

A BRIEF INQUIRY INTO
THE TRUE NATURE OF SCHISM :

OR

A PERSUASIVE TO CHRISTIAN LOVE AND CHARITY.

THERE is scarce any one thing that has been discussed in the Christian world with more heat and noise among the several dividing parties, than the charge of schism. This has involved the disputing part of the church in the most violent engagements above twelve hundred years. Schism is so deformed a brat, that nobody has been willing to own it, a crime so very black, that each party has been studiously industrious to clear itself from the charge. To this indictment all have pleaded *Not guilty*; and we find none that have justified it. But here is the misery; such notions of it have been entertained, that it has been almost impossible to deny, without recriminating. And perhaps the most guilty have been most hot in charging others. Athaliah, the greatest traitor, is most loud in crying, *Treason, treason*.

We are all agreed that schism is an arch-rebel in Christ's kingdom; but in sending out the hue and cry after it, the difficulty is, how to describe it. Several attempts have been made; would it be in vain to try one more? Waving all inquiries into the several definitions and descriptions which have been given of it, let us have recourse to the law and to the testimony; for whoever speak in the things of God, (as they certainly do who speak of sin and duty,) if they speak not according to that rule, it is because there is no light in them.

Therefore I only premise this one postulatum, that nothing is to be accounted sin, but that which is made so by the word of God: *Tekel* is to be written upon nothing but that which has been carefully weighed in the balances of the sanctuary.

In our inquiry what is sin, let those books be opened which must be opened at the great day. If sinners must be judged by those books shortly, let sin be judged by them now, and let not any man or company of men in the world, assume a power to de-

clare that to be sin, which the Sovereign Rector of the world has not declared to be so, lest in so doing they be found stepping into the throne of God, who is a jealous God, and will not give this branch of his glory to another.

Let us therefore see what the Scripture says concerning schism; not concerning the evil of it, we are convinced of that, but concerning the nature and *formalis ratio*—*due meaning* of it.

The Old Testament will not help us so much in this inquiry as the New; for as to the binding of Jews to worship only in one place, at Jerusalem, and to offer only upon that altar, it was a precept purely ceremonial, and to us Christians is vacated by that gospel rule, which wills us to pray every where, and their synagogues then (not their temple) were the patterns of Christian assemblies.

Only one scripture occurs in the Old Testament, which, perhaps, will help to rectify some mistakes about schism. It is the instance of Eldad and Medad, who prophesied in the camp. The case in short is this, Eldad and Medad were persons upon whom *the Spirit rested*, that is, who were by the extraordinary working of the Spirit endued with gifts equal to the rest of the seventy elders, and were *written*, that is, had a call to the work, but they *went not out unto the tabernacle* as the rest did, though God himself had appointed that they should, Numb. xi. 26. And *they prophesied in the camp*, that is, exercised their gifts in private among their neighbours in some common tent. Upon what inducements they did this, does not appear, but it is evident that it was their weakness and infirmity thus to separate from the rest of their brethren. If any think they prophesied by a necessitating and irresistible impulse, they may remember that *the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets*.*

Now if some of the schismaticating doctors that the church had known, had but had the censuring of Eldad and Medad, we should soon have had a judgment given against them, much more severe than would have been awarded to him who gathered sticks on the sabbath-day.

And it is confessed, all the circumstances considered, it looks like a very great irregularity, especially as an infringement of the authority of Moses, which they who prophesied in the tabernacle under his presidency manifestly owned, and submitted to.

Well, an information was presently brought in against them, *v. 27. Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp*, that is, to speak in the invidious language of the times, there is a conventicle at such a place, and Eldad and Medad are holding forth at it.

Joshua, in his zeal for that which he fancied to be the church's unity, and out of concern for the authority of Moses, brings in a bill to silence them; for as hot as he was, he would not have them fined and laid in the gaol for this disorder, neither; only, my lord Moses, forbid them; not compel them to come to the tabernacle, if they be not satisfied to come, only, for the future, prohibit their schismatical preaching in the camp. This seems a very good notion.

