AN

APPEAL

TO THE

PUBLIC

FOR

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY,

Against the Oppressions of the present Day.

By Isaac Backus.

Brethren, ye have been called unto Liberty; only use not Liberty for an occasion to the Flesh, but by love serve one another.  

GAL. V. 13.

BOSTON:

Printed by John Boyle in Marlborough-Street.

MDCCCLXXXIII.
AN

APPEAL

TO THE

PUBLIC, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

INASMUCH as there appears to us a real need of such an appeal, we would previously offer a few thoughts concerning the general nature of liberty and government, and then shew wherein it appears to us, that our religious rights are encroached upon in this land.

It is supposed by multitudes, that in submitting to government we give up some part of our liberty, because they imagine that there is something in their nature incompatible with each other. But the word of truth plainly shews, that man first lost his freedom by breaking over the rules of government; and that those who now
now speak great swelling words about liberty, while they despise government, are themselves servants of corruption. What a dangerous error, yea, what a root of all evil then must it be, for men to imagine that there is any thing in the nature of true government that interferes with true and full liberty! A grand cause of this evil is, ignorance of what we are, and where we are; for did we view things in their true light, it would appear to be as absurd and dangerous, for us to aspire after any thing beyond our capacity, or out of the rule of our duty, as it would for the frog to swell till he bursts himself in trying to get as big as the ox, or for a beast or fowl to dive into the fishes element till they drown themselves. Godliness with contentment is great gain: But they that will take a contrary course fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. 1 Tim. 6. 6, 9.

The true liberty of man is, to know, obey and enjoy his Creator, and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in his fellow-creatures that he is capable of; in order to which the law of love was written in his heart, which carries in it's nature union and benevolence to Being in general, and to each being in particular, according to it's nature and excellency, and to it's relation and connexion to and with the supreme Being, and ourselves. Each rational soul, as he is a part of the whole system of rational beings, so it was and is, both his duty and his liberty to regard the good of the whole in all his actions. To love ourselves, and truly
truly to seek our own welfare, is both our liberty and our indispensable duty; but the conceit that man could advance either his honor or happiness, by disobedience instead of obedience, was first injected by the father of lies, and all such conceits ever since are as false as he is.

Before man imagined that submission to government, and acting strictly by rule was confinement, and that breaking over those bounds would enlarge his knowledge and happiness, how clear were his ideas! (even so as to give proper names to every creature) and how great was his honor and pleasure! But no sooner did he transgress, than instead of enjoying the boldness of innocency, and the liberties of paradise, he sneaks away to hide himself; and instead of clear and just ideas, he adopted that matter of all absurdities (which his children follow to this day) of thinking to hide from Omnisciency, and of trying to deceive Him who knows every thing! Instead of good and happiness, he felt evil, guilt and misery; and in the room of concord was wrangling, both against his Creator and his fellow-creature, even so that he who was before loved as his own flesh, he now accuses to the great Judge. By which it appears, that the notion of man's gaining any dignity or liberty by refusing an entire submission to government, was so delusive, that instead of it's advancing him to be as Gods, it sunk him down into a way of acting like the beasts and like the devil! the beasts are actuated by their senses and inclinations, and the devil pursues his designs by deceit and violence. With malicious reflections upon God, and
and flattering pretences to man, he drew him down to gratify his eyes and his taste with forbidden fruit: and he had no sooner revolted from the authority of heaven, than the beauty and order of his family was broken; he turns accuser against the wife of his bosom, his first son murders the next, and then lies to his Maker to conceal it; and that lying murderer's posterity were the first who broke over the order of marriage which God had instituted; and things proceeded from bad to worse, till all flesh had corrupted his way, and the earth was filled with violence, so that they could no longer be borne with, but by a just vengeance were all swept away, only one family.

Yet all this did not remove the dreadful dis-temper from man's nature, for the great Ruler of the universe directly after the flood, gave this as one reason why he would not bring such another while the earth remains, namely, For the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; § so that if he was to drown them as often as they deserved it, one deluge must follow another continually. Observe well where the distemper lies; evil imaginations have usurped the place of reason and a well informed judgment, and hold them in such bondage, that instead of being governed by those noble faculties, they are put to the horrid drudgery of seeking out inventions, for the gratification of fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; and to guard against having these worst of all enemies detected and subdued, Enemies which are so far from being God's creatures,

§ Gen. 4: 15 and 6. 15. 16. and 8. 21.
tures, that strictly speaking, they have no being at all in themselves, only are the privation of his creatures well-being; therefore sin with it's offspring death, will, as to those who are saved, be swallowed up in victory. Sin is an enemy both to God and man, which was begotten by Satan, and was conceived and brought forth by man; for lust when it is conceived bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.

