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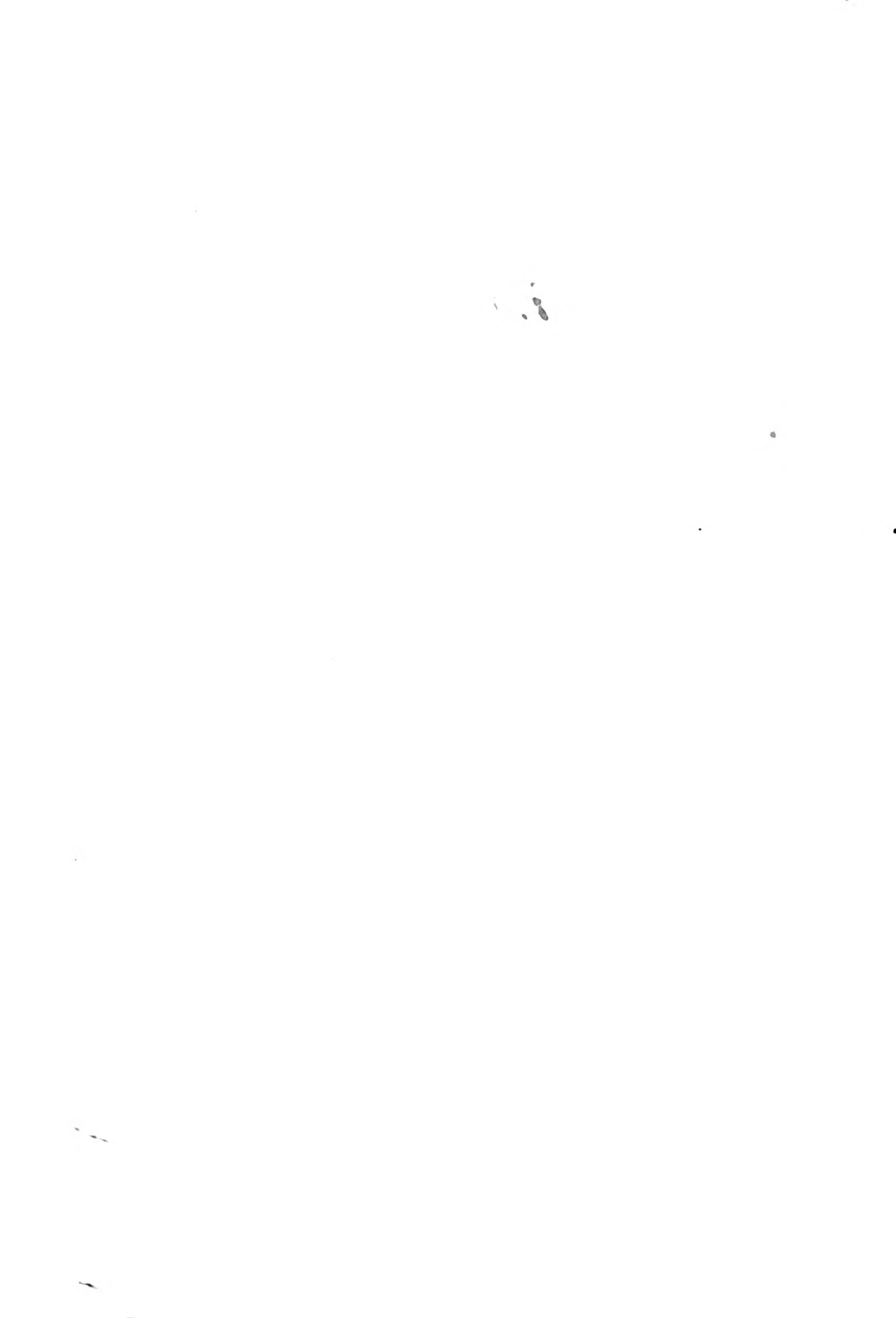
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A

CHARGE

Deliver'd to the

CLERGY,

AT THE

PRIMARY VISITATION

OF THE

DIOCESE of SARUM,

In the YEAR, MDCC XXVI.

By BENJAMIN, *Lord Bishop of the*
said DIOCESE.

