

A  
**LETTER**

WRITTEN OUT OF THE COUNTRY TO A PERSON OF QUALITY  
IN THE CITY.

WHO TOOK OFFENCE AT THE LATE

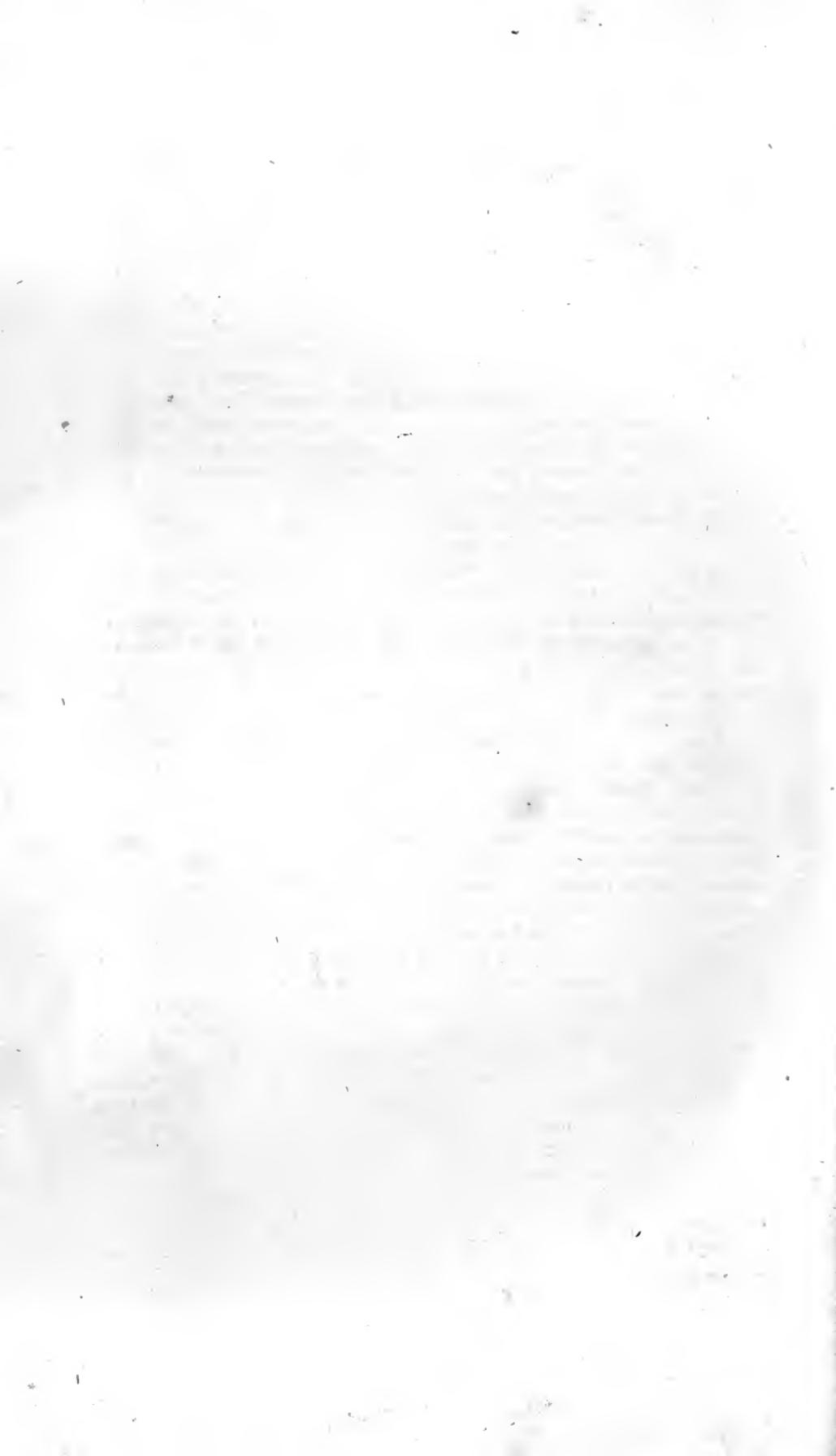
**SERMON OF Dr. STILLINGFLEET,**

*Dean of St. Paul's,*  
**BEFORE THE LORD MAYOR.**

—  
Considering thyself lest thou also be tempted Gal. 6. 1.  
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Johannes Coletus, Decanus quem dicunt, Divi Pauli,—a quo suos  
Anglos alter pene Apostolus Paulus habitus est. Polyd. Virgil.

John Colet, whom they call, dean of St. Pauls—was with his own  
countrymen (the English) accounted almost another apostle Paul.



## A LETTER &c.

X  
*SIR,*

**I** perceive your mind is disturbed, which my friendship with you can no more let me be unconcerned for, than if I heard you were sick; nor less to study your relief. Such may be the cause and measure of your passion, and such the disproportion between the one and the other, as to need it a great deal more, though yet perhaps to deserve it less. For your sickness might be your infelicity only, but a perturbation that exceeds its cause, cannot but be your fault. Which kind of evil, though it be much greater, and therefore needs no application for the removing of it; yet it can challenge less help from another, because you are your own afflicter, and may, by dependance on divine help, when you please, cure yourself, which no man else can do for you. But if another may contribute towards it, by laying before you apt considerations which you are yourself to apply, you know you are to expect it from no man's good will more than mine. If indeed you expect much from my ability, that is another fault, entirely your own, and whereto you could have no temptation.

