ROBERT ROBINSON (1735-1790),
with special reference to his Religious and Political Thought.

by

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1950
Yes, Mr. Pitt did me the honour to hold me up as a son of sedition; but I have been too long used to the abuse of such to care about that. Charles Fox for everlasting for me! That reprobate is a lover of freedom; can you say as much of any priest's tool in the world? Did ever, in any country since the world began, the clergy make mankind virtuous or free. They compass sea and land to make proselytes ...but not to freedom and virtue.

R.R. in ltr. May 5, 1787

"Your English theologians did not much please me. I found but one man who really interested me, and him I consider one of the most excellent men I ever saw. This was Robert Robinson of Cambridge; with me he is the beau-ideal of a Christian minister. I loved him even for his weaknesses. With all his peculiarities, he was thoroughly liberal. In his attachment to the Baptists there was a union of child-like simplicity and kind-heartedness that was quite charming."

Paulus of Jena to Henry Crabb Robinson
CONTENTS

Preface page iv

Chap. I Introduction 1

II Beginnings and Decisions 7

III Cambridge and the Gathered Community 25

Pastor 27
Preacher: Village Sermons 32
Church Discipline: Town and Gown 62
Cooperation 70
Hymns and Translation 79

IV Religious and Political Thought 93

Dissent 93
Arcana
The History and the Mystery of Good Friday 122
A Plan of Lectures ... 134
A Political Catechism 153
Affirmation
A Plea for the Divinity ... 155
General Doctrine of Toleration ... 172

V Closing Years: History and Heresy 185

Farmer 185
Scottish Tour 193
Historian 200
Closing Years 212

VI The Message and the Man 227

The "system" 227
The Message 238
The Man 241

Bibliography 247
CHRONOLOGY

1735 Born at Swaffham, Sept. 27.
1741 Latin School.
1743 Grammar School at Scarning.
1747 Michael Robinson (father) dies.
1749 Apprenticed to London hairdresser, March 7.
1755 Conversion.
1756 Indentures returned.
1758 Leaves London for north. Preaching for Methodists and Independents.
1761 Inducted at Cambridge Church. Resides at Fulbourn and then moves to Hauxton.
1764 New meeting-house opened, Aug. 12.
1773 Moves to Chesterton.
1775 Purchases residence.
1780 Scottish tour.
1782 Purchases leasehold.
1784 Visit from distinguished Americans.
1785 Turns over farming and mercantile interests to son-in-law.
1787 Julia Robinson (daughter) dies, Oct. 9.
1790 Death at house of William Russell at Showell Green, near Birmingham, June 9.
This does not propose to be a full biography of Robert Robinson, yet, in setting forth the man and his thought in relation to the history and thought of the period, it has seemed best to follow a chronological order. Thus, after what I hope has been literally an introduction to Mr. Robinson of Cambridge, chapter II deals with his early years from 1735-1761. In chapter III which covers the period 1761-1774, I have dealt primarily with Robinson as pastor and preacher. In chapter IV, which deals exclusively with his religious and political thought as set forth in his controversial writings which fall in the period 1774-1782, I have left off the narrative of his life. Perhaps in reaction to Dyer who clutters his Memoir with too much Mr. Dyer, I have let Robinson speak for himself. Chapter V dealing with his commercial ventures and historical research, continues the narrative from 1774 till his death in 1790. In the final chapter I have dealt first with his "system", and then with the message and the man. As I have in my study been much interested and sometimes fascinated by the Cambridge pastor, I hope this effort is not too uninteresting, for that would be most unfair to the 'eccentric' Mr. Robinson.

Henry Grabb Robinson tells us Wordsworth termed Dyer's Memoir "one of the best works of biography in the language". A modern Baptist historian has termed this "monstrous exaggeration". It is the most complete on the life. Benjamin Flower, editor of the Cambridge Intelligencer, prefixed a short memoir to his four volume collection of Robinson's works, published in 1807.
In 1861 William Robinson, no relation but a successor to the Cambridge pastor, published a memoir in his edition of the *Select Works of the Rev. Robert Robinson*. In a preface he states that both Dyer's and Flower's memoirs are "not satisfactory" though both enjoyed "great advantages as biographers" because of "their intimacy with Mr. Robinson". These together with Robinson's published letters are the principal sources for the life and each has its value:— Dyer for his completeness; Flower for his defense of Robinson's essential Christian position at the close of his life, and William Robinson for the extracts he has included from the Church Book written by the pastor. According to the present minister of Robinson's church, the old Church Book, unfortunately, is either lost or destroyed. For his works, except for separately published volumes, I have used Flower's collection.

I desire to express my gratitude to my Advisors of New College, University of Edinburgh for introducing me to Robinson and for their kind encouragement. I should also like to thank the Rev. Ernest A. Payne, Senior Tutor, Regent's Park College, Oxford and the Rev. Graham W. Hughes, Secretary of The Baptist Historical Society for their help.

I have endeavored to consistently follow American usage in spelling.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Robert Robinson was minister of the Baptist Dissenting Congregation meeting in St. Andrew's Parish, Cambridge in the eighteenth century. To paraphrase Rabbi Hillel: "This is the essence of my introduction; the rest is but an elaboration of it". If this savors too much of homiletics, it may be excused in the study of a preacher.

England in the eighteenth century was coarse and cruel for all its concern with the classics. It venerated reason, but superstition was still rife among the people and sometimes it made its way into Parliament. It called itself Christian, but many had not heard of Jesus Christ, and others who had could "serve Him" by inciting the mob to riot and violence. It talked endlessly of virtue, but countenanced much immorality and vice. Before the century was out there was some reform, but much more was needed. Its characteristic was confidence. It was confident that now freed from the long night of the past, it could see all things clearly and see them whole. An age of unchallenged assumptions, it considered all things, not from any precarious existential present, but from those timeless, objective vantage points of "reason" and "nature", and easily found "truth". Willey tells us:

One meets everywhere a sense of relief and escape, relief from the strain of living in a mysterious universe, and escape from the ignorance and barbarism of the Gothic centuries. Nature's laws had been explained by the New Philosophy; sanity, culture, and civilization had revived; and at last, across the vast gulf of the monkish and deluded past, one could salute the ancients from an eminence perhaps as lofty as their own.\footnote{The Eighteenth Century Background, p.1.}
Trevelyan in his *English Social History* omitting the "perhaps" tells us the "upper class regarded the Greeks and Romans as honorary Englishmen". He gives the years 1740-1780 as most typical of the century. Then lived a generation of men "self-poised, self-judged, and self-approved, freed from the disturbing passions of the past, and not yet troubled with anxieties about a very different future" soon to be ushered in by two revolutions: one Industrial; the other French. As Robinson lived from 1735 till 1790 it will not seem strange that he shares the self-assurance of his time, which those living in the atomic age - having lost confidence in "reason"; having seen demonic forces let loose in this "best of all possible worlds" - easily become impatient with. One need not follow his career far to realize that he lived and thought in that "little moment of peace between the religious fanaticisms of the past and the fanaticisms of class and race that were speedily to arise and dominate time to come". He has learned from Locke, as had many others, the value of toleration and the *Reasonableness of Christianity*. Mystery is in bad repute though miracle is not. The former is an invention of the schools to cloak ignorance or evil design, while the latter is still sure proof of the divine mission of Jesus of Nazareth.

Robinson pastored a gathered community in Cambridge which means he was not a *London divine*, and so like others in the provinces was suspicious of much that went on in the center of the world. Still he was not isolated from the larger world as some clergymen serving remote districts. It is generally agreed that the efforts of Cambridge scholars and professors were not Herculean at this time, but 1 pp.339f.
there were stirrings from the prevalent slumber, mostly about subscription and the Person of Christ. In this activity Robinson took an outsiders part, for though he had good friends in the University, as a Dissenter he must always remain an outlander. Suffice if he be respected and not disdained. Through hard work and native ability he gains an audience among the Gown, who first came to scoff. In time he is respected. The eminent Dr. Ogden, surprised at any good thing coming out of Nazareth, can wonder why he keeps his light under a Dissenting barn.

Trusting so implicitly in "reason" and plain, simple "truth", Robinson found it hard to understand such a child of history as the Church of England. So his light remained under the Dissenting barn, and nobly did he fight that those barns might be respected by all men as temples. Seemingly with every chance of success the battle was waged in pamphlets and Parliament. In that enlightened age both "reason" and "natural right" were on the side of the Dissenter's petitions and only "privilege" and "prejudice" in opposition. With the glorious happenings across the Atlantic, and later across the Channel, how was it possible that the fight should be lost? But lost it was and the reason was not to be found in "reason". Not all Dissenters had rallied to the cause; some were guilty of sabotage. These were more at ease with Articles and Subscription than with the Rational Dissenters - that "cultural unit remote from and above the Nonconformist community". Yet "the history of significant dissenting opinion in the years 1763-1800 is the history of the Rational Dissenters".  

1  Some Political & Social Ideas of English Dissent 1763-1800, p.30.
The Cambridge pastor was not always in this select company, nor does he easily fit into this or any group. He never gets "remote" from ordinary Nonconformists, nor does he ever seem completely at ease with "cold, killing, rational dissent". There was "but one Robert Robinson", to use words attributed to Robert Hall, and it is hardly just or easy to "pigeonhole" him. All his days he is "a man travelling" who continues till death to think and is not afraid. So in his pilgrimage we shall see many of the currents of religious thought and life which swept what is commonly though erroneously regarded as an irreligious century in English history.

Born into the Church of England Robinson feels himself as good a Christian as any man in the realm till one day he hears Mr. Whitefield and all is changed. After hearing numerous London preachers and Mr. Wesley, we find him laboring in the Methodist vineyard. Finding fellow workers sowing tares, he and some others withdraw and form an Independent congregation. In time he discovers the New Testament teaching on adult immersion and becomes a Baptist. With them he remains till death, though he is never proud of would-be tyrants in the fold. Throughout there is a strong emphasis on virtue, proving that Tillotson's "Gospel of Moral Rectitude" had not been preached in vain. At first he appeared among the "enthusiasts", but soon shared with many of his day a deep distrust of "enthusiasm", which distrust may have been aided by the atmosphere at Cambridge. Always there is the individual exercising that "sacred right" of private judgment, though at the end he confesses that earlier he had held great names, as Dr. Clarke, too much in awe. Till death he fights that members of any religious community be fully accredited in the State, and does not hide his sentiment
that Church and State are best separate. In his own denomination he fights that each member may enjoy unhampered freedom to search and find in the Scripture without fear of expulsion, - within the congregation, not outside where their allowance or disallowance means nothing. Near the end there are hints that not only doctrines formerly mined from Scripture, but the Mine itself must come up for scrutiny. Robinson suggests, like Locke, that there are limits to the toleration.

Specifically Robinson deals with the relation of Church and State; the state of the Church of England; the proper constitution of churches; the doctrine of the Person of Christ, and the exercise of toleration in the case of free communion among Baptists. The questions and answers are for the most part those of his time. Dissent is now respectable, and in America the separation of Church and State has been the accepted solution. The Church of England is not now what it was, and hardly appears menacing. The argument concerning the Person of Christ seems ever to recur and reshape, and never to be settled. Baptism does not loom as a burning issue in a world of spy trials, "cold war" and hydrogen research.

Still, as the assumptions of the eighteenth century are woven into the American Constitution and as the relation of Church and State there is being called into question, this study is not without relevance. To a Baptist this minister who scorns an exclusive priesthood and ecclesiastical meddling in secular affairs is not uninteresting; his message of individual freedom and responsibility to God, though repetitious, is not tiresome. Unless we make the mistake of the eighteenth century, we can yet learn from that 'classic age' which though near seems so distant.
Such a Christian thinker as Albert Schweitzer warns this generation "which regards as absurd and little worth, as antiquated and long ago left far behind, whatever it feels to be in any way akin to rationalism" that it has not, and "must not think it has done with rationalism because the rationalism of the past had to give place first to Romanticism, and then to a Realpolitik which is coming to dominate the spiritual sphere as well as the material".

When it has run the gauntlet of the follies of this universal Realpolitik and has thereby got itself into deeper and deeper misery, both spiritual and material, it will discover at last that there is nothing for it to do but trust itself to a new Rationalism, deeper and more efficient than the old, and in that seek its salvation.¹

Note: In the footnotes, after the title has once been cited, the following abbreviations are used:

George Dyer, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson ..... Dyer.
E. Flower, Miscellaneous Works of Robert Robinson, Five Volumes ..... Flower, I,II,etc.

¹ My Life and Thought, pp.257f. Comparing Christianity then and now (1931) he says: "Many people find pleasure to-day in talking continually of how 'shallow' Christianity became in the age of Rationalism. Justice surely demands that we should find out and admit how much compensation was made for that 'shallowness' by the services rendered by that Christianity. To-day torture has been re-established. In many states the system of Justice acquiesces without protest in the most infamous tortures being applied, before and simultaneously with the regular proceedings of police and prison officials, in order to extract confessions from those accused. The sum-total of misery thus caused every hour passes imagination. But to this renewal of torture the Christianity of to-day offers no opposition even in words, much less in deeds, and similarly it makes hardly any effort to counter the superstitions of to-day. And even if it did resolve to venture on resisting these things and on undertaking other things such as the Christianity of the eighteenth century accomplished, it would be unable to carry out its intention because it has no power over the spirit of the age." pp.275f.
CHAPTER II

BEGINNINGS AND DECISIONS

The events leading to the arrival of Robert Robinson into the world do not make happy reading. His maternal grandfather, Robert Wilkin, a respected resident of Mildenhall, Suffolk was "possessed of some literature and property".1 Having married a widow with two children, the new family was soon enlarged by the addition of a boy, Robert, and Mary, the mother of Robinson. Unlike David Copperfield's stepfather, Mr. Murdstone, Wilkin became excessively fond of his stepchildren, lavishing affection and attention upon them at the expense of his own children. Mary nothing daunted "took considerable pains" improving her mind, and "forming her temper by the principles of christianity".

In her manners she was amiable, and, from her appearance when much advanced in years, had evidently been very beautiful. Several persons of property and respectability requested her in marriage; but the old man, having private reasons for keeping her at home, rejected their proposals.2 These "private reasons" are defined by others as "mere caprice" and "motives selfish, and otherwise dishonorable".3 At any rate Mary found the unnatural affections of her father, and his match-breaking unbearable. To effect her escape from home she married Michael Robinson without her father's consent. She was then past thirty.

Michael Robinson is kindly dismissed in the Dictionary

1 George Dyer, Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Robert Robinson, p.3.
2 Ibid. p.4.
of National Biography as being an exciseman of "indifferent charac-
ter". 1 Others are not so kind. Dyer says he "was not only a person
of an inferior station, but of a profligate life". 2 Another writer
agrees he was of inferior station, and afterwards - if not at the
time of marriage - "of dissipated habits". 3 He also had reasons
for the marriage. He hoped that through it he would come into some
of Wilkin's property. In this he was disappointed as the resent-
ment of Mary's father continued till his death and he refused even
to see Michael. The subsequent career of Michael is briefly told.
Disappointed in his hopes he began to treat his wife with neglect
and rigor. She, however,

...continued accompanying him to the various places,
whither he went in the character of an exciseman, and
recommended herself to many respectable families, particu-
larly clergymen's; supporting herself and family by her own
industry. 4

It was while they were living in this manner at Swaffham, in the
county of Norfolk that their third and final child Robert was born
on September 27, 1735. 5 Later Michael was called "in the course
of his profession" from Swaffham to Scarning in the same county.
Being sued for a debt he was unable to discharge, the hapless
Michael was compelled to leave Norfolk, and soon afterward died
(1747?) - "it is supposed, at Winchester". 6

While at Swaffham the two oldest children were appren-
ticed: the boy to a painter and the girl to a mantua-maker. Of

2 Dyer, p.4.
3 W. Robinson, p.xi.
4 Dyer, p.7.
5 D.N.B. vol. XLIX, p.40. ..."his own repeated statement; the
date, 8 Oct., given by Rees and Flower, is a reduction to new style".
Dyer gives 8 Jan., 1735. Cf. discussion in W. Robinson, pp.xif.,
who accepts 8 Oct., 1735.
6 Dyer, p.8.
her youngest son, Mary said:

Robert grew up a pretty scholar: he was seven years old when we left Swaffham, and had been at a Latin school a year and an half. His master was very fond of him, and used to say that he never knew a child who discovered such a capacity.1

On moving to Scarning the boy was enrolled at the grammar school there which was under the care of the Rev. Joseph Brett.2 As at the Latin school, so here the abilities of the young Robinson impressed the master who regarded him as possessing "large capacity, uncommon genius, and refined taste". He expected him to attain "great honour in future life".3 When Mary became unable to pay the fee for her son Mr. Brett kept the boy in school without payment. Here he gained "considerable knowledge" of the French language "which was the more easily acquired, as the French usher lodged at his mother's house".

With classical literature he was better acquainted than boys usually are at such an early period: he also wrote a neat hand; but seems never to have gained any knowledge of common arithmetic, - a defect the rather to be mentioned, as flowing from a prevailing omission in many public grammar schools.4

Mary, a member of the Church of England, hoped the boy might be sent to college with a view to his taking holy orders in the Established Church. However, when Robert was fourteen this hope had to be abandoned because of the family's economic difficulties. The friendly master tried to find the boy employment along the lines of his study and commensurate with his ability. His effort failed - possibly because the boy was ignorant of arithmetic, or because

1 Ibid. p.7.
2 This school could boast of others who attained eminence: Edward Thurlow, Lord Chancellor, and John Norris, founder of the Norrisian Professorship of Revealed Religion at Cambridge.
3 W. Robinson, p.xiii.
4 Dyer, pp.9f.
Mary was unable to give a premium. A friend in London wrote Mrs. Robinson that her brother would accept Robert without a premium if she would agree to a trade for her son. Mrs. Robinson agreed and indentures were executed bearing the date March 7, 1749, apprenticing the lad to Joseph Anderson, a hairdresser in Crutched Friars, London.

Though in later life Robinson never appears to have been ashamed of his early humble employment - contrary to the fashion of his day - it also appears that at the time the boy was more concerned with books and sermon "tasting" than in barbering and attending customers. A journeyman in the same shop while Robinson was an apprentice gave the following account of this period:

Robert Robinson was one of the most ingenious, industrious and virtuous youths I ever knew; and his master understood his worth. ...he was a fine scholar;...he possessed talents that would have qualified him to have been as good a lord-chancellor as his old schoolfellow, Lord Thurlow; it was not expected that he would serve out his time, and, before the expiration of his apprenticeship, his master returned his indentures: he was more employed in reading, than working; in following preachers, than attending customers; yet with the entire consent of both master and servants: we all loved Robert; we knew him to be an extraordinary youth, and concluded, that though now a hair-dresser, he would live to be a great man.

A diary kept by the apprentice at this time indicates that though the master may have understood his scholarly bent, the shadow of Robinson's future greatness did not prevent the master from chiding him for his present lack of interest in the work at hand. Anderson even refused the boy the use of a candle when he rose early "at five - at four" to pursue the learning he might have gained at college. Often when sent out on business the lad would return "with

1 Ibid. p.11.
3 Dyer, p.12.
his pockets loaded with old books purchased from different stalls," and perhaps Mr. Anderson was not entirely pleased. In the autumn of 1756 Robert attained his majority. At this time, or shortly before, Anderson returned his indentures and gave him a high character.

The preachers whom the apprentice "followed" while in London included Independents, Baptists, Evangelicals, and Methodists. Dr. John Gill "the most rabbinical doctor of his age", Dr. John Guise (Guyse), "celebrated for his Commentary on the New Testament"; and the Rev. William Romaine - the Evangelical, persecuted for popularity with the poor - were favorites. But there were others not so famous who warmed the young man's heart. He tells us in his dairy:

I went to the monthly meeting at Mr. Hall's, and found it was good to be there. A good man in his own hair, from Deptford, prayed first; then old Mr. Crookshanks preached a sweet sermon, very awakening, from Hebrews xi.7:

He adds that "the oldest preachers are most thundering of late. God prosper them!" He also heard Mr. John Wesley and "liked him well", but it was George Whitefield, his spiritual father - "a tender father, who I trust will excuse my infirmities" - to whom he opened his heart.

The influence of Whitefield upon Robinson began when the apprentice was but seventeen. He with a group of other boys set out on Sunday morning, May 24, 1752 for a holiday. Encountering

1 Flower, I, p.xv.
2 D.N.B. vol. XLIX, p.41.
3 Dyer, pp.17f.
4 J.H.Overton and F.Relton, The English Church From the Accession of George I. to the End of the Eighteenth Century, pp.152f.
5 W. Robinson, p.xvii. W.R. dates this entry 1757.
6 Ltr. to G. Whitefield (1758?), in ibid. pp.169ff.
an old woman who pretended to tell fortunes, they engaged her to peer into their futures. That she might the better perform her service they "made her thoroughly intoxicated with spirits". The woman informed Robinson that he should live to a great age and "see his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren growing up around him". The youth, struck by the prediction, pictured himself a great burden to the young people in his old age. Thinking how he might then endear himself to the young he decided that the best method for an old man would be "sitting and telling them pleasant and profitable stories". To do this he must see and hear and note down everything "rare and wonderful". Thus, he said,

...shall my company be rendered pleasant, and I shall be respected rather than neglected in old age. Let me see, what can I acquire first? Oh! here is the famous methodist preacher, Whitefield; he is to preach, they say, to-night; I will go and hear him.¹

So it was that a very young man anxious about his old age made his way to the Tabernacle to hear the famous Mr. Whitefield expound Matthew iii.7. However, the youth who had come "to spy the nakedness of the land...to pity the folly of the preacher, the infatuation of the hearers, and to abhor the doctrine"², instead of hearing for others, was enabled to hear for himself, and to see what a "deplorable situation" his soul was in. This, in his own words, is what happened:

Mr. Whitefield, described the Sadducean character; this did not touch me. I thought myself as good a christian as any man in England. From this he went to that of the Pharisees. He described their exterior decency, but observed that the poison of the viper rankled in their hearts. This rather shook me. At length, in the course of his sermon, he abruptly broke off; paused for a few moments; then burst into a flood of tears; lifted up his hands and eyes, and exclaimed, 'O my hearers! the wrath's to come, the wrath's to come!' These

² Ltr. to G. Whitefield, May 10, 1758, in ibid. p.166.
words sank into my heart, like lead in the waters. I wept, and when the sermon was ended retired alone. For days and weeks I could think of little else. Those awful words would follow me, wherever I went, 'The wrath's to come, the wrath's to come'.

Afterward he "constantly attended the Tabernacle for two years and seven months; cut down for sin, groaning for deliverance, and yet dare not say, Christ was mine."

But at the end of that time the Lord was pleased to let him "experimentally know the happiness of that person whose iniquities were covered, and to whom the Lord will not impute sin". On Tuesday the 10th of December, 1755, he "found full and free forgiveness through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen". Many times he heard Mr. Whitefield expound scripture "very sweetly" at the Tabernacle. On one occasion the great preacher "read one or two of his spiritual son's letters" while Robinson was present. The enraptured young man noting this great event in his diary added "what hath God wrought!"

It was not long before others besides Mr. Whitefield came to know of this earnest young man and his religious profession. They urged him to consider seriously the ministry. In spite of disclaimers in his diary, - such as the following - it appears that his mind was agreeable to such counsel.

It is strange...that people all run away with a notion of my being called to the ministry. Lord, accomplish thy will, is all I have to say. If my king sends an ambassador, I know he will send credentials with him.

This night I supped at_____who wants me to join a church, that I may be sent out into the ministry. But, God forbid, that I should run, before I am sent, or, being sent,

1 W. Robinson, p.xv.
2 Ltr. to G. Whitefield, May 10, 1758, in ibid. pp.166ff.
3 Ibid. p.xv.
4 Dyer, p.18.
I should seek any sinister end! Oh! the weight, the insupportable weight of the ministry! 1

Dyer feels that the young man as early as his nineteenth year entertained notions of the ministry. In case he might be sent, the diffident young man would preach for an hour at a time in his own room to himself. These solitary sessions evidently proved disheartening for he had left London for the country and farming by May 25, 1758. On that date Whitefield wrote asking the youth why he had left London without informing him. Robinson replied:

You ask, Sir, why I did not make myself known to you in London? The plain truth is this, I had an abiding sense of my own unworthiness upon my mind, and thought your conversation too great an honour for me to enjoy.

He then goes on to tell why he left the city.

The motives that induced me to leave London, were partly at the desire of my relations, to see them; and, partly for my own health's sake (for I enjoy my health better in the country than in London); more than that, though my London friends told me God had a work for me to do in his vineyard, yet my fear of running before I was sent, made me determine, - Let God send by whom he would, I would not go. Could I help it? 2

His intent "to settle in the farming business in the country", was not to be. In the country were many awakened souls who had the word of God preached to them only now and then. The young man met often with them "of evenings to sing, and pray, and speak our experience". They sought him to speak among them. Neighboring dissenting ministers joined in the plea. The letter continued:

I long refused; till they wrung their hands and wept bitterly; and told me they were starving for the word; and God had committed to me the mystery of the gospel; and I sinned in hiding it. With many doubts and fears, at last I agreed; and must not say, "The Lord was a barren wilderness to me."

1 Dyer, p.23. Dyer says these diaries contain "little else, but what is called by the methodists 'experience;' which is usually composed of heads of self-examination, temptation, spiritual desertion, consolation, support, &c", pp.22f.
2 Ltr. to G. Whitefield sent from Norwich, no date (1758) in W. Robinson, pp.169ff.
People from surrounding towns came to hear and soon the young lay preacher was "invited higher up the country". A Mr. Wheatley heard of his preaching and sent his clerk asking Robinson to come to Norwich. Robinson complied, and supposes that Mr. Whitefield has heard particulars of his conduct at Norwich.

His first sermon had been "preached to a few poor people at Mildenhall, from Job, ix:2". At the tabernacle in Norwich, he first preached to a large congregation. Preaching from Rev:ii.8, 9,10, he felt: "The Lord was very gracious to me, and gave me strength equal to my day. He favoured me with great boldness, and owned the word to me." His preaching was extemporaneous, as was the practice of Methodists at that time. Like other "enthusiasts" Robinson entered the pulpit entirely dependent on the Spirit for what he would preach. On one occasion he could not "get a text from the Lord, till the last verse of the hymn". Finally from Solomon's Song came the words: "Comfort me with apples, for I am sick of love". Yet this text was not without some prior meditation for he says that he would have preached from it before but he could not tell the meaning of "being sick of love". But on this occasion "the Lord opened it to me". He was a long way from the man who should believe that Song "nothing but a pretty love song, addressed to some mortal beauty".

Already Robinson was preaching several times a week and in a number of places. Before the end of spring, he was preaching

1 Later he published Robinson's hymn, "Come, thou fount of ev'ry blessing"; see W. Robinson, p.295.
2 Dyer, pp.25f.
to a church at Norwich, numbering forty members. He reports that "on a Lord's-day" there are "several hundreds of hearers, who seem very serious, and inquiring the way to Zion". On week-days there were "abundance of people to hear". When he wasn't preaching in Norwich, the country people often sent for him,

...and multitudes come to hear, so that the preaching-houses will not hold them. However, I can go unto the commons; and, blessed be God, there is room there; and, what is best of all, there is room enough to spare in my Master's house.¹

It appears that at this time he was engaged solely in religious work. He writes that by the time he has preached in public, discharged the duties of a pastor to his people, and spent time in private devotion, his day is gone. His religious tasks did not claim all his time, for it was during this period that he became acquainted with Ellen Payne of Norwich who was later to become his wife. Understandably, he did not write the Rev. Mr. Whitefield a complete account of his activities.

Many of those of the "new enthusiasm" were sure that the fiery darts of the evil one had exacted a heavy toll among the ranks of the Establishment, but the young preacher was soon to find that there were casualties even among the Methodists. Among the preachers with whom he associated in Norwich was one of an immoral character who "could neither agree with Robinson nor the other ministers". Some of the laity were also "grossly profligate".²

The young preacher with thirteen others withdrew from the Methodists in 1758 and formed a "congregational or independent" church in the parish of St. Paul, Norwich. Robinson became the minister and the people raised twelve pounds a year towards his support.

¹ Ltr. to G. Whitefield (1758?) in W. Robinson, p.170.
² Dyer, pp.30f.
At this church Robinson administered the Lord's Supper and baptized infants. Just when he rejected infant baptism is not clear. Dyer passes over the change of view lightly, merely stating that before leaving Norfolk "he had been baptized according to the practice of the baptist churches, at Ellingham, by a baptist minister,...Dunkhorn..., well known among the Calvinistic dissenters of that county as a writer of hymns".1 Flower writes that "on his leaving this church, he...became an antipaedobaptist: his opinion, in this respect, he firmly, although without bigotry, retained to the close of life".2 William Robinson writes that before leaving the church at Norwich his opinions as to infant baptism "had undergone an entire change". One might think that the call from the church in Cambridge raised the problem of baptism, and necessitated a decision, but for the following story from Dr. Toulmin.

He was invited to the baptism of a child; the minister who was to perform the service keeping the company in long expectation of his appearance, some one suggested that supposing the child were not baptized at all, he saw not how it could affect his happiness. Though the conversation was not pursued, the hint struck Mr. Robinson's mind, and he immediately determined to read the New Testament with this particular view, to examine what is said concerning the baptism of infants. He, accordingly, began with the gospel of Matthew, and, in succession, perused the historical and epistolary books, in expectation that he should find in every following part what he had not met with in the preceding parts of the sacred volume, namely, passages recommending and urging this rite. But observing, on the whole, a total silence about it, he thought it his duty to relinquish the practice as without foundation in the rule of our faith, which appeared to him to speak only of the baptism of believers.3

The story rings true to the character of Robinson.

It appears that still another decision was made by the Independent preacher about this time. The account is from the

1 Dyer, p.32.
2 Flower, I, p.xix.
3 W. Robinson, p.xxii.
"Funeral Sermon for Mr. Robinson" by Dr. Rees.

A rich relation who had promised to provide liberally for him, and who had bequeathed him a considerable sum in his will, threatened to deprive him of every advantage which he had been encouraged to expect, unless he quitted his connection with the dissenters.¹

Unlike many of his day, the young man refused to let his conscience be coerced by financial considerations. Though later others would encourage him to seek preferment in the Establishment, he remained a Dissenter till death.

With his preaching and research into the New Testament's teaching on baptism, Robinson still found time to press his suit with Ellen Payne and in 1759 they were married. It was necessary for the couple to use part of the bride's dowry to supplement their meager income. In the spring of this same year Robinson received an invitation to preach to a small congregation of Baptists in Cambridge. He was interested.

This church at Cambridge had had a checkered history. Prior to Robinson's arrival, there had been a dispute about the Trinity which resulted in the suspension of five members on January 29, 1756. The pastor, Mr. Simson,² was a "North Briton" with an M.A. from Aberdeen. During his pastorate the church sent out "several gifted brethren" into the ministry, and branches to the church were added at Thaxted in Essex and at Wickhambrook. Yet, the church "declined both in doctrine and practice".³ "Her articles of faith were explained away, and evaporated, under a pretence of being refined. Her experience was enthusiastic, and her conduct...

¹ Flower, I, p.xviii.
² Church Book written by R.R. in W. Robinson, p.xxiii. "He was a complete scholar and a good preacher, a thorough protestant dissenter, a rigid Baptist, of a violent temper, a lord in his church, a tyrant in his family, and a libertine in his life."
³ Rather than casually start another church "branches" were established by Baptists. It was a serious undertaking to constitute a church. See E. A. Payne, The Fellowship of Believers, pp.82f.
grossly immoral. Some were cut off; some returned into the world as the dog to his vomit; and the few pious souls that remained were covered with confusion at seeing some of their best people withdraw to other churches." With things in this state Mr. Simson removed to a Baptist church in Norwich and without a leader "the little people (soured and disunited in their tempers, dispirited with their prospect, and extremely low in their circumstances) jangled awhile, and then broke up. The doors were shut and the people scattered."1

Things remained like this for "some time" when the famous hyper-Calvinists Dr. Gill and Mr. Brine,2 and "some neighbouring ministers" urged them to try again. They did: holding many meetings"of fasting and prayer" with an occasional supply. Through Mrs. Anne Dutton, who "aspired" to be the Baptist Countess of Huntingdon,3 they heard of a youth at Norwich, about twenty-three, who was "now inclined to settle with a protestant dissenting congregation" having preached "three years among the methodists". Perhaps as a spur to the congregation she advised them that the youth had been invited to Beccles. An invitation was sent and Robinson preached at Stone-yard for the first time, July 8, 1759 from I Cor.xv.3. He stayed another Lord's day and then returned to Norfolk, promising to return, as the church desired, for further trial. Though he continued on trial for two years, he refused to accept the pastoral office in spite of repeated requests from the people. In the Church Book,4 he gave youth and inexperience as the reasons for his refusal. Born in a family void of piety, and

1 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xxiii.
4 W. Robinson, pp.xxivf.
educated at Scarning for the Established ministry, he had been "unjustly deprived of his maternal fortune" and "exposed to the severest hardships". Converted by Whitefield, he joined the Methodists and because of this had been "deserted and persecuted by his relations, and left to extreme poverty". Therefore, he felt that "his prejudices of birth, education, and conversion might be too strong for his reason, and his opportunities of informing himself too few" so that "should he precipitate his settlement, he might adopt a plan which his maturer age might disapprove". He admits:

He did violence indeed to the affections of a people who tenderly loved him, who multiplied very fast, and in whom he found fathers, brothers, sisters, a love preferable to all that the world could afford; yet he could not prevail with himself to think of a settlement till the spring of 1761.1

On May 28, 1761 the church, observing a day of fasting and prayer extended another call. It was again refused because Robinson thought the church intended to maintain strict, or closed, communion as to the Lord's Supper. However, the congregation declared itself for open communion, several protesting "that they would never agree to a strict communion again". The long courtship over, and possible difficulties between the prospective pastor and people overcome, June 11, 1761 was the date decided upon for settlement. Soon would begin that happy union which remained unbroken until the diffident young man died.2

On this same date the congregation issued its final appeal to the young man; "renewed covenant, and became a church again". The membership totaling thirty-four, entered into a

1 C.B. in W. Robinson, pp.xxivf.
2 R.R.'s great-grandfather, Shelly of Jesus College, had been Vicar of All Saints, Cambridge, and "had, with others, diffused the principles of the Puritans". Dyer, p.426. Cf. R.R.'s Historical Account...in Flower, V, p.266.
subscription to raise three pounds, six shillings per quarter for the minister's support. The people's hearts and hopes may have been bigger than their pockets, for the first half year only produced three pounds, twelve shillings. The minister did not chide or hold them to their contract. He knew their circumstance and asks, "who that saw the poverty of half these honest people could lay his pro-fane hand on their property?".

As was customary, the little group sent around to sister churches asking them to send their minister and messengers to the service of installation, "not to lord it over their faith, but to behold their order and to assist their joy". Three ministers were invited to share in the conduct of the service.

They entreated one...to be their mouth, and to open the design of their assembling: a second to preach a sermon after the ordination, explanatory of their duty to their pastor: and Robinson besought another to enforce in a sermon his duty to the people.

Great care was taken to "preserve inviolable" the "grand principle of civil and religious liberty: that is, That all power originates in the PEOPLE". Since the people create civil governors they "have a right to call and ordain christian ministers". On Thursday, June 11, the church "publicly recognized their call, which being accepted, they conferred the pastoral office, the highest honour on earth, on that abandoned outcast boy: (Great God, he records it with tears!)

The service, very similar to those held in Baptist churches today, included a confession of faith. Robinson's "orthodox and calvinistic" confession consisted of thirteen articles:

1 This was meager even in that day. Stipends varied. Among Dissenters thirty to fifty pounds "was common", and "thoughtful churchmen" considered stipends of twenty and thirty pounds yearly "wholly inadequate". D.Coomer, English Dissent, p.48; R.Bayne-Powell, English Country Life in the Eighteenth Century, p.76.
2 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xxv.
3 The full text of the confession is in Dyer, pp.429-432.
(1) There is "one only living and true God". (2) The scriptures of the Old and New Testament "are the word of God; were given by inspiration, and contain all things necessary to be believed and practiced". (3) In the unity of the Godhead, "there are three persons, or substances - the father, the son, and the holy ghost, the same in substance, equal in majesty and glory". (4) God "foresaw, and fore-appointed whatsoever comes to pass; that of his grace he elected a certain number of persons to salvation,.... That the salvation of the elect is all of the Lord. The reprobation of the wicked of themselves". (5) Adam was created upright and of his own free will sinned against God and "as he was a public head, involved himself and all his posterity in sin and misery". (6) In the fulness of time "God sent forth his son,...,vested with the threefold office, of prophet, priest, and king;...He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and remains there till his second coming". (7) Men, "are justified freely by grace, not by works of righteousness". (8) Though "by nature, children of wrath; without merit, and without strength, the holy spirit, in his own time and way, impresses religious truths on the minds of the elect". (9) Those "called by grace, persevere to eternal glory; they may fall foully, but not finally". (10) Good works "are the necessary parts of a saving faith, essential to salvation, though not to justification". (11) A New Testament church is a "voluntary society of Christians, agreeing in the essentials of faith, and in the mode of divine worship, assembling in one place,...that every such society has an independent right of chusing its own officers, and exercising such discipline, as the holy scriptures direct". (12) Baptism is a "New Testament ordinance of perpetual use, that
it is only rightly administered by dipping, and a profession of faith and obedience;...the Lord's supper is an ordinance perpetually to be administered till the Lord comes; that as none ought to be forced into the church by baptism, without his consent, so none are to be kept from the Lord's supper, who conscientiously, though erroneously, approve of their own baptism in infancy". (13) There is "an eternal state of happiness and misery" and God "hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by Jesus Christ". The resurrection will reunite the souls and bodies of the just and the unjust and all "will receive the due reward of their deeds; the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal". Such was the confession and few Particular Baptists of the day would have quarrelled with any of it, except the practice of open communion.

More significant by far than the statement of faith were Robinson's remarks when he had finished reading his confession to the church. He said:

...these appeared to him Scriptural truths. That where any of them surpassed his comprehension, his reason did homage to revelation: that in this, there was nothing done but what a naturalist did every time he studied a daisy. That he intended, however, in his future ministry to dwell on the least disputable, as they were the most essential truths of religion.1

In later years he considered his settlement rather "a romantic than a rational undertaking". Financially the prospect was poor. He had not received more than ten guineas from his family for some years and no aid was expected from that quarter.

1 W. Robinson, p.xxvii. Cf. Archbishop Potter's advice to Wesley: "If you desire to be extensively useful, do not spend your time and strength in contending for or against such things as are of a disputable nature, but in testifying against open, notorious vice, and in promoting real essential holiness". Overton and Relton, op. cit. p.98.
The hundred pound dowry of his wife had been "diminished...among the methodists". The congregation was poor, and had acquired a "wretched character" through "the libertinism of many of its former members". Thus, it was unlikely that the congregation should increase, though his family would and there "was no prospect of so poor a people's supplying him long". Such obstacles "would have been insurmountable" to a wiser and older man, "but he was a boy, and the love of his flock was a million to him". He added, that his settlement "should be no precedent to future settlements". It was a brave act in a day when Baptist ministers did not quickly or lightly remove from one congregation to another.¹

CHAPTER III

CAMBRIDGE AND THE GATHERED COMMUNITY

The reputation of the Dissenters in the university and neighbourhood had for almost a century been sinking into contempt, when Mr. Robinson settled with the Baptist church at Stone-Yard. His abilities and assiduity, however, raised their reputation.

Encyclopaedia Britannica

Though Robinson was to spend his days ministering to the Dissenting Congregation, in St. Andrew's Parish, Cambridge, he was never to live in the town itself. In the eighteenth century this may not have been a hardship, for Gunning, who had "a perfect remembrance of all its horrible discomforts", thought it "surprising that any family should have resided at Cambridge who could live anywhere else". After assuming his new duties he resided for a short time with a member of his congregation at Fulbourn. While here he may have made his first University acquaintance, Commissary William Greaves (Graves), who "thought it incumbent" on himself to make the "most honourable mention" of the young minister to all his friends. Soon the young man found a modest cottage at Hauxton, a village near the London road and about four miles south of Cambridge. This was to be home for several years.

About the year 1770 Robinson's income reached upwards of ninety pounds, but at first, as we have seen, it was quite small so that it was necessary for him to accept assistance or

1 Vol. XVIII. Part I, p.100. (5th ed.) 1815.
2 H. Gunning, Reminiscences of the University, Town, and County of Cambridge, from the Year 1780, vol. I, p.322.
3 A small village five miles southeast of Cambridge.
"civilities" from generous benefactors. One of those who "appears to have conferred on him some pecuniary favours" was the famous Evangelical philanthropist, John Thornton. Thornton may have heard of Robinson through Berridge who corresponded with him. His generousness was commended by name in Cowper's poem, "Charity". Dyer cites the following letter to Robinson as evidence that Benjamin Wallin, the Baptist minister at Maze Pond, Southwark was another benefactor:

Herewith I send you the money and pamphlets, value four pounds: the copy bound is for yourself, if there is room on your shelf. ...may the Lord continue you humble and useful, ...and, be assured, I am in expectation of your frequent thoughts of me at the throne of grace, with hearty prayers for you.

It is unlikely that Wallin himself was the benefactor. In Ivimey this same letter is cited as evidence that the Baptist Fund contributed to Robinson's support. Certainly the young minister was eligible even though in 1717 "the Fund Committee of the Particular Baptists resolved not to aid any minister who was in receipt of as much as £25 a year".

The "shelf" of Robinson continually grew as he gathered books to study which would help him overcome his handicap of lacking a formal theological education. As there was little or no formal theological training at Cambridge or Oxford, this was not a great handicap. Remembering the "slumbers of the English Universities

1 Flower, I, p.xxii.
2 Overton and Relton, op. cit. pp.197f.
3 See pp.34ff.
4 Dyer, pp.48f. Dyer himself benefited from the Particular Baptist Fund while living with R.R. (p.178)
in the Eighteenth Century", and their great temptations to idleness and immorality, the lack of university training may well have been exchanged for the plain living at Hauxton and a serious resolve to study. If his "shelf" grew, so did his family. Before he left Hauxton in 1773, he had his wife, mother, and nine children to support.

The young Dissenter proved to be an excellent pastor. "He had little occasion to learn, what some preachers never understand, at least never practice, the art of stooping to the poor". His modest demeanor earned him the devotion of the humble and the esteem of all. His genuine interest in people and lively conversation made him a welcome guest in the village homes. Though they could ill afford it, the villagers insisted he share their plain hospitality. He was wise enough not to refuse, but tried to ensure that his visits did not work hardship on the poorer families. Excessively fond of children, they returned his friendship. When Mr. Robinson visited, they made for his lap instead of the village green. Dyer feels that Goldsmith's portrait of the good clergyman summarizes well this period of his ministry.

A man he was to all the country dear;  
And passing rich with forty pounds a year.  
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,  
Nor e'er had changed, or wished to change his place.  
Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power,  
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour:

Even later, when well known and not without influence, he found time to visit the meek and lowly.

How edifying and interesting was the sight of a great man, who had for his intimate friends the most learned

2 Dyer, p.51.  
3 See W. Robinson, pp.xxixf. for an "amusing example".  
4 Dyer, p.50. Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village".
members of one of the first universities in the world, sitting with his pipe in the chimney corner of a cottager, conversing in a manner the most peculiarly adapted to please and to improve.¹

On his occasional visits to London, he carried the problems of his people with him. The following memorandum indicates well the detailed interest he took in their lives.

Gown for poor M____. M. M's. son to be seen. H. wishes Mr. H. to be merciful. W. thinks his son's wages are too small. Watts's hymns for T.H. Testament for C.²

From the beginning Robinson focused his attention on "the raising of a congregation, and the advancement of his studies".³

With plain, but pleasant manners, and methodical habits he was to succeed in both. When the church was reorganized in 1759, there were thirty-four members. Two of these withdrew in 1761 because they opposed the practice of open communion. Of the remaining, only thirteen lived in Cambridge. The others were scattered in eight villages about Cambridge. If the gathered community with its scattered membership was not promising, its place of meeting was even less hopeful. They had hired,

...first a barn, afterwards a stable and granary, then a meeting-house, and, notwithstanding its pews and galleries concealed its meanness within-side a little, it was still a damp, dark, cold, ruinous, contemptible hovel.⁴

Not everyone could have welded such a small group, so inclined to division and wrangling, and meeting in such unpleasant surroundings, into a healthy vigorous church. It required a person with ability and sense. Robinson had both.

New members were added slowly, and the membership, such as

1 Flower, I, p.xxiii.
2 Ibid. p.cxxii.
3 Dyer, p.51.
as it was, disciplined. By 1763 only eleven members had been added and of these, but four lived in town. There were still, as in 1761, only three male members living in Cambridge. One of these, a "Mr. C.", in September 1761 had brought a charge against a woman of the congregation which proved groundless.

The pastor took occasion from hence to show the church the extreme danger of trifling with one another's characters, the injustice and cruelty of it in some cases, and the damage of it in all. He concluded by insisting on brother C.'s asking pardon of the church for abusing their patience and equity by relating an accusation with [which] he could not prove; and of sister G. for the rashness he had been guilty of to her. Mr. C. agreed. Mrs. G. was called in, and the worthy woman and the whole church forgave him on his asking pardon. This was intended to crush in the shell that viper's bird, tale-bearing.1

One might be cautious about joining such a group. The pastor felt extreme care should be taken in the admission of new members for the "greatest penetration and caution will be found little enough to prevent fatal consequences; and those may be received in haste, which destroy at leisure."2

Robinson's influence, however, went far beyond the membership of the church, for many "hearers" made their way to the humble barn and soon steps had to be taken towards "a purchase, a repair, or a rebuilding of the place" as the barn with its galleries could no longer accommodate members and hearers. In 1764 a group of "nearly thirty gentlemen", the greater part of whom were not members, were invited to meet to "advise and assist" in the matter. The building and site were bought from Alderman Alstead for £70, and conveyed to eleven trustees chosen by the church. In

1 Ibid. p.xxxi. Bayne-Powell, op. cit. p.91, Gives similar case in Established Church where discipline was becoming rare.
the words of Robinson,

The subscribers and purchasers, as well as the present trust, aim at no dominion, and will submit to no slavery. They have done all they could to secure the same independency to their successors, and wish to inspire them with a just horror for that worst of all noxious animals, a LORD-BROTHER.  

As to the latter, Dyer comments, "what kind of animal that is, dissenting churches well understand". This same year the barn was torn down and a new meeting-house, seating six hundred erected. It was opened August 12, and the entire cost - about five hundred guineas - was met by the people the same year. In a day when it was customary for congregations to solicit the help of others to pay for their building, the independence of Robinson's people was unusual and he was proud of their accomplishment. Of the general practice, he disapproved:

Why, (he would ask) should men run in debt by building a church, any more than by furnishing their dwellings? If they cannot afford a meeting-house, why will not a barn suffice? If they cannot be accommodated with a barn, why will not a room in a poor cottage content them?

The congregation had grown but not without incessant labor by its pastor. The sower went forth to sow. He did not spend all, or even most of his time in Cambridge. With his family he was always in town on Sundays, preaching two or three times, but


2 Dyer, p.67.


4 Dyer, p.66.
during the week he was visiting the surrounding villages, delivering his famous village sermons and catechising the children. Robinson felt very strongly the necessity of teaching thoroughly the essentials of the faith to children and prospective members. In December 1761 he wrote:

The primitive church was very wise in not receiving members too hastily. Their design was to compose their assemblies of wise and good men. In order to this, they detained their proposed members some time in the state of catechumens: that is, of catechised ones. In this state the pastor and elders used to instruct and prepare them for baptism. This discipline should be revived. Some, whose parents have discharged their duty to them, do not want this; but, alas! this is the case of very few. He adds that a society of catechumens should be voluntary and the time of this state left to the pastor's discretion. Finally, they should speak before the church "and be received, as now, by consent". The admission of members being a "most essential article of discipline", it should never be hurried "for innumerable evils follow".

