

bottom of the last page of the volume, I find the following record: "December 20th, 1847. I have just read this truly eloquent appeal, and it is so irresistible in its argument that I wonder the converted do not make greater efforts to place it in the hands of that class for whom it was written. In truth, there are none but may read it with advantage, and there can be but few who would not be much benefited by its perusal. I would rather have written such a work than 'Childs Harold,' or the 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.'"—*Sailor's Magazine.*

CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS.

Right of Interrogation—Wesleyan Conference.

A morning contemporary in commenting upon the proceedings of the Wesleyan Conference, apologises for its interference on the ground that that body has recently violated English usage and principle in the course it has pursued towards some of the members of the Wesleyan body. Our contemporary, in the professed character of "guardian of the character of England," comes forward to relieve that character of the stigma which "a gross outrage upon the old English principles of fair play" might otherwise cast upon it. The charge thus preferred against the Wesleyan Conference is a heavy one. Let us see how far it is warranted by the facts of the case.

It appears, that during the last four years, certain printed anonymous letters, called "Fly Sheets," have been from time to time circulated among the members of the Wesleyan body. Of these anonymous letters it is alleged, and not denied, that they contained slanders against the private character and even the families of persons high in position among the Conference. The anonymous letters in question, though printed to facilitate their circulation, bore neither signature nor printer's name, a sufficient indication as to what the writers of them thought of the respectability of their writings. The Conference having demanded of five suspected ministers whether they were or were not concerned in the authorship of the anonymous slanders, and the five gentlemen in question having declined to give any answer to the inquiry, the Conference then proceeded to admonish some of the suspected parties, and expel others. It is against this "inquisitorial" procedure that the invectives of our contemporary are directed. Now we confess we are disposed to view with great suspicion those who desire to shroud their conduct in a veil of impenetrable secrecy, and seek to evade any inquiry into their conduct, on the ground of such an inquiry being inquisitorial. Honest men have nothing to conceal, and most of all persons unjustly suspected would, we should think, be glad of an opportunity to relieve themselves from so odious a suspicion as that of anonymously calumniating their neighbours. But it is urged, no man is bound to criminate himself. The proceedings of criminal tribunals, and the rules of law which apply to them, are scarcely the best models for the imitation of any society of Christian gentlemen. The relation between the Crown and the prisoner arraigned for infractions of the criminal law can hardly in sober seriousness be represented as the same or even as analogous to the relation existing between members of the same society of which uniformity of religious faith, or even the most ordinary worldly-torn friendship, is the bond of union. Take a case *in pari materia*. Suppose the members of a club to be assailed with anonymous slanders;—suspicion attaches, perhaps unjustly, to one of their number. He is informed of the suspicion, and called upon to deny the truth of it. What would be thought of such a member if he pleaded the Old Bailey rule, that no man is bound to criminate himself, and gravely required his interrogators to prove his guilt? We do not see why Wesleyan Ministers should be treated less like gentlemen than the members of a political club. Admit, however, for the sake of argument, that the analogy between the suspected minister and the accused criminal is perfect, is it a thing so totally alien to British tribunals to call upon a prisoner to plead guilty or not guilty to the indictment preferred against him? If so, British tribunals must be very recent inventions, for, until the act of the 7th and 8th Geo. IV., c. 28, a criminal, by refusing to answer the "inquisitorial" question of the Clerk of Arraignment, suffered the same judgment and execution as if he had been convicted. This was the old common law, restored by the 12th George III., c. 20, abolishing the humane expedient of the *peine forte et dure*.

In the highest offence known to the law, standing mute was always equivalent to a conviction. So much for the pretence that the question put by the Conference was contrary to the spirit of English law. A man might not hold his tongue before the Court of Star-Chamber, nor before any other Court in this country, until the passing of an act not yet a quarter of a century old. It is difficult to decide whether the confusion of thought which could introduce such a parallel, or the historical ignorance displayed in its introduction, is more entitled to our admiration.

In the same spirit the anonymous 'Fly Sheets' are compared to the public journals, and the practice of the latter in imputing evil motives to their political antagonists is tortured into a precedent for anonymous calumny. Here again the attempted analogy is wholly untenable. No respectable journal with which we are acquainted assails the private character of individuals, but every journal, whether respectable or the reverse, owes a responsibility to the law. Now it is not denied that the "Fly Sheets" contained slanders on private character, and responsibility was out of the question, in the case of papers to which neither writer, printer, nor publisher, dared to affix his name. We may add, that with most public journals the responsibility in character is even more powerful as a check than the responsibility which the law throws upon them.

