

For the Colonial Churchman.

Messrs. Editors, (No. 4.)

Since the closing of my last letter, I have thought of another very plausible argument sometimes used in support of dissent, and which I think it is necessary to answer.

When the disciples reported a man to the Lord who was casting out devils in his name, and performing miracles, and whom they had forbidden so to do, because he did not follow them, 'Jesus said: forbid him not, for there is no man which can do a miracle in my name that can lightly speak evil of me.' Now, ask dissenters, 'is not this a plain proof that we have full liberty to preach the gospel without following you? Is not this a plain proof that you have no right to find fault with any man who preaches in the name of Christ?'

But I would also ask those who speak in this manner:—have you considered well and attentively the words of our Saviour, and the mark which accompanied the preacher whom the disciples reprov'd? have you observed that this man was working miracles in Christ's name?

In order to have been able to do miracles in the Lord's name, he must have received some express command, and some supernatural power from God himself. But where are the miracles performed by our dissenting friends? What marvels and wonders have sealed their commission to set up sects and parties among christians? I am sorry to say that I have, as yet, seen or heard of no real ones, unless we call the schisms and heresies which abound, miracles and wonders. And indeed they may truly be so called; for there was never a time, since the christian Era, when, so many strange and wonderful things and notions have been invented, as in our own days. As soon as any man can do a miracle to the satisfaction of the public, and in accordance with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, there we shall be bound to receive him, and acknowledge him as one sent from God, but not before. It has been said that sinners have been converted, and the eyes of the spiritually blind have been opened, but I say, and hope to be able to prove, that all this kind of miracles are the ordinary effects of the Holy Spirit, may take place much more easily, and with less opposition, if we were all closely united together, and the whole body of the church 'nourished and compacted by that which every joint supplieth,' 'making increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.' (Eph. 4. 16.)

But the circumstances in which this counsel of our Lord was given ought also to be taken into consideration. There was, at that time, no christian church organized distinct from the Jewish. Jesus and his disciples, it is well worthy of notice, never separated from the worship of the temple in which they were often to be found 'at the hour of prayer.' There could, therefore, be no schism, or no division, between Christ's disciples and the man in question, for they were all members of the same church and of the same communion. But let us peruse the Epistles; let us examine the writings of those who had received power to settle all matters relating to church government, and who soon had occasion to shew what they thought of those that did not follow them, and if we do this with a proper frame of mind, I am sure we shall not fail to discover that the

strictest unity and order were recommended and enjoined by the apostles.

While I am about refuting arguments, I may as well mention all those which may come to my recollection; and the following is a powerful one in the hand of Satan for dividing christians in order to conquer them better:—'My conscience tells me that I am right, and therefore I must be right! Is not this a capital way for deceiving the souls of men? Some people think that while their conscience does not speak, or rather while they can lull it asleep by 'good reasoning, and pious thoughts, and religious views,' they may do what they please. And this principle has been applied with fair success in the formation of sects and parties among the professed followers of Jesus. It seems to me, that in order to ascertain whether this is a good argument in favour of dissent, it is only necessary for us to know whether our conscience is always a safe guide. Does the unerring rule, the Bible, speak of conscience as of a sure and never failing monitor? Are we not told that 'there is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death?' And does not the apostle speak of 'an evil conscience being seared as with a hot iron?' Alas! it is but too true that we may be thus misled and endangered by the deceitfulness of our own hearts, and by the subtle insinuations of the devil! This great enemy of souls is even said to disguise himself into an angel of light; that is to say, he so ably clothes error with a fine appearance that we are often led to adopt views and opinions as very good, while they are only polished by the Great Seducer, and we do not see the thorn which is hid under his enchanting colours.—Now, since it is clearly proved that we may possess 'an evil conscience,' it will be granted that we are not to depend upon it any further than while it agrees with Revelation. Let us see then whether it can follow its dictates concerning our dissent from a christian Church.

We are required by our Saviour and his apostles, to love one another so perfectly as to allow no kind of division to come among us. The whole body of professing christians is always represented in the New Testament as forming but one Society, enjoying the same privileges, and governed by the same laws and the same kind of ministers. We nowhere find that two different creeds, or two different churches, were formed or organized by any of the Apostles. The general rules were;—'Be of one mind, live in peace,'—'be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment,'—'Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another, according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind, and one mouth, glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' After reading such rules of Scripture as these, I would ask, how can we allow any thing at all, unless it be some material error of faith, to trouble our peace, and cool our love for each other? How can we, with a clear conscience, dissent from a church in which the way to Heaven is to be found just as easily as in any other, and the doctrines of which are those of the Bible? Have we a right to find fault with any non-essential ordinance of the church of God? Was not full power given her to 'bind and unbind, to loose and unloose,' any minor rule or ceremony for the government and good order of her members, and are we not required to 'obey them that have

the rule over us, and who watch for our souls?' Shall we presume to say, in the fulness of 'zeal without knowledge,' that we could devise better plans for the promotion of God's glory, and the salvation of souls? And can we suppose, for one moment, that these objects will be best obtained by forming sects and divisions, creating party feeling and exciting emulation, and envy, and all the impure passions of the human heart?—Let all the sincere lovers of Christ—let all the sober minded and well disposed in every sect consider this. Let them see whether patience, and love, and forbearance, and long suffering, and a humble opinion of themselves, and a godly life and holy conversation among their neighbours, would not be much more according to the Spirit of the gospel, and more to the glory of God, than to form a distinct sect or society, as if they were more religious and holy than the rest of mankind, or rather, as if they thought themselves too good to mix with some of their religious brethren in public worship, and communion.

Some are also led into dissenting errors by the unscriptural idea that the church of Christ must be a pure body, that is,—must consist entirely of true believers and holy professors of the Gospel. I must say, I do earnestly wish that such could be the case, and it is our duty to do all in our power towards so desirable an end; but let us not go beyond the rule of God's word, let us not 'do evil that grace may abound,' let us rather use the means which each individual has at his disposal, with humility and prayer, and then we may hope for the grace of the Holy Spirit by which we shall be 'cleansed from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,' and prepared for the only pure church, even the church of the first born in Heaven.

But as for a perfect church on earth, where was there ever any one to be found or heard of? At the very first celebration of the Lord's Supper, which was privileged with the bodily presence of our incarnate God, there was a "devil." Among the numerous churches established in different places by the apostles, abuses, and immoralities, and sins, and lukewarmness, and indifference to religion, were so common, that they who were watching for their souls were forced to reprove and admonish them in a language which, in our days, would be thought very severe. 'Some had not the knowledge of God;' others had only 'the name of living while they were dead;' and others had 'lost their first love.' Yet all these are addressed as members of the church of God. Is it not evident, then, that there is nothing perfect here below, and that as long as we are in this earthly tabernacle we must expect to find corruption and imperfection, both in ourselves and in our fellow-creatures? The Saviour himself has well described the state of the church militant in his beautiful parable:—'the kingdom of Heaven is like unto ten virgins, five of which were wise, and five foolish.' Here we find the foolish and the wise together, and as it cannot be in the pure regions above, it must necessarily be in the impure regions below. The church is sometimes called the kingdom of Heaven, that is the dominion of God. She is also 'likened unto a net cast into the sea, and gathering both good and evil;' or 'unto a field in which tares are growing with the wheat until the harvest.' O then let us learn to bear the infirmities or imperfections which we may