

Church of England, in accordance with the Catholic Church at large, has ever held essential to the ministerial office, and hence by a large portion of the more pious church-people themselves, the Methodists are considered,—to use a phrase which you know used to be very popular,—to be nothing more than “churchmen in earnest;” and this is an idea which has done, and still does, much to uphold and extend Methodism. Presbyterians and Independents are known to be in general opposed to the Church,—with them, therefore, all religious connection is avoided by those who have been taught to love and reverence it; it is far otherwise with respect to Methodism, which, because of its similarity and reputed attachment to the church, has drawn away and retained more of her children than in modern times all the other dissenters put together;—thirdly, the positive separation of the Methodists from the Church, while at the same time they profess to love and reverence her, and even to admire her Episcopacy and government, has had a very great effect in blinding both themselves and others to the evil and sin of dividing the Church of Christ. Other dissenters have pleaded *principle*, saying that they believed the Church to be inconsistent with the Bible, and that therefore they could not conscientiously remain in her; but the Methodists have opened other places of worship and erected rival altars, on the mere ground of *efficiency*, because though, they admit the general excellency and scriptural character of the Church of England, they think that *they*, as individuals, “can get more good” from services conducted after their own manner. Now, Mr. Brown, if there is such a sin as *schism*,—and no one who reads his Bible can deny it,—are not the Methodists, of all denominations, the most guilty of it; for *they* have not even mistaken principle to plead? You will readily believe that I ask this question, not in anger, but in sorrow and kindness; for I need not tell you,—who know how many of my most honored connexions have been, and some of whom still are, amongst them,—that my very prejudices must lead me to think more highly of them than of any other of the sectaries. Indeed, the fourth ground which causes me to charge Methodism with doing so much injury to the Church is, that the superior talent of most of its preachers, the wealth and respectability of some and the piety of many of its members, and its rapid and extensive spread, have given an increased respectability to sectarianism, and have greatly tended to make the evils of schism little thought of: indeed schism in the Church, like rebellion in the State, would seem, from the conduct of many, to be no longer regarded as a sin; but let us not forget that, however the opinions of men may change, the word of the Lord abideth for ever, and that it is *that* by which we are to be judged.

Mr. Brown.—While I hope cautiously to

guard against being “driven about by every wind of doctrine;” I do yet most sincerely desire “to prove all things, and to hold fast only that which is good;” and, as an honest man, I cannot deny that if the Methodists have a right to form a new Christian sect, simply because they think some peculiar plans of Church government and discipline *expedient* as tending to purify the Church, I see not where schism is to end, or what arguments can be used to stop it; and this weakness, as you know, we have greatly felt in the divisions which have recently taken place amongst ourselves. I will confess also that what you have said respecting the opposition which Methodism offers, I hope undesignedly, to the Church, has greatly struck me; it gives much force to the remark you made a few evenings ago, “that obedience belongs to us, events to God;” or, in other words, “that we can rarely judge with safety of the propriety of any line of conduct by its apparent effect, for that the ultimate consequences thereof God alone can see.” Now, while I know Methodism is doing much individual good, I yet begin to see that perhaps it may be strengthening the hands of the enemies of Christ, by dividing and consequently weakening His Church, and also causing them to think highly of those things which He has declared to be sin.

Mr. Secker.—Your remarks, my dear sir, are exceedingly just, and certainly the effect of these truths would be more general, were it not that our prejudices are often stronger than our simple desire after truth.

Mr. Brown.—And yet, Mr. Secker, as I remarked at the commencement of our conversation this evening, *facts* do seem against you; for I cannot imagine how it is, if separation from the Church be a sin, that the various dissenting denominations, and especially the Methodists, have been so prospered, and that not only in their numbers, but also in their religious character, and their extensive usefulness in bringing so many careless and open sinners to seek redemption through Christ; it cannot surely be denied by any real Christian that the Spirit of God has verily aided the labours of the Wesleyan Methodists: for instance, you, at least, will have no doubt of this; but how can you reconcile this with the opinion that they are in a state of sinful schism; for it cannot be supposed that God would sanction sin. And you know the Apostle St. Paul himself appeals to his success as the proof of his apostleship, when he writes, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men” (2 Cor. iii. 2). Now, I confess, that I think our Methodist preachers may, in some humble measure, make the same appeal with respect to those whom they have been the means of bringing to God; and if the blessed effects of Paul’s preaching among the Corinthians proved him to be a true Minister of Christ, I do not see how you can deny