Thus much I freely profess to you, that I have a great value of an equal temper and composure of mind, not apt to be unduly moved, or entertain any thing that occurs with indecent perturbation, or other resentment than is due and suitable to the occasion: and desire it more than either to be in the best external circumstances, or not to be in the worst. As I wish for myself, I wish for you; and therefore am willing to place my endeavour accordingly, where it may be in a possibility of effecting somewhat to your advantage, and where it is most desirable it should

In the present case, the fault I find with you is, that your resentment of the matter you complain of, is undue, and not

proportionable to the occasion. And whereas you seem to labour under the distemper and excess of a twofold passion, of fear, lest a just and good cause (as you and I do both account) should suffer some great prejudice, by this opposition of Dr. Stillingfleet: and of anger, that he from whom better things might have been expected, should attempt any thing in this kind. I shall hereupon endeavour to represent to you the causelessness both of your fear, and (in great part) of your anger. And first defend the cause against Dr. Stillingfleet, and then add somewhat in defence of Dr. Stillingfleet against you.

*First.*—As to the former we are,

I. To give the plain state of it, with the doctor's judgment against us in it.

II. To discuss the matter with the doctor and shew; 1. The indefensibleness of that judgment: and 2. The inefficacy of the doctor's attempt to defend it.

I. It is first necessary that we have a true state of the cause itself before our eyes; which is plainly this,—That as there are very great numbers of people, beyond what the ministers of parishes, in divers places, can possibly perform ministerial duty unto: so there are withal very many that cannot be satisfied in conscience, to intrust their souls and their spiritual concerns to the pastoral care and conduct of the parochial ministry only; though they generally have a very reverend esteem of divers who are of it: do, many of them, very frequently partake of some part of their labours, and rejoice in them as great ornaments and real blessings to the Christian church. But these are very unproportionable in number to the necessities of the people, and are by legal restraints tied up one way, as they by conscientious, are another, in respect of some principal parts of Christian worship; without which they should be visibly in the condition of pagans.

There are also many persons who have been devoted to the service of God and his church in the ministerial function; some of them in the way which now obtains, others in a way which this reverend author did not disapprove, who are not satisfied in conscience about the terms upon which they might have continued, or may be admitted parochial incumbents. So that here are numerous flocks scattered without pastors, here are many pastors without flocks.

The people, it is true, on whose behalf these papers are more especially written, are in this destitute condition by their own scruples. Nor is it the present design to justify all those scruples. But they are, with many, of long continuance, and, for ought appears, unremovable. If they should be deferred, and hidden to use patience, while such further ex-

deavours are used with them as this sermon contains, yet death will have no patience, nor be deferred. So that there are multitudes passing into eternity out of a Christian nation, having no benefit of Christian ordinances; no means of instruction in the truth and doctrines of the Christian religion, in order to their salvation. The course which is *de facto* taken in this distress for their relief is that which the reverend author bends himself against in this sermon. And there are two sorts of persons concerned in it. The people; who, rather than return to the state of paganism, implore the help of these unemployed ministers, desiring them to perform the duty of Christian ministers towards them. And the ministers, who rather than they should cease to be christians, or themselves always cease from the work of ministers, comply with their desires, and, as they can, allow them their desired help.

This author doth more directly and professedly speak to the case of the people; to that of the ministers, only by way of oblique reflection. You and I who (among the former) do often partake in the worship and ordinances of God, in the separate assemblies (though we are not so squeamish as to balk the public, nor so unjust and ungrateful, as not to thank God for the excellent advantages that are sometimes to be met with there) are both concerned, and led by the doctor's discourse, to consider what is said as to this case of ours. Which yet I would have us consider not so appropriately, as to exclude them our very compassionate consideration, that are more pinched and confined to narrower limits, by their own scruples, than we are; and whose number you cannot but apprehend to be so great, as to call for a very large compassion in considering their case.

It is indeed a case of far-prospect, and which looks down upon after-times. You know how easily it may be deduced all along from the beginning of the English reformation, when some very eminent among our reformers were not well satisfied with the ceremonial part of the constitution settled at that time; how an unsatisfied party hath gradually increased from age to age among the common people also. They are now grown very numerous. And unless some very over-powering impression upon men's minds, (nor reasonably to be expected according to common measures) should alter the case, it is still likely to increase in succeeding ages. You are not ignorant that no one thing is more commonly scrupled by this unsatisfied party, than the addition of that federal rite in the dedicating of their children to God, the signing them with the sign of the cross, which many (how justly or unjustly I am not now to discuss) esteem so sinful a practice, that, rather than admit it,

they will choose not to offer their children to baptism. — Nor is it in itself of less weight (perhaps it is of much greater) that, in this solemn dedication, they have no opportunity of performing the parental duty, of covenanting with God on behalf of their own children, but that part (with the exclusion of themselves) is to be done by others whom God hath not concerned in the business; and who, after the solemnity is over, are never like to concern themselves. And there are divers other scruples besides, in reference to this, and other parts of worship that, with multitudes, are in no great probability to admit of cure.

Now let us see what the reverend doctor's judgment is upon this state of our case, who dissent from the established way, whether the people, or their ministers, and that both concerning what they do, and what, by consequence from his judgment, upon their case, they are to suffer. For the practice of the people in this case (at least the negative part of it) he hath some charity in his censure, for in their declining to join in the public assemblies, he believes them generally to practise according to their judgment as he professes, page 37. of his sermon. For the ministers, most of them, none at all, who, as he says in the same place, he believes go against theirs. His words are, "I dare say, if most of the preachers at this day in the separate meetings, were soberly asked their judgments, whether it were lawful for the people to join with us in the public assemblies, they would not deny it; and yet the people that frequent them, generally judge otherwise. For it is not to be supposed, that faction among them should so commonly prevail beyond interest."

But his judgment concerning what both are to undergo is eventually, and in the sequel, as he states their case, much more hard in respect of the people, who cannot relieve themselves; whereas the ministers, according to the notion he hath of them, presently may.

