

THE CHRISTIAN SENTINEL.

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.—HAB. ii. 1.

Rev. A. H. BURWELL, Editor.]

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CHALMERS ON CHURCHMEN AND DISSENTERS.

We copy the following from a provincial newspaper:—

"In the course of a sermon which Dr. Chalmers preached on the opening of Mr. Hare's chapel, near Bedminster bridge, Bristol, he made these remarks on the established Church:—'I hold the establishment to be not only a great Christian good, but one indispensable to the upholding of a diffused Christianity throughout the land. In spite of all the imputations and errors which its greatest enemies have laid to its door, we hold that on the alternative of its existence, there would hang a most fearful odds to the Christianity of England. We are ready to admit that the working of the apparatus might be made greatly more efficient; but we must, at the same time, contend that were it taken down, the result would be tantamount to a moral blight on the length and the breadth of our land. We think it might be demonstrated, that were the ministrations of your established Church to be done away, they would never be replaced by all the zeal, energy, and talent of private adventures. Instead of the frequent parish church, the most beautiful of all spectacles to a truly Christian heart, because to him the richest in moral associations, with its tower peeping forth from amidst the verdure of the trees in which it is embosomed, there would be presented to the eye of the traveller only rare and thinly-scattered meeting houses. The cities might indeed continue to be supplied with regular preaching, but innumerable villages and hamlets, left dependant on a precarious itineracy, would be speedily reduced to the condition of a moral waste. Our peasants would again become pagans, or, under the name and naked form of Christianity, would sink into the blindness and brutishness, and sad alienation of paganism. But we are far from regarding with a jealous eye the zeal and exertions of other orthodox religious bodies. In connexion with an establishment, we wish ever to see an able, vigorous, and flourishing dissentism. The services of dissenters are needed to supplement [supply] the deficiencies, and to correct and compensate for the vices of an establishment, as far as that establishment has the misfortune to labour under the evil of a lax and negligent ministrations, or a corrupt and impure patronage. Such wholesome dissent is a purifier, and because a purifier, a strengthener of the Church. I am willing to profess any where, and upon all occasions my sense of the usefulness of such dissenters, and of the worth of their services; but there is no place where an homage for that order of Society should be more profoundly felt, and more willingly proclaimed, than in a city which is honoured by the residence or the immediate vicinity of distinguished men, belonging to their communion, whose admirable writings have shed a lustre over our common Christianity, and who are themselves equally eminent for the mildness of their private worth and the majesty of their genius. Let Churchmen be assured that their most dignified attitude in reference to dissenters, is the attitude of fearlessness, their most becoming part is that of a kind and friendly co-operation with them in all that relates to the moral and spiritual good of the population.' * * * Alluding afterwards to those who regard the Establishment as an incubus upon the land, and think that Christianity might revive and flourish, were the whole of the machinery taken down, he observed, 'we honestly believe that the overthrow of the Protestant establishment, whether in England, Scotland or Ireland, would be attended with the most fearful consequences to the interests of Christian truth.'"

For the credit of Dr. Chalmers, we could scarcely induce ourselves to believe that the above absurdities were ever uttered by a man of such unquestionable talent; and we have refrained from

in an earlier notice, in order that the Doctor might avail himself of the opportunity to disclaim opinions so unscriptural and ridiculous. As this has not been done, we reluctantly admit the persuasion, that the above are the genuine sentiments of this popular preacher; and the rather, since we believe there can be no doubt that he, a minister of the established Church of Scotland, officiated in a place not only wholly unconnected with his Church, but of so very ambiguous and undescrivable a character, that it is, with significant propriety, designated by the reporter as "Mr. Hare's chapel." It would afford us a very high degree of pleasure to be authorized on Dr. Chalmers's part, to disavow language so absurd and pernicious as that which we have just cited; but in the mean time, we shall deem it our duty to expose the astonishing ignorance and false reasoning which are circulated—undenied, and almost unopposed, under the sanction of so eminent a name.

It would be unfair to expect from Dr. Chalmers that solicitous regard for the great duty of ecclesiastical unity which might consistently be demanded from a minister of our own Church. We are content to meet him on his own ground exclusively. He holds the establishment to be "not only a great Christian good, but one indispensable to the upholding of a diffused Christianity throughout the land." He contends "that if it were taken down, the result would be tantamount to a moral blight on the length and breadth of our land." "Innumerable villages and hamlets would be speedily reduced to the condition of a moral waste." "Our peasants would again become pagans, or, under the name and naked form of Christianity, would sink into the blindness and brutishness, and alienation of paganism."

Such is Dr. Chalmers's opinion of our Church. We thank him for a testimony which must be as independent as it is honorable. But in connexion with all this, the Doctor wishes ever to see "an able, but vigorous, and flourishing dissentism;" (this word being we presume, the northern form of what, in our vocabulary, would be called dissent.)

Now, what is this "dissentism?" Why its very essence and definition is separation from the Church; and this is what Dr. Chalmers wishes to see in connexion with the Establishment! It denies even the character of a Christian Church to that Establishment which the Doctor holds indispensable to the diffusion of Christianity, the removal of which would be a moral blight, and waste and reduce us to the blindness, darkness and alienation of paganism.* And this the Doctor would see "able, vigorous, and flourishing!" And why? The argument is worthy of the sentiment:—"such wholesome dissent is a purifier, and, because a purifier, a strengthener of the Church!"

Can Dr. Chalmers really be the author of this? If so, let us ask him to what extent he would see "dissentism" able, flourishing, and vigorous? If its nature is to strengthen the Church, the more it flourishes and increases, the stronger the Church must be; and by necessary consequence, the universal prevalence of dissent would place her in a state of complete fortification; and the strongest conceivable situation of the Church would be when she could not number an individual of her communion, and when all

* The great authority of the dissenters, Micah Towgood says, "compare the constitution of the Church of England, and the constitution of the Church of Christ, and see if they be not societies of a quite different frame." And again, "The Church of England and the Church of Christ seem to be two societies absolutely distinct, and of a quite different constitution."