Now how often have we been told, that he is not a freeman but a slave, whose person and goods are not at his own but another's disposal? And to have foreigners come and riot at our expense and in the fruit of our labours, has often been represented to be worse than death. And should the higher powers appear to deal with temporal oppressors according to their deserts, it would seem strange indeed, if those who have suffered intolerably by them, should employ all their art and power to conceal them, and so to prevent their being brought to justice! But how is our world filled with such madness concerning spiritual tyrants! How far have pride and infidelity, covetousness and luxury, yea deceit and cruelty, those foreigners which came from hell, carried their influence, and spread their baneful mischiefs in our world! Yet who is willing to own that he has been deceived and enslaved by them? Who is willing honestly to bring them forth to justice! All acknowledge that these enemies are among us, and many complain aloud of the mischiefs that they do; yet even those who lift their heads so high as to laugh at

|| Eccl. 7. 29. 1 Pet. 2. 11. Jam. 1. 14, 15.||
at the atonement of Jesus, and the powerful influences of the Spirit, and all public & private devotion, are at the same time very unwilling to own that they harbour pride, insidelity, or any other of those dreadful tyrants. And nothing but the divine law refered to above, brought home with convincing light and power, can make them truly sensible of the soul-slavery that they are in: and 'tis only the power of the gospel that can set them free from sin, so as to become the servants of righteousness: can deliver them from these enemies, so as to serve God in holiness all their days. And those who do not thus know the truth, and have not been made free thereby, if yet have never been able in any country to sublitt long without some sort of government; neither could any of them ever make out to establish any proper government without calling in the help of the Deity. However absurd their notions have been, yet they have found human light and power to be so short and weak, and able to do so little toward watching over the conduct, and guarding the rights of individuals, that they have been forced to appeal to heaven by oaths, and to invoke assistance from thence to avenge the cause of the injured upon the guilty. Hence it is so far from being necessary for any man to give up any part of his real liberty in order to submit to government, that all nations have found it necessary to submit to some government in order to enjoy any liberty and security at all.

We

We are not insensible that the general notion of liberty, is for each one to act or conduct as he pleases; but that government obliges us to act toward others by law and rule, which in the imagination of many, interferes with such liberty; though when we come to the light of truth, what can possibly prevent it's being the highest pleasure, for every rational person, to love God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself, but corruption and delusion? which, as was before noted, are foreigners and not originally belonging to men. Therefore the divine argument to prove, that those who promise liberty while they despise government are servants of corruption is this; For of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage. 2 Pet. 2. 18, 19. He is so far from being free to act the man, that he is a bond slave to the worst of tyrants. And not a little of this tyranny is carried on by such an abuse of language, as to call it liberty, for men to yield themselves up, to be so foolish, disobedient and deceived, as to serve divers lusts and pleasures. Tit. 3. 3.

Having offered these few thoughts upon the general nature of government and liberty, it is needful to observe, that God has appointed two kinds of government in the world, which are distinct in their nature, and ought never to be confounded together; one of which is called civil, the other ecclesiastical government. And tho' we shall not attempt a full explanation of them, yet some essential points of difference between them are necessary to be mentioned, in order truly to open our grievances.
strove very hard to have the church govern the world, till they lost their charter; since which they have yielded to have the world govern the church, as we shall proceed to shew.

SECTION II.

A brief view of how civil and ecclesiastical affairs are blended together among us, to the depriving of many of God's people of that liberty of conscience which he has given them.

We are not insensible than an open appearance against any part of the conduct of men in power, is commonly attended with difficulty and danger; and could we have found any way wherein with clearness we could have avoided the present attempt, we would gladly have taken it. But our blessed Lord & only Redeemer, has commanded us, to stand fast in the liberty where with he has made us free; and things appear so to us at present that we cannot see how we can fully obey this command, without refusing any active compliance with some laws about religious affairs that are laid upon us. And as those who are interested against us, often accuse us of complaining unreasonably, we are brought under a necessity of laying open particular facts which otherwise we would gladly have concealed: and all must be sensible that there is a vast difference between exposing the faults, either of individuals or communities, when the cause of truth and equity would suffer without it, and the doing of it without any such occasion. We view it to be our incumbent duty, to render un-
to Cæsar the things that are his, but that it is of as much importance not to render unto him any thing that belongs only to God, who is to be obeyed rather than man. And as it is evident to us, that God always claimed it as his sole prerogative to determine by his own laws, what his worship shall be, who shall minister in it, and how they shall be supported; so it is evident that their prerogative has been, and still is, encroached upon in our land. For,

1. Our legislature claim a power to compel every town and parish within their jurisdiction, to set up and maintain a pedobaptist worship among them; although it is well known, that infant baptism is never express'd in the Bible, only is upheld by men's reasonings, that are chiefly drawn from Abraham's covenant which the Holy Ghost calls, The covenant of circumcision, Acts 7. 8. And as circumcision was one of the handwriting of ordinances which Christ has blotted out, where did any state ever get any right to compel their subjects to set up a worship upon that covenant?