LONDON:

Printed for JAMES and JOHN KNAPTON, at the *Crown*
in *St. Paul's-Church-Yard.* MDCC XXVI.

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A

CHARGE

Deliver'd to the

CLERGY, &c.



YOU know, MY BRETHREN, that the *Relation*, I now bear to You, makes it my Duty, upon the present Occasion, to say something to You. And, as this is the first time of our coming together for that Purpose: I think, I cannot better employ it, than by calling to your Minds, and my own, some of the most Important and *General Points*, which are of equal Concern to You and Me; and of the greatest Weight to Us all in the Discharge of our several Duties. And, for this good End, nothing appears to me to be more proper than

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L. To

- I. To consider our selves, not only as *Christians*, but as, *Ministers of Christ*; and as having particularly devoted our selves to the Service of God, and of the Souls of Men, in the *Christian Church*.
- II. To consider our selves as *Protestants*; and as *Ministers* in a *Protestant Church*. And
- III. To consider our selves as *Ministers* in the *Church of England*, peculiarly so called, as it is at present Establish'd amongst Us.

THE Division of our Thoughts under these *Three Heads* will be of great Use to Us: as it will lead Us more distinctly to consider the several *Adversaries* We have to deal with, and the true Line and Measure of our Duty with respect to *Them*; as well as the Weight of our Office, and Our great Concern in the due Performance of it.

I. THE *first* and great Point, is, often to consider that We are not only *Christians*; but *Ministers of Christ*, who have voluntarily and deliberately taken upon our selves a *Sacred Office* in the *Christian Church*; and have devoted our selves peculiarly to the Service of Those Souls for which *Christ* died.

THIS

THIS is an awful and solemn Consideration, which ought to govern our whole Conduct, and spread its influence over Every Part of our whole Behaviour. As We have chosen this Office, I trust, upon such good Grounds and Motives, as will justify Us, before God, in what We solemnly declared at the first Step We took towards it, *Viz.* That We trusted We were *moved to it by the Holy Spirit of God*; it behoves Us, as much as We value the Favour of God, and our own Eternal Salvation, to take the greatest Care that No One of Those committed to Us, fall short of the great Reward which all Christians have in their Eye. If *We* be not wanting, on *our* Part, towards this; no Wickedness or Wilfulness of *Others* will be charged upon *Us*. But if there be any wilful Defect in *our* Care and Watchfulness; Those who perish will not perish without *our* Guilt mixt with *their own*: and We must answer at the Great Tribunal for our Share in so unspeakable an Evil.

BUT not only this. The frequent Consideration of Our selves, as *Ministers of Christ*, will be an infallible Rule of Judgment and Action to Us, in every Circumstance of our Office. It will guide Us into the true Notion of the *Dignity* of it: And it will lead Us to keep up, in some degree, our whole Conduct to that *Dignity*. There is, without doubt, a great and highly valuable *Dignity* in our *Office*. But it is in vain, my Brethren, for *Us* to boast, or so much as to speak, of it, unless We understand

what it is ; and, after We do understand it, unless We live and act, as if We our selves were sensible of it. We must first reverence Our selves, before We can expect that Others should reverence Us: *Reverence our selves*;—Not by demanding outward Marks of Respect ; but by such a Behaviour, as will naturally command them, by attracting the Real Esteem of those around Us ; and by such a Conduct, as will convince all who are Witnesses to it, that We are in earnest, and know what We mean by the just Value We set upon our Office.

OUR *Dignity* is our *nearer Relation* to Christ : And this *nearer Relation* is contracted by means of that particular *Function* which We have, under his Eye, and according to his Will, deliberately and seriously undertaken ; the Office of helping forward and promoting, in the World, the great End which He proposed in coming down from Heaven, and living and dying for Mankind. Now, all *Relations to Christ*, are either our Honour, or Reproach ; our great Glory, or our great Shame ; our higher Reward, or our deeper Condemnation ; according as We our selves behave our selves in them. A wicked *Christian* has indeed a worthy Name, *viz*, that of a *Christian* : But He himself has no Dignity by taking upon Him that Name, whilst He continues wicked. He reflects Shame upon the best *Name* in the World ; and the *Name* He has assumed reflects Shame and Ignominy upon *Him*, whilst He shews himself utterly unworthy of it. So it is, and so it must be, *my Brethren*,
with

