

For the Colonial Churchman.

Messrs. Editors, (No. 3.)

I cannot but hope that I have sufficiently shewn in my two former letters that *dissent* is an evil, and that it is the duty of every true christian to strive to banish it from the earth as soon as possible. I wish, however, to answer yet a few objections, and to devote this essay to that purpose; and may I do this in such a spirit as to show that my real object is not any party selfish view, but merely to fight for the truth, and to call upon all christians to remove the barrier which lays betwixt a great many of them, and to think more of the important virtues of *peace and brotherly love*, than of all the petty differences which tear to pieces the body of Christ.

There is an argument very often used by members of different sects in support of their party, and which easily misleads the unguarded. It is this,—*that God has already blessed them, and therefore their cause must be good.* How far this argument can stand we must see. Is it not a fact that many of the existing sects are not only divided from us as regards minor points of the christian doctrine but even in those things which we acknowledge to be the essential, or the main points of faith and salvation? Is it not a fact, too true indeed, that many dissenting societies who once held the same doctrine with us concerning the Divinity of our Blessed Saviour, are now become Socinians, or Unitarians, or Universalists? And do we not hear, almost every day, of some new sect or other, which pretends to some new discovery in the Bible, or to some new way of going to Heaven? No one can deny this. Well, and may not each of these sects boast of gaining ground and of making proselytes? Do they not bring many in all places over to their way of thinking? I am told, and their reports bear witness to it, that the Socinians in the United States have increased prodigiously during the few last years;—may they not also say that the Almighty is smiling upon them by conferring his blessing in this manner? No, no, an increase of number is no mark of God's approbation or blessing. The Romans might just as well say that they have been blessed in propagating their Popish errors. The Mahometans might also boast of having succeeded, through God's blessing, in establishing the kingdom of the false prophet.

But it might be further advanced, 'that many have given proofs of having been truly converted from sin and wickedness, and have found the peace of God shed abroad in their hearts through the means of dissenting societies.' As to this, I dare not say, how far the Spirit of God may, or may not, work for the conversion of sinners; and I would not indulge the comfortable hope, that wherever Christ is preached, the glad tidings of salvation will not fall to the ground. On this account I would say with St. Paul, 'I rejoice that Christ is preached though it be with a contentious spirit.' But with him I would also blame the unholiness in which so heavenly a message is delivered. It is not because God, in his infinite wisdom, is able to bring good out of evil, that we may adopt any plan that we please, to carry on our own plans and with the view of doing good, lay aside a large portion of His holy word. The sacred Scriptures are so plain in requiring believers to love one another, and to live in perfect peace and harmony, that I doubt much whether any true christian can see the evils of *dissent*, and still remain in it, and encourage it. There must be yet something wrong in the man who does not see that all this confusion of opinions, and all this clashing of different bodies, cannot come from a pure and holy God. It should never be forgotten that a man may have many good qualities, many good desires, and many "good words and fair speeches," and yet deceive himself and others too, upon some very important points. I do not say this with a view to condemn all dissenters without exception; I hope indeed that many among them are aware of the evils of *dissent*, and are led astray more from ignorance than malice. But I think, that they ought, and the love which I feel for many of them, leads me to urge them, to examine themselves and the ground on which they stand. I have often heard one here and there among them complaining of the want of unanimity and good understanding among the professors of the same religion, and I do venture to say that if

there was more of this spirit of love and peace among them, all worthless differences would soon vanish from the christian world!

Should it be asked by any:—where is the clashing and jarring occasioned by our divisions?—I would answer; that one must be blind indeed not to see them. Peaceful communities are split into various sects, and as it has always been the case, that men have been strongly attached to their own opinions, and prejudiced against any kind of innovation, it often happens that two parties, equally stubborn and strong, will arise in the same house, or in the same family, producing, in a most literal manner, "wars and fightings among them;"—the vigilant and active pastor is often discouraged and disheartened, when he sees the members of his flock, carried about by every wind of doctrine,—by every new opinion or new preacher,—by them who go about "with good words and fair speeches," and "by the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive,"—thus the labours of the clergy are made much more arduous and difficult, for while they ought to direct all their attention to the spiritual improvement of their people, and to the preaching of the main doctrines of salvation, and the reproving of vice and irreligion, they are obliged to devote much of their time and intercourse with their congregation to answer inquiries concerning the new sects,—to explain what they consider necessary for preserving them in unity;—but what is still worse, it is not always that a minister can retain a proper frame of mind when he finds his church thus assailed, and his sheep leaving him. Where is the affectionate father who will easily bear to see his children taken away from him? Where is the faithful Shepherd who will allow the wolf to come among his flock, and divide the sheep, if he possibly can avoid it? And where is the minister of the Gospel of PEACE who will allow the least thing to break the unity and concord which he is bound to preach and which are so necessary, as the best marks by which true christians are to be known, and the best means for the preservation of good order? I am sure there is none, unless he be "an hireling," and not a true "shepherd;" and I think all sensible men of all denominations will agree with me in this respect at least.

