

(To the Editor of the Scottish Press.)

LETTER I.

THURSO CASTLE, December, 1855,

DEAR SIR,—During my sojourn at Edinburgh the winter before last, I laboured with unremitting and earnest assiduity to bring about a union between the different bodies of unendowed Presbyterians, and not without receiving many tokens of sympathy and encouragement, for which I then felt, and still grateful. On the part of the United Presbyterian ministers there was manifested, without (so far as I can call to mind) a single exception, a concurrence in my views, characterised by the most unreserved frankness and heart felt approval. Many also of the most eminent amongst my Free Church friends were zealously and actively engaged in the cause; but in other influential quarters, there were doubts and difficulties started, which marred and frustrated the undertaking. The organs of their press gave me no assistance, and seemed disposed, instead of forwarding, to frown upon my sincere and persevering efforts; to which you, on the other hand, were pleased to afford your powerful and practical co-operation. It is to you, therefore, that I venture to make my present appeal; and in your columns that I hope to find a channel for the respectful but undisguised expression of the deep disappointment with which I perused those portions of the able and otherwise admirable speech, lately delivered at Glasgow by my eminent and excellent friend Dr Candlish, in which, to the best of my judgement, principles are propounded which must tend to prevent, in all time coming that friendly and fraternal fusion, of which I have been striving to forward the accomplishment.

There does not I think exist, in an ecclesiastical sense, a more painful and disreputable spectacle than that which is at present exhibited in Scotland, to the mortification of every friend to Christian unity, and the triumph of every scoffer at Christian inconsistency. There are no fewer than five denominations, all professing to be Calvinistic in their doctrine, and Presbyterian in their polity, and yet living on terms of actual dislike, or at the best of distant civility. Each in a great measure endeavours to ignore or discountenance the labors of the other. No matter if there should be in any district a place of worship large enough to accommodate the entire body of the Presbyterian population, and a pastor who preaches Christ crucified in the utmost purity and fulness, the adherents of other bodies must have a separate chapel (or perhaps two or three) of their own; and a large amount of money and labor are thus running to waste, at the very time when both are so much needed and so importunately called for in many destitute quarters. And yet so strong is the feeling of mutual repulsion, that it would be much easier to split up any one of these sections, dislocated into fragments, than persuade any two to coalesce.

It seems to be, at this moment, a mooted point, what body should be considered as constituting the Church of Scotland. All Scottish prelatists contend, that either there is no such entity, or that they alone are entitled, in an apostolic sense, to that designation. The Established Church sounds its claim on the Acts of Parliament, in virtue of which it is invested with the entire temporalities and prerogatives annexed to that enviable pre-eminence. The Free Church again, "holds that Establishment to be a thing of yesterday, a creation of Lord Aberdeen's; a thing which has existed only since 1843, and which, if not a creation of Lord Aberdeen's, is the creation of the Court of Session and the House of Lords," and it is averred that "by all the historical signs and marks which can possibly identify a national church, we can certainly trace our descent far more clearly than any Bishop can trace back his to the apostles." The United Presbyterians and Independents maintain that no communion can, without manifest arrogance and injustice, assume to itself the character of a "national church," inasmuch as there is none which, taken by itself, is not greatly outnumbered by the aggregate of the parties not included within its pale. I am persuaded, however, that if you were to poll the entire population of Scotland, there would not be found 100 persons who would be willing to concede to us the appellation of "national church;" and all the Dissenting bodies would without hesitation, admit, or rather contend, that if that name should be awarded to any church, it belongs of right to the Establishment. This decision would unquestionably be confirmed by the unanimous verdict of both Houses of Parliament and by the assent of all Englishmen, whether Churchmen or Dis-