We are to attend chiefly to what he says in reference to the lay-people, and shall consider,—How severe he is towards them; and—How well consistent he is therein with himself.

1. His severity towards those of us in respect of what we practise, who put ourselves under the pastoral care of other than the parochial ministers is to be seen in what he proposes to evince, page 20. namely, That our preceeding to the forming of separate congregations, that is, under other teachers, and by other rules, than what the established religion allows, is the present case of separation which he intends to consider, and to make the sinfulness and mischief of it appear. He doth

you see in short absolutely pronounce our practice in this case to be sinful and mischievous.

Now it is hence also to be collected, how hard things he would have us suffer upon supposition of our only remaining unsatisfied to join ourselves into the parochial communion. He doth not indeed bespeak for us gibbets, whipping-posts, or dungeons: nor (directly) any thing grievous to our flesh. But to such as consider themselves to have souls made for an everlasting state, the doom which his words imply, in the mentioned place cannot be thought gentle. Which that you may apprehend the more distinctly; observe that he hath nothing to say against our bare suspending communion in some particular rites which we modestly scruple, while we use it in what we judge lawful, page 20. (whereas page 37. he supposes us generally to judge it unlawful to join in the public assemblies) to which purpose he also speaks in his late dialogues page 171. and 172, (giving his antagonist an account of what he had said in his *irenicum* to the matter now in discourse) namely, That some scrupulous and conscientious men, after all endeavours used to satisfy themselves, may remain unsatisfied as to the lawfulness of some imposed rites, but dare not proceed to positive separation from the church, but are willing to comply in all other things save in those rites which they still scruple: and concerning these he puts the question, whether such bare non-conformity do involve such men in the guilt of schism. And this he confesses he resolved negatively (approving or not disavowing that resolution.) Thus far indeed he well agrees with himself; and seems to have no quarrel with us.

But consider the fatal consequence. He well knows that if we suspend communion in the rite of the cross (upon our never so modest scruple) we cannot have our children ministerially dedicated to God in the ordinance of baptism, nor be so ourselves, if being adult, we remain any of us unbaptized (as he may well apprehend many among us are) nor if we decline the use of sponsors as to what we conceive should be performed by parents for their children, and by adult persons for themselves. And that if we kneel not before the consecrated elements at the Lord's table, we are not to partake of his holy supper. Yea, and what if we scruple somewhat that is more than ritual, to sit under the ministry of a noted drunkard, or open enemy to godliness as our teacher and guide, when we might enjoy the fruitful labours of one that hath not his qualifications every Lord's day? No, by no means, without limitation, or the supposition of any possible case wherein it may be otherwise, a meeting never so little besides the established course, he will make

appear is sinful and mischievous, and not tolerable upon any terms.

What then would he have us do? He directs us indeed afterward to the endeavour of satisfaction. But what shall we do if after our utmost endeavours our dissatisfaction remain? What, while we are endeavouring? which may be all our days in vain. What if we can never be satisfied concerning the established way of baptism for ourselves and our children, and of partaking the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour? Nor to hear or give countenance to such a one pretending to preach the glorious gospel of the blessed God, who either substantially perverts and depraves it, or whose profligate life proclaims him an opposer and enemy to the holy rules and design of it? Nor to commit ourselves to the pastoral care and charge of a less exceptionable person, yea though otherwise never so deserving that hath tied his own hands, and is under such restraints that he cannot, or so disinclined that he will not dispense the ordinances of Christ in such a way, as wherein with satisfaction to our consciences we may enjoy them.

Read over the doctor's sermon again, and again, and you will find no course is prescribed us, but to sit still without any enjoyment of Christian ordinances at all. And with how great numbers must this be the case? for himself professes to believe, that the people that frequent the separate meetings (who you know are not a few) do generally judge it to be unlawful to join in the public assemblies. And are we always to sit still thus? That is to exchange visible Christianity for visible (at least negative) paganism! This, if you take the whole compass of it, is a thing of awful importance, that so great a limb of a Christian nation, they and their posterity, should be paganized from age to age, and cut off from the whole body of the Christian community, only because they scruple some things, the least exceptionable whereof are no part of the Christian institution (as himself, and they whose advocate he is, will freely confess) nor do necessarily belong to it, being (as they contend) but indifferent things. He seems rather contented we should not be christians at all, than not to be christians of this particular mode: that we should rather want the substance of Christ's gospel and sacraments, than not have them accompanied with confessedly needless additions, and which we fear to be forbidden us by their Lord and ours.

We do sincerely profess wherein we decline the communion he invites us to, we only displease him, and those of his way and mind, out of a real fear of otherwise displeasing God. We agree with them in far greater things than we can differ in. We are of that one body which they themselves profess to be

of, so far as mere Christianity is the distinction, and collective bond of it, and desire to be under the conduct and government of that one Spirit. We are called with them in that one hope of our calling, and earnestly expect (whatever hard thoughts they have of us) to meet many a one of them in the participation of the blessed hoped end of that calling. We acknowledge that one Lord, that one faith, that one baptism, (or covenant which the baptism of our Lord's appointment seals) and that one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all. Yet because we cannot, we dare not consent with them to the additions which belong not (and which we fear are unduly affixed) to the religion of christians, we are adjudged to be (as much as in them is) cut off from Christ, deprived of the dear pledges of his love, and acquisitions of his blood, are driven out from the inheritance of the Lord,, and it is in effect said to us, Go and serve other Gods. Thus far the severity of this reverend author towards us extends. Which while we thus truly represent and recount, let us also,

