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Beccles, Suffolk, by S. Wilton Rix**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRIEF RECORDS OF THE INDEPENDENT
CHURCH AT BECCLES, SUFFOLK ***

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**BRIEF RECORDS
OF THE
INDEPENDENT CHURCH,
AT
BECCLES, SUFFOLK;**

INCLUDING BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES OF ITS MINISTERS, AND
SOME ACCOUNT OF THE RISE OF NONCONFORMITY
IN THE EAST ANGLIAN COUNTIES.

BY
SAMUEL WILTON RIX.

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“The churches in those early times were entirely Independent; none of them subject to any foreign jurisdiction, but each one governed by its own rulers and its own laws.”

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MOSHEIM, Cent. I.

“Indeed this way of examining all things by the Word . . . is a course I would admonish all to beware of who would avoid the danger of being made Independents.”

OWEN ON SCHISM.

WILLIAM LENNY, PRINTER, BECCLES.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES
ARE INSCRIBED
TO THE YOUNG PERSONS
OF THE INDEPENDENT CHURCH AND CONGREGATION
AT BECCLES.

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PREFACE.

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MANY months ago, I was favoured with a perusal of the earliest records of the Independent church at Beccles. An interest in the subject once excited, I went on to collect such other materials for its history as fell in my way: and the re-opening of its place of worship, after considerable alteration, appeared a suitable time for offering these records to notice, in a permanent and connected form.

Publications of dissenting church history have not usually received extensive encouragement. That circumstance is, I believe, chiefly attributable to the anxiety of dissenting ministers and parents, in general, to inculcate and maintain the principles of personal religion, rather than the peculiarities of nonconformity. A just preference, unquestionably,—but which has betrayed many into a neglect of topics immensely, though not supremely, important. The youth of dissenting families too frequently grow up in ignorance of any other reason for their nonconformity than parental example. The natural result is, that “by and by, when persecution ariseth,” or when fashion, or emolument, or the attractive pomp of the national worship, allures, they forsake the ground which their ancestors maintained at the peril of liberty, and of life itself.

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Viewed in this light, the prevalent disregard of such subjects becomes a powerful inducement to invite attention to them. Nor am I altogether without hope that local associations and attachments, may, in the present instance, be subservient to such a purpose. At all events, I am desirous that my humble compilation should not be regarded as a *mere* depository of what is curious; but should tend to encourage a thoughtful and candid investigation of the history and principles of nonconformity, as they are developed in works of wider interest and higher literary pretensions. ^[vi]

Hence I have been induced to sketch at some length, though, I am aware, very imperfectly, the rise of nonconformity in the East Anglian counties,—a topic which deserves to be separately discussed, with the aids of extensive knowledge and ample leisure.

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The value of such a book as this greatly depends upon its accuracy and fidelity. At the same time it must be recollected, that general inferences cannot be deduced from isolated facts. The cause of nonconformity, if it be the cause of truth, will not ultimately suffer from the most candid development of its local history.

I do not know that what I have written can justly give offence to an individual of any communion. There is high ecclesiastical authority ^[vii] for the sentiment, that “whatever moderation or charity we may owe to men’s persons, we owe none at all to their errors, or to that frame which is built on and supported by them.”

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I must not omit to acknowledge the assistance I have received from several ministers and other friends; especially the Rev. Edward Hickman, of Denton, to whom I am indebted for material aid in compiling the account of his intimate and lamented friend, Mr. Sloper.

My express thanks are also due to the Rev. Dr. Owen, Rector of Beccles, for the readiness and courtesy with which he allowed me to inspect the early parochial registers in his possession.

S. W. R.

CHAPTER I.

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Antiquity of dissent from state religions—Leading principles of modern nonconformity: authority of Christ; sufficiency of the Scriptures; duty of examining and privilege of interpreting their contents—Right of private judgment claimed by its enemies—Position and duty of those by whom it is conceded—Illustrations from English ecclesiastical history—This right asserted by the first converts to Christianity; by the reformers—Henry VIII.—Edward VI.—Mary; seeks support from Suffolk protestants; promises toleration; practices persecution—East Anglian counties abound with protestants; they petition the queen; are rebuked; and remonstrate with her commissioners in vain.

It has been remarked by Lord Bacon, that “those times are ancient when the world is ancient, and not those we vulgarly account so, by counting backwards: so that the present time is the real antiquity.” Modern institutions are not hastily to be rejected as impertinent or crude; for they are frequently found to exhibit the successful result of a protracted struggle between truth and error, or to embody the accumulated wisdom of many generations. But if it be contended that, in speculations relating to religion, “*quod verum, id antiquissimum*,” that antiquity is the test of truth; they who claim to be free from all human authority in religious affairs, need not shrink from the application of such a principle. The origin of dissent from “the commandments of men,” on such subjects, must be sought at a period far more remote than the rise of Independent Churches in England. Under the Old Testament dispensation, nonconformity, thus understood, was nobly exemplified and divinely sanctioned in the instances of Daniel, and the three Hebrew youths. During the apostolic times its course was distinctly marked. It has since mingled with the impurities, and has sometimes been almost lost amid the intellectual and moral stagnation, of passing ages. At length opposing elements again brought it more conspicuously into notice: obstruction augmented the rapidity of its current; and it will flow on until it shall be lost in the ocean of piety and freedom, which is destined to cover the whole earth.

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The leading principle of nonconformity, as the term is now generally employed, to signify a continued separation from the national church of England, is, the *sole* authority of Jesus Christ as the head and lawgiver of his people. This exclusive right he is alleged to have claimed, when he cautioned his disciples against the assumption of ecclesiastical power, emphatically reminding them that *One* was their master, “even Christ.”^[3] A sentiment, which, from the peculiar form of its announcement, he appears to have intended that they should adopt as a principle and quote as an axiom of his government. All that *he* taught them, they were bound to obey; all that *he* enjoined, they were to practise; and he discharged them, by that brief and memorable sentence, from all spiritual allegiance to each other, and to their fellow-men, however exalted or wise. Reason, persuasion, the evidence of the sacred writings, “the effectual fervent prayer,” and the eloquence of a holy life, these were the weapons he put into their hands, the only weapons adapted to the genius of his religion and to the nature of man.^[4]

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From this view of Christ’s authority is derived another principle scarcely less momentous,—the absolute sufficiency of the sacred Scriptures, “the word of Christ,” to prescribe the faith and regulate the practice of his followers. A revelation inadequate to these purposes, it is generally admitted, would be at once derogatory to God, and a cruel mockery of erring man. Nor can the perplexity arising out of contending human powers, and conflicting articles of faith and rules of practice, be avoided, but by submitting all to one criterion,—“to the law and to the testimony,”—and by the consideration that “if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”^[5]

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The Bible, possessing such claims, addresses itself to every rational creature with an individuality which none can evade, and fixes upon each a responsibility which cannot be delegated. Hence there appears (at least in the apprehension of a nonconformist) to devolve upon every one to whom the page of revelation is accessible, the sacred and inalienable right, or rather the imperious and solemn duty, of personally examining its contents and submitting to its precepts. Since its Author has commissioned none to dictate its interpretation, he has, in effect, granted to all a perfect freedom of inquiry and discussion. Nor is it less a duty than a privilege, to aid, as circumstances may allow, in elucidating its doctrines and requirements, and in promoting the practice and the promulgation of such views of religion and forms of worship as an enlightened conscience may approve. This right alone, it is urged, could justify “Peter and the other apostles” when they openly disobeyed the command of the high priest; and, without claiming any special exemption in their own case, laid down as the ground of their conduct, the general principle “we ought to obey God rather than men.”^[7a] They deduced their duty from their convictions; and while their enemies “took counsel to slay them,” they firmly resisted the interference of human authority between their own consciences and that God who “seeketh such to worship Him” as “worship Him in spirit and in truth.”^[7b] Unhappily there has not always been found, among persecutors, a Gamaliel to point out the propriety and the result of allowing the free publication of religious opinions. “Refrain,” said he, in terms, a due regard to which would have saved mankind from an inconceivable amount of suffering; “refrain from these men, and let them alone:

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for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”^[7c]

Nonconformity, then, dates its existence from the time when the secular power first infringed upon the liberty wherewith Christ had made his disciples free. It professes to be jealous of *his* authority, and to adhere to *his* laws and institutions. Though ever so palatable or ever so bitter a draught be presented from another source, it still dares to draw from the well-spring of truth the waters of everlasting life which he came to dispense. Whatever, in modes of faith or forms of worship, may be enjoined by civil or ecclesiastical powers, it prefers “to keep close to the college of fishermen, and to the doctrine of inspired apostles; to a Scriptural creed and a spiritual worship.”^[8] It claims, in a word, to be the only *true* conformity. p. 8

The right of private judgment in religious matters, which follows immediately from the first principles of dissent, has been too generally denied by the rulers of this world to their subjects. Nevertheless, its enemies have frequently been constrained to bear a *practical* testimony in its favour. Under varying circumstances in our own history, for instance, this indestructible privilege has been assumed, alternately, by the christian convert from paganism, by the protestant, and the papist, again by the reformer, again by the Roman catholic, and, still more recently, by the puritan, and the dissenter from protestant establishments. This is the moving power which has caused, and the unfailing clew which has run through, all these changes, and will only find its termination in the perfect concord and liberty of the universal church. p. 9

To the truly liberal and candid, it must be a subject of profound regret, that, for so many ages, no party duly appreciated, or heartily countenanced, the liberty which each, in turn, asserted. But in proportion to the sorrow which such a view of ecclesiastical history occasions, will be the joy, if a gradual though tardy approach to the full recognition of the rights of conscience can be perceived; and especially if it be discovered, that there has long existed a numerous and intelligent portion of the christian world, among whom those rights have not only been claimed, but generally conceded; not merely assumed to serve a purpose, but watched and advocated as the invaluable and inalienable birthright of man. And although it will be admitted as a sad evidence of human frailty, if intolerance be found lurking even among the class of persons just referred to, yet, as a body, they ought never, on that account, to be ranked with those whose principles would lead them to enthrall the conscience within creeds and formularies of man’s devising. The characteristic views of congregational dissenters, containing the very elements of freedom, rise up to condemn, with double energy, the least departure from its laws in *them*. They, assuredly, should be the last to lord it over the consciences of their fellow-men, who, themselves, acknowledge in religious affairs, no lawgiver but Christ, and no directory but the Bible.^[10] p. 10

A glance at some of the great religious alternations which have occurred in England, will serve to illustrate the preceding remarks, and, at the same time, furnish occasion to trace, imperfectly, the origin and operation of dissenting principles in the locality to which the following pages are especially devoted. Perhaps it may be found that institutions which, even by the candid and charitable, are sometimes supposed to have their foundation in a morbid disaffection towards secular rulers, or at best, in a too prurient scrupulousness, and to lead to anarchy and infidelity, are based on nobler principles and tend to happier results. p. 11

In various parts of the Roman empire, multitudes were converted by the instrumentality of the apostles and their successors, and many died in testimony of their sincerity, and in defence of the right to deviate from human authorities in their religious creed. All the sanctions of Christianity were addressed to the reason, the affections, the hopes, and the fears, of the individual. Appealing from human tribunals to the commission she had received from the King of kings, she challenged the soul as the province of her undisputed sway; and the sincere convert to Jesus Christ felt that he dared not, and could not, had he dared, resign his faith at the bidding of any mortal. p. 13

When Christianity was adopted as the religion of the empire, and the clergy became wealthy and ambitious, the bishops of Rome assumed a superiority over their brethren, and announced themselves as possessing infallible authority in matters of faith. A claim, which, in the darkness of the middle ages, met with too ready a compliance, and has strikingly exemplified the fearful consequences of departing from the plain rules of the New Testament.

During the long reign of popery in England the general perusal of the Scriptures was prohibited; the services of the sanctuary were enveloped in a foreign language; a contribution towards the aggrandizement of the papal see furnished the customary atonement for the worst crimes; and the extermination of heretics was esteemed the brightest of virtues. p. 14

At length Wycliffe appeared;—he urged upon all the study of the Scriptures as a book “full of authority.”^[14]—Luther afterwards announced himself a dissenter from the established faith. The reformation was begun in Germany; and the writings of the reformer were disseminated at home.

Henry the Eighth, on his accession, vainly thought to arrest the growth of “heresy” by a rigorous execution of penal statutes against the Lollards or Wycliffites, while he unconsciously surrendered the principle of infallibility, on which alone the attempt could be justified, by entering the arena of controversy with Luther. The pope declared that the royal pen had been guided by inspiration, and rewarded Henry’s zeal with the title “Defender of the Faith.” So illustrious a controversy naturally attracted notice; and some were even presuming to compare the merits of the combatants, when the prince himself shook off the dominion of the Roman p. 15

pontiff. But the privilege which, in so doing, he claimed for himself, he was not prepared to grant to others, though demanded by them on far worthier grounds. He declared himself "head of the church of England," ^[15a] taking care to explain that office as including "full power to visit and correct all heresies and other abuses." Seizing, with a tyrant's grasp, the torch which was destined to enlighten the moral world, he employed it to guard his despotic sway and to kindle the fires of persecution. ^[15b] He dissolved the monasteries, whose existence was inconsistent with the line of policy he had adopted, and whose wealth furnished a powerful temptation. The reading of the English Bible in churches was prohibited, as well as its perusal by women, artificers, &c. Spiritual persons maintaining any thing contrary to the king's instructions, were to recant or be burned. Nearly all the leading doctrines of the Romish faith were retained; and papists and protestants went together to the stake, the former for denying the supremacy, the latter for questioning the creed, of an arbitrary and vicious monarch. ^[16]

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On the death of Henry, a brighter era seemed to be dawning. The Bible had already been published in English, and had become the intelligent study of many. Edward the Sixth, who succeeded to the throne, and those by whom his mind was chiefly influenced, were favourable to the Reformation. The right of private judgment, sanctioned alike by the example of the prince and the subject, might reasonably have been expected to receive encouragement, or at least protection. Hence numerous confessors who had fled to the continent, returned joyfully to their native land, looking for ameliorated institutions, and perhaps dreaming of entire liberty.

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He who contemplates for the first time, this crisis of religious history, imagines, like some of the early maritime adventurers, that he is about to plant his foot upon the soil of truth and freedom; but he speedily discovers that he is chasing a beautiful illusion, and that many days of suffering and nights of darkness must intervene before the vision can be realized.

Edward's advisers loosened the reins of ecclesiastical authority: they were unconscious that no mortal should have ever held them. Some statutes against the Lollards were repealed. An act of parliament was passed allowing the sacrament to be received by the laity in both kinds, of bread and wine, whereas the cup had previously been confined to the priests. Prescribing an improved form of worship, though retaining much of superstition in deference to the popish party, the legislature enjoined uniformity in the services and sacraments of religion. ^[17] Cranmer was directed to draw up articles, with the delusive expectation of "rooting out the discord of opinions." This led to the imprisonment of many, and even to the burning of some. But Edward's better judgment and his tender heart revolted from the infliction of such a punishment. He is said on one occasion, to have bedewed with tears the warrant which he reluctantly signed for the execution of the law, and to have told the archbishop "that if he did wrong, since it was in submission to his authority, he should answer for it to God." ^[18] Among those who dared to differ from the established faith, were Bonner and Gardiner; and Mary, the king's sister. They were incited by protestant persecution, as well as by their own intolerant principles, to the cruel course by which the succeeding reign is proverbially distinguished. The princess pronounced in reply to Edward's injunctions, at once her own apology and that of her victims: "Her soul," she said, "was God's."

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Mary was at her manor of Keninghall in Norfolk, when consumption carried off the young and promising king. His regard for the cause of the reformation had induced him to nominate as his successor the Lady Jane Grey in preference to Mary, in whose mind the claims of the papacy had been long identified with the rights of her mother Catharine of Arragon. Finding her claim to the crown disputed by some of the leading nobles, Mary sought to engage the commons in her cause. With this view she "speedeth herself secretly away" (to use the quaint but expressive language of Fox) "into the North." She soon learned that the council had sent out the Duke of Northumberland with an army in support of her rival, and "tossed with much travel up and down, to work the surest way for her best advantage, withdrew herself into the quarters of Northfolk and Suffolk, where she understood the Duke's name to be had in much hatred for the service that had been done there of late, under King Edward, in subduing the rebels; and there gathering to her such aid of the commons on every side as she might, keeping [kept] herself close for a space within *Fremingham Castle*. ^[19] To whom, first of all, resorted the Suffolk men; who being always forward in promoting the proceedings of the gospel, promised her their aid and help, so that she would not attempt the alteration of the religion which her brother King Edward had before established, by laws and orders publicly enacted and received by the consent of the whole realm in that behalf. To make the matter short," adds the historian, "unto this condition she eftsoons ^[20a] agreed, with such promise made unto them that no innovation should be made of religion, as that no man would or could have misdoubted her. ^[20b] Which promise if she had as constantly kept as they did willingly preserve her with their bodies and weapons, she had done a deed both worthy her blood, and had also made her reign more stable to herself through future tranquillity. For though a man be never so puissant of power, yet breach of promise is an evil upholder of quietness; fear is worse; but cruelty is the worst of all." ^[21a]

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Mary no sooner found herself, by "the power of the gossellers," firmly seated on the throne, than she qualified the promises she had made them in the hour of need, declaring, that she would not compel her subjects to be of her religion, *till public order should be taken in it by common consent*. ^[21b] A parliament sufficiently obsequious was assembled; the laws passed in the preceding reign, in favour of the reformation, were repealed, the service and sacraments used at the close of the reign of Henry the Eighth, restored, ^[22a] and the crown and realm of England formally reconciled to the papal see. A series of barbarities ensued, under the alleged sanction of religion, at the recital of which humanity shudders. The persecutors had been taught in the

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school of their victims, and neither party understood the principles of religious liberty. All the people were required to come to church, where the mass was revived. ^[22b] To deny the supremacy of the pope, was once more become as heinous an offence as it had been to question that of Henry the Eighth during the latter years of his reign. The dungeon and the faggot ^[22c] were the arguments by which erring judgments and tender consciences were to be restored and comforted. When some members of the convocation declined subscribing to the doctrine of transubstantiation, the discussion was terminated with the following conclusive reasoning: “*You*,” said the prolocutor, “have the *word*, but *we* have the *sword*.” ^[23a] An argument which has not unfrequently been employed in behalf of a state religion in more enlightened times.

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Rogers, the protomartyr of Mary’s short but frightfully sanguinary career, died because he would acknowledge no head but Christ, of his catholic church, and no authority above the word of God. ^[23b] Saunders, Hooper, Bradford, Latimer, Ridley, and the frail but afterwards repentant and magnanimous Cranmer, with a multitude of less eminent but equally honourable and worthy men, expired in the flames, to testify their attachment to a faith which, three years earlier, their rulers had taught them to admire and maintain.

Suffolk, and the adjacent maritime counties, had always been the stronghold of protestantism. Their geographical situation occasioned considerable intercourse with the continent, where the reformation still flourished, and whither many were self-exiled for conscience’ sake. At a much earlier period the Lollards appear to have been numerous in Norfolk; they had been multiplied by persecution, and by a comparatively extensive circulation of the writings of the reformers. ^[24a] Undeterred by the terrible examples of the queen’s severity, the protestants of Suffolk and Essex met privately for religious worship. ^[24b] Great numbers entirely forsook the public authorized service. At Stoke in Suffolk, there was a congregation of protestants, so considerable in number and so united in their views, that the bishops for some time hesitated to interfere. And at last, when the whole society was required to come to church, they contrived to escape, leaving their angry diocesan first to suspend, and then to excommunicate them. ^[24c]

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Every where the protestants had to endure the anxiety attending an exposure to the vengeance of their enemies, or the privations and inconveniences of concealment. Indescribably dreadful as the pains of martyrdom must have been, they were brief in their duration, and their very bitterness kindled the pity of the spectator and the fortitude of the victim. Perhaps the total amount of misery which they occasioned, was overbalanced by the less agonizing, but more protracted and retired, sufferings of the multitudes who “wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth,” and “of whom” (with equal truth it might be affirmed) “the world was not worthy.” The following are, probably, neither rare nor extreme instances. In the parish of St. James, near Bungay, there resided a family named Fisk. Of six brothers, three were protestants. A pursuivant employed to apprehend one of them, gave him, from motives of personal friendship, a private notice of the intention to seize him. Whereupon, the good man first called his family to prayer, and then hastened away to hide himself in a ditch, with his godly wife and her helpless babe. Another of these brothers was, to avoid burning, hid many months in a pile of wood; and afterwards, for half a year, in a cellar, where he diligently employed himself in profitable manufactures by candlelight; but his many hardships brought on an excessive bleeding, which shortened his days, and added unto the cry of the “souls under the altar.” ^[26a]

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Calling to mind their own efforts and the queen’s promise, the Suffolk protestants ventured to send a deputation to her to represent their grievances. But, “it was,” as Fox very justly remarks, “an heavy word that she answered them: ‘Forasmuch,’ saith she, ‘as you, being but members, desire to rule your head, you shall one day well perceive that members must obey their head, and not look to bear rule over the same.’” ^[26b] One of the deputation having referred to the particular ground on which they rested their claims, was put in the pillory three days, and had his ears cut off.

When the queen and council sent commissioners to Norfolk and Suffolk “to enquire into matters of religion,” a supplication was presented “by some good and well disposed men dwelling about those parts,” ^[27] in which they contended earnestly for the superiority of King Edward’s ritual. “All our bodies, goods, lands, and lives,” say they, “are ready to do her Grace faithful obedience and true service of all commandments that are not against God and his word: but in things that import a denial of Christ, and refusal of his word and holy communion, we cannot consent nor agree unto it . . . We think it no true obedience unto the queen’s highness or to any other magistrate ordained of God under her, to obey in the things contrary to God’s word, although the same be never so straitly charged in her Grace’s name . . . We think not good by any unlawful stir or commotion, to seek remedy . . . But unto such ungodly bishoplike commandments, as are against God, we answer with the apostles, *God must be obeyed rather than man*. If persecution shall ensue, (which some threaten us with,) we desire the heavenly Father, according to his promise, to look from heaven, to hear our cry, to judge between us and our adversaries, and to give us faith, strength, and patience, to continue faithful unto the end, and to shorten these evil days for his chosen’s sake; and so we faithfully believe he will.”

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The queen was alike deaf to reason and regardless of her promise. She answered the remonstrances of those who revered the Scriptures more than her command, and valued conscience more than life, with the most fearful torments bigotry and tyranny could inflict. Suffolk furnished its share of victims. Amongst them were, Dr. Rowland Taylor of Hadleigh, and three men who suffered in the town, to which the subsequent records more immediately relate.

Description of Beccles—modern improvements—probable state in the reign of Mary; the scene of persecution—Fox's account of the burning of three men; their examination; sentence; articles against them; their conduct and treatment at the stake—Remarks.

IN point of situation and general appearance, Beccles has been accounted by some worthy to rank as the third town in Suffolk. Towards the west it is skirted by a cliff, once washed by the estuary which separated the eastern parts of Norfolk and Suffolk. ^[29] A portion of the most elevated ground is occupied by the parish church and church-yard, commanding a view somewhat more expanded and interesting than is common in this part of the county. It overlooks the valley of the appropriately designated river Waveney. The church is a handsome building, said to have been erected about A.D. 1369. Its south porch, of rather more recent date, affords a fine specimen of highly ornamented Gothic architecture. ^[30a] A massive tower of freestone, erected early in the sixteenth century, stands apart from the church. The other principal buildings, for public purposes, are, a town-hall; a spacious modern gaol; a theatre; an assembly room, to which is attached an apartment used as a public library; a free school for instruction in "writing, cyphering, and learning," and in the established religion; a meeting-house belonging to the Society of Friends, appropriated to the purpose of an infant school room; ^[30b] and the meeting-houses or chapels of the Independent, Baptist, and Wesleyan denominations of christians. p. 30 p. 31

The population of Beccles, as stated in the census of 1831, was 3862, and is considered to be gradually increasing. The town possesses the commercial advantage of a communication by water with the sea at Yarmouth and Lowestoft. An extensive tract of marshes, formerly held by the abbot of Bury St. Edmund's, as part of the manor of Beccles, has long been vested in incorporated trustees for the benefit of the inhabitants. There are also other lands held for charitable uses.

It is probable, that long before the arm of the sea had retired within the humble banks of the Waveney—while Yarmouth was yet a sand-bank, swept by the ocean—the spot in question had become the settled abode of some who found in the adjacent waters a ready means of subsistence. ^[31] It is generally supposed that the name, Beccles, was adopted with reference to a church which had been built here at an early period. ^[32] Possibly Sigebert, king of the East Angles, and founder of a monastery at Bury, might select this place, among others, for the establishment and propagation of the Christian faith, which he had imbibed during a voluntary exile in France. ^[33] The manor and advowson of Beccles were granted by King Edwy, about A.D. 956, to the monks of Bury, and remained in their possession until the dissolution of the religious houses under Henry the Eighth. p. 32 p. 33

In most of its local features, as well as in its commercial, civil, and moral interests, the town has, no doubt, greatly improved since the period to which the close of the preceding chapter refers. Navigation and intercourse with other inland places have been facilitated; and trade, adapting itself to existing circumstances, has been extended. More efficient municipal regulations, and advancing civilization, have contributed to the preservation of order, and led to an extension of privileges to the inhabitants. Considerable progress has been made towards an improved system of prison discipline. ^[34] Schools, public and private, have, in some degree, tended to raise the tone of society, to soften the obdurate, and to tame the rude. The attachment to cruel, sensual, and frivolous amusements has abated, and a regard to the pursuits of literature and science has become perceptible. Nor can it be reasonably doubted that the exercise of an evangelical ministry in the separate congregation of the Independents, for nearly two centuries, and the labours of Christian ministers of other denominations, have been productive of incalculable moral, intellectual, and religious advantages to the town and neighbourhood. p. 34

The aspect of the place must have been very different when Mary succeeded to the crown of England. The parish church and its "beautiful gate," were then *more* beautiful than at present. The tower, still the characteristic local feature of the town, was fresh and fair from the hands of the architect. Besides the wealthy abbey, there had been many contributors to the erection of these buildings, who had evinced a zeal in the completion of them worthy the imitation of protestants. But there is reason to believe that to those features a strong contrast was presented in the generally mean appearance, the gross ignorance, and moral deformity of the town. Coarse rushes, produced by the common lands with an abundance sufficiently indicative of an almost worthless soil, furnished the carpet and the covering of most of the dwelling-houses. ^[35a] Superstition prevailed in the public services of the sanctuary. The "men of wyrship" appear to have been greatly deficient in forbearance and liberality, while a large portion of the inhabitants were boisterously tenacious of civil rights, which they were scarcely competent to manage. ^[35b] The seal of the late corporation of Beccles Fen bears such a representation of the gaol, existing in 1584, as leaves no room to question the account of "one having *hewed* himself out of it." ^[36] p. 35 p. 36

Prodigal of human suffering as Mary was, it was nevertheless a part of her usual policy to make each instance of capital punishment for heresy *tell* as extensively as possible. Beccles, the centre of a rural district in which the principles of protestantism had taken root, never to be eradicated, was chosen to be the scene of the first martyrdom by which her agents in the diocese of Norwich sought to terrify her subjects into conformity. The account given by Fox of the occurrence, must occupy a place in these pages. It is intimately connected with the history of nonconformity in Beccles.

Such punishments for such offences, wherever they were inflicted, could not fail to rouse a spirit of inquiry. Men would naturally turn from a spectacle so horrifying to investigate the basis of the institution it was intended to support, and to search into the expediency of intrusting the rule of faith with human beings, whose fallibility did not abate a particle of their bigotry. The more conspicuous the sufferings of the martyrs were made, the more certainly and extensively did they tend to the dissemination of truth and freedom.

p. 37

The faithful historian, having recorded and done honour to the Christian heroism of several "constant professors of Christ" who were burned at Colchester, Stratford le Bow, Smithfield, and Gloucester, thus proceeds:—

"Three burnt at Beckles. [37]

"After the death of these above rehearsed, were three men burnt at Beckles in Suffolk, in one fire, about the 21 day of May, An. 1556, whose names are hereunder specified—

"Thomas Spicer, of Winston, laborer,

"John Deny, and Edmund Poole.

