

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

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THE CHRISTIAN REMEMBRANCER AND DR. CHALMERS.

In No. 20 of the *Sentinel* we gave an article from the *Christian Remembrancer*, in which some sentiments of this celebrated and truly great man concerning the Established Church of England and the Dissenters were severely criticised. In one point of view, namely, were the question to be decided by *theoretical* perfection alone, we think the criticism extremely just; but in another, we think it should have been qualified, in a certain degree, so as to take off or soften the offensiveness which truth may be made to wear. Abstractly considered, the doctrine held by the Reviewer, is true doctrine. It is founded on the many assertions of Scripture involving the unity of the Church as a special peculium, as a particular kingdom, as a thing of unity in fact and in appearance in contradistinction to an indefinite number of sects.—upon which it is unlawful to make a breach, from which men have no permission to depart, much less erect counter systems so as to undermine the Church, break down the walls of her fold, and set her members free from their obligation of obedience to herself and to no other system, society, or government, claiming power over them as a church. In no part of the Old Testament do we find a recognition of the principle, that in order to correct abuses in the Church, a part of the people should desert her cause, and commence offensive operations against her, as with intent to effect her ruin. We do not find the least hint to this end in all the defections of the Jewish Church from doctrine and worship. We read of no parties and factions formed to subvert the hierarchy—no setting up the standards of opposite communions—and we find no admission of the principle which certainly receives Dr. Chalmers' high commendation. On the contrary, the setting up a simistry the rival of the Levitical, and which was intended to draw away the hearts of the people from it, was charged on the son of Nebat as a grievous sin: and it was one of the good acts of Josiah to bring as many of the Israelites as possible to worship at Jerusalem, and offer their devotions by the priests of the Temple. God, it is true, gave Jeroboam the kingdom of the Ten Tribes; but he gave no Church with it that did not already exist; and had he believed God, and gone to worship at Jerusalem instead of doing as he did, the kingdom would have been established in his house, and the unity of the Church preserved inviolate. Neither do we find any thing in the conduct of our Saviour to countenance the doctrine which the *Christian Remembrancer* condemns. We know that, as a Church, he treated the sect of the Samaritans precisely as if they had been heathens; and those people had as fair a claim to valid churchship as any other sectaries; for they both believed in and aimed to worship the true God according to the law of Moses, expected the true Messiah, were far less wicked than their neighbours the Jews, and after a short time received the doctrine of Christ in a body. Yet we nowhere find them recognized as the necessary checks upon the Jews, or the salutary correctors of corruptions in faith and practice. And had they in our Lord's time sent missionaries into Judea in order to purify the Jewish Church, we have no ground to suppose that he would have acknowledged their ministerial or priestly character. The New Testament abounds with the severest censures against the principle of separating from the Church at all; and the principle of Church Unity, as held by the Church of England, runs through the whole Bible. Indeed, no other was ever heard of till after the Reformation. Even the Samaritans claimed it; for they claimed, in opposition to the Jewish, that theirs was the true and authentic church. The simple idea of ecclesiastical unity, has nothing to do with corruptions of doctrine and practice, unless they trench upon that unity; because the true foundation of such unity is the primitive authentic holy orders or valid ministry derived from the Apostles through the legal channel of tradition. But Dr. Chalmers' position appears to require a recognition of the position, that any sectaries can

and do possess a valid and authentic ministry; and that the communion established by law is no otherwise preferable to any other than that it is so established, and by receiving public patronage is enabled to be more efficient than if it did not; while it is no breach at all on the principle of unity for bodies to separate from and oppose the legalized communion: which principle can be recognized as true by no Episcopalian, whether Romish, Protestant, Greek, Syrian, Coptic, Armenian, or any other. In short, if we admit the principle of separation to be lawful, we set aside that of unity, and fully admit in theory, that every single individual may lawfully form a sect or church by himself: which annihilates the Church of Christ at a blow, and reduces all to human authority alone.

But it must also be borne in mind, that the Church is not secured from abuses and corruptions, even tho' she strictly maintains her unity untouched; and that accordingly, abuses are found in that part of it called the Church of England. It is perfectly natural that some one should notice them, and those the sooner who either had separated, or, not understanding the principle of unity and adopting latitudinarianism, might be disposed to separate, and thus attract a notice they could not otherwise command. Various causes might be assigned—sincere and pious scruples founded in some mistake or want of proper information—a desire to correct abuses for the present, without weighing the principles involved in the method, or what might be the general result if all were to act in accordance with those principles, and as present expedience might appear to demand on a partial view, and each one follow his own judgment—or a fault-finding disputatious spirit, always dissatisfied except with innovation and heaping to themselves teachers—or almost any thing else. It is no violence to probability to imagine, that a very worthless clergyman might officiate in the Church and give serious offence to ignorant piety, and thus drive it to attempt the correction of a partial evil by forsaking the Church, instead of the man who disgraced it, and charging that to the body which barely was accidental to the individual member. It is very possible that a man, who cared nothing for unity, or who knew nothing about it, might well understand the moral truths of the Church, and teach them with good effect, and even think, as some have claimed to think, that zeal constituted holy orders, and that moral turpitude alone is capable of annulling holy orders. Though some of these things are certainly great absurdities, yet who does not see that any of them acted upon with vigor, and combined with the morals of Gospel truth, might alarm the men of the Church, "provoke them to jealousy," and cause them to become more faithful to that sacred charge which is committed to them for the glory of Christ and the good of souls? And would it not be folly to deny, that some of these things, which may perhaps be real theoretical vices, may serve as emetics and healing plasters to "the wound of the daughter of my people?" God may make use of one error to correct another without sanctioning either. He did so under the law, and "his hand is not shortened that he cannot" do so as long as "sin abounds" under the Gospel. But that error which is made the instrument of correction, ought to remember the fate of those wicked nations who corrected the Church of God of old. Dissent should beware of the road that leads "out from us." Socinianism, Universalism, &c. can never become embodied and fortified with formulaires and a regular scheme of entail upon posterity within the Established Church in its present condition, much as it may need repair;—but without it, they are furnished with every possible facility. And since she has enemies, would to Almighty God that none were found performing the office of correction upon her, but real heretics—and the fewer of them the better! No man who can, with a pure and sincere conscience, offer up to his Maker the *Litany* in our morning Service as words of truth and soberness and sound in its acknowledgment of the true faith in the Messiah, ought to wish the fabric of the Church demolished, and every man left to follow the imaginations of his own mind, uninfluenced by the salutary check which,—blessed be God!—our established ritual has exercised over the outbreakings of "false doctrine, heresy and schism." And if those "who separate themselves" to "draw away disciples after them," have ever been the means of making the Sons of the Church more faithful to their "calling and elec-