But hold, *Joshua, thou knowest not what manner of spirit thou art of*. Discerning Moses sees him actuated by a spirit of envy, and does not only deny, but severely reprove, the motion, Numb. xi. 29. *Enviest thou for my sake? Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, provided the Lord will but put his Spirit upon them*. He is so far from looking upon it as schism, that he does not only tolerate, but encourage it. And O that all those who sit in Moses's chair, were but clothed with this spirit of Moses.

This instance is full enough to show, that all is not schism, which even wise and good men are apt to think is so.

But our special inquiry must be in the New Testament; and forasmuch as words are the signification of things, let us see what the Scripture means by this word schism.

The critics observe, that the Greek word *σχισμα* is used eight times in the New Testament.

1. In a literal sense, for a rent in a garment, *σχισμα*, the rent is made worse. In the same sense *σχίζω* is used. As also of the rending of the vail. The cleaving of the heavens.^b But this makes little to our purpose.

2. It is used figuratively for a division; and that twofold.^c

(1.) A division in apprehension; so *σχισμα* is used. In which places it signifies the different thoughts and apprehensions that the people or their

rulers had concerning Christ, some thinking well of him, others not. Some accusing him, others excusing him.

In this sense *σχίζω* is used, for the different sentiments the people had concerning Paul.^d

Now this diversity of opinion, judgment, or apprehension, cannot be called or looked upon in itself as a thing criminal, inasmuch as there are many things which either because they are dark and obscure, and so not capable of demonstration, or because they are trivial and of light moment, and so not worth a demonstration, it is no matter what opinion men are of concerning them.

Only where the matter is weighty, and touches the fundamentals of Christianity, there an error is criminal, and if stubbornly persisted in, is heresy.

But the evil of it lies not in the diversity, but in the erroneousness and danger of the opinion.

I cannot believe that the greatest worshippers of the *Diana* of their own opinions, will be so sottish as to brand those for schismatics, who in every punctilio of opinion are not exactly of the same standard with themselves.

If there be any so strangely rigid, *let not my soul come into their secret*, for I despair to see even all the saints of a mind, in every thing, till they come to heaven.

It does therefore evidence too great a strangeness to the spirit of the gospel, to condemn all those who differ from us only in their apprehensions about little things. John's disciples were greatly displeased because Christ's disciples did not fast so often as they did, and quarrelled with Christ himself about it. And the answer of the meek and holy Jesus is worthy remark, that he gives a good reason why his disciples did not fast, viz. *Because the bridegroom was yet with them*; and yet does not condemn John's disciples that fasted often: which teaches us not to make our own opinions and practices (like Procrustes's bed) the standard by which to measure all others; and that in such cases we are to think it sufficient only to acquit ourselves, first to our own consciences, and then if need be to the world, without condemning others, who think and practise otherwise in such little things, and perhaps have as much reason for their thoughts and practices as we have for ours.

(2.) A division in affection: and in this sense it is used three times in the first epistle to the Corinthians, and no where else in all the New Testament.

We must particularly examine each place, that thence we may be furnished with a true notion of schism: and in plain terms, the case is whether a diversity (or, if you call it so, a separation) of communion be the *formalis ratio*—*due meaning* of schism.

^b Matt ix. 16. Mark ii. 21. John xix. 24. Luke v. 36. Matt. xvii. 31. John xxi. 11. Mark i. 10.

^c John vii. 43. John ix. 16. John x. 19.

^d Acts xxiii. 7.

I find the word, and with it, no doubt, the thing, *I beseech you brethren—that there be no divisions* (Σχιματα) no schisms among you; so reads the margin of our Bibles.

Now to find out what this schism is, let us inquire into the exegetical exhortations that accompany it.

[1.] *That ye all speak the same things*, viz. in the fundamental doctrines of Christianity; for in little things it can never be made a duty to be of the same opinion, since it is morally impossible, but (as Estius seems to understand it) not to break Christian charity in your disputes about them.

Observe, he does not oblige us to think the same thing, but though your thoughts be divers, yet speak the same thing, that is, in your preaching and conversation, speak of those things only wherein you are agreed; and for those things wherein you differ, do not fall out and fight about them, but love one another notwithstanding.