"This Thomas Spicer was a single man, of the age of nineteene yeares, and by vocation a labourer, dwelling in Winston, the countie of Suffolke, and there taken in his maister's house in summer, about or anone after the rising of the sunne, (being in his bed,) by James Ling and John Keretch of the same towne, and Wil. Dauies of Debnam, in the saide Countie.

p. 38

"The occasion of his taking was, for that he would not go to their popish church to heare masse, and receive their idoll at the commandement of Sir John Tirrell, Knight, of Gipping hall in Suffolke, and certaine other Justices there, whoe sent both him and them to Eye dungeon, in Suffolke, till at length they were all three together brought before Dunning, then chancellor of Norwich, and M. Mings the Register, sitting at the town of Beckles, to be examined.

"And there the said Chancellor perswading what he could to turn them from the truth, could by no meanes preuaile of his purpose. Whereby minding in the ende to giue sentence on them, hee burst out in teares, intreating them to remember themselues, and to turne againe to the holie mother church, for that they were deceiued and out of the truth, and that they shold not wilfully cast awaie themselues, with such like words.

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"Now as he was thus labouring them and seemed very loth to read the sentence, (for they were the first that he condemned in that dioces,) the Register there sitting by, being weary, belike, of tarying, or else perceiuing the constant martyrs to bee at a point, called upon the chancellor in haste, to rid them out of the waie, and to make an ende. At the which words the chancellor read the condemnation ouer them with teares, and deliuered them to the secular power.

"Their Articles.

"The articles objected to these, and commonlie to all other condemned in that diocesse by Doctor Hopton, Bishoppe of Norwich, and by Dunning his chancellor, were these:

"1. First, was articulate against them that they beleueed not the Pope of Rome to bee supream head immediatelie under Christ in earth of the uniuersall catholike church.

"2. Item, that they beleueed not holie bread and holie water, ashes, palmes, and all other like ceremonies used in the church to bee good and laudable for stirring up the people to deuotion.

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"3. Item, that they beleueed not, after the words of consecration spoken by the priest, the very naturall body of Christ, and no other substance of bread and wine to be in the sacrament of the altar.

"4. Item, that they beleueed it to be idolatry to worship Christ in the sacrament of the altar.

"5. Item, that they tooke bread and Wine in remembrance of Christ's passion.

"6. Item, that they would not followe the crosse in procession, nor be confessed to a priest.

"7. Item, that they affirmed no mortall man to haue in himselfe free will to do good or euill. ^[40]

"For this doctrine and articles above prefixed these three (as is aforesaid) were condemned by doctor Dunning, and committed to the secular power, Sir John Sylliard beinge the same time high sheriffe of Northfolke and Suffolke.

"And the next day following upon the same they were all burnt together in the said towne of Beckles. ^[41a] Whereupon it is to be thought that the writte *de comburendo* was not yet come downe nor could not be, the Lord Chancellor, Bishoppe Heath, being the same time at London. ^[41b] Which, if it bee true, then it is plaine, that both they went

p. 41

beyond their commission that were the executioners, and also the clergie, which were the instigatours thereof, cannot make good that they now pretend, saying that they did nothing but by a lawe. But this let the Lord finde out when he seeth his time.

“In the meane time, while these good men were at the stake, and had praied, they saide their beleefe; and when they came to the reciting of ‘the catholike church,’ Sir John Silliard spake to them; ‘That is well said, sirs, quoth he, I am glad to heare you saie you do beleeeue the catholike church; that is the best word I heard of you yet.’”

p. 42

“To which his sayings, Edmund Poole answered, thogh they beleeeue the catholike church, yet doe they not beleeeue in their popish church, which is no part of Christ’s catholike church, and therefore no part of their beleefe.

“When they rose from praier, they all went ioyfullie to the stake, and being bound therto, and the fire burning about them, they praised God in such an audible voice, that it was wonderful to all those that stood by and heard them.

“Then one Robert Bacon, dwelling in the saide Beckles, a very enemie to God’s truth, and a persecutor of his people, being there present within hearing thereof, willed the tormentors to throwe on faggots to stop the knaues’ breathes, as he tearmed them; so hot was his burning charitie. But these good men, not regarding their malice, confessed the truth, and yeelded their lives to the death, for the testimonie of the same, very gloriouslie and ioyfullie. The which their constancie, in the like cause, the Lord grant wee may imitate and followe unto the ende: whether it bee death or life, to glorifie the name of Christ. Amen.”

p. 43

These were the nonconformists of their day. Ignominy and torture were, in their estimation, preferable to the reproaches of an enslaved and guilty soul. But it is not for the purpose of indulging an acrimonious feeling towards the immediate or remote perpetrators of a legalized murder that this account has been introduced. The severity of the punishment is of minor importance, except as it places in a strong light the fallacious and mischievous principle from which it originated. The question is not, whether these men ought in justice to have suffered less than they did; whether, instead of being roasted amidst the scoffs of a depraved and deluded rabble, they should have been burnt in the hand, or branded on the forehead, or scourged and suffered to depart; or whether there should have been substituted for the pangs of martyrdom, only the deprivation of some civil rights, or the exaction of “a peppercorn rent” in testimony that they had “an interest in the services”^[44] of the national church, and in acknowledgment of their spiritual allegiance to a blood thirsty and despotic woman. It is not whether on their submission to such terms they should have been pitied on account of their errors, and tolerated on the score of their sincerity and their peaceableness. No. The inquiry which presents itself is, whether the exaction of the very smallest possible penalty, with whatsoever name it might have been gilded over, would not have involved the violation of a principle of incalculable moment to the interests of religion, of justice, and of freedom. The queen would still, if the grounds of modern nonconformity be tenable, have outstepped her province, and have interfered with rights derived from a source paramount to her own.

p. 44

The charge brought against the Beccles martyrs was, in substance, that their religious creed and observances differed from those of the Roman Catholic church, which had been set forth, by public authority, for the adoption of all. It is deserving of notice, that of the seven articles which constitute their accusation, four relate exclusively to an erroneous *belief*. Thus the very recesses of the heart were invaded. The faith of the unfortunate man, who could not find the doctrines of popery in his Bible, was extracted from him by interrogatories, and he was compelled to expiate in the flames the crime of preserving “a conscience void of offence towards God.” The remaining allegations relate to outward ceremonies which these individuals regarded as unscriptural and even idolatrous; and the observance of which, by them, must therefore have been an abomination to the Searcher of hearts.^[45] Him they refused to mock with a worse than formal service. And for these offences their fellow-creatures proceeded to “rid them out of the way.”

p. 45

Such is bigotry in the most hideous aspect she assumes. But if the principle be admitted, that faith or practice in religion is a fit subject for magisterial interference, it surely savours of harshness to censure Mary for affording her patronage to the creed she had sincerely imbibed, and to the rites she had been taught by maternal lips to hold sacred. Nor can there be any security that the supreme power in a state, if invested with authority in matters of faith, shall not prefer the licentious speculations of deism, or the delusions of the false prophet. It is in vain to contend that the establishment of the true religion alone is justifiable, for who is to solve the question, What is truth? If the ruler; shall Henry, or Edward, or Mary, or Elizabeth decide? Or shall the prince be guided in his selection by the majority? In England the suffrages may be in favour of episcopacy; in Scotland of presbyterianism; in Ireland and in Canada of Catholicism; in India of polytheism. Accordingly, with the exception of the last, these several forms of religion are at present established under the authority of the crown of Great Britain. Why does not the majority prevail in Ireland or in India? Is the alleged idolatry of the sister island less tolerable than that of the transatlantic colony? or are numbers of less account on the banks of the Ganges than of the St. Lawrence?

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p. 47

But how multifarious and inconsistent a thing would thus be made of religion! How are its beauty tarnished, its name degraded, and its influence neutralized, by this admixture of earthly elements, this rude and needless effort to grasp and to uphold its etherial principles! Is truth

thus mutable, or can it be thus bandied from hand to hand?

Whatever is established by the authority, should also be supported by the sanctions of government. And if gentle methods prove insufficient to check an offence *cognizable by the magistrate*, it is his duty to augment severity in proportion to the obstinacy of the offender. If even the dread of death fail to accomplish the desired reformation; to mitigate the punishment is to exchange the character of a judge for that of a tormentor, to lay aside the semblance of a wise and beneficent discipline, and to indulge the gratification of a wanton and useless cruelty. ^[48a] It would be easier, in such a case, to justify the infliction of superadded torture, than of the lightest penalty. p. 48

It is difficult to conceive that principles leading to such results will ever again be allowed to prevail against the liberties and lives of Englishmen. But if, as some strangely apprehend it may, the Roman Catholic faith should regain the ascendancy in this country, it would be interesting and profitable to observe the course which would be adopted by those who are at once enamoured of establishments, and at deadly feud with popery. Some would, no doubt, be prepared, with Archdeacon Balguy, "to defend, not popery only, but paganism itself—every *established* religion under heaven." ^[48b] But it may reasonably be supposed that such a sentiment would, in the present day, be very generally discarded as antiquated and untenable. The following language of a contemporary clergyman may, probably, be considered as indicating the views with which the supposed event would be more generally met by protestant episcopalians. "If the presbyterians or papists were to-morrow the great majority of the nation, and if the constituted authorities of the land, king, lords, and commons, thinking either of these persuasions the best religion, were to establish it by law, *I should then become a dissenter*. With my belief in the scriptural authority of episcopacy, I could not conscientiously be a presbyterian; and with my knowledge of the antiscritural doctrines of the church of Rome, *I must separate from her communion*." ^[49] The intelligent, conscientious, and consistent protestant would make his appeal, as did the martyrs, to the only supreme authority. Here, he would say, placing his hand upon the word of God, here alone, is "the religion of protestants:" p. 49

"Here is the judge that stints the strife
When men's devices fail;
Here is the bread that feeds the life
That *death cannot* assail." ^[50] p. 50

By the light of reason and in the exercise of prayer for that better illumination which cometh from above, he would commit himself to this safe guide. While he would value the protection, and conform to the regulations, and discharge the imposts, of civil government, in reference to things pertaining to its province; if for his religious profession he endured suffering or privation, whatever its garb, its nature, or its extent, he would resist with firmness; or succumb with reluctance, and complain of persecution. The absence of the faggot or the rack would not be admitted to purge away the stain of injustice. ^[51a] Whether debarred of personal liberty, or of some minor privilege of citizenship; subject to a legal slaughter, or to a legal tax; he would regard the champions of established catholicism as trampling upon the just liberties of a Christian man. He could give them, at best, no more than the poor praise of having learned to imitate the Italian assassins, who beat their victims with satchels of sand: no blood is spilt and no bones are broken—but the sufferer dies by the operation. ^[51b] p. 51

"*Any sort of punishment, disproportioned to the offence, or where there is no fault at all, will always be severity, unjustifiable severity, and will be thought so by the sufferers and bystanders.*" ^[52a] However disguised, or modified, or attenuated may be the persecution, they will regard it as persecution still, and will justly apply to its authors, with whatever communion they may be connected, or whatever pretensions they may set up, the language Milton puts into the lips of an archangel, to whom many of the episcopal edifices are dedicated:— p. 52

"What will they, then,
But force the Spirit of grace itself, and bind
His consort liberty? What, but unbuild
His living temples, built by faith to stand,
Their own faith, not another's?—for on earth
Who, against faith and conscience, can be heard
Infallible?" ^[52b]

CHAPTER III.

 p. 53

Queen Elizabeth, an intolerant protestant; her measures—Rise of the puritans; their views and position; persecuted; instances in eastern counties—Account of the "prophesyings;" suppressed by the queen—Continued cruelty—Norfolk and Suffolk petitions—Whitgift's articles—New commission granted—Aylmer—Puritan clergy summoned to London—William Fleming, rector of Beccles; his connexion with corporation differences; testimony to his worth arising out of them; summoned; deprived of the living—Honourable record of his interment—Justifiableness of his nonconformity.

THE accession of Elizabeth, once more, revived the hearts of the reformers. Her personal character, indeed, afforded no hope of her being favourable to freedom, though her parentage and education led to the reasonable expectation that she would encourage protestantism. Of all that was safe to be believed and fit to be practised, she deemed herself the competent and supreme judge. Regarding the privilege of dissenting from the state religion as part of her prerogative, she exercised that right herself, and then sternly denied it, alike to the learned and the rude, the conscientious and the careless, among her subjects. Her proclamation prohibited all preaching, until consultation should be had by parliament. In that assembly she was no less absolute than elsewhere. The supremacy of the church of England was again vested in the crown, and a statute ^[54] passed which was designed to establish uniformity in religion, and required all persons, having no lawful or reasonable excuse, to resort to their parish churches, every Sunday, and on all holidays.

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Under the authority of the Act of Supremacy, a court was erected, called the court of High Commission, which took cognizance of religious matters, without the aid of a jury. The liturgy was revised, and rendered more palatable to the papists. The clergy were required to comply with all the queen's injunctions, and at their entrance on their cures, publicly to assent to a declaration of articles of religion, drawn up by the bishops.

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Previously to this period, the contest between catholicism and the reformed faith had absorbed all minor differences of opinion. But the frequent changes of the national creed, induced many to consult the Bible for themselves, in order to ascertain its testimony as to faith and discipline. It was impossible the humblest capacity should not perceive that, had it been a part of Christian duty, to conform to the religion patronised and established by the state, that duty had been equally imperative in every successive reign. He whose life had been spared for half a century, must, unless there had been a strange vacillation in his opinions, or, at least, in his professions, have been very fortunate to have escaped the doom of an obstinate heretic.

The *exiles* of previous reigns had awaked to the perception of the great truth, that no human authority could deprive them of the right, or discharge them from the obligation, of seeking after God and his true worship. Some of them, availing themselves of the liberty they enjoyed upon the continent, had introduced what they deemed a purer, because a more scriptural, form of worship, than had yet been used in England. Returning to their native country on the accession of Elizabeth, they found her little disposed to co-operate with them in carrying on the reformation. A large portion of the clergy desired that the services of religion should be retained as near as possible to the popish form; and those who were favourable to religious liberty, or contended for further purification of the service book from the dregs of superstition, received the contemptuous but honourable name of *puritans*. These questioned not the propriety of a secular establishment of Christianity; but they objected to wearing the popish vestments, and to various ceremonies derived from the same source. ^[56] They disapproved of some things in the public liturgy, of church festivals, pluralities, non-residence, and lay patrons; they complained of the want of godly discipline, and desired to bring both the faith and polity of the state religion to the test of Scripture. ^[57] They were eminent for piety and devotedness to the cause of Christ. To say that their views of religious liberty were confused and inconsistent, and that they were themselves intolerant in their temper and conduct, is only to admit that they did not shake off, at the first effort, all the errors of the times in which they lived, and that their course, if it was firm and daring, was not precipitate or impetuous. They were for going fearlessly as far in the path of improvement as they could perceive that the inspired volume invited them: and with a moral magnanimity of which their persecutors dreaded the effect, they bared their souls before God, desiring to receive "amplified communications and superior light."

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Puritanism constituted a sanctuary in which the sacred rights of conscience were preserved and propagated, while the high church party had forgotten and forsaken the ground on which alone a departure from the papal authority could be maintained. The puritans occupy an intermediate position, between the first adherents to protestant popery, and the more enlightened nonconformists of the succeeding century.

p. 58

They were soon compelled to supply a test of their sincerity in the sacrifices they made. He who omitted *one* of the most unimportant of the enjoined ceremonies, was deemed "guilty of all." The most exemplary ministers were silenced; while the profane and the unprincipled were benefited, upon the sole ground of their unqualified conformity.

Among many who were suspended in Norfolk and Suffolk, may be mentioned Mr. Lawrence, an eminent divine, who had been benefited in the latter county. When Mr. Calthorpe, "a gentleman of quality," interposed in his behalf, urging the great want the church had of such men as Mr. Lawrence, whose fitness for his work, he said, the chief men of credit in the county would certify, the bishop pleaded that the queen required him to allow of no ministers but such as were perfectly conformable. ^[59a]

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Dr. Crick and Mr. Sanderson, two learned and useful ministers in Norfolk, and many others in the diocese of Norwich, refusing conformity, were prosecuted in the ecclesiastical courts. ^[59b]

Some of the bishops, ^[59c] however, sanctioned their clergy in setting up religious exercises among themselves, for the promotion of discipline and the dissemination of scriptural knowledge. These were called *prophesyings*, from the apostolic sentiment, "Ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." ^[59d] They furnish the original of similar discussions held, at a subsequent period, among the Brownists, and of which some traces are found in the Independent Church at Beccles soon after its formation.

The clergy who attended these meetings spoke in succession upon the interpretation of a given passage of Scripture, and conferred respecting sound doctrine and a good life. Their names were written in a table, and three took part in each exercise. The first opened and closed the meeting with prayer, and gave his explanation of the text. The other two added any further explanation of the subject and stated their objections. At the close of each meeting, the next speaker was appointed and his subject fixed upon. Those who joined in these “prophesyings” signed, on being admitted, a confession, to the effect that they believed the word of God to be a perfect rule of faith and manners; that it ought to be read and known by all; that its authority not only exceeded that of the pope but of the church also; that they condemned, as a tyrannous yoke, such articles of faith and fashions of serving God as men had enjoined without the authority of his word. “And to this word of God (said they) we humbly submit ourselves and all our doings, willing and ready to be judged, reformed, or further instructed thereby in all points of religion.” ^[60] p. 60

The utility of these grave debates early introduced them into the eastern counties, where they were encouraged by Bishop Parkhurst, till he received a reprimand from the queen, who insisted upon their suppression as “no better than seminaries of puritanism.” p. 61

Persecution never fails to foster and spread the principles it attempts to exterminate. Instead of ceasing altogether, the conferences of the clergy assumed a more formidable aspect. Not long afterwards there was an assembly at Mr. Knewstub’s church at Cockfield, near Lavenham, in Suffolk, of sixty clergymen of that county, Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire. The subjects for consideration were the Book of Common Prayer, and the extent to which submission to the ecclesiastical authorities was allowable. After repeated adjournments they agreed, that although such of the Articles as contained the sum of Christian faith and the doctrine of the sacraments might properly be subscribed, neither the Common Prayer Book, nor the rest of the Articles, ought; “no, though a man should be deprived of his ministry for refusing it.” ^[62a] They were desirous, however, of introducing a reformation into the church, without separating from it. p. 62

Archbishop Grindal and some other prelates endeavoured to regulate the “prophesyings,” by enjoining the observance of strict order, and by confining them to the conforming clergy. ^[62b] But this renewed the displeasure of the despotic woman in whose hand, by a fundamental and fatal error, had been placed the supremacy of the church of England. “By means of these assemblies,” her Majesty observes, writing to the bishop of London, “great numbers of our people, especially of the *vulgar sort*, meet to be otherwise occupied with some honest labour for their living, are brought to idleness, seduced, and in manners schismatically divided among themselves into a variety of dangerous opinions.” She commanded that these “exercises” should be forthwith put down, adding an order for the imprisonment of such as should refuse compliance, with a threat of severer punishment, and closing her communication by an insolent menace to the bishop himself. ^[63a] p. 63

Meanwhile, continued oppression induced the ministers of Norfolk to present to the privy council a supplication, in which, after many expressions of loyalty to the queen, they add, “Yet we desire that her Majesty will not think us disobedient, seeing we suffer ourselves to be displaced, rather than yield to some things required. Our bodies and goods, and all we have, are in her Majesty’s hands; *only our souls we reserve to our God*, who alone is able to save us or condemn us.” ^[63b]

Slaves could not have sued for less; but this was far too extensive a reservation to be allowed. The pacific Bishop Parkhurst having been succeeded by Dr. Freke, a man of very different spirit, seven ministers, in or near Norwich, were soon afterwards suspended. ^[63c]

Subsequent years brought no mitigation. Besides other instances of ecclesiastical molestation in the East Anglian counties, Mathew Hammond, a poor plough-wright at Hethersett, was condemned by the bishop as a heretic, had his ears cut off, and after the lapse of a week, was committed, in the castle ditch at Norwich, to the more agonizing torment of the flames. ^[64a] p. 64

Many puritan ministers who had livings in Suffolk were prosecuted for neglect or variations in the performance of the public service. Upon this some of the justices of the peace, and other gentry in that county, made a complaint to the privy council; thus declaring their grievance: “We see, right honourable, by too long and lamentable experience, that the state of the church (*especially in our parts*) groweth every day more sick than other; and they whom it most concerneth have been so careless in providing the means, as the hope of her recovery waxeth almost desperate . . . These towers of Zion, the painful pastors and ministers of the word, by what malice we know not,—they are marshalled with the worst malefactors, presented, indicted, arraigned, and condemned, for matters, as we presume, of very slender moment.” ^[64b] Valuable testimony, since it was borne by men who, nevertheless, avowed, in the very same document, their detestation of the name and heresy of puritanism. p. 65

The translation of Dr. Whitgift to the see of Canterbury, ^[65a] was the signal for augmented rigour. He was charged by the queen to restore religious uniformity, which she confessed, notwithstanding all her precautions, had “run out of square.” ^[65b] Canute had rebuked the profanity and folly of those who desired him to attempt the repression of the flowing tide. Elizabeth challenged to herself the right to bind, with the fetters of a statute, the immortal spirit. Losing sight of the true nature of religion, and regarding it only as a piece of state machinery, she sought to bend it to her despotic will, and wondered that it continually escaped from her grasp, and scorned her fury.

His Grace forthwith furnished the bishops of his province with certain articles for the

government of their dioceses, by which all preaching, catechising, and praying in private families, where any were present besides the family, were prohibited; and it was required, that all preachers should wear the habits prescribed, and that none should be admitted to preach, or execute any part of the ecclesiastical function, unless they subscribed the three following articles:—

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“1. That the queen hath and ought to have the sovereignty and rule over all manner of persons born within her dominions, of what condition soever they be; and that none other power or potentate hath or ought to have any *power, ecclesiastical* or civil, within her realms or dominions.

“2. That the Book of Common Prayer, and of ordaining bishops, priests, and deacons, *containeth nothing contrary to the word of God*, but may be lawfully used, and that *he himself will use the same, and none other*, in public prayer and administration of the sacraments.

“3. That he alloweth the Book of Articles agreed upon in the convocation holden at London in 1562, and set forth by her Majesty’s authority; and he believeth *all the articles* therein contained *to be agreeable to the word of God.*” ^[67a]

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These were called “Whitgift’s Articles,” as he was their principal author. Subscription to them was required, for many years, without the warrant of any statute, or even of any canon.

On the archbishop’s primary metropolitan visitation, a hundred and twenty-four clergymen in Norfolk and Suffolk were suspended in consequence of the application of this test. ^[67b] Petitions again flowed in from Norwich and Norfolk, and from other counties. But Whitgift opposed every degree of relaxation, “lest the church should be thought to have maintained an error;” and a new commission was granted for the detection of nonconformity, against which even the privy council remonstrated, as a copy of the Spanish Inquisition. ^[67c]

A conspicuous agent in this commission was Aylmer, bishop of London. At one visitation in Essex he suspended nearly forty ministers. Those who were brought before him, in his progress through the country, were loaded with invective. ^[68a]

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Others were summoned, from distant parts of the kingdom, to appear at St. Paul’s, or at Lambeth. ^[68b] The inconvenience and expense of travelling at that period rendered their case particularly grievous. They had to answer, upon oath, a string of interrogatories with which they were previously unacquainted, and which could not fail to convict the puritan clergyman on his own testimony. ^[68c] Too conscientious to conform in all points, he scorned to avert the sword of persecution by the aid of falsehood. If he would have sacrificed his convictions at the shrine of bigotry, and have signed his name where his reason refused assent, he might have revelled in the emoluments of ecclesiastical preferment, although he were

“a sot, or dunce,
Lascivious, headstrong, or all these at once.”

But it was enough to extort from him an admission that he had, in any *one instance*, deviated in the slightest particular from the ceremonies; or that he had said or written, publicly or privately, aught against the Book of Common Prayer, or *any thing* therein contained, as being unscriptural or *inconvenient*;—and although he had evinced the laborious zeal of Paul, displayed the eloquence of Apollos, and exemplified the holy benevolence of John, still—he was a nonconformist—he was cast out.

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Among those who were suspended for nonconformity at Archbishop Whitgift’s first visitation, was WILLIAM FLEMING, rector of Beccles.

The information which has been preserved respecting him leads to the conviction that he was a useful and an exemplary man, to a considerable extent influential and beloved; and respected even by his enemies. He had enemies. They who congratulate themselves on having none, have, frequently, cause to inquire whether they are discharging the duties incumbent upon them as members of society, with that high regard to principle which characterized the puritans, and is as remote from the meanness of indecision as from the rancour of mere party zeal.

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During Mr. Fleming’s ministry in Beccles, a warm and long continued dispute, occurred between the first grantees from the crown of the tract of marshes already mentioned, ^[70a] and some of the inhabitants. The grant had been accompanied by extensive powers, which were employed with little moderation. This was naturally a source of dissatisfaction, and led to animosities which ended in a surrender of the property in question to the queen. ^[70b] The incorporating of the “portreeve, surveyors, and commonalty of the Fen of Beccles,” was the result; an arrangement which met with considerable opposition, from a person named Harsault and others. The plan, however, was probably approved by the more judicious inhabitants, as calculated, in the *then existing* state of things, to preclude the evils of either a narrower or a broader system of municipal government. Mr. Fleming appears to have lent his influence in support of the new charter.

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A commission was issued to Sir Robert Wingfield and others, to attempt an arrangement of these differences. The commissioners met accordingly, at Beccles, and made a return, in which, after expressing their persuasion that the government of the town was likely to proceed in peace, they add: “And furder, whereas by vertue of the same yor ho: letters we are directed to th’ examynac’ on of certeyn trobles and molestac’ ons brought upon one Mr. Flemyng, the minister

there; we fynde the man to be *of verie good desert bothe concerning life and doctryne, and to have p'fited the peple there verie greatly*, yet had he ben much trobled by some sorrie instruments issueing from the same spring as we take it; for having hym and them before us, they alledged no cause of offence, but rather iustified the man, and reconciled themselves to hym, except one Harsault, whome we fownde factious, and a man utterlie unworthye of eny good allowance or regarde emongst his honest neighbors.” ^[72a]

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There was, however, one offence of which Mr. Fleming was found guilty. He did not conform in all points to the prescribed ritual. Urged in extenuation of this, the pains of a doubting or the convictions of a settled judgment, the testimony of a good life and the profession of sound doctrine, the attachment of his flock and the usefulness of his ministry—were, in the estimation of the intolerant ecclesiastics, of no value. He was summoned to London ^[72b] to undergo the mockery of an examination, and to sustain the costs of his journey, and the ultimate loss of his preferment.

Mr. Fleming refused to subscribe Whitgift's Articles; and the discipline of the ecclesiastical courts having been employed in vain in his correction, the bishop, on the 23rd of July, 1584, deprived him of his living. ^[72c] He continued to reside in Beccles, probably exercising privately the most essential branches of a minister's duty, if not, after a time, officiating in the parish church through the connivance of those who were conscious of his value. ^[74a] He died in 1613; and his interment, on the 8th of September in that year, is recorded in the parochial register in terms which prove that time had not sullied the reputation which persecution had failed to injure, and that when the grave had closed over his remains, he was remembered as the benefactor of his neighbours, and honoured as the founder of a new order of christian ministers among them. The entry, in the oldest register book now preserved, stands thus:

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“Bury: Master William Fleming, our minister and faythfull teacher, the glory of our towne, & father of y^e ministry round about us.” ^[74b]

From the terms in which the above entry is couched, it seems that Mr. Fleming was the first clergyman in Beccles who had cordially embraced and advocated the doctrines of the Reformation. ^[75] He had carried out its great principle to an extent which marks him as the father of the protestant *dissenting* ministry in that place. What were the precise objections made by him to the archbishop's Articles, is unknown. But the nonconformity of Beccles will appear to have been justifiable in its *origin*, if it be shown that those Articles embraced any point to which, as an upright man, he could not unhesitatingly assent.

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It will be recollected that by them he was required solemnly to acknowledge the queen's *ecclesiastical* supremacy; and to declare that the authorized ritual contained NOTHING contrary to the word of God; that he would use it *and none other* in the public service; and that he believed ALL the Thirty-nine Articles to be agreeable to the word of God. There was no room for evasion, no saving or qualifying clause. However trivial or indifferent the ceremony respecting which conscience paused, still, as nothing is trivial when truth and conscience are concerned, he could not with propriety subscribe. His apparent worldly interest and his desire for usefulness would naturally give him a bias towards conformity, and he would lament that matters so unimportant should be imposed as essential terms of preferment; but to have yielded, would have been to have climbed into the fold of Christ over the barrier of truth, to have held his living by the tenure of a solemn and deliberate falsehood.