If the gentlemen who were slandered by these anonymous letters had proceeded against the persons suspected of their authorship by civil action, would the parties suspected have allowed judgment to go by default? If they did, they would have no right to complain of the damages which a sheriff's jury might assess. These ordinary means, however, of vindicating their reputation, are not open to the members of the Wesleyan community—they are forbidden to go to law with one another, and it is in a society so constituted, that the persons who have been expelled refused to admit or deny the authorship of foul slanders against members of their own body. But suppose the persons expelled were innocent of the authorship of the slanders—suppose they were, we can see no great injustice in the course pursued towards them. By refusing to admit or deny the authorship, they have lent themselves to screen the real authors. They have *pro tanto* aided and abetted the concealment of those who were anonymously slandering their neighbours; and surely they cannot complain that a society to which they refuse their assistance in so plain a duty as that of checking a system of anonymous slander, refuses any longer to acknowledge them as members of its own body. But were the "Fly Sheets" really so disgraceful in their character? Upon this subject the Rev. Mr. Everett, one of the expelled members, has removed any doubt that might have been entertained. The rev. gentleman tells us that the question as to the authorship of the "Fly Sheets" involved an insult to the person to whom it was proposed. This would imply, that in the opinion of Mr. Everett the "Fly Sheets" were indeed disgraceful to the writers of them. We cannot think this, however, a very good reason for refusing to admit or deny the authorship—Such an interrogatory could not be fairly represented as an insult, for an appeal to the personal honour of a suspected party from whom a simple assurance is to be considered as conclusive of his innocence, implies too absolute a reliance upon the honour of the person interrogated to make the interrogatory insulting. Outward circumstances may foster the suspicions of the most heinous crimes on the most innocent persons, and where a simple denial will be taken as equivalent to a verdict of not guilty there is nothing either harsh or unjust in putting the question of guilty or not guilty to a suspected person.

With the internal administration of the Wesleyan body we have, of course, nothing to do. The Wesleyans have on all occasions honourably distinguished themselves from some of their dissenting brethren, by preferring the interests of religion before the aggrandisement of their own body, and so far they are entitled to the respect and good will of every member of the Church Universal. The discipline of their own internal administration is of interest solely to the members of their own body. We must protest against anonymous slander being represented as an English practice. Anonymous letters are the favourite resources of spiteful and cowardly malice. It is un-English to make charges, and to decline to substantiate them. It is un-English to foster a system of secret calumny. It is un-English to hesitate to avow acts for no man ought to engage in an act he is ashamed to avow. It is not un-English for any society, much less for a religious society to purge itself from the presence of those members who will not aid in preventing the recurrence of such disgraceful practices. The deservedly high character, indeed, of Dr. Bunting, might defy calumny, but that does not render calumny less odious, or less disgraceful in the calumniator.—*Standard—Friday.*

The *Times* of this morning charges us with a spirit of contradiction for disputing the truth of its remarks on the recent proceedings of the Wesleyan Conference. If by this is meant an unreasonable desire to find fault with our contemporary's views our answer to the charge is a very simple one.

The *Times* professes to come forward, in the character of "guardian of the honour of England," to protest against the proceedings of a voluntary religious society as un-English, because that society expelled certain members of its own body for refusing either to admit or deny the authorship of anonymously circulated slanders upon private character. From the exposition of the *Times*, in its professed character, we certainly did feel bound emphatically to dissent, and we think upon ground neither unrea-

sonable nor inadequate. We maintained that in no society of English gentlemen, associated together even for purposes of mere amusement, would it be endured that a member of such a society should shelter himself from a straightforward personal interrogatory, upon the ground that no man was obliged to criminate himself. Can any one pretend that if such a plea were urged in a society so constituted the society would not proceed at once to the expulsion of the offender?

Now, we cannot think that the members of a religious society are less bound than others by this personal responsibility towards one another, because they are Christian ministers. The *Times* reiterates to-day the same fallacy which ran through its former article upon the subject. The proceedings of the Wesleyan Conference are represented as analogous to the proceedings in person of a criminal tribunal, and because a burglar, or a pickpocket, is not bound to criminate himself, a Christian minister may fairly refuse to admit or deny the authorship of calumnies against a brother clergyman. Now let us suppose for a moment that no peculiar relation existed between the parties. Mr. A., we will suppose, has reason to suspect that Mr. B., has slandered him. *Not being a Wesleyan minister*, Mr. A. is free to do so, and accordingly issues his writ and files his declaration. Now upon this, Mr. B. must either deny that he uttered the slander, or confess that he did, and prove the truth of his assertion. So that, after all, the Wesleyan Conference only did what an ordinary plaintiff does to an ordinary defendant, under the sanction of every tribunal in the country. But we shall be told, an action for slander is not a criminal procedure. We might reply, that slander, except upon the legal fiction, that it is calculated to provoke a breach of the peace, is not the subject of criminal jurisdiction anywhere, and slander happens to be the very subject of complaint before the Conference. But what right has the *Times* to assume that the proceedings before the assembled Conference were criminal proceedings? If, in the case we have supposed, Mr. B. allowed judgment to go by default, and evaded his captors, he might by certain *ex parte* proceedings be outlawed, an infliction to the full as penal as expulsion from a voluntary society.