2. Our ascended Lord gives gifts unto men in a sovereign way as seems good unto him, and he requires Every man, as he has received the gift, even so to minister the same; and he reproved his apostles when they forbid one who was improving his gift, because he followed not them. 1 Pet. 4. 10, 11. Luk. 9. 49. But the Massachusetts legislature, while they claim a power to compel each parish to settle a minister, have also determined that he must be one, who
has either an academical degree, or a testimonial in his favour from a majority of the ministers in the county where the parish lies. So that let Christ give a man ever so great gifts, yet hereby these ministers derive a noble power from the state, to forbid the improvement of the same, if he follows not their schemes. ¶ And if the apostles assumed too much in this respect to themselves, even when their Lord was with them, can it be any breach of charity to conclude that ministers are not out of danger of doing the like now? especially if we consider how interest operates in the affair! For,

3. Though the Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel; or by the free communications to them, which his gospel will produce. 1 Cor. 9. 13, 14. Gal. 6. 6. 7. Yet the ministers of our land have chosen to live by the law; and as a reason therefor, one of their most noted writers, instead of producing any truth of God, recites the tradition of a man, who said, "Ministers of the gospel would have a poor time of it, if they must rely on a free contribution of the people for their maintenance." And he says, "The laws of the pro-

¶ It has been the custom of minister's who are settled in this way, for these thirty years past, to apply the gain-saying of Cere to those who have dissentenced from them; as if they were as certainly in the right way, as Moses and Aaron were. And 16 ministers in the county of Windham, in a public letter to their people in 1744, file theirs, "The instituted churches;" and those who had withdrawn from them, "uninstituted worship;" and then they go on to assert, that Deut. 13, prove that the people, "May not go after it, any more than—after a false god." p. 42. 43.
ince having had the royal approbation to ratify them, they are the king's laws. By these laws it is enacted, that there shall be a public worship of God in every plantation; that the person elected by the majority of the inhabitants to be so, shall be looked upon as the minister of the place; that the salary for him, which they shall agree upon, shall be levied by a rate upon all the inhabitants. In consequence of this, the minister thus chosen by the people, is (not only Christ's but also) in reality, the king's minister; and the salary raised for him, is raised in the king's name, and is the king's allowance unto him.†

Now who can hear Christ declare, that his kingdom is, not of this world, and yet believe that this blending of church and state together can be pleasing to him? For though their laws call them "orthodox ministers," yet the grand test of their orthodoxy, is the major vote of the people, be they saints or sinners, believers or unbelievers. This appears plain in the foregoing quotation; and another of their learned writers lately says, "It is the congregation in its parochal congregational capacity, that the law considers; and this as such does not enough partake of an ecclesiastical nature to be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction."‡

Hence their ministers and churches must become subject to the court, and to the majority of

† Dr. Cotton Mather's Ratio Disciplinae; or faithful account of the discipline professed and practised in the churches of New-England, 1726. p. 20.
‡ Dr. Stiles on the christian union. p. 83.
of the parish in order to have their salary raised in the king's name: But how are either of them in the mean time subject to the authority of Christ in his church? How can any man reconcile such proceedings to the following commands of our Master which is in heaven? Mat. 23. 9, 10. What matter of grief and lamentation is it, that men otherwise so knowing and justly esteemed, should by the traditions of men be carried into such a crooked way as this is! for though there is a show of equity in allowing every society to choose it's own minister; yet let them be ever so unanimous for one who is of a different mode from the court, their choice is not allowed. Indeed as to doctrine ministers who preach differently, yea directly contrary to each other, about Christ and his salvation, yet are supported by these laws which at the same time limit the people to one circumstantial mode.

It is true the learned author just now quoted says, "If the most of the inhabitants in a plantation are episcopalian, they will have a minister of their own persuasion; and the dissenters, in the place, if there be any, must pay their proportion of the tax for the support of this legal minister." § But then his next words shew that they

§ According to this rule, whoever gets the upper hand may tax the rest to their worship; but when will men learn the madness of such conduct!

Sir Henry Vane, who was governor of the Massachusetts in 1636, but whom governor Winthrop obliged the next year to leave the colony, he at a time when he had great influence in the British parliament wrote to governor Winthrop thus: "The exercise and troubles which God is pleased
they did not intend ever to have such a case here; for he says, "In a few of the towns, a few of the people, in hope of being released from the tax for the legal minister, sometimes profes themselves episcopalians. But when they plead this for their exemption, their neighbours tell them, They know in their conscience they do not as they would be done unto. And if a governor go by his arbitrary power, to supercede the execution of the law, and require the justices and constables to leave the episcopalians out of the tax, they wonder he is not aware, that he is all this while, forbidding that the king should have his dues paid unto him; and forbidding the king's ministers to receive what the king has given him."‡

How essentially and how greatly does this constitution differ, and from the institutions established in God's word, both in their nature and effects?

1. In pleased to lay upon these kingdoms and the inhabitants in them, teaches us patience and forbearance one with another in some measure, though there be difference in our opinions, which makes me hope that, from the experience here, it may also be derived to yourselves, least while the congregational way amongst you is in freedom, and backed with power, it teaches it's oppugners here to extirpate it and root it out, from its own principles and practice.

"Sir, I am your affectionate friend, and servant in Christ, June 10. 1645."


