

For the Witness of Truth.

THE DEBATE.

February, 1849.

MR. OLIPHANT—SIR:—Time having sufficiently elapsed since the termination of the late debate in Jordan to afford space for reflection, I take the pen to place upon paper my thoughts, feelings, and impressions—granting you the privilege, if required, of laying them before your readers with enlargement or diminution, correction or rejection. Here let me say that I heard the late famous controversy from the beginning to the middle, and thence to the end—the first and last word, with all the intervening words—having previously determined to listen with the utmost candor, attention, and impartiality.

Some good people have great prejudice against religious controversy, supposing that it is contrary to the scriptures. They also assume that alienation of feeling is the consequence—that envy, bitterness, and a malignant spirit are the results of such investigations. Others again are opposed to public examinations, fearing that some favorite principle or darling practice shall be attacked and shaken down, thereby causing much uneasiness of mind to themselves. Now, Mr. Editor, how shall we settle this matter? Because you are bound (using the positive style of your opponent) to assist me, seeing you have so recently played the part of a polemic in a brilliant encounter in which two antagonistic systems, in desperate conflict met—both claiming evidence from the inspired volume. I shall, however, attempt an adjustment of this question myself; and if you demur—supply the deficiency. You both admitted the Bible as evidence and authority, from which there is no appeal—grand admission, which I opine the whole Christian world will make. If so, then it follows that example as well as precept is authority in these matters. Hence the following as an example—“But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know at Philippi, we were *bold* in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God *with much contention*.” A command—“*earnestly contend* for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”

Now, Mr. Editor, no matter what stubborn prejudice may say—the recent encounter has the authority of an apostle—the approbation of heaven in favor of a noble effort—the ostensible design of which was to elucidate truth, eradicate error, and clip the eye-brows of gasconading opposers, of whom Paul said there were many in his day. We learn from the apostles’ practice that a most successful and efficient method of dispersing the smoke of rotten systems is by earnest contention, conducted in meekness and fear. On such occasions truth and error are placed in bold contrast—the former growing brighter and more lovely—the latter becoming blacker and more hateful. Surely never was this declaration more strikingly illustrated than on the late occasion. By the way let me affirm that I was highly pleased with the deportment and style of you and Mr. Lavell—they being sanctioned by the scriptures. Your gentleness, caution, strength and firmness all appeared in their proper time. Your opponent also possessed