration of the Lord's ſupper ?

Is it, therefore, a matter of furprife that houſes of ſeſſion, of various deſcriptions, have been erected almoſt in every town, and alſo in many villages throughout Scotland at large ? or ſhall it be uncharitably ſuppoſed, that mere caprice drove them to that diſtance they ſo rigidly maintain ? It might have been expected, that the General Aſſembly would have adopted ſome leſſons of diſcretion by theſe events. Is it not acknowledged, that coercive meaſures in religion, never answer the end deſigned ? In their own nature they are odious, irrational, and unjuſt ; and the reſult is natural, that thouſands

will again assuredly be driven from the church directly, as she assumes a government so cruel and severe. Have our prisons, for above a century, been filled with such delinquents as they now threaten to incarcerate? or will it found to the credit of the nation, that people are sent into banishment from Scotland, merely for keeping Sunday schools of instruction? And what will the public say, if, after all their charges of sedition, it should only appear to be a mean artifice of an interested priesthood, that they might avail themselves of the civil sword, to cover the dark designs of a malignant and avowed persecution?

Would it not therefore be much wiser and more consistent with the spirit of Christianity, to remove these causes of complaint, by a reformation among themselves, rather than by the persecution of others? Let the experiment at least be tried, and we will answer for its success. Should every parish minister, by his sound and zealous preaching, and by his holy familiar attention to the youth, render such visitors impertinent intruders, in a short time the cause of his complaints would cease to exist. His situation gives him every advantage he could wish for himself; and we are thoroughly satisfied, if he does not voluntarily retain these catechists as co-adjutors, he will not long have to deal with them as opposers,

I am, my dear brethren,

Yours affectionately,

ROWLAND HILL.

L E T T E R VII.

My dear Friends;

Glasgow, July 12. 1799.

HAVING in a former letter traced some of the real evils which the Church of Scotland has to fear, as existing within herself, I resume the subject.

While the tricks of infidels have been so curiously charged on the avowed friends of revelation, perhaps we shall find the Church of Scotland herself, inadvertently at least, a little too forward in the transgression she so wantonly charges on others. I observe *inadvertently* at least; for while the state pays any set of people for the religion they profess, there can be little doubt, from self-interested motives, of the loyalty of such, while they continue to receive the pay, whether the religion itself be true or false; and indeed all religions which are the mere invention of priest-craft and design, may easily be adopted, as caprice or interest may direct*. But Christianity is the garment which the real Christian alone can wear; and such a garment, when worn by the self-interested professor, furnishes the bystander with many a remark how ill it suits him. Nor will any encomiums passed upon themselves respecting their religion, their church, or their ministers, prevent others from making their free remarks, when sufficient evidence is given to suspect the truth and sincerity of such a profession, while the charac-

* I by no means design this as a general charge. A variety of good men, both of the English and Scottish establishments, who receive the reward provided by the state, most uprightly and conscientiously discharge the duties of their office. Nor mean I to blame the state, which provides them with the reward; but all things are liable to abuse.

ters of those whose religion is not only their own choice, but frequently against their interest also, will, generally speaking, notwithstanding the opprobrium they may sustain from the interested calumny of others, prove itself to be the religion of sincerity and truth.

The General Assembly, therefore, only skimmed the *surface* of the argument, when they brought forward the infidelity of France, as having done so much mischief to the state; though, had they gone a little deeper, and investigated the *grounds* of that infidelity, as originating in the evil lives and lax divinity of their clergy, it might have brought the application too nearly home to themselves, and to the motly groups contained in other establishments at large. When the grand essential doctrines of the gospel are, to say the best of it, only kept in the back ground, and a loose system of thin morality is produced as its substitute, it is easy to suppose, when the main design of Christianity is thus kept out of sight, as a dispensation of mercy to a ruined world, the volume of revelation is only felt as a useless fetter to the mind. Thus, thousands being seduced by the *masked* infidelity of the day, find it an easy transition to commence avowed infidels altogether.

Nor is this mere supposition; though the truth, I think, has been ill stated, so far as *all* the blame has been laid upon Papal superstition, however bad in itself, as having *alone* generated the infidelity of the day. The present cause, I believe, was principally from another source; it was the false philosophy of the protestants, not only in, but out of France; the Christless harangues of their ministers, of their *moderates* of the age, which did the business. These were the sentiments, which, when matured, produced the infidel. It was from these arose the scepticism of a Rousseau, &c. Nor are the like effects the less apparent in our own land. Can any thing