with Us. The *Office* We have undertaken, is a *Glorious* Office; I will say, a *God-like* Office, —to carry forward the Purposes of God himself, in the Direction of Mankind to his Favour and their own Eternal Happiness. There is a *Dignity*, and an Honour in it, consider'd in this View, not to be equal'd by any of the highest Offices of this World, deck'd out with all their Pomp and Shew. But *We* can have no *Dignity* accrue to *Us* from this Office, if *We* be so unhappy as openly and plainly to oppose our selves to the main Design of it. The higher the Honour, the greater the Dignity of the Office; the more conspicuous will it render every wilful Deviation of ours from it. In a Word, It is impossible, *He* should have Dignity *in* Himself, or conciliate Respect and Honour *to* himself; who, making the best and most glorious Profession with his Mouth, is seen openly to contradict it in the Tenor of his Conduct. *He* only receives a *Dignity* from it, who adds some *Dignity* to it, in his proportion, by his excellent Life and Christian Doctrine. And it is *He* only who cannot fail of procuring to Himself the *Respect* of All whose Respect is valuable, who shews that *He* respects himself; and, not in Words but in Deeds, looks upon himself as more nearly, than others, related to his great *Lord* and *Master*. This, I say, is *one* great Use of our considering our selves as the *Ministers* of *Christ*; that it will lead *Us* to the true Notion of the *Dignity* of *our* Office, in the imitation of *Him* whose *Ministers* *We* have undertaken to be. And this Notion, thoroughly imbibed, and received into our Hearts, will spread it self over our whole
Lives;

Lives ; and engage Us to frame and fashion our whole Deportment in such a manner, as that What is, in *it self*, the Highest *Glory*, may not, thro' *our own* Willfulness, become our Shame ; and tend to our Indignity and Condemnation, when we shall come to appear before our Righteous Judge.

BUT there is another and very important Use to be still made of this *first* and *principal* Point, *viz.* the Consideration of Our selves as the *Ministers* of *Jesus Christ* : and that is, to be persuaded, from thence, to take all our Directions ; all our Maxims ; all our Rules both of Life and Doctrine ; from *Him* alone, whose *Ministers* We profess our selves to be. From the first Moment of our devoting our selves to *his* Ministry, We become totally engaged to him. We are no longer under any other Guidance but *His*. This is implied in the thing it self. It is an Absurdity, a direct Contradiction, to call or think our selves The *Ministers* of *Christ*, unless We esteem our selves under the strictest Obligation to consult and follow Him alone as our ultimate Director and Guide. This is indeed, at once our *Honour* ; our *Happiness* ; and our *Duty*. It is our *Honour* ; because it is our Adherence and Resemblance to *Him*, to whom God *hath given a Name above Every Name*. It is our *Happiness* ; because We may be sure, We cannot err, or wander from the Truth, or from any thing necessary, so as to *hurt* our selves, whilst We follow such a Guide in the Uprightness and Sincerity of our Hearts. And it is our *Duty* ; because We have made our selves his Servants and

Ministers

Ministers : and, as placed in such a Relation to Him, must be guilty of a great and unpardonable Sin in not doing it.

FROM hence it will appear to Us, that We must throw off all regard to Our selves, to our own Wilhes or Inclinations, to our own private Opinions and Notions, any farther than as they are perfectly agreeable to his *express Declarations*. And from hence it as plainly appears, that We must not be the *Followers* or *Ministers* of Men, in any such Sense as is inconsistent with our constant *Uniform* Regard to *Christ* and *his Will*. There is no other infallible Oracle for Us, but This : And This will be sufficient for all our Purposes, if We have no Purposes but what become Christians, and are suitable to our Holy Profession. In our Lives and Conversations, This is common to *Us* with all other *Christians*, that from *his* Laws, from *his* Promises and Threatnings, We must take all our Rules of private Behaviour : And We have This to add peculiar to our selves, that, from the same Director we must learn effectually to be *Examples to the Flock* ; to excell in *good Works* ; and to let the *light* of those *good Works* so shine before Men, that *They* may from them be led to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.

