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Backus, Isaac, 1724-1806.

Government and Liberty.

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AAS copy.

GOVERNMENT

A N D

LIBERTY

DESCRIBED;

A N D

Ecclesiastical

TYRANNY

EXPOSED.

BY ISAAC BACKUS,

PASTOR OF A CHURCH IN MIDDLEBOROUGH:

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage;

GAL. V.—i.

MASSACHUSETTS-STATE: BOSTON;

PRINTED BY POWARS AND WILLIS,

And sold by PHILLIP FREEMAN,

IN UNION-STREET.

T O T H E P U B L I C .

AS the affairs of GOVERNMENT and LIBERTY, are the greatest points of controversy, now in the world, it certainly is of great importance, that our ideas be clear and just concerning them. Permit me therefore to offer a few thoughts, upon a familiar metaphor, which the holy Ghost has used to illustrate their true nature. In Amos, v. 24. he says, "Let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." From whence we may observe,

First. That judgment and righteousness are essential to freedom. When we would represent any thing as quite free, we say, it is as free as water. And not only the flow of mercy and grace from God to men, but also its effects in them, in producing obedience unto him, are often compared thereto in the word of truth—John, iv. 14. and vii. 38; Titus, 2. 11, 12. and 3, 5—8. This is most certain, because

Second. Freedom is not acting at random, but by reason and rule. Those who walk after their own lusts, are clouds without water, carried about of winds; or raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; while the true SONS OF LIBERTY are like streams, which run down in a clear and steady channel. David says, *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart. I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts.* Streams and rivers must have steady channels to run in; but they that promise liberty while they despise government, are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest. 11 Pet. 2. 10—19.

Third. Though tyranny and licentiousness often make a great noise, yet government and liberty are much stronger than they are. The former, like raging waves, dash themselves against the rocks, and die upon the shore; or like a tempest, after making sad waste and devastation, their strength is gone, and their force is over. While the latter, like a mighty stream, carry all before them, and never rest till they can get through or over all obstacles, which are put in their way.

Fourth.

Fourth. Streams and rivers are of great use, and cause a constant flow of refreshment and blessings wherever they come; so does the exercise and administration of judgment and righteousness, among all people that enjoy them. Hence,

Fifth. The command of heaven is, *Let them run down*; put no obstruction in their way. No, rather be in earnest to remove every thing that hinders their free course.

Sixth. The context plainly shews, that a main obstruction to these great blessings, among the people then spoken to, was their assuming a power to govern religion, instead of being governed by it. True religion is a voluntary obedience unto God. And the great design of all ordinances and acts of worship towards him, is that thereby we may obtain pardon and cleansing, with direction and assistance to behave as we ought towards our fellow-men. But instead of this, those people added their own inventions to divine institutions, and substituted their acts of devotion towards God, in the place of a righteous practice towards men; or for a cover to their contrary conduct: And they would fain have been thought very religious, although they turned *judgment into wormwood, hated him that rebuked in the gate, and abhorred him that spoke uprightly*. These things were written for our admonition; and all things of that nature, if indulged, will prove as pernicious to us, as they did to the Jews. And since self-interest and self-flattery have an amazing influence to blind men, concerning their own conduct in these affairs, great care ought to be taken to guard against deception therein. And perhaps a close attention to two late publications, from the ruling party in this State, may be very serviceable in that respect.

Eleven years ago, the episcopal clergy appeared very earnest for having Bishops established in America; which caused Dr. Chauncy of Boston, to write an answer the next year, to what Dr. Chandler had published upon that subject. And as Chandler had declared, that all they wanted, was only to have their church compleatly organized, without the least design of injuring others, the best reason that Chauncy could give, why his request ought not to be granted, was this: Says he,

“ We are, in principle, against all civil establishments in religion.—It does not appear to us, that God has entrusted the state with a right to make religious establishments. If the
“ state