‡ Ratio Disciplinae, p. 20, 21.
1. In their nature. Here you find that every religious minister in that constitution, is called the king’s minister, because he is settled by direction of the king’s laws, and the tax for such a minister’s support is raised in the king’s name, and is called the king’s dues: whereas no man in the Jewish church might approach to minister at the holy altar, but such as were called of God, as was Aaron: and the means of their support, were such things as God required his people to offer and consecrate to Him; and when they withheld the same, he says, ye have robbed me, even this whole nation; and it is represented as his peculiar work to reward obedience, and to punish disobedience in such affairs. * It is evident from sacred record, that good men in every station, used their influence by word and example to stir up their fellow servants to do their duty toward God in these respects; and good rulers, in conjunction with church-officers, took care to have what was offered to him secured and distributed according to God’s commandments. ¶ But what is there in all this that can give the least countenance to the late method, of mens making laws to determine who shall be Christ’s ministers, and to raise money for them in their own name! Christ said to the Jews, I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor


¶ 1 Chron. 29. 2 Chron. 31. Nehem. 13, 10—15.
honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only? John 5. 43, 44.

Even a heathen monarch, when he was moved to make a decree in favour of God's minister's and worship at Jerusalem, it was to restrain their enemies from injuring or interrupting of them, and to order that a portion of the king's goods should be given unto the elders of the Jews for the building of the house of God, and for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven. Ezra. 6. 6—9. Nothing appears of his levying any new tax for worship, only that he gave the articles there specified out of his own goods; yet some professed christians have imposed new taxes upon people on purpose to compel them to support their way of worship, and have blended it with other rates, and then called it all a civil tax. But as the act itself is deceitful so 'tis likely that the worship supported by such means is hypocrisy. For,

2. The effects of the constitution of our country are such, that as it makes the majority of the people the test of orthodoxy, so it emboldens them to usurp God's judgment seat, and (according to Dr. Mather's own account, which we have often seen verified) they daringly give out their sentence, That for a few to profess a persuasion different from the majority, it must be from bad motives; and that, they know in their conscience that they do not act by the universal law of equity, if they plead to be exempted from paying the money which the majority demand of them! And though in our char-
The king grants to all protestants equal liberty of conscience: yet for above thirty years after it was received, the congregationalists made no laws to favour the consciences of any men, in this affair of taxes, but their own sect; and it is here called arbitrary power, and even a forbidding that the king should have his dues, if a governor shewed so much regard to the Charter, as to oppose their extorting money from people of the king's denomination, for their congregational ministers. And perhaps the learned author now referred to, never delivered a plainer truth, than when he said, "The reforming churches flying from Rome, carried some of them more, some of them less, all of them something of Rome with them, especially in that spirit of imposition and persecution which too much cleaved to them."

These evils cleaved so close to the first fathers of the Massachusets, as to move them to imprison, whip and banish men, only for denying infant baptism, and refusing to join in worship that was supported by violent methods: yet they were so much blinded as to declare, that there was this vast difference between these proceedings and the coercive measures which were taken against themselves in England, viz. we compel men to "God's institutions," they in England compelled to "mens inventions." And they asserted that the baptists were guilty of "manifest contestations against the order and government of our churches, established (we know) by God's law." Though they professed

fessed at the same time that, "It is not lawful " to censure any, no not for error in fundamen- "tal points of doctrine or worship, till the con- "science of the offender, be first convinced (out "of the word of God) of the dangerous error "of his way, and then if he still persist, it is "not out of conscience, but against his consci- "ence (as the apostle faith, Tit. 3. 11.) and so he "is not persecuted for cause of conscience, but "punished for sinning against his conscience." * In reply to which Mr. Williams says, "The "truth is, the carnal sword is commonly the "judge of the conviction or obstinacy of all "supposed heretics. Hence the faithful wit- "nefes of Christ, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, "had not a word to say in the disputations atOx- "ford: Hence the non-conformists were cried "out as obstinate men, abundantly convinced "by the writings of Whitgift and others; and "so in the conference before king James at "Hampton court, &c." †

But says he, "Every lawful magistrate, whe- "ther succeeding or elected, is not only the mi- "nister of God, but the minister or servant of "the people also (what people or nation soever "they be all the world over) and that minister "or magistrate goes beyond his commission, "who intermeddles with that which cannot be "given

* Mr. John Cotton's piece which he called, The bloody tenet swafted. Printed 1647, p. 126. Mr. Roger Wil- liams in his reply, observes that Tit. 3. 11, and other texts which speak of church discipline, are perverted to sus- tain state-oppression and violence. p. 131.

† Williams's reply to Cotton, 1652. p. 192.
given him in the commission from the people.‡
If the civil magistrate must keep the church
pure, then all the people of the cities, nations
and kingdoms of the world must do the same
much more, for primarily and fundamentally
they are the civil magistrate. Now the world faith
John lieth in wickedness, and consequently ac-
cording to it’s disposition endures not the
light of Christ, nor his golden candlestick the
true church, nor easily chooseth a true christ-
tian to be her officer or magistrate. The
practising civil force upon the consciences of
men, is so far from preserving religion pure,
that is a mighty bulwark or barricado, to keep
out all true religion, yea and all godly ma-
agitratees for ever coming into the world.” ||