[2.] *That ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*. Which must be understood of a serious endeavour after it; for otherwise a perfect conjunction must be reserved for a world of everlasting perfection.

But the meaning of the exhortation seems to be, that all their little heats and animosities should be swallowed up in an unanimous zeal for the great gospel truths, wherein they were all agreed.

We must inquire also into the Corinthians' miscarriage, which occasioned this caution, which you have, 1 Cor. i. 11, 12. there were contentions among them, v. 11. ἐριδες. So that schisms and contentions are one and the same thing, and it is worth noting, that Clemens Romanus, in that famous epistle of his to the Corinthians, still calls schisms ἐριδες—contentions.

Now the contention was about their ministers; *I am of Paul*, says one; *I am of Apollos*, says another, &c. Now he who was of Apollos was as much a schismatic, as he who was of Paul, because they quarrelled and fell out about so small and indifferent a matter.

Observe, it was not so much being of Paul and being of Apollos that made the schism; for Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas were all theirs, (*chap. iii. 22.*) but saying, *I am of Paul*, that is, crying him up as the only man for them, so as to despise others. If one went to hear Paul, and another went to hear Apollos, that did not make a schism, no, nor if one communicate with Paul, and another with Apollos; for why might not each go where he could be most edified? But the schism was, that they sacrificed Christian love and charity to this difference of apprehension. This is evident in that those who said, *I am of Christ*, so as to despise and censure, and quarrel with them that said *I am of Paul*, &c. are reprov'd equally with the rest.

Now the way of curing this schism was not to silence Apollos and Cephas, that whether they would or no they might all be of Paul; nay, it is well worth the observing that in the same epistle we find Paul very earnest with Apollos to go to Corinth, (xvi. 12.) *As touching Apollos, I greatly desired him to come to you*. Which he never would have done, if he had not preferred the common interest of souls' salvation before his own credit.

But the way to cure this was to convince them of the folly of the quarrels, how senseless and irrational they were; and to persuade them to lay aside their enmities and heart-burnings, and to love one another, and to walk hand in hand in the same way though they traced different paths, which they might well do when the paths lay so very near together.

By this instance it appears, that narrow-spiritedness which confines religion and the church to our way and party, whatever it is, to the condemning of others who differ from us in little things, is the great schismatising principle, which has been so much the bane of the Christian church; *Hinc illa Lacryma—hence her sorrows*.

We find the word used, *I hear there be Σχιματα—divisions among you*, 1 Cor. xi. 18.

It is undeniably evident that it cannot be meant of any breach of communion, for it is said expressly (v. 20.) that they *came together in one place*, and that into the church too, that is, the place of meeting.

But the schisms were quarrels and contentions about some little things relating to the circumstances of public worship; and the quarrel seems to have been about the time of beginning their worship, especially when they were to join in the Lord's supper, or their love-feasts: it seems they did not come exactly at the time, therefore the apostle bids them *tarry one for another*, v. 33. Those who came early quarrelled with those who came late, for coming no sooner; and those who came late quarrelled with the other, for beginning before they came.

Some quarrels of this kind were the schisms here spoken of.

The word is used, *that there be no schism in the body*.^a The apostle is there carrying on a metaphor betwixt the natural body, and the church; and this clause clearly relates to the natural body, for he does not come to the reddition of the comparison till v. 27.

Now, what he means by the schism in the body, is plain from the antithesis in the following words—*But that the members should have the same care one for another*. So that when the members care not one for another, when the eye says to the hand, *I have no need of thee*; (v. 21.) when there is not a sympathy and fellow-feeling among Christians, (v. 26.) here is schism.

That is schism which breaks or slackens the bond by which the members are knit together.

^a 1 Cor. xii. 25.

Now, that bond is not an act of uniformity in point of communion, in the same modes and ceremonies; but true love and charity in point of affection. It is charity that is the *bond of perfectness*:^f it is the unity of the Spirit that is the *bond of peace*,^g and schism is that which breaks this bond.