“ state in England has this delegated authority, must it not be
 “ owned, that the state in China, in Turkey, in Spain, has this
 “ authority likewise? What should make the difference in the
 “ eye of true reason? Hath the state of England been distin-
 “ guished by heaven by any peculiar grant, beyond the state in
 “ other countries? If it has let the grant be produced. If it has
 “ not, all states have, in common, the same authority in establish-
 “ ments conformable to their own sentiments in religion; what
 “ can the consequence be, but infinite damage to the cause of God
 “ and true religion! And such in fact has been the consequence
 “ of these establishments in all ages, and in all places. Should it
 “ be said, we claim liberty of conscience, and fully enjoy it; and
 “ why would we confine this privilege to our selves? Is it not as
 “ reasonable, episcopalians should both claim and enjoy it? It
 “ is readily allowed; and we are as willing they should possess
 “ and exercise religious liberty in its full extent, as we desire
 “ to do it ourselves. But then, let it be heedfully minded, we
 “ claim *no right* to desire the interposition of the *state to esta-*
 “ *blish* that mode of worship, government, or discipline, we
 “ apprehend is most agreeable to the mind of Christ. We de-
 “ sire no other liberty, than to be left unrestrained in the
 “ exercise of our principles, in so far as we are good members
 “ of society: And we are perfectly willing episcopalians should
 “ enjoy this liberty to the full. If they think Bishops, in their
 “ appropriated sense, were constituted by Christ or his apos-
 “ tles, we object not a word against their having as many of them
 “ as they please, if they will be content to have them with au-
 “ thority *altogether* derived from Christ. But they both claim
 “ and desire a great deal more. They want to be distinguished
 “ by having bishops upon the footing of a *state-establishment*.
 “ The plain truth is, by the *gospel-charter*, all professed chris-
 “ tians are vested with precisely the same rights; nor has one
 “ denomination any more a right to the interposition of the
 “ civil magistrate, in their favour, than another; and where-
 “ ever this difference takes place, it is beside the rule of *scrip-*
 “ *ture*, and I may say also, the genuine dictates of *un corrupted*
 “ *reason*.* From whence we may learn, that *corrupt reason-*
 “ *ings*, have carried Dr. Chauncy’s denomination on in a way
 “ *beside scripture rule*, for these hundred and forty years; for just
 “ so long have their rulers interposed their authority, to support
 “ their

* Chauncy’s answer to Chandler, page 152, 153, 179, 180.

their religious ministers by *assessment* and *distress*, to the unspeakable damage of other denominations, and contrary to the practice of the first planters of the country, for eighteen years. And that *partiality* was wholly an arbitrary usurpation of the ruling party, without the least warrant for it, in either of our charters; yet the majority of the convention last winter, voted to incorporate those ecclesiastical laws with others, into the new constitution of government, which they were framing for us, which, if it had been received by the people, would have established them in another manner than ever they were before.— Upon hearing of which, the agent and committee of our Baptist churches met at Boston, Feb. 21, and drew up a protest, and petition to our next Assembly against it; wherein they shew, that those laws are contrary to christian liberty, exclude Christ from being the only lawgiver and head of his church, are a breach of public faith; as they tax people where they are not represented, and impower the majority to judge for the rest about spiritual guides, which naturally causes *envying and strife*, contrary to the wisdom that is from above, which is *without partiality, and without hypocrisy*. And they close with saying, “ Our earnest prayer is, that your honors may be the happy
 “ instruments of promoting such *impartial peace*, as to fix it as
 “ a fundamental principle of our constitution, that religious
 “ ministers shall be supported only by Christ’s authority, and
 “ not at all by assessment and secular force: which impartial
 “ liberty has long been claimed and enjoyed by the town of
 “ Boston.”

Great numbers, and of various denominations, subscribed this address to our Assembly; † which alarmed a number of ministers; and Mr. Phillips Payson, who preached the Election sermon, at Boston, May 27th, commended the constitution that was framed for us last winter, and says, “ It may justly be considered as a high evidence of the abilities of its compilers, and if it should not be complied with, it is very probable we never shall obtain a better.” And he said to the Assembly,

“ The importance of religion to civil society and government, is great indeed, as it keeps alive the best sense of moral obligation, a matter of such extensive utility, especially in respect to
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† Which would have been presented, if the constitution had been received.

