

for their innocence, and holiness; performing the obligations of christian piety, with a fervor and self-denial, worthy of our imitation. Such was the religion of the civilized portion of the earth, at the period of that dreadful storm, which broke out in Germany; in the sixteenth century; and which, falling upon the venerable fabric, overturned its altars; destroyed its worship: transferred its riches: its edifices: its temples: to a new order of men: and introduced a new order of things. "Surely, then, there is here reason to suspect, that a religion such as this, may be true, and if so, it is the duty of men to examine it."

Since the above mentioned revolution, a multitude of sects have been engendered; distinguished by a variety of features, which well deserve attention: the founders were discontented priests, and licentious friars, who, impatient of the restraints of celibacy; hesitated not, to violate their most solemn vows: whilst the authors of the more recent denominations, were, with few exceptions, laymen, and obscure enthusiasts. Where they have government it is heterogeneous: half human, half divine, half modern, half ancient: the artful combination of civil policy, or the illusive arrangement of successful fanaticism: their dissimilarity is so great, that neither the curiosity, nor the industry of learning can enumerate them: their establishments are, comparatively speaking, trifling and insignificant: the vice and immorality which surround us, is as astonishing, as it is distressing: even in the virtue of the *moral portion*, there is nothing striking, nothing that resembles the examples of ancient sanctity, or implies any painful sacrifices of self-love: little beyond the limits of great decency, or nice decorum: to the important features of antiquity and diffusion, which form the *grand characteristics of THE CHURCH OF CHRIST*, they can present no claim whatever: their titles are all of them new, some of them absurd. Such is the situation of religion in this country; the theatre of innumerable sects, and associations, all at variance with each other; yet, each arrogating to themselves, the exclusive privilege of being the *ONLY TRUE CHURCH OF CHRIST*. May we not justly observe, "there is reason to suspect that such religions may not be true, and therefore, it is the duty of men to examine them."

In the above description no allusion has been made, to the various schools of infidelity, which, blended with the multitude of religions, are so prevalent in this country: the number of these profane institutions, of Socinianism, Unitarianism, Deism, &c. are frightfully great; and what is still more awful; their disciples, for the greater part, consist, not of the illiterate; but of the best educated portions of the community. One of the most acute writers of modern times observes:

"Liberal opinions, that is, no fixed principles whatsoever, are professed in every quarter, and in spite of the apparent tranquility which reigns around the day cannot be distant, in which there will be as little belief among us, as there is now among the philosophers of Germany; that is, NONE AT ALL."

To assign a reason for the religious concord

which once prevailed, is a matter of little difficulty: there existed then, a *CENTRE OF UNITY*: which possessed the confidence and respect of nations: who, considered the *CHURCH* as their divinely appointed guide; and its authority as unerring, and infallible: who, upon hearing its voice, revered it as the voice of heaven, submitted to its decisions, and believed without reserve: by this happy conviction, union was preserved, the intrusion of error was more difficult, and the propagation of sectarianism became almost impossible.

To elucidate the causes, which have produced the unholy *DISUNION*, which now separates so large a portion of mankind, is not more difficult, than the preceding. When that revolution took place, which introduced the new order of things, the long established rule of unity was discarded, and the *right of private judgment* permitted: which conceded to each individual, the privilege to believe, and decide, according to his own understanding.

"When the protestants first withdrew from the communion of the Church of Rome, the principles they went upon were such as these: Jesus Christ hath by his gospel called all men unto liberty; the glorious liberty of the sons of God; and restored them to the privilege of working out their salvation by their own understandings."

"The Church of England, recognizes to the utmost extent, the right of every man to worship God according to his own conscience: for, since we judged for ourselves when we seceded from the Church of Rome, we allow others to judge for themselves when they secede from the Church of England."

This is the leading principle of protestantism: its *MAGNA CHARTA*: from this assumed privilege flows, that variety of religions which divide the Christian world: for if all men are to judge for themselves, the necessary consequence must be, that inasmuch as their habits, inclinations, and thoughts, all disagree, so will the opinions which they may form, differ in the same proportion. "The abuse of liberty, has rendered christian unity little more than an empty name: the generality of christian professors, consider themselves at liberty at all times, to choose their own persuasion, and to change their opinions as often as caprice may dictate." Hence, we may discern, the source from which the multitude of religions flow; and also, the yet greater calamity, the prevalence of irreligion: the natural consequence of the former, which, as it creates doubt, in the minds of some, must consequently produce contempt in others, and in many, a total indifference for religion: the same principle that explains the various creeds of heresy, equally elucidate the various codes of infidelity: these are contained in the vaunted privilege of "*GOSPEL LIBERTY*:" insomuch, that to it alone, the socinian, the deist, even the atheist, always appeal: being at once the proof, and sanction of their respective system.

"The atheist, assures the protestant, he admits no guide but his own reason: he obeys its dictates, and believes what he understands.—The Calvinist, does not understand the real presence; therefore,

he does not admit it. The socinian, does not understand the trinity; consequently, he rejects it. The deist understands no mystery, and hence he believes none: now to me, the divinity appears the greatest, and most impervious of all mysteries; therefore, my reason unable to comprehend it, cannot with consistency admit it. I only claim for myself, the same privilege which you do: we all have the same rule of belief: each of us excluding the rule of authority; with what justice then, can you condemn me? if I ought to renounce my reason, or, if you judge me guilty, while I attend to its suggestions; then do you renounce yours, which is not more infallible than mine; abjure your rule of faith: declare honestly, that what you have hitherto taught, is devoid of foundation; and that if truth do exist any where, you have not yet found out by what means it should be discovered.

"Hence it follows, that protestants cannot refuse to tolerate the atheist, without abandoning their own leading principle; if they say, that the latter makes a bad use of his reason; or, that he is not sincere, might not the same with equal justice be said of every class of heretics? The reproach is certainly inconsistent in the mouths of the sectarians: because, it applies equally to THEM, as to all others: what the protestant says of the atheist, the atheist says equally of the protestant: and who is the judge between them? REASON! But, it is precisely the judgement of reason that is contested: therefore, to call in reason to decide the difference, is solving the question by the question itself: it is laughing at common sense."

The statements which many eminent protestant writers have laid before the world, of the condition of religion in different protestant countries, exhibit the consequences to be expected, from the principle of "the right of private judgment."

Thus, STARKE, describes Germany: the birth place, and cradle of the reformation.

"As for protestantism in Germany, it is so degenerated here, that except the name, little else of it now subsists: it has undergone so many changes, that if LUTHER, or MELANCTHON, were to rise again, they would not know the church, which was the work of their industry."

STARKE, another protestant divine, says,

"The defection from Christianity is almost, if not quite general; you see there, the pastor, and the professor from their pulpits, casting doubts upon all the received doctrines of religion, and shaking every principle of Christianity, whilst the people in the mean time, are completely indifferent to it."

MULLER, assures us,

"That multitudes of protestant theologians, make it an ABSOLUTE DUTY, to drown the fundamental doctrines of christianity in deism."

According to Grenus, Heyer, and Empaytez, Geneva, the "Protestant Rome," is now no longer even Christian: it has become completely socinian: insomuch, that they assure us, its pastors not only laugh at the creed of Calvin, not only pity the credulity which could believe such non-