

sake, and will not remember thy sins." And Daniel, by the same spirit, says: "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him." "If thou Lord," is the language of the Psalmist:—"If thou Lord shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." And in that sublime manifestation of Jehovah, when he descended in the cloud, and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed his name, this was the glorious character, the "Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty."

We have here then two truths established on a foundation, which nothing can move. These are, first, that the Creator of the world, is the lawgiver of the world;—and second, that no one can forgive the violations of that law, but the God who gave it. And for any other in earth, or in heaven, we care not who that other may be, to attempt to forgive sin, is not only an impious opposition to God, but a blasphemous assumption of his power. And it is this claim that has branded on the forehead of that Anti-Christian power, which opposeth and exalteth itself against all that is called God, and is worshipped, the black and the burning character of the *man of sin*. The Scribes were then right in their declaration, when they said,—“Who can forgive sins, but God only?” But they were wrong in their application of the blasphemy to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now it is to this point, particularly, that we intreat inquiry. For if the Lord Jesus Christ forgave sins, it is an establishing of his right and title to be God, yea, “God over all.” Let us appeal to the fact. The circumstances of the case before us, were these:—A man sick of the palsy was brought to Jesus Christ, so grievously afflicted, that he required to be borne by four friends; and when unable to make their way to that Saviour, on account of the multitudes who passed around them, they uncovered the roof, and let him down immediately to the place where Jesus was. It was a signal act of faith in that Saviour's power, and most signally was it rewarded, even by declaring to him the forgiveness of his sins. The Scribes, or the expounders of the law, who were present, in their

hearts charged him with blasphemy, for thus laying claim to a power which belonged to God alone. But he who forgave sins, showed, that he could also discern the thoughts and the reasonings of the heart; and to these thoughts and reasonings, he replied, not by reasoning alone, but by a miraculous display of his power. “But that ye may know, that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, he saith to the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.” And what was the result of this command of the Saviour? It was a complete and triumphant reply to his enemies. For, “immediately he,” the man who had to be borne by four, “arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all.” We have the same things related by Matthew ix. 1, and Luke v. 18.

Here then we have the matter brought to an issue. Either the Lord Jesus Christ had power to forgive sins, or he had not. *If he had the power, then he was God, for none but God can forgive sins.* If he had not this power, then was he a deceiver for laying claim to this power. But that he had this power, in other words, that he was God, he gave a visible proof, by healing the body of the palsied man.

There are some other sentiments of this class, to which, if it please God, I shall claim a place in some future Number of your Magazine. H.

THE REV. CHARLES MASTERTON, M.A.

In a former number, (page 83,) we promised to give an account of this eminent Minister. This pledge we shall now redeem by a brief sketch of his life, and an enumeration of his works;—a specimen of which we trust is, by this time, in the hands of many of our readers.*

Mr. Masterton was a native of Scotland, and a graduate of one of her Universities. He was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Linlithgow; but, removing to Ireland, he was received and recognized by the Synod as a licentiate, in the year 1703. He was not long under its

* We allude to the edition of “Jones on the Trinity,” recommended in our last Number, to which is appended, Masterton's valuable Essay on the same subject.

care until he was invited to be the Minister of *Connor*, one of its largest and most respectable congregations. He accepted the call, and was ordained to this charge on the 17th of May, 1704. Over this congregation he continued to preside for eighteen years; till the agitations which afterwards terminated in the separation of the Presbytery of Antrim, opened the way for his removal to a more important and influential station in the church.

The installation of the Rev. Samuel Haliday,—who refused to subscribe the Westminster Confession of Faith,—to the charge of the First Congregation, Belfast, in the year 1720, offended many of the Orthodox members of that congregation, and caused them to withdraw from his ministry. In the following year, by their commissioners, Messrs. Smith, Lennox, John Young, Wm. Simms, and others, they memorialled the Synod to erect them into a distinct congregation, and afford them supplies of preaching. Their request was granted; and hence originated the Third Presbyterian Congregation, Belfast. This infant society, situated in a populous town, and surrounded by many talented opponents, required a learned and able Minister to support and defend their cause against the attacks of their adversaries. Such a Minister they found in Mr. Masterton. With the advice and concurrence of the Synod, they invited him to be their pastor; and he was accordingly installed as the first Minister of that rising congregation, in the latter end of the year 1722. In the following year he was chosen Moderator of the Synod, then assembled at Dungannon; and from this period he took a prominent part in the debates and proceedings of the body.

His first appearance from the press, was occasioned by the controversies respecting subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, which were then so keenly agitated. In the year 1722, Mr. Abernethy of Antrim, had published, anonymously, in Dublin, a pamphlet entitled, “A seasonable advice to the Protestant Dissenters of the North of Ireland; being a defence of the late General Synod’s charitable declarations.” The brevity of this sketch precludes us from giving any more than the mere titles of the publications with which Mr. Masterton was connected. To this work he immediately wrote a reply, which was published at Glasgow, early in the year 1724, with the following title, which we give at length, as it tends to explain the