an oath, which is one of the principal instruments of government. The fear and reverence of God, and the terrors of eternity, are the most powerful restraints upon the minds of men. And hence it is of special importance in a free government, the spirit of which being always friendly to the sacred rights of conscience, it will hold up the gospel as the great rule of faith and practice. Established modes and usages in religion; more especially the stated public worship of God, so generally form the principles and manners of a people, that changes, or alterations in these, especially, when nearly conformed to the spirit and simplicity of the gospel, may well be esteemed very dangerous experiments in government. For this and other reasons, the thoughtful and wise among us, trust that our civil fathers, from a regard to gospel worship, and the constitution of these churches, will carefully preserve them; and at all times, guard against every innovation, that might tend to overfet the public worship of God, though such innovations may be urged from the most foaming zeal. Persons of a gloomy, ghostly and mystic cast, absorbed in visionary scenes, deserve but little notice in matters, either of religion or government. Let the restraints of religion, once be broken down, as they infallibly would be, by leaving the subject of public worship to the humors of the multitude; and we might well defy all human wisdom and power, to support and preserve order and government in the State.”*

Perhaps many may think, that the two authors I have quoted upon religious establishments, are of opposite sentiments, if not of different denominations, in religion.— Could this thought be supported by evidence, it would readily be admitted; rather than to suppose them guilty, of such self-contradiction, as they most certainly are. For facts abundantly shew, that Dr. Chauncy has exerted himself, from time to time, to defend the establishment we complain of, much more than Mr. Payson has done. And to defend it against the bishops, the first of these gentleman says, “It does not appear, to us, that God has entrusted the state with a right to make religious establishments.” The other warns our civil rulers, against suffering any changes in their “established modes and usages in religion.” The first declares, that such establishments

religion, in all ages, and in all places. The other says, "The thoughtful and wise among us, trust that our *civil fathers*, from a regard to gospel worship, and the *constitution of these churches*, will carefully *preserve them*; and at all times, guard against every innovation, that might tend to *overset* the public worship of God."

The Jews at Thessalonica, when moved with envy, cried to their rulers, *These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also.* But for a professed minister of Christ, to alarm our civil rulers of danger, that the *worship of God* would be *overset*, if *they* did not carefully *preserve these churches*, is much more surprizing! He says, "Persons of a gloomy, ghostly and mystic cast, absorbed in visionary scenes, deserve but little notice in matters, either of religion or government." And indeed I think so too; and to whom can these epithets belong so properly, as to those, who think that the church of Christ, and the worship of God, would be overset, if secular force was not used to support them? Are such churches built upon the **ROCK**, or upon the *sand*?

This gentleman says, "The language of just complaint, the voice of real grievance, in most cases, may easily be distinguished from the meer clamor of *selfish, turbulent and disappointed* men. The ear of a righteous government will always be open to the former; its hand, with wisdom and prudence will suppress the latter." *——— This is an important truth. And since he warns our rulers against innovations, I think it my duty, plainly to mention some of them, which his party have been guilty of in our land. The learned tell us, that to innovate, is "to introduce, or practise new customs, opinions, or laws, after a sly, clandestine manner. And let the public judge, whether his party have not done so, in the following instances; although they have doubtless had many pious men among them.

The Massachusetts company came over to New-England, ten years after Plymouth people had begun the settlement thereof. † The charter, which constituted them a civil government, expressly limited them, not to make any laws contrary to the laws of England; and all the freemen, who were

* P. 22.

admitted

† My history, page xlv, lxii, lxiii,

admitted to vote for their rulers, took an oath of allegiance to the government, wherein they solemnly engaged to submit to, "all such laws, orders, sentences and decrees, as should be *lawfully* made and published by them." * But when they set out to frame and enforce a new religious establishment, very contrary to that of England, they found that their oath stood in the way of it; therefore they passed an act, four years after they came to Boston, to absolve themselves, and all the freemen, from their oath to keep acts *lawfully* made, and framed another, of submission to all such laws as they called *wholesome*. Was not this an innovation of the worst kind?

The following year the court sent out to all their ministers and brethren, for advice and assistance, about *one uniform order* of discipline in their churches; † and at the same time passed an act, to compel every male within their jurisdiction, of fifteen years old and above, to take this new invented oath, or be punished at their discretion.