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It is probable that he did not altogether deny the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the queen; though cruelty was already leading many to the conviction that human authority had no proper place in the administration of the kingdom of Christ. But, like the puritans in general, he was, no doubt, deeply impressed with the unscriptural character of popery, and with the mischievous tendency of cherishing any remnant of its idolatrous abominations. The arguments employed against the ceremonies which had been abolished, applied, with equal force, to some which had been retained. The sign of the cross in baptism, the use of the surplice, bowing to the east, and kneeling before the table of the Lord, were as devoid of warrant in the Bible, as the ceremony of following the cross in procession, the use of holy water, ashes, and palms, or the worship of the sacramental wafer. The bishops in the earlier part of Elizabeth's reign, had looked upon the catholic rites, which had been allowed to creep into the protestant church, as having been only tolerated for a time, and as a blot upon the Reformation, to be wiped off as soon as circumstances would admit. ^[77a] On the contrary, they were now held up as, each and all of them, essential to the uniformity of religion, and indispensable to the authorized performance of her public services. If Mr. Fleming deemed any one of them contrary to Scripture, as not being conducive to edification, but rather causing offence, ^[77b] he could not honestly put his signature to the archbishop's Articles.

p. 77

Turning over, with anxiety and thoughtfulness, the pages of the Book of Common Prayer, to which he was called upon to give so uncompromising an approval, he may be supposed to have noticed such particulars as the following.

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The Creed attributed to Athanasius in effect declared it essential to salvation, not only that the mysterious doctrines of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ should be believed, but that the *explanation* therein attempted of those doctrines should be embraced as “the right faith;” and it denounced the sentence of eternal condemnation against those who did not “thus think,” with a peremptoriness and reiteration amounting to a virtual claim of infallibility. But if he could not discover in the Sacred Records any such explanation of the doctrines in question, nor,

consequently, any such conditions of salvation, he might hesitate to declare his belief that those harsh clauses were not at variance with the word of God.

In the Baptism of Infants he would perceive that the priest was required to declare the baptized child to be *regenerated*, and to return thanks to God for so great a blessing. And he might think the doctrine obviously implied in that form, and plainly expressed in the catechism which follows it, “contrary to the word of God,” which treats of regeneration as a change of heart, such as no outward ceremony could confer. ^[79a]

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In the Catechism also, the Common Prayer Book taught that there were two sacraments “generally *necessary* to salvation,” whereas he might conceive that it was “contrary to the word of God” to make such an assertion respecting either of them, in any instance. ^[79b]

In the Order for the Visitation of the Sick, the priest was directed to assume authority to “absolve” the penitent sinner: but while he was required to subscribe, as perfectly scriptural, the volume containing that formulary, conscience might be demanding, who can forgive sins but God alone? ^[80a]

p. 80

Perhaps Mr. Fleming might apprehend that it was “contrary to the word of God,” which enjoins faithfulness in ministers, and sincerity in all, ^[80b] to adopt indiscriminately, with reference to all who were not unbaptized, excommunicated, or suicides, the form for the Burial of the Dead. He would gladly have availed himself, it may be, always of some portions, and frequently, of the whole of that beautiful and impressive service, if he might have been excused from expressing alike over the saint and the reviler of holiness—over him who had embraced and him who had denied the creed which all were required to receive as expounded by the church on pain of eternal death—over him who had calmly died in the well-grounded hope of acceptance at the bar of God, and him who had been hurried to that bar from scenes of intemperance or brawling—the same “*sure and certain hope*” of the resurrection of the deceased to eternal life; and if he had not been called upon, however depraved and hopeless the character of the departed, or however irreparable the breach in society occasioned by his removal, to give Almighty God thanks for taking him to Himself—thanks which the lip must profess to be “heartly,” but to which the heart, in the utmost stretch of charity in the one case, or of self-denial in the other, could not respond.

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The version of the Psalms incorporated with the Book of Common Prayer, differed in many respects from that in the authorized version of the Bible, and in one instance directly contradicted it. ^[81] He, therefore, who acknowledged the more recent version as the word of God, and had noticed the discrepancy, could not, with strict truth, profess his conviction that the Prayer Book contained *nothing* contrary to the word of God.

Again: one of the Thirty-nine Articles expressly affirmed that “Christ went down into hell.” If Mr. Fleming was not at liberty to assign to this language a meaning such as the words, in the plain literal sense, do not express, and such as the compilers did not intend to convey, he might naturally feel some difficulty in admitting the statement to be “agreeable to the word of God.”

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Another of the Articles asserted that Christ rose from death, “and took again his body with *flesh, bones*, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature; wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth *until* he return *to judge* all men at the last day.” But a contemplative mind, accustomed to bring all its speculations to the test of holy writ, might be ready to assent to the proposition that there is a sense in which the glorified body of Christ is identical with that in which he tabernacled on earth, and yet might venture to doubt whether the language of that Article was altogether “agreeable to the word of God,” in which the distinction is so clearly marked between the “natural” and the “spiritual” body; between that which is sown in corruption, dishonour, and weakness, and that which is raised in incorruption, glory, and power; and in which it is expressly asserted that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” ^[83] Nor could the concluding words of this Article be regarded as having the warrant of Scripture, by any who were looking for the millennial reign of Christ upon earth.

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It is possible that the “penance,” prescribed by another of the Articles as requisite to the restoration of an excommunicated person, would appear to some, to be more consonant with the genius of popery, but less “agreeable to the word of God,” than that *penitence*, without which the garb or the posture of humiliation could avail nothing.

Or, (not to multiply instances further,) perhaps Mr. Fleming was an admirer of instrumental music in public worship, and believed it to have the warrant of Scripture. But by the thirty-fifth Article it is declared that the homilies contained “a godly and wholesome doctrine,” although one branch of the doctrine comprised therein was, that “chaunting and playing upon organs displeased God sore, and filthily defiled his holy house.” ^[84]

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In the above statement, no account has been taken of the invasion of Christ’s authority and of his people’s freedom, implied in the requirement of subscription to *any* human formulary. Nor is it intended to rest the argument upon the most formidable objections to the Common Prayer Book of the English church in particular. Some of those objections relate to doctrines so momentous, sanctioned under circumstances so peculiarly solemn, as to relieve the dissentient altogether from the suspicion of captious trifling.

But it is submitted to the consideration of the candid reader, whether any hesitancy existing in the mind of a minister of the gospel, on any one of these, or any similar point, would not be enough to justify his declining, at whatever apparent sacrifice of usefulness or emolument, to give his deliberate assent to the propositions contained in Whitgift’s Articles. The law of

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sincerity binds not to a partial but to a universal obedience. A deep reverence for truth, and a peculiarly tender conscience, are obviously just the qualities most likely to have insured a refusal. Cruel and mischievous indeed must have been the policy which thus demanded an unqualified acquiescence in so heterogeneous a mass of propositions, holding out a premium to the temporizing and careless to fritter away the eternal boundaries of right and wrong. ^[85]

If the separation which took place among the professed Christians of Beccles at this early period may be designated a schism, the charge does not attach to Mr. Fleming, and those who, probably, seceded with him, but to the parties by whom they were rejected. "Schism is a thing bad in itself, bad in its very nature; separation may be bad or good according to circumstances." Separation is not necessarily schism; "for while it may be occasioned by crime, it may be occasioned by virtue; it may result in those who depart from intolerance attempted, or intolerance sustained, from the pride of faction, or the predominance of principle, attachment to party, or attachment to truth. A schismatic, in short, *must* be a sinner, on whichever side he stands; a separatist *may* be more sinned against than sinning." ^[86]

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Mr. Fleming was a separatist, he was so by compulsion; but he was not a schismatic: and protestant dissent in Beccles was pure in its source; for it must in justice be traced not to a factious disobedience to the higher powers, but to an act of moral heroism, elicited by the despotism of Queen Elizabeth and the severity of a protestant archbishop.

CHAPTER IV.

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Rise of the Brownists; persecuted—James I.—Millenary petition; Brownists imprisoned and exiled—Robinson; father of the Independents—Jacob establishes the first English Independent church—Book of Sports—Bishop Harsnet—Laud—Bishop Wren's Articles of Visitation—William Bridge retires to Holland—Returns on the change of affairs—Formation of Independent churches at Yarmouth and Norwich—Cromwell.

THE early puritans, in general, were strongly attached to the principle of a national established church. But some of them were at length prompted, by their sad experience of episcopal domination, openly to seek the substitution of presbyterianism, as a form of church government which promised to preserve the equality of christian ministers, while it maintained their connexion and their authority. Others conceived that if episcopacy trampled on the scriptural rights of the clergy, presbyterianism interfered with those of the laity, and that both invaded the authority of Christ. ^[88a] Convictions of this nature flashed across the active mind of a young clergyman named Robert Brown. In 1581, he attracted the notice of Bishop Freke, as a teacher of "strange and dangerous doctrine" at Bury St. Edmunds, where he received so much encouragement, and his opinions were spreading so rapidly, as (in the serious apprehension of the bishop) to "hazard the overthrow of all religion." ^[88b]

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The Brownists differed little from the Church of England in their doctrinal views; but they looked upon her discipline as popish and antichristian, her sacraments and ordinances as invalid; and renounced communion with every church that was not constituted on the same model as their own. They held that as the primitive faith was to be maintained, so also the primitive institutions, as delineated in the New Testament, were to be imitated; and that every congregation of believers was, according to the Scriptures, a church in itself, having full power to elect, ordain, and dismiss its own pastor and other officers; to admit or exclude members; and to manage all its affairs, without being accountable to any other human jurisdiction. They discarded all forms of prayer. As they did not allow the priesthood to be a distinct order, the laity had full liberty to "prophecy," or exhort, in their assemblies, and it was usual, after sermon, for some of the members to propose questions and confer upon the doctrines that had been delivered. ^[89] They were careful respecting the religious character of those who united with them in church fellowship. Thus their views embraced the substance of those entertained by the Independents of the present day. But the Brownists introduced into their "first rude sketch," some opinions which have since been modified by the steady hand of wisdom, and some practices which have been expunged as unsanctioned by Scripture. They lost sight, too, of that which constituted the glory of their system, that its leading principle forbade the assumption of infallibility, while it provided the best security for the correction of whatever was erroneous in the scheme they had adopted, and for the preservation of all that was according to the will of God.

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Brown took refuge from persecution at Middleburg, in Zealand; but soon returned to England, and ultimately renounced those principles of nonconformity, which he was better fitted to develop by his ardour, than to recommend by his character.

The flame which he had kindled continued to burn with a purer, a steadier, and a broader lustre. In the parliament which met in February 1592-3, Sir Walter Raleigh said he feared there were near twenty thousand Brownists divided into congregations in Norfolk and Essex and in the neighbourhood of London. ^[90] Even this enlightened statesman declared that he deemed them "worthy to be rooted out of a commonwealth;" and the parliament, which had often shown a disposition to favour the puritans, consented, with a view to the extermination of the Brownists, to pass an act characterized by consummate tyranny. It consigned to prison all, above sixteen years of age, who should forbear for a month to go to church, or who should deny the queen's

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ecclesiastical authority. And in case they refused to make a most degrading submission, they were to go into perpetual banishment; and such as remained beyond the specified time, or returned without license from the queen, were to suffer death as felons. ^[91]

The Brownists felt the full weight of this cruel law. The justices of Suffolk who petitioned the council in favour of the puritan clergy, had no mercy for such audacious heretics as these. "We allow not" (said they) "of the anabaptists and their communion; we allow not of Brown, the overthrower of church and commonwealth; we abhor all these; we punish all these." ^[92a] Many were imprisoned; some were hanged; multitudes were driven to the protestant states on the continent. Others remained at home "fluctuating between the evasion and violation of the law," and casting a wistful glance towards the expected accession of a prince educated in the presbyterian Kirk of Scotland. ^[92b]

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They had formed an estimate of James's character, of which it was eminently undeserving. When the demise of the queen brought him to the English metropolis, he was met by a petition from the puritan clergy (popularly called the *millenary* petition) for the reformation of ceremonies and abuses in the church. The signatures to this document were obtained in twenty-five counties of England. They amounted to a less number than the name implied, and Suffolk supplied *seventy-one*, while the highest number from any other county was fifty-seven. ^[92c] The petitioners learned the fate of their application, when at the conclusion of a conference the king had appointed to be held at Hampton Court, he declared that they should conform, or he would "hurry them out of the kingdom, or do worse." James fell an easy prey to the adulation of the English bishops, and was soon converted to a church of which he found he could be "supreme head." While he thus revived and pronounced the claim of infallibility, Whitgift echoed the language employed by the pope on a former occasion, declaring that "undoubtedly his majesty spake by the special assistance of God's Spirit."

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The archbishop died soon after, and was succeeded by Dr. Richard Bancroft, who "trode in the steps of his predecessor in all the iniquities of persecution." ^[93a]

In the second year of King James's reign three hundred ministers were deprived, imprisoned, or banished. Persons were subjected to fine and imprisonment, for barely repeating to their families, in the evening, what they had heard at church, during the day, under the pretence that this constituted the crime of irregular preaching. ^[93b]

Mr. Maunsell, minister of Yarmouth, and Mr. Lad, a merchant of the same place, were cited before the High Commission at Lambeth, for holding a supposed conventicle, and cast into prison. Nicholas Fuller, a learned bencher of Gray's Inn, appeared as their counsel when they were brought to the bar; for which crime he also was consigned to prison, where he lay to the end of his days. ^[94]

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Among those who were proscribed and exiled for professing the Brownist tenets, were Mr. John Robinson, and Mr. Henry Jacob.

Mr. Robinson had been educated in the University of Cambridge, and beneficed near Great Yarmouth, in which neighbourhood he had also a separate congregation. They assembled in private houses for seven or eight years; but disturbance from the bishop's officers, and ruinous proceedings in the ecclesiastical courts, induced them to remove to the continent. Mr. Robinson settled at Leyden. He had commenced his career a rigid Brownist; but a more extensive acquaintance with the world, and the conversation of learned men, particularly Dr. William Ames, an exile also for religion, rendered him more charitable and moderate. ^[95a] He struck out a middle course between the Brownists and Presbyterians. Maintaining the lawfulness of separation from the reformed churches, he did not deny that they were true churches: and while he contended that each christian society was invested with power to choose officers, administer the gospel ordinances, and exercise all needful discipline over its members, and that it was consequently *independent* of all classes and synods; he nevertheless admitted the expediency of grave assemblies among the elders of churches for the purposes of mutual friendly advice. ^[95b] Mr. Robinson recommended his sentiments by a character in which eminent faculties and attainments were crowned and encircled by the predominating power of a solemn and affectionate piety. ^[95c] The Independents generally regard him as the father of their sect. But since they claim for their sentiments a yet nobler origin, they have preferred to be designated by the terms *Congregational* or *Independent*; as indicating the point of church government in which they so materially differ from all who acknowledge the authority of bishops or a presbytery.

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Robinson, though distinguished by moderation, was not deficient in vigilance. After some years, his congregation began to be removed by death, and their children to form connexions with Dutch families. There was ground to apprehend that their church, few in number, might gradually be melted away into an irreligious population. No encouragement was afforded to return home; and after spending many days in solemn addresses to Heaven for direction, they formed the sublime resolution of transplanting themselves to the shores of America, "where they might enjoy liberty of conscience" with a more cheering prospect of propagating their principles. It was arranged that a part of them should first embark, and that their pastor and the rest should afterwards follow. A day of fasting and prayer was appointed; and Mr. Robinson preached, concluding his discourse with an exhortation which breathes a spirit of candour far in advance of the age in which he lived, and strenuously enforces the principle upon which the religious system of the protestant nonconformists is founded, and with which it must, ultimately, either sink into oblivion, or win its way to universal prevalence.

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"Brethren," said this truly venerable man, "we are now quickly to part from one another, and whether I may ever live to see your faces on earth any more the God of heaven only knows; ^[97] but whether the Lord has appointed that or no, I charge you before God and his blessed angels, that you follow me no farther than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

"If God reveal any thing to you by any other instrument of his, be as ready to receive it, as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am verily persuaded, I am very confident, the Lord has more truth yet to break out of his holy word . . . I beseech you, remember it, 'tis an article in your church covenant, that you be *ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God*. Remember that, and every other article of your sacred covenant. But I must here withal exhort you to take heed what you receive as truth. Examine it; consider it; and compare it with other scriptures of truth, before you receive it; for 'tis not possible the christian world should come so lately out of antichristian darkness, and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once." ^[98a]

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Mr. Robinson accompanied the adventurers to Delfthaven, and kneeling on the sea-shore committed them, in fervent prayer, to the protection and blessing of Heaven. ^[98b]

It is difficult to conceive of an expedition more truly noble and momentous in its objects and results.

"What sought they thus afar?
Bright jewels of the mine?
The wealth of seas? the spoils of war?—
They sought a faith's pure shrine.

Aye, call it holy ground,
The soil where first they trod;
They have left unstained what there they found—
FREEDOM TO WORSHIP GOD!" ^[99]

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Mr. Jacob, who has been mentioned as another of the exiled Brownists, had adopted their creed, without their uncharitableness; and during his residence on the continent, embraced Mr. Robinson's views, of church government. In 1616 he returned to London, and there planted the first Independent church in England. In this step he had the sanction of the leading puritans of those times.

Several of his friends who were desirous of uniting in church fellowship having assembled with him, a day of fasting and prayer for a blessing upon their undertaking was observed; and each individual, towards the close of the solemnity, made a public confession of his faith in Jesus Christ. Then standing together, they joined hands, and solemnly covenanted with each other to walk together in all the ways and ordinances God had already revealed or should further make known to them. Mr. Jacob was chosen their pastor by the suffrage of the brotherhood, and proper persons were appointed as deacons, with fasting and prayer, and imposition of hands. ^[100]

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The policy of the king, alike despotic, bigoted, and weak, continued to expatriate many of the best of his subjects, and swelled the ranks of the Independents at home. By the advice of the bishops his Majesty issued directions that none should be allowed to preach without perfect conformity, and that no preacher should maintain any point of doctrine not allowed in the church of England; a requirement utterly irreconcilable with his subsequent patronage of the Arminian tenets.

By the millenary petition the puritans had prayed "that the Lord's day be not profaned;" and James, taking an atrocious advantage of their regard to the sanctity of the sabbath, published, to prevent the spread of their opinions, the "Declaration for sports on the Lord's day," commonly called *The Book of Sports*.

This equally profane and ridiculous document originated, as his Majesty declared, from the prohibition of Sunday recreations by some "puritans and precise people;" from which "unlawful carriages" there flowed, according to the royal doctrine, two main evils, the hindering the conversion of many from popery, and the preventing the meaner sort of people from using such exercises as would render their bodies fit for war, when his Majesty might "have occasion to use them." He therefore announced his pleasure, that all the "puritans and precisians" should be constrained to conform, or to leave the country; and that, after divine service, the people should not be discouraged in any *lawful* recreation, such as dancing, archery, leaping; nor from May-games, Whitson-ales, morris-dances, and the setting up May-poles, and other sports therewith used. ^[101]

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The clergy were required to publish this "Declaration" in all parish churches. Many who refused to do so were brought into the high commission court, suspended and imprisoned. ^[102a]

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Dr. Samuel Harsnet, who was translated in 1619 from the see of Chichester to that of Norwich, was a zealous assertor of the ceremonies of the church, ^[102b] and a bitter enemy to all "irregularities." Mr. Peck, having catechised his family and sung a psalm in his own house when several of his neighbours were present, the bishop required them all to do penance and recant. Those who refused were immediately excommunicated, and condemned in heavy costs. The

citizens of Norwich afterwards complained to parliament of this cruel oppression. ^[102c]

By the same prelate, an individual named Whiting, was prosecuted and brought before the high commission, expecting to be deprived of considerable estates; but the death of the king put an end to the prosecution. ^[102d]

When Charles the first succeeded to the throne many of the descendants of the early puritans still adhered to the established church, seeking only the reduction of the inordinate power of the bishops, and the removal of "popish ceremonies." But the injuries they received were constantly stimulating their inquiries, and strengthening their objections to episcopacy. Dr. Laud, who was successively promoted from the bishopric of Bath and Wells, to the see of London, ^[103a] and the archbishopric of Canterbury, ^[103b] wielded the terrors of the star chamber and high commission courts with redoubled cruelty. New and more offensive rites were introduced into the church. The communion table was converted into an altar, and all persons were commanded to bow to it on entering the church. ^[103c] All week-day lectures, and afternoon sermons on Sundays, were abolished; and the king, "out of pious care for the service of God, and for suppressing humours that oppose truth," republished, by the advice of his ecclesiastical favourite, the Book of Sports, with a command that it should be read in all parish churches. ^[104a] This the puritan clergy refused, for which they felt the iron rod of their oppressors. p. 103

Another grievance under which the puritans laboured at this period, arose from the power assumed by the bishops, (in manifest dereliction both of the canons of the church and the laws of the land,) of framing and enforcing Articles of Visitation in their own names. The Articles of Dr. Matthew Wren, bishop of Norwich, were among the most remarkable. They consisted of nearly nine hundred questions, some very insignificant, others highly tinctured with superstition, and several impossible to be answered. ^[104b] They appear to have been chiefly designed to detect such ministers as were not "perfect" conformists—inquiring minutely into the observance of the ceremonies, the reading of the Book of Sports, the practice of conversing upon religion at table, and in families, &c. ^[104c] By his severities this prelate drove upwards of three thousand persons to seek their bread in a foreign land. ^[104d] p. 104

Among many who refused to read the Book of Sports, and otherwise disobeyed some of the bishop's Articles, was Mr. William Bridge, who had been a fellow of Emanuel College, Cambridge, and was parish chaplain of St. George's, Tombland, Norwich. ^[105a] He was silenced, and afterwards excommunicated. The writ *de excommunicato capiendo*, having been issued against him, he withdrew into Holland. ^[105b] An Independent church of English refugees, at Rotterdam, chose him as their pastor, and, during his residence among them, he appears to have become firmly attached to the Congregational mode of church government. ^[105c] p. 105

The forbearance of the English nation at last broke beneath the despotism of a king, who, not content with governing by a parliament, desired to rule without one, and the cruelty of a hierarchy which had become a hideous contrast to the church of the "holy, harmless, and undefiled" Redeemer. On the assembling of the long parliament in 1640, a storm of righteous retribution fell upon the authors of the ecclesiastical oppressions. The people assailed the parliament with complaints; the parliament presented their grievances to the king; and the deluded monarch replied by a proclamation, requiring an exact conformity to the established religion! But tyranny had already reached its height, and the torrent had set in an opposite direction. p. 106

The Independents, who had assembled in private, and shifted from house to house for many years, took courage and showed themselves in public. The same promising appearances induced Mr. Bridge to return to England in 1642. Many families of refugees accompanied him, some of whom settled in Yarmouth, and others went to reside at Norwich. All of them appear to have been warmly attached to Mr. Bridge, and very desirous of continuing under his pastoral care. This however was highly inconvenient, and it was at length agreed that the seat of his church should be at Yarmouth, and that the residents at Norwich, with some other serious persons there, should form themselves into a separate communion. This was done June 10th, 1644, several of the Yarmouth brethren signifying their consent with expressions of the most tender and endeared affection, as having been, many of them, "companions together in the patience of our Lord Jesus, in their own, and in a strange land, and having long enjoyed sweet communion together in divine ordinances." ^[107] p. 107

Mr. Bridge may be regarded as the founder of the Independent churches in the East Anglian counties. A constant intercourse had been maintained between those counties and the opposite coast of Holland, from whence they were not too remote to catch the spirit of religious freedom which had actuated the conduct, and which constituted the reward of the exiled Christians. A district so situated—the scene of Robinson's usefulness and sufferings, and which had given birth to Goodwin and Ames, and was receiving back into its bosom the champions of liberty and truth—presented an encouraging field for disseminating the principles of Independency. Hence they were rapidly and extensively embraced in this part of the kingdom. Dr. Calamy intimates that, some years after Mr. Bridge's return, "most professors of religion" in these counties "inclined to the Congregational way." ^[108a] p. 108

It was not, however, till after the monarchy had given place to the military usurpation of Cromwell, that those who were favourable to Congregational sentiments ventured to form themselves into churches in provincial places,—always doubly exposed to the inspection of ill-designing curiosity. ^[108b]

Though it is doubtful whether Cromwell really embraced the sentiments of the Independents, yet he certainly countenanced them, by selecting his chaplains, and supplying vacancies in the universities, from amongst the members of their communion; and by recognising in his public acts the right of private judgment. ^[109] The instrument of government which he framed, declared that none should be compelled to conform to the public religion, by penalties or otherwise; and that such as professed faith in God by Jesus Christ, though differing in judgment from the doctrine, worship, or discipline, publicly held forth, should not be restrained from, but should be protected in, the profession of their faith and exercise of their religion, so as they abused not that liberty to the civil injury of others, and to the actual disturbance of the public peace. ^[110]

An exception was made to the prejudice of "popery" and "prelacy," which would be generally regarded, by the Independents of the present day, as equally unjustifiable and needless.

CHAPTER V.

Formation of the Independent church at Beccles—Probable covenant—Earliest members—John Clarke—Baptists—Robert Ottee; made pastor—Deacons chosen—First administration of the Lord's supper and baptism—Prudential arrangements—Day of thanksgiving—Singing introduced—Prophesyings—Savoy conference—Interruption of the record—Act of Uniformity—Mr. Ottee continues his ministry; his death; posthumous work; opinions and character—Meeting-house—Communion plate.

THE formation of an Independent church at Beccles naturally followed from the course of events sketched in the preceding chapters. The sufferings of the martyrs, the puritans, and the Brownists, had preserved the leaven of christian freedom; and the political circumstances of the times combined with the fostering aid of the Norwich and Yarmouth churches, to encourage its manifestation, and to promote its diffusion. Upon those models several christian societies were formed, in various towns of Norfolk and Suffolk, during the years 1652 and 1653. ^[112a] Beccles took the lead. The church book opens with the following record:—

"The 6th day of ye fifth month, com'only called July, 1652." ^[112b]

"The names of such persons whoe have covenanted together to walke y^e of Christ according to Gospell Order, wth an account of such matters as haue occurred in y^e Church att Beccles.

"In y^e day & yeare above written, these following p'sons joyned in covenant ^[112c] together under y^e visible Regiment ^[113] of Christ, according to y^e Gospell, vz. Joh. Clarke, James King, jun Rob^t. Ottey, Edm. Nevill, Joh. Morse, Will^m. Cutlove, Edm. Artis, Rob^t. Horne, Joh. Botswaine."

Although this mutual engagement was all that was essential to the formation of a church of Christ, yet on an occasion so deeply interesting, and fraught with consequences so momentous, it was natural that the brethren elsewhere should be requested to add their approval, their counsel, and their prayers. In the Congregational church book at Norwich, a letter is stated to have been "received from the Christians at Beckles, by which they signified their intention to gather into church fellowship," and desired that church would "send messengers to be there upon the 23. of July, 1652." Daniel Bradford, James Gooding, and Samuel Clarke, were selected for this service.

The first of these three individuals had been "employed in the army," when the Yarmouth church was formed, and was afterwards a deacon at Norwich. The other two appear to have been among Mr. Bridge's companions in exile, and to have returned with him. ^[114a] Doubtless they were men whose zeal was chastened by experience and discretion, and whose piety had stood the tests of time and persecution.

It was usual with the early Independents, at the formation of their churches, to sign an agreement, or covenant, expressive of their objects in thus associating, and pledging themselves to the faithful performance of the duties devolving upon them as church members. ^[114b] On the formation of their first church at Norwich, their *covenant* was read aloud by one, and then subscribed by all the brethren.

That document, since it is highly probable that, at least in substance, it was adopted on the gathering of the church at Beccles, shall now be laid before the reader. It displays a noble solemnity and simplicity, connected with a candour and sense of fallibility, which have been justly described as "extremely graceful and evangelical." ^[115]

"It is manifest by God's word, that God alwaies was pleased to walke in a way of couenant with his people knitt together in a visible church estate, He promising to be their God, and they promising to be his people, separated from the world and the pollutions thereof as may appeare therein.

"Wee therefore, whose names are subscribed, being desirous (in the feare of God) to worship and serve Him according to his reuealed will, and beleaving it to be our duty to

walke in a way of church couenant, doe freely and solemnly couenant with the Lord and one another, in the presence of his saints and angells—

“1. That we will forever acknowledge and avouch the Lord to be our God in Christ Jesus, giuing up ourselves to Him, to be his people.