How weighty are these arguments against
confounding church and state together? yet this
author’s appearing against such confusion, was
the chief cause for which he was banished out of
the Massachusetts colony. And though few if
any will now venture openly to justify those pro-
ceedings, and many will clamour against them
at a high rate; yet a fair examination may plainly
shew, that those fathers had more appearance of a
warrant for doing as they did, than their chil-
dren now have, for the actions which we com-
plain of. For those fathers were persuaded,
that the judicial laws of Moses which required
Israel to punish blasphemers, and apostates to i-
dolatry with death, were of moral force, and
binding upon all princes and states; § especially

‡ Page 96. || Page 112.
§ Bloody tenet washed, p. 55.
ly on such as these plantations were. ¶ And how much more countenance did this give for the use of force to make men conform to what they believed to be the right way, than men can now have for compelling any to support a way which at the same time they are allowed to dissent from? For the Jews also were required to pull down houses, and to have persons away out of their camps or cities, if the priests pronounced them unclean; and they were not permitted to set up any king over them who was not a brother in their church. Did not these things afford arguments much more plausible, for their attempt to compel the world to submit to the church, than any can have for the modern way, of trying to subject the church in her religious affairs to rulers, and the major vote of inhabitants, a great part of whom are not brethren in any church at all! Though the state of Israel was obliged thus to inflict death or banishment upon non-conformers to their worship, yet we have not been able to find, that they were ever allowed to use any force to collect the priests or prophets maintenance. So far from it, that those who made any such attempts were sons of Beliel, and persons that abhorred judgment, and perverted all equity. 1 Sam. 2. 12—16. Mic. 3. 5, 9.

Many try to vindicate their way by that promise, that kings shall become nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to God's people. But as the character carries in it's very nature, an impartial care and tenderness for all their children.

ren; we appeal to every conscience, whether it does not condemn the way of setting up one party to the injury of another. Our Lord tells us plainly, that few find the narrow way, while many go in the broad way; yet the scheme we complain of, has given the many such power over the few, that if the few are fully convinced that the teacher set up by the many, is one that causeth people to err, and is so far from bringing the pure gospel doctrine, that they should break the divine command, and become partakers of his evil deeds; if they did not cease to bear him, or to receive him into their houses as a gospel minister; yet only for refusing to put into such a minister's mouth, the many are prepared with such instruments of war against them, as to seize their goods, or call their bodies into prison, where they may starve and die, for all what that constitution has provided for them. In cases of common debts the law has provided several ways of relief, as it has not in the case before us; for here the assessors plead, that they are obliged to tax all according to law, and the collector has the same plea for gathering of it, and the minister says, I agreed with the society for such a sum, and it is not my business to release any. So that we have had instances of serious christians, who must have died in prison for ministers' rates, if christianity and humanity had not moved people to provide them that relief, which neither those ministers nor the law that upholds them have done.

Another

1 Prov. 19:7 2 John 10:11
Another argument which these ministers often mention, is the apostolic direction to us, to pray for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. But do they pray and act according to that direction? One while they cry up the great advantages of having religion established by law; and some have caused near as loud a clamour about it as the craftsmen did at Ephesus; but when it comes to be calmly repretented, that, Religion is a voluntary obedience unto God, which therefore force cannot promote; how soon do they shift the scene, and tell us, that religious liberty is fully allowed to us, only the state have in their wisdom thought fit to tax all the inhabitants, to support an order of men for the good of civil society. A little while ago it was for religion, and many have declared, that without it we should soon have no religion left among us: but now tis to maintain civility. Though by the way, it is well known, that no men in the land, have done more to promote uncivil treatment of dissenters from themselves, than some of these pretended ministers of civility have done. In 1644 the court at Boston pass'd an act to punish men with banishment, if they opposed infant baptism, or departed from any of their congregations when it was going to be administered. And after they had acted upon this law, one of their chief magistrates observed, that such methods tended to make hypocrites. To which a noted minister replied, That if it did so, yet such were better than profane persons, because said he, "Hypocrites give God part of his due, the our-

* Mr. Clark's narrative, p. 37.
strove very hard to have the church govern the world, till they lost their charter; since which they have yielded to have the world govern the church, as we shall proceed to shew.

SECTION II.

A brief view of how civil and ecclesiastical affairs are blended together among us, to the depriving of many of God's people of that liberty of conscience which he has given them.

We are not insensible than an open appearance against any part of the conduct of men in power, is commonly attended with difficulty and danger; and could we have found any way wherein with clearness we could have avoided the present attempt, we would gladly have taken it. But our blessed Lord & only Redeemer, has commanded us, to stand fast in the liberty wherewith he has made us free; and things appear so to us at present that we cannot see how we can fully obey this command, without refusing any active compliance with some laws about religious affairs that are laid upon us. And as those who are interested against us, often accuse us of complaining unreasonably, we are brought under a necessity of laying open particular facts which otherwise we would gladly have concealed: and all must be sensible that there is a vast difference between exposing the faults, either of individuals or communities, when the cause of truth and equity would suffer without it, and the doing of it without any such occasion. We view it to be our incumbent duty, to render un-
to Cæsar the things that are his, but that it is of as much importance not to render unto him anything that belongs only to God, who is to be obeyed rather than man. And as it is evident to us, that God always claimed it as his sole prerogative to determine by his own laws, what his worship shall be, who shall minister in it, and how they shall be supported; so it is evident that their prerogative has been, and still is, encroached upon in our land. For,

1. Our legislature claim a power to compel every town and parish within their jurisdiction, to set up and maintain a pedobaptist worship among them; although it is well known, that infant baptism is never express'd in the Bible, only is upheld by men's reasonings, that are chiefly drawn from Abraham's covenant which the Holy Ghost calls, The covenant of circumcision, Acts 7. 8. And as circumcision was one of the hand-writing of ordinances which Christ has blotted out, where did any state ever get any right to compel their subjects to set up a worship upon that covenant?