Mr. Roger Williams was then minister of Salem; and because he publicly warned his flock against taking that oath, he was soon convented before the rulers at Boston: ‡ But he boldly stood his ground, against them and their ministers too. The next time their assembly met, they took away a valuable tract of land from his church, till they should give the court satisfaction upon these matters. For this, Mr. Williams and his church, wrote letters of reproof to the churches where those rulers belonged; but instead of repenting of this iniquity, they banished him out of their colony. § Whereupon he went and founded the first civil government, that ever established equal religious liberty, since the rise of Antichrist. And soon after gathered the first Baptist church in America. He also did the most to prevent the ruin of all these colonies by the Indians, of any one man in the country. Thus he overcame evil with good; while the advocates for the use of secular force in religion, have requited him, and his friends, evil for good ever since.

And they were so far from promoting peace among themselves by these means, || that in less than a year after his banishment,

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the

* Page 61, 518. † Page 62, 66. ‡ Page 57, 66, 70, 338, 452, 500, 536.
§ Page 71, 76, 88, 95, 105, 134, 147, 151, 154, 173, 189, 193, 257, 300, 337, 340, 349, 458, 508, 510. || Page 79, 82.

the two ministers of Boston, and the two chief rulers of the colony, who belonged to that church, got to open clashings in their meeting-house, on the Lord s-day, and the flame spread through the land.* This moved them to call a general synod upon it. And because a new house of representatives refused to join in punishing such as the synod had condemned, it was immediately dissolved, and another house called; and then several were banished, and seventy-six men were disarmed, of whom fifty-eight were of Boston.† The year after they made their first law to support ministers by assessment and distress; which was followed with finings, imprisonings, whippings and hangings; and with the exertion of all their art and power, for forty years after, in various attempts to divide and conquer Rhode-Island colony. And all the disorders, which these and other means could produce therein, have been used ever since, as a most prevailing argument for an established religion by human laws.

And those violations of the rights of conscience, furnished the British court with the most plausible plea they ever had, for taking away our first charter; and in the second, for depriving us of the inestimable privilege of choosing our chief rulers;‡ which was evidently the root of all the gall and wormwood, blood and slaughter, which we now deplore. For the crown being vested with an arbitrary power of appointing our chief officers, the arbitrary requirement of our property to support them, was the natural consequence. And it is well known that contests about that matter kindled this bloody war. So that the scheme of religious establishments by human laws, is stained with the guilt of all this blood.

In my late history of New-England, a great number of proofs are produced to the above facts, and our opponents are welcome to discover any mistakes therein, if they can. And I shall now close, with earnestly requesting the attention of my dear countrymen to two points.

1. Consider what our civil liberties will be, if these men can have their wills. I need not inform you that all America are in arms against being taxed where they are not represented:

But

* Page 37, 93, 101, 116, 113, 310, 319, 387, 399, 501, 524, 536. † Appendix, page 7—15. ‡ Page 399, 404, 457, 481, 486, 491, 517, 520, 539.—
§ Appendix, page 4, 14.

But it is not more certain, that we are not represented in the British parliament, than it is, that our *civil* rulers are not our representatives in *religious* affairs: Yet ministers have long prevailed with them, to impose religious taxes, intirely out of their jurisdiction. And they have now been desired to preserve order in the state, if they should drop that practice. "That magistrates should thus suffer these incendiaries, and disturbers of the public peace, might justly be wondered at (says the great Mr. Locke) if it did not appear, that they have been invited by them unto a participation of the spoil, and have therefore thought fit to make use of their covetousness and pride, as a means whereby to increase their own power."*