“2. That we will alwaies endeavour, through the grace of God assisting us, to walke in all his waies and ordinances, *according to his written word, which is the onely sufficient rule of good life for every man.* Neither will we suffer ourselves to be polluted by any sinfull waies, either publike or priuate, but endeavour to abstaine from the uery appearance of euill, giuing no offence to the Jew or gentile, or the churches of Christ.

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“3. That we will humbly and willingly submit ourselves to the gouernment of Christ in this church, in the administration of the word, the seales, and discipline.

“4. That we will, in all loue, improve our com’union as brethren, by watching ouer one another, and (as need shalbe) counsell, admonish, reprove, comfort, releeve, assist, and beare with one another, seruing one another in loue.

“5. Lastly, we doe not couenant or promise these things in our owne, but in Christ’s strength; neither doe we confine ourselves to the words of this couenant, *but shall at all tymes account it our duty to embrace any further light or trueth which shalbe reuealed to us out of God’s word.*” ^[116]

Such was the spirit, if not the letter, of the mutual engagement into which they entered, who introduced into the town of Beccles the Independent form of church government.

p. 117

Within twelve months from the formation of the church, twenty-one other persons had joined. The first of these was Mr. Joseph Cutlove, who appears to have been, at the same time, portreeve of the Corporation of Beccles, and to have had some influential friends among the members of the long parliament. ^[117] Amongst the names is also that of “Humphry Brewster,” one of the truly honourable family to whom belonged the hall and manors of Wrentham, and who, for many years, greatly encouraged and supported the dissenting interest there. ^[118a] And “Francis Hayloucke,” subsequently a deacon of the church.

p. 118

During the above period there was no recognised pastor. But in the year 1653, occurs this memorandum:—

“29 d. 5 m. com’only called July.

A pastor was chosen.”

Who this was is rather uncertain; perhaps Mr. JOHN CLARK.

He seems to have been a minister in the established church, for in the parochial register, under the years 1647 and 1648, are recorded the baptisms of two sons of “John Clark, minister, and of Ann his wife.” ^[118b] It is also observable that his name is the first enrolled on the list of members of the Independent church. And among the individuals subsequently admitted, was “Anna” his wife; which serves to identify him with the person mentioned in the parish register.

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He does not appear to have engaged fully in the performance of pastoral duties. Perhaps he had a lingering preference for the establishment, although the peculiar circumstances of the times, after the death of Charles the first, induced him to unite with other serious persons in church fellowship. Dr. Walker states that he got possession of the living of Beccles in 1655. ^[119] This he might be enabled to accomplish when Cromwell, in order that the Presbyterians might not fill all the livings with persons of their persuasion, appointed, by an ordinance in council, commissioners, partly selected from the Independent denomination, to examine all persons seeking admission to benefices. ^[120]

p. 120

It was to be expected that the possession of religious liberty, in a degree before unequalled, would occasion the propagation of many opinions previously unknown or concealed through fear. The Baptists, especially, now became a distinct and important denomination. They were the objects of bitter scorn and invective from the Presbyterian party, who had gained the ascendancy, and were treated with less kindness by the Independents than might reasonably have been expected. In 1656, two persons who had been members of the Independent church at Beccles, received adult baptism, and in so doing were considered to have given “offence” to the church, and desired to appear and “give an account of their practices.”

There are some subsequent instances of a similar kind. It was natural that, entertaining peculiar opinions as to the mode and objects of christian baptism, they should unite with societies professing the same sentiments. Greatly is it to be lamented that uncharitableness should ever have intruded where intolerance would have been deprecated; that fellow-christians should have allowed these minor differences of sentiment to create even an apparent separation of heart, or

p. 121

—“Let the basin and the flood
Divide the purchase of that blood,
Where *all* must plunge or die.”

The next pastor, and the transactions connected with his ministry will require a more extended notice.

ROBERT OTTEE was a native of Great Yarmouth, where his father carried on the business of a boddice-maker. ^[121] The son appears to have received such an education as, in some measure, fitted him for the more elevated and responsible situation he was destined to occupy. He was kept at the Latin school till he was old enough to be employed in his father's trade, at which he worked several years. It does not appear that at this early period of his life, he had any view to the ministry; but his inclination towards mental pursuits was so decided, that nothing but a deep sense of filial duty would have reconciled him to the manual occupation in which he found himself engaged. He had already imbibed a conviction of the supreme importance of religion, and while he laboured with his hands, his Bible generally lay open before him.

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Prompted by his serious impressions he attended the meetings of some Christians in his native town, held for united, earnest prayer, and other religious exercises. On one occasion an individual whose assistance was mainly depended upon, was prevented from being present. Mr. Ottee was induced to pray and expound a passage of Scripture; and he acquitted himself so well, as to call forth the admiration of the most intelligent persons present. Some of them applied to Mr. Bridge, desiring that he would encourage so promising a young man to devote himself to the christian ministry.

But Mr. Ottee evinced the same prudence which distinguished him through life, and a diffidence as to his qualifications, which is the frequent attendant on intellectual or religious attainments of a superior order. There were some who had previously received encouragement from Mr. Bridge, but who, not having been favoured with similar advantages of education, had not altogether fulfilled the sanguine expectations of their friends. He determined, therefore, not to yield to Mr. Bridge's suggestions, till he had consulted Mr. Brinsley, the exemplary and persecuted parish minister of Yarmouth. ^[123a] That grave, but urbane man, had repeated conversations with him on the subject, and was so fully satisfied as to his knowledge of the Scriptures, his gifts, his seriousness of spirit, and holiness of conversation, as to join cordially in recommending him to apply himself to the great duties of a minister of the gospel. ^[123b]

p. 123

His sense of the immense responsibility connected with the ministry would not allow him to think of blending with it the pursuits of trade. He had imbibed a settled conviction that, to use his own expression, *the work of the gospel was sufficient for one man*. "There is nothing," says he, in one of his sermons, "more plain in Scripture than this, that those whom God hath set [apart] to the work of the ministry are exempted from other worldly trades and callings. It hath been an abuse, in this nation, to think that men may trade, and buy, and sell, and run into all worldly business, and yet undertake the preaching of the gospel: yea, some there are, called the regular clergy, yet give themselves too much to farming, buying, and selling, and secular employments; this doth come short of their calling; for mind what the apostle saith to Timothy, in 1 Tim. iv. 13, "Till I come, give thyself to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." ^[124a]

p. 124

Mr. Ottee appears to have been residing in Beccles when the Independent church was formed. In the year 1656, he accepted the pastoral charge of the people with whom he had long "held sweet counsel." ^[124b] The circumstance is thus briefly recorded in the church book.

"12th No. 56.

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Mr. Otty made paster by y^e church."

This has been supposed to refer to his ordination, and the memorandum occurring 29th July, 1653, to his election. But a delay of more than three years between the choice and settlement of a pastor scarcely admits of a satisfactory explanation. The expression, "*made pastor* by the church," moreover, raises a strong presumption that the occurrence included, if it did not refer solely to, the *election* of a pastor. That expression would scarcely have been used with reference to the mere ordination of an individual, previously elected to the pastoral office. ^[125]

p. 126

With Mr. Ottee's pastorate commenced the appointment of such other officers as are sanctioned by the holy Scriptures, and the regular administration of christian ordinances to his flock. With reference to these subjects, the church book contains some memoranda, which will be perused with interest by those connected with the church or congregation.

"December 29th, 1656. Deacons chosen.

W^m. Cutlove & Edmond Artis, were sett ap'te to attend y^e office of Deacons: & from y^e Lord's day next ther is to be a weekly collec'ion putt into ther hands for y^e supply of y^e Lord's table, & the table of y^e (godly) poore of y^e church.

"December 29th, 1656

It was then agreed that y^e Lord's Supper be administred upon y^e 18th day of January next, & y^t y^e Thursday before be kept by y^e church by fasting & prayer, in order to a p'paration unto y^t ordinance: w^{ch} was accordingly observed. The p'paration day kept at o^r brother Artises, Jan. 15th, and y^e supper celebrated at Mr. Clearke's house, upon the Lord's day, Jan. 18th, 1656, w^{ch} was y^e first tyme of administration of y^t ordinance amongst us.

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At our monthly meetinge, being 28th of January, 1656, ^(127a) kept at o^r pastour’s house, the sacrament of baptisme was first administred amongst us by o^r pastour, Mr. Ottye.”
^(127b)

The deacons were evidently, according to the examples recorded in the New Testament, “men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,” chosen by the brethren, and set apart to serve the table of the Lord, and that of the poor members; to take charge, in a word, of the secular affairs of the church, while the pastor gave himself “continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” ^(128a) They found no description of the deacon’s office, as a gradation in the christian ministry, or as preliminary to it; or as continuing “for the space of a whole year;” or as including the administration of baptism and the duty of preaching, subject to the approbation of a bishop. They discarded these human inventions, and found their highest satisfaction in an adherence to the precedents of the New Testament.

p. 128

The mode of administering the Lord’s supper was that which had been, long before, adopted by the Brownists ^(128b)—that which the apostolic account, ^(128c) and the nature and design of the institution, alike indicated as the most appropriate. They who had openly professed their love and allegiance to Jesus Christ, commemorated his death in obedience to his command, enjoyed communion with Him and with one another in the sacred feast and, with grateful joy, found themselves delivered from the imposition of a posture, which had been the natural accompaniment and indication of a belief in transubstantiation, which was unsuited to the ordinance, and had no warrant in the word of God.

p. 129

Baptism was administered to the children of believers, as a sign of the gracious covenant God had made with the parents, and as an occasion for parental dedication and the solemn promise of christian instruction. But the use of sponsors was discarded, as alike unscriptural and unnatural; the sign of the cross was omitted, as a departure from the simplicity of the gospel, implying a proportionate approach to superstition; and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration was rejected, as calculated to produce and nourish a fatal delusion.

It is essential to the efficient existence of every society, whether secular or religious, that some regulations should be adopted with regard to the admission of its members. But the distinction cannot be too carefully noticed, between arrangements of this nature assented to by persons voluntarily associated for religious purposes, and terms of church fellowship enforced by authority, under civil penalties, directly or indirectly attaching to nonconformity. The former are consistent with unlimited toleration; the latter involve the very essence of intolerance.

p. 130

Mr. Ottee appears to have exercised a very commendable prudence in the admission of members into his church. Some of the brethren were usually appointed to confer with the candidates, “in order to the church’s satisfaction.” And repeated instances are recorded in which the society suspended its decision, until they could “give further satisfaction,” and should again apply for admission.

At a church meeting, held 25th February, 1656, the following resolution was recorded, apparently referring to Mr. Ottee’s recent settlement.

“It was likewise agreed upon, that this day fortnett, being the eleventh day of March, begininge at eleven of the clocke, be spent by the church in thanksgivinge unto God, for his gracious returneing unto us in a way of mercye, for o^r settlement after those many shakeinges we have bene under, in refference to o^r present church state, & y^t the Lord hath bene pleased both to give us to have the priviledges of his people administred unto us, & to oure children; & alsoe that we then seeke unto him by earnest supplication, for further grace, wisdom, & assistance, to walke in his house, as those who are priviledged wth such mercye—this meetinge to be at o^r brother Edmond Artis his house.”

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Hearts thus attuned to praise, sought its expression in “psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs.” Singing would have exposed the puritans to considerable peril, while they were obliged to meet in secret that they might evade the fang of persecution. But now “had the churches rest;” and they joyfully availed themselves of a privilege, at once permitted and prompted by their improved circumstances. At the next meeting the subject was brought under consideration.

p. 132

“Att the monthly meeting of the church, upon the 25th day of the first month, called March, [1657].

“It was agreed by the church, that they doe put in practice the ordinance of singinge, in the publiq upon the forenoone and afternoone on the Lord’s daies, and that it be betweene praier and sermon; and also it was agreed that the New England translation of the Psallmes be made use of by the church, at their times of breaking of bread: and it was agreed that the next Lord’s day seventh-night be the day to enter upon the work of singinge in publiq.”

The metrical version of the Psalms, alluded to in the above extract, was published in 1640. The pilgrim fathers, “though they blessed God for the religious endeavours of those who translated the Psalms into the metre usually annexed at the end of the Bible,” yet observed in that

translation so many variations, not only from the text, but from the very sense of the Psalmist, that "it was an offence unto them." Each of their chief divines took a portion to translate, and the whole was afterwards revised by Mr. Henry Dunster, President of Harvard College. They claimed the merit of a close adherence to the Hebrew, but were conscious that their versification was, by no means, free from imperfections. "We have respected," said they, "rather a plain translation, than to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase. We have attended conscience rather than elegance, fidelity rather than ingenuity; that so we may sing in Zion the Lord's songs of praise, according unto his own will, until he bid us enter into our Master's joy, to sing eternal hallelujahs."^[133]

p. 133

Whatever might be the comparative claims of a version of the Psalms composed two hundred years ago, it would grate upon ears accustomed to the more majestic flow of modern poetry. It has been the privilege—the almost exclusive privilege of nonconformity, to have derived the benefit of progressing refinement, and to have retained poetry as the permanent handmaid of devotion, while in the national churches the uncouth doggerel of the sixteenth century is still cherished as a thing which it were sacrilege to touch.

p. 134

The Independents never introduced into their assemblies that unbounded liberty of teaching, which had been the mark and the bane of the Brownist churches.^[134] But they desired, under the prudent, constant, and salutary superintendence of a ministry invested, if not with more extensive powers, with a more commanding moral influence, to retain the advantages of an open discussion of topics connected with their religious system and spiritual prosperity. The following extracts from the church book, show that something of this kind was attempted at Beccles. The reader will regret, that no account of the questions discussed, or of the manner in which they were treated, has been preserved.

"It was likewise" (at the meeting, held 25th March, 1657) further "agreed, that upon the next monthly meeting, the church doe take in considerac'on y^e bretherens' prophesying,^[135] or speaking to a question."

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"At a meetinge of the church upon the 3rd day of the month, com'only called June, 1657, it was agreed upon and condesended unto, that two of these bretheren hereunder written be appoynted in ther order to speake unto the questions w^{ch} shall be hereafter p'pounded, to be answered in our publiq church meeteinges; and our pastour or Mr. Clearke, one of them, be desired constantly to conclude the meetinge:

Edmond Artis & John Morse.	Francis Haylocke & Richard Heasell.
Edmond Nevill & Robert Horne.	Wm. Cutlove & Richard Shildrake."

Then follows:

"The order of bretheren to find ther questions w^{ch} they are desired to acquaynt eyther our present pastor with, or o^r brother Mr. Clearke, to this end y^t upon the conclusion of eyther days of these exercises, the question next to be spoken unto may be p'pounded unto the bretheren, who are desired to stay a little space, every meetinge, after the rest of the company who attend these meeteinges beside the church have withdrawen themselves, to the end y^t they may know w^t & whose question is next in order to be considered; and that one of them be desired to give out the question.

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"Brother Thomas Onge," &c. &c. [eleven other names.]

"It was likewise further agreed upon y^t after the next meeteinge of this nature be p'formed upon the second day of the weeke, publiq notyse be given at y^t meeting that from thenceforth it is intended y^t the exercise of this nature shall be kept in the usual place, upon the 3rd day of the week, to begin at the houres of two of the clocke in the afternoone in sum'er tyme, & at one in the winter."

Sept. 20th, 1658, occurs the following:

"At a meetinge then of the church, beinge occasioned by a letter sent from diverse churches touchinge a generall meetinge of the severall Congregationall churches at London, by ther pastors or others, bretheren, at the Savoye, upon the 29th of September next, it was agreed by the church that our pastour, Mr. Ottie, should goe to that meeteinge on the behalf of this church, and y^t y^e charge of the jorneye should be mutually borne by the bretheren of the socyetye."

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Previously to the death of Oliver Cromwell the Independents had petitioned for liberty to hold this synod. They had acquired, especially in Suffolk and Norfolk, considerable importance by their numbers, and by the accession of many opulent persons. But they had been (to use their own expressions) like so many ships launched singly, and sailing apart and alone in the vast ocean of those tumultuous times, exposed to every wind of doctrine, under no other conduct than the word and Spirit, and their particular elders and principal brethren, without associations among themselves, or so much as holding out a common light to others whereby to know where

they were. ^[137] It is a circumstance which strikingly distinguishes the Independents from the Brownists, that while they strenuously contended against the exercise of any spiritual authority, even by the gravest and wisest assemblies of men, they desired “that there might be a correspondence between their churches, in city and country, for counsel and mutual edification,” and that the world might know to what extent they, “being many,” were “one body.”

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The meeting at the Savoy consisted of ministers and messengers from above a hundred Congregational churches, and was graced by the presence of Howe, then chaplain to the young Protector, and of other eminent divines. The synod was opened by a day of fasting and prayer; and a committee of six divines, including Mr. Bridge of Yarmouth, was appointed to draw up a confession. On the 12th of October, the assembly agreed upon “a declaration of the faith and order owned and practised in the Congregational churches in England.” As its basis they adopted the confession drawn up in 1643, by the Westminster assembly of divines, omitting, however, all that related to the *power* of synods and councils, and of the civil magistrate in religious matters. They added a chapter on the proper magnitude of sacred societies, as properly congregational, though not so isolated as to preclude mutual counsel; the proper subjects of church-membership, namely, those who in the judgment of charity are sanctified persons; the commencement of the church relationship by the free choice of the individuals, and not by accidental dwelling in a particular civil district; the requisiteness, however, of the associating of believers who reside in the same city, town, or neighbourhood; the right of the members at large to be consulted, and the necessity of the concurrence of a majority of them, in all important transactions of the society; and the propriety of receiving into their communion those of different sentiments, so far as consistent with their own principles. ^[139a] They concluded with an expression of gratitude to their governors for the liberty of conscience they enjoyed, and that this liberty was established by law, so long as they disturbed not the public peace. ^[139b]

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On the 2nd of March, 1658, a meeting of the church was held at Flixton, (seven miles from Beccles,) for the purpose of administering the ordinance of baptism to several children.

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Another church meeting was held 3rd March, 1659. The detailed account of the proceedings of the society then abruptly terminates.

The death of Cromwell, and the resignation of his upright but unambitious son, involved the national affairs in new difficulty. The hour of comparative sunshine which religion had enjoyed had well nigh passed away. The restoration of the monarchy was indeed spoken of as an event calculated to unite all the jarring elements of the state;—a glowing hope, resembling the intense fervour of sunshine which precedes and foretells the renewal of the storm.

In 1662, was passed the Act of Uniformity, than which no chapter of the Statute Book has obtained, in the estimation of just and liberal men, a more ignominious notoriety. It demanded a perfect conformity to the Book of Common Prayer, and the rites and ceremonies of the established church. The 5th September (O. S.) 1662, on which day it came into operation, was properly denominated the *black* Bartholomew-day. “That Bartholomew-day” (says Locke) “was fatal to our church and religion, by throwing out a very great number of worthy, learned, pious, and orthodox divines.” By this statute nearly two thousand five hundred ministers were silenced. And it is affirmed that, upon a moderate calculation, it procured the untimely death of three thousand nonconformists, and the ruin of sixty thousand families. ^[141]

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This proceeding, however, was witnessed by the dissenting body more in sorrow than in anger. One of the leading Independents in Suffolk thus expressed himself. “About this time was the breaking up of the ministry; which sad dispensation I was very sensible of, and much bewailed in my own spirit, and in secret mourning for the sin and misery of England that had undone itself and declared itself unworthy of the gospel: writing *Ichabod* upon all my enjoyments, whilst the glory was departed; calling to mind my own iniquity that helped on this sad judgment.” ^[142]

p. 142

The Act of Uniformity had, according to Dr. Calamy, the immediate effect of silencing both Mr. John Clark and Mr. Ottee. Of the former, no further account has been handed down. The latter appears to have been soon enabled, by his own prudence, and through the respect which a holy and benevolent character often receives even from the worldly and narrow-minded, to continue the more private exercise of his ministry.

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Notwithstanding the passing of the Conventicle Act and the Five Mile Act, designed more effectually to crush the dissenting congregations and separate their pastors from them, he appears to have gone on, through the remaining years of the Stuart dynasty, preaching the gospel to his people in Beccles. “And God continued” (says Dr. Calamy) “to bless his labours among them to the end of his days.” He presided over his church with remarkable prudence and fidelity. His preaching was as solid and useful as it was plain, and “met with approbation, both from ministers and private Christians of all denominations.” The following testimony by Mr. Bidbanck of Denton, is equally strong. “He was, as is well known, an interpreter one of a thousand, Job xxxiii. 23; an Apollos, mighty in the Scriptures, Acts xviii. 24.” ^[144a] If he preached five or six sermons without hearing of any good effect, he was greatly dejected and very fervent in prayer for more abundant success.

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Towards the close of his life, he had, as he told Mr. Bidbanck, “many warnings of putting off his tabernacle.” With a view to his own consolation under those circumstances, and to the edification of his flock, he preached, in the mornings of the Lord’s days, a course of sermons upon the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. These were amongst his last

discourses. They were heard with deep and affectionate interest, and having been taken down in shorthand from the lips of the preacher, were published soon after his decease. ^[144b]

This little book was introduced to the christian world, by a short preface from the pen of Mr. Martin Finch, the minister of the Independent church at Norwich, ^[145] and dedicated to the deceased pastor's bereaved flock, by Mr. Bidbanck. In these discourses, Mr. Ottee enlarged upon the parallel drawn by the apostle between the priesthood of Melchisedec and that of Jesus Christ, in an expository style, discovering much energy of thought combined with deep piety and an ardent desire for usefulness.

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Mr. Ottee was, emphatically, a *protestant nonconformist*. With him personal piety was, indeed, the first, the absorbing consideration. But protestantism held scarcely an inferior place in his esteem. On this subject his style, even through the mutilating medium of shorthand, rises to animation. "What prophet, or what apostle," he exclaims, "said any thing for the worshipping of images? or what apostle, or what prophet, said any thing to warrant the praying in an unknown tongue? What prophet, or apostle, or penman of Scripture, hath said any thing concerning the sacrifice of the mass, for the living and the dead? Oh, filthy trash! What prophet, or apostle, or penman of the Scripture, hath said any thing concerning praying souls out of purgatory, or of having mass read for them? What prophet, or apostle, or Christ himself, said any thing of purgatory, or crossing themselves, or their childish crosses and beads? Of these popish superstitions God hath said nothing in all his word. And therefore the people of God must never meddle with these things; and if you be tempted or solicited to any ceremony, ask the question, Have Moses, or the prophets, or Christ, or his apostles, said any thing to this matter that you are so zealous for? O, search the Scripture; and what you find there, you are to practise in faith and in the fear of God. *'To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.'*" ^[147a]

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Nor did he hesitate to avow his objections to a church which retained any traces of the superstitions of popery. "As for us that have the reformed religion, how many amongst us delight to worship God after the law of a carnal commandment! Are there not too many amongst us which are more for old, abrogated ceremonies than they are for a gospel worship? Bewail and lament the apostasy of this generation." ^[147b] "If all the Mosaical rites and ceremonies were weak and imperfect, and God, for that reason, abolished them, because they could not reach the main end of man's happiness; then, here you may see the folly of those men that set up these rites and ceremonies and human inventions, in part of their worship. If God's own institutions were weak and unprofitable, what are men's inventions? Are their priestly vestments profitable? their crosses and cringings, profitable? What profit is there in bowing the knee at the word 'Jesus'? . . . But some will say, these are ornaments of the church of God. To that I answer, so is a painted glass an ornament to the house, yet it shuts out the light more than a plain glass . . . These painted and carnal ceremonies do shut out the light of the gospel; for the light of the gospel shines out more pure and clear in the plain administration of the gospel; and therefore all those things that carnal men so magnifie, are unprofitable." ^[148a]

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Mr. Ottee was *congregational* in his judgment; but he held his opinions in combination with so much modesty and moderation, as to win the esteem and affection of those who differed from him. In particular, he enjoyed the intimate friendship of Dr. John Collinges, the learned, pious, and eminent minister of St. Stephen's church, Norwich. ^[148b]

The discourses already quoted, contain ample evidence of the orthodox character of Mr. Ottee's views. They indicate his belief in the doctrine of original sin; ^[149a] of the consequent moral inability of man to effect his own salvation; ^[149b] of the indispensable importance of the change called the new birth; ^[149c] of the Trinity; ^[149d] of the union of the divine and human natures in the person of the Son of God; ^[149e] of the atonement made by him for sin; ^[149f] of the obligation resting upon all men to apply themselves to the exercise of prayer, and to lead a life of personal holiness; ^[149g] and the vanity of trusting to the mere mercy of God, irrespectively of the channel through which he has revealed his willingness to bestow it. ^[149h]

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There is another topic to which this excellent man adverted in his published sermons, which must not be passed unnoticed. This was, the duty of believers to provide for the support of a succession of christian ministers. In connexion with the statement of the sacred writer, that Abraham gave Melchisedec a tenth part of the spoil of the four kings, he remarks,—“I know it hath been long a dispute whether tenths or tithes ought to be continued any longer, or any more than altars and sacrifices, in a reformed christian church: I shall not determine that; but this we may all be assured of, that if tithes or tenths be of the ceremonial law, and so are abolished, yet the moral equity is to abide to the end of the world,—that those that minister at God's altar, should have honourable and comfortable maintenance.” ^[150]

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And referring to the mortality of the priesthood, he says, “We ought to pray that there may never want a succession of men to carry on the work of God. And this ought to be our care also, as far as in us lies, that there may be a generation brought up for the service of God, when another goes away. When Abraham died, his son Isaac succeeded him. When Aaron died, Eleazar succeeded, and took up the work of God that his father had laid down. So it would be the happiness of families, that children would take up the work that their fathers have laid down by reason of death. We live in an age wherein there is a great decay of godly ministers: the old generation wearing off, and many gone to the dust, and but few come in, that have the same spirit, the same grace, and shine with the same light as their fathers did, who are dead and gone. We ought, all of us, to pray, as our Saviour saith, that, as the harvest is great, the Lord

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would send forth labourers into his harvest. A good succession speaks a great favour of God, to families, churches, and nations. See how careful Moses was in that. When God had told him that he must die, (in Numb, xxvii. 16,) 'Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation.' And truly, so should all godly parents and godly ministers say, Let the God of the spirits of all flesh bring in some to my family that may go out and in before my family; and let the God of the spirits of all flesh bring in some to his church, to guide them and to teach them."

[151]

Mr. Ottee closed his useful career about the end of April, 1689, [152a] a few days before the Toleration Act laid a basis for the gradual attainment of religious liberty. [152b]

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In May, 1687, a part of the site of the present meeting-house had been purchased by the deacons, Edmund Artis and Francis Haylouck, probably with a view to the erection of a building for public worship.

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It will be observed that this was immediately after the first declaration for liberty of conscience was issued by James II. [153] The hollowness of the king's professions was probably discovered before any further measures had been taken: for there appears to have been some delay in the completion of the building.

The deacons just mentioned survived their excellent pastor. Two of the silver cups still used by the church in the celebration of the Lord's supper, had been marked, at an earlier date, with a faint, perhaps with a trembling hand,—

"FOR YE CH: A. H. E. F R."

This somewhat enigmatical inscription was afterwards interpreted by adding in deeply cut letters, upon one of the cups,

"To the use of the Church. Francis Haylock, Deacon, 1690." [154a]

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and upon the other,

"To the use of the Church. Edmund Artist, Deacon, 1690." [154b]

CHAPTER VI.

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Subjection of events to the designs of Providence—Joseph Tate—Death of Augustine Gregory—John Killinghall—"Mr. Green"—Members received—William Nokes—Edmund Spencer—Deacons ordained—Thomas Tingey—William Lincoln—John Hurrion—Nicholas Phené—John Fell—Baxter (?) Cole—Declining state of the interest.

THE wisdom of Providence is often exemplified in the disappointment of hopes, in themselves worthy to be indulged. He who turns the devices of his enemies to the accomplishment of his will, thus teaches his servants the insufficiency of all that they can do, independently of his aid and guidance, for the promotion of his glory. God does not forsake the work of his own hands; but he retains to himself the high prerogative, to choose the period and the instruments of its accomplishment. This consideration should reconcile the Christian to alternations of prosperity and adversity in the history of the churches, and should cheer the heart, and invigorate the hand, under circumstances the most discouraging.

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For a long series of years after Mr. Ottee's death the church and congregation at Beccles were, from a variety of causes, in a declining state. It will be well, if the contemplation of this period lead to a grateful feeling of mind under present prosperity, and induce, for the future, watchfulness against all departures from the faith and practice of the gospel, by which alone a church of Christ can be really injured.