2. Our ascended Lord gives gifts unto men in a sovereign way as seems good unto him, and he requires Every man, as he has received the gift, even so to minister the same; and he reproved his apostles when they forbid one who was improving his gift, because he followed not them. 1 Pet. 4. 10, 11. Luk. 9. 49. But the Massachusetts legislature, while they claim a power to compel each parish to settle a minister, have also determined that he must be one, who
has either an academical degree, or a testimonial in his favour from a majority of the ministers in the county where the parish lies. So that let Christ give a man ever so great gifts, yet hereby these ministers derive a noble power from the state, to forbid the improvement of the same, if he follows not their schemes. ¶ And if the apostles assumed too much in this respect to themselves, even when their Lord was with them, can it be any breach of charity to conclude that ministers are not out of danger of doing the like now? especially if we consider how interest operates in the affair! For,

3. Though the Lord hath ordained that they which preach the gospel shall live of the gospel; or by the free communications to them, which his gospel will produce. 1 Cor. 9. 13, 14. Gal. 6. 6. 7. Yet the ministers of our land have chosen to live by the law; and as a reason therefor, one of their most noted writers, instead of producing any truth of God, recites the tradition of a man, who said, "Ministers of the gospel would have a poor time of it, if they must rely on a free contribution of the people for their maintenance." And he says, "The laws of the pro-

¶ It has been the custom of minister's who are settled in this way, for these thirty years past, to apply the gainfaying of Cere to those who have dissent'd from them; as if they were as certainly in the right way, as Moses and Aaron were. And 16 ministers in the county of Windham, in a public letter to their people in 1744, file theirs, "The incorporated churches;" and those who had withdrawn from them, "uninstituted worship;" and then they go on to assert, that Deut. 13, prove that the people, "May not go after it, any more than—after a false god." p. 42. 43.
vence having had the royal approbation to ratify them, they are the king’s laws. By these laws it is enacted, that there shall be a public worship of God in every plantation; that the person elected by the majority of the inhabitants to be so, shall be looked upon as the minister of the place; that the salary for him, which they shall agree upon, shall be levied by a rate upon all the inhabitants. In consequence of this, the minister thus chosen by the people, is (not only Christ’s but also) in reality, the king’s minister; and the salary raised for him, is raised in the king’s name, and is the king’s allowance unto him.”

Now who can hear Christ declare, that his kingdom is, not of this world, and yet believe that this blending of church and state together can be pleasing to him? For though their laws call them “orthodox ministers,” yet the grand test of their orthodoxy, is the major vote of the people, be they saints or sinners, believers or unbelievers. This appears plain in the foregoing quotation; and another of their learned writers lately says, “It is the congregation in it’s parochal congregational capacity, that the law considers; and this as such does not enough partake of an ecclesiastical nature to be subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction.”

Hence their ministers and churches must become subject to the court, and to the majority of

† Dr. Cotton Mather’s Ratio Disciplinae; or faithful account of the discipline professed and practised in the churches of New-England, 1726. p. 20.

‡ Dr. Stiles on the christian union. p. 85.
of the parish in order to have their salary raised in the king’s name: But how are either of them in the mean time subject to the authority of Christ in his church? How can any man reconcile such proceedings to the following commands of our Master which is in heaven? Mat. 23. 9, 10. What matter of grief and lamentation is it, that men otherwise so knowing and justly esteemed, should by the traditions of men be carried into such a crooked way as this is! for though there is a shew of equity in allowing every society to choose its own minister; yet let them be ever so unanimous for one who is of a different mode from the court, their choice is not allowed. Indeed as to doctrine ministers who preach differently, yea directly contrary to each other, about Christ and his salvation, yet are supported by these laws which at the same time limit the people to one circumstantial mode.

It is true the learned author just now quoted says, “If the most of the inhabitants in a plantation are episcopalian, they will have a minister of their own persuasion; and the dissenters, in the place, if there be any, must pay their proportion of the tax for the support of this legal minister.” § But then his next words shew that they

§ According to this rule, whoever gets the upper hand may tax the rest to their worship; but when will men learn the madness of such conduct!