2. How can liberty of conscience be rightly enjoyed, till this iniquity is removed? The word of truth says. *why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.* But Mr. Payson says, "Let the restraints of religion once be broken down, as they INFALLIBLY would be, by leaving the subject of public worship to the humours of the multitude, and we might well defy all human wisdom and power to support and preserve order in the state." He tells of humours, but it is well known that no men are influenced more by distempered humours, than those who are fond of arbitrary power. And if he had not been deeply absorbed thereby in visionary scenes, how could he possibly have delivered this sentence as he did, directly in the face of glaring facts which then surrounded him, as well as against divine truth! By an express law of this government, the *multitude* of people in Boston, have been *left* intirely free, these eighty-five years, to choose what worship they would attend upon, and not to be compelled to pay a farthing to support any that they did not chuse: And there are proofs enough to shew, that this liberty has greatly contributed to the welfare and not the injury of the town. And his great swelling word, INFALLIBLY, is as contrary to the holy scriptures, as it is to experienced facts. That word says, *in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.* *If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing, if we shall reap your carnal things? The Lord hath ordained, that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel.* *Let him that is taught in the word, communicate unto him that teacheth*

in all good things. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. And Christ solemnly forbids the giving of any countenance or support to teachers who bring not HIS DOCTRINE; of which each rational soul has an equal right to judge for himself.—Mat. xv.—Rom. xiv. 4. 5.—1 Cor. ix. 1. 14 and x. 15. 29.—Gal. i. 8. 9. and vi. 6. 7.—2 John, x. 11. But the *commandments of men* among us, while they have allowed this liberty to Boston, have expressly denied the same to the country; where they have ordained, that they who preach the gospel, shall live of human laws; which laws are so opposite to these laws of Christ, that they empower the majority in each town or parish to judge for the rest; even so, that if the minority were ever so *fully persuaded*, that the parish minister *perverted the gospel*, instead of teaching it truly, yet the majority might seize the goods, or imprison the persons, of the minority, to support that blind guide! And the chief judge of each of our county courts have been required, from year to year, to charge the grand jury upon their oaths, to prosecute every parish in the county, that did not settle such a minister as the court called orthodox. Though, at the same time, if any church, together with the town or parish, was ever so unanimous in the choice of a gospel minister, yet there is an express law of this government that excludes him from being settled in their constitution, until he has an academical degree, or an approbation from the majority of the settled ministers in that county.

And this constitution has been so far from promoting our public welfare, that if the whole town of Chelsea, where Mr. Payson lives, was publicly sold for the most it would fetch, it would go but a little way towards paying the costs this government have been put to, only for the sitting of their legislature to form religious societies, and to hear and act upon quarrels and disputes of that nature, which they have no right to meddle with. And how can justice and righteousness ever have their free course among us, while men thus assume power to govern religion, instead of being governed by it?

I am as sensible of the importance of religion, and of the utility of it to human society, as Mr. Payson is. And I concur with him, that the fear and reverence of God, and the terrors of eternity, are the most powerful restraints upon the minds of men. But I am so far from thinking, with him, that these restraints would be broken down, if equal religious liberty

was

was established, that I am very certain we should heretofore have suffered much more than we have done, if the restraints of religion had not often constrained his party to act contrary to their ecclesiastical laws, or to suspend the execution of them. They often declare, that they allow us liberty of conscience, and also complain of injury, if we recite former and latter acts of their party to prove the contrary. Just so has Dr. Chandler done with regard to bishops; and he declares they had now no design of taxing America to them; yet he says, "Should a general tax be laid upon the country, and thereby a sum be raised sufficient for the purpose, I believe such a tax would not amount to more than four pence in one hundred pounds; and this would be no mighty hardship upon the country. He that could think much of giving the six thousandth part of his income to any use which the legislature of his country should assign, deserves not to be considered in the light of a good subject, or member of society."* Put in answer hereto, Dr. Chauncey says "If the country might be taxed four pence in one hundred pounds, it might for the same reason, and with as much justice, if it was thought the support of bishops called for it, be taxed four shillings, or four pounds, and so on." All but tories will allow this to be good reasoning; and why is it not as good in a baptist as in a presbyterian? He goes back 150 years, and tells of the EPISCOPAL YOKK OF BONDAGE, which our forefathers came into this wilderness to avoid, and says, "Shall it be declared in the face of the world, that this would be *no hardship* to their posterity, and that they would be neither good subjects, nor good members of society, if they *thought much* of supporting that POWER which has been, and may again be TERRIBLY OPPRESSIVE!"† True, Doctor: There lies the difficulty. It is not the PENCE, but the POWER, that alarms us. And since the legislature of this State passed an act, no longer ago than last September, to continue a tax of FOUR PENCE a year, upon the baptists in every parish where they live, as an acknowledgement of the POWER that they have long assumed over us in religious affairs, which we know has often been TERRIBLY OPPRESSIVE, how can we be blamed for refusing to pay that acknowledgement; especially when it is considered, that it is evident to us, that God never allowed any civil State upon earth, to impose religious

* Chandler's appeal, p. 107, 108.