On the 26th of October, 1691, MR. JOSEPH TATE, having previously been received into the church, was solemnly set apart to the office of its pastor.

In the year 1693, the congregation sustained the loss of a promising, and apparently robust, young man, named *Augustine Gregory*, who had been designed for the ministry, but was carried off by consumption in his seventeenth year. An interesting letter has been preserved, which was addressed to him a short time before his death, by his intimate friend, Mr. Josiah Baker, one of the excellent family at Wattisfield, to whom a reference has been already made. [157]

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"Wattisfield, Sept. 7th, 1693.

"Dying friend,

"Your present condition directs me to this epithet, which, though in itself it might seem harsh and grating, yet I hope your daily conversing with death will take off whatever of that nature may be in it absolutely considered.

"The great probability that there appears to be that we shall never meet again in this world, is an argument with me to trouble you with a few lines as a testimony of my truest affection, and to bid you farewell till we meet in a better world.

.....

"It behoves you to see that the foundation of a good work be laid in deep humiliation for sin, both original and actual, that there be not only a partial, but a thorough change wrought in you; that there be an unreserved resignation of yourself to a whole Christ, and a fixed reliance upon him alone for salvation; and all this joined with a filial submission to a Father's rod, in your present condition.

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.....

"The sweet in-comes which I hope you find under this rod, may greatly reconcile you to your present condition; and the forethoughts of the glory to come, and uninterrupted communion above, may beget in you a longing after the future state. God in his infinite wisdom, does generally give more fellowship and communion with himself, under affliction, than at other times, both for the comfort and peace of the afflicted, and to show that He is all, *without* all, as well as *in* all ordinances. And this should reconcile us to the sharpest affliction, even to death itself; if we may have His presence, his rod and his staff, to comfort us. The Lord's end, in affliction, is to take away sin; and if it be his will that we should not come back into a sinful world, but be removed into a sinless state above, we have no reason to be unwilling to put off our rags of mortality, that we may put on robes of immortality, and to go to that place, where all tears of conviction, humiliation, and affliction, shall be wiped off, and all sin and sorrow shall flee away.

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"You are made a singular example to all spectators about you, and especially to all young persons. It is eminently verified in you, that all flesh is grass, and as the flower in the field, so it fades and withers. And when I see so green grass withered, and so fair a flower faded, it teacheth me that the young man is not to glory in his strength. I'm sure there is a peculiar voice to myself in this affliction. The Lord grant I may hear that instruction which he intends by it, and that it may be sealed by his Spirit upon my heart!

.....

"Farewell, my dear friend. The Lord bless you, and make his face to shine upon you, and lift up the light of his countenance upon your soul. The Lord give you that assurance of his favour which you wait for, that joy and peace in believing, that may give you an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, where, I hope, at the glorious resurrection, you shall meet with

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Your most affectionate
and sympathizing friend,
"JOSIAH BAKER." ^[160]

During Mr. Tate's ministry at Beccles, upwards of thirty persons joined the church. But on the 28th November, 1694, he resigned his pastoral office, by a memorandum under his hand, in the church book; and his dismissal was testified by the signatures of "Edmund Artis," and "Fran. Haylouch," the deacons.

In the same year Mr. Tate became pastor of the Independent church then assembling at Girdler's Hall, London, where he succeeded Mr. George Griffith, an eminent preacher during the interregnum, and a principal manager in the synod held by the Independents in 1658. The afternoon service at Girdler's Hall was conducted by Mr. Tate for twelve or thirteen years, but of his subsequent history there are no traces. That church afterwards became scattered among other societies. Many of them joined in communion under the celebrated Dr. Isaac Watts. ^[161a]

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The church at Beccles remained without a settled pastor for nearly three years after Mr. Tate's resignation.

In the interval, John Primrose and Nathaniel Newton were ordained deacons. ^[161b] It is most likely that the first meeting-house in Beccles was erected at this period; for on the 11th January, 1696, (O. S.) the ground which had been purchased some years earlier, together with "*a house thereupon newly built,*" was conveyed to trustees, ^[161c] and the intention of the parties was declared, by a schedule annexed to the deed, that the house should be employed as a place of public worship for such protestants inhabiting in Beccles and the neighbouring towns, as could not conform to the established religion. ^[162]

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On the 28th July, 1697, MR. JOHN KILLINGHALL was admitted a member, and on the 13th of the following October, he was set apart to the office of pastor.

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He was an excellent preacher, and for some time highly esteemed here. But in September 1699, the pleasing prospect became clouded by an incorrectness of conduct calling for the severest discipline of the church. ^[163] There was no attempt to palliate sin, though it had gained a temporary victory over one, whose degradation could not fail to bring discredit upon the christian profession. The church proceeded with awful firmness, though not without full proof and a due

weighing of all circumstances, to show their obedience to Christ's institutions, by excluding the offender from their communion. It has been said that some persons of the establishment considered him to have been too severely treated: it does not appear that he ever thought so himself. Deeply penitent, not only that he had "wronged his own soul," but also that he had caused the good of others to be evil spoken of, he applied for some time to secular business, demeaning himself with great modesty and becoming remorse. These circumstances, combined with a desire on the part of the church to evince the utmost allowable tenderness towards an erring brother, led to his re-admission after the lapse of some months.

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These circumstances have long since been made public. Historical justice forbids their suppression. Nor is there any sufficient reason for adopting such a course. The individual himself has joined the assembly above, among whom "there is joy over a sinner that repenteth." None who have any pretensions to justice or candour, will deny that occurrences like that in question are rare among the ranks of the dissenting ministry; and none that value the respect of reasonable and unprejudiced men, will turn the failings of an individual to the disparagement of a party, much less of its principles. "There are too many faults" (to adopt the language of one distinguished by a truly catholic spirit) "among all parties; but God knows it is fitter for us all to mend than to recriminate. 'Yea, but the party we are of, professes not so much strictness.' No? What party should you be of, that professes less strictness? What more lax rule of morals have you than other Christians? Do you not profess subjection to the known rules of the Bible concerning christian and civil conversation? You do not, sure, profess rebellion and hostility against the Lord that bought you? Doth not your baptismal covenant, which you are supposed to avow, bind you to as much strictness as any other Christian? . . . We that think we stand should take heed lest we fall. It is a costly admonition that is given us in such instances."^[165]

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Mr. Killinghall did not again occupy the pulpit at Beccles; but about the year 1702 he was chosen pastor of a numerous and flourishing Independent church at Southwark. The expectations of those who had been inclined to think favourably of him were not disappointed. He continued with that society nearly forty years. He was one of the first six ministers chosen to preach the Horselydown Lecture for the support of a charity school instituted in 1715. His name is also on the list of subscribing members at the Salters' Hall synod in 1719. He died in the month of January, 1740.

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In the interval between Mr. Killinghall's departure and the settlement of the next pastor, the congregation was probably supplied by various ministers. In July 1701, the ordinance of baptism was administered by "Mr. Green," most likely the venerable pastor of the church at Tunstead, in Norfolk;—and a visit from so experienced and amiable a Christian, must have been peculiarly cheering and consolatory.^[166]

Among other persons admitted to church fellowship on the 2nd of February, 1703-4, were "Mr. Richard Playters," and "Mr. John Crispe." The former surname is now remembered in the neighbourhood of Beccles, principally in connexion with the mansion and estate of Sotterley; the latter is well known, as borne by a widely extended family circle, who, having been yet more honourably distinguished as "the children of the covenant, for four or five generations," have not suffered "the entail to be cut off."^[167a] The record adds, "Mr. Crispe was baptized before his receiving in."

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The next pastor was MR. WILLIAM NOKES. In the spring of 1688, he was at the University of Utrecht, surrounded by a constellation of men afterwards distinguished by their talents and usefulness; and in a situation to avail himself of the academical instructions of Witsius, and other eminent professors of divinity.^[167b] The eloquent Saurin was at that time officiating in the French church at Utrecht. But the students from this country had less dainty fare on the Lord's day, the minister of the English church being a Dutchman, who spoke the language very imperfectly, and who, though an honest and good man, was an indifferent preacher. Dr. Calamy mentions this circumstance, as well as the Dutch and French examples of laxity with reference to the sabbath, and the want of discipline in the University, as "very disadvantageous to the moral character and mental improvement of the English students."^[168a]

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It does not appear that Mr. Nokes had the charge of a congregation prior to his coming to Beccles. Nor is the exact date of that event known.^[168b] It is not unlikely that he previously resided for some time in London, for he enjoyed at this period of his life the friendship of Mr. (afterwards Dr.) Isaac Watts.^[168c] To that truly great, and profoundly humble, man, he told (what is seldom told, but in the patient ear of intimate friendship) the tale of the "days of darkness," which had clouded his spirit. A description of the state of his mind on religious subjects, which he committed to blank verse, Watts revised and amplified, and has preserved among his Lyric Poems. It is thus introduced: "The substance of the following copy, and many of the lines, were sent me by *an esteemed friend*, Mr. W. Nokes, with a desire that I would form them into a Pindaric ode; but I retained his measures, lest I should too much alter his sense." The style of poetry is such as fully authorizes the conclusion, that friendship must have furnished the chief inducement to Watts to bestow his pains upon it. The following passages will afford a specimen.

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"A SIGHT OF CHRIST."^[169]

.....

Once I beheld his face, when beams divine
Broke from his eyelids, and unusual light
Wrapt me at once in glory and surprise.
My joyful heart, high leaping in my breast,
With transport cried, 'This is the Christ of God:'
Then threw my arms around in sweet embrace,
And clasp'd, and bow'd, adoring low, till I was lost in him.

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.....

But the bright shine and presence soon withdrew;
I sought him whom I love, but found him not.
I felt his absence, and with strongest cries
Proclaimed, 'Where Jesus is not, all is vain.'

.....

Oh that the day, the joyful day, were come,
When the first Adam from his ancient dust
Crown'd with new honours, shall revive, and see
Jesus his Son and Lord; while shouting saints
Surround their King, and God's eternal Son
Shines in the midst . . .

Death and the tempter, and the man of sin,
Now at the bar arraign'd, in judgment cast,
Shall vex the saints no more; but perfect love
And loudest praises, perfect joy create,
While ever-circling years proclaim the blissful state."

In the same year in which Watts accepted the pastoral office, he addressed to Mr. Nokes the subjoined lines. The allusion to the sympathy of minds overwhelmed with floods of sorrow, renders it probable that Mr. Nokes had already been the subject of some deep affliction, while his subsequent history induces the supposition that it might be somewhat similar to that, which for so many years deprived Watts's church of his public services.

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**"TO MR. WILLIAM NOKES.
Friendship.
1702. ^[171]**

"Friendship! thou charmer of the mind,
Thou sweet deluding ill,
The brightest minute mortals find,
And sharpest hour we feel.

"Fate has divided all our shares
Of pleasure and of pain;
In love the comforts and the cares
Are mix'd and join'd again.

"But whilst in floods our sorrow rolls
And drops of joy are few,
This dear delight of mingling souls
Serves but to swell our woe.

"Oh, why should bliss depart in haste,
And friendship stay to moan?
Why the fond passion cling so fast,
When every joy is gone?

"Yet never let our hearts divide,
Nor death dissolve the chain:
For love and joy were once allied,
And must be joined again."

For several years the ministry of Mr. Nokes, at Beccles, was attended with success.

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In the early part of 1710, however, there were some things in him of which his people disapproved; chiefly, it has been supposed, his disposition to conform. But he was not hastily or harshly dismissed. The case was submitted to the ministers of the neighbouring churches in Norfolk and Suffolk, for their advice. ^[172] The result was, however, a determination, recorded in the church book and signed by the deacons and several other members, to withdraw their communion from him, with a renewed resolution stedfastly "to adhere to their church covenant, and pursue the common interest of Christ among them."

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Mr. Nokes did not, as has been imagined, immediately conform. In the same year in which he left Beccles, he undertook the charge of the congregation at Ropemaker's Alley, London, which had been for many years under the pastoral care of Mr. Walter Cross, a minister of considerable

attainments. ^[173a]

In 1712, Mr. Nokes had a good living given him in the Church of England, ^[173b] which he accepted. Little more is known of him. Mr. Harmer says, "he was afterwards disordered in his mind, and died in one of the streets of London;—some think, on the steps of St. Andrew's church, Holborn." ^[174]

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For about a year the church was without a pastor. On the 16th May, 1711, MR. EDMUND SPENCER was received into communion with them, preparatory to his assuming that office. They seem to have been very happy with him for many years. But growing old and infirm, he received a good deal of uneasiness from a part of the congregation, who wished him to resign. The mischief was greatly aggravated through the undue influence exercised by an individual who introduced some preachers from a distance. These occupied the pulpit, while the aged pastor consented to continue preaching in a private house. The most eminent ministers of Norfolk and Suffolk evinced the greatest respect for Mr. Spencer, and expressed their disapprobation of what they regarded as a sad violation of Christian tenderness. Mr. Spencer was pastor at Beccles nearly twenty-five years, and died there about 1736. His remains were carried to Norwich, and deposited in the Congregational meeting-house, St. Clement's,—several of his own people attending.

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He left one daughter, who, some time before his death, was married to a Mr. Pougher, a gentleman of fortune, educated for the ministry, but who, being blind, lived in a private capacity. He was a remarkable example of that beautiful provision of nature, by which the sense of feeling is improved to such exquisite acuteness, as almost to compensate for the loss of sight. ^[175a]

At a meeting held 13th March, 1722-3, John Utting and Philip Lefabuer were ordained to the office of deacons "without imposition of hands."

Mr. Spencer was succeeded by MR. THOMAS TINGEY, a son of Mr. Tingey, first of Northampton, afterwards of Fetter-lane, London. ^[175b] He had pursued his studies at the academy in London, under Dr. Ridgley.

Mr. Tingey, the subject of this notice, preached his first sermon "in Mr. Russell's place," from Jerem. i. 6, "Then said I, Ah, Lord God; behold I cannot speak, for I am a child." On which occasion he "gave uncommon content and satisfaction," and his friends were encouraged to look forward with sanguine expectations of his future instrumentality in promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. ^[176a]

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About 1730, he settled with the congregation at Lower Rotherhithe, as successor to Mr. Thomas Masters. He is described as possessing at that time good pulpit talents, combined with too much self-esteem and instability of character. ^[176b] But he was a young man, and there was reason to hope that time and experience would correct these failings.

On the 27th August, 1736, he was united to the church at Beccles; and on the 8th of the following month was ordained as its pastor, with the laying on of hands.

Mr. Nathaniel Newton, who appears to have been an active deacon nearly forty-four years, died 12th June, 1739, and was buried in the meeting-house.

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Mr. Tingey married in March, 1738, and continued at Beccles till his death, but the congregation declined in numbers under his ministry, and some who had adopted antipædo-baptist sentiments withdrew, and formed a distinct church. ^[177]

Mr. Tingey was generally considered a good preacher; but during the last few years of his life he was induced to involve himself in secular business, which tended to lower him in the esteem of the professing world.

He died about October, 1749, ^[178a] and was interred in the burial-ground adjoining the meeting-house. A stone was erected to his memory, the inscription upon which, so far as it is now legible, is as follows:—

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HERE LIETH THE BODY
OF THOMAS TINGEY,
PASTOR OF THIS CHURCH
13 YEARS,
WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE
... 1749, ^[178b]
...

From that time to Midsummer, 1757, the congregation was supplied by MR. WILLIAM LINCOLN. He had become a student in the academy at Northampton under Dr. Doddridge, in 1745, and came from thence to Beccles. Afterwards he removed to Bury St. Edmunds; was ordained pastor of the congregation assembling in Churchgate street in that town, September 7th, 1757; and died there April 22nd, 1792, at the age of sixty-four. ^[179a]

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After Mr. Lincoln left Beccles, various ministers occupied the pulpit some months; particularly

MR. JOHN HURRION, a grandson of Mr. Hurrion, first of Denton, and afterwards of Harecourt, London, and son of Mr. Samuel Hurrion, of Guestwick. ^[179b] He became, in August, 1761, pastor of the Independent church at Southwold, where he died much respected, March 13th, 1793, aged fifty-six.

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In the autumn of 1758, MR. NICHOLAS PHENÉ, who had been a student in the Hoxton Academy, came to Beccles. He continued here as a supply for about two years, and then went to Rendham, in Suffolk, where he was ordained June 6th, 1761. He again removed in 1764, to Gloucester, and afterwards to Bradford, Wiltshire, and died in 1773.

For many months subsequent to the Michaelmas of 1760, occasional ministers were engaged at Beccles. During several succeeding years, the pulpit was occupied by an individual whose talents and writings have rendered him eminent in the dissenting community. This was MR. JOHN FELL.

He was born at Cockermonth, in Cumberland, August 22nd, 1735. From his father, a pious schoolmaster, he received an education suitable for the station of a humble tradesman, for which he was intended. But the son afforded an example of natural talent, and indefatigable industry, combining with providential circumstances, to surmount all the difficulties which lie in the path to useful and honourable distinction. Removing to London that he might improve in his business, he happily connected himself with a master who could appreciate his solid abilities and literary taste. It was soon discovered that his highest ambition was to become a christian minister; and with the assistance of some gentlemen of wealth and philanthropy, he was placed at the Independent academy at Mile-end. He there applied to study with such incessant diligence, that his progress soon excited the admiration of his tutors and fellow-students. Quitting the academy with an unusual share of attainments, but having no immediate prospect of settling with a congregation, Mr. Fell became assistant in a school at Norwich. There he probably remained until he was invited, in 1762, to remove to Beccles to supply the vacant pulpit. He found the congregation few in number, but affectionate in private, and serious and attentive in public.

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During his residence in Beccles, he was cordially received into what is termed "the best society." He evinced the greatest charity and candour towards those whose views of religion he could not approve; and while he associated with the advocates of the Established church, he never hesitated to avow his ardent and unalterable attachment to the interests of civil and religious liberty. His manners were frank, easy, and unaffected, and his conversation cheerful, interesting, and instructive. He did not allow his quick penetration and his readiness of utterance to betray him into dogmatism or parade: and he knew how to defend himself, with point and humour, from such an imputation. Falling accidentally into company with Dr. King of Harecourt, London, that serious, but cheerful minister rallied him upon his alleged sprightliness of wit and acuteness of criticism. "Well, young man," said he, "I hear you are a critic;—pray, sir, how do you define a critic?" "Doctor," replied Mr. Fell, "I never did define a critic; but if I were to attempt it, I think I should say, he is one who labours to make *easy* things *difficult*." An answer which is said to have occasioned some amusement at the expense of the aggressor.

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Mr. Fell had a lively, energetic delivery; and his sermons, though always the result of hard study, were extempore. He received an invitation to become the settled pastor of the congregation at Beccles. But as they had long been without any regular church government, were few in number, and the prospect of an increase not, at that time, very encouraging, he declined the proposal.

In May, 1770, he visited, with a view to the pastoral charge, the Independent congregation at Thaxted, in Essex. There he was ordained in the following October, and soon made himself useful and beloved. But he was calculated for a sphere of usefulness wider, or at least more difficult to fill, than the charge of a country congregation. After several years' residence at Thaxted, he was prevailed on to become the resident classical tutor at the academy in which he had been educated for the ministry, and which had been removed, in 1770, to Homerton. He had not been long there, before a misunderstanding occurred which terminated in his dismissal. In this affair, the conduct of his adversaries appears to have been not unmingled with severity. Several highly respectable persons who were of this opinion, raised an annual stipend of £100, for which he was to deliver a course of twelve lectures on the evidences of Christianity. He entered zealously upon this task in the year 1797, but had only delivered four lectures, when death interfered with the completion of the plan. He expired on the 6th, and was interred in Bunhillfields on the 15th September in that year, his remains being followed by a train of fourteen mourning coaches and several carriages.

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Besides the four lectures before mentioned, (which were continued by Dr. Henry Hunter,) and several other publications, he was the author of answers to the Rev. Hugh Farmer's Essays on the Demoniacs and on the Idolatry of Greece and Rome; in which productions he displayed much acuteness and learning. ^[184]

After Mr. Fell's removal to Thaxted, Mr. Newton of Norwich, Mr. Harmer of Wattisfield, and other ministers; continued to preach at Beccles; and the congregation had for rather more than half a year preceding midsummer, 1771, the services of a Mr. Cole. It is surmised that this must have been the learned BAXTER COLE, who, prior to 1765, was morning preacher to the congregation in Rope-makers' alley, London, of which the Rev. Thomas Towle was pastor. In that year he went to Wymondham, in Norfolk, where he preached till May, 1766. He never undertook any pastoral charge; but was a close student, and superintended the printing of an edition of Dr.

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Lardner's Works. He also revised some of the publications of the truly great Howard. Mr. Cole died at Sible Hedingham, in Essex, his native county, Oct. 13th, 1794, at an advanced age. He was a firm dissenter and Independent, a strenuous assertor of civil and religious liberty; and a man of considerable attainments, of the strictest integrity, and true piety. ^[185]

But although the preaching of the gospel had been maintained with little intermission during the long period which had elapsed from Mr. Tingey's decease, the church had suffered much for want of a stated pastor. Member after member had been removed by death, and none were added. In the meeting-house, where the remnant of the people usually worshipped, the Lord's supper had not been administered for more than twenty years. No regular discipline had been kept up; and the interest itself seemed on the point of expiring. But it pleased God in answer to many prayers, to shine upon the decaying cause, and to unfold a new and more cheering era of its history.—"Happy assembly above, which knows no diminution, but rejoices in perpetual accessions to its numbers, perhaps in continual additions to its knowledge and consolations too!" ^[186]

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CHAPTER VII.

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Joseph Heptinstall—Early life—Settles at Beccles—His ministerial usefulness and character—His death—Isaac Sloper—Residence at Cheltenham—Acquaintance with Rev. Cornelius Winter—Studies for the ministry—Accepts the pastoral office at Beccles—His ordination—Afflicted—Visits his distant friends—Death of Mr. Winter—Meditation and prayer at the beginning of a year—Acquaintance with Mrs. Siddons.

JOSEPH HEPTINSTALL, pastor of the Independent church at Beccles from 1773 to 1802, was born at Walsall, in Staffordshire, January 26th, 1742. He was blessed with a pious and tender mother, who often took him into her closet, and on her knees prayed fervently to God on his behalf. Her supplications were not immediately answered. At the early age of twelve years, her son manifested the depravity of his nature, by avowing himself an atheist. But being providentially led to contemplate a flower in his father's garden, he was convinced that its beautiful structure must have been the work of a First Cause, that created and sustains all things. Conscience, in conjunction with the sacred Scriptures, impressively taught him that this Being was holy and just, and therefore would approve and reward holiness, and abhor and punish sin. These convictions led him to seek salvation "by the works of the law;" but he mentions that about this time, he read Law's "Christian Perfection," and imbibed more correct views of the purity and spirituality of the divine commands. Comparing his conduct with them, he was convinced of the awful state to which sin had reduced him, and greatly alarmed at the consequences of rebelling against God. With a mind thus depressed and agitated, he repaired to the throne of grace, imploring the mercy of God, and pleading his promises through the Mediator. He derived much consolation from that important passage of Scripture, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Being enabled by the Holy Spirit to receive the gospel, he enjoyed peace with God, and the happiness of those to whom iniquity is not imputed. He now began to consider how he might best glorify God, and serve him in the world; and determined, in the strength of God, to devote himself to the christian ministry. This resolution met with the warmest approbation of his parents. They were zealous advocates of the religious establishment of this country, and had the means of amply providing for their son within its pale, through an aunt, who readily promised him a living of which she had the patronage.

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With these views he commenced a preparatory course of study for the University of Oxford, where at the age of seventeen he was to have been admitted. Meanwhile he wisely examined the Thirty-nine Articles, which he would have been called upon to subscribe. He appears to have hesitated with regard to that "Of Predestination and Election;" and he was unwilling to recognise as a part of his creed, a doctrine which, at that time, was not so in reality. On the other hand he was much distressed at the idea of relinquishing his intention to become a minister; and, in his estimation, to abandon the church of England was the same, for hitherto nothing had ever induced him to cross the threshold of a dissenting meeting-house.

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In this unsettled state of mind he was introduced to an aged gentleman, to whom he imparted his feelings, and who was the means of removing not only his objections to the doctrine of election, but also his prejudices against dissent. In consequence of this conversation he relinquished all thoughts of Oxford, and after a short time entered the Independent academy at Mile-end, afterwards at Homerton, ^[190a] in which he remained upwards of seven years. ^[190b]

About midsummer, 1771, having finished his studies, he visited Beccles, by the advice of his friend the Rev. Thomas Towle, with the hope of being instrumental in reviving and re-organizing the almost expiring interest. There remained of Mr. Tingey's church only four members, one of whom was his widow. Another who was residing at Bury, communicated, through Mr. Harmer of Wattisfield, his acquiescence in the arrangements of his brethren.

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On the 8th May, 1772, the Rev. Thomas Bocking of Denton, with two messengers from the church under his care, attended at Beccles; and in their presence, three persons, ^[191] on a profession of their faith in Christ, were admitted to a participation with the small remnant of the church in the privileges of christian fellowship. On the following day Mr. Bocking administered to them the

Lord's supper, when also another member was admitted, under a testimonial from the church of Scotland.

On the 15th May, 1773, Mr. Heptinstall received a unanimous invitation from the church and congregation, to become their pastor, which he accepted; and on the 27th July he was ordained over them, "to the great consolation of the neighbouring churches and ministers."

The services were introduced by Mr. Bocking. ^[192] Referring to the interest evinced by the elders of other religious societies on this occasion, he disclaimed on their behalf any pretensions to ecclesiastical authority. "In truth," said he, "there is no power in the church but what is ministerial; which, as it comes from Jesus Christ, is revealed in the Scriptures, and there stands as a directory both of faith and manners. We deny that the 'church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and authority in controversies of faith,' most heartily adhering to this description, that 'the visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.'" . . . "Happy will it be," he added, "if former neglects and untoward circumstances should be improved for greater diligence, and the lamp which was just out, should so revive, as to burn with a steady and persevering flame."

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These anticipations were mercifully realized. In 1779 the number of communicants was augmented to thirty-six, and in 1785 to forty-six; and Mr. Heptinstall had the happiness to preside over an increasing and harmonious church to the end of his days.

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He had a fine clear voice, and his general delivery was unaffected and impressive. It was his object, in all his sermons, to pour contempt on human pride, that in every case self might be disclaimed and Christ alone exalted. He was a Calvinist from conviction, and wherever he addressed a congregation, he never failed to declare salvation to be entirely of grace,—the unmerited gift of God.

He was firm in his attachment to religious liberty, and ready, on proper occasions, with gratitude and animation, to point out its value to others.

But while he was decided in his own sentiments, he was distinguished by his candour, moderation, and benevolence, towards those who differed from him. His example served, in a great measure, to diffuse the same spirit through his own congregation, and to promote a friendly intercourse with persons of other denominations.

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He possessed much generosity of disposition towards the poor. But he was far from regarding this manifestation of christian principle as the ground of his acceptance in the sight of God. On the contrary, his mind was constantly impressed with the deepest sense of his personal guilt, so that it might be said of him, that he abhorred himself, and daily repented in dust and ashes.

The late venerable pastor of the neighbouring Congregational church at Bungay, the Rev. Robert Shufflebottom, who knew him long and intimately, always mentioned him as a brother greatly beloved. ^[194] He lived many years under the fear that, in his conflict with the last enemy, he should dishonour the cause of his Lord and Master. This state of mind was probably aggravated by profuse bleedings at the nose, which weakened his frame and broke his spirits. It was his earnest wish not to remain longer in the body, than he could preach the glad tidings of salvation to perishing sinners. More than once he expressed a wish to die either in the pulpit or soon after leaving it.

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This desire was granted. On the morning of the Lord's day, August 29th, 1802, he arose in his usual health, and performed the public service with his accustomed energy. But on leaving the pulpit he complained of violent headache, which after dinner had increased to such a degree, as to be attended almost with loss of sight. In vain were expostulations used with him not to attempt the afternoon service. Thinking he should feel better after he had begun preaching, he again ascended the pulpit, read a chapter with evident difficulty, and took for his text that memorable passage, John i. 29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" His impaired vision preventing the use of his notes, he preached extempore about half an hour, and closed the public worship of the day with the most impressive prayer his congregation had ever heard from his lips. A few minutes only had elapsed before his recollection failed. After he was taken home, he spoke only once, referring to the pain in his head and begging for assistance. He continued in a state of stupor till about seven o'clock in the evening, when he gave signs of returning reason, by pressing the hand of his afflicted partner. About ten o'clock he closed his earthly sabbath, by entering upon that which is eternal. ^[196]

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On the following Sunday afternoon, the Rev. H. W. Gardiner of Southwold delivered an impressive discourse upon the occasion, from Phil. ii. 16, "Holding forth the word of life, that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain."