2. Consider what agreement it holds with what we elsewhere observe from him. We have already taken notice, that for our bare con-conformity he acquits us of the guilt of schism. And, page 20. of this sermon, he says, he doth "not confound bare suspending communion in some particular rites, which persons do modestly scruple, and using it in what they judge to be lawful, with either total, or at least ordinary forbearance of communion in what they judge to be lawful; and proceeding to the forming of separate congregations, &c." It is this latter he severs and singles out for his opposition. Against our suspending communion in some particular rites (which we judge unlawful) if we use it in what we judge lawful, (which I with him, presume the lay-dissenters in England generally do;) he hath nothing to say: yea, and undertaking to shew what error of conscience doth excuse a man from sin, in following the dictates of it; he tells us, page 44. that "If the error be wholly involuntary, that is, if it be caused by invincible ignorance," (which he thus explains in the following words) "or after using the best means for due information of his conscience; though the act may be a fault in itself, yet it shall not be imputed to him for a sin, because it wanted the consent of the mind by which the will is determined." And now, Sir, I beseech you consider,

(1.) When he confesses if we be willing to be satisfied, and our error be involuntary, it shall not be imputed to us for a sin; why are we so severely dealt with for what is not to be imputed to us for a sin? If it were any, methinks it should not deserve such rigour at the hands of men, that are themselves also

liable to mistakes and errors. Is it so very criminal, if every poor illiterate dissenter in England (man or woman) cannot in all their days attain to a better and more settled judgment in such dubious matters, than this reverend person had himself arrived to twenty years ago? Especially that never had, or were capable of having those peculiar helps and inducements, to temper and reform their judgments that he hath enjoyed. It is a long time that his own judgment has been ripening to that maturity, as, at length to think it fit and reasonable to say so much as he hath, for the reforming of ours, even in this sermon. Methinks he should not be so very quick and hard towards us, upon so slender a cause, as our scrupling some particular rites, to adjudge us, and ours to be totally deprived of baptism, which themselves count necessary to our salvation, and of the other ordinances of Christ, which they do not think unnecessary. And consider,

(2.) Whereas he says, that if a man err after using the best means for due information of his conscience,—it shall not be imputed to him as a sin. What if we err this error as he counts it) after using the best means for due information; that we ought rather than to return to the state of paganism, to bear out part in the forming of such meetings for the worship of God, as wherein we may, with the satisfaction of our own consciences, enjoy all his holy ordinances? It will surely be within the compass of this his general position, and not be imputable as a sin. Then it is to be hoped we should rather choose to do so, than paganize ourselves, or live in the wilful neglect of his institutions: which to do by our own choice, when we might do otherwise, we cannot but think a very great sin.

If here the doctor should assume to himself to tell us not only that we err herein (whereof we are to regard his proof, as it shall be considered by and by, more than his affirmation:) but also that our error is wilful, we shall appeal from him to one that better knows, how willingly, how gladly we should receive information, and admit the belief, that we ought to content ourselves entirely and only with such provisions as the established religion, (to use the doctor's phrase) allows us, if the evidence of the thing itself did not seem irresistibly and unavoidably to persuade us otherwise. And for him to say so, were but to suppose men wilful, only for not being of his mind, who can as easily think him so, for not being of theirs. But this cannot be a question between the doctor and us; whom, as we have taken notice above, he hath so far obliged, as to admit, (page 37.) "that we generally judge as we practise, and that it is not to be supposed that faction among us should so commonly prevail beyond interest." But since this appears to be his

determination concerning us, and that his assertion seems positive and peremptory, page 20. "That in this our case, to proceed to the forming of congregations under other teachers, and by other rules than what the established religion allows, were a sinful and mischievous separation."—We are in the next place,

II. To discuss the matter with the doctor; wherein we shall endeavour to shew,—The indefensibleness, of the judgment the doctor hath given in this case; which will both infer (and in some part excuse) what we are afterwards to discover: namely—The infirmity of what is alleged by him in this attempt of his to defend it.

1. For the former, it being obvious to common observation, that a natural self-indulgence and aptness to decline and wave what is of more terrible import to themselves, doth usually insinuate and influence men's minds in their judging of such cases: we are the more concerned (because a favourable false judgment will do us no good) with an impartial strictness to hold ourselves to the thing itself. And when we most strictly do so, methinks the doctor should have somewhat a hard province of it. For his determination amounts to thus much, (that we ought to be kept in a state of damnation for scrupling the ceremonies) that is, to be deprived of the necessary means of our salvation. And that, while he accounts our scruple (after the use of due means for our information) not imputable to us as a sin: and not that only, but that we ought to consent to our own damnation for this no sin of ours; inasmuch as it would be sinful and mischievous to procure to ourselves the necessary means of our salvation in another way, while we apprehend that, without our sin, we cannot have them in the way which he allows us.

We are indeed satisfied, that our sin one way or other would contribute little to our salvation. But when also we are satisfied that we cannot enjoy the means of salvation in his way without sin; and he tells us, we cannot without sin enjoy them in our own: we hope every door is not shut up against us, and cannot think the merciful and holy God hath so stated our case, as to reduce us to a necessity of sinning to get out of a state of damnation. And therefore this reverend author having already determined that our remedy cannot lie (as our consciences are hitherto informed) in coming over to him and his way; for he believes we generally judge it unlawful to join with them in the public assemblies, page 37. and says, page, 43. "that no man that hath any conscience will speak against the power of it, and he that will speak against it, hath no reason to be regarded in what he says:" (as no question he expected to be,

otherwise he had not given himself so much trouble) and concludes, page 44. "that we should sin in going against it." As he also thinks we should in acting with it, which (as is necessarily implied) we as yet see not. Our great hope upon the whole matter is, that our relief must lie in taking the way which we do take; and that it cannot be proved to be sinful.