Now from all this laid together, I draw out this description of schism, which, according to my present apprehensions, is the true scripture notion of it.

"Schism is an uncharitable distance, division, or alienation of affection among those who are called Christians, and agree in the fundamentals of religion, occasioned by their different apprehensions about little things."

This is the schism which the Scripture makes to be a sin, and by Scripture rules it must be judged. Schism (as indeed the root of all other sin) we see lies in the heart and affections. The tree is known by its fruits. The bitter root bears gall and wormwood. Let us therefore take a short view of those practices, which, according to this description, are schismatical practices.

1. Judging, censuring, and condemning those who differ from us in little things, is a schismatical practice, as it evidences a great alienation, if not enmity, of the affections. *Charity thinketh no evil, οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν—does not reason evil, does not study to make sins, but cover them; and if they be made, yet not to make the worst of them, it puts the best construction upon words and actions.*

Now to pass a censorious judgment upon others, and to put the worst construction upon what they say and do, is certainly uncharitable, that is, schismatical. It is a practice often condemned in Holy Writ; *Judge not, that ye be not judged*,^h it is construed a *judging of the law*.ⁱ

It is especially condemned with reference to the present case, of different apprehensions about little things, in that famous scripture, (Rom. xiv. 4, 5.) a scripture, which, if well studied and lived up to, would heal us all. Judging the heart is, in my estimation, one of the most uncharitable species of judging. Censuring the principles and ends of an action, which are secret, charging those who differ from us with hypocrisy, is a heart sin. If the appearance be good, and the outside be justifiable, when we conclude hypocrisy is in the heart, we step into the throne of God.

2. Laying a greater stress upon small matters of difference than they will bear, and widening the breach about them. As on the one hand, to censure all prayers by a form, or by this form in particular, as superstition, will-worship, formality, and the like: on the other hand, to censure all extempore praying as babbling, canting, froth, and noise, as if God had not accepted his own people in the one as well as

the other. The fastening of a censure, and passing of a judgment upon a whole party and way, if it be not very clear and well-grounded indeed, will be likely to split us upon the rock of schism and uncharitableness.

3. Concluding hardly as to the spiritual state and condition of those who differ from us, excluding them out of the church, and from salvation, because they are not just of our mind in every punctilio.

Witness that notion which excludes out of the church, and consequently out of heaven, all those (how orthodox and serious soever they are otherwise) who are not in prelatical communion; if no diocesan bishops, then no ministers, no sacraments, no church, no salvation; which is certainly the most schismatical notion that ever was broached in the Christian world.

4. Reproaching, reviling, and railing at those who differ from us in little things, is another schismatical practice; fastening such nick-names upon them, and loading them with such reproaches, as carry in them all the odium that malice can infuse into them; dressing them up in bears' skins, and then baiting them, doing what we can by calumnies and misrepresentations, to alienate the affections of others from them.

5. Making, consenting to, approving, or executing of penal laws against those who differ from us in little things, to punish them for such difference in their persons, estates, or liberties, is another uncharitable or schismatical practice.

This is contention with a witness; which aims at no less than the ruin of a person contended with, in the dearest of his secular interests; to beat out his brains, because his head is not exactly of our size.

6. Separation from communion with those that we have joined ourselves to, without cause; give me leave to call it *separation for separation sake*, without any regard had to anything amiss in the church we separate from, or any thing better in that we join ourselves to. This is an evidence of an uncharitable alienation of affection, and is consequently schismatical, when we quite cast off communion with our brethren, out of ambition, animosity to their persons, affectation of novelty and singularity, or the like.

This was manifestly the case of the Donatists, the infamous schismatics of the primitive church. Their principles were, that the church of Christ was to be found no where but in their sect, and all other churches were no churches; that true baptism was not administered but among them; and a great many barbarous outrages they committed in the heat of their separation.

7. An affected strangeness, or distance in commu-

^f Col. iii. 14.

^g Eph. iv. 3.

^h Matt. vii. 1.