† Chauncey's answer, p. 193, 194.

gious taxes ; but that he declared his vengeance against those in Israel, who presumed to use *force* in such affairs.—1 Sam. ii. 16. 34 —Micah. iii. 5. 12.

Rulers, ministers and people, ought to improve all their influence, in their several stations, to promote and support true religion by gospel means and methods ; but as the *teaching the fear of God by the precepts of men*, brought confusion and ruin upon the Jewish nation—Isaiah. xxix. 13. 21 — it surely is of infinite importance, that every lover of our dear country, be in earnest to have it saved from such iniquity, and from such ruin.

IS A A C B A C K U S.

Middleborough, August 28, 1778.

At the annual meeting of the baptist churches, called The Warren Association, at Leicester, September 8, 1778, the foregoing observations and remarks, drawn up by our beloved agent, were distinctly read and considered ; and the elders and brethren present, unanimously desired him to publish the same, with all convenient speed ; especially for the reasons following, viz. As we knew that our former sufferings would have been greater than they were, if it had not been for restraints from Britain, when we saw that the Congress was like to have the highest place of civil power over us, we sent our agent to Philadelphia, to endeavour to procure some influence from thence in our favour. And being favoured with a meeting of the baptist Philadelphia association, they chose a large committee to assist us ; and a conference was requested and obtained, in the evening of October 14, 1774, with the honored delegates to Congress from this State, before a number of gentlemen ; to whom it was declared, that if the country might but have the liberty which Boston has long enjoyed, we asked no more. And some days after, said committee obtained a promise from said delegates, that they would use their influence to have the liberty enjoyed by Boston, diffused through our whole State. Yet we have since been accused repeatedly of acting the part of enemies to our country, only for being in earnest to have that liberty established. And we now solemnly declare for ourselves, and believe we safely may for the whole 120 baptist churches in New-England, that we want nothing more in this respect, than to have what the before-named Dr. Chauncey says is their principle, concerning religious liberty, established.

established in fact, and reduced to practice. We therefore freely refer it to the impartial public, whether our insisting upon this point, be the clamor of selfish, turbulent and disappointed men, who ought to be suppressed? or whether that character does not belong to the opposers thereof?

Signed, by order of the Association,

By

JOB SEAMANS, Moderator,
ELIJAH CODDING, Clerk.

MANY talk so plausible about religious liberty, that our good friends, who have not had sensible experience, of a contrary practice, can hardly believe, that a religious establishment by human laws, is so evil and dangerous as it really is. This makes a recital of a few plain facts, highly proper at this time, in order to prevent such evils for the future.

Many of the baptists in this State, have long been convinced, that a giving in the annual certificates required by the ruling party, as the condition of our exemption from taxes to their ministers, contains an implicit acknowledgement of a power assumed by man, which in reality belongs only to God. And in our appeal to the public, printed in Boston five years ago, we have given the particular reasons, why we cannot in conscience perform that condition. Yet, only because we have refused to wrong our consciences in that respect, our people, in various places, have been taxed from year to year to poe do-baptist ministers. And I am credibly informed, that the towns of Lancaster and Ashby have voted this year, that distress shall be made for such taxes, upon the baptists therein, who refuse a compliance with that condition. And another town has violated religious and civil rights to a much more surprising degree.

