

xvi. 19; 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14; 2 Tim., Titus, &c. &c.)

Mr. Secker.—I understand your difficulty perfectly; it is one which long painfully affected my own mind; but rely upon it, Mr. Brown, it arises from a *distortion of facts, and a misapprehension of duty*. You know nothing is easier than to bring slanderous charges against either individuals or communities, which, though they be entirely false, it may yet require long and painful efforts to disprove. Thus, if I were to begin to insinuate in public that you were not thoroughly upright in your commercial transactions, or not a strictly sober man, false as both one and the other would be, it might yet cost you considerable trouble before you could entirely disabuse the public of the suspicion that there was some ground for the slander. So it has been with the Church; the Dissenters have studiously represented it as being devoid of all spiritual religion, a lifeless image, cold and dead,—a congregation of mere formalists, who neither sought Christ nor desired the influences of his Holy Spirit; while, on the contrary, their own communities are represented as the sanctuaries of primitive purity and simplicity, in which alone the truly pious can find either Christian communion or spiritual profit. With regard to these latter assertions I shall say little,—I do not wish to become the accuser of the private characters even of those who, not content with the error of having forsaken our Reformed Catholic Church, do yet add the sins of unholy hate and slanderous speaking concerning her; this only will I say, that these who, amongst the Methodists and other Dissenters, are the most distinguished for their well-informed piety, are the individuals who have the least to say respecting the piety of Dissent as contrasted with that of the Church. With respect to the Church itself, while I know how far short too many of its members come of that spiritual devotion, and of that hungering and thirsting after righteousness which should distinguish every believer in Christ Jesus, still I trust that that “pure and undefiled religion,” which only springs from a true faith in Him, and which St. James declares to be this, “to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction,” is to be found in our Church in greater abundance than elsewhere. It is charitable to hope that the Dissenters have commonly judged otherwise, not altogether from their unholy jealousy of the Church, not to use harsher terms, but from their strange ignorance of what composes the visible Church of Christ.

The holy sacrament of baptism was adopted by Christ himself as the rite whereby all, whether Jewish and Pagan adults or the infants of Christians, were to be admitted into his Church; and mark, my dear sir, that as it is the only rite sanctioned by divine authority for this purpose; therefore, all who are duly baptized are

thenceforward positive members of the Church, and continue to be so, unless, by competent authority, they are openly excommunicated, and thereby cast out of the pale of the Church,—a measure which the Bible only permits in extreme cases. It is evident, therefore, as the heart of man is naturally prone to sin, that in the Christian as it was in the Jewish Church, very many of its members will be unworthy. The Methodists and other sectarians, on the contrary, have, I fear most unwarrantably, made new and unscriptural conditions of entrance into, what they call, their various churches; hence though they profess to baptize the children of their people, and thereby to unite them to Christ, they do most inconsistently refuse to regard them as true members of their religious body; their condition of membership being not that which Christ instituted, but a test of their own! This, I may just remark, was not originally the case with Methodism; Mr. Wesley always strongly insisted upon it that his people were *not a Church*, but simply *societies within the Church of England*; therefore, however unadvised this step might be, still he did not usurp the authority of Christ, by making new conditions of admission into his Church. Nay, such an usurpation as this the Romish Church itself, either by Pope or Council, never ventured upon; this was left for the boasted ‘private judgment’ of Dissent to do; and now alas! Methodism has fully fallen into this snare also. I have made this statement for the purpose of showing you how it is, that, by superficial observers, the Church should be thought to be less holy in its members than Dissent; namely, that as the sectarians acknowledge none as members of their so-called churches, except persons chosen from amongst adults who have already exhibited some degree of seriousness; it may well be supposed that, in proportion to their numbers, they will have an appearance of greater purity than our Apostolic Church, which does not deny the rights of membership to any of those who, according to Christ’s institution, have, by baptism, been once received therein, even though the lives of many of them should be far from such as becometh those who have the vows of the Lord upon them. Thus, Mr. Brown, I think persons are mistaken as to the matter of fact in the grounds upon which they suppose Dissent to be more holy than the Church; for you see that to make the comparison fair, it is the serious and devout communicants of the Church, those who are attentive upon her various ordinances, who must be compared with the members of dissenting denominations, and then in practical godliness I do not suppose that you yourself think that the Church will suffer by the comparison.

Mr. Brown—No indeed; for though I have no doubt as to the true piety of very many of the Methodists, still I am quite of the opinion of your candid friend the Rev. Mr. —, ‘that