No one, of course, will suppose that we are seeking topics for the defence of the Wesleyan Conference. In such analogies as these we only wish to exhibit the transparent folly of applying the rigid technical rules of jurisprudence to the proceedings of a voluntary association of Christian gentlemen.

Men of right feeling will not require to be taught that they owe a duty to one another beyond what the law actually imposes. Accusation of one's neighbour, at all times an invidious task, may sometimes doubtless be a duty, though it always must be a painful one. The responsibility which the character of an accuser generally implies within most cases prevent men unhesitatingly seeking that character. Secret and irresponsible accusations, however, are always hateful, because it is clear the author of them either has not the manliness to come forward and support the truth of his charges, or that his charges are false. Now that the "Fly-Sheets" did contain calumnies cannot be denied; the *Times*, however, is very gentle in its condemnation. After admitting that these anonymous publications charged individuals among the Conference, our contemporary proceeds:—

"They go this length, and we must say illegally, as the obnoxious 'Fly-Sheets' fear not the name of either author, publisher, or printer. In all this there is something to censure and much to deplore; nor is there any doubt of the feelings it is calculated to excite in the persons assailed. But the style of proceeding is so old, so usual, so recent so fresh in a thousand examples, that an unprejudiced bystander will only observe, Oh, this is the old contest between Reform and abuses, the St. George and the dragon of modern Hagiology!"

Now it is certainly in no spirit of gratuitous contradiction that we must protest against this thesis in favour of anonymous calumny. Assassination may doubtless plead its antiquity and its "customable right" among those base enough to use it. But this will scarcely justify the practice. The "Fly-Sheets," it appears, also contained attacks upon the internal Wesleyan administration, and suggested reforms; but with this part of the subject, we have already intimated, we have nothing to do.—*Standard—Monday.*

From a Correspondent of the Watchman.

GENTLEMEN.—The Rev. Wm. Griffith is reported to have said at Exeter Hall, "I hold in my hand a small volume, that goes under the name of the 'Large Minutes.' In the fly-leaf—it is not a part of the 'Fly-Sheets'—on the fly-leaf of this volume are these words—'to William Griffith, jun. As long as you freely consent to, and earnestly endeavour to walk by these rules, we shall rejoice and (?) acknowledge you as a fellow labourer. Signed, on behalf and by order of Conference, Jabez Bunting, President; Robert Newton, Secretary. Birmingham Conference, Aug. 4, 1836.' Now in this book it is

stated, that no Preacher is to be expelled from the Body unless he be convicted upon charges of which he has had due intimation in writing." I have a copy of the 'Large Minutes' now before me, with the same entry on the fly-leaf, and signed by the same honourable individuals, but dated Aug. 6, 1828, showing that those estimable Ministers have enjoyed the confidence of their brethren for many years, and that they have repeatedly been elected to fill the highest posts of distinction and responsibility by the honest suffrages of their brethren.

Now, in regard to the assertion made above and printed in italics, I challenge Mr Griffith to point out the page where any such statement is made, or any such law is entered in the above mentioned volume. I have looked over the volume and I cannot find it: I believe it is not to be found there. I do not wish to impeach the veracity of Mr. G. in this instance; it is possible he may be under a mistake, and that he refers to a law made at a subsequent period in the history of Methodism. But the statement is not true in fact. And if it be mere ignorance, or mistake, let me ask then, is such a man fit to become the leader of a people, or are his statements worthy of confidence?

But, for the information of Mr. C. and others, I will give a few sentences from the volume:—

1. "And in general, do not mend our rules, but keep them: not for wrath, but for conscience sake."—Large Minutes, p. 17.
2. "Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel."—Large Minutes, p. 18.
3. "We might consider those that are with us (Helpers) as our pupils: into whose BEHAVIOUR and studies we should INQUIRE every day."—L. M., p. 32.