ⁱ James iv. 11, 12.

nion or conversation, from those who thus differ from us, upon the account of such difference, avoiding conversation and familiarity with them, carrying it strangely towards them, only because they do not wear the dividing name of our party.

This evidences an uncharitable alienation of affection prevailing in the heart, and is consequently schismatical.

Many such like practices might easily be mentioned, if it were needful; but they are obvious enough, especially if we look into the laws of charity: (1 Cor. xiii. 4—7.) and remember that all transgression of those laws is uncharitableness, and when that is found in the things of religion, it is schism. The corollary from the whole is this, that whoever they be that allow themselves in these and the like practices and affections towards their brethren, who differ from them in little things, whether they be Episcopal, Presbyterian, Independent, or by what name or title soever they are self-dignified and distinguished, they are so far schismatical, inasmuch as they break the great law of Christian charity.

Let us now try what inference may be drawn from the Scripture notion of schism.

1. If this be schism, then is it not within the line of any human power to make that separation to be schismatical, which was not so in itself. By the description given of schism, it does appear to be a thing, *malum in se—evil in itself*, which was not so before; an attempt of that kind would sink with its own weight. And therefore it is well worthy observation, that when the parliament made a law against conventicles, (which are the great schismatical eyesores,) they called it an act to prevent and suppress *sedition* conventicles, knowing it to be within their line to declare a thing to be sedition; but not schismatical conventicles, for that was a thing in which they could not concern themselves.

2. If this be schism, then the guilt of it is to be looked for in particular persons, and is not to be charged by wholesale upon parties of any denomination whatsoever; as among us at this day in the prelatical party there are some schismatical, and others not; and the same is to be said of the separating party; nay, who is there who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from this sin?" Have we not all need to pray, *From envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness*, (which are the ingredients of schism,) *good Lord, deliver us*, both from the guilt, and from the power, of it? It is not so much our differences themselves, as the mismanagement of our differences, that is the bane of the church, burning up Christian love with the fire of our contentions.

Whence come these wars and fightings? Come they not hence, even from our lusts?^k And those who say they are perfectly free from these warfaring schis-

matic lusts, must give me leave to say, I doubt they deceive themselves, and the truth is not in them.

3. If this be schism, then there may be schism where there is no separation of communion; that is plain from the instance of the Corinthians, who came together into *one* place, and yet are blamed for being schismatical. Bringing people to one place will never cure a schism, till they are brought to be of one accord.

You may bind the leopard, and lay him down by the lamb, and yet the enmity remain as great as ever, except there be an inward change.

A quarrel about little things may likewise be schismatical on one side, and not on the other. Jeremiah was a man of strife and contention,^l that is, a man striven and contended with, and yet no schismatic; though ordinarily (as it is commonly said of domestic differences) there are faults more or less on both sides.

4. If this be schism, then there may be separation of communion where there is no schism. For thus we all agree, that there may be a difference of apprehension, and yet no schism; provided it do not eat out Christian love, but be managed amicably, as between the Arminians and Calvinists, in the church of England, and divers the like.

Now if this difference of apprehension relate to worship or communion, and the modes or terms thereof, there cannot but be a strong inclination to separate in whole or in part, according as the difference of apprehension is; for do what we can, as long as we are rational creatures, the understanding will have the directing of the will.

Now surely this separation, (if we must call it so,) or rather, this variety and diversity of worship and communion, may be managed without schism, provided Christian love and charity be kept entire notwithstanding.

For can any imagine that a difference of apprehension, in regard of worship and discipline, should be more schismatical than difference of apprehension in doctrine; since, of the two, doctrinal truths seem more essential to Christianity?

But to come a little closer. The meetings of the dissenters (though now, blessed be God, permitted and allowed of by the law of the land, yet) are commonly charged with being schismatical. The great outcry is, that we leave the church; and the unthinking mobile, who are so well taught as to know no other churches but the public places of worship, are easily induced to believe it; as if it were schism to worship God any where else, let the worship there be what it will.

Those who will allow themselves the liberty of an unprejudiced thought, cannot but see the difference so small, that as long as we believe the same Chris-

^k Jam. iv. 1.