We reckon it is not, and that the doctor's judgment herein is simply indefensible, because whatsoever is sinful must transgress some law immediately divine, or that obliges by virtue of the divine law. And we cannot find that God hath made any law, or enabled any made by others, to oblige us so far, in our present circumstances, as that we should be involved in the guilt of sin, by some variation from the letter of it. For any divine law that can be supposed to oblige us to the use of the things we scruple, or else to live without the worship and ordinances of God, not knowing any such ourselves, we must wait untill we be informed of it.

And that his law doth give an obliging force so far to any other, we as yet understand not. Wheresoever he hath been pleased to lodge and entrust the keys of the church, we do not find he hath appointed them to that use, to admit us into the communion of his worship and ordinances, or totally to exclude us, upon such terms. And herein we suppose we have the doctor consenting with us: who in his irenicum, (page 216.) plainly asserts, "that the office which the power of the keys implies is ministerial, and not authoritative; declarative, and not juridical." And says in the preface to the same book, that "he that came to take away the unsupportable yoke of the Jewish ceremonies, did never intend to gall the disciples necks with another instead of it." Whereto he immediately adds in the same preface: "And it would be strange the church should require more than Christ himself did; and make other conditions of her communion, than our Saviour did of discipleship. What possible reason can be assigned or given why such things should not be sufficient for communion with a church, which are sufficient for eternal salvation? And certainly those things are sufficient for that, which are laid down by our Lord and Saviour in his word. What ground can there be why christians should not stand upon the same terms now, which they did in the time of Christ and his apostles? Was not religion sufficiently guarded and fenced in them? Was there ever more true and cordial reverence in the worship of God? What charter hath Christ given the church to bind men up to more than himself hath done, or to exclude those from her society, who may be admitted into heaven? Will Christ ever thank men at the great day for keeping such out from commu-

nion with his church, whom he will vouchsafe not only crowns of glory to, but it may be *aureolæ, of gold* too, if there be any such things there? The grand commission the apostles were sent out with, was only to teach what Christ had commanded them. Not the least intimation of any power given them to impose or require any thing beyond what himself had spoken to them, or they were directed to by the immediate guidance of the Spirit of God. It is not whether the things commanded and required be lawful or no: it is not whether indifferences may be determined or no: it is not how far christians are bound to submit to a restraint of their Christian liberty, which I now inquire after; (of those things in the treatise itself) but whether they do consult for the church's peace and unity who suspend it upon such things: how far either the example of our Saviour or his apostles doth warrant such rigorous impositions? We never read the apostles making laws but of things supposed necessary. When the council of apostles met at Jerusalem for deciding a case that disturbed the churches, peace, wese they will lay no other burden *πλην των αναγκασιων τετων* besides these necessary things. Acts 15. 28. It was not enough with them that the things would be necessary when they had required them, but they looked on an antecedent necessity either absolute or for the present state, which was the only ground of their imposing those commands upon the gentile christians. There were, after this, great diversities of practice and varieties of observations among christians, but the Holy Ghost never thought those things fit to be made matters of laws, to which all parties should conform; all that the apostles required as to these, was mutual forbearance and condescension towards each other in them. The apostles valued not differences at all, and those things it is evident they accounted such, which whether men did them or not, was not of concernment to salvation. And what reason is there why men should be so strictly tied up to such things, which they may do, or let alone, and yet be very good christians still? Without all controversy the main in-let of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions, of the Christian world, hath been by adding other conditions of church-communion than Christ hath done."

Nor am I now inquiring whether the things commanded be lawful or no: nor whether indifferences may be determined or no: nor how far christians are bound to submit to a restraint of their Christian liberty? But only inquiring (as he there doth) concerning the charter given by Christ for the binding men up more than himself hath done. And I further inquire, by what power they can be bound which Christ hath not given? And if there be no such power to bind them, suppose the

things required were all lawful (which if it can be evinced, I should rejoice to see done) yet while they cannot in conscience think they are, how can they apprehend themselves bound to be without the means of salvation, which Christ's charter entitles them to? I readily grant it is fit a man do many things for peace and common order's sake which, otherwise, no law doth formally oblige him to, that is, supposing he can do those things without intolerable prejudice to himself. And so it is commonly determined in the matter of scandals. But can it be thought a man is to put himself out of the state or way of salvation in the compliment to such as will otherwise take offence? and be so courteous as to perish for ever, rather than they shall be displeased?

Yea, and it may be moreover added, that our course being accounted lawful, must also (as the doctor speaks in another case) be thought a duty: for the things that are as means necessary to our salvation, are also necessary by divine precept. We are commanded to hear God's word, to devote ourselves and our children to God in baptism; and, at the Lord's own table, to remember him, and shew forth his death until he come. And if we compare together certain positions of this reverend author, we cannot see but he must, as our case is, acknowledge our obligation to the practice which he here seems to blame. For in his *Irenicum* (page 109.) he asserts, that every christian is under an obligation to join in church society with others; because it is his duty to profess himself a christian, and to own his religion publicly, and to partake of the ordinances and sacraments of the gospel, which cannot be without society with some church or other. And he after adds, on the same page, "It had been a cause disputed of by some (particularly by Grotius the supposed author of a little tract, *an semper sit communicandum per symbola, must we always communicate by means of symbols?* when he designed the syncretism with the church of Rome) whether in a time when churches are divided, it be a christian's duty to communicate with any of those parties which divide the church, and not rather to suspend communion from all of them." A case not hard to be decided; for either the person questioning it doth suppose the churches divided to remain true churches, but some to be more pure than other; in which case, by virtue of his general obligation to communion, he is bound to adhere to that church which appears most to retain its evangelical purity. To which purpose he further tells us, page, 110. "he knows not whether Chrysostom's act were to be commended, who after being made a deacon in the church of Antioch by Meletius, upon his death; because Flavianus came in irregularly as bishop of the church, would neither communicate with him, nor with Pau-