The children at Cambridge were supposed to meet their pastor each Thursday for instruction, while those in the surrounding villages were instructed once a month. They would meet with Robinson an hour or so before the preaching services in the evening. Ordinarily he did not use a printed catechism, for he tells us that it was usual "to catechize the children by hearing them read a short scripture history, and questioning them about

1 "Each Sunday he devoted the intervals betwixt morning and evening service, to friendly intercourse; and being fond of a pipe, though he was never a drinker, he used to get his poor people round him at an old widow woman's house, near the meeting; here he gratified himself in hearing their distresses, in answering their difficulties, and, to the best of his power, in relieving their wants". ibid. p.149.


3 R. Robinson, Seventeen Discourses, on Several Texts of Scripture, in "Preface", p.iv.
the sense of it". Even in the eighteenth century Robinson found that for his method to be successful it was necessary "to allure or reward" the children by giving them "catchisms and bibles, testaments, hymn books, &c.". The method of allurements and rewards proved expensive as well as successful. The contributions of "several persons" were "unequal to the charge". The pastor "supported it as long as he could, and then was obliged to desist".1

II

They were meant as a sort of poor man's broom to sweep his almshouse. I wish I could persuade all the poor hereabouts to try to use them.

R.R. on the Village Discourses.2

The Village Discourses were necessary for two reasons. First, as "it has often been remarked" and as the Lord Bishop of Ely, Dr. Keene "remarked it, in a printed charge to his clergy at his first visitation at Cambridge, that the people round Cambridge have less knowledge of religion than is to be found in any other parts of the kingdom, the other university adjacencies excepted".3 This was no doubt due in part to the fact "that most of the churches within ten miles of Cambridge were served by Fellows of colleges".4 Generally these men were anxious to depart as soon as the service had been hurried through. Some "hastened back to dine" at their colleges while others sped on to adjacent parishes where they conducted one or two more careless and uninspiring services. Their first consideration was their own comfort and ease. "If the Sunday proved wet, Dr. Drop (a cant phrase signifying there was no service)

1 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xxxix.
2 Ltr. quoted in Flower, I, p.cxx.
3 R.R.'s Historical Account...in Flower, V, pp.283f.
did the duty". 1 That many times no congregation assembled is not surprising. To those serving two or three parishes this was welcome as it expedited performance of the days duty and sometimes a signal was "concerted between the parson and the clerk; the hoisting of a flag assured the rider that there was no congregation, and that he might pass on in peace...". 2 Secondly, as Robinson writes in the Preface to the Sermons:

The Protestant dissenting congregations at Cambridge, from the first forming of them, have always consisted, beside inhabitants of the town, of a great number of families, resident in the adjacent villages. In these last families there always have been children and servants, aged and infirm persons, who could attend the public worship in town only occasionally, some once a month on the Lord's supper day, others once a quarter, and the very aged only once or twice in the summer. 3

Thus it had become the custom for their teachers, "in compliance with their own desire, to instruct them at their own towns about once a month". Sometimes the "discourses" were given in houses "fitted up on purpose", but at other times were given in barns - "in summer when they are empty", and in winter in "dwelling-houses". In favorable weather such accommodations often proved too small and then "the teachers have stood abroad in an orchard or a paddock or any convenient place". 4 The meetings were usually held at half-past six in the evening, when the poor could "best spare time". When the teacher stayed all night a short service, lasting an hour, would be held at five in the morning. It was at this hour that the "short discourses, called for distinction sake Exercises" were delivered. In the summer a meeting would sometimes be held at two in the afternoon "for the sake of far-comers". The

1 Ibid. vol. II, p.149.
3 R.R. Seventeen Discourses...p.iii.
lectures were either annual or occasional "as it suits the people and himself" or "stated on a fixed day". They were arranged so they would not conflict with the great seasons of work. The pastor never went "on a week day in hay-time, harvest", or saffron-time. Most of the villages visited were within ten miles of Cambridge, although one, Wickhambrook was twenty-two miles distant.

In his village preaching Robinson was encouraged and assisted by John Berridge, Vicar of Everton. He had been a fellow of Clare Hall and at least once was appointed Moderator in the schools, which distinction had impressed George Whitefield. Berridge was a very good student, well liked by all for his lively and humorous conversation. Intellectually he came more and more to Socinian views and his devotional life suffered. During a ten year period he seldom engaged in private prayer. Perceiving "that from Socinianism he was insensibly lapsing into mere infidelity: and, being sufficiently impartial in his sceptism to be sceptical of unbelief itself, he fought his way back to orthodoxy" and resumed the practice of regular private devotions. In 1749 he was appointed curate of Stapleford. In spite of serious application, such that many thought him a Methodist, his preaching was unfruitful. Baffled, he removed to a College living at Everton in July 1755 where he remained the rest of his life. Here for two years his ministry was barren. Finally he began to have doubts about his own spiritual condition. For a period of about ten days he

1 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xli.
2 A list of the villages visited and the times with the number of hearers is given in R.R.'s Historical Account...in Flower, V, p.284. To this list, Dyer adds Wickhambrook, op. cit. p.53. The amount of hearers is estimated as 2900.
3 Smyth, op. cit. p.158.
4 Ibid. pp.159f.
cried unto the Lord for "the Knowledge of the Truth, as it is in Jesus". Finally the word of the Lord came to him: "Cease from thine own Works". He now saw clearly "the Rock I had been splitting on for near thirty Years". The doctrine of Justification by Faith alone which he had formerly depised, he now accepted unreservedly. He began to preach "the real Gospel of Christ" and results immediately followed. He later reflected:

I preached of Sanctification very earnestly for six years in a former Parish, and never brought one soul to Christ. I did the same at this Parish for two years, without any Success at all; but as soon as ever I preached Jesus Christ, and Faith in his Blood, then Believers were added to the Church continually; then People flocked from all Parts to hear the glorious Sound of the Gospel, some coming six Miles, others eight, and others ten, and that constantly.1

Smyth dates the Evangelical Revival in Cambridgeshire from the conversion of Berridge. His new style of preaching was terrifying to his audiences: children screamed, women fainted, men convulsed, and some became fixed in trance. "For a season this man produced a more violent influenza of fanaticism than had ever followed upon either Whitefield or Wesley's preachings".2 Many times Wesley visited and preached for Berridge at Everton. Their relations can be followed in Wesley's Journal. The vicar styled himself a "Riding Pedlar" because his Master "employed him to serve near forty shops in the country, besides his own parish".3

The short autobiography he had placed on his tomb-stone gives an insight into the character and eccentricity of this early Evangelical:

Here lay the earthly Remains of JOHN BERRIDGE late Vicar of Everton, and an itinerant Servant of JESUS CHRIST who loved his Master and his Work, and

1 Smyth, op. cit. p.163. Chap. VI is a study of Berridge.
2 Southey, Life of Wesley, quoted in ibid. p.165.
3 Dyer, p.54.
after running on his Errands many Years was called up to wait on him above. Reader art thou born again No Salvation without a new Birth.

I was born in Sin Feb. 1716
Remained ignorant of my fallen State till 1730,
Lived proudly on Faith & Works for Salvation till 1754
Admitted to Everton Vicarage 1755.
Fled to JESUS alone for Refuge 1756.
Fell asleep in Christ Jan[y] 22d 1793.¹

Berridge was not an easy man to work with² and as years passed his relation with Robinson became strained. The vicar who even dismissed some of his Evangelical High church brethren as having "too much of the steeple" in their belly,³ felt a change had come over Robinson. To Dyer he said:

Ah! when Mr. Robinson lived at Hauxton, he was a modest, teachable, and benevolent young man: but he possessed abilities, and grew vain; I thought him a most gracious preacher, but he has forsaken the Lord.⁴

Though Robinson never ceased to respect Berridge, he insisted, "I know how to estimate his good qualities, without making myself a simpleton".

Several undergraduates helped Robinson by giving expository lectures. Notable among these were Rowland Hill, Thomas Pentycross, and Charles De Coetlogon; all of whom remained in the Establishment. De Coetlogon continued on intimate terms with Dissenters "till he was appointed chaplain to a lord major of London, when he thought proper to join the high church party, and preached a furious sermon against the repeal of the Test act, in

² Wesley wrote to him: "It seems to me, That of all the persons I ever knew (save one) you are the hardest to be convinced. ...You like to be unconnected with any, thereby tacitly condemning all. ...do not you explicitly condemn all your fellow labourers, blaming one in one instance, one in another, so as to be thoroughly pleased with the conduct of none? Does not this argue a vehement proneness to condemn?" quoted in ibid. pp.187f.
³ Flower, I, p.xxiv.
⁴ Dyer, pp.54f.
which he reviled the dissenters, and bitterly attacked their civil and religious rights".1

Although the Village Discourses were not published until 1786, a consideration of Robinson's sermons and preaching is in order, since it was his preaching alone which distinguished him during this period. Like all of Robinson's sermons these were preached without the use of notes and had to be recalled for publication. To his son-in-law, Mr. Curtis, Robinson "while sitting, or walking about the room smoking his pipe, dictated every sentence, the texts of scripture, stops, the different characters, italicks, capitals, &c.".2 After little revision they were sent to the press. The discourses as published are considerably shorter than when delivered. Flower tells us that one of the Occasional Sermons:3

Christianity a System of Humanity, which may be leisurely read in half an hour, took up an hour and twenty minutes in the delivery; and I believe, there was not one of the numerous and attentive audience present, who thought it too long.4

Although the sermons "contain a copiousness of language, a felicity of illustration, and a readiness in quoting and applying appropriate passages of scripture, rarely to be witnessed", and though,

They may be read with profit by all, who love to contemplate the workings of a powerful mind in recommending and enforcing the principles of a holy religion, who are captivated with the inventions of genius, the current of a natural eloquence, sound words uttered in the spirit of christian philanthropy, and sentiments breathing the influence of a rational, fervent piety.5

2 Flower, I, p.xcii.
3 Sermons, Preached On Particular Occasions,...Hereafter referred to as Occasional Sermons.
4 Flower, I, pp.xcviii.
5 Sparks,op. cit. p.20.
the wrapt attention of the rustic audience was no doubt due in large part to the masterly pulpit manner of the preacher. The testimony of contemporaries as to this ability appears unanimous. Drs. Rees, Kippis, and other Dissenting ministers after hearing him agreed with Dr. Price "that he was the finest colloquial preacher they ever heard". 1 Dyer notes 2 that "his manner had too much the air of mere conversation, to captivate the admiration of transient hearers," but goes on to say:

From nature he had received much; he was also much indebted to art, and had formed himself by the best models. ...his voice... was uncommonly musical, and he possessed great skill in adapting it to the different passions that moved him, and the countenances of his hearers; but amidst all its varieties you heard the same voice;...he was never boisterous, rarely feeble, and seldom whining.

A letter written by the Rev. Daniel Turner of Abingdon reveals that Dyer, while preparing for the Dissenting ministry, paid an even higher compliment to Robinson's ability,

In his preaching without notes he (Dyer) is sometimes excellent, especially when he is not overawed. But some times he pauses rather too long. He came quite raw to Oxford in the preaching way, not having had time to form his mind, and Robinson is too much of an original to be a pattern for young men who are pleased with his manner and naturally attempt to imitate it; which there is not one in a thousand can do. 3

Dyer finally left the Christian faith, but another young man of twenty-three, who became a very great preacher, paid the same compliment. He was Robert Hall, Jr., who succeeded Robinson at Cambridge. After a time he gave up the attempt. Telling of it later he said,

1 Dyer, p.284.
2 Ibid. pp.149ff.
Why, Sir, I was too proud to remain an imitator. After my second trial at____, as I was walking home, I heard one of the congregation say to another, 'Really, Mr. Hall did remind us of Mr. Robinson!' That, Sir, was a knock-down-blow to my vanity; and I at once resolved that if ever I did acquire reputation, it should be my own reputation, belong to my own character, and not be that of a likeness. Besides, Sir, if I had not been a foolish young man, I should have seen how ridiculous it was to imitate such a preacher as Mr. Robinson. He had a musical voice, and was master of all its intonations; he had wonderful self-possession, and could say what he pleased, when he pleased, and how he pleased; ... besides all this, I ought to have known that, for me to speak slow was ruin.1

According to the Rev. Josiah Thompson of Clapham,2 Robinson's success in preaching "altogether without notes" did not depend on memorization nor working "himself up to a degree of warmth and passion, to which the preachers, among whom he first appeared [Enthusiasts], in general owe their ready utterance". It was due to his thoroughly mastering his subject. This emphasis upon a mastering of the subject is misleading. Dyer says that he "invariably preached extempore, and, of course, was not always to be depended on". He adds:

...some of the most elegant lectures that I ever heard him deliver, have been given to him by friends, from passages of scripture, just before he ascended the pulpit.3

It seems probable that Robinson often spoke extempore with much

1 O. Gregory, A Brief Memoir of the Life of Robert Hall, M.A. pp.35f.
2 Thompson wrote the last section of R.R.'s Historical Account ...in Flower, V, p.261. Extemporaneous preaching alone had its attraction. "I have been told that when my friend Dr. Benet, the Bishop of Clonye, (who is gifted with a very fluent eloquence) first entered on a curacy near Cambridge, the town was overrun with methodists. His discernment readily pointed out the principal cause of the emptiness of the church, whilst the neighbouring barn teemed with catechumens: namely, the humdrum method of fixing the eye immovably upon the book; where nothing distinguishes the exhibitioner from a statue of wood, or stone, but the droning whine and the mumbling lip. He adopted instantly the extemporaneous mode of preaching, and soon transferred the swarm into his own hive." G. Wakefield, Memoirs of the Life of... vol.I, pp.199f. 3 Dyer, pp.149f.
success because of his continuous reading and study.¹

In his Preface to the Village Discourses,² the writer tells us he believes "the Christian religion ought to be distinguished from the philosophy of it".

On this ground he studies to establish facts; and he hath no idea of guilt in regard to different reasonings on the nature of those facts, or, the persons concerned in them. He hath his own opinions of the nature of God, and Christ, and man, and the decrees, and so on: but he doth not think that the opinion of Athanasius, or Arius, or Sabellius, or Socinus, or Augustine, or Pelagius, or Whitby, or Gill, on the subjects in dispute between them, ought to be considered of such importance as to divide Christians, by being made standards to judge of the truth of any man's Christianity.

He can say this because he believes "virtue and not faith the bond of union, though he supposes the subject ought to be properly explained". His purpose therefore has been "to possess people of a full conviction of the truth of a few facts, the belief of which he thought would produce virtue, and along with that personal and social happiness". He knows quite well,

His ideas of this subject do not meet the views of some of his brethren: but while he wishes they may enjoy their own sentiments, he hopes they will not deny him their friendship, because he hath it not in his power to think as they do. It is on supposition of the harmlessness of philosophy, or

¹ Gunning relates two of "many anecdotes" his "friend Musgrave" told him of R.R. One of these tells of Dr. Rees going to Cambridge purposely to hear R.R. However another preacher was supposed to preach and R.R. did not feel "at liberty to put him off preaching" as he had come a long distance. Rees told the visiting preacher of his purpose in coming and "asked whether he would have any objection to be a hearer". The man agreed. R.R. asked Rees "to give him a text, which he declined doing; but turning to the Walden minister, asked him on what subject he had intended to discourse, and then remarked jocularly to Robinson, 'I think you had better take the same text.' This was unhesitatingly agreed to, Robinson requesting a few minutes for meditation in the vestry whilst the congregation were singing." He continues: "Dr. Rees assured me he had never heard him more luminous than on that evening." Gunning, op. cit. vol. II, pp.150ff.

² Seventeen Discourses... pp.iii-x.
rather on the benefit of getting into a sound philosophy, which is nothing but right reason, that he inculcates with all his might a spirit of universal liberty; for he never saw any danger in a difference of opinion, till some unruly passion,... brought the subject into disgrace.

He realizes too, that people must be dealt with differently, according to their situation in life. The difficulties in the minds of Christians arise from diverse prejudices. Thus "it is but just in an assembly greatly diversified to give each one a solution of his own difficulty, for otherwise the zest of the sermon is lost in regard to him, and that it ought not to be". Among learned youth whose faith has been shaken "by polished and bewitching recommendations of infidelity" it is proper "to take off the varnish, and discover the futility and inconclusiveness of such essays, and this ought to be done with wit, vivacity, ingenuity, address and point, superior if it were possible in salt and savour to the style of unbelievers". But this attack would be useless among an assembly of rustics "who never saw any charms in schools, whose ears are not accustomed to honeyed accents, and who have only vulgar prejudices against Christianity".

These people do not object against the doctrines, indeed they are apt to err on the other side, and to believe too much, sinking into a torpid state through credulousness as their opposites do through unbelief. They have no objection against anything in the gospel, except the virtue of it.

Where an assembly is mixed, it becomes necessary "to treat them all with justice and respect,...to direct a part, a line or two, a sentence, a hint, a word, or an argument to the edification of each". Should this method fail, it at least shows the good intention of the teacher.

The manner of treating the subject depends on the hearers also. For "what does it signify by what sounds, or by what sentences, or by what similitudes we set men a thinking, and convey
information to their understandings"?

From the melody of a nightingale to the croaking of a frog, from the eloquence of Cicero to the vulgar gabble of Mrs. Quickly, the renowned hostess of the knight of inexhaustible humour, from the manly reasoning in Butler's Analogy to the doleful dialogues between Epenetus, the devil, and Mr. Hobbes, all, all are, in some sense, indifferent.

The purpose of teaching "is to enable men to get above the want of teaching, and if that end be answered, the manner it should seem is an article of no very great consequence".

The author illustrates his design by a tale in which a Roman Catholic father is finally reconciled to his wayward son, who in becoming virtuous has also become a Quaker. The father must accept his son as a Quaker, or not at all, and to this he agrees. This story according to Flower¹ is "so beautiful and affecting, that there are...few persons of Christian sensibility who can read it with dry eyes". Today the story does not seem so striking, but when written, at a time when Roman Catholics "were virtually outlaws in their own country, doomed to a life of secrecy and retirement, and sometimes obliged to purchase by regular contributions an exemption from prosecution",² it was evidence of a broad sympathy. In concluding he asks the reader to forgive whatever may "have the air, and in some cases the nature, of impropriety, in these discourses". They were intended "to edify many, and to give offence to none". W. C. Unwin, the Established clergyman, felt the Sermons had succeeded in their design. Though there were "some few things" he could not understand, the friend of Cowper wrote to Robinson:

1 Flower, I, p.xcv.
You seem to me to have fulfilled the prophecy, that, "to the poor the gospel shall be preached," before any man now living, for you lay it bare in its naked simplicity, which I have long thought the "one thing needful" in the preaching of some good people.  

Though the Preface was written long after the sermons were delivered, the sermons do in fact seek to fulfill the task there set forth. Robinson deals with the great doctrines of Christianity and seeks to convince his hearers of their truth and implication. In other words he presents the "facts" as motives to the practice of virtue in daily living. "How is it possible," he asks,"that this declaration, (John 3:16)...this truth should lie in the world as cold as this other, two and two make four?". For him "Faith and holiness are inseparable". The essential truths, necessary for salvation, are so plain that a fool, not totally blinded by sin - who applies himself - may not err therein. Pure Christianity is not to be confused with the subtleties of church theologians of whatever party, who are intent on their own power and privilege. "Any Person, Who Understands Christianity, May Teach It". They have a right to teach but "not to domineer, and play the lord and master with insolence, and without control". They have a right to teach but "not to make a fortune". Teaching is not to be confused with mere talk, filling up an hour, killing time, tattling, sounding much and saying nothing. Even Paul was willing to learn and be comforted by his fellow Christians. The Apostle reasoned "with his brethren, and where his reasoning did not succeed with a plain Christian, he sat down content". Citing Apollos'

1 Dyer, p.280. Unwin "while at college, was an intimate acquaintance of Robinson's".
2 R.R. Seventeen Discourses...p.235.
independence of Paul (ICor.xvi.12.), as an example, he argues:

If men of such extraordinary endowments founded on them no claim to teach to the exclusion of their brethren, is it not abominable, that an ordinary Christian should sound such a claim on the glorious pretence that he can read the history of the gospels in two languages whereas you can read it but in one! Tell such a man, that the gospel is a set of facts, of which you are as able to judge, as you are when you execute the office of jurymen in a court of law, and a cause is tried in your hearing. Tell him, evidence of the truth of the facts doth not depend on a frivolous attention to single terms, but on a general view of the whole put together, and it is indifferent in what language information is conveyed, if it be conveyed at all.... Assure him, you respect learning, admire oratory, think him a very ingenious man, but, as you neither envy his habit nor desire his sees, your attention is more taken up with truth than with an elegant and handsome way of telling it, and that this is a truth which meets your conviction and approbation, you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. (p.383)

But though Christianity is easy to be understood, he warns his hearers that it should not be confounded with heathenism (philosophy).¹ Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy, etc. (Col.ii.8.9.). "Had this caution been given us by any of the other apostles, who had not had the advantage of a learned education, we might have supposed, they censured what they did not understand: but this comes from the disciple of Gamaliel". Robinson wants his hearers to distinguish Christianity from the philosophy of it. Christianity is a set of facts "which Jesus Christ taught, and which are all recorded in the gospel". The facts are reported "for the sake of the use to which we are able to apply them". This same "distinction between facts and their uses apart from the philosophy of them" is found in nature and is "the more credible because it makes Christianity exactly like the world in which we live". It shows that the Creator "is the author of our holy religion". He asks his hearers to consider their activity in

saffron time.

You gather the flowers early with great care, and after you get home you leisurely pick off the beautiful blue bell and throw it away, for the sake of the more valuable chive in the middle, which you save, and by the help of a kiln bring to the consistence of a dry fibrous cake, which you call saffron, and sell to pay your rents, and to maintain your families. Now who is there in this assembly that cannot distinguish between the fact, the use, and the philosophy of saffron?

* * * *

Were a man inclined to spoil your saffron trade, he could not take a more proper method than to require you to account for the size, and shape, and colour, and scent of saffron, and could you be prevailed on to waste the whole saffron time in disputing on questions of this kind, instead of practicing what knowledge you have about facts and uses, you would be spoiled to all intents and purposes. (pp.208f)

It is this that has happened to the truths reported in the Scriptures. The facts are as follows:

...there is a God, the first cause of all things, the Creator, the Preserver, the Benefactor, and Friend of mankind; that he sent word to us by prophets and apostles, and above all by his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, that though he blamed our conduct, yet he pitied our condition, and would freely forgive all our offences of every kind through the mediation of Jesus Christ.1 (p.211)

The plain Christian examining this information is not surprised that God esteems man his creature, "for he knows love is natural to him", nor is he shocked that God condemns sin for men do the same, even though this means self-judgment. He knows that God has the power; that "it will be highly to the honour of his wisdom and goodness" to make the "wretched happy". He sees that those who refuse and despise God's gracious offer are "exceedingly to blame, and ought to suffer the consequences". It does not seem strange that God should choose "to dispense all this goodness by the hands of Jesus Christ" because "he sees that there is but one first cause, and that God communicates his goodness to us by means in every case". But what happens when a philosopher examines this

1 Another list of the "facts" is given in "Jesus Christ Is The Governour Of His Disciples". ibid. pp.188f. It is longer but essentially the same.
Give a philosopher this truth, and he will perplex every part of it by inquiring how this God subsists, what is the precise nature of Jesus Christ, and so on, till, having dissected the subject into a thousand parts, given each an Egyptian, or a Hebrew, or a Greek name, and garnished the whole with scholastical ghosts, summoned by a kind of magick from all schools ancient and modern, he will render this glorious truth hardly credible, or glaringly false. (p.212)

He humbly beseeches his hearers "not to be rash in censoring people for being enemies to the gospel". There may be such men in the world but he "shall never believe that sincere men are such". Some of their ministers "speak of a dangerous set of men, whom they call, if I recollect the word rightly, deists, or some such name". Some are reputed enemies of the gospel, "only because they are enemies to that abuse of the gospel", of which he has been speaking. They do not find fault with the gospel according to the Evangelists but with the gospel "according to Wittenberg, where Luther taught; or to Geneva, where Dr. John Calvin lived". These were both great men, "but they would have been much greater if they had not applied their philosophy to religion".

Nothing can be plainer in the world than these two ordinances, (Baptism and the Lord's Supper): nothing was better understood before learned men perplexed them, and, what is very wonderful, though the schools (Reformers) have rejected the old philosophy on finding it false, yet they have retained it in these two ordinances. There were formerly in the schools what they called occult qualities. Do not set your eyes on me as if I could explain them, nobody ever understood them, and the words were only used for a cloak to conceal the ignorance of learned men. (p.213)

1 "To read the first writings of the reformers, you would suppose they were going directly into the spirit and practice of Christian liberty: but, certain it is, they fell short, and vindicated that liberty against a foreign bishop only to place it in the hands of civil governours,...". "Jesus Christ Is The Governor Of His Disciples". ibid. p.194.
They may talk a great deal about "the danger of the gospel in the hands of the poor and illiterate: but have the unlearned ever done anything like this"?

The spirit as well as the doctrine of Christianity has been "exceedingly injured" by philosophy. Jesus was "modest, mild, peaceable, full of mercy and good fruits"; the gospel has the same character and produces the same "just and gentle dispositions". But when the gospel "becomes a science it becomes disputatious, haughty, sour, and full of mischief".

Whence came persecution, with all its infernal train? It was from this spirit. The disputes, which have affected the peace of the whole Christian world, have not been about the Lord's prayer, the ten commandments, and the sermon upon the mount: but about curious and knotty questions, which have something plausible on both sides, and are therefore like to make work for contentious men to the end of the world. Whence is it, that we do not know whether we ought to love a fellow-creature, much less whether we are bound to respect him as a Christian, till we know how he understands some old stale questions of the schools, which ought to have been buried with the first inventors of them? The questions are harmless enough in themselves, for in general it does not signify much to practice which side we take. They are harmless enough in some people, whose good sense and sweet temper, and great piety, correct all their actions, and make every thing they say and do agreeable and edifying; but they play the mischief in unskilful or designing hands. (p.216)

Little wonder if the multitude heard him gladly!

It is easy to see how the introductions quickly gained the hearers' attention. In "The Christian Religion Should Not Be Mixed With That Of The Jews"1 he begins:

You have heard of a court of priests in some foreign countries called the inquisition, a cruel court in which men are tried, (not by the laws of Christ you may be sure) cast, and condemned to die for not believing as they are ordered. I have heard of a blunt prisoner, who, after the judge had passed a terrible sentence of being burnt to death on him, which he finished with praying the Lord to have mercy on his soul, cried, My lord, I am sensible of the favour your lordship intends me, but cannot I go to heaven without all this? (p.225)

Another begins by recounting a "needless and superstitious" custom formerly practiced by "some Christian churches in the eastern part of the world". He goes on to say that when "we trace most errors and superstitions, we find, they took their rise in some truth".

In "Jesus Christ The Principle Person Mentioned In Scripture", he leads, in fancy, the Lord Jesus Christ to the pulpit. Having considered the answers that some might give to the question "what think ye of Christ?", he bends on his "knee to the insulted Friend of sinners, and humbly ask, O Son of David! what think you of these people?". In "We Ought To Be Content With Providence", he uses the text, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage". He begins:

True, says one of my hearers, you had a goodly heritage, David, and I would say of my lot, as you did of yours, had I a Jesse for my father, a Solomon for my son, a palace for my habitation, gold and silver in abundance, ability to write scripture, and hope in a joyful resurrection: but, recollect, if David had a Jesse for his own father, he had a Saul for his father-in-law;... In a word, happiness is distributed among mankind much more equally than most men imagine. (pp.42f)

In one of the Occasional Sermons he begins: "The most violent prejudice that ever was formed against the Christian religion, is that which is taken from the means employed to support it." In a different mood he begins his discourse "Love Confirmed By Obedience", using John xv.15.

If ye love me! - If ye love me! O cruel "if!" Why is this? Is it possible that this can be a doubt? Love Thee, the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person? All my hope - all my joy - life of my life -

1 Ibid. "Jesus Christ Is The Governour Of His Disciple". pp.184-203.
2 Ibid. pp.89-110.
3 Ibid. pp.41-60.
5 Ibid. pp.249-266.
soul of my soul. If I love Thee! Why it would be better for me to have my love to my wife, my children, my parents, my friends, my dearest enjoyments, doubtful, than to have this so; and is it possible thou shouldst be in earnest to preface such an expression as this with an "if?" (p.249)

It is difficult to single out one sermon for special treatment as none are without value, even for the reader today. The published sermons may readily be grouped under the headings: God, Christ, Christianity, Scripture and Conduct. The sermon chosen for detailed consideration touches on these and gives a clear indication of the style and substance of the sermons, as well as the temper and mind of the preacher. It too, has an introduction that commands attention. The subject is "The Christian Religion Easy To Be Understood" and the text is Eph.iii.4: "When ye read ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ".

He begins by asking, "Suppose the apostle Paul, when he first stood up in the synagogue at Ephesus to teach Christianity to the Jews,...had begun his discourse by saying, 'Men of Ephesus, I am going to teach a religion which none of you can understand'. If this had been the case Paul would have "insulted the assembly" for they would have said either he understands what he is to speak of, or he doesn't. If he doesn't, then let him be silent. If he does, "why should he affirm we cannot? Are we assembled to hear him boast?" He would also have "disgraced himself; for what can render a man more ridiculous than his pretending to instruct others in what he doth not understand himself?" He would also have "misre-presented the Christian religion". By Christianity Robinson means "that religion which Jesus Christ taught his disciples, and which is all contained in the New Testament". This definition frees

1 R.R. Seventeen Discourses...pp.1-18.
"the subject from many difficulties".

Some misguided Christians propose a great number of mysteries, that is, secrets to us, such as that the bread and wine in the Lord's supper cease to be bread and wine, and become the flesh, and bones, and blood of Christ: such as that a wicked man is inspired by the Holy Ghost to lead us to heaven without our knowing the way; and that these wonders are performed by the uttering of certain words by a certain set of men: and these secrets, which nobody so much as pretends to understand, we are required to believe. However, we have one short answer for all mysteries of this kind; that is, they are not taught in the New Testament, and therefore they are no parts of the Christian religion. (pp.2f)

When he affirms that Christianity is not a secret religion, he means "Christianity now, and not formerly". This frees the subject from objections which may be made from certain New Testament passages. "Christianity, say some, is often called a mystery, or a secret, even the text calls it so. True, but the same text says, Paul knew this secret, and the Ephesians might understand what he knew of it, if they would read what he wrote to them".

Though the text "strictly speaking" refers only to the uniting of Jew and heathen in one religious community, what is affirmed of this one part "is equally true of the whole". Paul preaches to make all men see (Eph.iii.8.9.)!

When the preacher says Christianity hath now no mysteries, he does not deny that "the truths and the duties of Christianity are not connected with other truths and other exercises, which surpass all our comprehension". But he affirms, "that the knowledge of the incomprehensible parts, and the belief of what people please to conjecture about them, though they may be parts of our amusement, and perhaps improvement, are yet no parts of that religion which God requires of us under pain of his displeasure". He illustrates, (reminiscent of his "saffron" example):
Suppose I were to affirm, there is no secret in mowing grass, and in making, stacking, and using hay: all this would be very true; and should any one deny this, and question me about the manner in which one little seed produces clover, another trefoil..., and concerning the manner how all these convey strength and spirit to horses, and milk to cows,...; I would reply, all this is philosophy; nothing of this is necessary to mowing, and making, and using hay. I sanctify this thought by applying it to religion. Every good work produces present pleasure and future reward: to perform the work, and to hope for the reward from the known character of the great Master we serve, is religion, and all before and after is only connected with it. (p.4)

Concerning what is a mystery in Christianity, he divides the whole into three natural parts: "plan, progress, and execution". The first was before the world began, the last shall be after this world's end while the middle part "is before us now". There is no secret about any of these parts, "but there are incomprehensible mysteries connected with each of them". It is not possible to believe "by a man who knows anything of God, that the Christian religion came into the world without the Creator's knowing that such an event would take place". It is impossible for the same man to suppose that after this present life there will be no distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

There is no mystery in these general principles; but we may render them extremely perplexed by rashly agitating questions connected with them. (pp.4f)

So far as this present life goes: "Is the character of Jesus Christ a secret? Did ever anybody take him for an idle gentleman, a cruel tyrant, a deceitful tradesman, a man of gross ignorance and turbulent passions?" "Is the character of Scripture a secret? Is it not perfectly clear, that it is a wise and good book, full of information on all the subjects that concern religion and morality?" Finally, is it a secret that men are mortal, depraved, prone to sin; that a life of sin is accompanied with miseries, and deserving
Were I obliged to give a short account of the Christian religion, I would not say it is a revelation of the decrees of God, ... or a revelation of the mercy of God to a repenting sinner through the merit of Jesus Christ: for though each of these be true, yet all these are only parts of his ways: but I would call Christianity a revelation, or a making known of the true and real character of God; and I would affirm of the whole, and of each component part, that it was so made known as to be free from all mystery in regard to the truth of the facts, and yet so connected as to contain mysteries beyond the comprehension of finite minds. (p.5)

So his "good brethren" should take heart for they may "understand, practice, and enjoy all this rich gift of God to man, just as you enjoy the light of the day, and refreshment by rest at night". But when he says all may understand, he means if their own depravity does not prevent it. Plainly they can't understand what they will not attend to, and they can't understand Christianity if they attend to "something else put instead of it". One says he can't understand religion, and is it remarkable?

Consider, you never read the Scriptures; you never ask anybody to read them to you; you hate and persecute good men; you seldom enter a place of worship; you keep wicked company like yourself; you are often seen in the practice of enormous crimes....It would be a mystery indeed, if a man who never turned his attention to a subject, should know anything certain about it. We have no such mystery in all the Christian religion. Christians do not live like you. (p.6)

But a sober man - a regular churchgoer - complains he doesn't understand Christianity. All this is true, but the preacher is talking about the attendance of the mind at worship.

Now, it is a fact, abroad or at home, in the church or in the barn, your attention is always taken up with other things,...Sometimes your corn, sometimes your cattle, sometimes taxes and rates, and sometimes your rent and your servants wages; but at all times to live in this present world, engrosses all your attention. (p.7)

This man resembles "yon child fast asleep, without knowing it, in the arms of a parent". Robinson quotes scripture showing that it
is God who is before and behind him in all that this man does: It is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, and multiplieth thy herds and thy flocks,...and all that thou hast. This man can't understand his obligation to love and serve God, "not for want of evidence, but attention". The same applies to statesmen, soldiers, and lawyers, who give no thought to religion! It would be a shame if Christianity could be understood without attention for then the "ease with which we acquired knowledge would sink the value of it".

But it is absolutely necessary to focus attention on Christianity itself.

We hear often of the mysteries of religion; let us not forget that there are mysteries of iniquity. Ignorance, covetousness, tyranny, especially tyranny over conscience, all wrap themselves in mystery; (p.8)

If we incorporate any of these with the Christian religion and fail to attend to pure Christianity, "we may attend and study, but we shall never know; we shall be ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth". Paul's doctrine, manner of life, charity etc., were fully known, but "who ever knew the doctrine of transubstantiation, or that of the infallibility of a frail sinful man? Who of us, uninspired men, knows the feelings of a person immediately under the influence of the Holy Ghost?"

It is vain to pursue such mysteries; the greater the diligence, the greater the failure and despair,

If one place religion in impulses, another in new revelations, a third in a state of perfection, a fourth in discoveries and enjoyments inconsistent with our present state, and not set before us in the Christian religion, they may well be filled with doubts and fears, and spend life in complaining of the crooked and dreary paths of religion. (p.9)

But if we attend only to what is revealed and believe "only what is reported with sufficient evidence, to practice only what is
commanded by the undoubted voice of God; if we seek only such pleasures and distinctions as we are taught in scripture to expect: ...thereby good should come unto us".

Granted that anyone may understand Christianity, even a fool, why should one desire to? There are reasons in God, in the Christian religion, in the world, and in yourself that "should induce you to apply to religious knowledge". If these prove insufficient "reason will require but one thing more, that is, your everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord...".

He does not mean "to frighten" his listeners. Fear is one of the lowest of passions; "and though the fear of the Lord is in some men the beginning of wisdom, yet it is not the whole of it". He asks them to consider God: Is there nothing in Him "to engage you to esteem him"? Is the listener so drenched in sin as to "dislike a being of perfect wisdom, justice, goodness, and power?" "Is there nothing in all the tender compassion of the gospel worth your regard?" "If we wish to please him, it must be by making him, the sovereign beauty, the first cause of all things, the chief object of our esteem...". All creation praises him: "O, how full of preachers is this well-adjusted world!". This God so loved the world that He sent His only Son Jesus Christ, and to the "apostles alone, and to the whole multitude of the Jews with them" He said, This is my beloved Son, hear ye him. By "the mouth of an inspired man" God said, every soul ("Remark this expression") every soul that will not hear this prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.

"Why? Is this an arbitrary command...? No such thing; but because the Christian religion is the perfection of reason, and
intended to explain and establish the three branches of the eternal and unchangeable law of nature". The first is piety towards God; the second, love to our neighbors; the third, love to ourselves. "There is, therefore, in the Christian religion itself the highest reason for our acceptance of it."

There are reasons in the world. Consider the great numbers "who live in the constant practice of sin, drunkards, liars, thieves, extortioners,...who are expressly, by name, as it were, doomed not to inherit the kingdom of God"; there is surely no reason to wish to imitate them and share their company now, or in a future state of punishment. Christianity calls you out of this company.

Consider the prosperous and notice "with what hazard they get, with what anguish they keep, and with what agony they part with the good things of this life; the reason is, they have mistak-ten the nature of these things, they take them for their chief good, and part with them as if they were torn from Almighty God". Christianity commends itself by being "that religion which pre-serves the heart from taking damage by a plentiful harvest, a prosperous trade, and such other little advantages of life". Surely "that is the religion, which, if we were sure of prospering in all our undertakings, we ought first of all to embrace, lest the end of a prosperous life should be a miserable death, as that of all, who are wicked in prosperity, must necessarily be".

As for the afflicted: the poor, lame, blind, deaf, dumb, "the man in prison for his debts, and the man in an hospital with his sores, the poor father reduced to live upon charity through the extravagance of his son,...the man afflicted with the gravel, and dying by inches"; can anything but religion support the spirits of
these folk?

The Christian religion is a general balm to heal all their wounds. It teaches the doctrine of providence, that God brings good out of evil, and communicates the greatest blessings to mankind, under appearances the most mortifying to our senses. (p.14)

Finally, in the religious world observe those "good people gone before, and the rest now on the road". Does not the religion which supported Job, David, Paul, and Peter commend itself to you?

The reasons in "yourselves" concern your nature, depravity, condition, and prospects. One's nature is capable of high improvement. Even here one's body is improved by Christian temperance, sobriety, chastity, industry and "above all, the government of the temper," and at the resurrection of the dead, "religion will change the natural into a spiritual body". The soul too is "capable of great advancement".

Have you no ambition to know more than how to manage a few acres of land, how to dispose of a little corn, or a little money? Rise, men! rise into an apprehension of your dignity. You were made in the image of God; and though the picture is dirtied and defaced, yet Christianity calls you to aspire to such noble sentiments and worthy actions, such high enjoyments, and such duration, as become the majesty of your nature. (p.15)

"Think of your depravity. Are you perfectly reconciled to your own sins, to wilful ignorance; would you always be a fool? ...Are you quite easy with anger and malice, and are you never afraid that the violence of your passions may bring you to shame here, and to hell hereafter?" Without religion, this is what will happen.

Consider your condition: "every thing in that is a reason for religion". Would a father go "at the head of a family of eight or ten children, a guide to hell?" What is worse than a poor man
without religion? He is comfortless and offensive to others. Will the rich care to give charity or find work for such a one who will consume "all in the service of sin"? A young man without religion is dangerous and an old man teaching youth to sin by his example is considered a public nuisance. Those who are in health should not abuse it in sin, and those who are sick should be preparing to meet God.

As to prospects, answer the question Jeremiah put to the people of his day, What will you do in the end thereof? "Are you wiser than the old world, who lived as you do, while Noah was building and entering the ark?" If punishment is in prospect you will be turned to the supplication of God; if on the other hand "you have repentance, forgiveness, and heaven in prospect, you will be confounded for your ingratitude to that benefactor, from whom you live in hopes of receiving such undeserved favours".

Brethren, if there be in you the least degree of self-love, or the fear of God; if you have not lived in sin till your understandings are blasted and perished, I conjure you, respect the apostle of us Gentiles, who now says to us, If you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ. Tell him, if you have the heart we will not read, nor will we hear any body else read the book that contains the Christian religion. Religion is the last thing we desire to understand, and we prefer a newspaper and a ballad, before all your histories and prophecies, and epistles and gospels. If this be your case, when heathens are pitied, some of whom went half over the then known world in pursuit of wisdom, but never saw the wisdom of God in the Christian religion; I say, when you and they stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, to receive for the deeds done in the body, their condition will be more tolerable than yours. (pp.17f)

He concludes hoping that the God "who desireth not the death of a sinner, but that he should return and live" shall "inform your minds, by means of our instructions,...that you may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints! When you come to die, may he shew you
the path of life: and in the world to come may you see him face to face, and know even as also you are known!"

The brief, "Morning Exercises" are titled "Industry", "Caution", "Frugality", "Covetousness", "Self-Preservation" and "The Jews". In the first Robinson argues the advantage of early rising for the dispatch of business, the preservation of health, and the practice of devotion. Lying in bed after day break is to be considered "as one of the ills of the aged and the sick". To those who are "accustomed to sleep till eight in the morning", he gives practical advice on breaking this bad habit:

...rise the first week in April at a quarter before eight, the second week at half after seven, the third at a quarter after seven, and the fourth at seven: let him continue this method till the end of July, subtracting one quarter of an hour each week from sleep, and he will accomplish the work, that at first sight appears so difficult. It is not a stride, it is a succession of short steps, that conveys us from the foot to the top of a mountain. (p.418)

He reminds his hearers in speaking of "Caution", that to rise early and pray is not enough. We "ought to get up with all our senses about us, that we may contrive how to live like men and Christians in a world not everywhere favourable to liberty, property, and morality". The Book of Job is designed "to free us from the folly of imagining that the present life is a state of rewards and punishments". Life here is "a state of trial and exercise", a preparation for the future life. Therefore, we are to take care of our understandings. There is a popular error "that common people should not pretend to think, and debate, and determine on religion, but leave that to their guides".

Take care of this error, and trust nobody: your guides may be right, but you must be wrong. At least exercise your understandings to distinguish a wise from a foolish guide.... (p.431)

We should also take care of our property, lives, time and children.
From John vi.12, he argues the necessity of "Frugality". When Jesus fed the multitude he demonstrated the bounty of God, but he also taught frugality, for he said, "gather up the fragments that nothing be lost". The world is so constituted "that there should be no waste, and there is none".

Observe what passes in your own yards. The tasker in the barn takes down a floor of wheat sheaves, and threshes. The head-corn he throws and dresses and puts up for market. The tail he screens, and fans, and ries, or rids of its dust and rubbish, to grind for the use of the family. The chaff he carries to the horses, the straw he turns out for litter for the cattle, and manure for another crop. Mark how the small stock turn the straw over and over, beat out every grain that escaped the flail, and spread abroad all the rubbish, one class picking up the wheat, another the wild oats, a third the seeds of darnel, and other weeds, and all gathering up the fragments that nothing be lost. (p.440)

He considers frugality "as an imitation of Christ, and of God". They should be frugal in dress, diet, and the use of their money and time.

In "Covetousness" he warns that "there is only a thin partition between the last step of virtue and the first of vice". Thus when justice is carried too far it becomes cruelty, and "excessive frugality is parsimony, or covetousness". He explains that;

To covet is to desire beyond due bounds. God hath set these due bounds. He hath bounded passion by reason, and reason by religion and the nature of things. (p.445)

Covetousness is unjust, cruel, ungrateful, foolish and idolatrous. It is unprecedented in all our examples of virtue. "The Scripture shews us many sorts of good men, and honestly acknowledges their faults....but which of the saints ever lived in a habit of covetousness? It is Judas, who hanged himself, and not such as Peter, whom covetous men imitate". This Exercise is based on the story of Achan, and Robinson concludes "with the words of an ancient
teacher in Italy, one Ambrose, more remarkable for his wit than for the accuracy of his judgment".

"Josuua", said he, "could stop the course of the sun: but all his power could not stop the course of avarice. The sun stood still, but avarice went on. Joshua obtained a victory when the sun stood still: but when avarice was at work, Joshua was defeated". (p.450)

In "Self-Preservation" he begs leave "to read you a bit of a letter" written by "a great and good man in the north of Europe, more than two hundred years ago" to Theodore Beza, "that pious protestant persecutor". It deals with the problem of authority. Who shall determine the sense of Scripture? The writer's minister and Beza disagree. Both quote Scripture and both reason, but who shall be the judge? Beza calls his opponent a heretic "but the catholicks say you are both hereticks. Shall I believe them?"

They quote histories and fathers: So do you. To whom do you all address yourselves? ...You say, the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets: but you say, I am no prophet, and I say you are not one. ...You have broken off your yoke, allow me to break mine. Having freed yourselves from the tyranny of popish prelates, why do you turn ecclesiastical tyrants yourselves,...? (To plead it is the magistrates who banish and burn for heresy will not do for) have they done any thing more than practice the doctrine you taught them? ...When you talk of your Lutheran confession, and your Calvinistical creed, and your unanimity, and your fundamental truths, I keep thinking of the sixth commandment, Thou shalt not kill. (pp.454f)

Robinson sees his hearers "relish this letter". He will tell them more of the writer some other time. Meanwhile "here is one of the prettiest bound hymn-books that ever I saw" as a prize for "the little boy, who brings me the fairest written copy" of the letter.

1 Ltr. of Andrew Dudith, Hungarian Reformer; his 'teacher' was Stancarus. R.R. has changed ltr. to make it more easily understood by his hearers: i.e. Augsburg to Lutheran and helvetick to Calvinistical. Ltr. is published in the Ecclesiastical Researches in a section dealing with Dudith. pp.591-594. "Never was a finer pen than that of Dudith". p.593.
He that says it by heart, stands upright, looks pleasantly, and pronounces it with a soft but full-mouthed gracefulness to me, as the writer would have done to Mr. Beza, he shall have another like it: and he that best explains some of the hard words to me, such as heresy, minister, magistrate, secular power, prelate, Lutheran creed, and so on, he shall have a third. Do not be afraid. Ask your father, or the schoolmaster, or somebody, and come and tell me when I come again. We shall make it out among us I dare say, and understand it as well as the writer did. Come, let us finish by singing two verses of this incomparable hymn-book. (pp.455f)

In the last Exercise, "The Jews", he considers first "the general history of this people". Then he considers their customs, merit, sins, and calamities, and finally their recall. The text: "Afterward shall the children of Israel fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days", implies the Jews will finally reverence God's patience, providence, and grace.