bear a nearer resemblance to the life of a decent infidel, than the conduct of those who have nothing but the easy, fashionable, polite religion now in vogue? or have they among them a single feature belonging to the genuine character of the Christian? Can it be supposed, that they believe a book, which tells them *not to love the world, nor the things that are in the world*; which bids them to *mortify their members which are upon the earth*; which demands *self-denial* on every occasion; *a taking up of the cross*, and *a spiritual crucifixion from day to day*: which charges *the lovers of the world, as being at enmity with God*; yea, as *spiritual adulterers and adulteresses* in his sight; which therefore directs them *to come out from among them, and to be separated*, and which even forbids them *to touch the unclean thing*? How, I say, do the generality of professors believe this holy, practical religion, or do they even pretend to believe it? Among some is it not to be softened down, as being only different strong Eastern metaphorical expressions, that are now to mean nothing, or at least next to nothing; or, as among others, that all is to be confined to primitive times? And if the holy practice which originally existed is, in these free and easy days of Christianity, no longer necessary, what signify the principles themselves, on which such a truly spiritual and exalted practice can maintain its ground? Now, the fact is, that thousands of these *polite* Christians are turning deists daily. And it is notorious from whence, and from whom their converts are made; they are sure to get them from their near neighbours. The journey is short, the transition is easy; it is much more rational to sin without a Bible, than to sin and believe it.

Cool reflection is far from those who are strangers to self-possession, through the phrenzy of anger or of pride; and it is the unhappy fate of such to be strongly agitated by a variety of imaginary fears. However

I suppose both sides of the question, would charge the same mental disease on each other, yet the Church of Scotland may assure herself, that our *migh-ty* catechists will still be directed never to commence the most distant siege against her, lest the destruction of her religion should also be the destruction of her loyalty; and then, should she turn against the state, and prevail, as she now means to set herself against us, Roberspiorean vengeance might be expected through the land*.

Meanly to ask the Church of Scotland to believe us, after the proud insults she has bestowed upon us, were beneath the injured innocence of an insulted beggar; but we request the public to give us credit, that while government is secured in the obedience of some, for the reasons stated above, she is not less secured in the obedience of others, who, though not paid for their loyalty, find it their privilege to continue in subjection to the powers that be, for *conscience sake* before God.

And if the General Assembly mean to prove the reverse, and to redeem their own characters from the charge of WILFUL AND DELIBERATE SLANDER, they must remember, that it is not every vague, *lying* report, so plentifully distributed to *gull* the multitude, which will be admitted as evidence. "As we are informed," is argument with them; but the *laity are merciful*: and somewhat like proof, will be expected from *them*, farther than what has passed at their *re-verend* bar, that we are the MONSTERS represented by them.

A full confirmation of this I meet with wherever I go; for since I have been on my tour †, it has been

* The reader is requested to take the above remarks as belonging to the Church of Scotland in her present state, not as an established church, or in the place she originally stood.

† From Edinburgh, round by Stirling, Perth, Dundee, Aberdeen, Inverness, and through the Highlands to Glasgow.

in my power to make diligent enquiry, and I believe with considerable accuracy, what have been the effects of this *spiritual proclamation*; and I not only find, "as we are informed," is the justly indignant sneer in every person's mouth; but further, as that body of church governors have been sinking year by year, so they now seem to have accomplished the business, in their furious zeal against these Sunday schools. They have moreover enlarged our congregations almost universally, and promoted a spirit of investigation and enquiry, unknown before; having accomplished the very end we most fervently desired*. The purity of our designs, and the utility of the schools, begin now to be thoroughly understood, not only as the children thereby receive much present good, but also gain the habit of a sort of religious acquaintance with each other, which must naturally tend much to their advantage while they continue to grow up into life.

We are sorry to observe the jealousy of some of the Seceders on this occasion. They should remember the cause is theirs, as well as ours. Should a persecution seriously commence, the law cannot be partial; the rod prepared for us will equally prove a scourge for them. We must suffer all as one, directly as the established church procures the monopoly of the education of children, exclusively for herself. Would it not be well, if mutual jealousies among different parties might now subside? Instead of each encircling themselves within the narrow limits of imaginary districts, and confining their labours to their own party alone; would not the credit of Chri-

* I have also seriously been informed, and from very good authority, that these men have so far committed themselves, that their Moderator is open to an action at law from the Secretary of the Society, for signing a libel. Though I wish them to be more *moderate* than these *moderates* mean to be to them; yet this is a good opportunity to provoke them to prove their charge.

stianity be highly advanced by all joining heart and hand, in contending earnestly for the grand essential truths of the gospel, as once delivered to the saints?

With my warmest wishes, that you may be wisely directed and graciously protected in every effort to promote the glory of God in the salvation of mankind,

I remain yours sincerely,

ROWLAND HILL.

LETTER VIII.

My dear Brethren,

Edinburgh, July 15. 1799.