Sir Henry Vane, who was governor of the Massachusetts in 1636, but whom governor Winthrop obliged the next year to leave the colony, he at a time when he had great influence in the British parliament wrote to governor Winthrop thus: “The exercise and troubles which God is
they did not intend ever to have such a case here; for he says, "In a few of the towns, a few of the people, in hope of being released from the tax for the legal ministers, sometimes profess themselves episcopalian. But when they plead this for their exemption, their neighbours tell them, They know in their conscience they do not as they would be done unto. And if a governor go by his arbitrary power, to supercede the execution of the law, and require the justices and constables to leave the episcopalian out of the tax, they wonder he is not aware, that he is all this while, forbidding that the king should have his dues paid unto him; and forbidding the king's ministers to receive what the king has given him."†

How essentially and how greatly does this constitution differ, and from the institutions established in God's word, both in their nature and effects?

I. In

pleased to lay upon these kingdoms and the inhabitants in them, teaches us patience and forbearance one with another in some measure, though there be difference in our opinions, which makes me hope that, from the experience here, it may also be derived to yourselves, least while the congregational way amongst you is in freedom, and in backed with power, it teaches its oppugners here to exterminate it and root it out, from its own principles and practice.

"Sir, I am your affectionate friend, and servant in Christ, June 10, 1645."

II. "Vanet."


† Ratio Disciplina, p. 20, 21.
In their nature. Here you find that every religious minister in that constitution, is called the king's minister, because he is settled by direction of the king's laws, and the tax for such a minister's support is raised in the king's name, and is called the king's dues: whereas no man in the Jewish church might approach to minister at the holy altar, but such as were called of God, as was Aaron: and the means of their support, were such things as God required his people to offer and consecrate to Him; and when they withheld the same, he says, ye have robbed me, even this whole nation; and it is represented as his peculiar work to reward obedience, and to punish disobedience in such affairs. * It is evident from sacred record, that good men in every station, used their influence by word and example to stir up their fellow servants to do their duty toward God in these respects; and good rulers, in conjunction with church-officers, took care to have what was offered to him secured and distributed according to God's commandments. ¶ But what is there in all this that can give the least countenance to the late method, of men making laws to determine who shall be Christ's ministers, and to raise money for them in their own name! Christ said to the Jews, I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honor.


¶ 1 Chron. 29. 2 Chron. 31. Nehem. 13, 10—15.
honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only? John 5. 43, 44.

Even a heathen monarch, when he was moved to make a decree in favour of God's minister's and worship at Jerusalem, it was to restrain their enemies from injuring or interrupting of them, and to order that a portion of the king's goods should be given unto the elders of the Jews for the building of the house of God, and for the burnt-offerings of the God of heaven. Ezra 6. 6—9. Nothing appears of his levying any new tax for worship, only that he gave the articles there specified out of his own goods; yet some professed Christians have imposed new taxes upon people on purpose to compel them to support their way of worship, and have blended it with other rates, and then called it all a civil tax. But as the act itself is deceitful so'tis likely that the worship supported by such means is hypocrisy. For,

2. The effects of the constitution of our country are such, that as it makes the majority of the people the test of orthodoxy, so it emboldens them to usurp God's judgment seat, and (according to Dr. Mather's own account, which we have often seen verified) they daringly give out their sentence, That for a few to profess a persuasion different from the majority, it must be from bad motives; and that, they know in their conscience that they do not act by the universal law of equity, if they plead to be exempted from paying the money which the majority demand of them! And though in our char-
The king grants to all Protestants equal liberty of conscience; yet for above thirty years after it was received, the congregationalists made no laws to favour the consciences of any men, in this affair of taxes, but their own sect; and it is here called arbitrary power, and even a forbidding that the king should have his dues, if a governor shewed so much regard to the Charter, as to oppose their extorting money from people of the king's denomination, for their congregational ministers. And perhaps the learned author now referred to, never delivered a plainer truth, than when he said, "The re-forming churches flying from Rome, carried some of them more, some of them less, all of them something of Rome with them, especially in that spirit of imposition and persecution which too much cleyed to them."

These evils cleaved so close to the first fathers of the Massachusetts, as to move them to imprison, whip and banish men, only for denying infant baptism, and refusing to join in worship that was supported by violent methods: yet they were so much blinded as to declare, that there was this vast difference between these proceedings and the coercive measures which were taken against themselves in England, viz. We compel men to "God's institutions," they in England compelled to "mens inventions." And they asserted that the baptists were guilty of "manifest contentions against the order and government of our churches, established (we know) by God's law." Though they professed

† Massachusetts history, vol. 3. p. 404, 406.
telled at the same time that, "It is not lawful to censure any, no not for error in fundamental points of doctrine or worship, till the conscience of the offender, be first convinced (out of the word of God) of the dangerous error of his way, and then if he still persist, it is not out of conscience, but against his conscience (as the apostle faith, Tit. 3. 11.) and so he is not persecuted for cause of conscience, but punished for sinning against his conscience." *

In reply to which Mr. Williams says, "The truth is, the carnal sword is commonly the judge of the conviction or obstinacy of all supposed heretics. Hence the faithful witnesses of Christ, Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, had not a word to say in the disputations at Oxford: Hence the non-conformists were cried out as obstinate men, abundantly convinced by the writings of Whitgift and others; and so in the conference before King James at Hampton court, &c." †

But says he, "Every lawful magistrate, whether succeeding or elected, is not only the minister of God, but the minister or servant of the people also (what people or nation soever they be all the world over) and that minister or magistrate goes beyond his commission, who intermeddles with that which cannot be given

* Mr. John Cotton's piece which he called, The bloody tenet couched. Printed 1647, p. 126. Mr. Roger Williams in his reply, observes that Tit. 3. 11, and other texts which speak of church discipline, are perverted to support state-oppression and violence, p. 131.