In my zeal and ardent wishes to unite with the few humble and true followers of Jesus in other sects, I have, more than once, been tempted to leap over the wall of separation; but then how is this to be done consistently with the Scripture rule, and without overlooking the sin of schism? Does not St. Paul require us to "mark them that cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine; which we have received and to avoid them?" By mixing with other communions, therefore, I would encourage division, and might also partake of the sin of heresy. For, who will pretend to say, that all those who live under the influence of *dissent* are pure in the faith? Among the sects which I would most approve, (if a sect could at all be approved by a well ordered mind,) I have observed such a deal of spiritual pride, such an aversion to any thing which may savour of a dictatorial or reproving spirit in superiors,—such self consequence, especially when speaking of any Scripture subject,—and so many different opinions, with such a constant desire to criticise, and find fault with even those who are much more able to judge and to decide upon all matters of difference, that it is sickening indeed to think of the effect of *dissent*.—And beside, we can no longer associate with dissenters, or make free with them, without being in danger of falling in with some anti-Scriptural creed, with some of the many and various heresies which have sprung up in the congenial soil of division, and thus "be partakers of other mens' sins." If we favour dissent in one case, we must, in order to be consistent, favour it in all instances; for the Socinian has as much claim upon liberty of conscience as the more orthodox. But I hope to prove, before I conclude these letters, that such liberty of conscience, or rather, what is generally understood by this term—liberty for every man to do as he likes, is no where to be found in the word of God.

I remain, Messrs. Editors,

Your's, &c.

June, 1838.

From the Church.

THE BURIAL SERVICE.

We now proceed to perform the promise which made in regard to the passages in the Burial Service to which exceptions have been made. We shall take the exact words of the prayer itself, which is the chief ground of objection. It is as follows:

'Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God, in his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commend his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ; shall change our vile body, that it may be like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty power whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself.'

This is the whole of the prayer. In the two verses which follow it, there are two sentences which the Nonconformists choose to connect with this prayer, and to make the one the commentary on the other. The sentences are these—

'We give thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miserable and sinful world.'

And again,

'We meekly beseech thee, O Father, to raise him from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness; that, when we shall depart this life, we may be like him (i. e. in Jesus Christ), as our hope is this of our brother's death.'

We have extracted these passages verbatim, because every thing depends on the very words which our readers will see when we shew the manner in which the words have been quoted by our adversaries. The objections made to them we shall take from Baxter and Calamy, authorities among the Nonconformists, as well as from the Nonconformists' own account of the Conference in 1661.

The two former writers unhesitatingly assert, we pronounce those whom we bury thus to be certainly saved. They argue this from the phrase God's taking to himself the soul of our brother—when they interpret, taking that soul to heaven; when it only means, his taking that soul into his own hand for disposal. It is taken from the Scriptural expression, (Eccles. xii. 7.)—'the spirit (or soul) unto whom he gave it.'

So far, therefore, we do not find these objections of much weight; but the whole force of the argument is thrown into the exception taken against the words, 'in sure and certain hope,' &c. The following extract will shew their mode of arguing the question.

'Now they' (i. e. the Nonconformists who object to this service) 'durst not damn a known fornicator, fornicator, and drunkard, while he was living, and yet save him when he was dead. Nor yet could they commit his body to the ground in a sure and certain hope of a happy resurrection to eternal life:—the words must necessarily be spoken with reference to the person then interred, inasmuch as they are a continuation of the foregoing declaration, viz. 'taking his soul to himself.' Besides, it follows (as we put it out of doubt) in the last Collect or Prayer, 'That when we shall depart this life, we may rest in Christ (viz. Christ) as our hope is this our brother doth.'

Our readers will perceive that the words are altered into 'a sure and certain hope of a happy resurrection,' and their connexion with the words 'we commit' carefully kept in the back-ground. This is disingenuous enough, for this little alteration changes the whole sentence. In the words of the Liturgy we surely simply express our conviction of one of the articles of the Creed, 'The resurrection to eternal life.' And if any doubt could remain on the subject, it would be removed by comparing a similar passage in the burial service used at the present day. The corresponding words in that service are these—

'We therefore commit his body to the deep, to be turned into corruption, looking for the resurrection of the body, (when the sea shall give up her dead) to the life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We cannot think it needful to add any thing more to shew how unfounded an assertion it is, that the Church pronounces those whom she buries to be certainly saved. She does express a hope after