^l Jer. xv. 10.

tian faith, and agree in the same protestant abhorrence of papal delusions, we may easily be looked upon as one and the same church, as well as two several parish churches may, especially being united under the care and protection of one protestant king, and members of the same protestant commonwealth.

(1.) I do from the bottom of my soul detest and abhor all separation from the parish churches to atheism, irreligion, and sensuality, (*who separate themselves, sensual,*^m) who forsake the church to go to the alehouse or tavern, or to their secular business, or to their slothfulness and laziness, to *separate unto that shame.*ⁿ And if this separation had been more animadverted upon than it has been of late, probably the cure of schism would have been sooner effected thereby, than by severities that have been used against conscientious separatists.

(2.) I do likewise abhor all schismatical, that is, uncharitable, proud, censorious, rigid separation; such separation as theirs who condemn the parish churches as no parts of the visible church, who rail at ministers as Babylonish and antichristian: this is a horrid breach of the law of Christian love, and that which every good heart cannot but rise at the thoughts of.

And yet I cannot but say, and am satisfied in it, that there may be a lawful and justifiable separation, (though I would rather call it a diversity of communion from the parish churches,) which I shall endeavour to clear in three cases.

[1.] If my own conscience be not satisfied in the lawfulness of any terms of communion imposed, as far as I fall under that imposition, I may justify a separation from them, and a joining with other churches, where I may be freed from that imposition, provided that this be not done schismatically, that is, with heat and bitterness, and alienation of Christian affection. And I hope none that have the law of Christ written in their hearts will say, that it is impossible truly to love those with whom I am not satisfied to join in all the ordinances, for the sake of some ceremonies, with which, after all my study, prayer, and conversation, I cannot be satisfied.

So, if I be a minister, and as such obliged to preach the gospel, yet kept out from the public exercise of my ministry by such terms and conditions, oaths and subscriptions, as I judge sinful; in such a case surely it is lawful for me, with Eldad and Medad, to prophesy in the camp, since in my judgment the door of the tabernacle is made narrower than my Master has appointed it to be made. What should hinder but that, as a minister of Christ, I may administer all the ordinances, according to Christ's institution, to those who are willing to join with me,

and put themselves under my conduct (such as it is) in those administrations? If God has given though but one talent, it must be traded with, or else there will be an uncomfortable reckoning shortly, especially when we look abroad, and consider how the apparent necessity of precious souls call for our utmost diligence in our Master's work; and indeed there is work enough for us all, if God would give us hearts to be serious and unanimous in it.

In this also it is always provided, that my agency in a ministerial station be not made schismatical by my heat, passion, and bitterness; but that I live in true love and charity with those whom by reason of the impositions I cannot, *salva conscientia*—with a *pure conscience*, join with in communion.

[2.] Though I be satisfied in the lawfulness of the terms of communion required, and so when purer administrations are not to be had, may, rather than live in a total want of the ordinances, comply with them, yet when I have an opportunity of enjoying those ordinances in a way which I judge more pure and scriptural, or which I think more lively and edifying, and more likely to attain the great end of all ordinances, and that contribute more to my comfort and holiness, and communion with God; in such a case I cannot see but that I may lawfully have recourse to such administrations, though thereby I may seem to separate from another church, wherein before I had joined, and for which I still retain a very charitable opinion and affection. If the magistrate should be so unreasonable as to impose upon me an unskilful physician, to be alone made use of in case of sickness, I might take him rather than none; but if there be another, who, I am sure, has more skill and will to help me, I think I should be accessory to the ruin of my health and life, if I should not make use of him, notwithstanding such an inhibition.

And is not the life, and health, and salvation of my immortal soul dearer to me than any other concern? Is not communion with God the sweetest and most precious of all my delights? Is it not the life of my soul, and the crown of all my joys? And are not those administrations most desirable in which I find myself most edified? Must I then be such an enemy to my own comfort and happiness, as to throw away all opportunities which I might have of that kind, only in a compliment? *Amicus Socrates, amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*—*Socrates is my friend, Plato is my friend, but truth is my best friend.* The bishops are my friends, and the ministers my friends, and I have a true love for them, but charity begins at home, especially when my precious soul, more worth than all the world, lies at stake.