object of our author: “An Apology for the Northern Presbyterians of Ireland, wherein requiring a subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith, as a condition of ministerial communion among them, is justified, in answer to the Seasonable Advice from Dublin, and other late performances, published in opposition to the practice of the best reformed churches relating to creeds and confessions.” (Glasgow, 1724, 4to. p. 55.) This apology called forth a lengthened rejoinder from Abernethy, in defence of his Seasonable Advice; to which was added a Postscript, by three Dublin ministers: the Rev. Messrs. Weld, Boyse, and Choppin, who were anxious to preserve peace and union among the Northern Presbyterians. To this postscript Mr. Masterton replied, in the year 1726; and with it, this branch of the controversy terminated. Previous to the appearance of this latter pamphlet, Mr. Masterton had published a Sermon, probably that which he had preached at the opening of the Synod, in the year 1724. It is entitled, “Christian Liberty founded on Gospel Truth; or the great argument of Christian Liberty, explained in its necessary connexion with sound principles. In opposition to some dangerous notions relating to both.” (Belfast, 1725, p. 46.) The text of this seasonable discourse is John viii. 32. It is written with great plainness, and affords a favourable specimen of the sound reasoning and scriptural knowledge of our fathers of that day.

Not long after the appearance of this sermon, Mr. Masterton gave to the world his well known Treatise on the Trinity; the recent publication of which, gave rise to this sketch of its learned and judicious author. The first edition of this brief but valuable manual, on one of the most important doctrines of revealed religion, was published at Edinburgh, precisely a century ago. It originally bore this comprehensive title, which may serve as an index of its contents,—“The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity explained and asserted from the Holy Scriptures. Being a vindication of what is contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, and other Protestant Confessions upon that subject. Wherein the most important questions relating to that Doctrine are clearly and succinctly treated, many Scripture texts briefly explained, and the objections of adversaries answered: together with practical observations on each head, in the method of Catechetical discourses.” (Edinburgh, 1729, 18mo.

p. 56.) During the author's life, this popular treatise, which has been frequently re-printed since, passed through no less than *four* editions, the last of which was published at London, in the year 1745, with a recommendatory preface, and Greek notes, by A. Taylor, of Deptford. To this edition, Mr. Masterton appended a Supplementary Essay, entitled, "The great importance of the Scripture Doctrine of the ever-blessed Trinity of Divine Persons in the Unity of the Godhead. Being a Supplement to the foregoing Treatise." (12mo. p. 55.)

This was his last public work, as an author, and nearly the last, as a Minister. He was present at the Synod, held at Antrim, in the year 1745; but the infirmities of age increasing fast upon him, he shortly after resigned the pastoral charge of his congregation, which, under his care, had become a large and respectable society. The Rev. William Laird, who had been Minister of Ray, in the County Donegall, was chosen his assistant and successor, and installed in that office on the 16th September, 1747. Mr. Masterton did not long survive his retirement from the laborious duties of the ministry. He died full of faith and hope, July the 15th, 1750. After his death, his friends, desirous of possessing some memorial of his public services, encouraged the publication of two of his sermons in one pamphlet, which was printed at Belfast, 1753, 8vo. p. 60. One of these was the farewell discourse he had preached at Connor, prior to his removal to Belfast, from the appropriate words of Paul, Acts xx. 32. It was then first published from the original manuscript, and is a most interesting and affecting discourse. The other was a reprint of the sermon he had published in his life-time, on "Christian Liberty," as already mentioned.

SYNOICAL OVERTURES.

No. III.

THE third Overture provides, "That before any person be recognised as a candidate for the ministry, he shall, previously to his entering a theological class, be enjoined to present himself at our Annual Meeting, to be examined by a Committee of the Synod respecting his personal religion, his knowledge of the Scriptures—especially his

views of the doctrine of the Trinity, original sin, justification by faith, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit;—and likewise, as to his motives for offering himself a candidate for the sacred office of the ministry; and that should any examinant be found to be opposed to these doctrines, or appear to be destitute of vital godliness, he shall, in no case be recognised as a candidate for the ministry in the Synod."

To understand the bearing of this Overture, it should be observed, that formerly a *boy* was recognised as a candidate for the ministry among us, when he had completed his English and Classical education, and had passed an examination on these points, previous to his entering college at all. If, at that early period, some members of a Presbytery were anxious to ascertain whether the candidate were truly pious, others thought it quite preposterous to inquire into the matter, as the *boy* was too young to give decisive evidences on this most important point.

Hence, the matter was waived for the present. The lad was sent to college,—was examined from time to time, with regard to his *literary* progress; was received as a matter of course into the Divinity class,—underwent, afterwards, a mere literary examination, and gave in a series of discourses; finally underwent some general examination in Divinity before the Presbytery; and if he were satisfactory in these points, and no immorality were alleged against him, he was licensed to preach the Gospel. If, previous to his being licensed, any member of the Presbytery attempted to examine him with regard to the fact, of his being *renewed in the spirit of his mind*, and his being thus a partaker of vital godliness, he was instantly put to silence. Has he not a fair character? was considered the decisive and only question suitable to be put on the subject; and in the whole course of the young man's examinations there was scarcely any thing even to *remind* him, that *personal piety was the first and indispensable requisite in a Minister of the Gospel*.

It often happened, however, that the consciences of some Ministers would not allow them to acquiesce in suffering persons thus to enter the ministry under their sanction. They were entitled to ask such questions as might satisfy their own minds with respect to the piety and character of candidates for the ministry; and might, if they saw reason, protest against his license, in which case he could not be licensed till the meeting of Synod. But if any