What remains? Only this at present, Let us avoid putting stumbling-blocks in the way of the Jews. Let us propose Christianity to them as Jesus proposed it to them. Instead of the modern magick of scholastical divinity, let us lay before them their own prophecies. Let us shew them their accomplishment in Jesus. Let us applaud their hatred of idolatry. Let us shew them the morality of Jesus in our lives and tempers. Let us never abridge their civil liberty, nor ever try to force their consciences. Let us remind them, that as Jews they are bound to make the law of Moses the rule of their actions. Let us try to inspire them with suspicion of rabbinal and received traditions, and a generous love of investigating religious truth for themselves. Let us avoid all rash judging, and leave their future state to God. (p.462)

If it be a fact that "the truest type of popular preaching is that which has about it a certain rustic homeliness",¹ it will not be surprising that Robinson's fame soon spread. He was much sought after as a preacher for ordination services and other special occasions.² A number of the sermons preached on such "Particular

¹ Smyth, op. cit. p.182.
² In Cambridgeshire, and some neighboring counties, scarcely a single minister was settled, or a place of worship opened for several years, at which Robinson's presence was not solicited, either to preside, to preach, or, at least, to assist in the religious solemnities. Dyer, p.252.
Occasions" were, at the request of those who heard them, recalled and published separately.1 After the singular Dr. Ogden2 of St. Sepulchre's died, he "was the most popular preacher in the town".3

III

(W)hat sort of discipline has that church, which, having no confidence in its pastor, submits his office to the control of every disaffected brother, however destitute of pastoral abilities he may be? R.R.4

However popular as a preacher Robinson was in the town, there were some in his own church who preferred mysteries of grace to morality and "enthusiasm" to sober-mindness. Sometimes it was necessary for "the gathered community" to excommunicate. One case was brought before the church in May 1768. The accused, a man and woman, had long tried the church with their antinomian tendencies. The church trial failed to convince the erring, but it did serve as a warning and example to other members. Only the woman spoke in her defence. She was evidently not overawed by this ecclesiastical court. She told them plainly that:

...she did not assemble with the church,...the doctrine being corrupt... she owed no duty... to such corrupt officers as this church had: she had not slandered them, but she had said that they were the enemies of God and his gospel.... she did not pray for any but the elect, and she thought theirs a work of the devil.... she had indeed received many admonitions, but did not think herself obliged to obey them....5

Two of the deacons having proved the five charges, the pastor "recapitulated the matter", showing that "enthusiasm and anti-

1 In 1804 the Occasional Sermons were collected and published in one volume.
2 Speaking with Boswell of "the best English sermons", Johnson said: "I should like to read all that Ogden has written." Boswell, Life of Dr. Johnson, vol. II, p.179. (Everyman Ed.)
3 Smyth, op. cit. p.111.
4 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xli.
5 Ibid. p.xxxvii.
nomianism compounded their religion". He concluded that the people were to be pitied who had come under the influence of false teachers.

...the cry of the gospel, the gospel, was often the vain subterfuge of libertines, who did not mean the gospel of St. Matthew, or of St. Mark, or of St. Luke, or of St. John, or of Jesus Christ, but of some false apostle, some deceitful worker: that this was certainly the case with this faction, who declared just now before the whole church that Mr. Hussey's great book (The Glory of Christ Vindicated) was equal to the Bible:1

The pastor recommended them to "the pity, the prayers, and the patience of the church". The church feeling its patience already trifled with, "forthwith expelled the offenders".

There were other difficulties. The pastor began a Thursday afternoon class for the children of Cambridge "to say their catechism". The class grew and it was shifted to Sunday evening. Still growing "it was thought best to continue the meeting by preaching". So began the Sunday evening lectures which proved so attractive to town and gown. But they were an innovation and some did not like the way they were handled. On November 18, 1769 the pastor complained of "certain heady people" who had interrupted him in the conduct of public worship, which was the express duty of the minister. They had found fault with certain tunes "which the best judges of music in the assembly had approved as proper church music".2 He argued further that the objection came in a service which the church did not require, and having been begun by the minister was continued at the "desire of the gown and town".

2 One of these judges was Dr. Randall, Professor of Music at the University, "who worships with this people constantly, except when his office in the university obliges him to be absent". He wrote the music for Robinson's 'Mighty God while angels bless Thee'. C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xl and 295. Gunning relates the Professor "shone as much in convivial as in musical talent". Mr. Pitt was on one occasion "completely deceived" by "his celebrated song in the character of a drunken man". op. cit. vol. I, p.186.
He argued that the Thursday evening lecture was devoted to the church, as the lectures in the villages were devoted to the country people. He thought it his duty "to vary them all as well as he was able", for the good of his hearers and the growth of the church. This meant that he sometimes introduced a sprightly tune and preached "in another language and in another manner" than at the regular worship services of the church. He begged the church to believe the goodness of his intentions and leave him "an entire liberty" of conducting these lectures, "as he thought most conducive to the public edification". "All this was allowed".

Robinson believed that the power to appoint to the ministerial office rested with the people. He is quite clear that there is no room for a "lord-brother" in a Baptist congregation. However, after appointment, he feels that the leadership of the congregation is the pastor's right and duty. When disputes arose he appealed to his people, but he expected them to follow his leadership. For the Cambridge pastor democracy in church government need not be purchased at the cost of discipline. His practical common sense and jealousy for discipline is seen in his presentation of a motion made on behalf of his young people on the 18th of June, 1765.

The young people wished to form a society, which would meet each Sunday in the church vestry at noon. The pastor reminded the congregation that private meetings were subject to abuse. He felt "nothing required more circumspection and management than these meetings". Sometimes they

1 "His wish was, to lead people to think, and to act, for themselves: at the same time, no man possessed greater power over a congregation." Dyer. p.149.
...degenerated into a dry, useless formality; sometimes became hot-beds of enthusiasm; sometimes they were the sources of cabal, disorder, disputing, a vain-glory ostentation of imaginary gifts, of which the members were entirely destitute; that the members too frequently learnt in these private meetings to over-value their own abilities, and by ignorantly placing all religion in the discharge of the two duties of praying and singing, neglected other moral duties,...

So-called "experience meetings were the most dangerous of all" as they tended to ground religion "on uncertain feelings" rather than on "evidence and faith". These meetings often "cherished the vanity of hot-headed men" who, successful in pleasing "a few silly women" felt themselves "fit for the ministry". This posed a "painful dilemma" for the church which could send out novices "to disgrace religion" or restrain their rashness and thus "raise a disturbance in the church, where the weak and the interested would encourage them, and produce a faction or a division in the end". However, such meetings might be "productive of great good". He concluded by proposing the young people's request be granted "under certain regulations". These regulations "gave the ultimate power over the meetings, both as to management and continuance or dissolution" to minister and deacons "if they were unanimous; and, if they were not, to the church".

In the eighteenth century "disorderly and riotous conduct was far more common among undergraduates than nowadays, and discipline was lax and ineffective". When it is remembered that Dissent was viewed with suspicion and repugnance by some of the University authorities, it will not seem strange if boisterous undergraduates considered the Baptist meeting-house as a legitimate

1 C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xxxiii.
2 Ibid. pp.xxxiiif.
3 Winstanley, The University of Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century, p.16.
theatre of operations. This explains the entry in the Church Book in 1765 that the deacons with the church's consent appointed,

...three or four more servants, with small stipends... to accommodate strangers...in short, to preserve a decent order; than which nothing is more beautiful in any place, nothing more desirable for the credit of religion at Cambridge, where so many of the gown give such sad examples of rudeness.1

Many students came from serious motives, but for others "in the language of the younger part of the university, an attendance at meeting" was a "pleasant lounge".2 It is wrong to think that Robinson's meetings were peculiarly favored with undergraduate irreverence, for many times their own compulsory chapel services were conducted and attended with callousness and sometimes in a state of drunkenness.3 If a preacher was disliked, he soon became aware of the fact by a continuous scraping of academic feet.4

Sometimes they behaved no better when they attended the services of the Established churches in town. As late as 1790

1 W. Robinson, p.xxxii.
2 Dyer, p.68.
3 Smyth, op. cit. Chap. III, espec. pp.114-128. On p.128 the following "malignant, and no doubt distorted, picture of the religious exercises of a Cambridge College" is quoted: "The chapel itself exhibits a scene of the most disgusting and disgraceful indecency. The Dean generally goes through the first part of the service to a single auditor. Towards the beginning of the first lesson 'the students come in right frisky'; some running, some laughing, and some staggering. The lessons are not unfrequently read by a drunken scholar, who is either too blind to read what is before him, or too much inclined to v-m-t to pronounce what he can read. The rest of the men, are, perhaps, in the mean time, employed in tossing the candles at each other, in talking obscenity, or in d-mn-ng the Dean, the chapel, and the Master. Those who are not engaged in any of these amusements, and who are neither asleep nor sitting in a corner, are usually employed in reading F(anny) H(ill), the Age of Reason, the Barouche Driver and his Wife, or some other delicate and fashionable production." (The Satirist, May 1808, vol. II, pp.248-9).
4 Wakefield, op. cit. vol. I, p.94.
when the Evangelical minister, Charles Simeon was allowed by his church wardens to conduct an evening lecture, he found that undergraduate conduct had not improved. He realized his attempt was an innovation for a parish church and "conveyed at once the impression that it must be established for the advancement of true religion, or what the world would call Methodism". Thus he was not surprised that it was "regarded with jealousy by some, and with contempt by others, and that young gownsmen, who even in their own chapels showed little more reverence for God than they would in a playhouse, should often enter in to disturb our worship". Simeon's attempt to preserve order in his church failed. Professor Farish, "popular with the undergraduates for some years before and after he was Proctor" stationed himself at the outside door of the church to prevent improper conduct to people leaving, but even he failed. Although one young gownsmen was made to read a public apology in the church, the disturbances continued. Before the apology was read Simeon said to the congregation that they had "long borne with the most indecent conduct from those, whose situation in life should have made them sensible of the heinousness of such offenses". He specified:

...we have seen persons come into this place in a state of intoxication; we have seen them walking about the aisles, notwithstanding there are persons appointed to show them into seats; we have seen them coming in and going out without the slightest reverence or decorum; we have seen them insulting modest persons, both in and after divine service; in short, the devotions of the congregation have been disturbed by almost every species of ill conduct;¹

A quarter of a century had seen little change in the habits of the young gownsmen.

Sometimes Robinson, with his ready wit, was able to deal

with offenders in a way which thwarted their design without unduly disturbing the meeting.

On one occasion a playful student laid a wager that he would stand on the pulpit steps with an ear trumpet till the conclusion of Robinson's sermon. The great preacher quite ignored the gentleman's presence till a propitious moment, when in the course of his sermon he touched on the subject of divine grace. "A grace," he added, quietly pointing to the student, "which may be even extended to this silly boy." The ear trumpet fell to the ground, and the surprised undergraduate lost his wager. ¹

At other times the behavior necessitated appeals to the authorities. But though these complaints were "referred to the proctors and heads of colleges;...no effectual redress was obtained". ² Finally the pastor determined to get satisfaction, by law if necessary. For this purpose, (although he was later to regret it), it was fortunate that Robinson had "qualified" in 1765 under the Act of Toleration. ³ The particular case pressed concerned two young men of Emmanuel College, who made such a disturbance that it was necessary to dismiss the service. The Vice-Chancellor, Dr. Richardson, Master of Emmanuel, suggested some exercise be imposed on the offenders. The pastor objected that such might be proper for violations of college rules, but not for an offense against an act of Parliament. He insisted the offenders pay the legal fine of fifty pounds, or ask public pardon in the newspapers. The offenders chose the latter. Upon the recommendation of Dr. Farmer,

² W. Robinson, p.xlxi.
³ In that year William H. Ewin, a justice of the peace in Cambridge, had advised the Dissenting ministers of the town, "to qualify as the act of toleration required". This was done by the Independent minister Mr. Darby, and Robinson on October 11, when they went to "the Shire-hall at the sessions,...and in the presence of the...Earl of Hardwicke" and several other justices of the peace they "took the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and also the oath of abjuration, subscribing their names as the act directs;" they then received their certificates. C.B. in W. Robinson, p.xxiv.
tutor of Emmanuel, the church trustees agreed to omit the name of one student in "consideration of the general character" Farmer was pleased to give him.

Not unlikely such insistence on redress was a considerable annoyance to Farmer who "had a deep-rooted dislike of Dissenters". It may also have annoyed the Vice-Chancellor. He was having trouble getting the Proctors to take action in matters affecting the morals of the students, and the reputation of the University. In support of their insistence on a public apology, the trustees' letter to Dr. Farmer (after "their warmest thanks for your impartial and generous conduct in regard to your two pupils") urged:

In a profligate seaport town our dissenting brethren meet without interruption; and gentlemen of both army and navy, occasionally at our Cambridge meeting, have blushed at the difference. In the most dissolute parts of London, disturbances are unknown in meeting-houses: how mortifying the reflection! that civility, the offspring of good sense, is met with in sinks of ignorance, which is not to be obtained at a seat of literature.

* * *

...Would you imagine, Sir, that we scarcely ever meet without interruptions from the under-graduates; that every agreeable female in the society is exposed to the same insults as in a bawdy-house; no pew privileged from a bold intrusion; no family, however considerable in fortune or credit, from insolent affronts? Is it credible, that prostitutes should parade our aisles in academic habits? An unforeseen accident discovered the sex of such a one but a fortnight ago. Is it sufferable, that on reproving these disorders our lives should be threatened?

* * *

1 Gunning, op. cit. vol. I. p.177.
2 "We are here" wrote the Vice-Chancellor in January 1770 to Charles Yorke "as much pestered with lewd women who swarm as much in our streets as they do in Fleet Street or Ludgate Hill: and I cannot get a Proctor to molest them for fear of a prosecution." Quoted in Winstanley, Unreformed Cambridge, pp.210f.
3 These threats were not always idle. "About 1779 an under-graduate of Emmanuel was bound over to keep the peace for threatening to shoot Dr. Halifax, the Regius Professor of Civil Law", and Dr. Rooke, Master of Christ's in 1753 sought protection of the law from John Hutton. The proceedings were finally abandoned at the request of the Archbishop of York who was Hutton's uncle. Winstanley, Cambridge in the Eighteenth Century, pp.19-23. There were often fights between town and gown. At least one townsman was killed. See Gunning, op. cit. vol. I, pp.116f.
...Our American brethren were not at all conciliated to English episcopacy, but on the contrary highly disgusted with it, by the behaviour of the gown at our meeting: one of them protesting, 'I have preached in England, Scotland, Ireland, in various parts of America, to congregations of all denominations, to polite citizens, and to naked Indians; but never did I see such heathenish impiety during divine service as in the Cambridge undergraduates.'

IV

In spite of occasional friction within his congregation, and the disturbances caused by undisciplined gownsmen, Robinson's concern went beyond his own flock, to the Dissenting cause in Cambridge, and throughout the Kingdom. In 1766, the Independent congregation was without a minister, and Robinson proposed a union of the two churches. In his "Memorial" to the two congregations he argued it was not necessary to inquire into the reasons the church was so divided; enough to observe that the divisions were "neither authorized by Christ, nor encouraged by his apostles". The Lord above all "pressed the necessity of union and love", and anyone must be "totally ignorant of God, the law, the gospel, human nature...who thinks himself authorized to divide from a society, and cease to love the members of it, merely on account of some small difference in sentiment, or practice". Nothing has so contributed to the weakness of the church as "impolitic divisions of her members, who ought never to make two churches, where one would do". If this is generally true, it is more so at Cambridge "as the situation is more conspicuous in the eyes of a whole university, than in a small village, or a common market town". In 1720, when Mr. Hussey left, "the church (Dissenting) was the largest

1 Quoted in W. Robinson, pp.xliiff. The ltr. is dated Dec.1769 and "Mr. Robinson's hand may be traced in its composition".
2 "Memorial to the Two Congregations of Protestant Dissenters, in Cambridge" (1767) in Flower, IV, pp.179-187.
and most flourishing of any in the county". But since that time it has been broken into "five or six parts". Although it is now "collected into two", never have both flourished at once. The writer feels "there is a voice in this dispensation" designed to teach them unity; he therefore proposes union. A slight doctrinal difference, baptism already exists in one of the churches. As it does not cause the disunion of that church, it should not prevent union. A union would strengthen the Dissenting interest, as disunion has already weakened it. It would "annihilate all those unbecoming bickerings, jealousies, and cavillings, which almost always attend the members of two societies so near neighbours". A practical difficulty would also be solved.

It is absolutely expedient now, when one congregation is broken by an unhappy faction issuing in the withdrawal of several members. This is the ready and, perhaps, only way of reclaiming them; and when the other congregation is conscientiously inquisitive how to act towards those members of the other place, who came amongst them, to carry it at a distance is to behave uncivilly, and looks like want of love: and to enter into close connections, is to weaken and offend a sister church: therefore as they are obliged to have some, the same spirit enables them to embrace all the church; and to say all in one word, an union removes the difficulties on both sides.

The union would "be much to the credit and reputation of religion" as it would enable them "to acquit themselves generously to their poor, and to other good works which now are not to be done without burdening subscribers too much". A minister's salary and the upkeep of one church would be saved. It would mean:

A large church walking in love; a respectable congregation; a minister well provided for; poor comfortably assisted; every thing done with credit and honour;

The flourishing state of his own congregation "must convince all the world" that the offer of union is not "for any low sinister ends" but only from the constraint of love. But it may be objected
that this is to impose a minister on one congregation "whom, though they respect, yet they would not choose for their pastor". To this he answers in closing:

That he is conscious of his incapacity; and wishes the Lord had bestowed on him gifts acceptable enough, to serve the people in this case; and since the Lord had not been pleased to do so, he nevertheless, earnestly wishes the prosperity of Sion, and hereby promises to cede his pastoral office to any other minister, in whom the two congregations can unite, provided it can be done, and his removal agreed to by (as he does not see why it should not) his own people.

The offer to resign is not unconditional, but it is noble and generous. The Independents however, "declined to consider his overtures". Yet relations between the two groups continued friendly, for we find that in November of 1775 when the Independent minister, Mr. Saunders, was ill, the two churches united for services with Mr. Robinson preaching.

We have noted that Robinson was much sought after by sister churches to preach for them on special occasions. Though staunch in his belief in the freedom and inviolability of the individual congregation, he was interested in their activities and very active in promoting and attending associational meetings. He was chosen Moderator of the Eastern Association meeting at Hemel Hempstead, Herts on the 14th and 15th of May, 1776. As Moderator, he wrote the circular letter of the Association which was sent to the member churches. The plan of the letter was approved by the assembled group, but the letter is Robinson's and makes interesting reading. It expresses approval of "the grand principle of all trust in your societies, the responsibility of officers to those who appoint them". After a very summary account of progress,

1 Nutter, op. cit. p.89.
2 Flower, IV, pp.189-203.
the letter reminds readers of "the principles, the practices, and even the peculiarities" of their churches, and the necessity of giving their attention to each. Some of the practices commended cast light on changing as well as continuing customs among Free Church groups:

Make conscience of a regular attendance on public worship...
Keep up family religion, the reading of the holy scriptures, singing, and prayer, or the last at least. A little forecast will gain you time for this twice a day, and study to make it short and agreeable, that it may not disgust, but edify your families.
Catechise your children and servants;... You should pay the greater attention to this branch of family religion, in order to wipe off that foul scandal, which some zealots have cast on us for not sprinkling our infants, as if we were careless about their salvation, because we omitted a superstitious custom.
Endeavour to promote one another's temporal interest. Deal with one another; employ one another; intermarry together; give one another advice and assistance; consider your whole species as your brethren; but regard your own community as your family.
Be patient, prudent, and tender to one another's infirmities. Conceal them from the world; let the too common practice of whispering them among yourselves sink into disuse;... Time and patience have done wonders in recovering backsliders, while contrary dispositions, productive of violent measures, have been attended with scandalous effects.1

They are reminded of truths they hold in common with moral philosophers, the Greek, Roman, and other Protestant churches. They should not neglect these truths, but they are to "particularly enforce the truths, that are peculiar to your own societies, and for the sake of which you have separated from your brethren".

Support the right of private judgement, and liberty of conscience in opposition to all human authority in matters of religion; the acknowledgement of Christ alone as the head of the church; and the sufficiency of the holy scriptures as the rule of faith and practice.

Money too is mentioned:
Be not unmindful, brethren, of the support of your societies. Your pastors ask no emoluments; your churches

1 Ibid. pp.196-198.
have none to bestow. Conscience makes us your ministers; and it is to your credit, as well as to our comfort, to enable us to provide things honest in the sight of all men.

In order to discharge this duty, they must avoid fashionable vices, expensive luxuries of the times, and strive to excel in their professions. They must be industrious in getting; frugal in spending. The Moderator who had suffered financially for his convictions, and was never free from financial worry, and the malicious tongues of "brethren", might well sign such a document.

In a letter to the churches of the same faith and order in association at Cambridge, May 13 and 14, 1777, the Particular Baptist Church of Christ, at Cambridge made clear on what basis it joined in such proceedings. Its members' design was still to reform the church "to its primitive simplicity". They adopted "this method of communion with other churches,...as a branch of primitive religion, which, under the divine blessing, may be productive of great spiritual advantages to us and our posterity, unless our own folly defeat your good designs". However, they entered the association "with great jealousy and caution" for, though they saw clearly "the practice of associating, consulting, and mutually assisting in the purest ages of christianity", they were still aware "that such associations were in the end productive of the great antichristian apostasy".

...an apostasy so fatal to the civil and religious liberties of mankind, and particularly to those of the brave old puritans and nonconformists, that the very words, Synod, and Session, Council, and Canon, yet make both the ears of a sound protestant dissenter to tingle.

In spite of such danger, they felt this "branch of primitive godliness" was not to be rejected. As the associating churches came by

1 Dyer, app. VII, pp.464-467. The ltr. is signed "John Stanford", but R.R. is certainly behind it.
invitation, pretended no authority, "do not even take the liberty to interrogate us on any other articles than those which we choose to lay before you, - and then offer us advice, but not law", they were welcome and they "bless God for granting us the honour and the pleasure of this interview".

Throughout his life Robinson carried on a large correspondence. An examination of extant letters written during this period helps us see the man. To David Riste of Isleham in May of 1763 he writes what amounts to a sermon resume. He advises his friend to study "as a powerful antidote against all heart-sorrow, that Revelation which God has made of his Son". This he elaborates as a revelation first "in the dignity of his person" with appropriate sub-topics. Secondly, in "the efficacy of his atonement"; thirdly, "in the perfection of his obedience to the law"; fourthly, in the "fulness of grace treasured up" in his person and finally, "He is revealed in the beauty of a pattern". Mrs. Robinson joins with him in sympathy for Mr. Lambert's "late loss". He adds that he has heard Mr. Lambert "sweetly on God's sovereignty; now may it be a comfort to him". The tone of the letter and closing remarks indicate that he was not at this time as far from "enthusiasm" as he appears in the Village Sermons.

He writes2 to a fellow minister, "my dear Mr. L", wishing he had a seat in his congregation that he might read "his heart in his actions".

Does he court popularity and applause; - or is he aiming at winning souls to Christ? Is he giving himself airs? Does he study the art of the finger, show of the ring, cut

1 W. Robinson, pp.171f. "Farewell, my dear brother; walk circumspectly, redeeming the time. Let your moderation be known to all men, the Lord is at hand."
of the band, size of the wig, &c? or, dead to these, is his holy soul absorbed in the presence of God, importance of his errand, misery of sin, bowels of the Saviour, and certainty of approaching judgment, when he must give account? The former are baubles, fit only for babes and idiots, the latter worthy the desires of a minister of Christ.

He has suggested the man's name to a "pretty congregation" thirty miles from Cambridge who want "such"as I hope you are,". By this time Robinson has four daughters, a son, and a wife and is in his eighth year at Cambridge,

...with a people who abound in love to me and each other, so that I never knew what a wish to remove meant, and was I to choose this day a people in the three kingdoms, this is the people I should choose. Would to God I had the gift of an archangel for so worthy a people!

Not all Dissenting ministers were so happily situated, and one wrote Robinson about the advisability of removal. On December 3, 1766 Robinson answered\(^1\) that he was far from thinking himself able to advise "on so important a subject". Removal should never be considered but "on just and solid" grounds which will "bear the test before God" and "commend themselves to the consciences of sober, impartial Christians". After stating this broad position, he goes on to give a "particular explication" of the three things generally accepted as authorizing removal: "want of health, want of maintenance, and want of success". The first should be "such a want of health as disables a man from filling up the duties of his office, and which a different air will remedy". By the second he understands not "a want of many accommodations, which to the flesh are pleasing enough, but...a want of the necessaries, and many conveniences too, of life, which are absolutely necessary to enable a man to provide things honest in the sight of all men".

The want of success is of all the hardest to determine; for, are we good judges of our success? may we prescribe to God, or demand of him all the converts we choose? Different

\(^1\) Ibid. pp.175ff.
gifts are for different services; to convince is one man's work, to convert, another's; to plant one's, and to water another's, God giving increase to all.

"To speak directly" to his friend's case, "removal is lawful": the man's health is prejudiced, his maintenance deficient, - ("¥30 livings are in my opinion like college fellowships, for single men ...; why should the minister be the only one in the congregation, whose duty it is to waste his own property; and who, when he dies, leaves a widow in circumstances more necessitous than any of his society"), - and his success small.

Robinson is "sorry for the bigotry of my Baptist brethren", and blesses God that "our church" is of another stamp, holding open communion. The "mixed congregations flourish most hereabouts, while strict ones nurse one another to death". The Baptist cause, he believes, "the best cause in the kingdom, but worst managed". He denies being an author, and is not "ambitious of being numbered amongst that sort of gentry", some of whom "tease me perpetually to sell their paltry productions, which are more the fruits of pride than grace". He admits only "two hymns, which Mr. Whitefield printed" and besides these he has printed nothing. In April of the next year he congratulates¹ this same minister for successfully thwarting "the decree of the elders, scribes, doctors, &c., of our London sanhedrin". The adverse effect of the Metropolis on ministers puzzles him.

Tell me, for goodness sake, what is there in London air that thus metamorphoses mankind? How is it, that, as soon as a poor brother gets ordained in London, he becomes a London minister; that is, he buys us with other people's money, - the funds: he ceases to advise, and commences dictator: he gravely sits in judgment on us, our wives, little ones, and substance; and perhaps when we have travelled to oblige these

¹ Ltr. Apr.6,1767 in ibid. pp.177f.
great men, I know not how far, we come back laden with a good coat, or great wig; too little and bald for the clerical coffee-house, and hugging our chains, we admire the gifts as grapes of *Eshcol*.

The "carnality of the whole" disgusts Robinson, who can "ramble with impunity, though in their esteem a kind of outlaw, a wild savage". This same week he has more than twenty to baptize and "Dr. Gifford will be here".

In May of the following year he thanks his friend for the gift of his small volume and commends him on the size of the work: "truly, you are more amiable to me in such a little sensible, spiritual piece, than if you had appeared a fool in folio".\(^1\) He pleads the trouble in his church, caused by libertines as the reason he has not written, visited, or exchanged. If he had but an hour or two with his friend, he would say "as Herbert says" - "Dear friend, sit down, the tale is long and sad". We have examined this tale previously (pp.62f). Robinson writes of it.

> For my part, I think if Diabolus was incarnate, he would be a Hussite in judgment, a libertine in practice, and with an orthodox head, would dispute for Christianity, only to disgrace it. God knows I am a poor sinful creature, but libertinism I abhor.... Against this old leaven I have ever endeavoured to work, nor has much opposition appeared till lately.... One, lately questioned, declared that it was difficult to say whether the Bible or Hussey's great book was most eligible.

> ...In scarcity of all things, not a bit of bread for their hungry souls, these seven or eight watch to play some dividing game amongst us. Is this a time to go out a visiting? The people utterly refuse their consent, nor have I so much as been to Wickhambrook since I saw you last. The few say I deny all the doctrines of grace. They watch every minister that comes, and play off his sermon against mine as much more orthodox. Blessed be God, they are poor and of no account!

Yet after all he admits,

> ...their outcries have done good, brought more hearers, opened people's eyes, and struck the hearts of all with a

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1 Ltr. May23,1768 in *ibid*. pp.178ff.
knowledge and hatred of libertinism; the church grows, but secretly:

It was not until later that Robinson was allowed the freedom of the University library, but by purchase or loan he has read much - mostly in theology. His opinion of Hussey's "great book" is understandably not high. He likes Jonathan Edward's works, especially the Freedom of the Will and Religious Affections. In 1772 he has been "transported" by finding his own "notions of loving God" in Bellamy's Letters to Hervey. Lately he has been reading and "re-reading, studying and re-studying, Brown's Essays on Shaftesbury's Characteristics". He finds many "sensible things" in the Characteristics but feels Brown gives "a most complete answer indeed" to its hard treatment of religion. He adheres to the great Dr. Clarke's account of moral virtue. It would be a mistake to judge Robinson's extensive reading from his correspondence alone. An examination of his works reveals that throughout his life he was a constant reader.

V

In spite of the disparaging way in which he referred to the "paltry productions" of fellow ministers in his letter of December 3, 1766, Robinson was soon to embark on literary ventures which were to claim ever more of his time. There is confusion as to his earliest effort, which will probably never be resolved. In the Church Book he made entry of all his publications down to the year 1781. It begins:

1 Ltr. May 2,1771 in ibid. p.183.
2 Ltr. Apr. 11,1772 in ibid. p.184.
3 e.g. in Arcana: Homer, Cicero, Tertullian, Aquinas, Eusebius, Hippocrates, Bayle, Tillotson, Burnet, Berkeley, Plato, Milton, etc.
4 In W. Robinson, pp.294ff.
While R. was among the methodists, the Rev. Geo. Whitefield published (1) 11 hymns composed by him for a fast-day. 1757. Mr. Wheatley, of Norwich, published (2) a hymn, beginning, 'Come, thou fount of ev'ry blessing,' since reprinted in the hymn-books of Messrs. Madan, Wesley, Gifford, &c. 1758.

However, as we have seen, in his letter of December 3, 1766, he wrote: "my works consist of two hymns, which Mr. Whitefield printed; besides these I have printed nothing". The only other reference to a hymn is in the Church Book listing:

(8) A Christmas Hymn, set to music by Dr. Randall, and, with the notes, engraved on a copperplate half sheet. It begins, 'Mighty God, while angels bless thee,' &c. 1774.

This last hymn has nine verses, the earlier three. Mr. William Robinson solves the difficulty by considering a small tract containing eleven hymns, titled "Hymns For The Fast-Day" as those referred to by Robinson as item (1) in his listing. He feels the letter of 1766 read "11 hymns" and the "two strokes were supposed to mean two instead of eleven". He also feels that when Robinson wrote he "had printed nothing but 'two hymns,' this additional hymn had...escaped his memory". He quotes "a fair specimen",¹ of the eleven hymns in support of his statement that they "are very poor indeed". So it seems we still have the two hymns worth remembering.² His only other effort in a musical way was when he "reprinted Barton's Psalms, and wrote part of the preface" in 1768.

1 *Ibid.* pp.294f. The selection:

"Doth God attend the raven's cry?
And can he England's suit deny?
If sinners trust in Israel's Lord,
Won't he his gracious aid afford?"

² Another possibility is that "two" and not eleven was meant by the two strokes in the Church Book. That Robinson meant two in his letter, and had not forgotten the hymn "published" in 1758, but, in fact, one of the two hymns published by Whitefield was republished at Norwich. Might not the Christmas hymn of 1774 be a working over of the other hymn published by Whitefield? This would eliminate the difficulty of Robinson "forgetting" his best hymn. Then, however, one wonders why he did not use "republished" referring to item (2).
In 1770 Robinson translated from the French "a Sermon on the Eternity of God" by "the late Mons. Saurin". This was followed in 1771 by another titled "A Sermon on the Immensity of God". This work of translation was to continue until in 1782 four volumes of Saurin were printed at Cambridge. In 1784 a second edition of five volumes was printed for Dilly, London.1 To each volume, Robinson wrote a preface: (I) "Memoirs Of The Reformation In France, And Of The Life Of The Rev. James Saurin", (II) "Remarks On Deism", (III) "Reflections On Christian Liberty, Civil Establishments Of Religion, And Toleration", (IV) "Remarks On Christian Morality", and (V) "Remarks On Saurin's Sermons". At the conclusion of his preface to the first volume (2nd ed.),2 Robinson tells the origin and purpose of the translating. It was first begun "by the desire of a small circle of private friends, for our mutual edification". Against his private opinion he was "prevailed over by others to print this translation" not because he thought himself able to "give language to Saurin", but because he hoped that the sentiments of the author might be conveyed to the reader. He feels Saurin's sentiments "in general" those of Scripture, and his treatment of them "well adapted to impress them on the heart". The translator has not been able "to adopt his style"; he has endeavored "not to disguise his meaning".

From Saurin's twelve volumes of sermons, Robinson has followed his own judgement in selection. The first volume, against Atheists, is designed to secure the doctrine of God. The second, against Deists, "pleads for the holy scriptures".

1 Dyer, p.480.
2 "Memoirs Of The Reformation In France,..." in Flower, I, pp.1-63.
In the third, we intend to take those sermons, which treat of the doctrines of Christianity, as we humbly conceive that the new testament is something more than a system of moral philosophy.

The last volume is dedicated to "moral subjects", because "we think Christianity a holy religion, productive of moral obedience in all its true disciples". A fifth volume on miscellaneous subjects was added to the second edition. The purpose of it all:

May the God of all grace bless the reading of them to the weakening of the dominion of sin, and to the advancement of the kingdom of our blessed Redeemer, Jesus Christ! (p.63)

The Rev. James Saurin (1677-1730), whose career took him from Geneva to France, to England and finally to Holland, fascinated the translator, who was always eager to hear first hand reports of the cultured minister. He writes of one experience: 1

I fell in with a Dutch merchant, a good man in London, who had heard Saurin, and who told me everything about voice, gesture, &c. Think how I was delighted with a long Dutch pipe, a mess of rich rumbo, and a tale about Saurin.

From an Italian acquaintance he learned Saurin began his sermons, "in a tone modest and low" while in the body of the sermon "he was plain, clear, and argumentative". When addressing the wicked, -(and it is a folly to preach as if there were none in our assemblies...)" - Mr. Saurin "was often sonorous, but oftener a weeping suppliant at their feet".

In general, adds my friend, his preaching resembled a plentiful shower of dew, softly and imperceptibly insinuating itself into the minds of his numerous hearers, as the dew into the pores of plants, till the whole church was dissolved, and all in tears under his sermon. (pp.57f)

Robinson continues,

His doctrine was that of the French protestants, which, at that time, was moderate Calvinism. He approved of the discipline of his own churches, which was presbyterian. He

1 Ltr. (no date) in W. Robinson, p.187.
was an admirable scholar, and, which were his highest encomiums, he had an unconquerable aversion to sin, a supreme love to God and to the souls of men, and a holy unblemished life. Certainly he had some faults; but, as I have never heard of any, I can publish none.¹

The translations were well received and Robinson received a number of requests for sermons of Saurin "not yet presented to the public".

Five guineas a sermon were offered him by an Irish dignitary, and other proposals were submitted to his consideration by an English prebendary. Instances might be produced of a modern right reverend person, strongly soliciting the favour of a sermon, and of a very orthodox divine forestalling a part of Saurin's Translation, confidentially entrusted to him; which he inserted in a publication of his own.²

The "modern right reverend" was Dr. Beadon, Bishop of Gloucester. Known to be "determined on preferment", Robinson thought him an amiable person with liberal sentiments, but "too enlightened to be a bishop". On hearing of his advancement the Baptist minister remarked: "He is no fitter to be a bishop, than I am".³

Saurin's sermons were liked so well that five volumes did not satisfy. An eight volume edition appeared including Robinson's five volumes, the sixth by a Dr. H. Hunter and the last two by the Rev. J. Sutcliffe. These eight volumes along with three additional sermons were printed in a two-volume American edition by Harper & Brothers in 1846. Flower comments that Robinson's translating "was differently performed, some parts appear to be both faithful and spirited, in others there are evident marks of haste and carelessness".⁴ This was due, he found, to the fact that

¹ Flower, I, pp.57f. It seems Saurin was a favorite of Queen Caroline, at whose request he prepared a treatise on the education of princes for Prince Frederick, which was not published.
² Dyer, pp.89f.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Flower, I, p.li. But R.R. covers this: "I have endeavoured not to disguise his meaning, though I have not been able to adopt his style;...I do not offer to publish them (the Sermons) to the world for the language of Mr. Saurin". Preface to vol. I of Sermons in Flower, I, pp.62f.
some of the sermons were translated by other members of the minis-
ters family subject only to Robinson's correction. At any event
the subsequent translators of Saurin did not see fit to alter
Robinson's work.

The Dissenting minister was also approached for sermons
from his own hand. The requests "by many a younker in the Uni-
versity" for an occasional sermon were refused, but "the elegant
solicitation of a dignitary he" could not so easily refuse.
Troubled by the problem, he asked advice of the President of Bristol
Academy, Dr. Evans, who replied:1

...seriously, I see no harm in the world, in your making
consecration sermons, if you can get any one to preach them:
if our parsons here would but preach what I could compose for
them, I would work night and day, but I would serve them with
better husks, than they feed their flocks with now. - But
"the prostitution of the word of God!" - Wherein if you make
an honest scriptural sermon? If, indeed, you trim, and turn
high-churchman, you will be criminal indeed.

Evans argues that if it be impossible to storm the fortress of
hierarchy, one must sap it; if one cannot overthrow it, one must
undermine it. He sees no harm in "promoting the advancement of
one of low principles: you may be the means of promoting a young
Laud". Since they should not scruple to preach visitation or
consecration sermons, if permitted, why should they scruple to
"make one to be preached". But after all "you must judge". Dyer
tells us that "one or two sermons, composed for a dignified person,
of far too accommodating a character for one of his nonconformisti-
cal habits" were found among his papers, but adds that "though poor,
(Robinson) was scrupulous, and made few compliances of this kind".2

Such occasional assistance to a distinguished churchman
did not dampen Robinson's ardor for the Dissenter's cause and

1 Dyer, pp.90f.
2 Ibid.
during the years 1773-1775, he spent much time tracing the history of Nonconformity and the fortunes of those ministers of the Established church who were deprived of their living or silenced by the Act of Uniformity. Some of this labor found its way into The Nonconformist's Memorial edited by Robinson's friend, Samuel Palmer, an Independent minister of Hackney.

His correspondence makes it plain that translation and research is not claiming all his time. He writes2 his brother minister of his unwillingness to exchange pulpits. He would not "give a pin to be a S--" without him,

Come over and spend one Lord's-day at Cambridge, and as many more days as you choose. What if you should take a circuit round the villages here with me? I should have your company, and that I want. In return I will try to spend five or six days with you before the summer's gone, one of which shall be a Lord's-day, if I can get a supply.

He cannot understand what his friend objects to in the preface to Saurin. "The French nous literally translated, redeems Mr. S. from the charge of egotism". He agrees that "a shallow and superficial way of preaching prevails" and asks that "another and a better way" be introduced at S--.

'Tis well known preachers can speak Greek
As naturally as pigs squeak;
*  *  *
And Hebrew roots also are found
To flourish most in barren ground;
*  *  *
They can raise scruples, dark and nice,
And after solve them in a trice;
As if divinity had catch'd
The itch, on purpose to be scratch'd.-&c.

He apologizes for "scribbling Butler's doggerel to a grave divine, - but seriously, let us try to be other men than such fantastic apes

2 Ltr. May 19,1770 in W. Robinson, pp.180ff.
A year has passed and still he has not been to S--. His friends letters pain his heart.¹

If I am sincere in anything in the world, to be sure I am in my professions of friendship for you: but I have not been at S--. I wish I could revenge that reproach on you. I would come and stay a month, and be as cross as a bear all the while: be assured I will come this summer if the Lord spares me. I have had one fit of the ague, and a week's fever this spring, but am recovered. As to Dr. Moore, I paid all the respect to your recommendation in my power.... I went with him to the Presbyterians, who had no minister: there about eight pounds;...I also went with him to Walden, where he got fourteen pounds: he is a man of fine sense, the cause is a good one.

He goes on to explain "Scorn's attendance on a quiet mind". He means that,

...a fierce disputant for any doctrines, or any forms, will be caressed by carnal people embracing those forms; but that a man who enters into the spirit of the gospel, and grows like his leader, less attentive to words than things, will favour all parties, consequently be the champion of none. Love without dissimulation is rare, especially in the cloth; each looks for his gain from his quarter.

He is having trouble with the printer Lepard, in London who has had his work on Claude² for a year and a half. He neither prints nor returns the work. The printer tells him the work will always be saleable as Claude's reputation is established, "but the expense will be one hundred pounds or more". He intends "to write for it again, and insist on the copy". Pentycross who had been in London a long time, "returns to college this week". After some difficulty, he has his testimonial (for Established Church) and will be ordained in a fortnight. He will then be a curate near Leeds. "As to his piety and zeal, it is like other christians; first warm, then

¹ Ltr. May 2, 1771 in Ibid. pp. 182ff.
wise." Mr. De-Coetlogon, is settled in Kent, near Maidstone, "and is faithful, if not so useful as could be desired."

The Church Book notes that on the evening of May 18, 1771, the pastor was in Stapleford preaching a funeral sermon "on the death of our late sister Margaret Reynolds, a very poor, but a very honourable member of this church". The text was from Lk.xvi. 21: "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom".

Robinson's first published (Jan.17,1772) sermon, "The Nature And Necessity Of Early Piety", was preached before a society of young people at Willingham on New Year's Day, 1772. In April of this same year he exults in Dr. Nowell's disgrace.2 "May every Goliah be so slain!" He suggests his friend come over and spend a week during the summer. Then they can read over Claude together. He does not want to send his translation of Claude for he is "afraid of sending papers, which should they be ever printed, must (if torn or soiled, or any way blemished) be wrote over again". He feels Bellamy and Edwards "upon the same plan", and both above criticism, though Edwards seems the greatest. Still he feels they

1 In W. Robinson, pp.xlvlf.
2 Ltr. Apr.11,1772 in ibid. pp.184f. Dr. Nowell, Principle of St. Mary Hall, and Public Orator (Oxford) wrote in reply to Rowland Hill's anony. Piaeas Oxoniensis (1768) and in support of the expulsion of six undergraduates of St. Edmund's Hall, Oxford, accused of being "Enthusiasts..., who talked of regeneration, inspiration, and drawing nigh unto GOD". They were ejected as "enemies to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England". Hill replied to Nowell in Goliath Slain. Smyth, op.cit. pp.209-216. R.R. alludes to this last pamphlet in speaking of the "disgrace" Nowell suffered when his "famous absolutist sermon preached before the Commons in 1772,...was expunged from the Journals of the House". A.Lincoln, op.cit. pp.43f. Boswell and Johnson took an opposite view of the incident. The Dr. said: "Sir, the Court will be very much to blame, if he is not promoted". Boswell, op.cit. vol.II, p.524.
are a bit extreme and asks "do not they (after all) overstrain the bow?".

Without doubt, if it were possible for a creature to exist independent on God, that creature must admire the grandeur and beauty of his nature, and love him for himself: but since no creature does so exist, it is hard to say when love is disinterested;....I should suppose true love of two sorts, or rather two degrees of the same love, the first interested, almost, if not altogether so; the latter (considered comparatively with the former, not absolutely in itself), disinterested. I should think the religion of most people begins with the first, and rises by degrees into the last, most of all refined and sublimated in heaven. I should be afraid to condemn all that love God for interest, yet I should exhort all to aspire at the last.

Another letter¹ shows, as might be expected, that sometimes his large family demanded much attention. So, when his days were full, he might reasonably claim their help in translation. He is "the tenth time in waiting for my wife's lying in".

She reckons yet three weeks longer, but has been this last week so poorly as to keep her room: three nights I have sat up, and what with the fatigue of overseeing so great a family, where one is old, another sick, and all (as it were) past help, or not arrived at it; what with public labours, and a variety of et ceteras, I am now fit to sleep on the floor: you will not omit praying for us.

He has been "rummaging a criticism" on Mk.ix.49. As three friends wanted the criticism, he "thought it the shortest way to give it Mr. Gurney" as he has repeatedly asked for an article for his Gospel Magazine. It will appear under the signature Drusus in the September issue. Robinson wants his opinion of the article as he has others for the magazine, or not, as they are "accepted or disgraced". He confesses a love of praise, but is "irreconcilable" to public censure of these articles.

In September he explains his absence from "Mr. R's"

¹ Ltr. no date (but before Sept. 19,1772) in W. Robinson, pp.186f.
where "I took it for granted...you would spend the afternoon". 1 He was not invited: "to have intruded would have been impertinence". He took the wisest course, "absence, though it was with much regret". He laments that the "spirits of some bigots" and "the mean tool of their tempers" makes it hardly possible for anybody to "maintain a brotherly intercourse with both". The "price of the favour of that side, is affronting this: blessed be God, I have not so learned Christ; nor ever design it". His wife "has been so bad that we were obliged to fetch a physician from Cambridge at midnight".

...he came, prescribed, and through mercy, removed a complaint, which had it remained, must have terminated her days. She is better, the complaint removed, and we hope in a fair way of recovery. I have had a fine week, you must think: nurses, helps, &c., to the number of seventeen or nineteen in a day, with my own family: and I, poor I, all day forced to find eyes and feet, and thought for all.

Robinson's views on requirements for the ministry are seen in an extract from the Church Book dated October 17, 1772. 2

The pastor having called the church together, informed them, That he called a church-meeting by desire of Mr. Ab. Barfield, a methodist preacher, who desired to be baptized, to be admitted a member of this church, and to be regularly sent into the ministry. The pastor said that he had been applied to by two more on the same account.

A call has two parts: divine, a qualification for the work, and human, "the church's approbation, and employment of that ability" given by God. It was "difficult to determine precisely wherein a ministerial qualification consisted", as a man might be qualified for one church and not another. Their churches had two sources of ministers: the public schools, and "our own churches".

2 In ibid. pp. xlvff.
affected to lord it over their brethren, and were too proud to accommodate themselves either to the salaries or the services of the poor churches: That learning was very desirable in all ministers, but not essential to some, whose flocks knew nothing about it: That the other sort of ministers, called out of our churches, were some of them solid, useful men, and others insufferable for their ignorance and self-conceit, valuing themselves more for their ignorance than others could for their knowledge.

Since churches were responsible for the qualifications of men sent into the ministry, it would be "the height of imprudence" to send out a private member without "previous preparation and long trial". It would be "good discipline" to put a candidate under the minister's "immediate tuition" for at least a year. The candidate's mornings might be employed in "literary exercises"; some afternoons in "theological pursuits", and evenings in village preaching. He should occasionally visit the sick, "and after having been a while a presbyter or elder, should be sent into the ministry".

In this instance the church was "too poor or too luke-warm" to support such a program. In a short time the church might test Mr. Barfield's ability to preach, but could not determine "whether he were qualified as a pastor to govern a church". As Barfield was not able to "stay the necessary time of trial here", it would be dangerous "to run with a stranger by an immediate mission". He advised referring the gentleman to a Baptist congregation in London where he resided and his character was better known. In this way, "he might be sent out with more credit to himself, and with a greater probability of usefulness in the churches". To this the church "unanimously agreed".

In spite of the letter to the University authorities, and the apology obtained in 1769, disturbances evidently continued in the meetings. As a result on January 10, 1773, Robinson preached his famous sermon, "On A Becoming Behaviour In Religious
Assemblies", which was published in 1776, and which, according to a not unbiased commentator is allowed by the best judges of composition, who have seen it, to be the most complete piece of argument, genteel satire, and christian oratory that ever was read. The following June Robinson moved from Hauxton to Chesterton, a village about two miles from Cambridge. Here, from Richard Rose, a minor, he rented a "commodious but dilapidated" house "on the left bank of the Cam" for ten pounds a year. There would be greater changes than residence in the life of Robinson during the coming years. Having successfully championed the cause of Dissent in Cambridge, he would soon enter fields of wider and more intense conflict. True to his resolve, he had continuously studied while at Hauxton and therefore, was able to give to any man a reason for the faith in liberty and morality which burned in his heart. Armed with deep conviction he was to battle bravely. His other resolve, on moving to Hauxton, had been to raise a congregation. In this he had succeeded by his devotion, wit, and common sense. In 1774

1 Occasional Sermons, pp.197-219. Flower says,(I,p.lx) the apology and sermon together "appear to have produced the desired effect", for "no similar complaints have been made from that period to the present (1807)". This must be an overstatement for R.R. wrote in his "Advertisement" to the sermon (p.196) that "it happens in their Congregations, as it does in the Churches, the unthinking vivacity of youth sometimes disturbs the people, and particularly at Evening Lectures. Such an interruption, continued for three or four evenings, gave occasion to the following Discourse". His text was I Tim.iii.14,15.