This case is somewhat the clearer in those parishes

where the public ministers are either ignorant, profane, or malignant.

[3.] Nay, suppose I am so well satisfied in communion with the parish churches in all administrations, as not to desire better, or not to expect better, in the dissenters' meetings, yet I cannot see what schism, that is, what breach of Christian love and charity, there is in it, for me to be present sometimes in the congregations of the sober dissenters, and to join with them who worship the same God, in the name of the same Mediator, read and preach the same word, and live in hopes of the same inheritance, and differ from me only in some little things which I think not worth contending for, scarce worth the mentioning; hereby to evidence my universal love and catholic charity, and that I am not of narrow, schismatical, dividing principles, nor one who will sacrifice Christian love to the petty trifling fancies and interests of a party.

The sober dissenters are such as I have reason to hope have communion with God in what they do, and therefore why should not I now and then have communion with them? *In every nation he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him*; and why should he not be accepted of me? Why may not I have fellowship with them who have fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.^o To fancy schism, that is, uncharitable contention and a breach of Christian love, in this is very absurd.

Obj. But hereby I encourage a schism, and countenance them in their separation from that which in my estimation is lawful and good, and does not give just cause for such a separation.

Ans. There must be grains of allowance for difference of apprehension, different capacities, constitutions, and inclinations; custom, and especially education, must be put into the scale; and while I walk according to the light which God has given me, I must charitably believe that others do so to.

Whether the dissenters' meetings be as to the constitution of them (looking upon them only as diversities of communion) schismatical, has been considered already, and found otherwise by Scripture light.

The common outcry is, that it is the setting up of altar *against* altar: which is not so; for at the most it is but altar *by* altar; and though I have often read of one body, and one Spirit, and one hope, and one Lord, and one faith, and one baptism, and one God and Father,^p yet I could never find a word

in all the New Testament of one altar,^q except Jesus Christ, the altar that sanctifies every gift, in whom we all centre. And if there be any of the dissenters who are schismatical, that is, contentious, bitter, and uncharitable in their separation, let them bear their own burthen, but by my presence with them I encourage that in them, no more than I do too much of a like spirit in too many of those who are called the church-of-England men, by my adherence to them.

To conclude. By all this it is evident that unity of affection is the thing to be laboured after, more than uniformity in modes and ceremonies. We have been long enough trying to root schism out of the church, *vi et armis—by impositions, fines, and penalties*, choking our brethren, because their throats have not been so wide as ours. And it has been found ineffectual, even in the judgment of our great Sanhedrim, who have declared that “giving ease to scrupulous consciences is the likeliest way to unite their Majesty's protestant subjects in interest and affection.” What if we should now try another method, and turn the stream of our endeavours into another channel? Hitherto we have been as it were striving which should hate one another most; what if we should now strive which should love one another best, and be most ready to do all offices of true charity and kindness, and bury all our little feuds and animosities in that blessed grave of Christian love and charity?

What if we should every one of us, of each party, (as we have been too often called,) set ourselves by our preaching to promote and propagate the gospel of *peace*, and by our prayers to prevail with God for a more plentiful pouring out of the Spirit of *peace*, that the dividing names of *Baalim* may be taken out of our mouths, and that, however it goes with uniformity of ceremony, we may keep the unity of the Spirit? And then I doubt not but that we should soon see our English Jerusalem established a praise in the midst of the earth.

And yet I am afraid even saints will be men; there will be remainders even of those corruptions which are the seed of schism, in the best, till we all come to the perfect man.

And that is the comfort of my soul, that if we can but once get to heaven, we shall be for ever out of the noise and hurry of this quarrelsome, contentious, dividing world, and the church triumphant shall be no more militant, but that happy world of everlasting light will be a world of everlasting love.

^o 1 John i. 3.

^p Eph. iv. 4—6.

^q Heb. xiii. 10.