I CANNOT close my correspondence with you on this subject, without a few remarks on the *unanimity* with which the vote of the General Assembly was carried against us. It is recorded of our Lord's own disciples, that at the time of his danger, they all forsook him and fled; and Peter, the most forward of them, was the deepest in the transgression. For this, however he went out and wept bitterly. We must leave our brethren, whom we yet love and honour, as preachers of the same precious gospel, to the reflections of their own consciences, in thus completely giving us over into the hands of our most malignant and avowed opposers. We will pray for them notwithstanding, and wish them success in the name of the Lord; and while the General Assembly has completely established the bar of separation, by denying gospel ministers the use of their own pulpits, even to ministers of their own denomination, if not educat-

ed among themselves, they cannot prevent us from wishing them much success in the contracted sphere of usefulness still allowed them. We trust, however, they cannot be displeased with us, if we chuse for ourselves, a more enlarged circle of action than they are permitted to enjoy. The scriptures of God demand it. We are to preach the gospel to every creature, God promising to be with us always, *even to the end of the world*; and the laws of our country allow the liberty we humbly claim. These good ministers themselves know the deplorable state of many parishes around them, and how much assistance is needed for them, while it is entirely out of their power, from the laws of their church, to give them that aid they so deeply require. We have not even to ask them, if we have been wrongfully accused:---They know, that neither against establishments, nor against the state, have we the least design. We pray for the increase of their numbers, and grieve for the oppressive conduct of their General Assembly, under whose power they so deeply groan, and for which cause alone some have been constrained to leave the establishment with regret, casting no censure on those who still continue with her, and requesting only to be understood for themselves as acting according to the solemn direction of their consciences before God. How far they themselves will feel the effects of this criminal silence, a future day alone can determine.

The General Assembly are now at full liberty to publish the most wanton invectives, and make even these good men the vehicle of these their most notorious slanders, while they can continue to create new laws, the most oppressive and severe, without the least controul. And it is most probable, the vengeance of their future designs will be felt on those, whose unjustifiable silence has given a strength and confidence to that body, the rod of whose power is already sufficiently

severe; and they must be satisfied that the present schemes of the General Assembly are as much designed against them, as us. What will these good men have to say in vindication of themselves, when, according to the information this day received from Aberdeen, the persecution is now actually commenced, one of the catechists having been committed to jail, for peaceably instructing the people in the parish of Alford?

How far these furious proceedings are to be continued, alone can be determined on a future day. It were well, however, if those ministers who were assured of the innocence of these sufferers, and who forgot to vindicate them in public, would remember them, when in prison. Our Lord directs them to this compassionate step: *I was in prison, and ye visited me.* Nor will it avail to bring forward any instances of weakness or indiscretion which may have appeared among these honest well-meaning men. Where there is much integrity and sincerity before God, a degree of imprudence may still exist. If any of these in any measure offend against the civil laws of society by a conduct impertinent or tumultuous, let the civil magistrate correct them. But if a plain well intentioned man goes into any town or village, and peaceably asks the poor people if they will allow him on a Sunday eve to instruct their children in the Assembly's catechism, and presumes, if he pleases, to converse with others thereon, who voluntarily commit their children to his care, where is his crime against the state? and why should the sword of persecution be drawn against him?

Matters must, however, soon be brought to an issue. We dare not betray our own consciences with the same ease as we have been betrayed by the silence of our brethren; and a few months will determine if a religious persecution is again to commence in the mild and merciful days of a British Sovereign, whose

first promise from the throne was to maintain toleration inviolate.

We lament also, that our brethren who preach the gospel in the established church had not been more aware of the bad effects of their silence, as it has operated too much against their own characters among the religious^{ly} public at large. We wish them to stand high in the esteem of the people, that their usefulness may be the more extended.

Having thus freely delivered myself before the public in vindication of my own aspersed character, and that of others, I have only to remark, that I should have been happy, if the cause would have admitted a softer style. But it has ever appeared to me, that language strong and pointed alone, would bring matters to an issue. A style cold and tame, would have sounded like a tacit acknowledgment of guilt. That great and good man, Dr Wither-
poon, in his Ecclesiastical Characteristics, judged a still severer style of irony as absolutely necessary, years ago, when the Church of Scotland had not taken such rapid strides of declension as in the present day.

I now commit these letters, the hasty production of the few vacant hours redeemed for this purpose, during my itinerant labours, to the candour of the public, adding my solemn prayers to Him, who is the defender of his persecuted church and people, that we may be kept near to himself, dependent upon his almighty power, steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; for as much as it is faithfully promised, our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

I remain, yours,

Unalterably and affectionately,

ROWLAND HILL.