linus another bishop at that time in the city; nor with the Meletians but for three years time withdrew himself from communion with any of them." And, page 113. "Where any church is guilty of corruptions both in doctrine and practice, which it avoweth and professeth, and requireth the owning them as necessary conditions of communion with her, there a non-communication with that church is necessary, and a total and positive separation is lawful and convenient." What he discourses page 111, 112. upon the question, "Whether it is a sin to communicate with churches true, as to essentials, but supposed corrupt in the exercise of discipline?" many of us will no doubt heartily concur with him in. But it touches not the case of many more, who do not so much fear upon the account of the neglect of discipline, to be involved in the guilt of other men's sin; (as there seems to be little cause, that part being not incumbent upon us :) nor, if that be his meaning, when he speaks of separating on a pretence of great purity, is it the case with most of us: but we justly fear (and therefore avoid) to be made to sin ourselves, by having such things as we judge to be sinful imposed on us, as the conditions of our communion. And as to this case, this reverend author speaks our sense in in this last cited proposition, and pleads our present cause. Nor need we more to be said on behalf of it than what is reducible to that general proposition; or particularly, to that second thing, compared with the third, which page (115.) he says "makes separation and withdrawment of communion lawful and necessary; namely, corruption of practice, where we say as he doth, we speak not of practice, as relating to the civil conversation of men, but as it takes in the *agenda* of religion; when unlawful things of that kind, are not only crept into a church, but are the prescribed devotion of it: those being required (which he adds as an accession to the foregoing) as necessary conditions of communion from all the members of their church, which makes our withdrawing from them unavoidably necessary, as long as we judge them to be such corruptions as indeed they are." And whereas he instances only in such things as belong to the head of idolatrous customs, (suppressing what might be instanced under the other head, which he also there mentions; namely, superstitious practice) yet we doubt not if other things also, that appear to be sinful, besides idolatrous customs, be required as necessary conditions of communion, the case will be the same, unless we will distinguish sins, into such as be lawful, and such as be unlawful. Or there be any that may be committed, that we may be admitted to the communion of this or that church.

Now, to reduce things to the method which suits the present

case ; if this reverend author do still judge,—that where sinful conditions of communion are imposed, there non-communication is necessary (and those things be sinful to us which our consciences judge to be so,) as he hath acknowledged:—and again, if he still judge,—that we are under an obligation to join in church-society, so as to own our religion publicly, and to partake of the ordinances and sacraments of the gospel ;—he must certainly account that our duty, which he taxes in this sermon as our fault, at least till our consciences be otherwise informed, whereof many of us have no great hope.

We are indeed not so stupid, as not to apprehend there are laws, the letter whereof seems adverse to us. Nor are we so ungrateful, as not to acknowledge his Majesty's clemency in not subjecting us to the utmost rigour of those laws ; whom we cannot, without deep regret, so much as seem not, in every thing, exactly to obey. Nor can it enter into our minds to imagine, that he expects to be obeyed by us at the expence of our salvation. Or that it would be at all grateful to him, that being, as we are, unsatisfied in some things that are by the law made necessary to our partaking the privileges of the Christian church, we should become pagans in duty to him. His Majesty was once pleased to give an ample testimony, by his never to be forgotten gracious declaration of March 15, 1672. how remote any such thought was from his royal breast ; and though we humbly submit to the exigency of those reasons of state from whence it proceeded, that we enjoy not the continued positive favour which his Majesty was then pleased to express towards us ; yet we have no reason to doubt, but his propensions are equally benign as they were.

Nor, though it be uncertain to us what laws they are, the authority whereof this reverend person relies upon to make our practice sinful, yet we hope he doth not mean to urge us herein with the laws of the civil government, because those as much forbid our non-communication (and under as severe penalty) for which, he acquits us from the guilt of schism or, if we endeavour satisfaction, from any sin imputable to us.

But if that should be his meaning, we desire it may be considered how unreasonable it seems, that the design of the law relating to that part of our practice, which the doctor in this sermon condemns, being declaredly to prevent sedition ; they should take themselves to be meant who are conscious of no such design or disposition.

And again, that it is not with any reason, charity, or justice, to be supposed, that when that, and other restrictive laws were made, either the temporal ruin of so great a part of the nation, as are now found to be dissenters, was intended by

the legislators, or the reducing them to the condition of heathens. But a uniformity in the worship of God, being in itself a thing really desirable; this means was thought fit to be tried, in order to that end. And so are human laws, about such mutable matters, generally designed to be probationary; the events and success being unforeknown. Whereupon, after a competent time of trial, as his Majesty was graciously pleased to declare his own favourable sense and intention, so it is very commonly known, that the like propensions were by common suffrage expressed in parliament, namely, to grant a relaxation. So that the law, being in its own nature, nothing else but an indication of the legislator's will, we may account the thing was in substance done, so far as may satisfy a man's private reason and conscience concerning the lawgiver's intention and pleasure; though it were not done with that formality as uses (and is generally needful) to be stood upon, by them who are the ministers of the law. And that it was not done with that formality also, seemed rather to be from a disagreement about the manner or method of doing it, than about the thing to be done. And how usual is it for laws, without formal repeals, gently and gradually to expire, grow old, and vanish away, not being longer useful, as the ritual part of the Mosaical law did become an ineffectual and unprofitable thing? And how easy were it to instance in many other laws, the letter of which, they that urge these against the dissenters, do without scruple transgress? And from which no such weighty reasons do urge to borrow now and then a point? How many dispense with themselves in many parts of their required conformity, that have obliged themselves to it? The priests in the temple transgress the law, and are blameless. Yea, and he that knows all things, and who is Judge of all, knows how little scruple is made of transgressing the laws by gross immoralities and debaucheries. Men learn to judge of the sacredness of laws by their own inclinations. Any that can be wire-drawn, and made by torture to speak against religion not modified their way, must be most binding. Such as prohibit the vilest and most open wickedness, bind as the withs did Sampson.