2 Josiah Thompson in R.R.'s Historical Account... in Flower, V, p.283.

3 Dyer, p. 95.

4 W. Robinson, p.xlvii.

5 "Very few persons have so thoroughly studied the PRINCIPLES OF NONCONFORMITY as Mr. Robinson", Flower, I, p.cxxvii.
he could write in the Church Book: 1

By the nearest calculation that I can make, there are about 200 families that attend, and allowing five to each family there must be about 1000 souls...

...The meeting-house will seat about 600, and it will hold about 800. There are more than can sit down in an afternoon, and there are as many as can stand in an evening:

\[1\] W. Robinson, p.xlviii.
CHAPTER IV

RELIGIOUS & POLITICAL THOUGHT

I. DISSENT.

A.

Both as a piece of literature and as a controversial work, it ranks with Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone as one of the two ablest performances in the literature of Repeal. It surrounds the events of 1772-3 with an atmosphere that can only be described as political romanticism.

Anthony Lincoln on the Arcana.

In 1774 Robinson published Arcana3 "a work which at once established his claim to be regarded as one of the very clearest thinkers and most forcible writers of whom dissenters could boast". Daniel Turner the Baptist minister at Abingdon wrote: "When I was informed, that the Arcana was written by a baptist minister, I replied, no, it cannot be: we have not one amongst us who can write such a book as the Arcana".5

The circumstances leading to its writing and the plan of it are given in the preface. Robinson begins by comparing the religious state of Britain to its "state-policy when the Romans invaded and enslaved it". As a result, while each Christian party "employs its learning, eloquence, fortune, and influence, to prevent the incroachment of another party, to enervate its neighbour,

1 In this chapter we shall not trace the private life of the Cambridge pastor, except as it is necessary in explaining the reasons for the writing or publication of his works dealt with here. The narrative of his life will be resumed in the next chapter.
2 Lincoln, op. cit. p.219.
3 Arcana: or the Principles of the Late Petitioners to Parliament, for Relief in the Matter of Subscription. in Eight Letters to a Friend. in Flower, II, pp.1-139.
4 W. Robinson, p.xlviii.
5 Dyer, p.82.
6 Flower, II, pp.1-17.
and invigorate itself,...ignorance and immorality, stupidity and luxury, overflow all bounds". Yet a "general coalition" is possible for Christianity addresses itself to the "first principles" in mankind, "the dictates of nature" in which mankind "agree much more than some are aware of". All Scripture aims to give glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and benevolence among men. These ends are so desirable that all sects agree in them. The "only question" is "the proper means of obtaining this end". One sect proposes oaths, subscriptions etc., but the present petitioners, "supposing these means contrary to the nature of things", and contrary to the teaching of Christ, "propose the abolition of the present penal means, and the introduction of the original, mild, and placid mode of tuition". "The reasonableness of the pretensions of each side is under examination".

Several "excellent pieces" have been published on this controversy, and these letters do not "pretend to add any thing" to the subject, but only aim "to expose the grounds and PRINCIPLES of those publications". By "a strange oversight" the "real principles of this controversy" have been mistakened. The dispute is not about a "DOCTRINE", but about "church DISCIPLINE": "the question is not WHAT, but WHY the church believes". Aristotle's, "That only can please which accords with nature", expresses the principles of the petitioners in a single axiom. This principle is applied to church government in these letters: "for why NATURE should be allowed the supreme censor in all other cases, and not in legislation, cannot be easily accounted for". The reader will kindly distinguish between "nature as created", and "nature as

1 As those by Drs. Stennet, Kippis, Wilton, and Mr. Toulmin. R.R. in Flower, II, p.256.
corrupted"; "the latter is the luxuriance, the former the perfection and excellence of whatever exists". Arts and sciences "as they originate in the supreme spirit, so they address themselves to the image of that supreme spirit, man". Christianity does the same and nothing proves its divinity "more than such a comparison", as there is "not one natural operation of the mind but has its object in this religion". The subject will not be pursued. "Let it suffice to add, jurisprudence is perfect in proportion as it fits the nature of man, and universal toleration in matters of conscience is a tendency towards that perfection".

The letters are called "the principles of the petitioners" not because published with the consent and knowledge of the petitioners but because "they contain what the writer takes to be the real sentiments of those gentlemen". The letters, first written for "the private use of an intimate friend", are now "made public only for the sake of diffusing right notions of religious liberty among plain people". Little notice is taken of the controversies among the petitioners themselves "except in the last letter". Therefore Robinson feels it well to add a word about this.

Some petitioners believe the magistrate hath a right to require a test and conscientiously subscribe the articles. They petition that their brethren may have a similar freedom from penal laws. Others believing the magistrate has a right to require a test, "dislike, because they disbelieve, the present test; and ask to be free from subscribing any thing but the holy scriptures". This is the substance of "both the petitions\(^1\) presented by the

\(^1\) The Established clergy's "Feathers' Tavern Petition" presented to the Commons Feb.6,1772 was soon followed by the Dissenter's Petition in April of the same year.
established and dissenting clergy", but "whoever would understand the merits of the cause must observe that the same request by different men produces two very different questions". With established ministers the question is whether a church has a right to require "any religious test of her own ministers", but with the Dissenting clergy the question is whether one Christian church has a right to force her creed on "another Christian church". "The far greater part" of the petitioners are said to be of a third group who "wholly deny the magistrate's authority to require any religious test at all". Some of these have been charged with inconsistency for asking a right of the crown which they disown, but such charges are "cruel and ungenerous".

The controversy may be considered philosophically, theologically, "in a civil light", or historically, but "let the subject be viewed in what light soever it will, the reformation will be allowed a good and laudable work; and the reformation allowed, the principles of the petitioners cannot be denied". During the reformation "would that man have been well employed, who, instead of promoting so noble a work, had faddled away his time in exposing the supposed weaknesses of his brethren"? Similarly as then, different men will see the present controversy in different lights, "and, without tainting their integrity, will adopt different measures of action". If one would patiently get rid of grievances by degrees, while another refuses any relief till he "can obtain all", they differ as two creditors; "when one will have all the debt or none, the other will take it by parts as the debtor can pay". Is it right to question the honesty of the first and the humanity of the second, when both aim at their country's welfare? It is not
for this "disinterested pen to determine whose is the greatest merit" but it "will venture to scribble, that such as consider bad but old maxims of government, as they consider bad habits of body, and apply in both cases...a slow relief, seem to have had the most comprehensive view of the matter".

The first letter, "On Candour in Controversy", commends the addressee for his "generous and patient docility" with which he has closed his letter blaming the "late petitioners" and arguing the need of subscription. His desire to hear counter arguments atones for all his mistakes. "Is not this to possess the finest state of mind in the world?" "Should the answer be given in the same spirit in which the inquiry is made, friendship will cement though sentiments differ." His "candid and disinterested pursuit of truth...naturally contrasts itself with the absurd conduct of others".

The indolent prefer an easy faith to a painful search, and their reason bleeds on an altar erected to the love of ease. The impatient, like Pilate, ask, What is truth? But never wait for an answer. The proud, though not infallible, are always in the right! The sons of luxury or avarice, like Esau, prefer a meal to a birth-right. What a waste of goodness would it be to propose truth to these? Their minds are preoccupied, and till their vices are dispossessed, it is morally impossible to alter them. (p.24)

"A thousand apologies" such as the prejudices of education, want of information, influences of company and example, "will always afford pleas for honest mistaken men" which "may diminish the guilt of an error, though they cannot assign to it the merit of truth". The reason his friend is mistaken is not important, enough that he is open to conviction.

You lament, (and indeed who can help lamenting?) the bad spirit of too many religious controversies. Religion is a sacred thing, and meekness is a part of it: whence then is
it, that prejudice and passion in some, fire and flame in others, appear in these disputes? The gospel is nothing of all this; the gospel needs nothing of all this; all this disgraces the gospel: for which reason, perhaps, our Saviour forbad the devils to publish his mission. (p.26)

In "On Uniformity in Religion" it is pointed out that though legislation "is doubtless a sacred thing" yet "in parliaments, as in paradise, the serpent has found a way to corrupt and deprave".

Britons boast of their laws, and in general with great reason; but some of them blush for their country when they read a law entitled an act of UNIFORMITY. (p.31)

The origin of this law will not be inquired into as for present purposes it is "more proper to show that religious uniformity is an impossibility, and that a law of this kind can neither be argued from the light of nature, nor from the holy scriptures".

"Sound policy requires a legislature to preserve its dignity; but the dignity of a legislature is never more prostituted than when impracticable edicts are issued". Such dignity is more dependent on enforcing than inventing laws. The latter "a pedant in his study" may do; but enforcement "must have power, property, magistracy, penalty, in a word, authority to support it". When obedience is required which people cannot yield, the legislature is forced to abandon the obedience required. What follows?

...the people despise a folly which could not foresee, a narrowness of capacity which could not comprehend, a timidity which dare not, or a weakness which cannot inforce its decrees. (p.32)

"The impossibility of inforcing" the Act of Uniformity "might have been foreseen".

In vain the queen (Elizabeth) attempted to inforce the act by penalties; in vain have succeeding princes endeavoured to inforce it; in vain were the formidable forces of oaths,
subscriptions, fines, and prisons brought into the field; cruelty and lenity, madness and moderation, the gentleness of the eighteenth, and the rage of the seventeenth century have been employed in vain; the act stands disobeyed and unrepealed to this day. (p.33)

Let religion be speculation, practice, faith, fancy, reason, passion, or what you will; "uniformity in it is not to be expected". "Philosophy is a stranger to it, and christianity disowns it".

"A philosopher holds that the system of the universe is perfect; that the duty and glory of man is to follow, not force nature". Moral philosophy is a harmony between the worlds of spirit and matter. Moral evil produces natural evil and moral good, natural good. A philosopher given a farm to cultivate would study the soil, seasons etc., and discovering the possibilities would farm it accordingly, never expecting figs of thistles.

What would he, or a common farmer say of an "act for the uniformity of husbandry"? It would be seen an impossibility. "Thus NATURE teaches men to reason, and thus they reason right".

Having traced the evolution of the thirty-nine articles the writer states "it is not only certain that clergymen explain, and consequently believe them in different and even contrary senses; but it is also credible that no thirty nine articles can be invented by the wit of man, which thirty nine men can exactly agree in. It is not obstinacy, it is necessity". Suppose for argument sake that the articles contain "a given number of ideas", fifty. Suppose men's capacities differ, "as they undoubtedly do", and "one man's intelligence...able to comprehend fifty, a second's five hundred, and a third's but five and twenty".

The first may subscribe these fifty points of doctrine, but who can confine the genius of the second? Or who can expand the capacity of the last? In minds capable of different
operations, no number of points of doctrine can possibly be fixed on as a standard for all; for fix on what number soever you will, there will always be too many for the capacities of some, and for others too few. If this be the case who can establish an uniformity of sentiment? (pp.36f)

If uniformity of sentiment is impossible, the practice of the same ceremonies will fall of itself. "For then the question will be, ought two men who confessedly differ in sentiment, to profess that they agree? Ought an honest man to be one thing, and appear another? Heaven forbid that any should maintain so dangerous a thesis!" (p.35)

Furthermore the degree of evidence for each of the doctrines, may be inquired. As it differs, it may well be asked "whether it be possible to inforce an uniform degree of belief". If degree of assent "ought to be exactly proportional to the degree of evidence, a magistrate, who would establish uniformity, must either give falshood the evidence of truth, or oblige men to believe a probable as fully as a certain proposition. But if neither of these can be done, what becomes of uniformity?"

Finally what is uniformity good for? "Is it essential to salvation? Is it essential to real piety in this life?" Is a subject made more loyal, a husband more faithful, a parent more tender? "Cannot a man be honest and just in his dealings without knowing any thing about St. Athanasius?" Did the "great Supreme"

1 Cf. Locke: "whatssoever is practised in the worship of God is only so far justifiable as it is believed by those that practise it to be acceptable unto him. Whatssoever is not done with that assurance of faith is neither well in itself, nor can it be acceptable to God." "A Letter Concerning Toleration" in The Second Treatise of Civil Government and ....Ed. J. W. Gough. p.142.

2 R.R. in his writings makes much of the doctrines of Analogy, Proportion, and Perfection. These are "necessary" characters of a divine revelation. They are especially dealt with in his Preface to the Third Vol. of Saurin's Sermons: Reflections on Christian Liberty...in Flower, I, pp.87-134.
govern His universe by an act of uniformity, "men might be damned for believing too little, seraphs degraded for believing too much".

Almighty father, can a blind belief please thee? Can thy creatures believe what they cannot perceive the evidence of? Can all understand the evidence of the same number of truths? Formed with different organs, educated in different prejudices, dost thou require the same services? Art thou indeed the hard master who reapeth where thou hast not sowed? Far from all thy subjects be such a thought. (p.39)

Conclude then, worthy Sir,...if VARIETY be the characteristic of all his works, an attempt to establish UNIFORMITY is reversing and destroying all the creator's glory.

But the reader may object that Christianity is a religion of revelation, not nature; "what therefore may seem absurd to philosophy may be explained by christianity".

This objection is answered in the following letter, "On the Right of Private Judgment". He begins by quoting Sir Richard Steele's dedication to the Pope in which he points out that:

The most sagacious persons have not been able to discover any other difference between us, as to the main PRINCIPLE of all doctrine, government, worship, and discipline, but this one, that you CANNOT err in any thing you determine, and we never DO. ...that you are INFALLIBLE, and we ALWAYS IN THE RIGHT. We cannot but esteem the advantage to be exceedingly on our side, in this case, because we have all the benefits of infallibility, without the absurdity of pretending to it, and without the uneasy task of maintaining a point so shocking to the understanding of mankind. (p.43)

Unfortunately this satirical stroke is true, for though Rome refuses the Scriptures to the people some Protestant churches "grant the sight of the book, but retain the meaning". What is the difference whether one reads, or no, when the sense is fixed and one varies only at the peril of preferment?

But where do church governors get this right? Not from the nature of Christianity, the doctrine of Christ or His Apostles, "the condition of man in a state of nature, his condition as a member of society subject to magistracy, nor indeed in England from
any thing but the act of supremacy". This act gave Henry VIII "the
title of sole and supreme head of the church of England; a title
which by subsequent declarations was so explained as to annihilate
the right of private judgment, and yet private judgment gave birth
to this very act". If "Harry the VIIith" had formulated a creed,
it would have created the difficulties pointed out in the last
letter.

No mean is lawful which destroys the end for which it
was created. The end is the establishment of Christianity. How
can the denial of private judgment be lawful in establishing that
end, when Christianity "is a personal obedience to the laws of
Christ arising from a conviction of their excellency, and their
connection with certain facts of whose certainty evidence is given,
which evidence to be received must be examined"? And if the denial
of private judgment is destructive of the nature of Christianity
in general, "it is more remarkably so" of Reformed Christianity.
"The right of private judgment is the very foundation of the ref-
oration, and without establishing the former in the fullest sense,
the latter can be nothing but a faction in the state, a schism in
the church". The Reformers were right in exercising private judg-
ment, but wrong in denying the right to others. In exercising the
right they had the example of Christ and His Apostles.

Christ exhorted his hearers to search the Scriptures;
"a strange impertinence unless the right of private judgment be
allowed"! He also "warned his disciples not to usurp that right.
CALL no man your father upon earth, neither BE YE CALLED masters".
Had Christ felt private judgment unlawful, "he would first have
instructed Herod, or Caiaphas, or some of the principle rabbies,
and by them he would have converted the nation". Instead He gives it "as a proof of his mission that the gospel was preached to the poor, and constantly protects his followers in the exercise of the right of private judgment", as when the disciples, breaking "two canons of the established church", plucked and ate corn "probably before morning service was over". "The apostles, worthy followers of such a master, went into all nations preaching a doctrine which no church governors upon earth believed".

Consider the condition of "man in a state of nature" where all "are on a level". You "will readily grant either that a right of determining for himself is no man's, or every man's right". In nature there is "neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, prince nor subject: the right of one argued from his nature is the right of all".

A Christian cannot and ought not dispose of this right. All "the purposes of civil government may be answered without" disposing of this right and one cannot be a Christian "without its exercise". The power of the magistrate will be dealt with in the next letter; the remainder of this letter is filled with inquiring, "whether, if this advantage of private judging had been denied to other classes of men, the world would not have sustained infinite damage".

Men would have been deprived of an "innumerable multitude of useful discoveries" if any of the "mechanical arts" or sciences had been kept in the state reached "seven hundred, five hundred, or two hundred years ago". The ecclesiastical advisors of the King of Spain were against Columbus' voyage, and "quoted St. Austin, who, in his book *de civitate Dei*, had declared it impossible to
pass out of one hemisphere into another". However "Seneca the heathen, had declared long before, that future ages would discover new worlds" and "it must be owned" that in this matter "St. Austin was an heretic, and Seneca a sound believer". "St. Austin was not the only person who denied the possibility of Antipodes; the church denied it, that is, the head pope Zachary denied it for all the members." Fortunately the king and Columbus dissented, "judged for themselves" and were amply rewarded. What of Copernicus and Galileo? The first waited forty years to publish his work and then "died immediately after it was presented to him; the persecution he dreaded being the supposed cause". The latter was charged with heresy for affirming that the sun, and not the earth, "was in the centre". "The pope, the sole judge, was pleased to think that these discoveries in geography and astronomy clashed with certain doctrines established in the church". Had not this "extravagant claim been denied, and the right of private judgment established in arts and sciences", what condition would the Christian world be in by now?

Of the numerous objections that are made against the right of private judgment in matters of conscience, only two "are worth answering". First, "Christianity is perfect and entire in the holy scriptures". But, both Roman Catholics and Quakers deny this, the one requiring the Church and the other the Spirit. There are others who deny the divinity of the Scripture.

Now ought not all these people to be allowed the liberty of examining the proofs of the divinity and perfection of the bible? For private judgment which is their malady is also their only medicine. (p.52)

But granting the perfection of "the holy canon", it amounts to no
more "than granting the perfection of the works of nature". The "word of revelation, like the works of nature, present objects to view, but objects to be examined and understood". But this requires the right of private judgment.

"The other objection is, that this will open a door to all sorts of heresies, and the truth will be oppressed and disappear." Robinson, would let the truth stand on its own feet.1 "Indeed! And is truth such a timorous, cowardly thing?" "Christianity is not to be loaded with calumnies, she is so already, her only hope is a fair trial."

But to abridge the matter. Do not facts contradict this? Is not the church of Rome full of heresy? Has not the gospel and the right of private judgment gone hand in hand in the reformation? Is the power and promise of God nothing? Has he not engaged to support his church? (p.54)

As promised, the next letter is "On Civil Magistracy". Here he argues that civil magistracy may arise where it will, but from no source can it derive "a right over the consciences of the subjects".2 "A natural magistracy is such a government as Adam had over his descendants" or, such as any man might have over his family if he and his wife were transported to a desert island, and peopled it with their own children and grandchildren. Such a magistrate would encourage the use of private judgment.

Should there be a fool in his little empire who could not, or an obstinate subject who would not use the right of judging for himself, it would give him the most exquisite pain; and should any protest that after their best search they

1 The Applicants "agreed with Locke that truth would do well enough if left to shift for herself. Truth was, they thought, a developing content: it thrived best when most challenged and once found could never be lost". Lincoln, op.cit.,pp.221f.
2 So Locke: "the whole jurisdiction of the magistrate reaches only to...civil concerns;...it neither can nor ought in any manner to be extended to the salvation of souls..." Ltr. Concerning Toleration... Gough's ed. p.127.
could not perceive the evidence of some things asserted by
their princely parent, he would naturally conclude that
youth, inexperience, want of capacity, were imperfections of
nature in them, but no crimes; that for his own part he was
not infallible; that possibly himself might be mistaken....
To parents the argument appeals. (p.60)

Whatever magistracy obtained by power may claim, it
cannot claim legality. "If magistracy be immediately derived from
God, it is not supposeable that God should require a magistrate
to exercise a power which himself does not exercise". How blas-
phemous to suppose God requiring of the magistrate what He has
given him no ability to perform! Even in the Jewish Theocracy
toleration in morals (divorce) and in religion ("they were suffered
to carry the tabernacle of Moloch...") were tolerated.

It must be owned that Moses published very severe
laws against idolatry; but whether it was that he found
severity not answer the end, or whatever was the cause, there
was an omission of circumcision, and the passover, all the
time of his government,...and there are traces of extreme
toleration all through the history of that people down to
the death of Jesus Christ, when Sadducees are found in the
high priesthood. (pp.61f)

It must also be agreed that a magistrate deriving his
authority immediately from God, is unable to be the minister of
God in anything opposed to God's will. There is abundant Scrip-
ture proof that the magistrate should not exercise authority over
men's conscience. "St. Paul wrote his epistle to the Romans about
the third year of Nero's reign: is it credible that the subjection
he insists on, Chap.xiii. is a subjection of conscience to NERO'S
creed?" Primitive Christians were "dissenters" for three hundred
years, and yet during that time "they thought the magistrate the
minister of God for good". "All that time either the magistrate
did not claim, or the church did not allow his claim of the right
in question."
A magistrate whose power derives from the people has no "just claim over their consciences". People coming "out of a state of nature into a state of society" give up many private rights but it is impossible to give up this right for it is inalienable in nature. But suppose he could, he would not, but for a greater advantage. "But what advantage can compensate for the loss of liberty of conscience?"

If any should say the peace of society is obtained by it - whose peace? Not the magistrates; for malcontents are a trouble to him; not his that loses his liberty. But the proper answer is, that where the peace of society hath been once disturbed through an abuse of toleration, it has been a thousand times disturbed by the opposite spirit of intolerance. (p.63)

The fact is that the peace and well-being of civil society consists in a moral, not a sentimental union. Suppose a uniformity of sentiment prevailed in music, art, etc., would it mean the peace of society unless there were a moral unanimity also? If it be possible to have moral union without the magistrates authority over conscience, it would certainly be desirable, for any magistrate knows that rule by consent is better and easier than rule by coercion.

The preservation of a moral union does not depend on the governors' exercising a right over the consciences of the governed. On the contrary, the history of all Christendom will prove, that this very claim has destroyed more moral union than all other pretences whatever. It was a just saying of the Emperor Maximilian II. to Henry III. of France. Such princes as tyrannize over the consciences of men, attack the Supreme Being in his strongest part; and frequently lose the earth by concerning themselves too much with heaven. (p.65)

When a magistrate tries to rule over conscience he deprives the state "of the services of some of the worthiest of men". Thus such a claim injures the state.
Was it possible to raise from the dead the greatest men in their several professions that ever lived, were they all to be assembled in England, the state would be deprived of their fine abilities, unless (which no man can be sure of) they would subscribe the established faith. (p.66)

Diversity of opinion, rightly managed, tends to discover, not destroy truth. To give a magistrate power over conscience annihilates it. One who went around the world "must be all religions; or, to speak more properly,...of no religion at all". He draws attention to the "first of twenty-four articles...of Pennsylvania", written by Penn, which "deserves to be written in letters of gold", and gives freedom of conscience to all, "so long as every such person useth not this christian liberty to licentiousness, or the destruction of others", Christian liberty.

He shows the difficulties a modern Paul might have in converting Algonquins or the Hurons. Could he say to their chief magistrates that it remained to them whether the message of Christianity were false or true?

O say you, all this is nothing to the purpose, a king has no right over conscience *quatenus* king, but as a christian king; without this just distinction, you will be able to prove that if a Canadian king be wrong, his subjects however are right; for they do what God requires, that is, they submit their faith and consciences to the king as supreme. Very well. See now what all your fine theory comes to. Suppose a jesuit should convert the king; has he a right to establish christianity as the papists profess it? No, say all the reformed churches. The right belongs to him *quatenus* protestant christian king. *Quatenus* episcopalian, says one; *quatenus* presbyterian says another; not at all says a third, whose voice ought to silence all: - *Render unto Caesar, the things that are Caesar's and unto God, the things that are God's. Farewell.* (pp.69f)

*"Considered merely as a king."

Before presentation of their bill in Parliament, most petitioners were confident of success because of "the equity, the reasonableness, the modesty" of the petition, and "the good sense,
the generous and candid spirit of the government in religious matters". 1 Their confidence however, proved false because as one of their number had prophetically warned, "it is an innovation, and statesmen always fear, and often justly, innovations". 2 Therefore in his fifth letter, 3 Robinson turns his attention to this subject. He readily admits "that antiquity is sacred, especially in religion; that innovations are sometimes dangerous, above all religious ones". But to urge novelty against the petition is to place the argument on a different level. The question no longer is whether a freedom from subscription is right and according to nature, but whether it is new. To this the petitioners answer, No. "The practice of judging for themselves is coeval with mankind, to be traced up to the most remote antiquity." Subscription to creeds is an innovation; "nobody surely will be so rash as to affirm this to have been the practice of the first three hundred years after Christ". He cites Du Pin's "Bibliotheque des auteurs ecclesiastiques" to prove that papal infallibility is another innovation. Should any plead for the authenticity of the Apostles' Creed,

...it must not be a member of the established church, for people would naturally say; if the Apostles thought proper to compose a creed, no doubt but it was a perfect one; by what authority then have you added thirty-nine

1 Cf. Lincoln, op. cit. pp.223f. "...the Dissenters felt, it was,...an issue between right and expediency. The right was all on their side, and who, in so candid an age, could question the expediency of mitigating such ungenerous and outmoded laws, or could oppose such 'innovation' in negation of the principle of the Reformation itself? Encouraged in the possession of so extended and cogent a body of theory, they approached the legislature in a spirit of fantastic confidence."

2 The defeat of the first petition gave the King "infinite satisfaction". "For, said His Majesty, as a sincere friend of the Constitution he was a great enemy to any innovations, Ecclesiastical or Civil; 'in this mixed Government, it is highly necessary to avoid novelties', " J. Drinkwater, Charles James Fox, p.78.

3 "On Innovation". Flower, II, pp.77-89. 
articles, two more creeds, and the whole book of homilies to the creed of a subscriber? (p.76)

But could it be proved that the Apostles or their immediate successors composed it, "can any proof be brought of their requiring subscription to it on oath"?

Yet sometimes innovators are necessary. "There are enthusiasts of all kinds, but no greater surely than some immoderate admirers of antiquity." Think of the state of learning before the Reformation. Innovation was even more necessary in the churches than in the state and schools, for the ignorance of the clergy was "insufferable".

By a survey of the established church in 1585, and 1586, it appeared, that after 28 years establishment of the church of England, there were but 2000 preaches to serve 10,000 churches;... Many of those incumbents were ignorant and scandalous men, while hundreds of good scholars and pious livers were shut out of the church for nonconformity.... (p.81)

He cites an example of the survey dealing with Cornwall County. Three men are listed and each described as "no preacher". Under the heading "His conversation" is the following information: the first, "He liveth as a pot companion"; the second, "A simple man", and the third, "A common dicer, burnt in the hand for felony, & full of all iniquity". There is no member of the Church of Rome "but would blush now to preach what the infallible Innocent the third was not ashamed to publish".¹ Who preaching before a modern university would imitate the pious Latimer who "at Cambridge in christmas time, divided his discourse by a pack of cards"?

Innovate! England, to her praise be it spoken, has done nothing but innovate ever since the reign of Henry the

¹ "A male child, says that pontiff, as soon as it is born cries A: a female E. that is by transposition, Eva, thus acknowledging their descent from Eve, and their title to sin and misery. (p.32)
seventh, till whose time, they say, the king had not a currant bush in his dominions. (p.83)

England has improved and enriched herself by importing "the inventions and productions of the whole earth". The fact is that human knowledge is progressive, and thus innovation is a necessity. The love of novelty "is one of the noblest endowments of nature".

It is the soul of science, and the life of a thousand arts; it fixes one to his books, another to his instruments, ...it sets one to calculate at home, another to navigate abroad; it is seen everywhere;...If it be said, this passion defeats itself, and, having explored the whole creation, is as restless as ever; true, it is so, and this proves its sublime original; it will at last terminate on God, and God is an object every way fit to satiate this desire....Perhaps the sacred historian might not so much blame the Athenians for telling and hearing some new thing, as for spending their time in nothing else. (pp.83f)

All this may seem far from the question at stake, but it has "a great deal" to do with petitioning. The petitioners deny the charge of innovation; "they are antiquarians, only not superstitious enough to prefer the rust to the medal". Yet, "without availing themselves of this" they prove innovation natural, and the yearly assembly of legislatures "an allowance of the necessity of abrogating some laws, reforming others, and making new ones". But someone admitting the justness of the reasoning will point out that one should not innovate without cause. To this he answers that "it is highly probable" the advantages arising from toleration would be "very great". "It would remove a mark of infamy from many of his majesty's loyal subjects, whose ambition is only to pass for what they really are, the hearty, not the hired friends of the constitution". It would stop the endless "strifes about words to no profit" and "disarm popery of its most formidable weapon against protestantism, that is, the endless divisions of protestant
communities". If it be argued that "wise men do not judge now of names but things"; that they know a law superior to statute law by which they live, still "do the bulk of mankind know any thing more than names?"¹ It was for them that Robinson would enact this innovation, "(if it must be so called)".

In "On Orthodoxy",² Robinson takes issue with "father Thomassin" who says "that the whole earth would have been overrun with heresy, had not the emperors maintained the faith". Could" there be a more cruel aspersion on the truth than this"? And what alliance can there be between faith and the sword? However, if by faith he means the "romish religion" and by heresy "whatever is not in the pope's creed", Robinson agrees. But should anyone affirm this of "the true belief of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he would asperse the gospel in the most shameful and indefensible manner". As Orthodoxy, "(like almost all the martial terms of controvertists)" is equivocal, meaning in one latitude "belief of one thing, in another" a contrary belief, Robinson lets "it stand for what St. Paul calls the belief of the truth,...as it is in Jesus". And without "enquiring who is in possession of this truth" examines whether it is "exposed to danger by an universal toleration".

"Evidence is the characteristic of truth." Thus Father Thomassin must mean "that penal laws have the power of conferring the characteristic of truth upon falsehood". But no power can do this. If truth is supported by evidence, the magistrates support

1 The Birmingham riots in 1791 were to prove that if the government did not avail itself of the penal laws against Nonconformists, the people under the lash of hysteria would take matters into their own hands.
2 Flower, II, pp.93-104.
is unnecessary.

If he means that the bulk of mankind, from the base principles of avarice or fear, will profess to be of the magistrate's sentiments, and without examining, will maintain his creed, all this is granted; but that such slaves to interest are orthodox believers, or believers at all, is denied. (p.95)

He can say this because orthodoxy in "its original and true import" signifies a "right belief". Furthermore,

Is it credible that such numbers of people in all Europe would have suffered martyrdom for their own sentiments, if punishments could have made that true which was false before, or could have prevailed on the martyrs to believe what they could not perceive the evidence of? (p.95)

There are three things "essential" to the belief of a truth: "an object, a proposition representative of that object, and an operation of an intelligent being assenting to that representation." But this assent "can be obtained no other way than by the mind's perceiving the agreement of the proposition with its object". This belief or assent "is an after operation of the mind, fixed by the God of nature as immutably as the parts of the body are". Thus it is not in the power of one to believe, nor in the power of "any body else to make him believe truth without evidence". Take an object, Moses; a proposition, "Moses was a faithful historian": Now, no act of government can effect the truth or falsity of this proposition. "If he was a faithful historian, no act of government can make him an imposter; if he was an imposter, no government can establish his fidelity".

...the object, and the truth of the object, described in a proposition, are as independent on magistracy as the being and motions of the planets. (p.97)

Orthodoxy requires and depends on examination, but "establishments

1 Cf. Locke: "All the life and power of true religion consist in the inward and full persuasion of the mind; and faith is not faith without believing." Ltr. Concerning Toleration... Gough's ed. p.127.
destroy examination the mean, and thereby orthodoxy the end".

The hope of reward and the fear of punishment influence the bulk of mankind, and when a man risks all by reasoning justly, when the conclusion of his arguments is a fine, an imprisonment, or death, how strong is the temptation not to reason at all or to reason superficially! (p.99)

When a test of orthodoxy is required of a man reaching manhood, how many are the motives which induce him to comply. From that moment "the die is cast. He must know little of human nature who does not perceive that all future studies will rather be apologies than examinations".

Whatever weight such reflections have upon "vague general orthodoxy" - any truth, they "have infinitely more in the belief of gospel truth". There is a "glorious analogy" between Scripture and Nature; for both "present objects evident to all, but fully comprehensible by none". If this notion of revelation be allowed, it follows that various truths of Scripture "must be classed in different degrees of evidence, and importance".

Some truths are so plain that they need but be read to be understood, and as soon as understood are believed. Others are so sublime, that through their grandeur, or their distance, they are indeterminable to the greatest natural and acquired abilities; yea an inspired apostle himself cried, O the depth! (pp.101f)

Now it is certainly not necessary to call councils of bishops to establish right belief concerning the truths of religion that are plain and simple. It is not necessary to call a council to "make all men swear that water is liquid, that gold is malleable, that a collier is black, and a drunkard mad". If it is needless to establish right belief concerning the simple, it is dangerous to establish orthodoxy as to the "indeterminable sublimities of the faith". Yet if this is granted, are there not

"another class" of truths "to be established by law for peace sake"? This shall be inquired in the next letter "On Persecution". ¹

In spite of the fact that Christianity has its origin in the love of God; that its end is "peace and good will amongst men; its laws, its gifts, its motives, its all is love"; it has been "so explained as to patronize the bloodiest of cruelties that the world ever saw". "Whatever idolatry and superstition may have produced, they seem to have been out-sinned here; even idolaters seem to have had less intolerance than some christian states."

Joseph in Egypt, Nehemiah in Persia, and Daniel in Babylon were able to hold "the chief offices at court, without a test". Robinson cautions not to be too hasty in charging such crimes against any one "set of christians; all have stained, though some have dyed their hands with blood".

Such persecutions arises from "violence in religious disputes". It would not be hard to show that "plots, assasinations, massacres, cruelties of every name, have constantly been produced by denying a liberty of conscience; and more, that such dismal scenes will always follow the same practice, in the same proportion as liberty of conscience is refused". From "the tribunals of reason, history, scripture, and experience" he shows there is no proper defense of persecution.

Even those that have written most for persecution for conscience-sake, pretend to write, not from interest, ignorance, or bias of any kind, but, O strange! from conviction: thus granting their opponents all they claim. (p.111)

The man who pretends to find a reason for persecution in Scripture so insults the "nature of religion in general", Christ and His Apostles' doctrine and their example in particular, the common

¹ Flower, II, pp.107-120.
sense of the reader and the inspiration of the writer that he
deserves no reply. If it could be proved that compel them to come
in "means any compulsion but that of evidence, it would be no hard
matter to disprove the divinity, and destroy the authority of all
the christian religion". It will not do to nibble off the edges
of texts as some deists do. "Take one, and the same truth is in
an hundred more." Futile are the subtle critics that talk for-
ever of "elucidation, and interpolation, and canons of interpre-
tation", for the people are "prejudiced in favor of this religion".
It is true they don't examine this religion, any more than the
critics' subtleties, but "now and then" when "cousins visit them"
they hear their children read:

    Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamour, and evil-
speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye
kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another,
even as God for Christ's-sake hath forgiven you. (p.116)

Though they do not practise this, they wish the squire, and the
parson, and the overseer would. "They are sure times would be
better if they did". But if one could prove that the Christian
religion "teaches men to kill one another for conscience sake",
the success of its detractors would be speedy and great. Let
critics prove "Paul an inquisitor, and his master a pope" and no
longer will they have to "patiently angle as...now, for now and
then one disappointed scholar". Their arguments would be popular
and easily entangle "all that have not eradicated the tender feelings
of humanity". "Persecuting christians caress religion as Delilah
Samson, without knowing where its great strength lays."

The verdict of history is that persecution "is the greatest
absurdity, the most egregious folly, the most preposterous crime
that man eyer inserted in his list of extravagancies". When did it
ever answer the persecutor's end or diminish disputable points?

If there be a piece of salutary advice deducible from history it is Let them alone, for if the device be human it will come to nought. (p.118)

Though it may seem "ungenerous" to urge experience "at this time of day", when no one is hurt for conscience-sake, this imputation should not be "cast on hearts filled with unspotted loyalty, and profoundly devoted to the spirit of the present government". The fact is that the laws do not "harmonize" with the spirit of the legislators. The Dissenters "entirely attached to the government" only ask "the total extinction of those penal laws which the government never use, and declare they never will".

At present the laws harm the children, reputation, and influence of Dissenters. The Dissenter has difficulty educating his children properly because of oaths at the Universities; it is unlawful to endow a Dissenting Academy, and one does not want his children educated in a foreign land. Dear as one's reputation is, Dissenters are "reputed ignorant, disaffected to government, a setter forth of strange gods". No one examines the righteousness of these charges, but all "point at and reproach you". A man wishing to "extend his influence for moral purposes" is forbidden because he "wears a long-skirted drab-coloured coat, says thou instead of you, and to complete his wickedness, cocks up his hat with hooks and eyes instead of loops. These sir are disqualifications for office."

All these, it is said, are small inconveniences, these ought not to be called persecution. That is, this is not the worst stage of the disease, this therefore is no disease at all. The putting forth of the finger and the wagging of the head differ from burning a man, only as the whelp that snaps your fingers differs from the dog that worries you to death.

1 This need not be taken too seriously. See p.153 and Introduction to A Political Catechism.
Christian ministers, renounce these hidden things of dishonesty: full of a belief of the goodness of your cause, boldly rest it on its TRUTH; you have nothing to fear, sooner or later truth and benevolence must reign triumphant. Take Calderwood for your example. When James I. had read his book called Altar Damascenum he was very uneasy: let not this disturb your majesty said one of the bishops, we will answer the book. Tush mon, said the monarch, what wid ye aunswer, 'tis nothing but scraptur and razon.

Farewell. (p.120)

In his final letter, "On Sophistry" Robinson pleads that "where men's dearest interests are in hand sophistry must be banished, and a close just reasoning pursued". In argument some mistake the question; others suppose in argument what their opponents will not grant. This has happened in the present argument over subscription. Some refuse to support the petitioners because they feel the petitioning originated in a principle, Arianism. What should they have to do with petitioning, who subscribe nothing but what they believe? Why should they aid the spread of false doctrine?

Robinson answers that all such cries as, "Loyalty to the king; respect to the clergy:...the patronage of arianism" are sophisms. Petitioning did not originate in principle. "It would be easy to show that an entire liberty of search is an idea prior to all that is meant by principle here." But if it did originate in Arianism, it would signify nothing unless it were a part of Arianism, which it is not. Arianism is doctrine; the petition concerns discipline. It is questionable "whether you do believe all you have subscribed upon oath", else why at ordination do your ministers "frequently print other creeds extremely different from what they have subscribed"? Granting you do believe all you subscribe, the question is not what you believe, but why you believe? It is questionable that only the Arians need exemption

1 Flower, II, pp.123-139.
from penal statutes.

Most certainly the doctrine preached in most places of worship does need toleration, and by the law is actually exposed to rigour. Pray does your church read Bel and the Dragon for example of life and instruction of manners? Ah! if Harry the VIIIth. should come again and want money, he would catch you all in a praemunire...

Granted you are safe, "is selfishness a part of your religion"? Would you be like Pharaoh's butler? And after all "do you not know in your own consciences that liberty to be an arian, and liberty to be a calvinist, are cyons that grow out of the same stock"? This can't be left to the magistrate else you are at liberty to be a calvinist only till the magistrate sees fit to reform the church again. Would joining the petitioners help spread false doctrine? "No surely! Is arianism so self-evident that to propose is to propagate it? Is the divinity of Christ so badly supported by evidence that it must call in the sword?... Let the arians come forth boldly,...if the divinity of Christ be true, it will gloriously answer all: if not true, what interest have you in it?"

"Nothing need be said to prove that truth has nothing to fear from examination in every point of light." If all parties agreed in the search for it all might lose something, but gain infinitely more, the truth. A mind earnest in the search for truth would reward those who discovered defects in its belief. But this is the "core of the misery". Each party cries "hold fast without wavering" regardless of where, when or by whom their creed was fashioned. It is no use to pursue sophisms further. "All that would say any thing to purpose" should show why the liberty claimed and allowed to one should not be extended to all.

Consider that all men claim their own reason for their
own sentiments; that no one tries to make a believer of an infant, idiot or madman, by the power of magistracy. But why? "They have carcases and you have creeds! Yes, but reason is absent." But what is the difference between these and a man denied the right of private judgment? The first cannot, while the latter must not reason. "The most bloody persecutors have pretended to reason heretics into truth, and have affected only to draw the sword when reason could not prevail." So the English reformers "were first disputed at Oxford in public and afterward burnt". But,

If religion be not received by examining, judging, and self-determining, why dispute? and if it be, why burn and destroy? Is not this cruelty and sophistry both? (p.130)

Sometimes the chief magistrate, the king, "who should preserve the creed of his subjects, does not believe it himself", yet "who but a madman would dare to insult royalty with the thought of any corporal punishment"? A tyrant may be resisted, but a heretic, "who deprives no subject of a right" is another matter. "Now if mere heresy ought not to dethrone a king, how, without the help of sophism, can it be proved, that it ought to disfranchise a subject?"

An hereditary right to seven acres is as inalienable as an hereditary right to seven provinces, or to seven kingdoms; and in many respects more so; seeing the latter was originally granted to a reigning family for services to be rendered to the state; and the former descended from father to son free from such obligations. (p.131)

He concludes the letter and the Arcana recalling that "all men claim the right of private judging, and are sophistical in denying it to their fellow creatures". "Paganism presents to view none greater than Socrates", whose only "aim was to set a young gentleman a thinking for himself, and to give a right turn to a habit of reasoning". Cicero was "delighted" with this method
of establishing truth. But this method is incompatible with force, and no pagan can receive "these principles and employ force without falling into sophistry".1

From Paganism he passes to Judaism where the "first of that nation is undoubtedly Jesus Christ". When the Sadducees questioned the doctrine of the resurrection, ("Remark how the Saviour dealt with Heretics.") Jesus pointed out that their error sprang from ignorance of Scripture and God's power.

Had they examined the evidences of God's power, they would have known he could, and had they attended to the meaning of scripture, they might have known he would raise the dead. (p.133)

But it may be objected that this is proof to Christians but not Jews. Then hear "that famous Rabbi Abarbanel, on the end of sacrificing".

The sum is, that the burnt-offering was designed to attract and accustom men to love and study divine things, and to expiate their guilt when they had not done it. (p.134)

If Jews believe the Mosaic law, and receive the Rabbinic teaching concerning burnt-offerings "they claim a right of private judging from the magistrate, and with christians reserve conscience only for God".

Roman Catholics like the Jesuit Bourdaloue, Bossuet, Flechier, Fenelon and Massillon, have made the same claim for themselves, and glory in the obstinacy of their martyrs in the face of hostile magistrates. "Is it not ten thousand pities that such men should change sides, and deny all they have advanced when protestants make the same claim?" What about the Church of England? Does she claim authority over men's consciences? If not, why subscription? If so, "why disown the spirit of persecution"?

1 However, Robinson notes, Plato "is guilty of this in his tenth book de legibus". p.132.
Do the Dissenting sects require this authority over conscience? They cannot claim it by law, or from Scripture. "Why then are they not unanimous in humbly petitioning for an abolition of what themselves call an unjust claim?" Whatever some Methodist clergy may have pleaded for, most certainly their first ministers did not claim authority over conscience.¹ "In what barn have not the methodists cried EXAMINE YOURSELVES whether ye be in the faith?"

In short, whoever looks attentively will find that the leading principles of the petitioners, as far as they relate to the subject in question, are the allowed or professed principles of all mankind, and it will be easy from hence to infer that universal toleration, when thoroughly understood, will meet with less opposition than may at first seem from all ranks of men... (pp.138f)

In spite of such able pleading Sophistry, and not Candour was to have the day, and it would be a long time before the sophistical cry of "King and Church" would give way to that universal reason that pervaded all "right minded men" and on which Dissent of the eighteenth century placed such unwarranted dependence. The heart had bad as well as good reasons which the mind knew not of and they were to prove more powerful.²

B.

The History...pleaseth us much. A worthy episcopal divine writes to me, our clergy are angry, but it is an incomparable piece.

Josiah Thompson³

The next piece written from the standpoint of a Dissenter

¹ R.R. cites a "just and sensible remark" of Whitefield on another's sermon: "The good man so spent himself in the former part of his sermon, in talking against prelacy, the common prayer book, the surplice, the rose in the hat, and such like externals; that when he came to the latter part of his text, to invite poor sinners to Jesus Christ, his breath was so gone, that he could scarce be heard." (p.138) The Methodists strongly opposed the petition. Lady Huntingdom procuring counter petitions and enlisting the aid of North and Burke. Skeats and Miall, op.cit. pp.365f.

² See Lincoln, op.cit. pp.210-270, for an admirable discussion of the naive confidence of the Dissenters in the success of their cause, which confidence was so long in dying.

³ Ltr. to R.R. in Dyer, p.130.
was published in 1777, under the title, "The History and the Mystery of Good-Friday". In the introduction after dealing with the necessity for obscurantism by the Roman Church because of its infallible claims, Robinson examines the work of that "wise and vigorous set of men, the protestant reformers". Exposing "the pretended titles of the pope to public view", they "did all in their power to simplify religion, and to reduce it to its original plainness and purity".

They laid open the inspired writings, they taught the right of private judgment, and they summoned all mankind to enter into that liberty with which Jesus Christ had made them free. (p.143)

Their fault, if any, "lay in the breadth of their scale". Aiming to convert whole nations at once, "and to change their customs in a day", which religious customs were a part of the civil law, it was necessary to seek the aid of secular powers to complete their design. This aid was readily given, but as a result it was necessary "to keep measures with royal prerogatives, court factions, the intrigues of the old clergy, and the prejudices of the common people". Thus the Reformers died with their work unfinished, hoping their successors "would complete in happier periods what they had begun".

Far from entering into this just and liberal design, we seem to have lost sight of it, and to have adopted principles subversive of the whole. We seem to have discarded piety, incorporated luxury, and the few, who have not given up all sense of shame, endeavour to conceal the scandal under a cover of superstition. Thus we affect modesty, and dance naked in a net to hide our shame. (p.144)

Superstition, like astrology is the foolish daughter of a wise mother. The writer has no objection "in general against days of fasting and prayer" as "they are often edifying and some

1 Flower, II, pp.143-186.
times necessary". He does not criticize Christians "who make conscience of observing all the festivals of their own churches". He supposes the English clergy have taught their people that "all practical religion divides into the two parts of moral obligations, and positive institutes". The first are "universal, unalterable, and eternal;" the latter are "appointed by the legislature to serve the purposes of the first". Because "the cause of moral rectitude can never be pleaded too often" nor its nature explained too clearly, and as superstition easily corrupts religion, and as many greatly interested "in these articles have not leisure to trace them through folios" the writer hopes it neither "unseasonable" nor "impertinent, to expose to public view in brief, the history - the authority - the piety - and the polity of church holidays". He selects for examination "that day, on which, it is reputed, the founder of our holy religion was crucified", for to "discuss one is to examine all".

No one should blame the historian who does not begin before his records; "it is not his fault, it is his virtue". In Protestant churches all documents "strictly speaking", should "be found in the holy canon". This because,

...the people of each church refer an inquisitive man to their clergy, their clergy refer him to their printed confessions of faith, and all their confessions refer him to scripture. (p.145)

Many ceremonies in Protestant churches do not pretend to derive from Scripture, but were appointed by those "appointed by scripture to ordain them". Such appointment will be examined in the next article, but "Good-Friday is a ceremony of this kind, and the original records of pure christianity say nothing about it". The Gospels, either separately or together, do not give "the whole
history of Jesus Christ, nor yet all the circumstances of those parts on which they enlarge most".

The times of the birth and crucifixion of our Saviour are so written in these authentic records, that nothing certain can be determined concerning them. All who have pretended to settle these periods, are conjecturers, and not historians, as their variety proved. (p.146)

Robinson would have Christians "respect the silence of the oracles of God" for no argument from that silence can imperil Christianity. "A point of chronology is not an object of saving faith, nor is zeal for an undecided question any part of that holiness, without which none shall see the Lord."