AND then, as to our *Preaching*, and that Great Duty incumbent upon Us of instructing Others ; how can We possibly hope to do it, either with Satisfaction to our own Consciences, or with the Hope of God's Favour accompanying

our Labours, unless We frame and fashion all our Teaching upon the *Gospel* deliver'd by *Christ*, or by his *immediate Disciples* from *Him*? We say, We are the *Ministers* of *Christ*; beseeching Men, in his Name, to be reconciled to God through *Him*; and to be what He has declared They ought to be, in order to be accepted by God. How therefore, can We be the *Ministers* of *Christ* in this Work, unless We take all our Directions from Him: when it is so very evident, that, as far as We neglect to do this; as far as We follow our own Imaginations and Conceptions, or the Imaginations and Directions of any other Uninspired Men, without comparing them with the *Will* of *Christ*; so far, We cease to be *His Ministers* or Servants, and become the *Ministers* of *our own* Will and Pleasure, or of the Will of *other* weak Men like our selves? And how can We teach and advise and beseech Men to be reconciled to God; and to behave themselves so as to be accepted by Him; without declaring to them those *Terms*, upon which alone They may be thus accepted? And how can We lay before them those *Terms*, unless We know them our selves? And how can We possibly know them our selves, but from *Him*, who alone had Authority from God to propose them to the whole World, where-ever the Sound of his *Gospel* should be heard?

YOU will forgive Me, MY BRETHREN, if I insist upon this as the *Principal* of *all* Considerations in which *We* have any Concern. It is in order to impress That upon
my

my own Conscience, as well as *Yours*, without which We cannot take One right Step in our whole Duty; but under the constant influence of which, We may be happy, and go on secure in the Satisfaction of doing our Duty thro' every Branch of it. I should esteem my self utterly unworthy of the Name of a *Minister* of the *Gospel*; and much more so, of the *Relation* which I now stand in to You; if, in putting you in remembrance of any Instances of your Duty, I could ever forget this Great Foundation of all; or should ever cease to inculcate this upon *You* and *My self*, That it is in vain we call our selves the *Ministers* or Servants of *Christ*, unless we take *Him* and his *Gospel*, as He left it Us, for the Rule of our Preaching his Will: and that it is in vain we preach to Men the glad Tidings of Salvation, unless We study those Sacred Books in which alone those glad Tidings are to be found; and study them so effectually, and with so just Conceptions of them, as from *Them* only to lay before our Hearers those *Terms* of *Salvation*, which *They alone* can teach us. And happy will it be for Us, if We continue constant to this Rule. It will be our Guide, and our Support, in every Branch of our Office. It will overrule our Hearts, and Practice, in every Circumstance of it. It will be a Fountain of *Infallible Directions* to our Flocks. And it will entitle our selves to the Favour of that Great *Master*, from whose Mouth alone we thus seek for True Knowledge.

II. THE *second General* Point, I mentioned at first, was, That We ought often to consider our selves as *Protestants* ; Members and *Ministers* of a *Church* reformed from the *Superstition* and *Tyranny* of the *Church* of *Rome*. And I mention this, to put our selves in remembrance of what Length of Time, and our own seeming Security from Danger, may too often remove from our View ; and yet, what is of great Importance to have often before our Eyes. I would not have it thought, that I intend by this to stir up any undue Zeal, or Resentment, against the Persons of Any who are Members of that Communion. I think They have the *Common Right*, with All others, as to their *Religious Tenets*, (properly so called) to be treated with Humanity, and to be convinced only by Argument. What their *Principles* lead to, with respect to the *Civil Government* ; or what their Practices threaten ; *This* is the proper Concern of the *Civil Government*. But as to *Us*, whose only Concern, as Preachers of the Gospel, is with their *Religion*, (which is to be treated by Us with *Spiritual Weapons* only,) the present Consideration will be of a *double Use*.

