

For the Colonial Churchman.

AN ANTIDOTE TO DISSENT.

Messrs. Editors, (No. 11.)

In my last I promised to answer some of the principal objections usually made to the Church by dissenters, but before I proceed to fulfil my engagement, I would beg leave to make a few more remarks on the subject in my last letter which want of room would not allow me to do.

I have often spoken to dissenters on the subject of their dissent from the church, and I generally find among them a desire to treat ancient things with disrespect, unless they can use them for the benefit of their cause; but if they can at all make something out of the same otherwise disregarded and despised argument, they take good care not to lose it. Thus, when we plead the apostolicity of our church, we are answered by some with contempt, and by others by endeavouring to make out that the peculiar tenets of their sect were the primitive and only true ones. Now, surely there must be some great mistake here; and it seems to me that many besides myself ought to see it. What then is the best remedy to remove the mistake? If I say, let us drop all our differences; let us all unite in one communion; and supposing my proposals were agreed to by all parties, yet we would have to fix upon some form of worship, and to adopt some particular plan of church government. Now I would ask, which of the present systems would be the most approved? 'O surely,' it will be said, 'the best must have the preference!' Very well, but which is the best? Are men able to judge in this matter? Is it not what they have been endeavouring to do these two or three hundred years, and they never can succeed in satisfying their poor fickle and restless minds and hearts? If we have the ability to select for ourselves the best church in existence, we certainly ought to be all united very closely now; but the fact is that in this also we want the assistance from above, the help of Divine grace, to direct us in the good "old paths," that we may "walk therein, and find rest for our souls." I suppose no one will deny that among the numerous religious systems now opposed to each other, some one must be best. All must agree to this, since all will have their own to be the one. Then I would ask, how comes it that they who are in the wrong do not see it? It is, however, generally thought that there are very pious people in every sect, but if all these communions must be wrong except one, how is it that the pious part of them do not see their error? One of my parishioners asked me the same thing the other day in the following manner:—"If dissent be such a great evil, how is it that the Holy Spirit has operated in my heart, in other respects, but has never shewn me this?" This man, however, thinks himself, and is thought by his neighbours, to be a very religious man, and yet he cannot see the evil of division. Why? because he mistakes his own feelings for the operation of the Spirit of God and pays more attention to what his conscience tells him than to what the word of God tells him! In the same way, I fear, many are deceived with regard to their choice of the religious body they join, and may indeed be also deceived as regards their own pious feeling. Besides, it is unhappily too true that there always remaineth something of the flesh in us while we live in this tabernacle, and

many well-meaning men might easily be in error upon some important point without being aware of it until a certain time. But let us not be mistaken any longer. It is impossible for us to follow the will of God without a willing mind, and unless we have this grace, we can never discern which is the church of God among the multitude of those who assume this sacred name. It is the plainest thing in the world, that the principal motives which can lead men into so much division and confusion, cannot be the true principles of the gospel. As long therefore as they will be guided by the spirit which causes dissent, they will never seek or take a remedy. Yet it is our duty to offer it if we have it in our power, and let us pray that a time may come when christians will at last open their eyes, and when "love" will be indeed "without dissimulation."

But, it may be asked, "what then is the best remedy for all these miserable divisions?" In answer to this I would beg leave to say, that in my opinion, I know no other religious body better calculated to conciliate all parties, than the Protestant Episcopal Church. In her we find all that is primitive, without a doubt. In her we find a regular ministry as old as christianity itself—a liturgy composed according to scriptural and catholic purity and beauty—and in her, her most inveterate enemies will never be able to find any thing taught, as necessary to salvation, which is not plainly and distinctly expressed in the Bible.