His remains were interred in the church-yard of Mutford, near those of his wife's relatives. A small monument was erected in the meeting-house to his memory. It describes him as having laboured "in the christian ministry with fidelity and success." The inscription upon his grave-stone is as follows:

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PROTESTANT DISSENTERS IN THE
TOWN OF BECCLES,
WHICH OFFICE HE FAITHFULLY AND
ZEALOUSLY DISCHARGED FOR
TWENTY-NINE YEARS;
AND DIED ON THE EVENING
OF THE LORD'S DAY
AUGUST THE 29TH, 1802,
AGED SIXTY.

The sudden removal of their excellent minister was deeply felt by the church and congregation, and earnest prayer was presented, that the dispensation might be sanctified, and the stroke healed. In the month of November, God was pleased to introduce among them their late admirable pastor.

ISAAC SLOPER was born at Devizes, in Wiltshire, May 30th, 1779, and was baptized soon after, by the Rev. Rowland Hill. His parents, though not distinguished by rank or riches, were endowed with those honours which come from above, and died in the well-founded hope of the "crown of glory which fadeth not away." He received his early instructions under the Rev. J. L. Fenner, the Presbyterian minister at Devizes, afterwards of Taunton, in Somersetshire, where he died in 1834, greatly advanced in life.

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In April, 1794, Mr. Sloper left his father's house, and was placed as a clerk in the office of Mr. Richard Pruen, an attorney at Cheltenham. Of this period of life his private papers contain the following interesting account.

"During my residence at Cheltenham the serious impressions which I had acquired from the example, instruction, and prayers of my parents, were almost entirely destroyed. Though I verified the assertion of the wise man, 'The way of transgressors is hard,' in process of time my conscience would more easily permit me to neglect prayer and the Scriptures, think lightly of the sabbath, and prefer the society of the gay and dissipated to that of persons religions and grave. To the brink of ruin was I hurried . . . But my destruction was prevented by an omnipotent arm, and sovereign grace. By reflection and a serious train of thought, I was convinced of my excessive folly and irreligious conduct. I was enabled to betake myself to prayer, and to pay a diligent regard to the other means of grace. At first my convictions were attended with much dejection of mind, and fears concerning the important matters of my soul, of death and eternity. But the God of all grace soon permitted me to experience that the ways of true religion are 'ways of pleasantness,' and that all 'her paths are peace.'

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"Brought to see the evil of sin, and to feel the importance of true religion for the present life, and for a future state, I possessed a strong desire to devote myself to the solemn and arduous work of the christian ministry, that I might labour to convince my fellow-creatures of their danger, and invite them to receive the grace of the blessed Redeemer, and seek the honours, riches, and happiness of eternity."

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Under these impressions, Mr. Sloper turned his thoughts towards one who was ever the willing, affectionate, and judicious adviser of pious youth,—the truly Reverend Cornelius Winter, of Painswick. While he was expressing, in a letter to this excellent man, his views and inclinations, Mr. Winter went to Cheltenham on a visit to Sir Richard Hill. He favoured Mr. Sloper with several interviews; and at one of them introduced, in the course of conversation, the very subject which was uppermost in the mind of his young friend. When informed of the purport of the letter which Mr. Sloper had partly written to him, he was struck with the singularity of the circumstance, and proposed corresponding on the subject in question. Several letters were exchanged. The value of the advice which Mr. Sloper had secured, and its probable influence upon his future character, conduct, and circumstances, will be best estimated from the following extracts.

"My ever dear Isaac,

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"If you had not been peculiarly near to me, I could not have spared a moment for you to-day. Your desire has more weight with me than a command would have from many of your superiors. I therefore drop you a hasty line, to exhort you to give yourself unto prayer; to watch and wait for the openings of providence; and to be fully satisfied, upon the strictest and narrowest examination, that you stand prepared for all the difficulties of the gospel ministry, as well as to be disposed to promise yourself all the comforts it affords, in conjunction with the improvement preparatory to it. I am truly glad you can lay yourself unreservedly open to *Him* who seeth and knoweth all things, even the secret recesses of the soul, and the spring and motive of every action.

"I see you will find some difficulty to get disengaged from Mr. P. I need not say, behave handsomely upon the occasion; and while you are firm in your resolution, be prudent. You remind me of the great difficulty I was under when a young man; how sanguine, and consequently, how restless to carry my point. Though, in fact, it was God's point I could not move in my own time, nor in my own way. ^[202] Your line is drawn, and you will be that which God would have you. Maintain communion with him, and when he hides

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his face, beg him to show you the cause, that your humiliation may be in proportion to the sin he means to resent. Remember, my dear fellow, that there are seasons wherein faith must be called into exercise, that when you talk of faith, you may talk by experience. At all times look unto Jesus; and when you cannot look immediately to him, look after him. Resist that enemy, stedfast in the faith, who is permitted to buffet you; and every blow he gives you will recoil upon himself.

"You may be sure I will keep the object in view. I am praying for direction, and as directed, will act . . .

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"I can add no more than a heart full of good wishes, and my constant prayers. You are interested in these, because I am, my ever dear Isaac,

Yours very affectionately,
in our dear Lord Jesus,
CORNELIUS WINTER."

"PAINSWICK,
Jan. 21, 1797."

Again in the month of April of the same year: "What a mercy we have a God, such a God, to whom we can commit ourselves. My dearest Isaac, let him be your God for ever and ever. Serve him as a real Christian while you live, though you should never serve him as a minister in his church. Watch the footsteps of his providence, and let him have the disposal of you. He can do nothing wrong. He has all his plans before him, and he is very wise and exact in the execution of them."

It was at length determined that Mr. Sloper should apply for admittance into the academy at Homerton; and in October, 1797, he was received into that institution. There were then fourteen students, and the tutors were Dr. Fisher and the Rev. John Berry.

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Early in the summer of 1798, Mr. Sloper was admitted a member of the church at Stepney, under the pastoral care of the Rev. George Ford, whose ministry proved truly beneficial to him.

Towards the close of the year 1799, Mr. Berry resigned his office as resident tutor, and was succeeded by Mr. (now Dr.) John Pye Smith, to whose invaluable instructions and uniform friendship Mr. Sloper felt himself under the greatest obligations.

His conduct as a student was truly exemplary, and, as may generally be observed, laid a foundation for that high respectability of character which he manifested in his future life.

At the close of his preparatory studies, he was requested, through the Rev. Samuel Newton of Norwich, to spend a few probationary weeks at Beccles. Accordingly, Nov. 5th, 1802, he left London for that purpose, and delivered his first sermon at Beccles on Sunday, Nov. 7th. After preaching to the people six sabbath days, he was requested to return to them for a longer season, with a view to becoming their stated minister. In the month of February, 1803, he consequently came again to Beccles, and in the following April an invitation from the church was presented to him to become their pastor, which was accepted by Mr. Sloper, on Sunday, 8th May, and was followed on the 7th July by his public and solemn ordination.

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On that occasion, Mr. Sheppard of Wrentham, commenced the service with prayer and reading of the Scriptures. Mr. Walford of Yarmouth, delivered an introductory discourse, on ordination, as practised among protestant dissenters; asked the usual questions of the minister; and received his confession of faith. Mr. Newton of Norwich, offered up the ordination prayer, which was unaccompanied by imposition of hands. Mr. Ford of Stepney, gave the charge, from Col. iv. 17. Mr. Ray of Sudbury, preached to the people, from 1 Cor. xvi. 10. Mr. Shufflebottom of Bungay, Mr. Gardiner of Southwold, and Mr. Craig of Bocking, engaged in other parts of the service; and Mr. Atkinson of Ipswich, preached in the evening. More than twenty ministers were present. ^[206]

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The important union thus formed and recognised, was, on the 16th of August, in the same year, followed by Mr. Sloper's marriage; and both events were productive of felicity, for which, to his very last days, he constantly blessed God.

After his ordination his ministry created considerable attention; the congregation gradually increased; and through the divine blessing, his preaching was rendered effectual to the conversion of some, and to the improvement and comfort of many.

Previously to Mr. Sloper's pastorate, it was usual in this, as in many other Congregational churches, for persons desiring to unite with the society, to send in a written account of their christian experience. And it was also customary to hold three church meetings before the reception of a candidate. In December, 1803, as prudence did not appear to require a rigid adherence to these regulations, it was agreed, at a church meeting, that the writing a paper should be left to the inclination of the candidates, and that they should in future be proposed at one meeting, and received, or rejected, at the next. ^[207a]

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In 1804, a secession of a few members took place. They formed the nucleus of the Baptist church which has since existed in Beccles. ^[207b]

Mr. Sloper was visited in the same year with an indisposition, which occasioned his absence for six weeks. During this affliction he had ample proof of the affection of his people. Prayer-

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meetings were held for the special purpose of imploring the blessing of God on the means employed for his recovery, and upon his ministry when he should resume it. These supplications were graciously regarded, and he was enabled again to preach very frequently, and with much success, till October, 1806, when it pleased God to afflict him with typhus fever. This illness lasted till the middle of December, and at times was attended with considerable danger. He observes, "It produced a great dejection of spirits, and dread of death; but goodness and mercy attended me every moment. My affliction excited in the minds of my people, and fellow-townsmen, general concern; and, I believe, was the means of strengthening the mutual affection that exists between my charge and their minister. The kindness of my congregation and friends on this occasion, I trust, will not soon be erased from my recollection, or my heart." He makes no allusion to the cause of his illness. It originated from his attention to an afflicted individual. The house of sickness and mourning was never forsaken by him; and there was a tenderness of sympathy in his manner, and a glowing affection in his heart, which were very soothing to the afflicted. He regarded visiting the sick as an important duty, and expressly consulted his friend, Mr. Winter, on the best mode of discharging it. "I generally," said that excellent man in his reply, "endeavour to be very serious in prayer;" ^[209] and Mr. Sloper did not fail to profit by this suggestion. His prayers in seasons of trial were peculiarly touching and appropriate.

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In the summer of 1807, he took a journey for the purpose of visiting his distant relations and friends. He met again, at that time, his early and venerated friend, Mr. Winter. The tie which connected them had been doubled by Mr. Sloper's alliance with one who in early life had been much with that holy and benevolent man—one of his numerous "children by adoption and kindness." About two months previous to the attack which terminated his useful life, he wrote to her as follows:

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"My very dear daughter,

I sit down purposely to write something to you. I wish it may be something profitable; for otherwise a letter is nothing worth . . .

I am disappointed at not seeing more genuine religion produced by my labours. Some I hope fear God, and walk before him, but many are so irregular in their walk, that I fear for them. I hope matters are different at Beccles. I find the short time since I was there has produced changes. Some have quitted the stage of life, and left vacant seats in the house of God; . . . yet our dear friend has a considerable number by which his hands are strengthened. Oh that they may be his present joy, and his future crown of rejoicing! . . . I need not say, consecrate yourselves to God; keep the mind heavenwards; let your friends see that you live upon the suburbs of the heavenly kingdom. Do not let the world engross you in any degree. Whether it smile or frown, be alike indifferent to it. Conceive of it as it is, fleeting and uncertain. Take the refreshments provided for and suited to the pilgrim; but do not set up your rest where you should only bait. Prepare to meet your God. . . . My good wife is as well as may be expected, and so is Mrs. Tyler, to whom we are much indebted for her kind exertions. They unite in salutations to you and my son, from whom I shall ever be glad to receive a line. If he will commission you to use his pen, and you will accept the commission, it will be equally and very acceptable to

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My ever dear daughter,
Your very affectionate father,
CORNELIUS WINTER." ^[211]

"PAINSWICK,
Oct. 16, 1807."

To the death of this greatly esteemed friend, Mr. Sloper thus tenderly refers in his private papers. "January 10th, 1808, that excellent man, that eminent Christian and minister, Rev. Cornelius Winter, was removed by death to his eternal home. His decease seriously impressed my mind, and drew from me the tear of selfish regret, that I should receive no more instruction from his lips, nor ever more be delighted with his pious conversation, fervent prayers, and affectionate intercourse. Oh may the son who now writes concerning his honoured father and friend, possess a measure of his spirit and imitate his holy example. His image is impressed upon the hearts of all who knew him; and his heavenly portrait, painted by the hand of his adopted son, the worthy and eloquent Mr. Jay, will be held up for the admiration and regard of succeeding generations."

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The following interesting reflections and solemn prayer, found among the same papers, under the date of January 3rd, 1809, deserve to be introduced here.

"By the grace of God I am spared to the commencement of another year. I would begin it with serious reflection on the past, and with humble prayer as it concerns futurity.

"Many of my fellow-creatures have commenced this year in the world of spirits. They have done with time and with all its concerns. Their season for gaining and doing good is closed for ever. But God has prolonged my existence, and, during the past year, distinguished me with his goodness and mercy. Upon the whole my health this year has been much improved: as a minister, I have been enabled to exert myself considerably in the preaching of the gospel: the congregation has been large; and a few, the fruit of my ministry, have been added to the church.

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"My domestic comforts have been great. My house has been the seat of *health*, *affection*, and *peace*. Here I would raise my Ebenezer,—‘Hitherto the Lord hath helped me,’—and turn my reflections into prayer to the great Preserver of my being.

"O thou God of grace, in whom I live and move continually, help thy servant to prostrate himself before thy throne; and hear the faithful acknowledgments which he desires to offer.

"I thank thee for all thy favours which thou hast bestowed upon me ever since I came into the world: for preservation in the midst of dangers; for restoration from sickness to health; but, above all, for a religious education; for the wise conduct of thy superintending providence, and for thy distinguishing grace in calling me from the follies of the world into the family of thy children, and into the ministry of thy dear Son. I thank thee, O God, for all the privileges of the past year, for all my exemption from affliction and pain, for the strength which I have possessed for the performance of every duty as the head of a family, and as the minister of a congregation. I thank thee, O Lord, for the happiness I enjoy at home, and for the peace that prevails among the people of my charge.

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"But whilst thou art worthy to receive the warmest returns of gratitude for thy goodness towards me, I would, on a recollection of my conduct, with contrition humble myself before thee. Merciful God! forgive my pride and vanity of heart; forgive my levity of speech and behaviour, my lukewarmness in thy service, and every error and defect which have been found in the exercises I have performed. From a consciousness of my many imperfections I would throw myself entirely on thy compassion, praying with the publican, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner!’

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"Shouldst thou spare me, O God, through the year upon which I have entered, O spare me for the benefit of my own soul, for the good of others, and for thy glory. Enable me to read thy word, and to study it with attention and delight: help me to maintain the spirit and practice of devotion in my closet, in my family, and in the public assembly: assist me to deal faithfully with the souls of my people when conversing with them in friendly intercourse, and when addressing them from thy holy word. May I be instant in season and out of season for the conversion of the irreligious, and for the comfort of those that already believe. May the people committed to my charge be preserved from every error in sentiment, and irregularity in conduct, injurious to themselves and dishonourable to thee. May many be added to the church, and may great prosperity attend us.

"Shouldst thou, in thy infinite wisdom, see fit to afflict me in my own person, family, or friends, enable me to meet the visitation with a full dependence on thy all-wise providence, and with humble resignation to thy righteous will. And shouldst thou call me from time into the eternal world before the close of the present year, Oh may I die in the faith of that gospel which I preach to perishing sinners, and in the possession and enjoyment of that hope which I have recommended to others, which has heaven for its glorious object, and the atonement and intercession of thy Son Jesus Christ for its firm foundation. Amen."

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In the autumn of 1810, Mr. Sloper spent some time at Lowestoft, a distance from home, which allowed him the enjoyment and advantage of the sea air, without seriously interfering with the performance of his pastoral duties. There he became acquainted with the celebrated Mrs. Siddons, who had escaped from the excitement of public life, to the unmolested retirement and invigorating breezes of the same watering-place. That extraordinary woman had a *talent*, rather than a *taste*, for the vocation she pursued. Her natural character was marked by extreme diffidence, and a "benignant singleness of mind." What was said of her, could have been said, even in poetry, of few actresses:

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"Behold, dividing still the palm of fame,
Her radiant science, and her spotless life."^[217a]

She had already passed the zenith of her celebrity. Providence had repeatedly and recently, called her to tread, in domestic life, the "path of sorrow," and her religious advantages, however few, had taught her that

"*That path alone*
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

"Sweet sometimes," said she, "are the uses of adversity. It not only strengthens family affection, but teaches us all to walk humbly with our God."^[217b] It is not surprising that she was disposed to cultivate the society of those who could blend piety with cheerfulness, and with whom she might be on friendly terms without ceremony. Such acquaintances she found in Mr. Sloper's family. Mrs. Siddons, with unassuming kindness, contributed to their amusement by specimens of her powerful reading. She joined willingly in the worship of the family, and maintained the same invaluable practice at her own lodgings.

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Just at that time Mr. Sloper was requested to preach a sermon to his own people,^[218] on an affecting and mournful occasion—the death of a suicide. Though he keenly felt the delicacy and difficulty of the task, a sense of duty and the possibility of usefulness overcame his scruples. He

selected as his text, the impressive sentiment of the apostle, "*The sorrow of the world worketh death.*"—2 Cor. vii. 10. Mrs. Siddons was one of his auditors. She who had been the honoured guest of royalty, who had been enthroned as the Tragic Muse, and whose voice had charmed applauding multitudes—was seen, in the humble dissenting meeting-house at Beccles, shedding abundant and unaffected tears at the plain and faithful exhibition of religious truth!

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Mr. Sloper's preaching was as powerfully recommended to her by the delightful illustration of christian principles, exhibited in his private character, as by the intrinsic importance of those principles and the simple gravity and penetrating earnestness with which they were announced from his lips. He afterwards procured for her, at her request, a copy of Scott's admirable "Commentary on the Bible," which he accompanied with a letter, warmly urging upon her attention the great realities her profession had so manifest a tendency to exclude from her contemplations.

Mrs. Siddons more than once expressed her gratitude for the interest Mr. Sloper had evinced in her eternal welfare; she thanked him, in writing, for the advice he had given her, adding an emphatic wish that "God might enable her to follow it"—a wish which her pious and amiable correspondent echoed with all the fervour of his heart. She returned into the glare of popularity: but a hope may surely be indulged, that the pressure of subsequent relative afflictions, and of old age, were not permitted to come upon her, unaccompanied by the impressions and consolations of true religion. Her elegant biographer, Mr. Campbell, draws a veil over the state of her mind during her last hours, which it would be deeply interesting to penetrate. Would she not *then*, if reason were undimmed, reflect upon the faithful counsel she received with Scott's Bible, as being of infinitely greater value than the applause of myriads or the fame of ages?

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CHAPTER VIII.

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Meeting-house rebuilt—Daniel Delf—Formation of the Beccles District Missionary Society—Bible meetings—Association Sermon—Meetings of ministers—Samuel Archer—Illness of Mr. Sloper—Attacked with paralysis—Letter to the Treasurer of the Suffolk Missionary Society—Second attack—Rev. John Flower—Mr. Sloper resigns—His character—Ordination of Mr. Flower—Death of Mr. Sloper—Tablet to his memory—William Crisp—Enlargement of the chapel—Conclusion.

THE dilapidated state of the meeting-house, as well as its inadequacy to the accommodation of increasing numbers, gave rise, in the year 1809, to the design of erecting a more substantial and commodious place of worship. This was accomplished in 1812, at an expense, including the purchase of a small piece of ground, of £2140 18s. 4d. Besides a regular periodical subscription, repeated efforts were made, by those who felt an interest in the work, to liquidate this debt. It was not, however, till 1829, that there appeared a balance in hand. To a society who, as a body, could not boast of opulence, this was naturally a subject of much pleasure. The pecuniary and personal aid of their benevolent minister, had been rendered with cheerfulness and alacrity; and he heartily sympathized with them in the final accomplishment of their design. It was a fit occasion for the exercise of the best social feelings. Mutual congratulations were blended with ardent thankfulness to God; and the account of the various donations and subscriptions were closed with the following memorandum.

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"Be it remembered with gratitude to the Giver of all good, that the debt of £2140 18s. 4d., contracted in the erection of the chapel, in the year of our Lord 1812, after sixteen years' persevering exertion, was this year entirely discharged; in commemoration of which, forty-four of the subscribers dined together at the King's Head Inn, and in evidence of which the minister and deacons have hereto subscribed their names, this 16th day of February, 1829.

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ISAAC SLOPER, Pastor.

WILLIAM CRISP,
JOHN CRISP,
SAMUEL TOVELL,
JOHN MAYHEW,
Deacons."

In the margin of the entry a reference is made to a passage of Scripture, which indicates the character of the joy and the proper object of the thankfulness thus manifested. 1 Chron. xxix. 16, "O Lord, our God, all this store that we have prepared to build thee an house for thine holy name, cometh of thy hand, and is all thine own."

While the new chapel was building, this christian society was deprived by death of a member whose character and usefulness, as a man and as a Christian, are entitled to be recorded here—*Mr. Daniel Delf*. He was favoured in early life with the religious training of a pious mother, and the public ministry of Mr. Bocking. Settling at Beccles, he soon became a member of Mr. Heptinstall's church; and in 1792, on account of his excellent spirit and character, he was chosen

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a deacon. In that office he exerted himself continually to promote the peace and prosperity of the church, and to strengthen the hands of his minister. Every member found in him an example to stimulate, a friend to advise, and an advocate before the throne of God. While his particular attention was devoted to the "household of faith," he habitually laboured to do good unto all men, and was ever ready to alleviate suffering humanity at the expense of self-denial. Hence he was admired and respected by all who knew him. Some who despised his piety, perceived the benefits of it; and while they could ridicule the saint, revered the man. Such an individual his friends could have wished to retain for ever; but in the spring of 1812, repeated invasions of disease warned them of the loss they were soon to sustain. He went to Lowestoft, to try a change of air and scene; but returned after a few weeks. Passing slowly near the building he had been zealous to raise for God, he directed his eye towards the work, and burst into tears. He wept when he thought of the place of worship he should never enter, and of the society he was about to leave: but he soon resumed his fortitude, for he was in a few days to enter the glorious temple of God, that "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

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The chamber of this dying saint exhibited a scene fraught with instruction. Surrounded by relatives and friends in unutterable anguish, *he* was serene, possessing "the peace of God which passeth understanding." "Remember," said he to his sorrowing partner in life, "I shall not take *the promises* with me." His medical attendant coming in shortly before he expired, he said, "If you can give me any thing whereby I may glorify God more, do it." But nature was exhausted, and he fell asleep in death.

A numerous congregation attentively heard his funeral sermon, from Psal. xii. 1, "Help, Lord; for the godly man ceaseth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." ^[225]

His memory, is still cherished by all classes of his neighbours with a vividness and a regard, which speak the justice of the inscription compiled by his beloved pastor and placed upon his grave.

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BENEATH THIS STONE
LIE THE MORTAL REMAINS OF
DANIEL DELF,
WHO AFTER SUSTAINING IN AN
EXEMPLARY MANNER THE CHARACTERS
OF HUSBAND, PARENT, FRIEND, AND
DEACON OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH,
WITH UNSHAKEN CONFIDENCE IN THE
REDEEMER, PASSED THROUGH THE VALLEY
OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, TO HIS
EVERLASTING REST,
JUNE 7TH, 1812,
IN THE 55TH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

Be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Heb. vi. 12.

Mr. Sloper had the happiness in 1814, to witness the formation of the Beccles District Society in aid of Missions, which was soon extended to the whole county of Suffolk. In September of that year, a meeting of the neighbouring ministers was held at his house, in consequence of some previous conversation on the subject with two of his brethren in a friendly visit. His whole soul entered into the cause of missions; and when the county society was formed, every eye was directed towards him as the proper person to act as its secretary, an office which he filled with great wisdom and unabated zeal, till his last and long-continued affliction compelled him to relinquish all active service. The days of the missionary meetings were among the most happy of his life; and never was he absent, except when sickness compelled that absence.

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About this time, also, he began to take a very active part in all the meetings of the Bible Society within twelve or fourteen miles of his residence. His great love to the holy Scriptures, and consequently to all the means of disseminating them, rendered him a willing helper. Probably no individual in the county of Suffolk attended more of the meetings of the Society. And though at those meetings he always took a leading part, yet none could accuse him of a forwardness disgraceful to him that manifests it, and injurious to the cause which he professes to serve.

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Indeed, the excellent pastor of the Congregational church at Beccles, was so highly and so universally respected and beloved by his brethren in the ministry, and by the members of neighbouring churches, that there were few occasions of interest to them on which his presence and assistance were not sought. They felt that in him they could present to the most numerous and mixed assemblies, a picture of the judicious, faithful, practical christian minister, which the heavenly-minded would admire, and which the profane would find it impossible to despise. He was the counterpart of Cowper's "pastor,"

"Simple, grave, sincere;
In doctrine uncorrupt; in language plain,
And plain in manner; decent, solemn, chaste,
And natural in gesture; much impress'd
Himself, as conscious of his awful charge,
And anxious mainly that the flock he feeds

May feel it too: affectionate in look,
And tender in address, as well became
A messenger of grace to guilty men.”

It would be difficult, and is unnecessary, to enumerate all the instances in which Mr. Sloper was engaged at ordinations, at the opening of places of worship, and in the service of societies formed for promoting the interests of the Redeemer’s kingdom. p. 229

On the 23rd April, 1816, he delivered at Needham Market, before the half-yearly association of the Suffolk Independent churches, a discourse, which he published at their request, and which speedily went into a second edition. It is founded on 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? are not even ye, in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy.” This sermon affords a specimen of that sober evenness of style, supported by solidity of sentiment, and adorned by dignified yet affectionate earnestness, which characterized Mr. Sloper’s pulpit exercises. He points out in what respects christian churches are the glory and joy of their ministers; and urges a devout regard to the objects of their union. The following passage, with which he closes his discussion of the former of these topics, will at once illustrate his manner of preaching, and the value he attached to the intercessions of his people. p. 230

“Christian affection, my brethren, sweetens the intercourse of life; it is the comfort of the church on earth, and the element of the church in heaven; and in the exercise of this celestial virtue, you will promote each other’s welfare, and fill your pastors’ hearts with gratitude and joy; you will receive their admonitions with meekness, listen to their instructions with a proper temper, cover their infirmities and not expose them, and be ready by your words and actions to strengthen their hands.

“Ministers are greatly encouraged by the pious and constant prayers of their people. Ah! my friends, we need your prayers: we are frail creatures, and men of like passions with yourselves. Whatever be our feelings, we must perform the solemn duties of our office. Our work is arduous; our responsibility awful; and even an apostle says, ‘Brethren, pray for us;’ and *we*, you may rest assured, cannot dispense with your supplications, or be happy without them. We are relieved, in all our labours and afflictions, by the persuasion that the people of our care are a godly and praying people. How refreshing is the thought, that while we are studying the Scriptures, and preparing for the exercises of the sabbath, our christian friends are imploring the aid of God’s grace and Spirit, to preserve us from error, and to render us faithful to the solemn trust assigned us! With what pleasure do we enter the pulpit, when we can believe that our hearers have been praying for a blessing on our souls, and on the labours of our ministry! We are animated to proceed in our exertions, when the hearts of our friends ascend in supplication to God, that the word of his grace may be applied with power to their own minds, and be the means of leading others to the Saviour and to the kingdom of heaven. If you come to the house of God with a devotional spirit, and bear your ministers and their great work upon your hearts, it is more than probable that a disposition to cavil and to censure will be destroyed, and as new-born babes, you will “receive the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;” while, in a sense that rises in importance with the progress of time, you will be the ‘joy and crown of rejoicing,’ of those who have taken the oversight among you in the Lord . . . p. 231

“If you are true Christians, and firmly hold the sublime and holy doctrines of the gospel of Christ; if you improve under the ministry of the word, and bear the fruits of righteousness, to the honour of divine grace; if the important duties of social religion be conscientiously and steadily performed; if your desires, prayers, and efforts are employed for the comfort, encouragement, and success of your ministers; and if all your conduct as Christians and members of churches, be directed to the glory of the great Head of the church; you are indeed most honourable societies; you are a credit to your profession, the ‘hope’ of your pastors, and will meet them as their ‘joy and crown of rejoicing’ at the resurrection of the just.” [232] p. 232

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A society of a private nature for friendly intercourse among a few neighbouring ministers, was formed at Mr. Sloper’s house in 1822. The occasional interchange of counsel and sympathy thus secured, afforded him much unmingled satisfaction; and even during his last illness he joined in one of these meetings, and prayed with great fervency and affection. p. 233

In 1824 Mr. Sloper published an account of Samuel Markham Archer, a little boy who died at Beccles, May 1st, in that year. It is an interesting narrative, beautifully illustrating the power and value of religion operating upon the mind of a child. This tract reached a third edition, and was stereotyped in the following year.