THE *first* arises from hence, That it is very apparent, from the Experience of every Week, and almost every Hour ; That Those of *that Communion* cease not, Day or Night, to perpetuate and press all their antient Claims ; that They watch every Opportunity, and make use of every

every Art, to ingratiate, first *Themselves*, and then *their Doctrines*, to the Minds of the Unstable, and the Unthoughtful Part of our World; to infuse into Those who come in their Way, the most agreeable, but false, Notions of their Religion; and to seduce Many out of the Flocks committed to our Care. From hence, I say, arises One Reason for our frequent Consideration of our selves as Ministers in a *Protestant Church*; That We may not be lull'd asleep, whilst such an *Enemy is sowing Tares in the Field* of it; That we may not be led to think that the antient *Controversies* between *Us* and *Them* are of no Moment: but that We may frequently review them in the Course of our Studies; and so thoroughly comprehend them, that We may be ready and prepared to resolve the Doubts, and answer the Scruples, which may at any time be artificially convey'd into the Minds of our People; and be always arm'd with every thing necessary to combat the Sophistry, and to wipe off the False Colourings, of the Adversary; and so to preserve Those who, without our Help, must too probably be carried away with the fair Outside and Appearance of things.

ANOTHER Use of this *Consideration* will be, That, rightly apprehended, it will prevent *Us* from giving Those same *Adversaries* that great Advantage which they have always made Use of most effectually against *Us*, by preserving *Us* from all *Inconsistencies*, in our Arguings and Practices, as *Protestants*. I mean, by leading *Us* (as it must do, if

we pursue it justly and sincerely) to an Uniform Set of Principles and Behaviour; by shewing Us the necessity of not Claiming, or Practising, Any thing *our selves*, which We utterly condemn in *Them*; and for the sake of which (*chiefly*, if not *only*;) We separated from them. *With* this, We have nothing to fear from any the strongest Attaque that can be made from that Quarter, in the Way of Debate or Argument. But *without* it, I will be bold to say, They are so well instructed, and know so well the Force of *Topics* taken from *our* Weaknesses, and Inconsistencies, that it is in vain to hope for much Success against them: Not to mention here a very important Consideration; That All *Truth* must of necessity be *Uniform* and *Self-Consistent*. I pass on now,

III. To the last *General* Point I propos'd at first: which was, That We must consider Our selves as *Ministers* in the *Church* of *England*, peculiarly so call'd, as it is at present Establish'd amongst Us. And this I am so far from wishing to be ever left out of our most serious Thoughts, when we are considering our Office, or our Duty; that, I think, We are under all the Obligation to the contrary, which the Voluntary and Serious Engagement of Our Selves to this *Church* can possibly lay upon Us. I have time only to mention *one* or *two* Particulars under this *Head*; which yet will comprehend most of What may, at another Opportunity, be more largely insisted upon.

WE have deliberately chosen, not merely *Conformity* to this Church, but the *Ministerial Duty* in it. And if We have acted sincerely in *this*, as I trust We all have; This *Choice*, I think, must have been made, because It appears to Us, (who must be determined by *our own* Judgments, as *Others* are by *Theirs*) after the most mature deliberation, all things considered, to be the most Unexceptionable and most Excellent of *All* which have come within our View: Or, in other Words, a *Church*, in which, We truly think, We can do *GOD*, and the Souls of Men, most service. *This* therefore, We are obliged, agreeably to our voluntary Engagements, to defend by our Arguments; as Persons always ready to give a *Reason* for the *Choice* We have made. *This* we are obliged to comply with, as to Its Rules and Orders, in all our Administrations; as well as to adorn by our *Examples*, whilst We continue *Ministers* in it.

IN all our *Defenses* of It, against Those who differ from Us, on each Hand, We must never forget the *Two former* Considerations, that *We* are *Christians*, and *Protestants*; and that *This* Church is a *Christian* and a *Protestant* Church. The View of these *two Points* will make all our Arguments Powerful and Consistent. The Meek and Good Spirit of Christianity will govern all our Zeal; and give it not only a *Beauty*, but an *Effect*, beyond what it could otherwise have. And the great Foundation-
stone

-stone of all *Protestantism* laid down always for the Ground-work, will probably make whatever We shall build upon it, *Uniform* and *Strong* beyond all Danger. These Two absolutely necessary Points, will teach us to endeavour to convince the *Judgments* of Those who differ from Us, but not to confound or injure their *Persons*; and will, at the same time, shew Us the *Only good Method* of doing it.