4. "What can be done, in order to a closer union of our Helpers with each other?—1. Let them be deeply convinced of the want there is of it at present; and the absolute necessity of it:—2. Let them pray for a desire of union:—3. LET THEM SPEAK FREELY TO EACH OTHER:—

6. "Let them never speak slightly of each other in any kind:—7. Let them defend one another's characters in every thing, so far as consists with truth:—8. And, let them labour in honour each to prefer the other before himself."—L. M., p. 35.

At page 36, several questions are given to be proposed to Candidates, amongst which are the following: "Do you know the Methodist Plan? Have you read the Minutes of Conference? Are you willing to conform to them? Have you considered the rules of a Helper? Especially the first, tenth, and twelfth? Will you keep them for conscience sake?"

It is reported in the newspapers that Mr. Dunn said, "It will be evident to any one who reads this law of 1777 that it has nothing to do with the question. It is a law, or rather a direction for the examination of candidates for the ministry." I would fain hope, for the sake of Mr. D.'s moral character, that this is only a mistake. But if that is all, Mr. D. is evidently led away by a great error. The question proposed by Mr. Wesley (Minutes of 1777) was, "Are there any objections to any of our Preachers?" A. "Yes. It is objected that most of them are not called of God to preach." Most of them, but the whole body of preachers; for the next question, but one asks—"But suppose they were called once, have they not forfeited their calling?" This question assuredly refers to those who were already in the work and not candidates, for the question would not be appropriate in reference to a candidate. How could he be said to have forfeited his calling, whose call could not be considered complete till he had received the usual call of the church? And this point is further illustrated by a subsequent entry in the Minutes of 1777: "Are not some of the Preachers unfit for the work?" Then follows a question on another subject. The answer to this question is: "The former led to a close examination into the Preachers' characters, which was attended with much good."—Minutes of Conference, vol. 1, page 131. Mark, a "close examination" took place into the Preachers' characters." This entry clearly goes to prove that the inquiry was general, and that no notice of trial had been given. Now, let the law of 1777 and 1835 be read and studied by an unprejudiced mind, in the light of the above extracts—and then, I think, such an individual must come to the conclusion that the course recently pursued by the Conference has been perfectly in accordance with our constitution, and the spirit of Methodism, as exhibited in the Minutes of Conference.

In the minutes of 1797, I find the following law: "Before any Superintendent propose a Preacher to the Conference, as proper to be admitted on trial, such Preacher must not only be approved of at the March Quarterly Meeting, but must have read and signed the 'General Minutes,' as fully approving them."

Mr. Griffith doubtless did this either formally or virtually. I must assume that he read the "Minutes" and signed them, or did what was tantamount to it. He and Messrs. Everett and Dunn therefore promised and engaged. "to

act as a son in the Gospel of a son to a father? If to answer this question he would reply that it was by his father frankly an

Mr. G. declared that of discipline that, with church to engage eye view. He solemnly at of the "Minutes" which freely to each other: slightly of each other more he promised at his to obey those chief Ministers committed the charge at and to follow with a gloriously admonitions, and their godly judgments," is instituted as to what been kept, and these observed, there is a cry "novel, illegal, inquisitorial-Protestant, un-Wesleyan" that it is not novel, is ley instituted "a close Preachers' characters," it is not Methodistically, the laws and precedent is not improperly "in for John Wesley said, "one." Mark, "examinations" having been raised, it examined, but, "examine" own words. That "despotic" is clear, for Wesley's day submission nation was attended with is not un-English is: has any knowledge of land, for explanations, sought, demanded, and in the year. That it is clear, for it is the very to try to discover the result. That it is no manifest, for the meth Wesley, in 1777, or es scriptural," is proved one. There was an e And Joshua said to a thou hast done, hide preferred no charge, J confessed. "Eli suspended her, "How spott Hannah was innocent "No, my lord, I an spirit; I have drunk Lord, but have pour drink." She gave h answer, and Eli said: "Saul preferred no but he knew that son juries had been g "Tell me what thou Peter preferred no e yet he said, "I'll m for so much?" Act

We thus see that i be strung together, v and appear very for examined, they are thrown up to blind cessity of a calm ap such bold assertions, tion doeth not preven brethren learn which ever indicate operation of divine found in all the psal prayer of

Sept. 6th, 1849.

A False B

The Wesleyan various forms, du weeks, a report al ment of the Missio al names of respe in connexion with the opportunity o denial which it m the Extracts from Wesleyan Miss Within

MY DEAR SIR,— time, this s'erout leyan Times, dat effect—"We ha Walton, lately o aries, was intrus certain Wesleyan that the Annual I Jamaica District, they make them counts, to the tu thousands of pou Bunting said in C rent discrepancy would be, in tim is appointed to h Rev. Mr. Inglis, of whom have rec es, throw any affair?"

Will you be popl, or at your