What then was the origin of Good-Friday? The early churches were made up of Jews, Jewish proselytes, and Pagans. Each of these brought into the Church "some of their old education prejudices, and endeavoured to incorporate them with the doctrine and worship of Christianity". While alive the Apostles prevented "this unnatural union", but after their death corruptions took place. This accounts for the rise of Good-Friday, and other Church holidays.

Christianity affirmed the facts - proselyte mathematicians guessed at the times - pretended scholars accommodated prophecy and history to the favourite periods - and devotional men, whose whole knowledge consisted in an art of turning popular notions to pious purposes, began to observe the days themselves: by the austerity of their examples they gave them a sanctimonious air to others, and so recommended them to the observation of all who chose to be accounted pious as well as wise. (p.147)

After tracing in some detail the disputes between the eastern and western Christians as to the observance of Good-Friday and Easter, Robinson briefly summarizes the history:

Neither Good-Friday, nor any other fasts or feasts were appointed to be observed by the Lord Jesus Christ or his apostles. The time of Christ's birth cannot be made out,
and that of his crucifixion is uncertain....Our ancestors murdered one another for variety of opinion on...(the date of Easter); but we are fallen under wiser and better civil governors; who allow us to think and act as we please, provided the state receives no detriment; so that the language of scripture is spoken by the law of our country. He who regardeth a day, let him regard it to the Lord; and he, who regardeth not a day, to the Lord let him not regard it. What good christian can refuse to add a hearty Amen? (p.151)

However, "dull and uninteresting" the subject may be "as an article of history, it becomes extremely important, when it is foisted into the religion of Jesus Christ, enjoined on all christian people under pain of his displeasure, and considered as the livery of loyalty and piety". The writer asks what authority made it so.

A few old women refer me to the fourth verse of the twelfth of Acts for the word Easter, and I return the compliment by referring them to their grandsons at school, who say St. Luke wrote passover. I could, were I inclined to revenge, be even with these old ladies by telling the tale of Lady Easter, Ashtar or Ashtaroth, a Sidonian toast: but I am too busy and too placid now, and I take my leave of this goddess, and also of the godly translator, who profaned a Jewish fast by nicknaming it after a pagan prostitute, and laid the blame on innocent St. Luke. (pp.153f)

The Established clergy do not claim Scriptural, but legal authority for the ceremony which "arises from that act of parliament which ratified the thirty nine articles". The writer admits it "an unquestionable fact, that the religion of all the good people of the church of England was, in 1562, put to the vote of one hundred and seventeen priests, many of whom could hardly write their names". Many were not present and voted by proxy. The article on ceremonies and holidays was "carried by a majority of one single vote, and that given by proxy".

Whether the absent member, who had the casting vote, were talking, or journeying, or hunting, or sleeping, is immaterial, he was the God Almighty of this article of

1 ...the CHURCH hath power to decree rites and ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith. (p.154) Art. XX.
English religion, and his power decreed rites and ceremonies, and matters of high behest. (pp.154f)

The insertion of the clause on rights and ceremonies in the twentieth article "was an infamous piece of priestcraft". The clause...

...is not in king Edward's articles. It is not in the original manuscripts subscribed by the convocation. It was not in the printed book ratified by parliament. It was not in the Latin translations of those times - nor did it dare to shew itself till twenty-two years after, as Heylin, and other high churchmen allow. (p.155)

Subscription to the clause "is mere mummerly". "The church power to decree rights and ceremonies! An absolute falsehood". But one person, the king has power to decree rites and ceremonies for this church. However, the clergy "have introduced organs - pictures - candles on the communion table - bowing towards the east - and placing the communion table altar-wise:

...but they had no right to do so: for as the Common Prayer book no where enjoins them, they are expressly prohibited by the act of uniformity, which says no rites or ceremonies shall be used in any church - other than what is prescribed and APPOINTED to be used in and by the Common Prayer book. By what effrontery does a priest allow organs in public worship, after he has subscribed to the truth of an homily, which declares them superstitious! Or with what presumption does he dare, in direct opposition to act of parliament, to invade a prerogative that belongs to the crown! (pp.155f)

Robinson concludes this section:

The article of authority, then, amounts to this. In that system of religion, which goes on the principles of the perfection and sufficiency of scripture, and the sole legislation of Jesus Christ, church holidays are non-entities. (p.158)

In systems allowing human authority, church holidays rest on the appointing power. In Great Britain this power is constitutionally bound. Thus "a Good-Friday ceremonial" has as much influence over a British subject, as he chooses to give it. Those who belong to the National church in conscience ought ("if it be possible for conscience to agree to its own dissolution") to keep the fast.
Those who dissent are protected "in disowning the authority, and the obligation is void". The writer cannot close the section without noting that human wisdom affecting to adorn a religion of divine revelation "presumes to paint a diamond, or to lace and embroider the seamless coat of one, whose simplicity is his evidence and his churches glory".

"If piety be the discharge of duty towards God", the writer finds "only two short questions to answer": Is Good-Friday "a duty required" by God? How is it discharged, by those thinking it a duty? The duties required of man by God are contained in the moral law, "but nobody ever yet pretended" the Easter celebrations a part of the moral law. The other duties required of Christians by God are the positive institutes appointed by Jesus Christ: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The fast of Good-Friday is neither and it wanders about "a mere beggar actually destitute of every token of a legitimate divine institute". Since the observance of this day is no part of piety, the writer is driven "for want of materials to fill up this article in decent guise, to the sad necessity of turning the tables, and of considering the impiety of this black, this bloody Friday". There is first the impiety of its establishment. This includes:

...the unwarrantable implication of the imperfection of christianity as Jesus Christ appointed it - the incorrigible obstinacy of judaizing bunglers,...the rash enterprizes of minute philosophers,...the paltry babbling of traditionists, whose impertinence put them on pretending to give evidence to wise and grave men by their senseless repetitions of, I heard say, that he heard say, that she heard say, that they heard say - the self-employed and uncommissioned racket of councils - the daring achievements of those knights errant the popes of Rome ...I pour out floods of tears to think what human ceremonies have cost all mankind, and particularly what a dreadful price my native country has paid for them; and I wish with Luther, that there were no feast-days among christians, except the Lord's day. (pp.161f)
But some disagree, thinking "the observation of this day a duty of religion", so Robinson considers how this duty is discharged. The "far greater part" of the Establishment pay no regard to the day. Most of the wealthy members of the church pay no regard to it beyond eating fish instead of flesh. "Numbers of the clergy read the ritual, and deliver a sermon composed by others, and this is their whole performance." The lower classes imitate their superiors: some pay no attention to the day, while others hating "work worse than witchcraft" attend church in the morning, the ale house in the evening "and there deposit piety till Easter Sunday". In vain has the "Father of universal nature" given Britons "learning, reason, and religion". They violate all His laws - "are guilty of drunkenness, debauchery, perjury, simony, bribery, impiety, and irreligion of all kinds" and hope to atone for all their impieties, "by saying, have we not fasted on Good-Friday, and feasted on Easter-Sunday?".

In the section on the polity of Good-Friday, the writer contrasts primitive Christianity with the later corruptions of it. Primitive Christianity "recommended itself to all just governments by its perfect agreement with civil polity", for it inculcated principles productive of obedient citizens, and justice and harmony within the State. The corrupters of Christianity bartering "purity for power" deprived it of this character. Because of their inventions, mysteries, dreams, innumerable canons, and their barbarous use of secular power "with infinite pomp. ...most great men consider religion as nothing more than an engine of state". Robinson hopes Christianity will recover from "these deadly wounds", but such books as "Hooker's church polity, and Gibson's Codex" will
not help for their sole object is the support of the hierarchy.

These writers have lodged their sentiments in the dark caverns of metaphorical style, and there they lurk in seeming asylum. There is an imaginary being called the church governing, distinct from the church governed - this animal has sex, in violation of the English language, and the laws of precise argumentation - she is either married or a prostitute, for she is a mother, it seems, and has children. All this may be rhetoric; but nothing of this is reason, less still can it be called religion, and least of all is it that religion which Jesus taught, and which never diminishes the glory of civil polity. (p.167)

"The whole farrago of a secular religion is a burden, an expense, a distress to government, and every corrupt part and parcel of it is some way or other injurious to civil polity". If the kingdom be considered a family and all the priesthood as one domestic chaplain, "compare what he costs with the good he does, and judge whether the family gains as it ought, or loses as it ought not by his chaplainship". The writer applies "these general strictures to one article, consisting of fasts, feasts, and holidays". He divides these into five classes: obsolete holidays, Sundays, red-letter days, "Saints' days, and other holidays, which the clergy are obliged by their superiors to observe",¹ and a fifth class "which constitution and custom engage the whole national church to observe; the smallest number of these is TEN." It is only this last group he considers.

As these festivals are generally observed, they hurt the health, the morals, and the little property of the poor - they depress virtue, encourage vice, and generate superstition - they clog business, burden the clergy, increase the rates of parishes, endanger the peace of society at large, perplex magistrates - in a word, they impoverish the kingdom in proportion to the extent of their influence. (p.170)

¹ The clergy "ought not to complain, if they are required to fast on the 30th of January for the expiation of a crime, which no man alive committed; for they are amply rewarded by many a festival, from which none but themselves ever derived the least benefit". (p.170)
In proof of this he examines the effect on a day laborer "employed all the year at seven shillings a week". He supposes the laborer's wife earns six pence a day, and his four children four pence each. "Not to earn is to pay", and for these ten days the poor laborer is at the annual charge of 11s 8d; his wife, 5s; his children 13s 4d. Adding to this the amounts that will be spent by them on beer, tea, nuts, gingerbread and so on, the national festivals cost this family fifty shillings, "a heavy tax paid for a cargo of idleness".

But the people derive great advantages from festivals! ....Good God! is religion magick! What people derive advantages from festivals? They, who never attend them? It is notorious the poor are not to be found at church on Easter and Whitsun holidays. Inquire for the London populace at Greenwich, and for the country poor at the sign of the Cross Keys. To say they might reap benefits, and they ought to pay for the liberty, is equal to saying, the sober populace might get drunk at the Dog and Duck, and they ought to pay the reckoning of those who do. (p.172)

If they do derive any advantage, certain it is that many of their neighbors derive great disadvantage. The laborer should pay thirty shillings rent which his landlord never sees. The parish receives no rates and the government no taxes. Doctor and grocer bills might also be paid if the poor man were allowed to earn fifty shillings a year more than he does. But there is even greater disadvantage to the community:

...he got drunk on the feast of the Epiphany,...set up a score at the alehouse - rolled in the dirt - spoiled his clothes - lost his hat - fought with Sam Stride, who sent him a lawyer's letter, for which he paid six and eight-pence, beside a guinea to Stride to make it up - and on the same night he gave Blue Bridget nineteen pence for the liberty of leaving a bastard to the parish - magistrates were tormented with warrants, and oaths, and depositions - peaceable subjects with the interruptions of riot and debauchery - the whole business of the parish stood still - and the industrious were obliged to pay out of their honest gains the whole expence at last. (p.173)
To the objection that Robinson would keep people in "eternal employment", and allow no holidays, he answers: "I would keep them in perpetual employ". Six days they should labor and on the seventh "the clergy should so perform divine service as to engage them voluntarily to choose to fill a religious assembly". Religion should be "unmasked and exposed in its own beauty to their view" and its great principles instilled.

...at present it appears to them an unmeaning encumbrance of expensive forms. Their infants are questioned, and sprinkled - their wives pay a shilling and are churched - they are generally funny at a wedding, and feel no expense but the ring - they eat cross buns on Good-Friday - they are merry at Easter - and mad at Christmas - they pay small tithes through life - and are buried in form when they die - and they call this the Christian Religion in the best constituted church in the world, and abuse all who think otherwise as knaves and fools, ignorant of God and disloyal to the king! (p.174)

He would allow the poor to take as many holidays as they can afford, and their masters can spare. "Far be it from us to wish to abridge their liberty, or diminish their little enjoyment of life: but let us not make religion of their gambols, nor enroll their pastimes among the laws of Jesus Christ." These festivals are not necessary to inform people of the events which they celebrate, in order to perpetuate their remembrance. "Where was Christianity so well understood as in the primitive churches, which celebrated none of them? Where is the Christian religion less understood than in the Roman community, where they are celebrated without end?"

This lively piece makes a popular appeal by its style and "by addressing the pockets of the common people, easily gains admittance to their understandings". It ends by giving advice to any sincere parish priest who mourns the vices of his country,
dreads the chastisements of providence, and wishes to contribute
toward the public good. He should acquaint himself with the
"singular polity" of this country which aims at civil liberty and
leave secular affairs to secular men. Being a minister of a
religion "famous for its morality", he should do nothing "to weaken
this evidence of its divinity". Being a minister of a revealed
religion he should study holy Scripture and,

...distinguish the doctrines of revelation from the
discoveries of philosophers; the precepts of Christ from the
prudential saws of Epictetus; the doctrines and laws of his
kingdom from human creeds and worldly maxims; and do not
imagine that classics and mathematics, novels and plays,
contain a body of christian divinity. (p.179)

Being a minister of a rich community - "Your country gives you
good wages, and they expect at least some work."
he should employ
his "emoluments to better purposes than those of dress and equi-
page, Sunday visits, midnight revels, assemblies, simoniacal con-
tracts, and such like". Finally he should avoid the six vices,
"that disgrace too many of your order", and foster deists and
infidels. These are: "Ignorance of a body of christian divinity",
Perjury, Ambition, "Insatiable avarice, ten thousand times more
tenacious of a four-penny Easter offering than of all the ten
commandments", Time-serving and Hypocrisy.

Be it your holy ambition, Sir, to wipe off the foul
prejudices that defile the face of a weeping reformed church.
Your community is suspected of symbolizing with popery, for
Parpello the pope's nuncio offered in the pope's name to
confirm your service book. All reformed divines own, the
distinguishing characters of that apostate church are three,
superstition, tyranny, and immorality. Are there no evidences
of your possessing these gloomy marks of antichristianism?
Are your morals uncorrupt? Do you place no religion in
habits, places, words, and forms? Have you resigned the un-
righteous dominion over conscience, that in less inquisitive
times your order unjustly acquired? Have you like other
penitents joined restitution to repentance? (p.182)

To some of the Establishment who had been gracious to
Robinson it appeared "that their compliance and civil intentions received an ungrateful return". They were to be further provoked by his A Plan of Lectures on the Principles of Nonconformity: for the Instruction of Catechumens, published in 1778.

(John Robinson's) catechism contained no precept of religion whatsoever. It consisted of one continued invective against kings and bishops, in which everything was misrepresented and placed in the worst light. In short, it was a catechism of misanthropy, a catechism of anarchy, a catechism of confusion — grossly libelling the national assembly in every part and passage...

Edmund Burke

In the Preface to the first edition of the "Lectures" Robinson states that he is addressing only those who disapprove of the constitution of the "commonly, though improperly denominated", Church of England. Nonconformists (Baptists, Independents, Presbyterians, Quakers) "amount to near two thousand; so that they bear about the proportion of a fifth to the episcopal church". Whatever the worth of these Nonconformist principles, it is a fact that "they have operated, and they continue to operate, a firm, resolute attachment to nonconformity; and it must needs be worth while to propose them in all their fair extent to the inquisitive youth in our communities, for whom our first wish is Christianity, our second nonconformity".

Many Nonconformists "have lamented the inattention of our youth to dissenting principles, and they attribute it to one or other of the three following causes": 1. It is usual to credit the Episcopal Church with the moderation of the State, and thus it is felt that dissent from such a mild church less necessary than

1 Dyer, p.154.
2 In Flower, II, pp. 187-256.
3 Hansard, XXVIII, p.435.
formerly. "The truth is, what the church was at first that it still continues." Articles, ceremonies, courts, principles and canons remain unchanged, as when it persecuted. "The state has restrained the operation of the ecclesiastical system on dissenters; but the system itself is the same. The state tolerates; but the church does not." 2. "Nonconformity is unfashionable, and in some places through various causes, contemptible; and fashion is law to too many people." 3. "Many pious ministers, all intent on inculcating the necessity of being saved from sin and punishment through faith in Christ, omit these peculiar principles of dissent." Their zeal is highly commended, "but, as all their labours proceed on supposition of the truth of these principles, we presume, they ought diligently to examine and inculcate them".

These "Analyses of lectures" are made up of notes, each of which contains "one or more distinct ideas, and each idea is sufficient to form a period; the whole constituting a lecture". Each is "half history, and half doctrine" which "elucidate each other, and nonconformity includes both". At the end of the notes is an example "of the manner of turning these notes into discourses". The instruction contained is intended for "persons waiting to be admitted to church-fellowship, or of any others, who may choose to be informed".

In a preface to the fifth edition, the writer pointed out that the "little piece was written, without any malevolent design", for the use of associated churches; and was printed, but not published to "avoid the trouble of transcribing". It was never intended to be published as "it was known to contain some
disagreeable truths, which are at all times a censure, and therefore always an offence to some people, and it was thought needless to offend where there was no hope to reform. However, "the book fell into the hands of a certain noble peer, who thought proper to mention it in a debate in the house of lords, and, the dissenters bill being just then depending in parliament, much was said about it also in the house of commons". Because of "these accidents" the book has been published.

During four editions the writer answered nothing to what was said of it as he thought he had been so careful in it to "distinguish between men and things, that nothing but wilful ignorance" could charge him with "rancorous bigotry in matters of religion". Now he feels "it necessary to say a few words" to those who have thought "this insignificant pamphlet" worthy of censure. He divides his opponents into two classes. To the first, among whom are Candidus, Veritas, Niger and Mendax, he has nothing to say. These incorporate "their own passions into the christian religion," and call "ignorance solidity, indifference candour, censoriousness and ill temper zeal for truth, pride of priesthood, propriety of character". To others who "have somehow mistaken my meaning" he begs leave with "all possible deference" to write of the book's subject and its manner of treatment.

The subject is "the constitution of a christian church".

It is affirmed, that Christ is the head, believers the members, scripture bishops and deacons the only officers, scripture the law, and pure and undefiled religion the sole

object of this community. How can this subject be offensive to any disinterested Christian? (p.196)

"The manner of treating it is by a statement of historical facts, which never were, nor ever can be denied." The facts might have been accompanied by "soft words" which "would have rendered them less glaring" but then the work would have been a history, and not "an analysis, an index of history" as it is.

The truth is, some of us are ugly fellows, and no style of painting can reconcile us to our own faces. (p.196)

When the truth of the facts is undeniable and the manner of statement indifferent, there remains but an imputation of the writer's motives to get rid of the facts. This "expeditious method" is suited to anyone no matter how devoid of ability or whether or not he has even looked at the work. Even though the truth of history does not depend on the historian's motives, Robinson will "honestly declare, as far as I know in my heart, and in the sight of him who searcheth it," what motive underlay its writing. The "tale shall be plain and artless, suffice it at present, that it is true".

He has long observed and enjoyed the felicity of being a Briton. He notes that Great Britain is the first country in the world, stored by the God of nature with everything for its inhabitants happiness. He has noted "with the utmost pleasure" the "art and industry" of his countrymen giving "grace and elegance to this lovely island". He has had additional pleasure from the fact that his country has not arrived at its zenith, but may be further improved. The "happy constitution of our government" insures a "mixed monarchy", containing "all the excellencies," and providing "against the evils of the three sorts of government". Being human, it is "imperfect, and liable to degenerate". The
excellence of the system does not lie in either of its components, "but in a nice union of the three", which "prevents any one from preponderating, and rendering the other two subservient to itself". He adds: "Whatever may be my private opinion concerning the present inclination of the balance, I have said nothing on the subject in this book." 1

His pleasure "has risen higher still" by observing the "innumerable benefits" which flow from the "justice and generosity of this happy kingdom". A legal system, "universally administered" holding the "life, liberty, and property of every individual sacred" and charitable schools, hospitals, and "public provisions for all the wants and the maladies, to which mankind in the several stages of life are exposed". "To crown all, the religion of our country is christianity, the last best gift of God to man." Thus Britain appears a "paradise" to him.

This pleasant picture is "interrupted by a universal complaint of the general infidelity and profligacy of the inhabitants of this happy clime". This is not the "murmur" of a "rigid monk" nor the "explosion of the fierce rage of an enthusiast", but "the sad and sober remonstrance of all the wisest and best men in the kingdom", and it is supported by proofs "too glaring and notorious". Making every concession for human frailty, and giving all merit to the virtues that do exist one must confess "that we abound with impiety and immorality".

Two things are clear to the writer: first, that "christianity is a religion so good in itself, so admirably adapted to

1 In his Political Catechism he tells of the "present inclination". See p.154. R.R.'s high opinion of Britain was shared by many on the Continent. G. M. Trevelyan in Johnson's England, vol. I, p.3.
the wants and just wishes of mankind, so plain to the meanest
capacity, and so clear and irresistible in its evidences of divini-
ty, that it is not capable of any improvement"; second, and just
as certainly is it true that Christianity is not practiced. "A
question, then, naturally arises: what is the cause of this
universal darkness amidst such a profusion of light?" The cause
is not a lack of teachers and clergymen "all freed from secular
employments, and professing to teach and exemplify the principles
and practices of Jesus Christ". Nor is it due to a "scarcity of
provision for our instructors"; besides "the immense salaries paid
to some, and the abundance of small dues to all, the whole produce
of the ground, except in a few cases is every tenth year alloted
them". Yet sure it is that national sin persists,

for, we are daily told, that the present calamitous
war, the ruin of trade, the increase of taxes, the many,
very many ills under which we groan, are all punishments
of our sins; hence general fasts, and fast sermons, and in
every pulpit catalogues of crimes to be repented of, and
forborn. (p.202)

Still there must be a cause and Robinson "ventured to

suppose", that it lay "not in the clergy, but in the constitution
of" the Established Church. He has been "very scrupulous" in
comparing "the rules of ecclesiastical action laid down in the new
testament with the canons of the church...the gospel according to
the four evangelists, with the gospel according to the episcopal
reformers". He has found "an admirable fitness in the first to
answer the ends of Christ's coming into the world,...and conse-
quently an unfitness in the last". He feels that if Christianity
were proposed to Britons now as it was to the Greek and Romans
in Apostolic times "it would produce as good effects, because we
have as much good sense as they, and it would produce no commotions and allowed persecutions, because we have better notions of civil and religious liberty than they had". He believes "not real, but disguised" Christianity, "the object of the suspicion, doubt, and ridicule of infidels". He protests that:

Whenever we talk of reformation, though we detest a spirit of persecution, and propose no means but reason, argument, and example, yet some men's heads instantly swarm with notions of anarchy, confusions, convulsions of church and state, skirmishes and battles, and wounds and prisons, and fire and blood. They take fright, talk wildly, and, with artifice truly sophistical, set up a cry, treason, sedition, republicanism, error, heresy, schism, all gushing out, and threatening to overflow, and carry away monarchy, universities, literature, candour, indulgence, toleration, and religion, and yet God knows there is not one word of truth in all this. (p.204)

Appealing to the pocketbook, as he did in the History and Mystery of Good-Friday, he calculates that,

Surplice-washing, then, costs the nation above thirteen thousand a year. I say nothing of three pounds for a new one every seven years; but I do think the whole money might be better employed, and the religion of Jesus Christ suffer no damage. (pp.204f.)

An episcopal dignitary, "for whom I shall always entertain the highest regard", asked him to suppose they two were "appointed by conformists and nonconformists to reconcile differences", and to state what reforms he would wish. Robinson asked that "the doctrine of imposition" be settled first. This was "instantly acceded, as indeed every man of sense must, for, if anything in nature be clear, this is, one christian ought not to impose his religious principles and modes of worship on another". This settled the writer had nothing to add, "for by this one article, the whole is effected".¹ Each congregation would choose

¹ So in Reflections on Christian Liberty...in Flower, I, p.131. "Were Christians sincere in their professions of moderation, candour, and love, they would settle this preliminary article of IMPOSITION, and, this given up, there would be nothing else to dispute."
its own minister, and each minister would "form and adopt principles of his own". Those thinking "priests and prayer-books, and surplices and ceremonies necessary to religion" would support them, but would not oblige others to maintain a ritual, from which they received no benefit. It would mean religious liberty.

Although the Rev. Prebendary of Winchester¹ "speaks the language of all considerate members of his community" when he acknowledges the need for some revision and reformation, he misses the great point on which all controversy turns. He would revise the articles and the liturgy, "not the point, the great point, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY". "We object against a constitution, and we are answered by encomiums on the officers, who administer it; a dignified clergyman could not say less, and a prudent bishop would not wish for more."

His sole object when writing "this book" was to convince Nonconformist youth of the "nature, worth and importance of primitive christianity". His objects of contemplation were truth, "christianity in the hand of Christ", and error, "christianity in the hands of modern teachers". The only object of his complaint is "captivity of conscience" and its liberation the sole object of his attention. He has no personal rancour against "the persons of men, or any order of men". If he supposed Prelates punished at the last day, he "supposed these prelates bloody persecutors; and do we not all affirm, that a persecutor is a criminal, and will be punished", whoever he be? "It is a fact, that the preface, the close of the sixth lecture, and, in brief, the whole

¹ "Who thought fit" to mention "this book" in letters to the Bishop of London.
book distinguishes PERSONS from THINGS, agreeably to the quotation from bishop Burnet in the title page. 1 

...(I)f I had the whole episcopal church, yea the whole papal community as much at my disposal as the most absolute tyrant ever had his slave, I would not deprive them by force of one article of faith, or one ceremony of worship; I would only oblige them to separate religion from civil and secular affairs, in order to make all men free as Christ intended they should be. (p.207) 

He would not "model a church to serve a state" but establish a state "on wise and virtuous principles" and let "a supernatural religion" support itself. "If prophecies and miracles, if the goodness of the doctrine and the lives of the founders of christianity cannot maintain the credit of revelation, alas! what can pomp and power do?"

In the first of the twelve lectures the "doctrine of free religious inquiry" is "stated, explained, and vindicated". "FREE religious inquiry is examination uncontrollable by human authority - BY our own passions and prejudices - BY popular customs - FASHIONS - MAXIMS." Yet the "most free religious inquiry is necessarily limited by the nature of things", as a search into some subjects "beyond our capacities" is vain, and others "are revealed in their truth; but not in their mode of existence". Inquiry "when it possesses a liberty of proceeding as far as the reason and fitness of things allow" is free. It is vindicated by the fact that all intelligent creatures are capable of it and good men, especially so. Further it is essential to religion, by its nature; is commanded by Christ and injures no

1 "Whatever moderation or charity we may owe to mens' persons, we owe none at all to their errors, and to that frame which is built on, and supported by them."
civil rights. The "Lecturer" is advised to contrast "countries where it is suppressed with those where it is cherished". He should finish by "applauding the worship of our churches, consisting of free prayer - FREE and frequent preaching - FREE debate - FREE psalmody - FREE joining a church - FREE dimission - ALL tending to nourish free inquiry".

In "The History of the Reformation" it is noted that, "HENRY'S reformation altered the form of popery - BUT did not remove the grand principle of it, human authority in matters of religion - THE act of supremacy lodged the same power in the crown, that had been vested in the pope". Elizabeth "made religion an engine of government". The "Lecturer" should finish by "contrasting the characters of her bishops with those of FOX - COVERDALE - KNOX - CARTWRIGHT - AND other puritans".

The third lecture gives "A general view of Queen Elizabeth's church", and notes that the Church system "acquires no reputation from the times in which it was formed" nor those who formed it. The hierarchy is not religion, and "considered as a CORPORATION" it is unconstitutional when it violates the "first allowed principles of government". Since the people are the source of power in "all good governments", prelacy as "a system of governing is unsound at heart". Established hierarchy is "baneful to learning - ESPECIALLY sound critical religious literature", as in such a system the thirty-nine articles "tell all"; there "is nothing to find out".

THERE is nothing to improve - FOR to swear not to endeavour to alter - IS to give up the idea of improvement. - THERE is nothing to defend - THE SWORD does that - NO use of reason - ARGUMENT - PERSUASION - FOR the people were all made christians at baptism. (pp.217f)
This system disagrees with preaching as the method of propagating "the generous plan of redemption". It drives some away from public worship, fatigues others with "tedious - unmeaning - ceremonies" and leaves few minutes for preaching, and these are seldom employed, but if so are used to declaim "a dry morality - A dream to amuse - OR a drug to stupify".

The system is harmful to property, for it entails "enormous tax" on industry to empower some to create others like themselves - "TO sign a few useless papers - TO loll in idolence - TO riot in luxury - AND to defeat among lords - WHAT liberal acts for religious liberty are supported by commons". Finally Prelacy hurts morality, as it is formed for the destruction of personal principles and encourages prevarication, hypocrisy, formality and bigotry. The "Lecturer" should close this lecture by placing Prelates and people before "the judge of the whole earth at the last day". The final word to the Prelates is "DEPART!".

The fourth lecture deals with "The History of Puritanism during the reign of James I". This monarch was "weak in his intellects", profane in life, destitute of learning and religion, and a despot in government. His Bishops "were fit tools for such a tyrant". The Hampton-court conference "was a ridiculous farce" whose actors "forgot nothing but their masks".

The fifth considers "The Constitution - officers - worship - and ceremonies of the Episcopal church". In revealed religion, it is "not enough that a thing is not forbidden - IT must be commanded". The Christian revelation makes Christ the sole legislator; gives good men "entire liberty of conscience".

1 This had happened to the Dissenter's petition.
and all the "right of private judgment". The Episcopal Church "transferred all these rights to Harry and Elizabeth", putting them "in the place of God" and their "successors in the condition of irrationals". This Church is supported by "worldly riches - SAVED out of the shipwreck of that pirate - THE pope". Its supreme head is a king or queen, whether Lutheran, Presbyterian, Prelatical or popish. "It has existed under all - AND served the views of each." The stated liturgy of its public worship is condemned as a collection of genuine and apocryphal scriptures, prayers of scripture, mass, fathers, and for containing "errors of every kind"; literary, philosophical, philological and theological. "THE whole is unnecessary - and unwarrantable - AND the imposition of it despotical."

THE whole ritual is unordained by God - UNPROFITABLE in divine worship - EXPENSIVE - HETEROGENEOUS - AND hurtful to popular piety - BYemploying the little time - AND capacities of the common people about trifles - GENERALLY rendered hateful to them by the slovenly manner in which they are performed. (p.226)

The "Lecturer" should conclude by pointing out why the "bulk of the people" acquiesce in this sort of worship. Many never attend; many, who do, are totally ignorant; "many are interested, being paid for attending - IN various methods"; many complain but go on. Those who never thought of religious liberty are good conformists; those who have are driven away. True divine worship requires diligent labor and search; since most men love ease, they readily accept what is, rather than inquire what should be.

In the sixth lecture dealing with the "History of the times of Charles I", it is pointed out that Episcopacy has not varied from the days kings created it. "IT has always been a
hireling state of servitude." "IT is a shrewd prejudice against it, that the most arbitrary of our princes have discovered the greatest fondness for it". The cant "no bishop no king" is a "bold - impudent falsehood", but "no king no bishop is true", for the episcopacy is not supported by argument, Scripture, reason or free election of the people, but "by authority at a vast expence". Perhaps the writer recognized that in this lecture he had been extreme. He counsels:

Finish - BY distinguishing persons from things - BISHOPS from episcopacy - AND shew that strictly speaking prelates are objects distinguishable from prelacy - SOME prelates like some christians have never entered into the spirit of their profession - AND as christianity is laudable - BUT some christians are execrable - so some prelates may be laudable - BUT all prelacy is execrable - FOR it is composed of secular pomp - AND civil power - IN matters of religion - WHICH belongs to neither. - COMMEND the ingenuousness of those prelates - WHO have executed intolerance - APPLAUD those - WHO have acknowledged the defects of their constitution - AND blame their pusillanimity - FOR not daring to act on the very principles - WHICH they propagated. (p.230)

In the introduction to "The terms of communion - nomination of officers - and discipline of the episcopal church" the Nonconformist Champion states that "EVERY thing in this community has been blasphemously put to God's account". There is the divine right of kings, of bishops, of tithes, and now "a book of divine right". The admission of members and clergy are so managed to "render examination useless - OR dangerous". "THE whole affair of subscription is a miserable scene of prevarication", as some say the articles are Arminian, others say Calvinistic; some subscribe they say to the words, others the sense - some their own, others that of the writers - "OTHERS again in no sense - THEY subscribe them as articles of peace - NOT of truth". The system deprives both clergy and laity of religious liberty; its discipline
"is the most irregular" and "tyrannical - THAT can well be in this country". Seven attempts at reform have proved abortive, because at all, like at Trent, Prelates "WHO were parties" were judges in both. "WHITGIFT - LAUD - SHELDON - MORLEY - WARD - SPRAT - AND others like them - always did - AND always will - SACRIFICE christianity to save episcopacy - AND create ten thousand infidels - RATHER than give up one useless ceremony."

In the eighth lecture, he traces "The State of Religion during the Civil Wars, and the Protectorate", noting that Cromwell was "an astonishing man" with "uncommon" capacity, infinite address, undaunted courage, just and liberal political principle, "HIS religion doubtful"; however, "NECESSITY - NOT equity governed some of his actions against his principles. - SOME peculiar maxims rendered his conduct inconsistent".

"A view of Presbyterian church-government", points out that religious, like civil tyranny exists in various degrees: Presbyterianism is a weak degree, while popery is "the consummation of it". But the former has in it "the essence" of the latter and differs from it "only as a kept mistress differs from a street-walking prostitute - OR as a musquet differs from a cannon". It is a "kind of ecclesiastical aristocracy" that excludes both monarch and people, "placing church-government in the hands of a select few". Equally "intolerant with episcopacy"; it "cannot stand without civil power". "IT is somewhat remarkable that popery in Canada - EPISCOPACY in England - AND Presbyterianism in Scotland - ARE all three established religions in the dominions of the king of Great Britain."

There are various reformed church-governments, reducible
to three: Popery and Episcopacy, similar to absolute monarchies; Presbyterianism, similar to aristocracy; Independency, similar to democracy. However, "all adopt one grand error" considering conscience a subject of human government. This error produces two evils: human legislation in matters of conscience, and enforcement of "laws made by Jesus Christ - BY penal sanctions". In Episcopacy and Popery, the legislative and executive power are lodged in one; "PRESBYTERIANISM is exactly like them - AND only swears the civil magistrate to do the worst part of the work".

The tenth lecture deals with the "State of Religion from the Restoration to the Revolution". By restoring Charles II, "a polite - DISSIPATED - gentleman - OF humane principles - BUT of no religion", the nation "aimed to realize Oliver's plan of monarchy and liberty". In his reign civil liberty was much advanced, and religious liberty would have done likewise, but for the revival of episcopacy. The Episcopalians, "those old sinners", failing to "become wise by affliction", soothed the king and then deceived and destroyed the Puritans by the "farce of a conference at the Savoy", the Act of Uniformity and the Conventicle Act.

James II, "an arbitrary governor" with "his bloody counsellor Jefferies brought the episcopal clergy into the most terrible dilemma". Having "asserted absolute royal supremacy over conscience", the head of "their protestant church was a furious papist". Nonconformists, courted by both King and Prelates in the ensuing struggle, "sacrificed their just indignation against the cruel prelates to national safety" and heartily joined the revolution. Yet when William of Orange was voted the throne "TWELVE or thirteen prelates voted" for a regency, pretending to "abide
firmly bound by oath to an abdicated tyrant - WHO had broken all his oaths to them". They

...had considered the whole nation as the property of a tyrant - INALIENABLE in his family - TO be transmitted from father to son - LIKE a herd of cattle to be fed - WORKED - OR butchered - AS their master pleased. - THEY called this the doctrine of the episcopal church - AND of Jesus Christ - AND kept up a faction on account of it through the two next reigns. (p.245)

In "A view of modern Nonconformity" he holds there are stronger arguments for it than ever before as it has been divested of superfluities; tried and found practicable. Nonconformists count among them men of eminence in every branch of learning. Their youth now have the advantage of learning without any secular or ecclesiastical interest to divert them from the truth. "WE can go without danger - WHEREVER investigation can carry us."1

"MODERN nonconformity naturally leads us to study government - SIDNEY - LOCKE - MONTESQUIEU - BECCARIA - teach the notions - WHICH we hold - of government." All hold "the people the origin of power"; administrators but responsible trustees, and the enjoyment of life, liberty and property the right of all mankind - "EXCEPT of those, whose crimes are allowed by the constitution to have disfranchised them". As others, they differ concerning "the best mode of government", but no one has attempted to subvert that established - "OR even wishes to do so".

The Dissenters public property is considerable. Their private property is large because their religion "keeps them from many expensive vices" and "makes them frugal - INDUSTRIOUS - AND

1 "For nearly a century and a half, from the Restoration in 1660 to their decline at the end of the eighteenth century, their academies gave the best and most practical instruction for youth to be found in Britain, outside, that is, the colleges and universities of Scotland." Lincoln, op.cit. p.66.
commercial - so that their property is more than equal to their wants". It also "keeps them from many heavy episcopal exactions".

Their church polity is the "wisest in the world" because:
1. Connected only with religion. 2. Unsupported by base motives - "so that it is by principle - OR it is not at all". 3. "SCRIPTURE is sole law." 4. "CONSCIENCE is its own judge of the sense of scripture - AND thus the source of virtue is kept clean." 5. Coercion of any kind is inadmissible. 6. "IT despises the cant of heresy -

SCHISM - CLERGY - THE church - EASE to doubting consciences - CONVENTICLES - SPIRITUAL lords - COURTS - LAWS - &c. - BY all which their ancestors were spiritualized out of their lives by faggots and fires. - THE nonconformists are - WITH all their infirmities - THE excellent of the earth, in whom is all our delight - PEACE is within their walls - PROSPERITY in their palaces! (p.249)

The final lecture covers the period "From the Revolution to the accession of George III". William III "was a serious - GRAVE presbyterian - A friend to religious liberty". Having passed the act of toleration, he proposed the comprehension of his Protestant subjects, but was "frustrated by prelates -PRIESTS - AND Tories". "QUEEN Anne went as she was led."

DURING both these reigns the ruling clergy pursued intolerant measures - UNDER specious pretences of moderation - THEY veered about to all points of the compass - SAID and unsaid - DID and undid - BUT never departed from their own worldly interest. (p.250)

"THE accession of the present royal family was favourable to liberty" as they have protected the toleration, befriended Dissenters and "execrated intolerance". Yet, "prelacy has hither-to defeated all liberal attempts towards religious liberty". Present laws hurt Dissenters in three ways: 1. Gentry, rich merchants, manufacturers and tradesmen are deprived of civil
rights. 2. Ministers are oppressed with oaths, fines and subscriptions. 3. School masters are obliged to conform against conviction - "AND spend their malevolent force on our innocent children - BY dooming them to ignorance - OR error and vice".

The Plan of Lectures concludes by pointing out that "popery is despotism in the highest degree - THAT prelacy is popery restrained by civil power - THAT nonconformity is reason and religion - FRIENDLY to civil polity - AND hostile only to a constitution of tyranny - AND not to those, who support it". A claim of dominion over conscience "is an usurpation of Christ's prerogative" and His gospel is calculated to destroy it. In "God's due time it will effect it, according to the sure word of prophecy". Until that time Christ's servants "must prophesy in sackcloth". The "Lecturer" should point out that "they who do so merit the highest esteem here - AND will shine with peculiar glory hereafter".

Without doubt this piece is forcefully written, with little regard for the feelings of the opposition. It provided Burke with weighty evidence when he gave the alarm that establishment was in danger. In defence of the Dissenter's cause in Parliament Mr. W. Smith argued that he had never seen the "political catechism" before "the right hon. gentleman had produced it that day". He pointed out that "Mr. Robinson was a man of extraordinary ability, but very eccentric, and by no means looked up to by the dissenters as a person qualified to lead them as a body".¹

The syllabus of lectures had in fact been approved by the Eastern Association meeting at Harlow, Essex on June 18th, ¹ Hansard, XXVIII, p. 443.
1778 and recommended "to our sister churches". Because of the respectful way in which the syllabus was mentioned in the upper house by Lord Shelburne and his spirited address to the Bishops at that time, the clergy were obliged to consider its contents. Among those who preached against it was Dr. Edmund Keene, Bishop of Ely, in whose See Robinson lived. Some of the opposition recognized its value. Bishop Horsley said of this and "Palmer's catechism":

These are tracts, cheap in price, rich in matter, and which should be gotten by heart, by every one who wishes to be thoroughly acquainted with the principles of nonconformity.1

Some Dissenters thought his language too strong and Flower pointed out to Robinson certain passages he thought objectionable. The writer explained the passages "in his impressive manner" and then added:

Friend Flower, I give you full credit for the purity of your motives; but you are a young man; when you are as well acquainted with ecclesiastical history and ecclesiastics as I am, you will think I have been merciful.2

The following letter written to a friend in 1777 helps to explain the severe tone and cutting language of the Lectures:

To-day an undergraduate visits me, protests he does not believe the articles, has not read the homilies, dislikes the canons, and believes the very prayer book wants mending; tomorrow he goes into the senate-house, takes the oath of supremacy, comes out graduated, gets ordained, and commences an able minister of the New Testament! I have seen so many instances of prevarication on one side and dominion on the other, that sometimes my whole soul is covered with gloom on account of it....When an envious snail destroys a peach, I feel a little emotion of grief, if none of resentment; but when cruel constitutions nip the bud of opening thought in a learned, simple-hearted youth, and of a lovely christian philosopher make him a miserable parish priest, a beast of

1 "Remarks on the Test Act, &c." quoted in Flower, I, p.1xxiii.
2 Flower, I, p.lxxi. Cf. Dyer, p.162. "What I have said is mercy to what I could have said."
burden, a slave of all works, I feel grief and resentment too;...Pardon me, dear Sir, I have slidden into a subject that touches me very often, and very acutely. Few imagine how much I feel on this article. The sight of this spiritual despotism is a tax laid on dissenting ministers at Cambridge, and we pay it by abundant distress.1

D.

In 1782 appeared a work devoted almost exclusively to secular aspects of government. Titled, "A Political Catechism", its "whole design" according to the author was,

To support the present excellent administration, to prevent the return of such distracted times, to disseminate safe political principles, to place publick happiness on its true base, PUBLIC POLITICAL VIRTUE...to endeavour to attract the attention of youth to this subject. (p.259)

The essay is not a system of government, but seeks to engage British youth "to study the subject in books professedly written for the purpose".

May the present happy revolution be the everlasting death of toryism, and the joyful resurrection of honest men. (p.260)

After an introductory talk, "George" and his "Parent" discuss in Socratic style the subjects: Mysteriousness, Constitution, Administration, Representation, Taxation, Responsibility, Generalissimo, Aggrandizement, Emigration. The influence of "the great Locke" is seen throughout the discussions. George understands: "that there is, in all kingdoms impliedly, and in our kingdom expressly, a mutual compact between prince and people"; that no man ought "to regulate my affairs without my consent"; that "this sort

1 Ltr. Feb.6,1777 in W. Robinson, pp.190ff.
3 That of the Marquis of Rockingham, in the hope that such as North would not return.
of government considers us as two open, ingenuous, sensible, honest men"; that "the British civil constitution is nothing but a declaration of the natural rights of mankind". To preserve these natural rights the English people constitute a form of government.

The British Constitution unites the three requisites of good government: wisdom, virtue, and power. It is this union which gives it "its singular beauty and superiority" over a constitution which provides for only monarchy, or aristocracy or democracy. If all three branches of government (King, Lords, and Commons) have equal influence, British government will maintain the three virtues. But should "the splendour and power of the monarch" blind the wisdom and "bribe away" the virtue of the other branches of legislature, the constitution would, in effect, be destroyed. What of the present balance of influence? George answers:

All the boys at school have that by heart, that is that the influence of the crown hath increased, is increasing, and OUGHT TO BE DIMINISHED. (p.300)1(Dunning's motion of 1780)

It appears that the new administration is redressing the balance, but if this is not the case there remains "an indubitable right" with the people to do so. A "general, calm, peaceable, but firm and resolute declaration of rights" should be enough to "enforce responsibility". However, as the "great Locke" pointed out:

...there remains at all times inherent in the people, a SUPREME POWER to alter or remove the legislative, for when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them, the trust is abused and forfeited, and devolves to those who gave it. 2 (p.331)

1 Cf. R.R.'s discussion in the preface to the 5th ed. of the Lectures. There he did not give his "private opinion concerning the present inclination of the balance". See p.138.

2 Probably a rough quote from The Second Treatise of Civil Government, Chap.XIII, para.149: "there remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them;...the trust must necessarily be forfeited, and the power devolve into the hands of those that gave it,...."
II. AFFIRMATION

A.

I perused this pamphlet with care and attention, and was both surprised and concerned to find so many of my friend Lindsey's arguments and positions (in his APOLGY) so totally subverted a fundamentis, provided the pleader's reasonings and authorities were well grounded. To prove this to myself I consulted a number of the texts he had cited, and found his super-structure bottomed upon a rock....Indeed so far as concerns the Socinians, I think it unanswerable:1 Archdeacon Blackburne on the "Plea".

Among those who had petitioned against subscription were Theophilus Lindsey and John Jebb. Both of these men resigned their preferments and "discovered considerable zeal in opposing the popular doctrine". Both, in pamphlets explaining their resignations had attacked the divinity of Christ.2 There were several replies but none deemed worthy until in 1776 Robinson published his famous, A Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.3 The Established clergy were quick to praise the effort as "it was pretty generally agreed, that the Plea was the best defense of the divinity of Christ, that had been published". Many sought his acquaintance and he was encouraged to join the National Church.4

Dr. Ogden, Woodwardian Professor asked him, "Do the dissenters

2 The Apology of Theophilus Lindsey, M.A. on Resigning the Vicarage of Catterick, Yorkshire, and Jebb's Reasons for Resignation.
3 In the Preface to A Sequel to the Apology...Lindsey gives an account of those by Burgh a member of the Irish Parliament, Jones, Bingham and Dr. Randolph of Oxford. Dr. Samuel Hallifax, professor of civil law, (Cambridge) and successively Bishop of Gloucester and St. Asaph;" did battle with little success, for "as a reasoner he was very feeble, and as a divine flimsy and superficial". Dyer, p.106.
4 Dr. Hinchcliffe, Bishop of Peterborough, Dr. Hallifax, Dr. Goodard, Master of Clare Hall, Dr. Ogden, Dr. Cooke, Provost of King's College, Dr. Beden, Public Orator (Cambridge) and later Bishop of Gloucester, Dr. Tucker, Dean of Gloucester. R.R. "continued for several years in an agreeable intercourse with these men, and received from them occasional civilities, more particularly, from the Bishop of Peterborough". Dyer, pp.108f.
know the worth of the man?" and received the reply, "The man knows
the worth of the dissenters."\footnote{Ibid.}

Many Dissenters did recognize his worth even at this
time. Among the Baptists Daniel Turner of Abingdon and Drs.
Stennett and Evans paid him "handsome compliments". The Inde-
pendent minister Josiah Thompson wrote:

I have read your Plea with singular pleasure, but not
more than I expected to receive from it....I cannot help
joining with Dr. Furneaux and Dr. Kippis, in requesting you,
when you have finished Saurin, never to spend your time in
any more translations; they say it is a great pity that a
man who hath such singular talents and abilities for original
composition, should be lost to the republic of letters, by
wasting them in translations.\footnote{Ltr. Feb.13,1776 quoted in ibid. pp.109f.}

The \textit{Plea}\footnote{A Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ: in a Pasto-
ral Letter Addressed to a Congregation of Protestant Dissenters at
Cambridge. (4th ed.) 1780, in Flower, III, pp.1-136.} begins by explaining to the members of the
congregation why it is addressed to them when "nothing new remains
to be said" on "the doctrine of our Saviour's divinity". The
doctrine is important as it concerns the object of worship. If
Jesus Christ is not "truly and properly God", His worshippers are
guilty of idolatry. They should distinguish between the virtue
of those "worthy clergymen" who lately resigned their livings
because of conscience and the truth of the doctrine. Finally he
wishes "to cherish that amiable spirit of TOLERATION, which reigns
among you; but to preclude an ABUSE of it". A firm attachment to
one's own principles is "perfectly compatible with an extensive
charity to those" holding "principles diametrically opposite". It
ill becomes "frail fallible men" and especially Protestant Dis-
senters "to assume a dictatorial air in matters of faith". What
he offers "appears to me the truth: but perhaps I am deceived; for
who can understand his errors?". "At present" he affirms because
he believes, "that JESUS CHRIST IS TRULY AND PROPERLY GOD". Should he ever discover himself mistaken he would retract his error.