IN our *Ministrations* in *this Church*, Our Engagements oblige Us to keep to the *Rules* and *Orders* laid down plainly and expressly in it: Which, as it is established by *Law*, has by that same *Law* tied Us down to the *Orders* and *Ceremonies* appointed in it; and indeed, has effectually and plainly forbidden *all other*, besides *Those prescribed* in the *Book of Common-Prayer*.

THESE Orders and Prescriptions, I think, we are strictly obliged to observe, as the Rule and Measure of our Behaviour in all the Administrations belonging to our several Offices. And this *Rule*, I trust, (as We *ought*, so) We *may* all follow, as the safest: without being censured, either on one hand, for not adding *Other Ceremonies*, *Arbitrary* and *Unprescribed*; or, on the other hand, for not omitting or varying *Any* of Those which are *appointed*.

WE

WE must add to this a Constant Care to perform the publick Services of the *Church* in a Manner that may shew Us to have a Mind to preserve and to conciliate a Respect and serious Regard to them: behaving our selves in all our *Administrations*, with the utmost Decency and Gravity: reading the *Offices* with a distinct, deliberate, and manly Pronunciation; without the Affectation of any thing Theatrical on *one* hand; or any thing Low, Careless, Dead, and Spiritless, on the *other*. And to all We must add the strictest regard to our own Lives and Conversations; That our Conduct may adorn our Profession; that our Care of our Flocks may be suitable, in some Degree, to our Obligations; that our *Examples* may *teach*: Without which, all our *Words* and all our *Preaching*, will not, I fear, *teach* Any who attend upon Us, or reconcile any *One* of our Adversaries to the *Communion* We would most willingly recommend to Them.

AND thus I have given You my best Thoughts, upon Those principal Points, which I propos'd to speak of at this time. To These, all other Particulars relating to our Duty in our Function, and our Behaviour with respect to All around us, (whether *agreeing with Us, or not,*) may be reduced; and rightly judg'd of, from them. But the Time does not now allow Me to shew this distinctly in the several Instances which might be named; or to enter into any other Important Considerations, as I once design'd to do,
and

and as I shall still hope to do, upon another like Opportunity, if it shall please God to bring us together again.

AND NOW, MY BRETHREN, having put You, and My self, in Mind of Those General Lessons, in which You and My self are equally and constantly concern'd, in the Execution of our Office ; Give me leave to add one Word, before I conclude, with relation to that *Personal Intercourse* which must necessarily be between Us. And, as to this ; I sincerely speak it, I desire No *Regard* from *You*, but in Proportion to the *Regard* You shall ever meet with from *Me*. If You find that No difference, real or supposed, in our Opinions upon any sort of Matters, shall at any time hinder or obstruct the *Impartiality* of *Justice* in all my Proceedings with You ; if You always shall meet with a Kind Reception, an Open Ear, a Ready Assistance, the Sincerest Advice, and Every Instance of Friendship in My Power, always prepared to exert it self for your Service : I may then hope, You cannot refuse Me the just and natural result of all this ; the return, on *your* Part, of what I shall always highly value.

MY BRETHREN, It is my Heart's Desire, that our whole Behaviour, in the *Relation* We have contracted, may be to our mutual entire Satisfaction. Nothing, I promise, shall be wanting on my Part, which is agreeable either to Justice, or Affection. I shall always be glad of any Assistances or Advices from You, as Occasion

sion shall offer. And I shall now end All, by praying God so to direct both *You* and *Me*, that *We* may live together here in a well-grounded Peace and Love; and, after our Course of Duty run, may meet one another, at the Great Day of Accounts, with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory: When Our Great Lord, (whose *Ministers* *We* are, if *We* follow his Directions,) shall come to judge the World in Righteousness; and to render to *Us* all, not according to the Opinion of *Others* about *Us*, but according to *our own* Works, and to what *We* our selves have taught and acted, during our *Ministration* here below.

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