In the spring of 1825, Mr. Sloper was again the subject of severe affliction, and for several Lord’s days his people were deprived of his public services. It was his great anxiety that they might continue to be fed with the bread of life. His brethren in the ministry readily lent their aid; and on the first sabbath in May he was again permitted to unite with his flock in sweet communion at the table of the Lord.

For several subsequent years he continued to labour with much acceptance, and to enjoy the unmingled respect and affection due to a truly upright, holy, and amiable deportment. p. 234

In the autumn of 1832, the awful ravages of the cholera occasioned special meetings for prayer, in almost all christian societies. At the suggestion of Mr. Sloper, such a meeting was held at the Independent chapel, Beccles, on the evening of Wednesday, September 5th. It was numerously attended. A solemnity equally free from formality and enthusiasm prevailed in the assembly and characterized the service. Several leading members of the church prayed appropriately and fervently. The psalms selected for singing, were suited to the particular occasion, and were afterwards remembered with a sad impression of their almost prophetic strain, with reference to the mysterious event which was about to be disclosed in the providence of God. The faithful and beloved pastor himself read, from the pulpit he had so long occupied,—

“Death, like an overflowing stream,
Sweeps us away; our life’s a dream,
An empty tale, a morning flower,
Cut down, and wither’d in an hour!”

He delivered an address, pointing out the peculiar propriety of prayer under the circumstances of that affecting period; and with solemn supplication and the apostolic benediction closed the service. While the congregation were withdrawing he was observed in the act of descending with extreme difficulty from the pulpit. It had pleased the Sovereign Disposer of all events to afflict him with paralysis, so severely, that the most painful apprehensions were felt as to the result. p. 235

Such an occurrence, under these circumstances, was singularly affecting. Mr. Sloper had entertained a presentiment that his labours would not be extended to a much longer period than those of his immediate predecessor. On the sabbath which completed the twenty-ninth year of his pastorate, his mind had been much occupied with this apprehension; and though he knew in whose hands his “times” were, it was not till he had made one unsuccessful effort that he could so far overcome his feelings as to commence his public address in the afternoon of that day. It was now perceived that his fears were about to be realized. But the juncture had arrived at which a faithful minister might well receive with humble thankfulness and patient acquiescence, the summons to his great account. He was “found” in the exercise of watchfulness, and in the very act of prayer, labouring “out of season” to render the judgments of God subservient to the best interests of his flock, with his “loins girt about, and his lamp burning.” p. 236

This event excited the deepest interest and sympathy, not only in the congregation, but throughout the town and neighbourhood. Special prayer-meetings to implore the divine mercy in the restoration of the smitten shepherd, and the influence of the Holy Spirit to direct the church in their critical affairs, were held; and temporary measures were resorted to for supplying the pulpit.

For about two months the congregation availed itself of the services of Mr. Russ, who had just then terminated an engagement at Gorleston. From the middle of November 1832, to the beginning of the subsequent July, the Rev. Thomas Morell, jun. (nephew of the eminent principal of Coward College, London,) laboured here. p. 237

In the spring of 1833, Mr. Sloper’s indisposition was so far alleviated, that he was enabled, in the seclusion of his own house, to employ his mind upon topics and objects still dear to him. He had always been accustomed, as secretary of the Suffolk Society in aid of Missions, to prepare its Report. The annual meeting drew near; and he felt his incapacity for the wonted task. But he wrote, at intervals, a letter to the treasurer, Mr. Shepherd Bay, which was read at the meeting, and printed in lieu of the sixteenth Report of the Society. Never had he furnished a report which was heard with deeper interest.

Beccles, April 26, 1833.

“My dear Friend,

The approaching anniversary of the Suffolk Society in aid of Missions, awakens feelings of no ordinary character in my mind. Gladly should I, as on many former occasions, meet you in the performance of official duties, and in the enjoyment of some of the highest privileges of the Christian, had not the all-wise providence of God incapacitated me for meeting my brethren and friends, except at a throne of grace, where, notwithstanding the distance of forty miles, we can cherish the same feelings of benevolence towards the perishing heathen, and exercise christian love one towards another . . . Gratefully I desire to acknowledge the kindness of my dear brethren and friends, personally shown to me as their secretary during past years, and especially their kind letters of condolence and fervent prayers since my affliction, which has made me the Lord’s prisoner for nearly eight months. I rejoice in their personal and relative peace and prosperity; and with you, my friend, do I share in the satisfaction that our county Society exhibits pleasing signs of christian union and hopeful efficiency, and that the desire of our hearts, as its sincerely devoted servants, promises to be increasingly and ultimately accomplished. p. 238

“I trust this anniversary will be distinguished by every thing that increases the dignity of the christian character; that promotes the cause of social religion at home; that gives a holy impulse to the soul in seeking the prosperity of our churches, the best interests of our country, and the extension of the Redeemer’s kingdom throughout every part of the habitable world. May the great Head of the church pour out his Holy Spirit on your assembly!—that the young may be enlisted into the blessed service in which the fathers p. 239

of many have been so honourably and happily employed; that christian zeal may be reanimated; that devotion and liberality may be abundantly increased; and that the coming year may be rendered the most prosperous and encouraging of all that have passed away since the formation of the Society within the venerable walls where you will, on Tuesday, be assembled.

.....

“Continue, my dear friend, to pray for me; and the same request I would make to all who may meet you in the sanctuary on the delightful occasion, that the awful dispensation with which I have been visited may be sanctified to me and to all with whom I am connected: and should the Father of mercies realize my hopes of ultimate recovery, I trust the cause of the blessed Saviour will continue to lie near my heart, and that I shall renew my humble efforts with you to advance, as God’s honoured instruments, the best interests of the Suffolk Society in aid of Missions. To be, for years to come, your fellow-labourer in the service of our Association, will continue to be one of the chief enjoyments of my pilgrimage; and to die an undisgraced servant in the cause which the Society was formed to promote, will contribute to comfort my departing spirit when, from scenes of duty and means of grace, I shall pass to my final account, and return no more for my own advantage, or that of my fellow-men upon earth.

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I am, my dear friend,
Yours with sincere affection,
and best wishes,
ISAAC SLOPER.”

About two months after the above letter was written, Mr. Sloper had a second attack of so serious a description, as to preclude all hope of his ever again returning even to the partial discharge of his pastoral duties.

An application was consequently made to the directors of Highbury College for further supplies, and on September 15th, 1833, MR. JOHN FLOWER, jun. first officiated at Beccles. He had come down as a supply for a month only; but that time had not expired before all hearts seemed to be united in his favour. A special prayer-meeting was held, the afflicted pastor of the church consulted, his approval decidedly expressed, and on October 13th Mr. Flower was invited to take the oversight of this people. The church expressed their humble hope that as they had sought divine direction, the result would be their own growth in holiness, the conversion of many sinners unto God, and the enlarged manifestation of the divine glory. Mr. Flower accepted the invitation, proposing, as he had not completed his studies in the college, the last sabbath in the following February for the commencement of his pastoral duties.

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Meanwhile the public services of the congregation continued to be conducted by a variety of ministers.

Prior to Mr. Flower’s entering upon his office, Mr. Sloper sent in his written resignation in the following humble and affectionate terms:

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“Beccles, Feb. 13th, 1834.

“My dear friends,

After labouring among you for upwards of thirty years, I am brought to the painful necessity of resigning my connexion with you as your minister and pastor. I resign with humility, acknowledging my unworthiness, and craving the mercy of our Lord Jesus at his second coming.

“If I have offended any of our friends I ask their forgiveness, and commend them all to the divine mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto life eternal. It is a comfort to me that, while I feel imperiously required by my imperfections to resign my pastoral relation, I can commend to you my dear friend and brother Flower, to take the oversight of you in the Lord: and this I do with sincere affection, and with earnest prayer that the divine blessing may remain with you for ever.

“Begging my affectionate regards to all classes of my friends—to the aged, the poor, and the young—I am

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Yours with the most affectionate regard,
and most earnest prayers,
ISAAC SLOPER.”

“To MR. JOHN CRISP,
and the other Deacons, &c. &c.”

The best testimony to Mr. Sloper’s ministerial character and exertions, is the *effect* of his devoted services. It is sufficient to point to a church remarkable for its numbers—to a congregation constant and attentive, and comprising many who had not formally joined the church, but were the friends of Christ—and to prayer-meetings, and other week-day services, regularly and well attended:—a minister of the gospel needs no other commendation.

Some intimations of Mr. Sloper's personal character have appeared in the previous pages. It was formed from an assemblage of those attractive and useful, though unobtrusive, qualities, which are not the best adapted for elaborate description, but are peculiarly conducive to the respectability of the individual and the happiness of society. His predominant quality was *benevolence*, ennobled and directed by deep and abiding piety. With him it was not a sickly sentimentalism exhausted upon objects of no moment, nor a heated enthusiasm aiming at projects of extravagance; but a principle which could expand to the great interests of humanity, or contract itself to the minute charities of domestic life. It guided his energies to the work of evangelizing heathen millions, and pervaded his ordinary intercourse with friends and neighbours. Those who occasionally saw him were struck with the urbanity of his manners; those who were favoured with his intimate friendship knew that his heart was all kindness. He rejoiced with those that rejoiced, and wept with those that wept. Much of his happiness consisted in making others happy. Once speaking of a servant visiting her friends, he observed with true generosity, "It is right she should go; she has the same feelings with ourselves."

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No one was more free from the unamiable passions. Although he never deemed it necessary to merge the citizen in the saint, or forgot how inseparably blended are the interests of civil and religious liberty, he was unstained by political animosity. The avowal of his opinions was never unaccompanied by candour and charity towards those who differed from him. By his explanatory and conciliatory addresses on various suitable occasions, there is reason to believe that he contributed in no slight degree to prepare the minds of those within the circle of his influence, for the more cordial reception of the great legislative changes of which he lived to witness the consummation.

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If ever he was betrayed into a warm expression, he was remarkably candid and placable: once convinced that he was wrong, he *made haste* with kindness and compunction in his heart, and frankness on his tongue, to repair the momentary error. Nor was he less ready to forgive. Some years ago a vexatious injury was committed in his garden. He remarked respecting it, "I wish the man a better heart." It is in matters of such comparatively trivial importance that character exhibits its true features.

Even when affliction had partially obscured his mental powers, and his faith and patience were called into constant exercise, the holy love of the Christian still burst through the cloud, and irradiated the long evening of his pilgrimage.

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It is not to be wondered at that he was greatly beloved, not only by his immediate friends, but by persons of all ages, classes, and callings, wherever he was known. "I was present," says one of his most esteemed brethren in the ministry, "at his ordination; I was present at his interment; I enjoyed a large share of his friendship in the long interval between the two events; and I never witnessed his approach without gladness, or parted from him without regret."

Mr. Flower's ordination took place June 5th, 1834. The Rev. Wm. Ward, of Stowmarket, delivered the introductory discourse, on the scriptural character of a christian church. The usual questions to the deacons and the new minister were put by the Rev. John Dennant, of Halesworth. Prayer was offered by the Rev. Andrew Ritchie, of Wrentham; and the charge to Mr. Flower was given by his father, the Rev. John Flower, of Titchfield, Hants. On the evening of the day, the Rev. John Alexander, of Norwich, addressed to the church and congregation an affectionate and excellent discourse.

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About five weeks after the above event, Mr. Flower was visited with a painful and alarming affliction, which laid him aside from his public duties until the 7th June following.

During those months, the public services of the congregation were conducted by a succession of ministers.

On the 23rd November, 1835, Mr. Sloper's protracted affliction was terminated by death. Although he had been long lost to society, the event was a subject of general and sincere lamentation. The chapel was thronged with those who came to witness his interment at the foot of the pulpit from which he had dispensed the words of eternal life.

His death was improved on the following Lord's-day afternoon, by Mr. Creak, of Yarmouth, from 2 Pet. i. 12-15. The young people of the congregation have since gratified their feelings of veneration for one who ever manifested the tenderest regard for their best interests, by placing in the meeting-house a neat marble tablet, with the following inscription:

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IN MEMORY OF
THE REV^D. ISAAC SLOPER,
FOR THIRTY YEARS PASTOR OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST
ASSEMBLING IN THIS PLACE;
IN WHOM BENEVOLENCE AND CANDOUR WERE SO CONSPICUOUSLY
BLENDED WITH FIDELITY AND UPRIGHTNESS,
AS TO SECURE TO HIM, IN AN EMINENT DEGREE, THE AFFECTION
AND CONFIDENCE OF HIS FLOCK, AND THE ESTEEM OF ALL.
HE RECEIVED, ON THE 5TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1832,
WHILE DISCHARGING THE DUTIES OF HIS SACRED OFFICE,

A SOLEMN WARNING OF HIS APPROACHING DISSOLUTION,
AND WAS DISMISSED TO HIS EVERLASTING REST
ON THE 23RD OF NOVEMBER, 1835,
IN THE 57TH YEAR OF HIS AGE.

“Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when
he cometh, shall find so doing.”

These records ought not to be closed without a brief reference to the truly honourable life and peaceful death of *Mr. William Crisp*.

He became a member of this church on the 4th June, 1802, and was some years afterwards chosen a deacon. In both relations, he acted with uniform candour, kindness, meekness, and generosity. He was a liberal pecuniary contributor to the support of the cause; the friend of minister and people, and the benefactor of the poor.

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He sustained, as a merchant, a reputation against which slander never ventured to direct a shaft; and his whole deportment imparted, in the eye of the world, a weight and dignity to the christian community to which he belonged. The declaration of holy writ was manifestly verified in reference to him: “The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him,” Prov. xx. 7. He lived to witness the departure into the eternal world, of five of his children, who all died in the faith and hope of the gospel. Two only survive—they have risen up to “call him blessed,” and one of them fills an important station in the Baptist Academy at Bristol.

Mr. Crisp died on the 18th January, 1836, in the 80th year of his age. ^[250]

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After Mr. Flower’s restoration to health, an increasing eagerness to hear the gospel was manifested, and the duty of providing additional accommodation in the chapel became a subject of serious consideration. Early in the last year (1836) an extensive alteration and enlargement was determined upon; the greater part of the requisite funds were furnished by the cheerful contributions of many, and the very liberal assistance of some; and the work has since been accomplished. A sketch of the building in its improved form is prefixed to this little volume.

The expense of erecting and enlarging places of worship is far more serious to dissenters than to members of the Established Church, since independently of receiving no direct aid from government, the former are subject to the duty upon the materials used, from which burden the latter are exempt. Nearly allied to this tax upon nonconformity, are the stamp duties upon the conveyances, and deeds for renewing trusts, of chapels, and the charges for enrolment.

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These form a heavy item in the balance of justice which remains due to the dissenting portion of the community, or rather, to the interests of religion itself. Its liquidation is not demanded merely as an act of justice; but as a step towards the total disenthralment of Christianity from the paralyzing grasp of state patronage. The religious world, taught by principle and by example, is discovering that it must look to the voluntary efforts of benevolence, impelled by christian principles and crowned with the divine blessing, for the evangelization of the people.

For a long period after the revolution, the nonconformists, bleeding with the persecution of ages, sank into a premature and too protracted slumber. But they have gradually aroused themselves, and are engaging in the assertion of their rights with increasing vigour. Nor will their claims cease to be reiterated, till in the affairs of the soul, “ABSOLUTE LIBERTY, JUST AND TRUE LIBERTY, EQUAL AND IMPARTIAL LIBERTY,” shall have become the possession of every British subject.

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SUMMARY OF MINISTERS.

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	PASTORS.	SUPPLIES.
John Clarke (?)	1653-1656	
Robert Ottee	1656-1689	
Joseph Tate	1691-1694	
John Killinghall	1697-1699	
William Nokes	1703(?)–1710	
Edmund Spencer	1711-1736(?)	
Thomas Tingey	1736-1749	
William Lincoln		1749-1757
John Hurrion		1757-1758
Nicholas Phené		1758-1760
John Fell		1762-1770

Baxter (?) Cole		1771
Joseph Heptinstall	1773-1802	1771-1773
Isaac Sloper	1803-1834	1802-1803
Thomas Morell		1832-1833
John Flower	1834-	

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Footnotes

[vi] In addition to the books referred to in the subsequent pages, may be mentioned Towgood's Letters to White; Furneaux's Letters to Blackstone; Robinson's Plan of Lectures on Nonconformity; Graham on Ecclesiastical Establishments; Marshall's "Ecclesiastical Establishments considered," and "Ecclesiastical Establishments further considered;" Scales's "Principles of Dissent;" Thorn's "Union of Church and State Antiscriptural;" and, amongst a multitude of able pamphlets, that by the Rev. J. B. Innes, of Norwich, entitled "Ecclesiastical Establishments Indefensible," and "A Letter on the Principles and History of Dissenters," by the Rev. John Raven, of Hadleigh.

[vii] Bishop Burnet.

[3] Matt. xxiii. 10.

[4] One of the opinions Wycliffe was charged with holding was this, "It is blasphemy to call any but Christ, head of the church."

"The office of the head is, to prescribe laws to his church which should bind men's consciences to the obedience of the same: and of such lawgivers there is but one. James iv. 18."—*Archbishop Usher*.

"Christians are forbidden to look up to any man as having dominion over their faith, as entitled to implicit credence and submission, or, as the head of their sect whose decisions were stamped with authority over their consciences; they were to oppose all claims and pretensions of this kind by whomsoever they were advanced or on whatever grounds."—*Rev. T. Scott, late Rector of Aston Sanford, Comment*. Matt, xxiii. 8-10.

It is equally difficult to reconcile a hearty belief in the twentieth article of the Church of England with these sentiments, and to distinguish them in substance from the following: "Authoritative and legislative interference apart from him, we dare not recognise: our loyalty to Christ as the church's only head, compels us to disclaim it, and to protest against all human dictation. It cannot be shown that he has any where delegated his sovereignty; that he has appointed any order of men to act for him in a vice-regal capacity, and invested them with irresponsible and discretionary powers, or indeed with any powers at all, to frame articles of belief and formularies of worship and discipline, to fix the meaning of his word, or to devise and prescribe the religion of a congregation, or community, or province, or nation."—*Scales' Principles of Dissent*, p. 72.

[5] Isa. viii. 20. "With respect to difference of opinion on religious subjects, the basis of religion is the Bible, and those [are the] most orthodox christians who adhere the most strictly to the doctrines laid down in that sacred volume. To explain it, is the duty of all mankind, and its interpretation is confined to no particular sect. To use coercion in compelling uniformity is not only impolitic, but while man is constituted as man, it will be impracticable."—*Hansard's Debates, May 21st, 1811. Speech of the Archbishop of Canterbury*.

[7a] Acts v. 29.

[7b] John, iv. 23, 24.

[7c] Acts v. 38, 39. The conduct of the apostles "was a stand for principles; and in this respect they take their station at the head of the reformers of the world."—*Bogue and Bennett's History of Dissenters*, i. 290.

[8] Earl of Chatham, in the House of Lords, 1773.

[10] There is abundant evidence that the christian sects properly called with reference to their church government, Independents, are entitled to this honourable distinction. The Rev. Thomas Adkins in his recently published Records of the Independent Church at Southampton, (a book more especially valuable for its argumentative and explanatory observations,) has collected several testimonies in support of the statement that "The Independents were the first as a sect, in this country, to discover and to recognise, to their full extent, the sacred rights of conscience."

The editor of Col. Hutchinson's Memoirs, (a clergyman of the Established Church,) says, they "proceeded upon that principle which, how general soever it ought to be, is, however, unfortunately very uncommon, of allowing to all that liberty of conscience they demanded for themselves."—*Introd.* p. 17.

Mr. Brodie, the learned author of the History of the British Empire from the accession of Charles I. to the Restoration, remarks that "The grand principle by which the Independents surpassed all other sects was, universal toleration to all denominations of christians whose religion was not conceived to be hostile to the peace of the state, a principle to which they were faithful in the

height of power as well as under persecution.”—Vol. iii. p. 517.

“By the Independent divines, who were his instructors, (says the noble biographer of Locke,) our philosopher was taught those principles of religious liberty which they were the first to disclose to the world.”—*Lord King’s Life of Locke*, 4to ed. p. 178.

On the motion for inquiring into the cause of the death of the missionary Smith, Lord Brougham is reported to have said, “Mr. Smith was a pious and faithful minister of the Independents, that body, much to be respected indeed for their numbers, but far more to be held in lasting veneration for their unshaken fortitude, with which, in all times, they have maintained their attachment to civil and religious liberty, and holding fast by their own principles, have carried to its utmost pitch the great doctrine of absolute toleration.”

[14] He affirmed, from his own perusal of them, that in the primitive church there were but two orders of ministers, priests and deacons, and that “by the ordinance of Christ priests and bishops were all one.”—*Vaughan’s Life of Wycliffe*, 2nd ed. vol. ii. p. 275.

[15a] Stat. 26 Hen. VIII. c. 1.

[15b] Stat. 34 & 35 Hen. VIII. c. 1.

[16] He “laid all his subjects on the bed of Procrustus; some he stretched as too short for the extent of the monarch’s faith; and others he decapitated for presuming to look over his shoulders.”—*Bogue and Bennett*, i. 44.

[17] Stat. 2 & 3, Edw. VI. c. 1. 5 & 6, Edw. VI. c. 1.

[18] Burnet’s Hist. Ref. ii. 178.

[19] Framlingham Castle had been granted by the preceding monarch to Mary. One inducement to take her station there during the suspension of her rights, probably was the proximity of the place to the sea coast. The residents in Suffolk who came forward as her adherents do not appear to have been all favourable to the reformation. The first who took up arms and levied men in her defence was Sir John Sulyard of Wetherden, who, as a reward for his fidelity, was appointed to guard her person during her stay at Framlingham; and whom we shall presently find zealously engaged in executing her sanguinary edicts.

[20a] Eftsoons, immediately.—*Bailey*.

[20b] It was an argument employed in her favour by the Earl of Arundel, in his harangue at the great meeting of her friends at Baynard’s castle, that she had made this promise. Who, he asked, had seen cause to think that, in matters of religion, Queen Mary intended any alteration? for when she was lately addressed about this, in Suffolk, she had given a very fair, satisfactory answer.—*Green’s Hist. of Framlingham*, p. 79.

[21a] Fox’s Acts and Monuments, ed. 1684, vol. iii. p. 12.

[21b] Neal’s History of the Puritans, ed. 1822, vol. i. p. 73.

[22a] Stat. 1 Mary, sess. 2, c. 2.

[22b] Neal’s Pur. i. 77.

[22c] The Statutes of Rich. II. and Hen. IV. for burning heretics, were revived.—*Neal’s Pur.* i. 82.

[23a] Burnet’s Hist. Ref. ii. 267.

[23b] Fox’s Acts & Mon. iii. 98.

[24a] Fox’s Acts and Mon. i. 600.

[24b] Neal’s Pur. i. 92. Price’s Hist. of Prot. Nonconf. i. 191.

[24c] Fox’s Acts and Mon. iii. 773. Brook’s Lives of the Puritans, i. Introd. 13.

[26a] Rev. vi. 9. See Mather’s Hist. of New England, 1702, p. 140. From the last-mentioned of these brothers, was descended Mr. John Fisk, an eminent preacher and writer in the primitive times of New England. He was born at the parish referred to in the text, about 1601, and died at Chelmsford, N. E. 16 Jan. 1676.

[26b] Acts and Mon. iii. 12.

[27] Fox has preserved the whole of this interesting document. Acts and Mon. iii. 578.

[29] “The mouth of the Yare at that time, (*cir.* A.D. 1000.) was an estuary or arm of the sea, and extended, with considerable magnitude, for many miles up the country. Tradition, the faithful preserver of many a fact which history has overlooked or forgotten, confidently and invariably asserts it; and the present appearance of the ancient bed of the river, from Yarmouth to Harleston in Norfolk, tends to confirm it.”—*Gillingwater’s Hist. of Lowestoft*, 4to, p. 26.

[30a] The upper part of this porch forms a room in which is a small, but valuable, collection of books in divinity.

[30b] A subscription has been set on foot, a site purchased, and the promise of a grant from

government obtained, for the erection of a school on the principles of the British and Foreign School Society.

[31] The herring fishery was evidently a principal source of emolument to the inhabitants. In the time of the Conqueror the fee farm rent of the manor of Beccles to the king was 60,000 herrings, and in the time of the Confessor 30,000.—*Domesday Book*.

The grant to the inhabitants at a later period, of the tract of marshes reclaimed from the sea, was perhaps an inadequate compensation for the loss of the fishery. It was stated by a writer at the commencement of the seventeenth century that more wealth was raised out of herrings and other fish in his majesty's seas by the neighbouring nations in one year, than the king of Spain had from the Indies in four.—*Phoenix*, i. 222.

[32] There has been a difference of opinion respecting the derivation of the name, which is not likely to be settled. The common notion is, that the first letter is an abbreviation of *Bella*. Some suppose the first syllable, *Bec*, to be derived from the name of an abbey in Normandy. A third interpretation may be suggested. *Bec de terre*, a point of land, was sufficiently descriptive of the spot, while the marshes which lie west, north, and east of the town, remained under water. *Bec* and *eglise* might be compounded into *Becclys*, the ancient orthography. It has been surmised that the town may have owed its origin to its site having "*protruded* into the ancient river" and served during the Roman, Saxon, and Danish invasions, as a convenient situation for placing a *beacon* or signal.—*Gillingwater's History of Lowestoft*, p. 26. At all events, the Rev. Geo. Crabbe has been led into an error in supposing the name to be derived from the present "beautiful church," nor does it appear why he prefers "*beata*" to "*bella*." *Crabbe's Life and Works*, vol. i. p. 147.

[33] Under him it is said that "the sable clouds of paganism which had overshadowed these parts near two hundred years," were "dissipated by the glorious rays of the gospel."—*Gardner's History of Dunwich, Blithburgh, and Southwold*, 4to, 1754, pp. 42, 43.

[34] The first rise of any material improvement, in this respect, is to be traced to the labours of the philanthropist Howard. He visited Beccles in the years 1776, 1779, and 1782, and thus describes the arrangements of that comparatively recent period. "Beccles.—A room on the ground floor, called the ward; a chamber for women, called the upper ward; a day-room with a fire-place; and a dungeon seven steps underground. In the ward is a window to the street, which is highly improper; . . . no proper separation of the men and women. Only one court; . . . Licence for beer: (a riotous alehouse)" . . . *State of the Prisons*, 3rd ed. p. 303.

[35a] Account of the Corporation of Beccles Fen, 1826, p. 4.

[35b] *Ibid.* p. 14.

[36] Account of the Corporation, p. 14. There is an engraving of the seal in Lewis' Topographical Dictionary of England.

[37] Acts and Mon. Ed. 1579, p. 1735. Ed. 1684, vol. iii. 589, col. 2. The diction and orthography of the earlier of these editions is here preserved.

[40] Toplady, in his "Historic Proof of the Doctrinal Calvinism of the Church of England," adduces the testimony of these men as contained in this last article. *Toplady's Works*, ed. 1825, vol. ii. p. 42.

[41a] Tradition assigns as the immediate scene of this, in every view, execrable affair, the ground eastward of the town, and now called the Fair close. A statue, or an obelisk, has often marked a spot far less worthy of being had in remembrance by the friends of protestantism and religious liberty.

[41b] Prior to the reign of Henry VIII. the sheriff had been allowed to burn heretics without the writ *de hæretico comburendo*. It was rendered necessary by stat. 25. Hen. VIII. cap. 14. *Neal's Puritans*, vol. i. pp. 7, 13. The writ was abolished by 29 Car. II. c. 9.

[44] Quarterly Review, (Dec. 1836,) vol. lvii. p. 366.

[45] "I may grow rich by an art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust, and by a worship that I abhor. . . . Faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God."—*Locke's third Letter concerning Toleration*, 4to, pp. 26, 27.

[48a] See Locke's third Letter on Toleration, 4to, p. 105. "He that would vex and pain a sore you had, with frequent dressing it with some moderate, painful, but inefficacious plaister, that promoted not the cure, would justly be thought not only an ignorant, but a dishonest surgeon."—*Ibid.* p. 124.