Before giving evidences of the doctrine he would "discharge it from some incumbrances, which, having been associated with it, weaken its evidence". First, he pleads for the divinity of Jesus Christ but not the explication of it which is contained in a creed "commonly attributed" to St. Athanasius. Secondly, he does not "propose a distinct address in prayer to one divine person exclusive of another divine person". The Persons in the Deity may be distinguished but not divided. Prayer is offered to the one God through the mediator Jesus Christ. Thirdly, he does not justify any similitudes used by ancients or moderns to explain God's nature. As God "is a being without parallel", He is therefore inexplicable. Thus "an attempt to explain the divine nature seems absurd and impracticable". Fourthly, he does not think it necessary "to enter on learned arguments".

A doctrine supported only by criticisms, the understanding of which requires much literary skill, is certainly not a doctrine intended for the bulk of mankind. (p.9)

Fifthly, any notion "of a right to persecute those, who disbelieve the doctrine of Christ's divinity" is renounced. Sixthly, he insists that they too are Unitarians. The dispute is not whether there be one God or three, "but whether the divinity of Jesus Christ be incompatible with the unity of God, which unity both sides believe". Finally, as St. Paul, "We walk by FAITH, and not by SIGHT";

that is to say, the course of our lives is directed by the belief of certain principles, which we could not have discovered, which we cannot comprehend; but which we believe on the testimony of the revealer. (p.10)
Unlike the Greeks whose "science of God" was grounded on "the speculations and discoveries of their own reason", a believer "convinc'd of the imperfection of his own reason, derived his religious ideas from the testimony of that superior intelligence Jesus Christ".

In this wise plan, capacity, learning, accuracy of sentiment, were not essentially necessary. The exercise of a little plain common reasoning to obtain evidence of the credibility of the teacher was sufficient.

...This very idea of christianity is a strong argument for its divinity; for no religion can be divine, which doth not adapt itself to the illiterate, that is, to the bulk of mankind. Indeed, on this article, there is very little difference between wisdom and folly; and we might as well expect to see a smaller circle contain a greater, as to see a finite intelligence comprehend the idea of an infinite God. (p.11)

Thus the question "reduced to its true size" becomes "what idea does the new testament mean to convey of the NATURE of Jesus Christ?". He humbly conceives that the writers of the New Testament "meant to inform their readers that JESUS CHRIST IS TRULY AND PROPERLY GOD". His brethren are exordied "to attend to the following direction" in proof of this.

1. "Consult the language of the new testament, and compare it with the state of the pagan world at the time of its publication." Jesus Christ, the Evangelists and Apostles purposed "to destroy idolatry, and to establish the worship of one only living and true God". To effect this, "it was absolutely necessary" for them "to avoid confusion and obscurity of language, and to express their ideas in cool and cautious style". Men have always been prone to idolatry and if Jesus Christ "were not God, the writers of the new testament discovered great injudiciousness in the choice of their words, and adopted a very incautious and dangerous style". The writer cites the case when heathens at Lystra would have
deified Paul and Barnabas after "a miracle and a sermon". The history of Christ, "which is made up of miracles and sermons", and "the general disposition of the heathens" surely indicated to those Apostles that Jesus would also be deified by pagans.

If Jesus Christ be only a creature, the distance between him and the creator God is beyond all conception infinitely greater than that between Jesus Christ and Paul;...We naturally expect, that men, who rent their clothes in abhorrence of confounding the creature with the Creator, should express the nature of God, and the natures of all creatures, in the most circumspect language. In speaking of Jesus Christ, where the temptation to idolatry was the stronger, we naturally expect a more than ordinary caution; the case required it. (p.13)

The writers of the New Testament professed to declare the testimony of God in "WORDS OF TRUTH AND SOBERNESS" and using "WORDS WHICH THE HOLY GHOST TAUGHT". Remembering this he finds in the New Testament these propositions concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. 1

The word was GOD. GOD was manifest in the flesh. His name is Emanuel, GOD with us. John turned many to THE LORD THEIR GOD. The Jews crucified the LORD OF GLORY. GOD purchased the church with his blood.... (p.14)

If the writers of these propositions intended to affirm the divinity of Jesus Christ, these words are sober and true; "if not, the language is incautious and unwarrantable, and to address it to men prone to idolatry for the purpose of destroying idolatry, is a strong presumption against their inspiration". Especially is this true as the Greek language "was not a poor contracted tongue", but one which enabled a writer to express exactly what he meant. Further, the writers addressed not philosophers and scholars, but common people "and consequently they used words in their plain

popular signification".¹

II. "Compare the style of the new Testament with the state of the Jews at the time of its publication." At the time of Christ the Jews zealously defended the unity of God and Jesus Christ and His Apostles, professing the highest regard for the Jewish Scriptures, "constantly appealed to them" and "directed people to search them". The New Testament writers describe Jesus Christ "by the very names and titles by which the writers of the old Testament had described the Supreme God". Robinson then lists in parallel columns titles given to God "in the Jewish Scriptures" and those "given to CHRIST in the Christian Scriptures",² and adds:

If they, who described Jesus Christ to the Jews by these sacred names and titles, intended to convey an idea of his deity, the description is just, and the application safe: but if they intended to describe a mere man, they were surely of all men the most preposterous. They chose a method of recommending Jesus to the Jews, the most likely to alarm and enrage them. Whatever they meant, the Jews understood them in our sense, and took Jesus Christ for a BLASPHEMER. We stone thee said they, for BLASPHEMY; because thou, being a man, MAKEST THYSELF GOD. (pp.16f)

III. "Compare the perfections, which are ascribed to Jesus Christ in the scriptures, with those which are ascribed to God." One cannot be too careful in describing God and creatures "for were a divine to ascribe either the imperfections of creatures to God, or the perfections of God to creatures, the most alarming

¹ "The common people, it seems, understood the words in our sense of them; for, in the Dioclesian persecution, when the Roman soldiers burnt a Phrygian city inhabited by christians, men, women, and children submitted to their fate, calling upon CHRIST THE GOD OVER ALL." (Euseb. Eccl. Hist. lib. viii. cap. 2.) p.15.
consequences would follow". In contrast with pagan theology which "was a chaos of confusion on this account", Jewish theology "is pure and chaste in description; it gives unto Jehovah the glory due unto his name, and it forbids the giving of his glory to another". Jesus Christ declares "ALL THINGS, THAT THE FATHER HATH, ARE MINE; a very dangerous proposition if he were not God; and rendered more so by those descriptions, which the writers of revelation give of his perfections!". The New Testament writers ascribe to Christ the same perfection they ascribe to God. In proof of this Robinson cites the affirmation "In Christ dwelleth ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD bodily" and lists the perfections ascribed to God and to Christ under the headings: Eternity, Omnipotence, Immutability, Omnipresence, and Omniscience.1 Thus, if those who ascribe the perfections of Deity to Jesus Christ have erred, "they have been led into it by the writers of the new Testament". It is not credible "that such accurate writers" who distinguished "the flesh of MEN from that of BEASTS; and that of FISHES from that of BIRDS; the glory of CELESTIAL bodies from the glory of TERRESTRIAL", should "make a mistake so gross as to ascribe the excellencies of God to a MERE MAN".

If Jesus Christ be God, the ascription of the perfections of God to him is proper: if he be not, the apostles are chargeable with weakness or wickedness, and either would destroy their claim of inspiration. (p.22)

IV. "Consider the WORKS, that are ascribed to Jesus Christ, and compare them with the claims of Jehovah." The New Testament writers ascribe the works of Jehovah to Jesus. "Nothing

can account for their conduct, except in their system Jesus and Jehovah be the same." Creation, preservation, the mission of the prophets, the salvation of sinners, and the forgiveness of sin—all works of God—are also in parts of Scripture ascribed to Jesus Christ.¹

The same might be said of the illumination of the mind; the sanctification of the heart; the resurrection of the dead; the judging of the world; the glorification of the righteous; the eternal punishment of the wicked; (p.23)

If Jesus Christ be not God the writers of Scripture "contradict one another" and themselves; "degrade writings, which, they pretend, are inspired, below the lowest scribbling of the meanest authors". Hacket in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and in the time of Cromwell a James Naylor "assumed the names and titles of Jesus Christ, and arrogated to themselves those works, which are peculiar to him". For this one was executed and the other imprisoned, "set in the pillory, and had his tongue bored through for blasphemy, and in vain did he plead that the honours were not paid to him, but to Jesus Christ, who dwelt in him". Now,

...if these men were guilty of a high misdemeanor, (and that they were the most moderate must allow,) in arrogating to themselves the honours of another man, how much more guilt must they accumulate, who ascribe to any man, to Moses or to Christ, the names, the titles, and the works of the ineffable God? If Jesus be a mere man, the distance between Hacket and Jesus is trifling in comparison of the distance of both from the infinite God. The apostles ought to have kept up an idea of this distance. They have not done so: on the contrary, they have ascribed the glories of God to Jesus Christ. Either Jesus Christ is God, or their conduct is unaccountable. (pp.25f)

V. "Consider that WORSHIP, which the scriptures claim for Jesus Christ." Though it is a command of God, "repeated by our Saviour, thou shalt worship THE LORD THY GOD, and HIM ONLY

shalt thou serve", the Scriptures "command all the angels of God to worship Christ".

They say, at the name of Jesus every knee in heaven, and in earth, should bow. They command all men to honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Twenty times in the new testament, grace, mercy, and peace, are implored of Christ, together with the Father. The committing of the soul to God at death is a sacred act of worship; in the performance of this act Stephen died, saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit. The whole host of heaven worship him, that sitteth upon the throne, and the Lamb, for ever and ever. (p.26)

Robinson now directs his attention to Mr. Lindsey's argument concerning Stephen's prayer to the Lord Jesus in Acts vii:59. Although Lindsey holds that religious worship is "incommunicable to any other person" as it is appropriated to God alone, still Stephen was not idolatrous because he "saw Jesus with his eyes, and called him the son of man". He further argues that this "can be no precedent for directing prayer to him unseen or addressing him as God". Robinson answers:

Had all the apostles, had the whole Jewish nation, prayed to Jesus Christ during his abode on earth, nothing, according to this reasoning, could be inferred from it to direct our worship now; because they saw him with their eyes, and to us he is unseen. According to this, when blind Bartimeus said, Jesus! thou son of David! have mercy on me! he was guilty of idolatry; for he addressed an unseen Jesus; but when, having received his sight, he followed Jesus in the way, and praised him, he ceased to be an idolater; and had he been stoned in the exercise, he would have been a blessed martyr. (p.27)

The writer next hopes that Mr. Jebb who thinks "the addresses of christians may with the same propriety be directed to the virgin Mary, as to the person of our Lord" will reconsider. Consider the case of Cardinal Bonaventure "who converted all the addresses to God in the book of psalms into invocations of the virgin Mary, by changing the word Lord, or Jehovah, into Lady". Suppose at death the Cardinal invokes the Virgin Mary and commits his spirit to her.
A protestant asks, *Who hath required this at your hands?* David resigned his soul into the hands of the TRUE GOD. Jesus Christ adopted David's words, and commended his spirit into the hands of his Father. St. Stephen committed his into the hands of JESUS. According to my system, Jesus, the Father, and the true God, ARE ONE. The terms of invocation differ; the object is the same, each invocation is therefore proper. But, granting for a moment, that Jesus is a mere man, I have, at least, in Stephen's invocation of him, a precedent for committing my soul to him; but where is your's for invoking Mary? Who will pretend to say, there is the same propriety in both? (p.31)

Surely Jesus Christ's titles to adoration are not "equally as spurious as those of Mary" and Stephen is "a safer guide, than a superstitious Cardinal of the church of Rome".

VI. "Observe, my brethren, the application of old testament passages which belong to Jehovah, to Jesus Christ in the new testament, and try whether you can acquit the writers of the new testament of misrepresentation, on supposition that Jesus is not God." One has a right to look for "the utmost precision" in men who pretend to inspiration. This section deals not so much with "the force of the terms; as the wisdom and equity of those who apply them". Robinson again enumerates passages which if Jesus Christ be God are proper. "If we deny it, the new testament, we must own, is one of the most unaccountable compositions in the world, calculated to make easy things hard to be understood."

VII. "Examine, whether events have justified that notion of Christianity, which the prophets gave their countrymen of it, if Jesus Christ be not God." One of the results of the Messiah's coming foretold by the prophets was that the Gentiles would be led to forsake idols and worship the one living and true God. "If Jesus Christ be God, the event answers the prophecy; if not, the event is not come to pass, for Christians in general worship
Jesus, which is idolatry, if he be not God." Whether or not as Mr. Lindsey and others affirm, Christians for three centuries after Christ "were generally Unitarians", the writer affirms - "what neither side will deny" - that whatever their belief the practice of primitive Christians was to worship Jesus Christ. In proof he cites the witness of Pliny, Mohammed, "(we will return to earlier evidence presently....)" and Justin Martyr. That the practice has been continued by "the far greater part of christians" will not be doubted. Either "the whole christian church has not injured the unity of God by worshipping Christ" or Christianity has suffered "horrid corruption". The fact that both Testaments are silent about such a corruption suggests the former alternative. "If the apostles did not foresee, this idolatrous worship", they were given a less degree of the spirit than Moses. If they foresaw, but did not foretell "this dangerous departure from their doctrine" what becomes

...of all their fine professions of declaring the WHOLE COUNSEL of God, of keeping back NOTHING that might be profitable, of imparting their OWN SOULS, and so on? Are not all these rather romantic? (p.61)

The writers of the New Testament foresaw and foretold corruptions of Christianity in regard to morals (II Tim.iii:1, etc.) and faith (I Tim.iv:1). In writing of demon worship, St. Paul foretold "that christianity should be corrupted with the worshipping of saints and angels" but where in Scripture is "the least intimation of christians falling into idolatry by worshipping Christ"?

Those scriptures, which are able to make men wise unto salvation:...which make a man of God perfect, and thoroughly furnish him unto all good works, would they have left us without warning on this dangerous topic? (p.62)

VIII. "If Jesus Christ be not God, you will be obliged
to allow, that Mohammed has written more clearly on the nature of Christ, than the apostles have, and that the Turks, who reject the gospel, have clearer notions of the nature of Jesus Christ, than christians have, who receive and study it." Again in parallel columns Robinson compares statements of the "Inspired writers" with those of Mohammed who says: "They are INFIDELS, who say, God is Christ"; "Christ the Son of Mary is no more than an APOSTLE"; "Christians say Christ is the SON of God. How are they infatuated! Far be it from God that he should have a SON"; "Jesus is no other than a SERVANT". Jesus said he would build his church upon the rock of Peter's confession, and promised to his disciples the spirit of truth.

But, if the generality of christians believe the divinity of a mere man, they believe a lie, and the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, has forsaken the christian church, and dwells in the mosques of a vile impostor. (p.66)

IX. "Consider what numberless passages of scripture have no sense, or a very absurd one, if Jesus Christ be a mere man." Among other passages he cites Philippians 11:6 and explains:

That is, say some, Jesus, not being God, thought not of the robbery of being equal with God. Glorious humility! A creature did not think of ranking himself with the creator!

1 An interesting side light on the Plea was Robert Hall's cutting reply in an exchange with R.R. that "if he ever rode into the field of public controversy, he should not borrow Dr. Abbadie's boots". Gregory, op.cit. pp.36f. The illusion is to the French work, Traite De La Divinite de Notre Seigneur Jesus-Christ. by Mr. Abbadie. On this W. Robinson writes; "The Plea shews that its author was well acquainted with Abbadie's work on the same subject; e.g. the argument that unless Christ be God, Mahomet, who denied his divinity, was on that point a teacher more to be relied on than Jesus, is borrowed. The resemblance is quite sufficient to give sting to Mr. Hall's repartee,...and to create some surprise that no mention is made of Abbadie in the Plea. But whatever ideas the author borrowed, he has re-produced in a new shape." p.lxxii.

The humblest effort of the wisest human mind was only not to equal itself with Jehovah! (p.67)

He appeals to his brethren whether the doctrine of Christ's divinity is "embarrassed with any difficulties equal" to those of a doctrine of his mere humanity and feels "these considerations ought" to induce them "to allow St. John's proposition, He, WHO WAS MADE FLESH, WAS GOD". The Christian who admits it "walks in a plain and easy path". He reasons that as the inspired writers called Jesus God and used "the same names, titles, attributes, and works," to describe Him as the prophets used to describe God, therefore He is God. As Jesus is "worshipped by all the host of heaven" and "teaches his followers to do the will of God on earth" as in heaven, the plain Christian "will worship Jesus on earth, as the angels worship him in heaven".

Robinson next disposes of the idea that Jesus is "only a delegated deity" by disproving six propositions: 1. "Jesus was an Impostor"; 2. "Jesus was a good man, and taught a better morality than any other philosopher had taught"; 3. "Jesus was an extraordinary man, who lived in the reign of Tiberius"; 4. "The human soul of Jesus existed before his assumption of flesh"; 5. "The Archangel Michael, as a superior spiritual existence, was united to that system of organized matter, which served our Lord in quality of a body, performed the offices of a reasonable soul in it, and gave him his supreme dignity as the Son of God. This tutelar angel of the Jews often appeared to the patriarchs and prophets"; 6. "God may create an infinite series of spiritual agents, in subordination one to another; some of which may, by an authority communicated to them from the supreme God, act as Gods with regard to inferior beings. God may enable such a one to create a world."
Jesus Christ is a being of this kind: He is a DELEGATED GOD."

In answer to the last proposition the writer argues that he is not concerned with what God may do, but what God declares He hath done. He finds a revelation of this in the Bible. Here he finds "that the one living and true God united himself to the man Jesus for the purpose of displaying his glory".¹ Thus in Jesus the divine and human nature are united; "therefore the complex person Jesus is styled God".

Thus I have one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. As God he requires and accepts a mediation; as man he mediates, and presents TO HIMSELF a glorious church, holy, and without blemish. Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness - God was manifest in the flesh. (p.84)

How happy for Christianity had later Christians, like primitive, "rested in the SIMPLICITY OF REVELATION" instead of practicing "the art of explaining what they did not understand". Resultant "philosophical explications",

...produced a novel notion called a Trinity, and with it disputes, creeds, subscriptions, proscriptions, persecutions, wars, and other calamitous consequences, which have disgraced Christianity, and divided Christians from that day to this. (p.84)

Undoubtedly there is a "SCRIPTURE TRINITY" but the writer's present concern is only with "our Lord's divinity".

In concluding Robinson discusses why "wise and worthy men" maintain wrong opinions of Christ's divinity; whether this doctrine is "free from all difficulty, and liable to no objection" and finally "what conduct ought a Christian, who believes the divinity of Christ, to observe to one, who doubts or disbelieves

¹ W. Robinson "looking at the work as a whole, and having respect to the testimony of others" feels it "almost beyond doubt" that R.R. was a Sabellian when he wrote the Plea; "that is, he supposed the names Father, Son, and Spirit denoted, not different agents, but different modes in which the one God manifests himself". pp.lxxif.
it". Concerning the last Robinson urges that "as sincere man, who
denies our Lord's divinity" should be considered as "a mistaking
brother; in every other attitude an object of esteem; and in that
of denying" Christ's divinity an object of "tenderest compassion".
Finally: "Remember, the primitive christians were happy till they
began to attempt to EXPLAIN the nature of Christ."¹

Archdeacon Blackburne, as we have seen,² thought the
Plea unanswerable "so far as concerns the Socinians". According
to Belsham,³ Mr. Lindsey and the other Socinians also thought it
unanswerable, but for different reasons. Referring to the
complimentary letters Robinson had sent to both Jebb and Lindsey
together with a copy of the Plea, Belsham says:

Courteous answers were of course returned. But neither
of the gentlemen so addressed entertained at that time any
thoughts of writing a confutation of the Plea;...neither of
them regarding this superficial attack as deserving of a
serious reply.

This seems extreme. Jebb in answer to Robinson's letter wrote,

Although I must confess, that my opinion regarding
the main point of doctrine, which is the subject of our
consideration, remains the same, I yet can say with truth,

¹ In a "Postscript" to the Plea R.R. gives "proofs and illus-
trations" of several maxims taken for granted in the Letter, as
those to whom it was addressed allowed them. The maxims are: "I.
The Books of the Old and New Testament were given by divine inspi-
ration. II. The inspired writings contain all things necessary to
be believed and practised in religion. III. The words by which the
inspired writers expressed their ideas, are to be understood in
that sense, in which the people, to whom they wrote, generally
understood them at the time of their writing, unless notice be given
of the contrary. IV. The belief of a proposition does not neces-
sarily imply a clear idea of that object, of which the proposition

² P.155. Blackburne however, can hardly be considered impartial
as when the Established clergy's petition was defeated, and several
left the Church, Blackburne, "the promoter of the movement, retained
his preferments, openly saying that he could not afford to give up
his means of living". Skeats and Miall, op. cit. p.367.

³ T. Belsham, Memoirs of the Late Reverend Theophilus Lindsey,
M.A. pp.184f.
that I read your essay with pleasure, and received, in many particulars, information and improvement from the perusal.\footnote{Dyer, p.119. Lindsey's reply is given on p.117.} 

Dr. Priestley referred to it\footnote{Funeral Sermon preached on the occasion of the death of R.R. quoted in \textit{ibid.} p.421.} as "one of the most plausible of the treatises on that side of the question, and the only one that Mr. Lindsey thought proper to reply to". Belsham admits that the \textit{Plea} "excited greater attention, and made a deeper impression than these gentlemen (Jebb and Lindsey) expected, and than its intrinsic merits deserved, and it soon became apparent that a reply of some kind was advisable". Lindsey tried to find out from his friends at Cambridge "whether any notice was likely to be taken from the press of this new 'Plea,' which for a time had so much vogue". He could only find that, "it was looked upon as so very superficial, and had so little argument in it, that it could not long deceive anyone, and needed no confutation". This too was extreme for by 1785 the \textit{Plea} had undergone three editions and Mr. Lindsey's anonymous "Examination"\footnote{"An Examination of Mr. Robinson of Cambridge's Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by a late Member of the University." In subsequent editions, Lindsey affixed his own name to the work. Belsham, \textit{op.cit.} p.187.} was in the press. His reasons are given in letters to a Mr. Cappe.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} p.186.} 

Mr. Archdeacon Blackburne has often asked me, in triumph, how we could go on in Essex-street without confuting this work? It is also much commended by several dignitaries in the church; and held as gospel very generally among dissenters. I have been formerly and often pressed to take some notice of it. I asked the Cambridge men at the time and since, but they declined. Very much importuned by some persons lately, I have undertaken it,...

And in a letter dated 25th February, 1785:

I often wonder at myself, and am often not a little drooping, to think how I should venture on the public, when certain persons, so much more able and capable, are silent.

\footnotesize{1} Dyer, p.119. Lindsey's reply is given on p.117. 
\footnotesize{2} Funeral Sermon preached on the occasion of the death of R.R. quoted in \textit{ibid.} p.421. 
\footnotesize{3} "An Examination of Mr. Robinson of Cambridge's Plea for the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, by a late Member of the University." In subsequent editions, Lindsey affixed his own name to the work. Belsham, \textit{op.cit.} p.187. 
\footnotesize{4} \textit{Ibid.} p.186.}
But then it recurs, that it is fit something should be opposed to such triumphant nonsense and declamation, which seems well received because many know no better.

In the Preface to his work, Lindsey charged that Robinson had "seldom given himself the trouble of doing anything more than barely to bring together texts of Scripture, without explaining them, or even showing how they apply to his purpose in proving Jesus Christ to be truly and properly God; presuming that it would be taken for granted, at sight and upon his authority, that they prove the point for which he assigned them". He then proceeds to answer each argument of the *Plea* and examines the texts cited there. Again, according to Belsham, the success of the Examination "was complete". "From the time that it was published no person who had the least pretension to Biblical learning was heard to open his lips in defence of this famous Plea for the Divinity of Christ; not a syllable was written in confutation of the Reply". Robinson, though strongly urged by friends and opponents to reply refused. In a letter he wrote,

I do not intend to answer the anonymous examiner. He hath not touched my arguments, and his spirit is bitter and contemptuous. His faith stands on criticisms: and my argument is, that if the doctrine require critical proof, it is not popular, and therefore not divine. Yes! they will have the last word, and let them.

The temper of a debate was important to Robinson. To Robert Tyrwhitt of Jesus college he said:

Some people handle their opponents sharply, but the temper of your pamphlet is gentle, yet judicious, and I am willing to be convinced.

1 Quoted in *ibid.* p.187.
2 Archdeacon Blackburne does not seem to have been convinced by the "Examination", for he recommended the "serious perusal" of the *Plea" to some young clergymen a very few weeks before his death". *Blackburne's Works*, vol. I. pgxxxv.iii. quoted in *Flower*, I, p.lxii.
3 Quoted in *Dyer*, p.113.
The orthodox also found fault with the performance. They considered the tone of his argument too tolerant for such an important doctrine. This was as Robinson had predicted in the *Plea.*\(^1\) He wished that those "who inhabit the torrid zone" would "renounce their disposition to damn mankind."\(^2\)

Some doubted the writer's sincerity, feeling him mostly interested in applause. In refutation of this Flower cites his own request to Robinson to write a similar piece "respecting the personality and divinity of the Holy Spirit". To this request, made when "the *Plea* was in the meridian of its popularity", Robinson replied, "How can a man write upon a subject the truth of which he himself has considerable doubts?".\(^3\)

B.

Robinson had championed the right of private judgment in matters of faith against the State and had vigorously denied the need or value of a human creed, as a standard of membership in a Christian church. Within his own denomination he was to fight for the same principles in the matter of mixed communion.\(^4\) This matter which has agitated members of Baptist churches from the beginning of their history, and for which no common solution has yet been found for all Baptist churches, was much agitated in Robinson's day. Robinson in his piece titled, *The General Doctrine*

1 "A peaceable christian, who lives in an age of dispute, has but two ways before him. Either he must enter into all the violent measures of the combatants on one side, or he must suffer the reproaches of both." Flower, III, p.101.
2 Dyer, p.110.
3 Flower, I, p.lxiv.
4 R.R. means by this more than allowing pedo-baptists fellowship at the Lord's Table; he means allowing pedo-baptists who confess faith in Christ, full membership, rights and privileges without adult immersion.
of Toleration Applied to the Particular Case of Free Communion, gives a brief history of the controversy from about 1633 to 1772 when Turner of Abingdon, Ryland of Northampton, and Brown of Kettering argued for the practice while Turner of Birmingham, Buttfeld of Thorne, and most notably Abraham Booth of London in, An Apology for the Baptists argued against the practice. In stating the case Robinson feels the whole debate "may be divided into a case of fact and a case of right".

It is a fact that sincere Christians owning only the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and practice and having searched the Scriptures "with all the diligence and rectitude, of which they are capable,...think infant baptism of divine appointment". Many Baptist churches "conscientiously admit such" to membership, and feel "no inconvenience has arisen to them from the mixture of their communion". It is also a fact that such Christians "glorify God in their lives and conversations" as honorably as the others. Not only in the reign of Charles I and since, but,

...during the time of the great papal apostacy, while churches were congregated in private for fear of prelatical persecution, believers, who held infant baptism, and believers, who disowned it, were united in the same community, as ancient manuscripts and authentick records abundantly prove.

(p.147)

It is also true that from the first appearance of Baptist churches in England some "have refused, and to this day continue to refuse" any, no matter how qualified in other respects "who have not been baptised by immersion on their own profession of faith and repentance". Yet all these Baptists "allow the piety and virtue of unbaptized believers" accounting them members of Christ's body and feel themselves "bound to discharge every kind

office to them, except this one of admitting them to church fellowship. These churches do not believe baptism "a saving ordinance", "a test of true religion", "nor do they hold that unbaptized believers ought not to be tolerated in a state, nor do they deny any intelligent being the right of private judgment; they only refuse to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches". Such refusal is not from bigotry, wilful ignorance, "or any other illiberal disposition; but from a fear of offending God by acting without a sufficient warrant from his written word, the rule of all religious conduct".

Some Independent churches by practicing mixed communion have thereby in time become Baptist churches, and similarly have Baptist churches admitted "so many unbaptized members, that the churches have in time chosen ministers, who held infant-baptism, and lost the ordinance of baptism by immersion".

Lastly: it is matter of fact, that the primitive churches, ...were originally constituted baptist churches, and that they lost the ordinance of baptism, along with the doctrines of the gospel, and the very nature and essence of christian churches, not by practising a wise toleration towards men of allowed piety, but by setting up certain external qualifications of church members, which in time became tests of orthodoxy, to which wicked men could and did conform, under pretence of authority from Christ to establish uniformity. (p.149)

Yet, all these facts do not constitute "christian law"; for that it is necessary to ascertain not what is, but what ought to be.

To determine what is the right of the case, the "truly protestant ground of action" is the revealed will of Jesus Christ, "the original projector of church fellowship, and the sole legislator in all the assemblies of his saints". To try out the question "as fairly and clearly" as possible Robinson sets out "the judge of the controversy, and the law of the case".
The right in question can't be determined "from the universal consent, real or pretended, of men out of our own community". The Church Fathers are incompetent for one says yea, another, nay "and both refer us to Jesus Christ, and so we leave off where we began". The Roman Catholics are incompetent for their proper work is not the investigation of truth, but submission to Papal authority. "A catholick priest does not deserve to be made a lord prelate till he has well and thoroughly learnt, that his business is not to examine the load, but to keep the cart on wheels". Neither can Baptists allow the testimony of "polemical divines, and pious ones too, in established reformed churches". The case never came, nor could come "seriously before them" and having subscribed a religious test "they could not prudently, or even uprightly, give an opinion in direct contradiction to it". Baptists judge them "mistaken in every part of baptism, in the nature, the subject, the mode, and the end of it". Finally, as this is "not a learned question", the learned critics "have no occasion to interfere". "It would be a great misfortune to a company of plain homely christians in church fellowship, if any case pertaining to life and godliness must cost fifteen hundred pounds worth of Latin and Greek to make evident and clear."

The right can not be determined from "the great names in our own churches", such as Gale and Foster or Bunyan and Kiffin. Neither general notions of benevolence and usefulness, nor "zealous and upright intentions of preserving purity of doctrine and order" can determine, for this case of the constitution of Christian churches comes "under written revealed law". Thus, "general dispositions must be regulated by particular directions". A
particular case in the New Testament, or the silence of the New Testament says nothing to the case, "for the truth is, infant baptism was not then known". Finally, "accidental circumstances" determine nothing and only serve to lead one's attention "from the case in hand".

Having "cleared the court of a bustling noisy crowd, that do no good because they give no evidence, and do a deal of harm because they perplex the question by throwing in a quantity of foreign matter", the writer proceeds to investigate "the law of Christ in this case". He affirms,

...that it is JUST and RIGHT and agreeable to the revealed will of Christ, that Baptist churches should admit into their fellowship such persons as desire admission on profession of faith and repentance, although they refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they sincerely believe they have been rightly baptized by sprinkling in their infancy. (p.154)

In explanation he distinguishes "what our divines call the esse or the being of a church, from the melius esse, or best being of one". A "mixt church" is "rightly constituted" though its constitution is not "so perfect as that of the primitive churches". "A church that tolerates is a good church: but a church that has no errors to tolerate is a better." He does not blame churches "never required to admit unbaptized believers, for maintaining strict communion", but believes "where the requisition is made, a compliance with it is just and right". In support of this he uses "two sorts of arguments": "general principles of analogy, on which, the scriptures declare, the christian church is founded" and "the

express laws of Jesus Christ".

The New Testament tells us that God "is the author of christianity, the creator of the christian church" and "hath inviolably preserved an analogy between the natural and preternatural worlds". This doctrine of analogy "is the true ground of all the parables, in which Christ taught his heavenly doctrine". Thus, God exercises the same attributes in the church as in the world, the display being "brightest in the first".

As in the natural world so in the church "we should diminish evils and difficulties, which we are not able wholly to remove". A sincere man with "faith in Christ and moral obedience", but without "light into adult baptism" wishing to join one of their churches presents an "insurmountable difficulty" as they cannot give him knowledge and cannot baptize him without it. Still they can diminish the difficulty by admitting him to the Lord's Table "and so build God's house with the best materials we have".

Secondly, it is "agreeable to the nature of things, that there should be no discqualification where there is no crime". On this principle Baptists "argue against a sacramental test in the episcopal church". The person seeking fellowship without "light into adult baptism" is imperfect in knowledge; "but his imperfection is innocent". There can be no moral turpitude where a person has "exercised all the ability and virtue he has, and his ignorance is involuntary".¹ To deny such a one church fellowship is to inflict a punishment "without an offence, and in violation of a

¹ Cf. R.R. in "Reflections on Christian Liberty, Civil Establishments of Religion, and Toleration" in Flower, I, p.92: "Mere mental errors, if they be not entirely innocent in the account of the supreme Governor of mankind, cannot be, however, objects of blame and punishment among men."
right". "Now, as we all agree, that Christ hath constituted his
church on principles of equity, it should seem, this argument is
valid and of force."

Continuing his argument from analogy the writer holds it
"agreeable to the nature of things": "that all men should be placed
in that condition, in which they can do most good"; "that a visible
difference should be put between the righteous and the wicked".
Finally it "would argue great unfitness in any scheme of religion
for this world, if it made no provision for human imperfections".

First among the "EXPRESS LAWS OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP
contained in the written revealed will of our excellent legislator"
Robinson cites Christ's "law of exclusion". There are both general
and particular lists of those "who will be denied an entrance into
the kingdom of heaven" but in none of these are "the persons now
before us" mentioned. It is no good to argue that such legislation
is incomplete,

...for our lawgiver was a prophet, and a tender prophet,
who foresaw all future periods and persons, and forewarned
his church of every thing that would endanger the constitution
of it. (p.162)

Secondly, "his law of toleration" includes the persons
in question. This law "that all christians should enjoy unmolested
IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH the right of private judgment" is found in
a multitude of passages,

...and this right of self-determination is vindicated
not only against magistrates, philosophers and Rabbies, but
against fellow-members, as in the xivth of Romans; and even
against inspired apostles, as in the 8th and 10th verses of
the xxiiiid of Matthew. By this law we are bound to allow an
universal toleration in all matters, that do not destroy the
essence of gospel worship. (p.163)

Before proceeding, he explains exactly his meaning. He pleads for
a "free toleration of the right of private judgment" for each church member and all good men. He pleads for the right to be exercised "not in the state, that our civil governors allow, but in the church".

We do not only affirm, that unbaptized believers have a natural right to freedom in Britain, so that they may congregate, and form churches of their own faith and order; but we affirm, that they have a scriptural right to their own faith and order in our churches. (p.164)

If it be argued that such toleration would destroy their own faith and order, he answers that "in general, Toleration ought to extend as far as is consistent with purity of faith and order, and of this each church ought to judge for itself".

The "objects of toleration" are "errors of faith, and irregularities of practice". As to faith it is necessary to distinguish "the facts recorded in scripture"¹ from "reasonings upon these facts". A man believing the facts, "who reasons obliquely upon them" is to be tolerated. A man disbelieving the facts "is an infidel, he does not believe the record God has given of his son, and consequently he is not a disciple of Christ, and so can have no claim to sit at his table". As Christian obedience concerns moral and positive precepts, two types of irregularity of practice are to be tolerated: In moral obedience, improper action proceeding "not from malice, but from infirmity"; In positive obedience "that sort of irregularity", proceeding "from innocent mental error". This toleration destroys neither the "essence of christianity nor the purity of gospel worship", and makes for the "peace and prosperity of the church". Such errors

¹ Such as the birth, life, miracles, death, resurrection, etc. of Christ. This distinction is elaborated much more fully by R.R. in "Reflections on Christian Liberty..." in Flower, I, pp.119-129.
and irregularities of practice are tolerated. As their churches "have never yet agreed on the number of positive institutes"\(^1\) (which proceeding from Christ "ought all to be treated with equal reverence"), and irregularities are tolerated "in some of them without any danger to the general law of obedience to positive religion, what imaginable good reason can be produced for making an exception in the case of unbaptized believers"? The writer will not be put off with the answer that Baptists allow "the person in question" to exercise private judgment and join a church of his own sentiments. They are to allow the exercise of private judgment in their own community, "not out of it, where your allowance and disallowance operate nothing".

Thirdly, "the law of baptism itself" though a New Testament ordinance "to be practised till the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" is not a New Testament church ordinance. Baptism was practised by John the Baptist and Jesus before the churches had been congregated. Believers should publicly avow their faith in Christ, "and their resolution to obey him, by being baptized". The proper time is "after believing and before admission to fellowship: however, as there was no original and actual, so there is no natural and necessary connection between baptism and fellowship". "Baptism was an initiation into the profession of christianity at large, not into the practice of it in any particular church." He pleads this law, as a "command to perform one duty is not a prohibition of another" and because "this positive law of baptism is not enforced by any penalties".

\(^1\) "All hold two, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; some add a third, the Sunday sabbath; others several more, as worshipping God by singing, anointing the sick with oil, abstaining from things strangled and from blood, and so on." p.167
"By what right then do we affix to the breach of it such a severe penalty as exclusion from church fellowship?"

Fourthly, "the law of gifts" obliges men to employ and improve whatever spiritual gifts have been given them by Christ. The "want of baptism" does not "incapacitate" the exercise of "fancy, judgment, memory, penetration, freedom of speech, courage, nor any other excellence, that goes into the composition of a spiritual gift". There is no express law in the New Testament against the use of such gifts because of "the imperfection of baptism", but there is an express law to use such gifts. "Christian societies cannot regularly employ these gifts among themselves, unless they admit the persons, who have them, to fellowship."

As all their churches "allow and employ neighbouring independent ministers to preach to them, and daily express a high and just regard for their useful labours", he asks but a similar toleration "for members of their own congregations".

Fifthly, he urges the "law of constitution" for New Testament churches. When Christ descended into Judea, "he brought along with him three sorts of excellencies; a body of perfect wisdom, an assortment of holy affections, and a set of upright actions". These he imparted in some degree to his disciples, and they to others "assisted by his divine influence". Although none possess these as Christ, nor all disciples "in such eminent degrees as some do", "there is a general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, religious principle, if you will, in all believers, on which the christian church is constituted". His argument "turns on the sufficiency of this general excellence, which is common to all believers, for all the ends and purposes of church
fellowship". Unbaptized believers possess this general excellence. If it be argued that they fail to answer "the description of the primitive christians" because they have not been immersed, it should be observed that baptism is "neither repentance towards God, nor faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" but "only a profession of these graces". Church fellowship seems in its very nature "connected with the graces, and neither with this, nor with any other peculiar mode of professing them". The truth is,

...right to church communion lies in that royal charter, which the clemency of God hath granted to mankind, and by which persons of certain descriptions, though imperfect in knowledge, defective in obedience, and encompassed with many infirmities, are allowed the favour of approaching him through the merit of Jesus Christ. Title to fellowship lies in the divine charter, meetness for it in personal qualification. (p.179)

This qualification, he calls "grace, general excellence, religious principle, supreme love to truth and virtue". Though imperfect in degree, it is "perfect in kind" and Christ's law is that "his churches should be constituted, of only such persons as actually possess this real sterling goodness". The possession of it "ought always to be considered as a clear warrant to admit to fellowship".

Finally, he urges "the law of release and deprivation". He unites these because "release from duty includes in it a deprivation of benefits". In "the moment of regeneration" a man ceases to be subject to any but Jesus Christ in religious matters. Christ "binds him to duty, and endows him with privilege, and none but the highest authority can deprive him of one, or release him from the other". When Baptists "pretend to no authority to release from duty, how is it possible" they should claim authority to deprive of benefit?

In concluding the work, Robinson makes an "apology" for
those who refuse "to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches". Sprinkling is "so incompatible with the nature of a rational religion to be received and professed on a conviction of the truth and excellence of it", and so foreign to the New Testament, "and the mischiefs attending it so notorious, that they may well be excused for their aversion to it". Christ's will and example are so plain in the matter and the ordinance of adult baptism of such value to a congregation, "that we must not be too severe" on those who considering themselves sole defenders "of this part of primitive religion, hold infant sprinkling in abhorrence". Further, as the denomination has through the years "been misrepresented, and treated with more partiality and rigour than any other nonconformists" by church historians, theologians, literati, priests - and even by other protestants - their attitude is easily accounted for. It is but an excess of virtue, "and excessive virtue is the most pardonable of all vices".

However, in his fancy he pictures "a strict church" being asked to admit ten who held "infant sprinkling for christian baptism":

Their names were John Calvin, the reformer, William Tindall, the translator of the bible, John Owen, vice-chancellor of the learned university of Oxford, Matthew Henry, the expositor, and Isaac Watts, the composer of the psalms and hymns on the table. The ladies were Thecla the writer of the Alexandrian manuscript, Mary, Countess Dowager of Warwick, Lady Mary Vere, Lady Mary Armyne, and Mrs. Margaret Baxter, whose praises were in all the churches. (p.189)

He fancies the feelings in the hearts of the congregation rebel against their settled opinion and notes that the "heart in some cases is a good casuist; and will teach us many things worth our attention".

Were the Apostle Peter in the place of the minister of this church he would say, "Come, ye blessed of my father,...".
Flower feels that the above drawn picture makes "such a powerful appeal to the heart of every sincere christian, that I may safely pronounce it unanswerable".\textsuperscript{1} Abraham Booth who received from Robinson a copy of the piece, prior to its publication, felt otherwise. In his reply he charged Robinson with committing,

\ldots an act of high treason against the majesty of ETERNAL TRUTH; \ldots (and encouraging) rebellion against her... salutary claims, on the understandings, the consciences, and the hearts of men.\textsuperscript{2}

Still today, as noted previously, there are those who side with Booth against Robinson, though it is doubtful they would use their opponents so harshly.

\textsuperscript{1} Flower, I, p.lxxix. Much the same argument is used in the \textit{Arcana} in a different connection. See pp.107f. 
Much besides the literary activity dealt with in the last chapter, occupied the Cambridge pastor upon his removal from Hauxton to Chesterton in midsummer of 1773. His income from his church and literary efforts, together with the gifts of friends was insufficient for the support of his large family, and he became in addition a coal and corn merchant. In 1775 he bought the premises he had formerly rented for £270, and then rebuilt much of the house. He was soon making many improvements to the acre of land included in the purchase. Until 1785 when Robinson made over his farming and mercantile interests to his son-in-law, Mr. Curtis, he was much engaged in the purchase of lands; their cultivation and the improvement or rebuilding of barns, etc. He even hired the ferry adjoining his house, "and would frequently employ himself in ferrying passengers across the river". It may be wondered how any one man could adequately fulfill the manifold responsibilities which were Robinson's, but Dyer assures us that the Baptist pastor more than measured up.

...the versatility of his genius was uncommon: and whether he was making a bargain, repairing an house, stocking a farm, giving directions to workmen, or assisting their labours, he was the same invariable man, displaying no less vigour in the execution of his plans, than ingenuity in their contrivance. The readiness with which he passed from literary

1 Dyer gives the following figures for some of his works: Arcana 20 guineas, Claude's Essay £400, Political Catechism 20 guineas. p.203. For the translations of Saurin, with publisher difficulty, he got at least £125. Ltrs. in W. Robinson, pp.204-208.

2 Dyer, pp.200-203 and W. Robinson, pp.lxiiiff. give detailed accounts of his commercial activities.

3 Flower, I, p. xxix.
pursuits to rural occupations, from rural occupations to
domestic engagements, from domestic engagements to the forming
of plans for dissenting ministers, to the settling of churches,
to the solving of cases of conscience, to the removing of the
difficulties of ignorant, or the softening of the asperities
of quarrelsome brethren, was surprising.\(^1\)

To Flower it seemed that his agricultural and mercantile pursuits
were "in general successful, as he maintained his family in reputa-
tion, and left behind him some property".\(^2\) William Robinson
suspects - though he does not assert - that the pastor "understood
the poetry of agriculture much better than its profits", and feels
that perhaps "the shadows which overspread his last years" may
have had some connection with his monetary affairs.\(^3\)

A letter written to his friend Henry Keene of Walworth
gives "a diary of one day". It shows that if Robinson did not
understand the profits, he understood the perspiration as well as
the poetry of agriculture for he was no gentleman farmer.\(^4\)
Up at 3 a.m. he "crawled into the library" for meditations, after which
he rang "the great bell" to rouse the girls to milking. Then to
the farm where he roused the horse-keeper - "fed the horses while
he was getting up" - and called the boy to suckle the calves and
clean the cow-house. After lighting his pipe he toured the gar-
dens, "went up the paddock to see if the weanling calves were well",
and then to the ferry to see if the boy had cleaned and scooped
the boats. Then back to the farm and more inspection - "ordered
a quarter of malt, for the hogs want grains and the men want beer"
- and back to the river to buy "a lighter of turf for dairy fires,

1 Dyer, p.95.
2 Flower, I, p.xxix.
3 W. Robinson, pp.lxiv and lxxxiii. He cites a Cambridge resi-
dent 48 years who "certainly had the impression that Mr. R.'s
farming balance sheet would not shew to great advantage". p.lxiv.
4 May 26,1784 in ibid. pp.208ff.
and another of sedge for ovens". Soon he called the men to breakfast "and cut the boys bread and cheese, and saw the wooden bottles filled". Having "sent one plough to the three-roods, another to the three-half-acres, and so on - shut the gates, and the clock struck five", it was time for his own breakfast. Then he

...set two men to ditch the five-roods - two more to chop sads, ...two more to throw up muck in the yard - and three men and six women to weed wheat - set on the carpenter to repair cow-cribs,... the wheeler to mend up the old carts, ...walked to the six-acres, found hogs in the grass - went back, and sent a man to hedge and thorn - sold the butcher a fat calf, and the suckler a lean one - the clock strikes nine -

After inspecting some of the crops he feels the need for rain and "prayed for rain, but could not see a cloud". The morning is filled with odd jobs, inspections and the assignment of work. Finally he sets down under a bush and wonders "how any man could be so silly as to call me reverend" - reads two verses, and thinks of "His loving-kindness in the midst of his temple". After giving out "Come, all harmonious tongues", to the tune Mount Ephraim, he rises up whistling - "the dogs wagged their tails" and makes for home where dinner is waiting. After dinner and a pipe, he fell asleep later to be wakened "by the carpenters for some slats, which the sawyer must cut". So much for the cares of the world. Then

...the Reverend Messrs. A. in a coat, B. in a gown of black, and C. in one of purple, came to drink tea, and to settle whether Gomer was the father of the Celts and Gauls and Britons, or only the uncle - proof sheet from Mr. Archdeacon - corrected it - washed - dressed - went to meeting, and preached from The end of all things is at hand, be ye sober and watch unto prayer - found a dear brother reverence there, who went home with me, and edified us all out of Solomon's song, with a dish of tripe out of Leviticus, and a golden candlestick out of Exodus.

Some "reverences" were critical of his secular pursuits,
but this failed to worry the Cambridge pastor. He would not have his conduct directed nor his industry censured by "Godly boobies, too idle, many of them, to work, too ignorant to give instruction, and too conceited to study" 1 who spent their time in tattling and mischief. He was always glad to see their ministers "address themselves to honest employments". 2 Idleness was abominable and "where a man hath not more books than he can read over in a month" the "pretence of study is a joke".