The sum of all is, that whereas we are under the obligation of the divine law to worship God in the use of those his ordinances which require to be dispensed and attended in society, and that we apprehend we cannot do it without sin in the way this reverend author invites us to. Whereas also we do, with this author, deliberate, whether Christ hath given any power to men to oblige us to the things we scruple, or disoblige us from the things we practise, and judge it unproved. We cannot but reckon the judgment the doctor hath given in our case

(that our practice is sinful) is erroneous and indefensible by any man, but least fitly, of most other men, attempted to be defended by himself. From whom it would little have been expected that he should so earnestly recommend that very thing to us, as the only foundation of union, which he had so publicly told us in his preface to the Irenicum, "was, without controversy, the main in-let of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world, namely, the adding other conditions of church-communion than Christ hath done."

And though he hath lately told the world, there are some passages in that book that shew only the inconsiderateness of youth, and that he seems to wish unsaid, yet he hath not, that we know, declared that these are some of them. However, since this present determination and judgment of his against us is so peremptory and positive, as well as severe, let us, in the next place,

2. Consider, and carefully examine, as we are concerned, what he hath performed in defence of it; and, it is to be hoped, the inefficacy and weakness of his attempt therein will sufficiently appear. What I can find in his sermon, hath any aspect or design that way, is either *ad rem*, or, *ad hominem*. And, to my apprehension, his reasonings, of the one kind or the other, are altogether unconcluding.

(1.) As to what may be supposed to be *ad rem*, if you look narrowly, you will find, that the principal things alleged by him, that can, under that notion, give support to his cause, are only affirmed, but not proved. For instance, page 9. when he tells us, that the "apostle supposed the necessity of one fixed and certain rule," &c. this had been very material to his purpose; if, first. He had told us, and had proved, the apostle meant some rule or other super-added to the sacred Scriptures: for then he might, it is to be presumed, as easily have let us know what that rule was, which, most probably, would have ended all our controversy; it being little to be doubted, we should all most readily have agreed to obey it: or, secondly, if he had proved, that, because the apostle had power to make such a rule, and oblige the churches to observe it, that therefore such church-guides as they, whose cause the doctor pleads, have an equal power to make other rules divers from his, containing many new things, which he never enjoined, and to enforce them upon the church; (though manifestly tending to its destruction, rather than edification:). but these things he doth but suppose himself, without colour of proof.

Again, for his notion of churches, page 16, 17, 18, 19. examine as strictly as you will what he says about it; and see whether it come to any thing more than only to represent a na-

tional church a possible thing? And whereto the name church, may without absurdity be given. His own words seem to aim no higher. "Why may there not be one national church from the consent in the same articles of religion, and the same order of worship?" page 18. "The word was used in the first ages of the Christian church, as it comprehended the ecclesiastical governors, and the people of whole cities. And why many of these cities being united together under one civil government and the same rules of religion, should not be called one national church, I cannot understand," page 19.

But can it now be inferred thence, that therefore God hath actually constituted every Christian kingdom or nation such a church? Can it further be inferred, that he hath invested the guides of this church, not chosen by the people (according to Scripture, and primitive practice for some ages) with a power to make laws and degrees, prescribing not only things necessary for common order and decency, but new federal rites, and teaching signs and symbols, superadded to the whole Christian institution; with many more dubious and unnecessary things besides? And to exclude sober and pious christians, from the privileges that are proper to the Christian church, as such, merely for that out of conscience towards God, they dare not admit into their worship those additions to the Christian religion? to take order they shall have no pastors, no sacraments, no assemblies for worship? And because they will not be so much more than christians, that they shall not be christians at all?

He that would go about to make these inferences merely from the forementioned ground, Would gain to be laughed at by all sober men, instead of a conclusion, whatsoever better success he should have, who should undertake to prove the same things any other way.

This reverend author was so wise as not to attempt either of these. But then in the mean time, What doth the mere possible notion of such a church advantage his cause? Because it is possible, there might have been such a Macedonian, or such a Lydian church, is such a one therefore necessary? and any other constitution of a Christian church impossible, or unlawful? Or because the general meeting of magistrates of the whole city and people together in pagan Athens was called *Εκκλησια*, therefore such must be the constitution of a Christian church? And therefore such a church hath such powers from Christ as were above mentioned?

Here howsoever we make our stand, and say that until the doctor hath proved these two things.

[1.] That such a church as he hath given us the notion of, as

of a thing merely possible, is actually a divine institution : and [2.] That God hath given to the ecclesiastical governors in it never chosen by the Christian community, or to any other power, to super-add institutions of the nature above mentioned, and to enforce them under the mentioned penalties : all his reasonings that pretend to be *ad rem*, are to no purpose, and do nothing at all advantage his cause.

Yet there are some passages in this part of his discourse, that though they signify nothing to his main purpose, are yet very remarkable, and which it is fit we should take some notice of.

As when, page 16. He tells us what he means by whole churches ; namely, “ The churches of such nations, which upon the decay of the Roman empire, resumed their just power of government to themselves, and upon their owning Christianity, incorporated into one Christian society, under the same common ties and rules of order and government.” As if there could be no whole churches in the world that had not been of the Roman empire, or as if those of the Roman empire could not have been whole churches without resumption of the civil government ; as we suppose he means.

Or, as if (which he intimates, page 19.) we needed this (so dearly espoused notion as a ground) to acquit us from the imputation of schism, in our separating from the church of Rome. Which certainly it were not for the advantage of the protestant cause to admit : for then all that remain within the empire, were bound to continue in the communion of the Roman church. And in the other kingdoms, where princes have not resumed their just right of reforming errors in doctrine, and corruptions in worship ; all should be schismatics that should separate from the church of Rome.