[48b] Like the prudent monk, who, when Satan would have drawn him into heresy, by asking him what he believed of a certain point, answered, *Id credo quod credit ecclesia*. But, *Quid credit ecclesia?* said Satan; *Id quod ego credo*, replied the other.—*Dr. Jortin's Preface to his Remarks on Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 27, 28.

[49] Rev. Samuel Charles Wilkes. See Binney's "Dissent not Schism," p. 44.

[50] Stanzas prefixed to the Bible, 1598.

[51a] "They may not maim a man with corporal punishments; may they use any corporal punishments at all? They may not starve and torment them in noisome prisons for religion; that you condemn as much as I; may they put them in any prisons at all? They may not deprive men of their estates; I suppose you mean their whole estates; may they take away half, or a quarter, or an hundredth part?"—*Locke's third Letter for Toleration*, 4to, p. 107. See also p. 121.

[51b] Dr. Jortin, *ubi supra*, pp. 30, 31.

[52a] Locke's second Letter concerning Toleration, 4to, p. 9.

[52b] *Paradise Lost*, b. xii. 1. 524–530.

[54] This statute, (1 Eliz. cap. 2.) and that of supremacy, (1 Eliz. cap. 1.) "constitute the basis of the reformed church of England, and will be regarded," says Mr. Price, "as its disgrace or glory, according to the views of religious liberty which are entertained."—*Hist. Prot. Nonconf.* vol. i. p. 134.

[56] Such as the crossing of infants on the forehead in baptism; bowing at the name of Jesus; kneeling at the sacrament, as a term of communion; the use of sponsors to the exclusion of parents; confirmation; and the marriage ring.—*Brook's Puritans*, i. *Introd.* p. 29.

[57] Neal's Puritans, i. 125.

[59a] Brook's Puritans, i. *Introd.* 29, 40.

[59b] *Ibid.* 36.

[59c] Particularly Dr. Scambler, Bishop of Peterborough.

[59d] 1 Cor. xiv. 31. Neal's Puritans, i. 221, et seq.

[60] Neal, i. 224.

[62a] Neal, i. 277.

[62b] *Ibid.* 283.

[63a] Neal, i. 284.

[63b] Brook i. *Introd.* 39.

[63c] *Ibid.*

[64a] Brook, i. *Introd.* 43.

[64b] Strype's Annals, III. i. 264.

[65a] September 1583.

[65b] Neal, i. 320.

[67a] Strype's Whitgift, pp. 115, 116. Neal, *ubi supra*. Brook, i. *Introd.* 45.

[67b] Neal, i. 323. Brook, i. *Introd.* 46, where a list is given of the ministers suspended in Suffolk.

[67c] Neal, i. 330, 341.

[68a] Neal, i. 345, 352, 376.

[68b] *Ibid.* 335, 353.

[68c] *Ibid.* 337.

[70a] Page 31.

[70b] The surrender is dated 26 Jan. 26 Eliz. [1583, O. S.] and was signed at a meeting of the inhabitants held in the parish church.—*Account of the Corporation*, p. 10.

[72a] Account of the Corporation, pp. 14, 15.

[72b] Neal, i. 353, 354.

[72c] Brook says, on that day he was suspended and deprived by Bishop Scambler, adding, "This is attested by Richard Skinner the Bishop's Register."—*Lives of the Puritans*, iii. 509. But there is some inaccuracy in this account. His suspension was the act of Whitgift himself, and had taken place some months earlier. Dr. Scambler was not elected Bishop of Norwich till December 15th, 1584, when Dr. Freke was translated to the see of Worcester; so that the latter was more likely to have been the immediate instrument of Mr. Fleming's deprivation.—*Blomefield's History of Norfolk*, iii. 558, 559. His successor was first instituted November 2nd, 1583, and again September 5th, 1584.—*Lib. Inst.* xx. 97, 111. This was Mr. John After. A person of the same name is mentioned by Strype in his Life of Grindal, (p. 59,) as a native of Calais, who was ordained by that prelate, July 25th, 1560, at the age of fifty.

The living of Beccles, at the period of Mr. Fleming's deprivation, was vested in Lady Anne Gresham, the widow of Sir Thomas Gresham, Knt., founder of the Royal Exchange. Previously to

her marriage she was the widow of William Rede, merchant, of London and Beccles.—*Lib. Inst. ubi supra. Account of the Corporation*, pp. 11, 15.

In the volume of Blomefield above referred to, (pp. 272, et seq. and 552,) will be found some account of Bishop Hopton, and of his Chancellor Dunning, (or Downing,) mentioned in the preceding chapter.

[74a] The register of Beccles parish records in the interval from 1586 to 1592, the baptisms of several children of “Mr. William Fleming, preacher” (and “minister”) “of the gospel, and Anne his wife.”

[74b] In a more recent transcript of the register here quoted, Mr. Fleming is merely styled “preacher of God’s woorde.”

[75] “Which word *minister* became usual in these times for distinction from the idolatrous priests of the Romish church.”—*Strype’s life of Parker*, i. 127. Anno 1559.

[77a] Price’s *Hist. Prot. Nonconf.* i. 146–149.

[77b] Rom. xiv. 21; 1 Cor. x. 23, 32; 2 Cor. iv. 1, 2; xiii. 8.

[79a] Ezek. xxxvi. 26; John iii. 7; 2 Cor. v. 17; James i. 18; 1 Pet. i. 23.

[79b] John iii. 16; Acts xvi. 30, 31; and Mark xvi. 16; on which passage it has been well observed, “By connecting baptism with faith in the former clause, our Lord plainly forbids our treating that institution with indifference, and by his omitting it in the latter we are taught not to lay an undue stress upon it as necessary to salvation.”—*Stennett’s Works*, i. 139.

[80a] Luke v. 21. See also Isa. xliii. 25; Psal. cxxx. 4; Dan. ix. 9; Col. i. 14; 1 John i. 9.

[80b] Psal. li. 6; Tit. ii. 7, 8.

[81] Psal. cv. 28.

[83] 1 Cor. xv. 50.

[84] See *Wilton’s Review of some of the Articles, passim*; a work to which the writer of these pages is indebted in several instances, and of which he has availed himself the less scrupulously as it has been long out of print.

[85] After the lapse of two centuries and a half, the terms of subscription in the Church of England remain substantially the same, with this additional safeguard against evasion, that the subscription is required, by the Act of Uniformity, to be made *ex animo*. The writer does not feel himself called upon to reconcile this fact with the increased spirit of investigation which characterizes the present age, or with the acknowledged upright character of many of the clergy. It may be conceded that each party is conscientious; but each should bear in mind that there is an essential and unalterable difference between truth and error; and that it cannot be a matter of slight importance whether the one or the other is embraced and propagated.

[86] Binney’s *Dissent not Schism*, p. 30.

[88a] Acts xv. 12, 22, 23. 1 Cor. v. 4, 13. Harmer’s *Misc. Works*, 144.

[88b] *Strype’s Annals*, III. 23. [17.]

[89] Mr. Harmer attributes these practices to their “not considering that the 14th of the 1 Cor. was a portion of an epistle directed to a church in which *miraculous powers* at that time existed,” and to “a want of due deference to their ministers, or in the language of St. Paul, ‘knowing them which laboured among them, and were over them in the Lord, and admonished them.’”—*Misc. Works*, 145.

[90] Neal, i. 428.

[91] See Price’s *Hist.* i. 404–406.

[92a] *Strype’s Ann.* III. i. 266, [184.]

[92b] Grahame’s *Hist. of the United States*, i. 215.

[92c] Price, i. 452.

[93a] Brook, i. *Introd.* 62.

[93b] Grahame, i. 218.

[94] Brook, i. *Introd.* 64.

[95a] Neal, ii. 43.

[95b] Wilson’s *History of Dissenting Churches*, i. 31.

[95c] Mather’s *History of New England*, b. i. p. 5.

[97] He died before he could fulfil his intention of accompanying the remaining part of his congregation to America.

[98a] Wils. Diss. Ch. i. 33.

[98b] Mather's New England, b. i. p. 6.

[99] Mrs. Hemans.

[100] Neal, ii. 44, 92.

[101] Phenix, i. (1.)

[102a] Brook, i. Introd. 68. Several of the bishops objected to so strange a display of ecclesiastical supremacy; and Archbishop Abbot, being at Croydon when the order for publishing the "Declaration" came forth, expressly forbid its being read there. *Ibid.* 69.

[102b] Blomefield's Norfolk, iii. 566.

[102c] Brook, i. Introd. 69.

[102d] *Ibid.*

[103a] 1626.

[103b] 1633.

[103c] Neal, iii. 169, 173.

[104a] Phenix, i. (1.)

[104b] Neal, ii. 247.

[104c] *Ibid.* 248.

[104d] Brook, i. Introd. 81.

[105a] Blomefield says, "He had a Friday lecture here, and was paid for it by the court." *Hist. of Norf.* iv. 362.

[105b] In 1637. *Nonconf. Mem.* iii. 19. Mr. Bridge was afterwards one of the "five pillars of the Congregational party, distinguished by the name of the Dissenting Brethren, in the Assembly of Divines." Neal, ii. 228. iv. 403.

[105c] *Palm. Nonconf. Mem.* iii. 19.

[107] Neal, iv. 172. Harmer's MSS.

[108a] *Nonconf. Mem.* iii. 286.

[108b] It can hardly be doubted that if prudence had permitted, they would have done so at an earlier period, without any scruple as to the lawfulness of such a proceeding. They had, indeed, as Mr. Harmer suggests, "this to plead for themselves, among other things, that they entered not actually into these associations till the whole legal frame of the episcopal church was dissolved by the extinction of monarchy, and men left to follow their own light in these matters by the then public authority." But to attach any importance to such an argument, would betray the advocate of religious liberty into a surrender of his great principle,—a principle clearly stated in a quotation occurring in connexion with the above language: "As freedom is the birthright of mankind, any number of persons may voluntarily unite themselves for such purposes, and under such regulations, as appear useful and convenient to them, provided they do not encroach on the rules of justice, and the rights of others. And if they may unite for other purposes, much more may they unite for the purposes of religion, and the service of their common Lord and Master."—*Harmer's Misc. Works*, 147, 149.

[109] Morell's *Hist. of England*, ii. 253.

[110] Neal, iv. 69.

[112a] At Wymondham, North Walsham, Guestwick, Tunstead, Stalham and Ingham, Edgefield, Godwick, and Bradfield. The churches at Walpole, Bury, Wrentham, and Woodbridge, were formed somewhat earlier: that at Wattisfield in 1654, and that at Denton in the following year. *Norwich Ch. bk.* Neal, iv. 172. *Harmer's Misc. Works*. 147.

[112b] At this period, the use of ordinal numbers, instead of the pagan names of days and months, was not peculiar, as at present, to the Society of Friends, but was common with serious persons of other denominations. The Friends have become singular in this respect from the desertion of the practice by other religious communities.

[112c] The early Congregationalists were much attached to the term *covenant*, which, while it was accurately descriptive of the transactions to which they applied it, derived, in their estimation, a peculiar sacredness from its employment in the Old Testament. See *Harm. Misc. Works*, 159.

[113] Regiment,—established government; mode of rule; (not in use). *Johnson*.

[114a] *Norwich Church Book*.

[114b] Neal, iv. 175, note.

[115] Harmer's Misc. Works, p. 156. Phil. iii. 15, 16.

[116] Norwich Church Book.

[117] Account of the Corporation, p. 16. It will be remembered that the Corporation Act had not yet stigmatized, as unworthy of being intrusted with civil power, all who could not conform to the legislative creed, or consent to prove themselves unworthy, by desecrating the most solemn ordinance of religion to the unscriptural and unholy purpose of qualification for office. Dissenters have been relieved from this grievance, but it is deemed necessary still to require, on their acceptance of municipal offices, a solemn declaration against using the influence they may possess *by virtue* of these offices, to the injury of the established church. This is one of the "acknowledgments" which dissenters are still obliged to render to the dominant church; objectionable enough to be felt, by many of them, as a legislative insult and a bitter grievance; but forming indeed a poor protection to the establishment, since every dissenter may, nevertheless, use his *extra-official* influence to bring about that great renovation and extended usefulness of the episcopal sect, which will result from a dissolution of its alliance with the state.

[118a] Neal, iv. 172.

[118b] The statement of Calamy that he "*came* to Beccles in 1655," is not warranted by the authority he quotes. Contin. ii. 803.

[119] The same writer mentions Mr. John Shardalow, who had been instituted to the living of Beccles in 1640, as being one of the episcopal clergy who suffered persecution during the grand rebellion.—*Attempt, &c.* p. 371. Persecution is to be deprecated wherever it is found, but the Independents, as a body, are not chargeable with the many instances of it which occurred at that period.

[120] Neal, iv. 93.

[121] Cal. Contin. ii. 803.

[123a] Palm. Nonconf. Mem. iii. 17.

[123b] Ibid. iii. 19.

[124a] Christ Set Forth, p. 8.

[124b] It appears that the church had previously invited Mr. Asty, of Stratford, to take the spiritual oversight of them; for in the accmpts kept at the period in question, are the following items:—"To Bro. Shildrake, for his journey to Stratford, to Mr. Asty, *to give him a call*, 10s." and, "Pd. to Girling, for goeing to Mr. Brewster's in y^e night, to inq^r. about Mr. Asty, 4d." This might be the Asty who was ejected from Stratford in 1662, or the individual (probably his son) who, in 1675, became teacher in the Independent church at Norwich. See Palm. Nonconf. Mem. iii. 288. Harmer's Misc. Works, p. 195. Wils. Diss. ch. ii. 537.

[125] Mr. Harmer (and after him the Editor of the Nonconformists' Memorial) was evidently led to consider Mr. Ottee as the pastor chosen in 1653, by mistaking the year in which he was said to be "made pastor," which is certainly 1656. Mr. Harmer says, "July 29, 1653, Mr. Robert Ottee was chosen their pastor, and ordained Nov. 12th." See also Palm. Nonconf. Mem. iii. 255. Mr. Ottee is stated, in the dedication prefixed to his posthumous Sermons, to have been minister of this congregation "for above thirty years," which would be a more natural mode of expression, if he had been thirty-*two*, than if he had been thirty-*five* years pastor; and he died in 1689.

[127a] It will be recollected that prior to 1752, the year commenced on 25th March.

[127b] He baptized, on this occasion, two of his own children, (Mary and Samuel,) and three others. The baptism of his son Samuel is recorded under the same date, in the parish register: "Samuell, y^e sonne of Robert Ottey, preacher of God's woorde, & Margret his wife." This appears to have been the only son of Mr. Ottee who attained manhood, and he died at the age of twenty.

[128a] Acts vi. 1-6. In the "Form of making of Deacons" prescribed for the church of England, the *apostles* are said to have been inspired to choose the martyr Stephen, and others, to this office; whereas it is plain that the election was the act of "the multitude of the disciples."

[128b] Neal, i. 428.

[128c] 1 Cor. xi. 23-26.

[133] Mather's Hist. New England, b. iii. p. 100.

[134] See Neal, i. 305.

[135] This expression, (as well as the practice itself,) was evidently borrowed from the "prophesyings" of the Elizabethan times.

[137] Neal, iv. 172.

[139a] Harmer's Miscellaneous Works, p. 150.

[139b] Neal, iv. 177.

[141] Mather's Hist. New England, b. iii. p. 4. Palmer's Nonconf. Mem. *passim*. It is no

satisfactory answer to the statement in the text, that the episcopal clergy had suffered persecution at a previous period. See on this subject, Adkins's Hist. Indep. Ch. at Southampton, p. 38, note; and Rogers's Life of Howe, p. 129.

[142] *Mr. Samuel Baker's Experience*, 1667, MS. He was born about 1645, at Wrentham, of which place he declared his belief that religion had there flourished longer, the gospel had been more clearly and powerfully preached, and more generally received, the professors of it were more sound in the truth, open and stedfast in the profession of it in an hour of temptation, more united among themselves, and more entirely preserved from enemies without, than in any village of the like capacity in England. He was sent to school at Beccles, and mentions that, during the latter part of his stay there, being about twelve or thirteen years old, he was "exceedingly pleased with Mr. Ottee's ministry, and became more serious and affectionate." He afterwards studied at Cambridge, and at one of the Inns of Court. He became the proprietor and occupier of Wattisfield Hall, a zealous Congregationalist, and a sufferer unto bonds for a good conscience. *Ibid.* And see Harm. Misc. Works, p. 182. Palm. Nonconf. Mem. iii. 283.

[144a] Dedication to "Christ set forth." William Bidbanck, M.A. was ejected under the Act of Uniformity, from Scottow in Norfolk, and was afterwards pastor of the congregation at Denton, where he was greatly beloved for his sweetness of temper, obliging deportment, and excellent preaching. He died, much lamented, about 1693.—*Palm. Nonconf. Mem.* iii. 14.

[144b] "Christ set forth, in several Sermons upon the 7th chapter to the Hebrews, by Mr. Robert Ottee, late Pastor to a congregation in Beckles, in Suffolk. London: printed for Edward Giles, Bookseller in Norwich, near the Marketplace, 1690."

[145] Ejected from Totney, Lincolnshire; "a man of the most remarkable seriousness, meekness, prudence, and patience, mingled with the greatest zeal to do good to the souls of men." Palm. Nonconf. Men., ii. 434. And see Blomefield's Norfolk, iv. 465.

[147a] Christ Set Forth, pp. 70, 71.

[147b] *Ibid.* p. 76.

[148a] Christ Set Forth, pp. 87, 88.

[148b] See Palmer's Nonconf. Mem. iii. 9, and Blomefield's Hist. of Norfolk, iv. 149. The value of Dr. Collinges's friendship may be learned from the former of these works. The latter writer contents himself with stating that "he was a grand Presbyterian."

[149a] Christ Set Forth, pp. 54, 155.

[149b] *Ibid.* 121, 122, 142.

[149c] *Ibid.* 54, 55.

[149d] *Ibid.* 124, 125.

[149e] *Ibid.* 115, 116.

[149f] *Ibid.* 127, 128.

[149g] *Ibid.* 1, 157.

[149h] *Ibid.* 129, 130.

[150] Christ Set Forth, pp. 22, 23.

[151] Christ Set Forth, pp. 113, 114.

[152a] "May, 1689, Robert Utto, clarke, was buried, the 5th day."—*Beccles Parochial Register*.

[152b] This statute, though it was invaluable to the dissenters, and was gratefully received by them, as affording considerable protection, and as opening the way for further improvements, was, nevertheless, encumbered with intolerance. It afforded no relief to Papists, or Unitarians. It exacted from dissenting teachers a subscription to nearly all the Articles of the church of England; it did not abrogate the Corporation and Test Acts; nor permit the solemnization of marriage by dissenters in their own places of worship, nor exonerate them from the obligation to contribute to the maintenance of the public religious establishment, though they do not attend on its ministrations. To a great extent, these deformities have been removed by successive struggles. The period immediately following the revolution may be regarded as one of comparative bondage; but much still remains to be accomplished, before the religion of the Bible will have shaken off all the impediments which have hitherto interrupted its free and triumphant course.

[153] Neal, v. 30.

[154a] His gravestone remains in the church-yard, near the south porch;—"Here lyeth y^e body of Mr. Francis Haylovck, who departed this life, March y^e 7th, 1702, aged 77 yeares."

[154b] 1694. February, "Edmund Artis, gent. was buried the 21 day."—*Parochial Register*.

[157] See page 142.

[160] MS. in the possession of Rev. E. Hickman.

[161a] Wils. Diss. Ch. ii. 515, 518.

[161b] August 7th, 1695.

[161c] The trustees were, John Killinghall, Robert Sherwood, William Crowfoot, John Primrose, Nathaniel Newton, John Utting, and Thomas Feaver.

[162] There cannot be a greater mistake than to suppose that at the period referred to above, the Presbyterian dissenters alone couched their trust deeds in general terms; unless it be the strange notion that the absence of doctrinal restrictions implied indifference as to religious sentiments. The present is one instance of many in which a Congregational place of worship was settled in that manner, under a minister whose sermons betray no symptoms of such an indifference. Equally unfounded, and more unkind, is the imputation of intolerance cast upon the modern Independents, on account of the restrictions by which experience has taught them to protect property *they devote* to a specific object, from being diverted into other channels. In order to sustain so serious a charge it should be shown, not merely that the Independents attach the highest importance to the possession of scriptural views on the doctrines of Christianity, and that they take care not to allow their chapels to be held by those whose opinions *they* disbelieve, and even regard as dangerous; but that they desire to employ some degree or kind of coercion to induce others to profess their opinions and to worship in their temples. The truth is, that the importance attached by the Independents to certain doctrines, imparts a more honourable character to *their* advocacy of religious liberty, than can belong to those who deem religious opinions of minor if not of trivial moment. The writer has been induced to advert to these topics in consequence of a remark on the subject of Presbyterian practices, in an interesting work, written by one whom he well knows to be incapable of wilful misrepresentation, or even of an unkind feeling towards any denomination of Christians. See *Murch's History of the Presbyterian and General Baptist Churches in the West of England*, pref. p. x.

[163] Wils. Diss. Ch. iv. 147.

[165] Howe on Charity in reference to other men's sins. Works, vol. ii. pp. 226, 231.

[166] Of the esteem in which he was held amongst his own flock, a touching illustration is afforded in the following circumstance. Mr. Green, it seems, was extremely fond of roses, and several of the good people, desirous to testify their respect to the old gentleman, in every form, used to bring him roses and stick in the pulpit, till sometimes it was almost surrounded with them. *Harmer's MSS.*

[167a] See the eminent Mr. Benjamin Robinson's death-bed address to his children, Wils. Diss. Ch. i. 377.

[167b] Calamy's Life and Times, by Rutt, i. 139, 142.

[168a] Life and Times, i. 144.

[168b] The first mention of him in the church book, occurs 28th July, 1703.

[168c] Milner's Life and Times of Watts, p. 290.

[169] Watts's Works, Barfield's ed. iv. 451, 452.

[171] Watts's Works, iv. 461.

[172] This advice is stated in the church book to have been given by "the reverend elders, *met* at Norwich." Such meetings were occasionally held in the earliest times of the Congregational churches, in Norfolk and Suffolk. At a later period, *stated* meetings were held by the ministers of the Walpole, Wrentham, and Southwold churches, who were, by degrees, joined by others of their brethren. Dr. Doddridge, in 1741, dedicated a sermon (preached at Kettering) to the associated ministers of Norfolk and Suffolk, with expressions of great affection and respect. In 1761, these meetings, which, (as Mr. Harmer remarks,) "agreeably to the usual course of human affairs," had been attended with diminished zeal, were revived on an extended scale, and continued to be held twice a year, for some years afterwards. Those who attended them, claimed no "authoritative power, but merely a reverential regard to counsels, given in the gentlest way."—*Harmer's Misc. Works*, pp. 197-200.

[173a] Wils. Diss. Ch. ii. 536. Prot. Diss. Mag. vi. 259. There was, at one period, a disposition amongst some of the members of the Independent church at Norwich, to invite Mr. Nokes to settle there as colleague to Mr. Stackhouse.—*Harm. MSS.*

[173b] Calamy says "in Suffolk." Life and Times, i. 142.

[174] MSS.

[175a] Harmer's MSS.

[175b] Prot. Diss. Mag. vi. 349.

[176a] Rev. Samuel Hurrion's Diary. MS.

[176b] Prot. Diss. Mag. vi. 95. Wils. Diss. Ch. iv. 369.

[177] Harmer's MSS. Wils. Diss. Ch. iv. 369. The seceders were afterwards joined by the Baptist church of Rushall, which is said to have been as ancient as the protectorate. About 1730 a Mr. Miller was its pastor. He subsequently removed to Norwich, and was succeeded by Mr. Milliot. Towards the close of his life they chose a Mr. Simons, the benefit of whose ministry the Baptists of Beccles were also desirous of enjoying. For their accommodation the seat of the church was removed to Beccles, and there Mr. Simons resided till his death. After that event the interest at Beccles declined. It was broken up about 1766, and the members residing in or near Beccles re-united with the Independents there and with the congregation at Rushall.—*Harmer's MSS.*

[178a] Dr. Ridgley published a sermon on his death, preached at Fetter-lane, Nov. 9, 1749.

[178b] When the chapel was re-built in 1812, several gravestones were laid down in the floor of the entrances, and amongst them Mr. Tingey's. This accounts for the partial obliteration of the inscription. Two or three are almost entirely effaced. There is one to the memory of "Mrs. Elizabeth Playters, relict of Mr. Richard Playters, who departed this life December the 22nd, 1727, aged 44 years." And another which pointed out the resting-place of "Joshua Nunn, who departed this life Feb. y^e 27th, 1729, aged 80 years." Surely a more respectful mode of disposing of these memorials of the departed might have been adopted.

[179a] He had a daughter married to the Rev. W. Parry, the late divinity tutor of the Academy at Wymondley.

[179b] Mr. Samuel Hurrion being obliged, by an impaired state of health, to resign his ministry, retired first to Bungay, and then to Beccles, where he died Oct. 25th, 1763, aged fifty-three years. He was buried at Denton, his native place. Wils. Diss. Ch. iii. 296. He is described on his tombstone as "late of Beccles."

[184] Prot. Diss. Mag. v. 1—6. 355. vi. 112. Aikin's General Biography.

[185] Wils. Diss. Ch. ii. 554.

[186] Harmer; MSS.

[190a] His father, in consequence of this step, disinherited him, and never saw him but once afterwards. Theol. Mag. iii. 179.

[190b] His academical certificate is dated 6 Kal. Junii 1771, and is signed by Drs. Conder, Gibbons, and Fisher, and by Messrs. Barber, Hitchin, Watson, and Stafford.

[191] These were Thomas Ebbs, afterwards a highly respectable deacon, and whose daughter Mr. Heptinstall married; Wm. Leabon [Leavold]; and John Dann.

[192] Mr. Heptinstall's ordination took place on the sixteenth anniversary of Mr. Bocking's.

[194] It appears that these two excellent ministers and the late Rev. John Carter of Mattishall, Norfolk, all commenced their labours, at the respective places in which they so long adorned the gospel, upon the same sabbath. They enjoyed an unchanged friendship till separated by death—a friendship which has been renewed in heaven, never more to be interrupted by distance, or severed by calamity.

[196] Theological Magazine, iii. 177-181.

[202] Those who are acquainted with Mr. Jay's "Life of Winter," will understand this reference to his cruel treatment with regard to the ordination he desired to obtain in the church of England,—treatment, however, which was so overruled by Providence, that he possessed, as Mr. Whitfield predicted, "the greatest preferment under heaven,—to be an able, painful, faithful, successful, suffering, cast-out minister of the New Testament."

[206] Mr. Sloper's MSS. and Evan. Mag. 1803, p. 406.

[207a] Church book.

[207b] At first they united themselves to the Baptist church at Claxton, in Norfolk, under the pastoral oversight of Mr. Job Hupton; but the inconvenience of attending public worship at so great a distance, induced them to obtain the use of a building in Beccles. The place they procured had been occasionally used for devotional purposes, and the celebrated John Wesley had once preached there; but it was sometimes appropriated to the barbarous amusement of cock-fighting. This circumstance was very repugnant to the feelings of those who resorted thither for religious purposes, and it stimulated their efforts to provide a house of prayer of their own. In 1805, the present Baptist meeting-house was erected. On the 5th Sept. 1808, a church was formed consisting of twenty-four persons; and, on the 12th July, 1809, Mr. Tipple, late of Hail-Weston, Hunts. was publicly recognized as their pastor. He resigned his pastorship in the following year, and from that period the church and congregation were supplied by a succession of ministers, without pastoral settlement, till 1822, when the Rev. George Wright commenced his labours. On the 19th July, 1823, he was set apart to the pastoral office, which he now ably and usefully sustains. The church comprises, at the present time, nearly 150 members.

[209] Jay's Life of Winter, p. 284.

[211] Jay's Life of Winter, 2nd ed. p. 223.

[217a] Anna Seward. See Campbell's Life of Mrs. Siddons, ii. 241.

[217b] Campbell's Life of Mrs. Siddons, ii. 329.

[218] September 16th.

[225] Evan. Mag. 1813, p. 61.

[232] Pp. 15-17.

[250] The writer regrets that the scantiness of his information, as well as the unexpected length to which these records have extended, prevent his noticing some other excellent and exemplary individuals, who have been ornaments to the church, and are now "through faith and patience inheriting the promises."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BRIEF RECORDS OF THE INDEPENDENT CHURCH AT BECCLES, SUFFOLK ***

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