Besides, what is there to find out? A catholic had need be a subtle dog, and furnished with all the lore of the schools, to make the New Testament speak in favour of his church; but a Baptist, whose whole religion lies in believing a few plain facts, and in imitating that very plain example, Jesus Christ, - what hath he to do to rack his invention, and to assemble all apologies, ancient and modern, to justify him for doing so?

He felt that "some beautiful readings, and fine criticisms, and strokes of oratory" came off a poor second to "three pounds, gained honestly by the sale of a fat bullock" in firing his spirit.

With three pounds I can set fire to ten cold hearts frozen with infirmity and widowhood, poverty and fear. Half a guinea will purchase the native eloquence of a grateful old woman; and she, if I set her to read, will give me a criticism of the heart, and the finest reading in the world. Oh! bless the old soul! what honied accents she pours into my ear! If I can honestly get, and afford to give away three pounds, it will always be my own fault if I be not very happy. Now then, set me to preach. How is it possible I should be dull?

After the Arcana in 1774, Robinson's next effort was "A Discussion of the question, Is it lawful and right for a man to marry the sister of his deceased wife?". This was published in the Appendix to the second edition of John Alleyne's, Legal Degrees of Marriage, Stated and Considered. The barrister felt

1 Dyer, p. 205.
Robinson's case for the affirmative "exceedingly sensible and conclusive" and in a letter expressed his gratitude "for the very great favor you have done me at the request of the Reverend Dr. Stennett and Mr. Thompson".¹

A glimpse of the Church Book at this time shows us that in spite of the pastor's farming and writing, the work of the church was not neglected. The church meeting for prayer on the 9th of February, 1775 agreed that the next "church meeting day" should be devoted to "fasting and prayer". Mr. Geard of Hitchin preached in the evening and the pastor "classed the children to be catechised". Dr. Stennett² preached the evening of February 25th and twice the following day; the pastor conducting the evening service.

On March the 9th, the church met at 11 a.m. to observe the "day of fasting and prayer".

The pastor began by praying, and having briefly opened the nature, &c., of the meeting, continued to direct the worship of the church till half-past one; in which time several of the brethren prayed, and, between each prayer, the pastor sang two verses, or read and briefly opened some passage of Scripture. At half-past one he preached from 2 Chron. xxviii.10, last clause. The church was dismissed at half-past two.³

The year 1776 saw the publication of the Flea in February and also the publication of "A Lecture On A Becoming Behaviour In Religious Assemblies" which had been preached in January 1773. On his return from the meetings of the Eastern Association at Hemel Hempstead, Robinson jumped out of a coach "on Snow hill"

1 Ltr. to R.R. Aug. 18,1775 in Flower, I, p.xlix.
2 Later (1782) he and R.R. 'fell out' over a misunderstanding about money loaned to R.R. Stennett "for several years, took the lead among the dissenters in the distribution of" the Regium Donum. R.R. who despised the pension openly, felt he had been tricked by Stennett into taking its funds under the impression it was a personal gift. Dyer, Chap. XVI.
3 In W. Robinson, p.xlix.
spraining his ankle. This "incapacitated him for free locomotion" and deprived him "of what, above all things in the world" he loved, "frequent preaching of lectures in villages, where members of my congregation lived". To console himself and assist his brethren he decided to revise, enlarge and publish John Claude's, An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon. As Robinson had not yet been allowed the use of the University library, it was fortunate that Christopher Anstey of Bath, "author of the New Bath Guide" allowed him the use of his late father's library in the "mansion" at Trumpington. To this mansion in 1777 came Mrs. and Miss Calwell, "relatives it is believed of Mr. Anstey", who were "possessed of a very ample fortune". Through their generosity Robinson "enjoyed a degree of learned ease, that he had never yet experienced, and a part of that property, which he afterwards possessed". "He in turn aided them in some matters of business; and on one occasion secured to them a considerable sum of money which they had been in danger of losing." 

Claude's Essay was published in two volumes; the first appearing in November 1778 and the second in May of the following year. In a Preface to the first volume, the translator recounts "a few of the memorable actions of this eminent servant of God". Son of a Reformed pastor, this famous French divine "from his earliest years...united the gravity of a divine, and the easy politeness of a courtier". Educated at Montauban, he served

1 Ibid. p.l.
2 R.R. in "Advertisement" to An Essay on the ... vol. I.
4 Dyer, p.124.
5 W. Robinson, p.l.
successively at La Treyne, the church of St. Afrique in Rovergue, Nismes, Montauban, and Charenton. An able controversialist, he wrote a number of works including, *A Defence of the Reformation*, "allowed by all to be a master-piece, the best defence of our separation from Rome, that either he, or any other protestant minister had ever published".\(^1\) Upon the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, he fled France and found asylum and favor with the Prince of Orange at the Hague. Here he wrote the *Essay* "for the use of his son, who was pastor of the Walloon church" there.\(^2\)

The translator added copious notes of his own which showed once again that he might best be employed in original composition. The critic for the *Monthly Review* noted that the publication "derives its principle value from the original notes",\(^3\) with which judgment Flower agrees. W. Robinson writes:

> The tales of preachers and sermons, good and bad, which Robinson has appended to Claude, are so varied and racy that it has been doubted whether any one, taking up the two volumes, ever so far succeeded in resisting the fascination of the annotator, as to make acquaintance with the author at all.\(^4\)

Some felt otherwise. The Reverend Charles Simeon published an edition of the *Essay* which omitted most of the notes. Simeon in his Preface stated that the notes were "at least, four times as large as the original work" and "not altogether so unexceptionable as might be wished" since they were obviously compiled for the use of dissenting ministers.\(^5\) Another "bastard edition, published likewise by a clergyman, who concealed his name," omitted most of the notes.\(^6\)

As a companion to the two volumes of Claude, Robinson planned a third "of the same size, entitled, AN ESSAY TOWARD A HISTORY OF PUBLIC PREACHING". This ambitious plan which covered the history of preaching from the "revelation given to Adam" to the "present state of preaching in England" was designed with the view of proving "free and simple preaching of the pure word of God a publick blessing to society, and the power of God to the salvation of men". Not being able to fulfill this plan, though he "found pleasure enough to repay all the labour of collecting many materials, and poring over books and manuscripts", he threw, or gave away many of the notes and wrote a "brief sketch" as a preface to volume two, titled: "A Brief Dissertation, on the Ministration of the Divine Word; by Public Preaching". ¹

While indisposed because of his ankle, Robinson was urged by friends "to be less eager and restless in his literary pursuits". Because of his fine constitution and temperate habits he refused such advice feeling "nothing could shake his nerves". In jest he said "he had but one weak nerve: this came from his breeches pocket". ² His confidence in his health was unwarranted, for during the winter of 1777 he is suffering "sleepless nights and sickly days" and is "actually good for nothing". He has not been able to preach more than three Sunday evenings, "nor to go to village barns as usual in the week-day evenings". His restless spirit finds the role of invalid difficult.

² Ibid. pp.127f.
Great God, what an employment for an immortal soul, to sit and nurse a perishing body! to guard against the air, to mend the fire, to discuss gravely, what shall I eat? what shall I drink? what miserable employments are these! O that I could resume my vivacity, gird myself and go whither I will! 

In time his wish was granted and before a year was up he could write: "I am sorry to say I shall not be at home next week".

This is my journal: - Tuesday, go to Lynn; Wednesday, assist at the ordination of Mr. Richards; Thursday, transact business at Lynn; Friday, return home; Saturday, meet the commissioners on an appeal from the new house-tax.

Literary activity was also keeping pace. The History and Mystery of Good Friday and the third volume of Saurin appeared in 1777, and the next year the Plan of Lectures. This same year he prepared part of a life of Baker, with accounts of Baker's manuscripts for inclusion in Dr. Kippis' Biographia Britannica.

II.

A pleasant and well deserved respite came to Robinson during the summer of 1780, when, with the Calwells and his son, Robert, he made a tour of Scotland. His letters home help us to see the man and give us glimpses of the Northern Kingdom as it appeared in the eighteenth century to one less celebrated than Dr. Johnson. The party travelled to Abingdon in Berkshire where Robinson visited his friend Turner and then on to Oxford where he preached for "a little society of dissenters, then forming". Because at Oxford he "preached to such multitudes, and so often, and heated myself so much, that I got violent colds, and was very ill two or three days" - he dropped the clerical garb and "disguised" himself for the rest of the journey in light clothes, white

1 Ltr. Feb. 6, 1777 in W. Robinson, pp.190ff.
2 Ltr. Dec. 8, 1778 in Ibid. pp.192f.
3 "the learned antiquary, of St. John's college, Cambridge". Dyer, p.184.
4 Ibid. p.197. Dyer says The General Doctrine of Toleration... was published "for their use, principally".
stockings, scratch wig, a round beaver hat, and "a band and buckle".

They stayed a Lord's day in "Ashborne - 17 miles from Derby this way" and heard,

...a grave old gentleman preach at the meeting, to about forty well-dressed people, a rational sermon about the gospel's being a provision for virtuous, honest hearted persons: but what comes of poor abandoned sinners in this plan?¹ (p.311)

After a brief tour into Staffordshire they went to Matlock with its bath where people "come for the sake of drinking and bathing in the warm water". The preacher observed:

These public water-places are too frequently odious assemblies, of the sick and the dissipated, the gay and the miserable, who contrive to murther time and waste life and money, in rounds of vice, covered with a handsome pretence of drinking and bathing to preserve health. (p.314)

Five miles from Buxton some jovial miners holding a wake insisted the Cambridge pastor was a "Scotch Lord" and "drank his health by the title of Lord Lothian". The party are "all well, but stiff and tired" and having seen "this wonderful country" will make their way "with all expedition through Yorkshire to the North".

Through Whitby, where drunken soldiers "singing and dancing with a drum and a hurdy-gurdy" disturbed him and Durham, where the Cathedral guide was so drunk he "forgot that monks were never married", they made their way through Northumberland to Edinburgh. Here the famous historian Professor Robertson² showed them "every thing in the university worth seeing". According to Dyer "he might have received the diploma of doctor in divinity" from the University. Robinson later observed that, "so many egregious dunces had been made D.D.s both at English as well as

¹ The ltrs. of the trip are given in Flower, IV, pp.310-345. Page numbers in Flower are used to reduce footnotes.
Scotch and American universities, that he declined the compliment".1 They missed seeing his "good old uncle" since "he dropped down as he was walking from his house in the country to town, and expired suddenly". However Robinson's nephew "was in transports to see us, and did every thing in his power to make our stay long and pleasant". Their stay would have been longer than three days "could we have reconciled ourselves to nastiness".

From Edinburgh they went to "Midcalder" and found an excellent inn though it "was a little tainted with Scotch sluttery; but we did not mind a little, for we came from Edinburgh". On their way to Glasgow they visited "the kirk of Shots, so famous in church history for the plentiful effusion of the spirit". At Glasgow they have,

...a whole land, that is, up three pair of stairs, a dining room, three bed rooms, and a kitchin, with Nelly Drummond, a bare-footed Highland lass, to wait on us. (p.324)

Sunday morning they heard a sermon on death and the church "was pretty well filled, for the Scotch have far more of the face of religion than the English, and their Kirks are full on the Lord's day". In the afternoon they tried to hear "the famous old Mr. Gillies, but he was gone a journey". In the crowded church "it was a favour to get a seat".

Every one had a bible and psalm book, and all seemed deeply affected with the sermon. The preacher was a Mr. Finlay, it was only his third public sermon. Indeed it was heaven to be there. (p.326)

Unable to get chaises, they missed seeing the textile manufactory at Paisley. Though tobacco "is the great mercantile article at Glasgow", they were unable to get any good tobacco.

1 Dyer, p.199. Lincoln citing the case of R.R. says that at "the close of the century, the practice of receiving such degrees had become so common as to be disreputable". op.cit. p.73.
The Scotch smoak very little; in large towns we are sometimes troubled to get a pipe; seldom get any tobacco but coarse stalks, and sometimes only the leaf. (p.326)

From Glasgow they journeyed through Renfrewshire and Ayrshire ("Airshire is in general, the most pleasant county in Scotland") to Kilmarnock. To the "Seceders or Scotch Nonconformists" who had a kirk here, Robinson wished God-speed and "they blessed him in return".

The town and the road was filled with them; they made a very decent appearance, but some things appeared very odd to us. Most of the men wore the blue Scotch bonnet, and the plaid cloak, greens, reds, and various stripes thrown over the shoulder. The good women took off their shoes and stockings, when they came out of the assembly, and pulling up their petticoats, tied them in a sort of pucker or gather, just under the knee, and so trudged barefooted home. (p.327)

The ride to Cumnock was fine, but lodging not available they went on to Sanquhar. From Sanquhar the first six miles of road "runs through a country, so fine that Italy itself cannot exceed it". After riding "in paradise" for several miles they turned off to visit Drumlanrig, "an old seat of his Grace the Duke of Queensbury". The neglected condition of the place proclaimed "that his Grace, their master, lives in London".

At Thornhill, "a pretty little town", a fair was in progress so they had to find lodging outside the inn. Still the inn-keeper sent them,

...a quarter of roast lamb, a couple of broiled fowls, currant tarts, Cheshire cheese, ale, porter, port wine, good bread, and Scotch bannock, that is oat cakes, as thin, and as broad, and as round, as a woman's straw hat. (p.330)

Perhaps unnecessarily, the writer adds: "We dined deliciously". He notes the fair "was made up of plain, decent people, mostly free from drinking, rioting, and such like disgraces of English fairs". In the cottage where they stayed, they saw "the form and
the furniture of a poor Scotch house".

The walls are of stone, the roof of thatch, very thin, and laced on tight and neat: there are a few spars of square stuff, and boughs and rough poles serve cross-ways instead of lath, the chamber is boarded, and you ascend it by a ladder. There is no floor but the earth, a peat fire was upon the hearth, and the chimney was no higher than the roof of the house. There are two rooms below, each the size of our compting-house, there was a bed in one, ...In the other...a bed of turf, that is, thin grassy flags of earth, dry, lying one upon another, about three feet high, covered with a blanket and coverlid... Each low room has a little window of four small sash squares. The whole lets for thirty shillings. (pp. 330f)

At Dumfries where they had to "lie still" as Mrs. Calwell was fatigued, the "finest fresh salmon" sold for a penny a pound, and a side of lamb cost 1s6d. Beef was "about four-pence" and "all other things in proportion". It is a "prodigious market for black cattle", and the "Shire of Galloway alone, sells here seven or eight thousand annually". From Dumfries they went to Annan, where the "great building, at the upper end of the street, is divided into two parts, the one is the parish kirk, the other the jail: an odd association!". At Gretna-Green which "is mostly composed of miserable little huts, the worse we saw in Scotland", they "peeped into the school house".

...a master was teaching twenty or thirty children: but it is not to be described, no hogstye in Chesterton is so wretched. The kirk, like others, into which we peeped, is a vile hole, worse than a barn. It is, indeed, built of stone, and covered with slate; but the roof is not celled, nor is any thing done to the inside of it. There is no floor but the earth, and in this lay some straw to keep the people's feet warm I suppose. There is little light, and much dirt, a pulpit, a seat for the clerk, a round pew at the foot of the pulpit (pulpit?) for the elders, and benches with backs for the people, with a sort of gallery for the squire. At the side of the pulpit, where our sconces are, is a swinging iron, in which the bason is put at what they call baptisms. (p. 334)

At Carlisle was another fair where "all the black cattle folks, and all the clean good women selling their home-spun pieces
of linen and woollen cloth, and all the fish - flesh - fruit - green - toy - folks, &c. did not make so much noise as one fellow upon a cart, who had a calf with two heads to shew". At High Hesketh they ate eggs "and drank some rum and water, in a shady close behind the church". Proceeding to Penrith, they "staid the Lord's day" and "heard that cold, killing preaching which they call rational dissenting, yet, as the scriptures were read, and the true God worshipped without superstitious rites, we would not go nigh old Bab, otherwise she has a pretty church here of red stone, and large windows".

From Penrith they travelled through Keswick to Ambleside. The "incomparable beauty" of the stretch from Keswick to Ambleside "no pencil can describe"; but the writer tries:

The tremendous rocks and mountains rise above the clouds on either side. We had the pleasure of seeing a great white cloud clasp, and hang, and play about the neck of one. Innumerable cascades come purling or gushing from the sides of the mountains, and run gurgling down the rocks in to a river, far, far, beneath our feet. The slopes of the hills are laid out in ten thousand various forms; here a meadow with cattle grazing, there a piece of yellow corn waving its luxuriant head, yonder a grove, beyond it a cottage, picturesque all, and all romantic and enchanting.

(pp.338f)

Leaving Ambleside they went to Kendal and then Lancaster where they had tea "and should have staid all night, had not the house been under the management of a slut". The journey had taught them "the inexpressible value of cleanly women, for how much they contribute to the comfort of travellers, none but travellers can tell". At Garstang they were able to lodge "at a very clean house", and then proceeded to that "fine and populous town of Preston, usually called Proud Preston, and mostly inhabited by gentlemen, attorneys, proctors, notaries, and manufactureres".

1 This remark is noteworthy as Lincoln classes R.R. a "Rational Dissenter", op.cit. pp.29f.
At Wigan "Miss C---bought a few cannel coal snuff-boxes", and at Warrington they noticed a "large charity school, founded by a Mr. Waterson, with money which he acquired by shewing a dancing horse for a penny a piece". The last forty-two miles were travelled in one day and had left them very tired "for the roads here, both footpaths and coach roads, are paved with pebbles, and are very rough and unpleasant to travel". They have travelled "upwards of a thousand miles, and wish to be at home". There are "twelve daily coaches from hence to Liverpool" and Manchester and other towns, but they are "glutted with seeing and hearing, and therefore shall not visit them".

Through Frodsham, Chester, Hollywell in Wales, Wrexham, Shrewsbury, and Bridgnorth they came to Kidderminster, "once the habitation of the famous Richard Baxter".

I was so wrapped up in thought about that favourite servant of God, that I wept freely over the remembrance of him, and became dead to their carpets, and linsey-woolseys, ... and I saw none of them. (p.344)

The next stop was the "beautiful city of Worcester" and then Pershore on September 9th. He had hoped to be home on the 10th, although he felt the 17th "most likely". At any rate he wished that no one might know of his return "for the two or three first days of my being at home, for I am so full of riding, and staring, that rest would be a kingdom to me". The letters take us no further than Pershore, but the above extracts show us the wide interest and keen observation of the man. Reading his letters with their stories of incidents at the different inns, of the Guide at Durham Cathedral; their descriptions of the countryside, the accents and dress of the people, and the famous High Street of the Old Town of Edinburgh, one sees a man for whom the world
is full of new wonder each day; for whom each face has a story; for whom life is truly a gift from his God above.

III.

Church history seems to me one long lie, and no branch of history needs so much a reform.

R. Robinson

Because, while I was busied with the history of earlier Christianity, I had so often to deal with the results of its sins against the truth in history, I have become a keen worker for honesty in our Christianity of to-day.

Albert Schweitzer

The following year there was a meeting held at the "King's head in the Poultry" presided over by Dr. Andrew Gifford, assistant librarian at the British Museum. At this meeting a group of London Baptists resolved:

...that a new history of the baptists is a work much to be desired....the Reverend R. Robinson, of Chesterton, is a proper person to be invited to execute that work; the Reverend Dr. Gifford generously offering him an apartment in his house, for the inspection of manuscripts in the Museum, and every other assistance in his power.

It was further resolved that Robinson be requested to come up to London "early in the week before the second Lord's day in every month, and stay till the latter end of the following week". The historian would also lecture at the various churches. He would be paid five guineas "every journey by the treasurer, to be appointed, and the overplus (if any) at the end of the year".

The proposal disturbed the church at Cambridge who were "so charmed with their pastor's appearance in the pulpit, that they could scarcely endure any body else".

In a letter to the London group, the congregation expressed their misgivings.

1 Ltr. to Rev. Toulmin May 29, 1787 in Flower, V, p.293.
2 A. Schweitzer, op.cit. p.67.
3 Dyer, p.214.
5 Ibid. p.216.
...many suspicions arose in the minds of some of our brethren, lest the execution of the task that our beloved pastor is so warmly solicited to undertake, should lead him into temptations to desert a people that are not ignorant of his value; and, I believe, nothing would have induced an unanimous vote in the church, for his absence one Lord’s day in a month, for a year, (and, perhaps, for a longer time) but the strict injunctions, I may say positive commands, imposed upon me to subjoin to this their consent the obtaining of a promise that your committee will deal with the church, in strict Christian faithfulness; - that you will neither directly, nor indirectly, promote any plan or scheme, that shall eventually tend to remove our pastor from us; nor yet to alter the plan, at present proposed, (either in the present, or any future year, if the work to be undertaken should require it) whereby our pastor shall be from us more than one Lord’s day in a month.

To this the London group agreed and Robinson began work.

Robinson's "lectures" were popular and his meetings soon became "uncommonly crowded". Usually dealing with religious freedom and Christian toleration, "he easily conciliated the more liberal of all parties among the dissenters". The more orthodox however, were dissatisfied and suspicious of his preaching. They felt it "calculated rather to make men doubt, than believe; - to inquire, rather than convince; his eloquence rather fascinating than solid". Though Robinson styled himself a "moderate Calvinist", they considered him unsound - "wavering between the doctrines of Arius and Socimus". It appears that his defense of the doctrine of "the innocence of mere mental error" in a pamphlet "published about this time", alarmed "the greater part" of his hearers. As his visits to the Museum were not as rewarding as he had hoped and preaching and visiting took up so much time,

1 The ltr. in ibid. p.217 was written by William Nash, a deacon and chairman of the committee.
2 At one time R.R. planned a work An Essay on Moderate Calvinism Considered as a Narrow Path Between Two Extremes. The work was never completed. Flower published the first "three chapters" of this work in his edition of Posthumous Works (1812).
3 Dyer, p.219.
he soon retired to the country in order to complete the work.1 Back at Chesterton work on the History progressed much better for he was free from the interruptions of life in London and had not only "free access to that invaluable treasure of literature contained in the public library, but the liberty of having any books conveyed to his house that he wished". The Baptist minister had obtained this privilege "through the kindness of some masters of arts in the university".2 Although the results of his historical research were not published till after his death, we shall deal with The History of Baptism (1790) and Ecclesiastical Researches (1792) here since the closing years of his life were devoted largely to this work.

The plan and purpose of the "collection" are given in letters to friends.

Absolutely we have no history, and we have suffered enemies to tell our tale. My collection will make about four thin quartoes. The first is an history of baptism; the last three contain an history of baptists. The first is divided into essays, and they again into sections. The whole is intended to contain an account of the rise, progress, connections, corruptions, appendages, and reformation of baptism, and so on. The historical part begins with apostolical churches, goes through the several countries of Asia, Africa, and Europe, and ends with America.3

It was an ambitious plan and it was not long before Robinson was to realize the mass of materials that must be examined and the

1 Dyer gives the following sample preaching schedule for a week: "Tuesday evening, April 15, at Mr. Rippon's. Thursday morning, - 17, at Dr. Stafford's. Lord's day morning, -20, - Dr. Rees'. - afternoon, - Maze Pond. - evening, - Little St. Helen's. Monday evening, -21, - Maze Pond Vestry. Tuesday evening, -22, - Mr. Rippon's. Wednesday morning, -23, - Maze Pond." pp.219f.
3 Ltr. to Rev. Thomas, Leominster in Flower, IV, p.245.
difficulties to be surmounted. About 1784, he wrote to the Rev. Thomas of Leominster that while collecting materials for a history of Baptists he decided a "history of the baptists might be traced through all the dark ages of popery".

...last winter I addressed myself to the study, and made some progress in the history of foreign baptists; but, I confess freely to you, the greatness of the work discourages me, for I feel my incompetence. There is only one thing that induces me to persevere. I have access to the university-library, and I am the only one of our brethren who can come at one of the national repositories, where books on all subjects, and of every price, are to be inspected.

He has had loads of books, "and loads more I must have, if I finish the plan I have laid out".

In March of 1787 he writes his friend Henry Keene that he has "done nothing for almost two years, but study the Baptist history". He has found the "little despised article of believer's baptism" to be "inexhaustible". If the article was inexhaustible, the investigator was not. Language was one difficulty.

When I met with the Spaniards I could not do anything till I had learned a little Spanish. I conquered that. Then the Italians stared at me, and I at them; but we had no conversation till I procured grammars and dictionaries, and learned a little Italian.

But that is not all for a young minister has brought him "four huge folios, full of authentic documents of German Baptists; but all in the old black German letter, and the German of the last century". This friend offers to teach him German, but he rebels.

I will not learn; and neither you nor any man in England shall make me twist my jaws, and goosify my throat, to speak German. I shall brew up the tooth-ache; and who are the Baptists, that I should get the tooth-ache for them?

Besides he has not come to the German Baptists, and when he does he "shall not need to speak German; enough, of all conscience, if

1 Ibid. p.243. No date, but the phrase "about two or three years ago, a committee of our denomination in London desired me...".
2 Ltr. Mar. 12,1787 in W. Robinson, p.231.
I can read it".

To another he had written: "Spanish and Italian are nothing, for being only dialects of Latin, they are easily surmountable; but high and low Dutch are ruffian-looking rogues". The other difficulty of evaluating documents requires that the work "not be hurried, but proceed leisurely, for new facts and new light daily rise on the subject".

Ignorance, malice, political manoeuvres, clerical sophistry, and party zeal have thrown together a vast pile of materials, true, false, doubtful, important, impertinent, and so on. All these are to be examined, assorted, arranged, and even lies must be disposed of, or they, like vipers numbed a while, will revive and poison true historical facts.¹

Not unnaturally he is often discouraged and his spirits made low by "the mighty mass" of material, especially when he recollects "how ready prepared to censure and abuse the most upright intentions" are some "idle souls, who do nothing but gape and grin at those who are at work". It "is a very obscure, a very difficult history, and the writer of it deserves mercy toward his innocent mistakes" though "he neither expects nor asks for any".

Although the "difficult history" was never completed, the historian "prosecuted his inquiries with such intense application, as is thought to have impaired his health, and to have brought on the fatal disorder of which he died".² Only the first volume, The History of Baptism was "put to the press" by the writer. In the Preface he states:

I feel happy on reflection that I did not set about this work on any motives below the dignity of a Christian, nor am I aware that I have prostituted my pen to serve a party, or once dipped it in gall. Escapes undoubtedly there are many, but when did any individual of my species produce a work of absolute perfection? (p.vii)

² In "Advertisement" to The History of Baptism. p.i.
This work traces the history and modes of baptism from the time of John the Baptist to the time of writing. It discusses whether John's baptism was taken "from any Jewish Washings, particularly that of Proselytes"; Eastern, Roman, and Mohammedan baths; "Baptisteries", pictures of baptism and baptismal fonts. Heavily documented, the work is filled with examples of the varying practices in connection with baptism in every century and every branch of the church. In spite of the intricate detail and obscure glimpses of the past, the writer has kept his work interesting, and even lively sometimes, by his happy style of writing. His style and the way the preacher of liberty often gains ascendancy over the historian in his work are seen in his chapter dealing with "the Efforts of Augustine to bring in the Baptism of Babes".1

He tells us "it is absolutely necessary" to sketch the character of Augustine and his opponents to account "for the fraud and force used to introduce the baptism of babes". Augustine, canonized "for his zealous labours in favour of the cause of enthusiasm and church power" was "not always a saint". Born 354 A.D. of "poor but Christian parents", who later "forced him to go to school", "he discovered no inclination for learning".

He had a fit of sickness in his youth, in which he was very near being baptized, being in fear of death; but his mother - ("called Monica, and celebrated for her eminent superstition, which her party called piety") - as he got better persuaded him to defer it, for she knew him and the world better than he knew either. He recovered, and justified all her fears, for he became a debauched, unsettled, profligate young man to the excessive grief of his mother. (p.202)

At sixteen - "though he was very poor, and partly supported by the charity of one Rominian" - "he began to plunge into vice" and

1 Chap. XXIII.
"kept a mistress". After picking up "a few scraps of learning at Carthage", he "lived a rambling life, teaching what little he knew of grammar and rhetorick, first at Tagaste, and then at Carthage". His mother, "more miserable about the profligacy of her son than the loss of her husband", having come to Carthage to try and reform him, found he had gone to Milan to teach and there "persisted in his former course of life". Crossing to Milan she found he sometimes heard Bishop Ambrose. Yet, as "he continued his former course of living and kept the woman whom he brought from Carthage", she was not satisfied; urged him to marry and reform.

He pretended, that he was not a Pagan, that indeed he was not of his mother's church, but however he was of one much better; he was of the Manicheans, a people so remarkable for love of virtue, that they called themselves Puritans. This did not content the old lady, who thought let him be of what denomination he would, he was of that class which God had threatened to judge. At length he gave out that as he was walking in a garden he heard a voice from heaven calling to him and saying, Take up the epistles of Paul and read them. He obeyed the voice, opened the book, and found out what any Pagan could have told him without a revelation from heaven, that rioting and drunkenness, chambering and wantonness were grievous crimes. (p.203)

Determined to marry, he sent his old mistress back to Carthage and "fixed his eyes on a girl who would be marriageable two years hence". While he and his "bastard son" were preparing for baptism, "he took another mistress into keeping till the young lady should come of age". Meanwhile "he wrote books in defence of that religion which he was about to embrace". Though he understood neither Greek nor Hebrew "he expounded both the old testament and the new".

In the end he became intimate with Ambrose the bishop, set his heart on the ministry, renounced rhetorick for a better trade, laid aside the proposed marriage, turned off his mistress, vowed he would become a monk, and in company with his bastard son, then fifteen years of age, and his friend Alypius, was baptized by immersion in the baptistery at Milan by Ambrose, at Easter, in the year three hundred
eighty-seven,....Soon after he became assistant of Valerius bishop of Hippo, in his own country, and lastly his successor, and continued almost half a century the light and glory of Africa. How thick that darkness must be where such a genius was taken for sunshine may be easily guessed. (pp.203f)

Among his opponents "were two African teachers of the name of Donatus, the one bishop of Carthage, called for his learning and virtue Donatus the great, the other bishop of Casa Nigra". These like Tertullian found "they were somehow incorporated into a very corrupt community".

They dissented, and in a very few years there were in Africa four hundred congregations, all called Donatists. They did not then differ from those who called themselves Catholicks in doctrine, but their chief difference lay in their morals, which were pure and exemplary, and their discipline, which was exact, for they not only baptized converts from Paganism, but they rebaptized all on their own profession of faith, who came from the pretended Catholicks to join their churches. They did so, not for a reason of faith, but morals, for they thought immorality had unchurched the Catholicks, and sunk them into a mere worldly corporation. (p.213)

Among Baptists the work became well known and was much esteemed by many "on both sides of the Atlantic". Many American Baptists "desired that it might have a more general circulation" and to this end the Philadelphia Association "appointed the late Dr. Samuel Jones, of Lower Dublin, Pennsylvania" to prepare an abridged edition. Dr. Jones unable to fulfill the appointment, a similar plan was executed by David Benedict on his own initiative. The abridged edition was published by subscription in Boston in 1817.1

The Ecclesiastical Researches were prepared for publication by William Frend of Cambridge controversy fame. Upon the advice of friends Robinson's family decided they should be published. Those responsible for publication pointed out in the Preface that they "should have been unpardonable in withdrawing from the publick

eye the result of his ecclesiastical researches". The author has
...with indefatigable pains explored the records of
antiquity, and proved that there never have been wanting men
to stand up in defence of the gospel, and to oppose that
spirit of domination and persecution, which reigns in the
romish and the greater part of the protestant churches.
Wherever that spirit appears, it is in the following pages
justly reprobated: neither the fervour of Luther's zeal nor
the purer doctrines of Socinus cast a veil over their intoler-
ance, and we are fired with proper indignation at the treach-
erous conduct of Calvin, the murderer of Servetus.

Though it is lamentable that "these papers were not subjected to
the last corrections of the authour's pen", the "candid reader"
will "make due allowance".

Six of the sixteen chapters deal with the history of
churches: the Greek, African, Roman, Spanish, Navarre and Biscay,
and Italian. Five deal with the history of Christianity in
geographical areas: the Valleys of Piedmont, Bohemia, Munster,
Poland, and Transylvania. Separate chapters are devoted to a
general view of the Roman Empire and of Judea at the birth of
Christ. Another chapter views "the new OEconomy introduced by
John the Baptist". In this he tells us:

Many criticks, antient and modern, suppose the genuine
gospels to have been corrupted, and they cut off the two
first chapters of Matthew, and...Luke. Then the four gos-
pels begin with the baptism of John, for the discourse
concerning the logos in the gospel of John is merely
introductory. The Ebionites, particularly the learned
critick Symmachus, who was an Ebionite, Marcion and the
Marcionites, the Manicheans, and many others denied the
miraculous conception of Jesus, and affirmed that they had
the genuine gospels of Matthew and Luke. (p.32)

He feels the subject deserves "patient and candid investigation,
and more eastern materials than are at present known in the west".
However, as long as the Christian world continues as now "en-
venomed by system, subjects of this kind are not likely to be
investigated, except by a few, with becoming moderation".
In his chapter on "Jesus the Christ" he writes that it is "extremely difficult" and "not necessary" to his purpose to determine the precise time of Jesus' baptism or the duration of his ministry. Of his baptism:

...lo! the clouds parted, and rolled back, a bright light collected itself, as it were, into a body, and, having hovered a while, as a dove hovers before it alights on the ground, settled and rested upon him. No banks of the river, no bushes, or trees, or surrounding objects could throw him into a shade; there in broad light he stood, to be seen, and examined, and known of all, while a voice from heaven proclaimed, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

Conducting His ministry with "godlike views" He addressed himself "not to the rulers, but to the people at large".

He taught them to transfer their attention from human authority to God,...apprized them of the nature and worth of revelation,...awoke them to their own dignity, and while he unfolded his wisdom in his sermons, and the proofs of his divine mission in his miracles, he taught them the use of their own understandings,...He foretold his own death, the calamities of his country, the dissolution of the mosaical oeconomy, the fate of his universal religion, and he ordered his apostles, whom he had well instructed, to tarry at Jerusalem after his death till he should rise from the dead, and meet them again and give them further orders.

On the Mount of Olives he took leave of his family, and in their sight ascended, they steadfastly looking up, and he lifting up his hands, and blessing them, till a cloud received him out of their sight. He sat down at the right hand of God, and they returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Perhaps the introductory chapter "On the Caution necessary to a Reader of Ecclesiastical History", is most worthy of being read today. He begins with "an old observation, that of all history ecclesiastical is the worst written". Instead of showing a succession of men "contending (if contend they must) for something worth contending for", in each century it "proceeds from bad to worse" till Christianity seems doubtful to philosophers, and
statesmen consider it necessary to restrain and regulate its profession by law "for the safety of the state". Lack of precision in church history is "one chief cause of the gloom that involves the divine religion of Jesus", and

...while this confusion remains, a cheat is put on the reader, and a long time elapses e'er he discovers that what had been given him for an history of good men, the very disciples of the son of God, was an history of counterfeits, disciples of the world, and regulated only by the maxims of it. (p.2)

Therefore a reader "to ascertain facts" should "guard against the magick of words". He illustrates by the use historians have made of the words Christian, Catholic, Heresy, Council, Barbarian and Baptism. Some historians like Gregory of Tours and Bede felt belief of the Trinity essential to Christianity, "so that they who deny the divinity of Christ, or persons in the Deity, are not christians but pagans".

In polemicks this style may be suffered: but in history it is a great fault, for Arians are not either Pagans, or Jews, or Mohammedans, but professors of the christian religion, or, in the popular sense of the word christians. Whether they be wiser than other christians who believe the trinity is quite another question, and the solution of it is not the business of an historian. (p.3)

He then cites examples of how the word has been misused and the difference it makes to use the word Christian in the wider sense rather than allowing a writer to limit it to his own party.

He urges caution in regard to the contradictions of historians, noting "they give great trouble to such as would reconcile them, but in some cases a very simple principle serves to adjust the difference". In urging caution "against the injudicious application of terms, which have the nature of epithets, and by which ecclesiastical writers confuse subjects by false
colouring", he cites the example of Cyprian who felt each bishop "sole judge of religion in his own church". Cyprian describes a schismatic:

He bears arms against the church. He fights against God's ordinance. He is an enemy of the altar. He is a rebel against the sacrifice of Christ. He is sacrilegious and not religious. He is an undutiful servant, an impious son, an inimical brother, who, contemning bishops, and forsaking the priests of God, dares to set up another altar. (pp.8f)

What is the meaning of "this heterogeneous mass of ill chosen words... (for it ought to mean no more than the fact to be described)"

(Im)piety, enmity, sacrilege, rebellion, undutifulness, fighting against an altar and a sacrifice, and Christ and God, all evaporate, and there remains nothing more than that some members of the church at Carthage could not believe, and did not choose to act as bishop Cyprian ordered them, and therefore withdrew, and formed themselves into another church. (p.9)

The reader is warned "against the rhetorick of ecclesiasticks, and the support which they affect to give it by passages of holy scripture". As regards attestation:

Without invalidating the general character of an historian, a judge ought to use great caution in admitting his testimony. Invectives are not necessary to this, for a very sincere witness may be ill-informed, or prejudiced, or partial. There are some tales absolutely impossible, others improbable, some manifestly false, and others, though true, yet not to the purpose. (p.10)

Finally, he warns "the article of forgery should not be forgotten".

Whoever recollects the state of writings before the invention of printing, will at once perceive the facility of forgery: the state of keepers of archives will account for the practice: and whoever observes the avidity of collecting manuscripts, and the fashion of publishing them when printing first came in vogue, and when the Reformation threw all parties, who were not satisfied with the scriptures, into agonies for arguments, will naturally suspect that though much spurious matter hath been discharged yet there is some dross still mixed with the gold of antiquity. (p.11)
The imports of the Greek merchant Andrew Darmarius, who became "rich and famous by this traffick", have provided "a great deal of work for learned men, who have most heartily execrated him for his pains". To put it briefly, "church history wants more than a reformation: it stands in need of regeneration".

It is unlikely that one would read this work today, but if so one might agree with Joseph Priestley who wrote from America:

I have read Robinson's "Ecclesiastical Researches," and find more in it than I expected, with many repetitions and superfluities. He must have taken much pains in reading books that come into few hands.¹

IV.

The latter years of Robinson's life may appear to many too hastily gone over, such usually being the most interesting, and the most fertile in discoveries. But the latter years of the most active spirits are frequently spent in retirement: and, as they become entirely domesticated, we no longer expect that variety, which charms the admirers of biography.

George Dyer²

It is true that absorption in research narrowed the activity of Robinson in the closing years of his life, but it is wrong to picture him as the scholarly recluse. Till his death he continued to labor in his church and was often invited elsewhere to preach on special occasions. Although he became estranged from some because of his unorthodoxy and friendship with Unitarians, many Calvinist friends remained loyal and he found new admirers among the less orthodox. In spite of this it seems that Robinson found the alienation from old friends very disturbing. On one occasion he complained to Priestley "that among all his former

¹ Ltr. to T. Belsham, Mar.30,1800 in Rutt, *Life and Correspondence of Joseph Priestley*, vol. II, pp.428f. He had read it "With a view to improve my Church History".

² Dyer, pp.320f.
friends in London, he had only two subscribers to his book". His church members, with few exceptions remained loyal. Undisturbed by his failing popularity among some, they said:

He was the minister of our choice, and still is of our esteem.

In 1782 his Political Catechism appeared, and whatever his personal religious belief, his passionate attachment to political and religious liberty made him warm friends across the Atlantic. A friend to American Independence and a "zealous admirer" of their new constitution who felt with Charles Fox "That, compared with Washington, all the sovereigns of Europe, our own excepted, were paltry and contemptible", he was much elated by a visit from distinguished Americans, in the summer of 1784. He tells of it in a letter to his friend Daniel Turner.

There sat I, in my own hall, in more than Indian regal rapture - over against me, my wife, making tea - on my right hand, the honourable Speaker of the American house of Congress - on my left, the great general Read, second to Washington, in the American army - next to him, an envoy from the states; and along with us a circle of friends, listening to the honied accents of their tongues, distilling with all the richest and most fragrant sounds of liberty, property, law, commerce, religion, and a future state of perfect and everlasting felicity; - when in came a well-known, grave, and lovely figure, and addressed me with, "My dear naughty boy!" Full of ideas of dignity, I said with Mungo in the Padlock, "Naughty boy! naughty yourself: old massa little tink how great I be."

The Americans' visit lasted from Saturday evening till Monday afternoon. They offered the minister his choice of cabin on "the Washington, and as much land in the states as I would wish to

1 Ltr. of Priestley to T. Lindsey June 21,1790 in Rutt, op.cit. vol.II, pp.69f. Priestley felt R.R. "more affected than he ought to have been by the reception he met with among his old friends, after his change of opinion was known". Priestley assumes, without sufficient evidence, that R.R. also became a Unitarian.
2 Dyer, p.321
3 Ibid. pp.121f.
4 Ltr. June 22,1784 in Flower, IV, pp.234f.
accept". He wishes peace and prosperity to this happiest of
countries which he shall never see; "but if I forget the ability
and virtue, that struggled to obtain, and actually did obtain, all
that mankind hold dear; let my right hand forget her cunning".

In his own way Robinson was working in England to main-
tain and even to improve what had been obtained by the Revolution
of 1688. He founded the Cambridgeshire Constitutional Society,
modeling it after the London society which had been formed in
April 1780.¹ This society which at first numbered a few Dissenters
soon became "a very large body of freeholders of liberal senti-
ments". At their quarterly meetings, the founder was often given
the chair. On these occasions he would "preach civil and religious
liberty, and often, when tea comes, theology, - not points, but
general, and, I judge, useful truths". Earlier when "the subject
of the slave trade was discussing" Robinson had drawn up the
"humble petition" which "the gentry, clergy, freeholders and others
in the county of Cambridge" submitted to "the honourable the
Commons of Great Britain in parliament assembled". If Dyer be
not mistaken it was "the first petition to the House of Commons
on this business".²

As mentioned, until 1785 farming took up much of Robin-
son's time. To his friend Miss Hays³ he complains of his

¹ By Capel Lofft, Jebb, and others, Dyer, p.194.
² Ibid. pp.194ff. Here the petition is given. On Feb.10,1788
R.R. "composed less for the purpose of exposing the iniquity of
the African slave trade, than for that of vindicating the character
of the primitive Christians, or rather the credit of Christianity
itself, which is grossly misrepresented when it is described as
compatible with slavery", a sermon titled "Slavery Inconsistent
With The Spirit Of Christianity" preached Feb.10,1788. Occasional
Sermons, p.160.
³ "...extensively known by the volumes, about twenty in number,
which her pen produced". W. Robinson, p.196. Glimpses of her rather
unhappy life are given in On Books and Their Writers, by Henry
Crabb Robinson,
"perpetual succession of employments": weeding wheat, barley, haying, hoeing turnips, "harvest, and so on". Occasionally he snatches an hour and hovers "between religion and the world like a needle between two loadstones". After the pleasant reverie of his American visitors he reminds Turner:

My literary matters are at present in the field. I have twenty acres of grass to mow, - an hundred acres of corn to get in at harvest, - fifty acres of fallows ploughing, - ditching, - manuring, and preparing for the next wheat-crop, - beside cattle fat and lean to inspect. Guess, therefore, whether I can either journey or study with any degree of prudence, till the fall of the year.

Soon he was to abandon these worldly cares and bury "himself alive in his literary pursuits, retaining no live stock excepting two cats, which took a daily walk with him down his garden to the willow which hung over the Cam".

Among the Village Discourses published in 1786, was one titled: "We Ought To Be Content With Providence". To a fellow minister suffering the loss of a loved one he had written:

Remember, these are the times in which we are called to realize our doctrines, and to live on that consolation which we so often have the honour of communicating to others.

When the Angel of Death struck his own family, Robinson was to find he had given no easy counsel. Julia "the beauty and pride" of the family, after "a gradual decline of three years" died October 9, 1787. Apparently she was all that a proud parent could wish. Tall, "straight as an arrow", with dark eyes "like fire" and a "complexion

2 Ltr. June 22, 1784 in Flower, IV, pp.234f.
3 W. Robinson, p.lxiv. To Miss Hays he wrote, Jul.15,1788: "I have no employ..., except to keep my house in repair, to cultivate my garden, to keep my pleasure-boat in trim, to watch my bees, and to purr, like old puss by the fire, to my wife and family." in ibid. p.254.
like the lily tinged with the blush of the rose", she was also witty, wise, and "had the most just and sublime notions of God, and a perpetual veneration for him". Little wonder if the father "wilfully blinded" himself to the likelihood of her death. He wrote:

I could not, I would not believe it could be, but it was, and I have felt it, and ever shall feel it.

* * *

I am not offended with the good Father in heaven. I have no fears about the lovely spirit of the departed. But will the great Being be angry with me for perceiving, when my family assemble, that "David's place is empty"?

How wonderful are God's ways! My mother at ninety, with a complexion and a vivacity proper to seventeen, goes into mourning for seventeen, decrepid, departed, decayed! Mrs. Robinson and the family have borne the shock better than could have been imagined. The lot has fallen upon me, and they in eagerness to comfort me console themselves.

All was not darkness in the event for Julia's loss, "severely felt" by her sisters "excited them to perform what they till then neglected" and Robinson "had the happiness sometime after of baptizing at once six of my family, and of seeing the church admit them to communion". They were not baptized in the church but in the bath at the bottom of the garden because the happy father "had a mind to try the primitive eastern mode of immersing".

I led one down the steps, turned her about and set her face toward the steps, placed myself on her left side transversely, and putting my right hand on the back of her head, bowed her forward into the water, and effected a perfect immersion, while I pronounced the baptismal words. We are all so satisfied with this mode, for the rest followed the first, one ascending, another descending, that I think I shall never use any other in future.

Though a year later he could write of the deep wound which "time has done little to close", life goes on and he wonders

1 Ltr. to Mrs. T(Gurney), Oct.29,1787 in W. Robinson, pp.239f.
2 Ltr. to Miss Hays, Nov.28,1788 in ibid. p.257.
4 Ltr. to Miss Hays, Nov.28,1788 in ibid. p.256.
if his friend Taylor knows of any history of the English General Baptists. There are certain books which Taylor is to "seize" for the historian if he happens to run across them in an old book stall. Before the library was shut for Christmas holidays he managed to get a "fine parcel of scarce and invaluable old pieces" to read. One is W. Tyndale's "The Obedyence of a Chrysten Man" which yields "one of the many proofs beyond all contradiction... that immersion in ordinary baptism was the invariable practice of the English till the Reformation".¹

He laments that Sykes' piece "on the Innocence of Error" and other writers "the first in learning, piety, and critical taste, lie wholly unknown to most of our ministers". He gives the reason.

They have mistaken their true and real characters, and instead of considering themselves disciples of truth set up for defenders of faith. Hence it is, you may ride a black horse white among that class of men, and not find a single critic. I do not call a snarling pickthank a critic. I call him so who hath the talents and the temper which constitute critical abilities. One is not a critic; he hath no brains. Another is not; he is too idle, he will not labour. A third is not; he is too poor, he cannot procure books and tutors. Another durst not be one; he is so afraid of his reputation. A very great fund of both folly and vice is at the bottom of all such cases, except the first; for if a man have no natural talent, if he be nothing but a bundle of sheer boobyism, blubber for orthodoxy he may, but criticise a sentence he cannot; and if his temper were as soft as his brain, I should hold him innocent.

What is needed "is the critical study of the New Testament". Not just of "single words and phrases, but of the whole in connection with geography, chronology, eastern customs, languages, &c". This "is the peculiar business of a disciple of truth". "It is easy to

¹ He cites the following: "The plunged into the water signifieth that we die, and are buried with Christ as concerneth the old life of sin, which is Adam. And the pulled out again signifyeth that we rise again with Christ in a new life." Ltr. to Taylor, Dec. 24/25, 1787 in ibid. pp. 241-245.
make of boys defenders of faith. It is not easy to make even men sound critics."