Pepperell, in the county of Middlesex, has had a name for religion and regularity, and for an uncommon zeal in the defence of our country, against foreign invaders. But their attachment to their ecclesiastical establishment, by human laws, has betrayed them into the following extravagances, viz. Because Mr. Daniel Davis, who had some acquaintance with the baptists before he removed into that town, requested Mr. Samuel Fletcher, of Chelmsford, to come and preach at his house, and he, by a letter, had appointed a meeting there on
March

March 19, 1778, his letter was broke open as it came into Pepperell, after a town-meeting, and Mr. Nehemiah Hubbard, their town-clerk, and one of their selectmen, was for calling a vote whether he should preach there or not. And as some asked who this preacher was, Mr. Hubbard said, he is old Timothy Fletcher's son; the fox-hunter's son, &c. Such behaviour caused Dr. Ephraim Lawrence to remind them of what was once said about *the carpenter's son*; and so prevented a vote upon it; and Mr. Fletcher came and preached according to appointment. And, at Dr. Lawrence's request, he came again and preached at his house, on March 27th. But in the time of worship, the house was assaulted, by many inhabitants of the town, some of whom were their leading men; and one Temple, a traveller, was sent in to break up the meeting, who spake out repeatedly for that purpose, till he was turned out of the house; and then they went to an adjacent tavern, from whence a scurrilous letter was wrote to the preacher, which, by advice, he burnt. Soon after another was sent, directed thus: "To Samuel Fletcher, now in Pepperell." Wherein they say, "We should be glad that you will not come into town ever again upon such an errand; and you may rely upon your being treated with opposition and scorn. Don't, upon your peril, come into town again on such an errand, as it will certainly be opposed, as ever such doctrine is delivered again in Pepperell, as we are united, and desire no baptists in town. This for your interest. *March 27, 1778.*

"It is acquiesced in by all friends to freedom and unitedness."

This I copied from the original letter. Other threatenings were given out for the same purpose; though Mr. Fletcher was not deterred thereby from preaching again in that town in May. And on June 25, Mr. Isaiah Parker, pastor of the baptist church in Harvard, came with him and preached there. The next morning they met again, when the aforesaid Mr. Davis, Mr. Simeon Shattuck, and his wife, and three single young persons, gave a satisfying account of God's dealings with their souls, in order for baptism. In the afternoon they met by a river-side, for preaching and the administration of that ordinance, upon lands that three of them were heirs to, which at present is improved by their mother, Mrs. Lydia Wright. After prayer and singing, Mr. Fletcher read a text and began his

his sermon, just as Lieut. Col. Henry Woods, Capt. Nathaniel Laken, Cornet Simon Gilson, Lieut. Jonas Varnum, Captain Jeremiah Shattuck, the before-named Mr. Hubbard, and a great number of their followers, came up; some of whom were armed with clubs and poles, and forbid our friends either to preach or baptize, any where within the limits of Pepperell. — Upon this breach of the peace, Mrs. Whright spake to those disturbers, and ordered them to depart from off her lands; but they refused to go. Mr. Parker desired, that they would act like men, if they would not like Christians: and reminded them, of the liberty of conscience, which the Protestants, and even the King of Britain allowed; and mentioned sundry scriptures to prove the divine warrant for such liberty: But Cornet Gilson said, Don't quote scripture here! These men had newly approved of the constitution of government, which was framed for us last winter, which, Mr. Parker told them, they had now broken. All this could not silence their clamour; but in open contempt of our religious sentiments, some of them took a dog into the river and plunged him. And further to inrage the populace, the odious name Tory, was cast upon Mr. Davis; and when he attempted to answer to that slander, Capt. Lakin, (a church member, and one of their committee of safety) said, Hold your tongue, or I will beat your teeth down your throat!

Hereupon Dr. Lawrence invited our injured friends to his house; and in an inclosure by his door, Mr. Fletcher finished his sermon, though not without much noise and disturbance from the opposite party. And while Mr. Parker was at prayer, after sermon, John Green, junior, and Joshua Blood, who stood near him, made open disturbance; though Mr. Parker says, that from a sense of their safety under the divine protection, he blessed God, that there were none to make them afraid; upon which (as others testify) one of them said aloud in prayer time, That is a d—d lie! After which, some of those officers, with a bowle of liquor, hired Abraham Boynton, and Jeremiah Lawrence, to go into a river that was near, where Boynton dipped Lawrence, and then asked him if he believed? And upon saying he did not, he plunged him again, if not a third time. And as if all this was not enough, two dogs were carried into the water, in the presence of the aforementioned leaders of the town,

and as they were put under water, Mr. Hubbard said aloud, There is one dipt ! There is another, &c. with laughter and insult among the multitude