But to this a dissenter will object by saying, that he believes his communion is the best, and that he of course, has as much right to choose his church as I have to select mine. How then are we to settle the matter in order to remove every thing which obstructs our christian fellowship? It is evident that one of the two must give way to the other. But is it likely that one will give up a divinely organized society for another of human invention? Is it likely that the man who holds to the oldest institution will give up his pretensions, especially while nothing very material is defective in the doctrines of that church, for one of a later origin, and formed by perhaps only one simple individual? Even supposing the new system possessed of attractions which are not to be found in the other, yet nothing but presumption, or a "zeal without knowledge," could make us substitute any plan of our own for that which Christ, the Apostles, and the whole Church during the fifteen first ages of Christianity, formed, approved, and supported. It appears to me that the origin of many mistakes concerning these things is the low opinion in which God's institutions are held. If I lose sight of the Divine origin of the Church and of all her ordinances, I am at once in a labyrinth of confusion. And so it is with all dissenters. Having forgotten this noble feature in the true church, they are obliged to live in constant search for what they have lost without ever finding it. They want a centre of Unity, and they will find it nowhere upon earth but in Episcopacy. Once out of this "old path," they are on the wide world, or on the wide ocean, without a compass to guide them. I would therefore ask all those dissenters who confess that we are all divided by mere trifles and non-essentials, if they are all desirous of opposing the dangerous effects of dissent, and of putting a stop to our shameful divisions, whether they would not do well to return to "the old path" of Episcopacy as the best

step they can take towards healing up all past differences, and restoring peace and order to the divided and contentious world? There are many, I am sure, who might easily lay by these trifles and non-essentials for the sake of Unity. They only want a sufficient portion of humility, disinterestedness and charity, and all other considerations will fall to the ground in presence of these heavenly virtues. What a blessing for the world, if all those who differ, as it is said, only about small things, would lay by these small things, which are, "Obedience to them that have the rule over us,"—Love, Peace, and Unity! Oh! may we not look for such a day?

I remain, Messrs. Editors, Your's, &c.
Oct. 24, 1838.

EXTRACTS FROM THE LIFE OF WILLIAM WILBERFORCE BY HIS SONS.

DR. CHALMERS.

'All the world wild about Dr. Chalmers; he seems truly pious, simple, and unassuming. Sunday, 25th.—Off early with Canning, Huskisson, and Binning, to the Scotch Church, London-wall, to hear Dr. Chalmers. Vast crowds—Bobus Smith, Lord Elgin, Harrowby, &c. So pleased with that I went again; getting in at a window with Lady D. over iron palisades on a bench. Chalmers most awful on carnal and spiritual man. Home tired, and satisfied that I had better not have gone for edification.' 'I was surprised to see how greatly Chalmers was affected; at times he quite melted into tears. I should have thought he had been too much hardened in debate to show such signs of feeling.' 'All London,' he was soon after told in a very different circle from his own, 'has heard of your climbing in at that window.' With the healthful play of a vigorous mind he entered readily into the joke. I was surveying the breach with a cautious and inquiring eye, when Lady D., no shrimp, you must observe, entered boldly before me, and proved that it was practicable.'

THE DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

'Through General Macaulay, who was in attendance on the Duke of Wellington at Verona, he heard of the admirable zeal, perseverance, judgment, and temper, which the duke had manifested in conducting what he calls 'our business' at the Congress. I am particularly pleased with the general's confidence in the Duke of Wellington's plain-dealing honesty, against all the tangled web of the French Machiavelian manufacturers. Dieu defend le droit. I shall love all generals the better for it as long as I live, and so I hope will my children after me. I am highly gratified by finding so much resolution and practical zeal in our good cause, in a man whose life has been spent for very different purposes, but who has been so signally honoured by Providence as the instrument of our national deliverance.'

HIS LAST FRANK.

On the very day on which the new writ was moved he was enjoying peacefully the simplest pleasures. 'Foggy in the morning,' says his diary, 'but cleared up and became delightful. The sun full out all day. The bees seduced to fly about into the crocus cups. The blackbirds singing.'—To two of his sons, who had requested him to send them his last frank, he wrote on the same day:—

TO ROBERT ISAAC WILBERFORCE, ESQ. AND SAMUEL WILBERFORCE, ESQ., ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.
'My dear Boys,—When Charles the First was on the very point of exchanging, as I trust a temporal for an eternal crown, he was forced to be short, so he said but one word; and now I have but a moment in which to use my pen, and, therefore, my dear boys, I also will adopt his language, and add, as he did, 'Remember.' You can fill up the chasm. I will only add, that with constant wishes and prayers for your usefulness, comfort, and honour here, and for glory, honour, and immortality for you hereafter, I remain, ever your most affectionate father,

W. WILBERFORCE."