† Williams's reply to Cotton, 1652, p. 192.
given him in the commission from the people. If the civil magistrate must keep the church pure, then all the people of the cities, nations and kingdoms of the world must do the same much more, for primarily and fundamentally they are the civil magistrate. Now the world faith John lieth in wickedness, and consequently according to it's disposition endures not the light of Christ, nor his golden candlestick the true church, nor easily chooseth a true christian to be her officer or magistrate. The practicing civil force upon the consciences of men, is so far from preserving religion pure, that is a mighty bulwark or barricado, to keep out all true religion, yea and all godly magistrates for ever coming into the world.”

How weighty are these arguments against confounding church and state together? yet this author's appearing against such confusion, was the chief cause for which he was banished out of the Massachusetts colony. And though few if any will now venture openly to justify those proceedings, and many will exclaim against them at a high rate; yet a fair examination may plainly shew, that those fathers had more appearance of a warrant for doing as they did, than their children now have, for the acts which we complain of. For those fathers were persuaded, that the judicial laws of Moses which required Israel to punish blasphemers, and apostates to idolatry with death, were of moral force, and binding upon all princes and states; § especially

† Page 96.  || Page 112.
§ Bloody tenet washed, p. 55.
ly on such as these plantations were. And how much more countenance did this give for the use of force to make men conform to what they believed to be the right way, than men can now have for compelling any to support a way which at the same time they are allowed to dissent from? For the Jews also were required to pull down houses, and to have persons away out of their camps or cities, if the priests pronounced them unclean; and they were not permitted to set up any king over them who was not a brother in their church. Did not these things afford arguments much more plausible, for their attempt to compel the world to submit to the church, than any can have for the modern way, of trying to subjeet the church in her religious affairs to rulers, and the major vote of inhabitants, a great part of whom are not brethren in any church at all! Though the state of Israel was obliged thus to inflict death or banishment upon non-conformers to their worship, yet we have not been able to find, that they were ever allowed to use any force to collect the priests or prophets maintenance. So far from it, that those who made any such attempts were sons of Beliel, and persons that abhorred judgment, and perverted all equity. 1 Sam. 2. 12—16. Mic. 3. 5, 9.

Many try to vindicate their way by that promise, that kings shall become nursing fathers, and queens nursing mothers to God’s people. But as the character carries in it’s very nature, an impartial care and tenderness for all their children.

[Massachusetts history, vol. 3. p. 151.]}
ren; we appeal to every conscience, whether it does not condemn the way of setting up one party to the injury of another. Our Lord tells us plainly, that few find the narrow way, while many go in the broad way; yet the scheme we complain of, has given the many such power over the few, that if the few are fully convinced that the teacher set up by the many, is one that causeth people to err, and is so far from bringing the pure gospel doctrine, that they should break the divine command, and become partakers of his evil deeds; if they did not cease to hear him, or to receive him into their houses as a gospel minister; † yet only for refusing to put into such a minister's mouth, the many are prepared with such instruments of war against them, as to seize their goods, or cast their bodies into prison, where they may starve and die, for all what that constitution has provided for them. In cases of common debts the law has provided several ways of relief, as it has not in the case before us; for here the affereors plead, that they are obliged to tax all according to law, and the collector has the same plea for gathering of it, and the minister says, I agreed with the society for such a sum, and it is not my business to release any. So that we have had instances of serious christians, who must have died in prison for ministers rates, if christianity and humanity had not moved people to provide them that relief, which neither those ministers nor the law that upholds them have done.

Another

† Prov. 19 27 2 John 10 11
Another argument which these ministers often mention, is the apostolic direction to us, to pray for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. But do they pray and act according to that direction? One while they cry up the great advantages of having religion established by law; and some have caused near as loud a clamour about it as the craftsmen did at Ephesus; but when it comes to be calmly represented, that Religion is a voluntary obedience unto God, which therefore force cannot promote; how soon do they shift the scene, and tell us, that religious liberty is fully allowed to us, only the state have in their wisdom thought fit to tax all the inhabitants, to support an order of men for the good of civil society. A little while ago it was for religion, and many have declared, that without it we should soon have no religion left among us; but now tis to maintain civility. Though by the way, it is well known, that no men in the land, have done more to promote uncivil treatment of dissenters from themselves, than some of these pretended ministers of civility have done. In 1644 the court at Boston passed an act to punish men with banishment, if they opposed infant baptism, or departed from any of their congregations when it was going to be administered.* And after they had acted upon this law, one of their chief magistrates observed, that such methods tended to make hypocrites. To which a noted minister replied, That if it did so, yet such were better than profane persons, because said he, “Hypocrites give God part of his due, the out-

* Mr. Clark's narrative, p. 37.