But lest all this should not deter our friends from their purpose Col. Woods, Capt. Lakin, and Mr. Hubbard, came into Dr. Lawrence's house ; and when Mr. Parker asked them, whether they would protect the Baptists in obeying Christ, in Baptism ? Or whether they would act at the head of their molesters ? They refused a direct answer ; but, calling for Mr. Fletcher out of another room, they informed these ministers, that they appeared there in behalf of the majority of the town of Peppereli, who were against having any Baptist preaching or baptizing therein ; and therefore they advised said ministers, immediately to depart out of the town, for their own safety.— Do you mean, said Mr. Parker, that our lives will be in danger if we do not thus depart ? This question they would not answer, though Mr. Parker told them he should take that to be their meaning, if they did not explain it otherwise. After other discourse, Mr. Parker addressed them in this manner, viz. I appeal to your consciences, in the presence of God, before whom we must all appear hereafter, whether you have come up against us in the spirit of Christ and his disciples, or in the temper of the persecuting Jews against them ! To this they made no answer ; but soon left the house. Whereupon our friends privately agreed to disperse, and, by different ways to draw together to a distant place of water ; which was effected in such manner, that those six persons were decently baptized, notwithstanding the arrival of some mockers before it was over ; And as they were returning to our friend Shattuck's house, they were met by Col. Woods and his followers, who shook their whips over them, and struck some of the company. And after their entrance into our said friend's house, many surrounded it, declaring they would have those Baptist preachers out of town that night. Yet, as they prayed and sang praises to God, the mob dispersed, and they rested there quietly ; and returned home safely the next day, according to their purpose.

A narrative of these transactions was laid before our association at Leicester, on the 9th instant ; and upon consideration thereof, it was judged to be expedient that I should visit those
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injured friends, and collect as exact an account as I could of the true state of the most material of those facts, and to lay the same before the public. For though far less glaring breaches of the peace in such respects, have heretofore been punished by authority, in the southern parts of this State; yet we had no certainty that these would meet with like treatment. For there were not only a principal part of Pepperell concerned therein, but Col. Woods was one of our law-givers last year, and many others of them are greatly afraid of losing their legislative power over us in religious affairs; which, according to their own principles, depends intirely upon their continuing to be the majority of this State. The author of their election sermon two years ago, says, "The law of self-preservation will always justify opposing a cruel and tyrannical imposition—~~except~~ where opposition is attended with greater evils than submission; which is frequently the case, where a few are oppressed by a large and powerful majority. This (says he) shews the reason, why the primitive christians did not oppose the cruel persecutions; that were inflicted upon them by the heathen magistrates. They were few, compared with the heathen world; and for them to have attempted to resist their enemies by force, it would, without a miracle, have brought upon them inevitable ruin and destruction." † According to which opinion, Christ would have ordered the use of force in the first erecting of his church in the world, if he had not been so unhappy, as to begin the work at a time, when the heathen idols had a more powerful party than he had. But since the Baptists worship a Saviour, who always has had the most powerful party; and since he has taught them that the reason why he forbid the use of force in religion, is because his kingdom is *not of this world*; they expect, according to his word, to overcome all their accusers, by the *blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony*; and think it their duty to attend upon the use of those means for that end. Indeed we apprehend that we have the same right to have our persons and properties protected by authority, as our neighbour have; but party influence has denied it to us, in many instances. Three Baptists in Chelmsford, were imprisoned above five years ago, for ministerial taxes; and after spending the value of above an hundred silver dollars, the Court

at

† WAsR's Election sermon, at Boston, May 29th, 1776. P. xix.

at Charlestown, gave judgment in their favour ; yet the assessors who taxed them contrary to law, soon had all their expenses paid by their town ; while the Baptists have had neither expenses nor damages paid them to this time, as they assured me this week. Who then can blame us, for appealing to the impartial public, against such oppressions ?

I have been to Pepperel, where I preached twice, and baptized two persons, without molestation. And from the best light I could gain, from many witnesses, the above state of facts is not exaggerated in any one circumstance ; which is published to prevent the like for the future.

I S A A C B A C K U S.

B O S T O N, *September 19, 1778.*