The value of the doctrine of the innocency of error is seen in this very connection.

A man who affixes guilt to any mode of thinking must not so much as suspect some popular notions which are called fundamental to be false, or only true in part. He must not even be known to buy or read heretical books. He must never examine more than one side; that is to say, he must renounce all pretensions to that perfect liberty in which his Lord placed him by his gospel, and he must declare for some species of tyranny. You hold general redemption; another particular: you hold one another guilty; so you begin in coolness and end in enmity. I hold you both innocent in regard to me as long as you differ only in thinking of this subject: and whether either of you be guilty, or which of the two, or in what degree, I leave to the great Judge to determine. Both innocent in my eye, I admit you to all christian privileges,... The moment you break the king's peace by any unjust action one to the other on account of your different sentiments, I hold you both guilty, not of believing error but of overt acts which disturb society.

A "champion of orthodoxy" comes in for special attention:

A man the other day, a man of God too, and, more than either, a Londoner, wrote us word he was not sure he understood Robinson's notion of the Innocence of Error, but he and his brethren condemned it. Now is not this abominable, friend T.? This genius doubted whether he understood what he had heard of, but he did not hesitate to censure it!

He begs pardon for "scribbling on at this rate". It is snowing heavily and he doubts whether he shall have any company. Christmas is a "popish festival" and the writer, a Protestant, leaves the Pope "to countenance his own frenzies". He has not held any service, for he will not "disgrace" himself "by stooping to preach to those who would not hear if they had anything else to do".

It seems fitting that this friend of freedom, who was devoted to principle rather than party, should in his closing years be fighting intolerance within his own communion. In 1789 he writes to Taylor about the establishment of a benefit fund for
poor ministers who "believe Jesus is the Son of God, and who shall attest by their lives the sincerity of their profession". This would help show that all Baptists did not practice tyranny over conscience as those who administered the Particular Baptist Fund. He wonders how such can "ask for the repeal of the test acts, seeing they impose human tests upon one another". It is a Calvinistical creed and he wonders: "What makes Baptists so fond of the name and the creed of Calvin, seeing the barbarian burnt Servetus, and denounced the vengeance of God and the civil magistrate against all Anabaptists?"

The question is not of the truth of their creed, but of the imposition of it, for such only shall receive our charity as believe as John of Geneva did. Could I subscribe a human creed, I would not do it for a poor Baptist dole; I would submit to my lords the bishops, for some good thing in their rich corporation. These ecclesiastical sheriffs, appointed by the crown, play Jupiter with a better grace than our little Anabaptist tyrants. Believe what they will, but why pretend to write a creed for me? Why sap the foundation of the good old Baptists? Scripture alone is a sufficient guide for every Christian man.¹

His wife "who sits by, asks how people found the way to heaven before Calvin" was born. For some weeks he has written "sheet after sheet to some" in London "against their ignorance and intolerance". In their own congregation a poor old minister had petitioned the London fund.

Instead of sending him charity they sent him faith, and informed him that they had made a law not to receive any unless they signed a creed, a human creed, which they sent him, and the first article of which is, "There are three divine persons in the unity of the Godhead," - absolute nonsense, supported by tyranny over men's consciences! The old man believes as they do, and he sent up a faith as sound as that of old Calvin himself, but he could not help boggling at the idea of a London lord over a country brother's conscience?

1 Ltr. Feb.21,1789 in ibid. p.261.
2 Ltr. to Miss Hays, Mar.4,1789 in ibid. p.265.
It appears that "the faith" as well as the charity of the London fund was in danger of spreading to Wales. To a Welsh Dissenting minister Robinson expresses his confidence that "our good brethren in Wales...will resist such tyranny, by either refusing fund money, or by accepting it free from all conditions of believing this or that". If "their creed" be true it will stand and if not, no subscription will make it true. Having resisted Rome and dissented from "a wealthy established church", "shall we suffer four or five poor Baptist brethren to put a yoke upon our necks"?

Oh God forbid! they are self-employed. Neither government, magistrates, or prelates, set them about this work, nor did we ever send to them a petition humbly to pray them to make a creed for us. Who then elected and commissioned these men? Are they apostles, and have they any extraordinary call? Blessed be God, the ages of fraud and credulity are over, and having got by the providence of God, possession of the oracles of God, we are now to judge for ourselves, and not to return to infancy to be carried about with every wind of doctrine according to the caprice of unforeseen fundees.

Robinson would keep for his brethren the freedom to search the Scriptures which had been his throughout his ministry. But freedom to search necessarily meant freedom to find new treasure. It was no good to have an open book with a fixed message. Since he had made his confession before the Cambridge church in 1761, his understanding of many things had changed, but in his preaching he had remained true to his promise "to dwell on the least disputable, as they were the most essential truths of religion". Not long before his death he tried to make clear his belief.

Believe me, I am neither a Socinian nor an Arian; I do not know among what class of heretics to place myself: sometimes I think I am a Paulianist, or Samosetanian; for I think Jesus a man in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells; and I

1 Ltr. June 1, 1789 in ibid. p. 276.
give him more dignity than they do, who ascribe to him only a third part of the Deity. Years ago reverence for great names misled me. I said after Clarke, there was a Scripture Trinity; and I would say so still if I could tell what I meant; but, as I cannot, I cast that phrase also to the bats and moles.

He believes the atonement, but not some "gross description of it; yet, I cannot think all the passages that speak of the death of Christ are to be taken figuratively". He believes the Scriptures, "the record that God hath given of his Son", but as for the disputes of the schools: "be so good as to settle them among yourselves, and allow one disciple of Christ to sit at his feet, and be content with hearing his word, and no more". Because he refuses to take sides he is represented as being indifferent to truth and error. This, because his detractors apply what he says of "scholastic theology" to "the gospel of our Lord"; "as if a man who held their brangles indifferent, held the sacred truths of revelation so". Whatever their orthodoxy, he is sure it is "offensive to God and good men" when accompanied, "as it mostly is, with a spirit of persecution". Around him these "knights errant of orthodoxy" are "the greatest gossips, the busiest censors, the most zealous calumniators in the county".

I had rather believe all the heresies stirring, than rob one man of his character, or injure in any degree my fellow-creature. By faith Calvin, barbarous Calvin, burnt Servetus, and by faith that false, drunken debauche, St. Augustin, obtained a good report: and their followers make nothing of a holy life, but like their masters, cry up faith in their nostrums to heaven. In a free country, what occasion have we to be gull'd so? let us return to the purest ages, before such troublers of the world had uttered their oracles, and let the oracles of God be our faith, and the life of Jesus our model of living.

In view of the gossip and hearsay which persisted after his death,

it may be well to add the "confession" he makes in this letter.

I adore God for so loving the world as to send his Son; I embrace him as an unspeakable gift; I believe his doctrines, trust his promises, copy his life, imbibe his disposition, and live in hope of the glory he has promised all his disciples. I have no doubts, and I want none of the reputation which this host of men ("orthodox") lavish upon one another.

It was generally felt that Robinson's intense labors on the History had impaired his intellectual powers, dampened his spirits, and injured his health. Whether the cares of a large family, and financial problems also helped hasten his decline is in doubt, but certain it is "that during the last year of his life he exhibited evident marks of decline, both bodily and mental".

It was hoped that a trip to Birmingham with his son, Henry, where he would preach for Priestley would work improvement, though his doctor wished the trip delayed a few weeks. However, the trip was made without delay, and on June 11, 1790 Priestley wrote to his friend Lindsey:

We have had a melancholy scene here since I wrote last. Mr. Robinson, who preached our charity sermon on Sunday last, was found dead in his bed on Wednesday morning, at Mr. Russell's. He was much enfeebled in body and mind, but had been bent on taking the journey, and exerting himself to the utmost. His disorder the physicians call angina pectoris.

1 W. Robinson who suspects financial difficulties notes from the Court Roll that he died intestate and "in 1789 he effected a mortgage of £300 on the house in which he resided". p.lxxxiii. A letter of Henry to Curtis telling of R.R.'s death suggests financial difficulties: "You know the state of his affairs. I hope they will be able to live on the rent of the little property he had at Chesterton." in ibid. p.293.

2 Flower, I, p.cx. To his congregation Priestley said in his sermon on R.R.'s death: "What you saw and heard of him here would give you no idea of what he had been. For the disorder to which he had been more than a year subject, ..." quoted in Dyer, p.420.

3 Priestley's friend William Russell of Showell-Green. R.R. was buried in the Dissenters' burying ground at Birmingham, "with every token of affectionate respect". Dyer, pp.398f.

4 Ltr. in Rutt, op.cit. vol. II, pp.67f.
On Sunday the preacher "rambled into many things quite foreign to the subject, dwelling much on Unitarianism at both meetings, though they were different sermons". Monday evening "he had a fit" from which Priestley thought it unlikely he would recover.

However, he was much better the next day, when he dined with Mr. Hawkes, and after dinner was in remarkably good spirits, and entertained us with many stories and anecdotes. He ate a hearty supper, and went to bed seemingly in good health; but it was evident that he had another fit soon after he went to bed, and that he expired in it, for he was almost cold at nine o'clock the next morning.

Robinson aware of his decline had said to one introduced to him at Birmingham, "You are only come to see the shadow of Robert Robinson".2

To those displeased with Robinson's views, there was in his decline the stuff out of which fanciful tales might be woven. The "weavers" were soon at work and remembering the Cambridge pastor's strictures on those who would write history by the method; "I heard say, that he heard say, that she heard say, that they heard say", it is interesting to consider some of the resultant stories which darken the shadows in the last year or so of his life.

William Robinson an "orthodox" writer relates two anecdotes, each of which was "second-hand" when he got it.3 One tells us that after a misunderstanding over some money Robinson "was a distressingly altered man" and at dinner sometimes appeared "wholly lost", allowing "his food to fall about like a child". The other shows

1 By 'fit' Priestley probably meant a heart attack for after the 'fit' during the night, when R.R. was found dead in the morning his bed-clothes were "not discomposed in the least". Ltr. H.E.Robinson to Curtis June 9,1790 in W. Robinson, pp.292f. Thus his death was as R.R. wished it: "soft, suddenly, and alone". Dyer, p.398.
2 Dyer, p.397.
3 W. Robinson, p.lxxxiii: "The Rev. T.C.Edmonds told me that a gentleman - an intimate friend of Robinson's - once informed him..."; p.lxxxv: "I am indebted for this anecdote to Rev. J. Adams, of Sandon, who heard it at Thaxted from the lips of Mr. Bowers, and he thinks about fifty years ago".
him deeply shaken by a visit from two friends returning from an ordination to which he had not been invited. He asked them to pray with him. They obliged and "his spirit seemed to be stirred to its depth"; one friend felt "he could never forget the prayer (Robinson) then offered". Another thinks there is no way of considering Robinson's late years "with any hope respecting his salvation, but that in which the late Dr. Abraham Rees once expressed himself to the writer of this article, that for sometime before his death he was evidently insane!". In 1866 a "touching and instructive tradition" concerning Robinson as a hymn writer was published.

It is said that one day, on one of the well-known roads, a lady had been for some time engaged over one page of a little book, which, in the course of the journey, she had occasionally consulted. Turning at length to her companion in travel, a gentleman from whose appearance she gathered that an appeal on such a question would not be disagreeable, she held the open page towards him, and said, "May I ask your attention to this hymn, and ask you to favour me with your opinion of it? Do you know it?"

The lady showed him three verses of "Come, Thou Fount of every blessing". Glancing at the page, the gentleman tried to be excused from "conversation on the merits of the hymn; but the lady ventured on another appeal".

"That hymn has given me so much pleasure," she said; "its sentiments so touch me; indeed, I cannot tell you how much good it has done me. Don't you think it very good?"

"Madam!" said the stranger, bursting into tears, "I am the poor unhappy man who wrote that hymn many years ago, and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them, to enjoy the feelings I then had."

By 1899 this tradition had become even more "touching and instructive". Noting that after 1757 Robinson "lapsed into careless

1 The writer of "Church At Cambridge", in Ivimey's, A History of the English Baptists vol. IV, p.457.
2 S. W. Christophers, Hymn-Writers and Their Hymns, pp.292ff.
It is told of him that on one occasion, while travelling by coach, his conduct was so objectionable that a lady in the conveyance upbraided him for it. He seemed to be affected by what she said; and seeing this, and desirous of improving the occasion, the good lady quoted a verse of *Come, Thou Fount of every blessing*, informing him that the hymn had been the cause of much blessing to her. This was too much for Robinson, who burst into tears, exclaiming, 'I am the poor unhappy man who composed it; and I would give a thousand worlds, if I had them to enjoy the feelings I had then.'

Of more weight is Robinson's confession of indebtedness to Priestley "for the little I know of rational defensible Christianity. But for your friendly aid I fear I should have gone from enthusiasm to deism: but a faith founded on evidence rests upon a rock". Yet Dyer notes that "some express doubts" with respect to this confession, and adds that a similar remark was made to Robert Tyrwhitt of Jesus College and others. Priestley felt Robinson a Unitarian who "did not wish to incur the odium of it with all his old friends". He wrote:

Mr. Robinson said he never felt so sensible a relief to his mind as when he read what I published on the miraculous conception. He had always doubted the story, but never ventured to mention his suspicions to any body.

In a letter Robinson referred to his youngest son Henry, "a sailor, just returned from the Levant", as "deeply infected with heresy, of which, to be sure, Dr. Priestley is like to cure him". From all this it may be gathered that Robinson had expressed gratitude

1 J. Brownlie, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church Hymnary*, pp.176f.
2 In his "only" letter to Priestley. Belsham, *op.cit.* p.192.
3 Dyer, p.416.
4 Ltr. to Lindsey June 24,1790 in Rutt, *op.cit.* vol.II, p.70. Priestley with some right (see p.157) thought "He ought, certainly, to have made a public recantation of his book (Plea)". *ibid.* p.71.
5 Ltr. to Lindsey in *ibid.* p.68.
to Priestley for help received from his works. Considering Robinson's tendency to flatter, it is easy to understand the exaggerated compliment to Priestley, and how the latter not knowing Robinson well, might consider him of like faith.

Certain it is that opinions as to his belief at the end differ. It is interesting that Dyer a Naturalist, (or at least a skeptic), Flower a "Robinsonian", and Priestley the Unitarian, all claim him, while the orthodox thought highly of him and his ability till he, in their opinion, "wavered" or became "insane". The popular assumption that he was a Socinian hovering on the brink of black infidelity is not to be credited. One should certainly not take too seriously "interested" opinions of friends or enemies of a man's belief when he was but the shadow of his former self. It is perhaps most fair to accept his last "confession" cited above and let him plead his own cause before the Judge of all the earth, who searcheth the heart and knoweth all things. This is all he asked from fellow Christians.

1 ie. History of Early Opinions Concerning Jesus Christ,... vol. IV, cited in Ecclesiastical Researches, p.32.
2 A gentleman "well acquainted" with Dyer, and also a skeptic, said to Flower: "How unjustly the biographer (Dyer) of Mr. Robinson had treated his character"; "For...Mr. Robinson to the close of his life would with earnestness endeavour to convince me of the truth and importance of Christianity." Flower, I, p.cxxxvii.
3 P.222.
CHAPTER VI

THE MESSAGE AND THE MAN

The giants of those days were but dwarfs compared to their predecessors or their successors; and the chief interest is in exhibiting the rare germs of future development.

Leslie Stephen.1

Reader, speaking of Robert Robinson, say not of him, "he believed this tenet, or disbelieved the other;" for perhaps there may exist persons who may think themselves qualified to contradict thee - Say rather of him,...

George Dyer.2

His life long the Cambridge pastor read, grappled with various systems and more and more came to think for himself. To the end his mind remained open so that a month before his death he could confess that the longer he lived the more convinced he became that there were "difficulties in every system which cannot be explained".3 In spite of this and Dyer's caution, it is not unfair to speak of Robinson's "system" for in his sermons, writings, and letters one repeatedly finds certain major premises on which he bases his belief. If at the end, as seems likely, his thought was in transition, it was because he was beginning to see that certain of his assumptions stood in need of review. A change in these might necessitate considerable adjustment in the elaboration of his system but it is wrong to view this either as fickleness or a desertion of principle. He is more like a scientist who having drawn up certain seemingly satisfactory assumptions from the facts available, is then confronted with new facts which must be

2 Dyer, p.418.
3 To Thomas Dunscombe in Flower, I, p.cxlix.
assimilated into the system. It sometimes happens that the system must change. The new "fact" for Robinson was a change - or at least aforesboding of change - in his view of Scripture. As a Protestant who believed with Chillingworth that "the Bible is the religion of Protestants", it is not hard to see how he might be in a transtitional period at the end. What was his system?

Most thinking men in the eighteenth century believed in "reason" and "the nature of things" and so much was plain and sure beyond doubting. Nature, as the Deists maintained, showed unmistakably the hand of the Divine Artificer, the great First Cause, and every man, as Locke had publicized, had "in a state of nature" certain inalienable rights, among which was the right of private judgment. Robinson too, believes heartily in "reason" and "the nature of things". The right of men to judge for themselves can never lawfully be taken away. Society renders no benefit to make up for its loss. He has no difficulty accepting the argument from design and Paley's illustration of the watch. He is sure that Nature to the unaided reason gives "a full demonstration" that there is a God; that there is but one; that He is an intelligent Spirit, both wise and beneficent.

Some were completely satisfied with this faith delivered at all times in every land to men of sound reason. Possessing the virtues of impartiality and universality, it was demonstrably true without the aid of subscriptions, creeds, inquisitions, and priests. In comparison the religion of Revelation seemed irrevelant, absurd or at best obsolete. Jehovah seemed a childish and petty Deity as He worried about an obscure Semitic tribe and raised havoc in the heavens and on earth that their interests might be furthered.
Insanely jealous of their affection, He was shockingly oblivious to the needs and just aspirations of the rest of mankind. Revelation remained dark with mystery, able only to divide men into hostile camps, sharing one common characteristic, namely, a readiness to anathematize opposing sects and make of them burnt offerings and bloody sacrifices to a very "unreasonable" Deity. Before long sensible men in the interests of the advancement of society and concord among men would consign Christianity to the dust heap.

Understandably Christians disagreed; among them Robinson. With the eminent Bishop Butler he holds such a dichotomy between the God of Revelation and the God of Reason false. On the contrary there is "a glorious analogy" between the two. If Scripture be the word of God it must exhibit similarity to the works of God as seen in Nature. That Christ could teach His heavenly doctrines by parables showed that the great Supreme had kept an "analogy between the natural and preternatural worlds". This was fortunate, else not Nature's God but Scripture's would be discredited. Analogy is further seen in the fact that Scripture and Nature both present objects to view and objects to be examined; both exhibit simplicity as well as majesty. The simplicity of Scripture allows its benefits to be appropriated by all while its majesty gives employment to superior minds, rewarding them with "super-added felicity".

Reason also leads men to expect that a divine revelation exhibit perfection and proportion as well. Once again, Christianity in Scripture measures up. Jesus in the parable of the Talents and Paul in likening the Church to the body of Christ teach the doctrine of proportion. Further its revelation is
proportion:ate to the capacities not only of the gifted (as the religion of Nature), but of the meanest capacity so that a fool may not err therein. Does not Jesus give it as a proof of His mission that the poor have the Gospel preached to them? Yet it has sublimities which exercise and finally baffle the greatest minds, even such as St. Paul who can only say, "O the depth!". Its perfection is seen by its noble end, the assimilation of man to God, and the adoption of adequate means to accomplish that end, namely, the mediation of Jesus Christ. It proposes to propagate itself only through the power of love so in its accomplishment does not destroy its end, which is Unity. Thus its perfection, proportion and analogy to God's other word in Nature proves Christianity, as it is contained in the New Testament to be a divine revelation.

It is absolutely necessary to distinguish true Christianity from much that passes as Christianity in the world, else the opponents of Revelation can readily show a wide disparity between the God of Nature and the God of Revelation. True Christianity, the religion which Jesus taught, is all contained in the New Testament. New Testament Christianity neither diminishes the glory of civil polity nor restricts private judgment. On the contrary it makes for the very best citizens and encourages private judgment; as it is not possible for one to be a true believer without the exercise of that most sacred right. This means that Christianity can only be propagated by convincing the mind of each individual of its truth. To convince the mind the "evidences" of Christianity are more than adequate. The "evidences" are prophesy fulfilled, miracles performed (with the very best attestation) and the
unimpeachable witness of the Apostles.

If New Testament Christianity be so plain, some wondered how so many snarling sects could arise, all claiming sole possession of its truth. The tempers of many who would spread the Gospel of love by the promotion of hatred and the employment of persecution Robinson admits both embarrassing and deplorable, but the intellectual disagreements within Christianity are readily explained. Many confuse "facts" with "reasoning on the facts", and thus mistake the nature of faith. The "facts" are plain and about them there is universal agreement. It is a belief in the "facts" because of a conviction of their truth which is faith and such faith produces virtue. The "facts" are the divine revelation and the "reasoning upon the facts" is human explication. It is the latter when mistaken for divine revelation and made a part of a saving faith which produces all the havoc within Christendom. If this distinction were made all Christians would soon find there was much more agreement than had formerly been supposed. What is needed is for Christians to exercise a wise and generous toleration of various "reasonings on the facts". A disbelief of the facts however such as the life, death, resurrection and second coming of Christ renders one an infidel for he does not believe the revelation God has given of His Son, and has no claim to Christian fellowship.

If it be granted that Christianity is a divine revelation which Jesus taught and is all contained in the New Testament; that men have the inalienable right of private judgment, the way Robinson deals with the relation of Church and State, the state of the Church of England, the proper constitution of churches, the
Person of Christ, and toleration as to "believers' baptism" within his own denomination, is straightforward and follows rather readily, although there is some difficulty with the last.

As Jesus came preaching to men, appealing only to their private judgment and never enlisted the aid of rulers to induce right belief, it is absurd for Christians to call in a magistrate. If prophecy and miracle and the sublime doctrine of Christianity cannot support the credit of revelation what can persecution and tests do? The State rests on a moral not a sentimental union, and those governments which exercised tolerance have been most in agreement with "reason" and "the nature of things". Incidentally, history shows they have the least trouble in preserving a moral union. As it is impossible to construct a human creed which is in just proportion to all men's abilities, a "test" to hold public office is contrary both to Christianity and Reason.

As Christianity is all contained in the New Testament the Episcopal Church of England is still in desperate need of reform. It has retained human traditions, creeds; added homilies, and confessions, and only altered the form, not the Grand Principle of Popery by making the King head of the Church. In a divine revelation it is not enough that a thing be not forbidden, it must be commanded. Yet this Church has manufactured ceremonies and forms not authorized by the Sole Legislator, implying that Christianity from the hands of Jesus is imperfect. It is the sheerest arrogance and folly for human wisdom to seek to adorn a divine revelation - like a man who would paint a diamond!

Episcopacy is unchristian in theory and tyrannical in operation - always a danger to men's freedom. Whatever the Church of England
be, it is not the Church of the New Testament.

In the Church of Christ there is one sole legislator and head, Jesus Christ. The only officers are Scripture bishops and deacons. Wherever disciples of Christ gather together voluntarily, they rightly constitute a church and have the right to appoint their officers, just as the people appoint civil governors. Virtue is the bond of union. Members having exercised their private judgment in joining the church must be allowed to continue the exercise of it within the church. There are to be no "lord-brothers".

It is foolish for a finite mind to try to comprehend the infinite, and therefore the only proper way of dealing with the Person of Christ is to ask what the New Testament seeks to convey about it. Thus one by-passes Confessions, Councils, Church Fathers and the endless bickerings of the Schools. The New Testament writers apply the same titles to Jesus as in the Old Testament are applied to Jehovah. Jesus performs the works which in the Old Testament are done only by Jehovah. In addition the language of the New Testament writers is extremely injudicious if they meant to convey that Jesus was a mere man. Further, although many corruptions of Christianity are foretold in the New Testament, such as the worship of saints, nothing is said of what is its greatest corruption, its gross idolatry in worshipping Jesus, if He be not truly and properly God. The difficulties with some texts on this assumption are insignificant compared to those which one must surmount if Jesus be considered a mere man. The plain man will pay no heed to learned criticisms but will take the plain sense of Scripture, for if a doctrine need be established by
criticisms, it is not popular and therefore not part of that which God requires men to believe on pain of His displeasure. He will render worship to Jesus as truly and properly God with all the angels in heaven.

In advocating tolerance in the matter of "believers' baptism" in his own denomination Robinson has most difficulty, for here he must make a choice. He has argued extensively that man in a state of nature has the right of private judgment which Christianity does not take away, but on the contrary requires its exercise. Yet on the other hand he has argued that Scripture is quite plain so far as necessary saving elements. These are belief in the "facts" and obedience to the "positive" institutes of Christ, which are Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The difficulty arises because some "plain Christians" of virtuous life think their infant baptism valid, and seek membership in Baptist churches. It would seem that Scripture is not so plain, or Baptism is not part of essential Christianity, or that these "plain Christians" are culpable and undeserving of membership. Robinson refuses to admit any of these. Rather the "plain Christians" satisfied with their infant baptism are suffering from "mere mental error" which if not entirely innocent in the sight of God cannot be an object of blame or punishment among men. Therefore, when the request is made, Baptists should allow such full membership in their churches. Not to do this is to deny the right of private judgment within the church and this is plainly wrong. Robinson points out that the essential qualification for church membership is "real sterling goodness" - a "supreme love to truth and virtue". To the objection that on his definition of baptism, this is to allow people to be
members of a Christian church without baptism, he argues that baptism is not a Church ordinance, but a profession of Christianity at large. Further, such Christians in their opinion judge they have been baptized and thus according to their own imperfect light have obeyed their Master. To bar such from Church membership is only to encourage further "disobedience". Robinson has made his choice for freedom rather than authority.

For the most part the system worked well. The distinction between "facts" and "reasonings on the facts" freed him from endless theological disputes which since the religious wars of the seventeen century had rendered Christianity suspect. His similar distinction of necessary saving truths, plain to all and sublimities of the faith incomprehensible even to a St. Paul allowed Scriptural Christianity like Nature to bestow its benefits upon the simplest and still challenge the finest minds. His insistence on acceptance of the "facts" only after they have been demonstrated to be truth by sure evidence saves him from assenting to the "superstitions" of the Roman Church and the "subjective vagaries" of the Quaker. His emphasis on reason saved him from the excessive emotionalism of "enthusiasm" while his belief in the God of Revelation who sent His only Son saved him from the aridness of a cold rationalism.

But the system has flaws, some of which Robinson appears to have suspected at the end. Like Charles Leslie he had assumed that Scripture was a contemporaneous and accurate record.¹ So he assumed that "reasonings on the facts" and tradition had no place within the pages of the Holy Canon. He neglected if he did not

exclude the need of the Holy Spirit in enlightening the mind to the truth of Scripture, and he further neglects the mediation of the Church in formulating the Canon. In "Reflections on Christian Liberty ...", he illustrates a point by imagining a bird to drop a New Testament on the deck of a Pagan ship whose complement had never heard of Christianity. This through most of his life appears to have been his position. Both in his system and its application he fails to see or appreciate that Scripture has not been dropped full blown from heaven above without being touched by human frailty, with all that means. But this is only to say that Robinson handled Scripture like most in his day. Of more significance for the present is Robinson's willingness, near the end, to critically examine Scripture and his questioning the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke. In other words he came to see that his distinction of "facts" and "reasonings on the facts" must be carried into the sacred precincts of the Holy Canon. This is a foreshadowing of the movement which was to search for the historical Jesus and that liberalism which would distinguish the simple truths of the Master from the theological "reasonings" of St. Paul.

Living in a "classic" age, Robinson's want of a sense of history, a not uncommon failing among Baptists, may be forgiven. Viewing primitive Christianity as not only the norm, but absolutely perfect, he fails to give full weight to those passages of Scripture which speak of more truth to break forth and greater works to be done. He oversimplifies the equality existing in the

1 H. W. Robinson, op. cit. p.141. "Baptists as a whole are often wanting in any sense of history, whether the history of the thousand years in which the experience behind the Bible slowly deposited itself in the literary record, or those intervening centuries of the history of the Church which have added so much to the interpretation of the Bible."
early Church. If it be true, as he suggests, that the Apostle Paul would argue "believer to believer" fashion, it is also true that in his letters there is ample evidence that St. Paul is conscious that he is an Apostle with his authority from Christ, not subject to the majority vote of the various churches in Galatia, Corinth, and elsewhere. He also fails to consider that the relation of Church and State might change when a Pagan state became Christian nor does he give full weight to the fact that Jesus' mission and message were begun within the framework of a national religion.

There have not been many, if any, that would agree with the smug appraisal the eighteenth century Church of England made of itself. On the contrary it has been severely censured even to the point of undue abuse. Of late it has been assessed with both appreciation and understanding. One finds it difficult not to like Parson Woodforde - perhaps typical of the country clergy - even though his Diary shows more concern with the things of the table than the things of the Spirit. He is no saint, but he is not a hypocrite. Still Robinson's strictures on the Church of England are not without foundation. It is true he uses the language of polemics but this is justifiable. He is fighting a battle not writing a thesis, or examining religious trends in the eighteenth century.

However inadequate Robinson's method of comparing

1 Ibid. p.87. "...the authority of the Apostle Paul is very real, and is firmly exercised; he is far from being the self-effacing chairman of a democratic society."

2 Norman Sykes, Church and State in England in the XVIIIth Century. Sykes writes in Johnson's England: "Encumbered...by many obstacles, the Church of Johnson's England strove, not unworthily upon the whole, to work out its own salvation and to minister to the needs of the times according to the standards of the age." vol. I, p.37.
parallel texts indiscriminately in proving the divinity of Jesus Christ, his general argument is not as weak as it appeared to the Unitarians. That the writers of the New Testament viewed Jesus as divine, and entitled to worship few biblical scholars today would deny. And it should be remembered that it was on the basis of the teaching of Scripture that the argument was pursued. The general argument that Jesus did for men what only God can do is pretty much the argument still used today.

II

I ask no pardon for expressing my abhorrence of intolerance. Always when I met it in a course of reading, I thought I met the great devil, and my resentment was never abated by his appearing in the habit of a holy man of God.

R.R.¹

It has long been the opinion of many persons, who are by no means unfriendly to liberty, that Mr. Robinson's notions of it are licentious and extravagant; and in this opinion I cannot help concurring.

Andrew Fuller²

However one assess Robinson's system, it must be admitted that his thinking is "current" and he tries to relate Christianity to the thought of his day. Not dependent on the logic of his system, there is a message which Robinson proclaims nobler than that system and greater than the thought of any period of history, which men forget or think commonplace at their peril. It is a message of freedom - freedom of the individual to examine the credentials of any authority. It is the freedom of the individual to stand before his Maker and before Him alone and give an account. It is God given and therefore His Son can only rule where this freedom has first held sway. This for Robinson

is the basic right which if denied renders true Christianity impossible. It must never be surrendered and therefore there is freedom within faith as well as for faith.

He is not afraid of freedom because he believes in the majesty and inviolability of truth. Truth carries its own authority and needs no defense from fallible men. Having the seal of the Eternal it will stand while kingdoms and systems rise and fall. Believing in truth and freedom he can believe in tolerance. One need not fret that truth will be lost midst false opinions if both are given a thorough airing. There are no flowers that bloom in the garden of truth that need hot-house care. Nor are there any divinely appointed gardeners. To pretend to defend or shelter eternal truth is the sheerest arrogance on the part of pompous, power-seeking clergy. In the world Christianity must submit its credentials and if it be divine its glory will shine forth for all men to see. Within the Church the doctrine of the divinity of Christ is to submit its credentials and if it be true will gloriously answer all, and if not he challenges, "What have you to do with it?"

Believing passionately that freedom is God's gift, truth His invincible Word; that tolerance preserves freedom and leads to the discovery of truth, he wages righteous war against persecution and its more prevalent companion bigotry. This means he has no use for monarchs who feel themselves above the law and ecclesiastics who pervert Christianity till it becomes an engine of state, a tool of oppression and a curse to mankind. The latter made it possible for such as D'Holbach to attack Christianity as harmful to the State. Robinson would answer such attacks by
freeing Christianity from worldly priests that it might regain its original simplicity when it did no harm to good civil polity and recommended itself to all just governments. He feels all Christians should cease setting up as defenders of the faith, and become disciples of the truth! That all might come to a knowledge of the truth and a steadfast conviction of it in their inmost hearts he says Amen to words that found their way into the first national anthem, of what for him was the land of promise: "Let freedom ring" and would add, Let freedom reign! When dark tyranny is again casting its ugly shadows over vast areas of land it is a message that needs to be heard once again. If the message seems too simple and naive, it may be pointed out that in most of the countries where truth is now suppressed; persecution is practiced and tolerance considered treason, this simple message was seldom if ever heard.

Robinson also brings a message of the efficacy of virtue. He will have nothing to do with faith that lacks virtue. Such is a fraud and allows for all sorts of excess and fanaticism. If a man's religion does not make him behave it is suspect before the bar of sound common sense. In a day when many make mock of such preaching of simple virtue from the pulpit, it may not be amiss to remember it stands recorded that One commanded: Be ye perfect; told the forgiven sinner to sin no more; warned that some would hear solemn words: "depart from me, ye that work iniquity". In his Exercise on "Covetousness" Robinson had stated there was only "a thin partition between the last step of virtue and the first of vice". Some contemporary Baptists, like Andrew Fuller felt the Cambridge pastor had taken this step with his "extravagant"
notions of liberty. They felt Robinson too insistent that Christians call no man master, and lax in pointing out that One was their Master. Fuller thought him more concerned with liberty, than the liberty that is in Christ. There is danger in exclusively preaching an external freedom without stressing the more personal freedom from sin. However, it seems to me that Robinson makes much of both freedoms, for he continually insists on virtue, which includes freedom from sin, but he will never let men forget that tolerance too is a virtue.

III

Say rather of him, "he was an amiable, a benevolent, a generous, a learned man; a true philanthropist, an invariable friend to liberty." That assertion no man living will be able to confute. George Dyer

I have sometimes allowed myself a little mirth in that awful science religion, and in the presence of that grave thing called a sermon:

R.R.

As important as was Robinson's message, like his system it can hardly be considered in any sense original. Many others in his day assumed what Robinson assumed; loved liberty; believed in "reason"; studied Locke, Tillotson, Butler; read Voltaire and the new French philosophers. So it is perhaps most fitting to end this study with an appreciation of the man, for the more one reads of this Cambridge pastor the more one feels Robert Hall was right - there was but one Robert Robinson. This was no ordinary man who came to Cambridge and raised the reputation of Dissent. He has the common touch remarkably blended with uncommon ability. If sometimes his reasoning savor s too much of the romantic, his

1 Dyer, pp.418f.
dealing with problems in his church shows us a man with broad understanding, tact, and the ability to build as well as inspire.

At a time when many of the clergy were not famous for arduous labors or systematic study his industry was remarkable. In his later years one is apt to forget that he continued to preach regularly and fulfill the duties of a pastor, because it seems that farming and research into the history of Baptists would be plenty for any man. When one reads that in addition he is learning new languages that he may study dusty, almost forgotten records in the original, one can easily believe his life was cut short by such intense application.

At a time when many could not see beyond party horizons, Robinson, for all his controversial writings, could count warm friends in all groups. Through life he continued to grow. In the beginning he is preaching with the "enthusiasts". It is not long however till Berridge feels Robinson "suspect" - the "promising" preacher has begun to think for himself. At the end he journeys to preach for Priestley, but one feels that his home was symbolically as well as literally the Baptist Dissenting meeting-house in Cambridge. That is to say he was neither "enthusiast" nor Unitarian but a man with an open mind still sitting down before the open Book, no doubt with a changing approach to Scripture, but still with faith he will find there treasures both old and new. Finally he asks to be allowed to sit at the feet of Jesus as a disciple with only "Christian" after his name. It would be ungenerous to label this insincere for his life long in an age when it was not uncommon nor thought particularly unworthy to trim conscience for the sake of comfort he had gone "against wind and
One is sure this was not always easy, for Robinson, liking people and wanting to be liked, had what today would be termed "personality". Dyer says he was a flatterer and vain which being interpreted means that in company he liked 'to say the right thing' to get along with people, and appreciated a compliment. His intense dislike of the pretensions of some of the clergy earned him the title 'eccentric'. Possessed of an exuberant temperment, he attacked the affected mannerisms of ministers both in the pulpit and in private. He confessed this "the unpardonable sin which he committed". Such criticisms of fellow-ministers, he termed "pricking the bladder". Justifying his conduct he would argue: "Preachers are too full of wind, and it is mercy to let it out". Nor did he spare himself. "My people", he would say, "can preach themselves, if they think proper; but they are determined to keep a parson; that is their only reason for supporting me". This may be viewed as an effort, if not entirely wise, to destroy that "clericalism" which rears its head even in Baptist circles.

Such remarks show us a side of Robinson, which Dyer lacking a sense of humor failed to appreciate. This was an important part of the pastor's personality for Henry Crabb Robinson, who could appreciate satiric humor testified, "that, half a century ago, in all Dissenting circles, the bons mots of Robinson formed

1 Dyer, p.297. "...the clerical attire, the official solemnity, the severe and morose orthodoxy, the super-crestial raptures (in some such manner he used to talk) of many of his Calvinist friends, he frequently satirized as well in private circles, as in the pulpit, with all the point of ingenious raillery."

2 Ibid.

a staple of after-dinner conversation". In 1845 he wrote down anecdotes of the Cambridge pastor which had been "floating in his memory between forty and fifty years". These were published in the "Christian Reformer". One illustrates the pastor's intolerance of dullness. Robinson became exasperated in arguing with a supporter of "what he deemed the corruptions in the Church and State" who could allege against his reasonings nothing better than the frequent repetition of, "I do not see that, - "

"You do not see it!" retorted Robinson, - "do you see this?" taking a card out of his pocket and writing GOD upon it. - "Of course I do," said his opponent; "what then?" - "Do you see it now?" repeated Robinson, - at the same time covering the word with a half-crown piece, - "I suspect not." 1

At a ministerial meeting Robinson overheard a brother whispering to another that he was unsound in his belief in the existence of a personal Devil.

"Brother! brother!" he cried out, "don't misrepresent me. How do you think I can dare to look you in the face, and at the same time deny the existence of a Devil? Is he not described in holy writ as the accuser of the brethren?" 2

Yet this one, impatient with dullness could sign a paper as a kind of testimonial to enable "poor John of Norwich, (alias John Carlton), who was a kind of idiot" to stroll about the country, and lisp nonsense, "for he could not speak a word plainly". 3

Perhaps in defense of this Robinson told the following:

"I have in my pigsty ten white pigs and one black one. The other morning, as I passed by, I heard the black pig squeaking away lustily, and I thought to myself, That's pig language: I don't understand it, but perhaps it pleases the white ones: they are quiet enough." 4

And this John preached frequently in Robinson's family.

2 Ibid. p.271.
3 Dyer, pp.136ff.
The Cambridge pastor probably felt harmless nonsense preferable to the malicious slander of another preacher whom he befriended. This gentleman who in Robinson's phrase was "ready to burst with orthodoxy" had been given clothes, food, money - been introduced to his Cambridge friends and allowed to preach in his pulpit. In return the man misrepresented Robinson's character, and even preached against him in his own pulpit. It was during a visit that Robinson became aware of his "insidious intentions", yet he preserved "towards him, in his conversation, all the mildness of a child, and all the frankness of a brother minister" till the end of his stay. When the man came to take leave of his host "he received the most severe and poignant rebukes":

the more severe, because administered with apparent gentleness; the more poignant, because he was addressed as a religious man.¹

Robinson who confessed himself on certain occasions "as proud as a Spaniard" was thought by some "too familiar with servants". Dyer reports "he was influenced as much by compassion, as by considerations of private utility" in the hiring of servants. Thus he frequently received "into his house persons, who could get little employment elsewhere". One of these, "for a considerable time supported in his family" was a poor old woman guileless, but with "scarcely common sense". To her the employer was pastor as well.

Robinson used to hear all her religious tales; and whenever she was in a state of soul-desertion, Robinson was at leisure to drop some gracious gospel-promise into her ear; when she was in a state of religious exaltation, Robinson partook of all her triumphs. - She was deaf.²

¹ Dyer, pp.139f.
² Ibid. pp.137f.
This then was Robinson the man: merciless in his ridicule of the pompous, impatient with dullness, kind and generous to the weak, severe to ungratefulness, but the soul of understanding to the simple. It is not hard to see how Priestley could write to Lindsey that "Mr. Robinson had many persons much attached to him", nor why it was the gathered community meeting in St. Andrew's Parish, Cambridge made such rapid strides under his leadership. With the passage of years, one can hardly agree with Dyer that he was a "great" man, but it must be admitted that this one who believed so strongly in the parable of the Talents did not bury his.
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_____, Miscellaneous Works of Robert Robinson, Late Pastor of the Baptist Church and Congregation of Protestant Dissenters, at Cambridge. 4 vols. Cambridge, 1807. (B. Flower)

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Robinson, Robert: Translations of:


Revolution de Paris (Trans. of three numbers) 1790.

Miscellaneous Articles, etc.

Hymn: "Come, thou fount of ev'ry blessing". 1758.

Preface to Barton's Psalms, part of... 1768.

Hymn: "Mighty God, while angels bless thee". 1774.


A single sheet, addressed to the Corporation of Cambridge, on the General Election. 1774.


"A Discussion of the Question, Is it lawful and right for a man to marry the sister of his deceased wife?" (Appendix to John Alleyne's Legal Decrees of Marriage, Stated and Considered) 1775.

"Memorial to the Two Congregations of Protestant Dissenters, in Cambridge; the Following Memorial is Humbly Presented." 1767.

"The Circular Letter of the Eastern Association, Held at Hemel Hempstead, Herts; May 14th and 15th, MDCCLXXVI."


"Circular Letter" ("The particular baptist church of Christ, at Cambridge, to the churches of the same faith and order in association at Cambridge, May 13 and 14, 1777, wisheth grace and peace.")
Robinson, Robert: Miscellaneous Articles, etc. cont.

"Part of a Life of Baker, with Accounts of Baker's Manuscripts in the Biographia Britannica, published by Dr. Kippis and others." 1778.


"Plan of a Charity School". 1778.

"An Essay on Liberality of Sentiment:" (Published in "Theological Magazine") 1784.

Sermons: (* indicates separately published)

The Nature and Necessity of Early Piety, Jan. 1, 1772.*
On a Becoming Behaviour in Religious Assemblies, Jan. 10, 1773.*
Deliverance From Danger, 1776.

Christianity a System of Humanity, Mar. 3, 1779.*

Christian Submission to Civil Government, Jan. 30, 1780.*


The Destruction of Antichrist, June 6, 1781.

The Kingdom of Christ not of this World, Aug. 28, 1781.*

Love Confirmed by Obedience, Sept. 16, 1781.

Discourse at interment of Mrs. Susanna Birley and Child, Jan. 23, 1782.

The Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, Sept. 11, 1782.*

Discourse When Mr. James Dore Chosen as Pastor, Mar. 25, 1784.*
(Maze-Pond, Southwark)

Ordination of the Rev. G. Birley, Oct. 18, 1786.*

The Christian Religion Easy to be Understood.

Almighty God is the Lovely Father of all Mankind.

We Ought to be Content With Providence.

The Scripture is a Good Book, Written by Divine Inspiration.

Jesus Christ is the Principal Person Mentioned in Scripture.
The Merit of Jesus Christ Distinguishes Him from all Other Persons.

Jesus Christ is the Most Excellent of all Teachers.

The Death of Jesus Christ Obtained the Remission of Sins.

Jesus Christ is the Governour of His Disciples.

The Christian Religion Should not be Confounded with Heathenism.

The Christian Religion Should not be Mixed with that of the Jews.

Christians Should Behave Properly to Such as Give Confused Accounts of Religion.

The Spirit of God Guides all Good Men.

Faith and Holiness are Inseparable.

Incorrigible Sinners will be without Excuse at the Last Day.

Any Person, who Understands Christianity, may Teach it.

Slavery Inconsistent With the Spirit of Christianity, Feb. 10, 1788.* (With Appendix)


Advantages of an Early Religious Education, June 7, 1789.

No Man May Punish Christ's Enemies but Himself.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit.

The Righteousness of the Gospel.

The Corruptions of Christianity Exposed.

The Goodness of God, and its Effects.

The Importance of a Right Reception of the Gospel.

Walking in the Light of Revelation.

Industry.

Caution.

Frugality.

 Covetousness.

Self-Preservation.

The Jews.


, English Social History A Survey of Six Centuries Chaucer to Queen Victoria. London, 1944.


ARTICLES & PAMPHLETS


Debate on Corporation and Test Acts in The Parliamentary History of England From the Earliest Period to the Year 1807. vol. XXVIII. pp. 387-452. (HANSARD)

(The following are from Controversy on the Corporation and Test Acts. 10 vols.)

Berington, Joseph. An Address to the Protestant Dissenters.

Catlow, Samuel. An Address to the Dissenters, on the State of Their Political and Civil Liberty, as Subjects of Great Britain.

Debate on the Repeal of the Test and Corporation Act, in the House of Commons, March 28th, 1787.

Debate...March 2d, 1790.

Fownes, Joseph. An Enquiry into the Principles of Toleration.

Fox, Charles James. Two Speeches, Delivered in the House of Commons, on Tuesday the 2d of March, 1790 by the ... In Support of his Motion for a Repeal of the ...

(Horne, George?). Observations on the Case of the Protestant Dissenters with Reference to the Corporation and Test Acts.

(Lofft, Capel?). The Right of Protestant Dissenters to a Compleat Toleration Asserted; Containing an Historical Account of the Test Laws.

Pitt, William. The Speech of the Right Honourable...In the House of Commons, on Tuesday, the Second of March, 1790, Respecting the Repeal of ...


"A Layman", Cursory Remarks on the Reverend Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

(Anon.). A Look to the Last Century: or, the Dissenters Weighed in Their Own Scales.
Baptist Magazine. 1822, 1831, (DNB.), 1832, 1834.


Christian Reformer. 1844 (DNB.).

Evangelical Magazine. 1803 (DNB.)

Gospel Magazine. 1772 (R.R.)

Monthly Repository. 1806, 1808, 1810, 1812, 1813, 1817, 1818 (DNB.).

Protestant Dissenter's Magazine. 1797, 1799 (DNB.).

Universal Theological Magazine. 1802 (Whitley).

* Source of reference indicated in parenthesis.

Note: I. In listing the works of R.R., I have used the bibliography in W. Robinson which incorporates R.R.'s own listing in his Church Book. This has been augmented by the list and appendices in Dyer, and the material included in Flower's Collection. In addition to these Whitley lists the following in his Bibliography:

Hymns for the fast day (eleven). (Also in R.R.'s listing. See thesis p.80.)

"The atheist invited to believe that there is a God"... by "the ploughman". (R. Robinson) 1765. (British Museum).

The Young Dissenting Minister's Companion and Directory: or, a Variety of Forms and Directions for Administering the Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.... London, 1770. (I have read this and it does not appear to be the work of R.R. of Cambridge. It discusses pedo-baptism favorably, and is not written in R.R.'s style, who became a Baptist in 1759. Like the above, except for the hymns, R.R. makes no mention of it in his listing in the Church Book.)

"The Doctrine of Absolute Submission Discussed, or the Natural Right Claimed by Some Dissenters to Dismiss Their Ministers...Exposed." 1775. (British Museum).

"The Great Sin and Danger of Oppression: Two Sermons Preached During the Late High Prices of Corn, etc...". 1775. (British Museum).

"The disappointed Amalekite". 1777. (Angus Library).

Note: II. In Flower's volume of Posthumous Works are included the following, not listed separately above:

THREE DISSERTATIONS.

II. Some Brief Literary Precautions Necessary in the Study of Theology.

III. On the Doctrine of Predestination; or Moderate Calvinism Considered as the Safe Path Between Two Extremes.

Historical Account of the Protestant Dissenting Churches in Cambridgeshire.