Again, when page 17. He would confute that great mistake, the making the notion of a church barely to relate to acts of worship : (a mistake whereof I never knew any man guilty) he surely runs into as great an opposite mistake, in making the notion of a church to be no more than of a society of men united together, for their order and government, according to the rules of the Christian religion. Now faith and worship are quite excluded the notion of a church : and order and government and the rules of the Christian religion, but as they refer to these, only included. Whence it will come to pass, that we can have no notion of one catholic church, from which yet he argues at the bottom of the same page.

Nor, though I dislike the thing, do I understand the strength of the doctor's argument, against making the notion of the church barely to relate to acts of worship ; namely, That if

this held true, the church must be dissolved as soon as the congregation is broken up. For will it not also follow as well, that if the notion of a church relate only to order and government, every time any meeting for affairs of order and government is broken up, the church is dissolved? And that an assembly of the states in any kingdom or nation cannot break up without a dissolution of the government? A parliament (at least) not adjourn or be prorogued without being dissolved? And whereas he adds, but if they retain the nature of a church, when they do not meet together for worship, then there is some other bond that unites them, and whatever that is, it constitutes the church. Is it not possible there may be such a bond for worship, as well as for government? an obligation to meet at stated times for that purpose, when they are not met? And then (if this were all that were to be said to the contrary) why might not that bond as well serve to constitute the church? But

2. For his reasonings *ad hominem*, they need not detain us long; he argues from the judgment of the assembly of divines, and others. All which arguing must suppose, if it concern us, that we are bound to be of the same judgment with the ministers that are and have been so and so minded, which I for my part understand not. But I perceive here his intention is, having endeavoured to draw us off from our ministers; now to move another stone, and try if he can draw them off from us.

For the assembly, I think it fit those that survive of them should be as much concluded by what they then determined, as this reverend author by the *Irenicum*. But I know no reason that such as they never represented, nor who ever pretended to be of their party, should be concluded to the world's end. Nor do understand why even the same party may not be as well supposed in a possibility, to vary from itself in forty years, as the same man from himself in less than twenty. If they did incline to deal too hardly with their brethren, that will not justify them who deal more hardly. It is hoped such as have been so inclined, have, being smitten, and suffered the rebukes of the Almighty, repented it, and are become wiser: and when some think themselves grown wiser by prosperity, others by adversity, there is less reason to suspect the latter.

Yet also this reverend author ought to have considered the great disparity of the cases he would parallel. For when one sort of men are considering of having only such a frame of things settled, as are imposed by Christ himself, whether they judge rightly or no, that he hath imposed every part of that frame, yet while they think and judge that he hath, and consequently that nothing is to be abated of it: it were very unfitly argued,

that therefore another sort professing to impose many things never imposed by Christ, should abate nothing of their unnecessary impositions.

For such as the doctor quotes besides of the non-conformists, acknowledging the parish churches true churches, and the lawfulness of holding, sometimes, communion with some of them; it is not to be thought but among so many parties as come all under one common notion of dissenters from the public rule (and whom that rule did not find one, but made them so in that common notion) there must be great diversity of opinions, and proportionably differing practices in these matters. I heartily prefer the most moderate, as I believe you do. But here this reverend author takes occasion for so ignominious reflections upon our preachers, as insincere, dishonest, and unconscientious, as I doubt not, in one twenty years more, his ingenuity will oblige him to repent more heartily, than ever it permitted him to do of his Irenicum. Because he can allege a very few persons that have spoken to this purpose, therefore, first it must be represented to the world as their common judgment; next, they are charged with concealing this judgment (why is this kept up as such a mighty secret in the breasts of their teachers? page 37.) and then it is endeavoured to make men think they practise against their own judgments, in preaching to separate congregations.

Surely you and I are concerned, as we have occasion, to say what we truly can, for the just vindication of our ministers. I doubt not but you believe, and you have, for some, particular reason to be confident that, it is for our sakes they expose themselves to the displeasure of such men as Dr. Stillingfleet. I must, for my part, say,

(1.) that I believe it to be the judgment of very few, that every parish is, as such, a true Christian church. I am sorry I have such a ground to fear it of one kind, namely, that some may not be so, as not having among them any tolerable understanding of the most confessedly fundamental principles of Christian religion. What say you to such, where the minister is grossly ignorant of the principles of religion, or habitually vicious, and of a profligate life? Do mere orders make him a minister, who (perhaps since he received them) is become destitute of the most essential qualifications? any more than the habit, a monk? or a beard, a philosopher? Can a Mercury be made of every log? not to insist that this reverend author can scarce think they are, from a ground of another kind, because they assemble only for worship, and not for government.

(2.) And surely, a church may be unfit to be communicated with, although it be a true church; (those words of the reve-

rend and worthy dean of Canterbury carry their own light with them to this purpose †) as a man may be truly and really a man, though he have the plague upon him, and for that reason be fit to be avoided by all that wish well to themselves. It is true, there are vastly different degrees of that unfitness. But I see not how they can apprehend there is the fitness which is simply necessary, who judge there are conditions of communion imposed that are sinful.

And I believe this reverend author will think it possible a true church may impose some sinful conditions of her communion; in which case, he hath determined a non-communication with her necessary and unavoidable.

(3.) For those that are of that judgment, the parochial assemblies ought to be communicated with so far as is alleged was declared. As I know none of the dissenting ministers, that thought they ought always, and only to be communicated with, so I see not with what pretence it can be said they keep up their judgment herein, as a mighty secret. If it be so, how came this author to have it revealed to him? Is printing it to the world keeping it secret? Some have published it in that way, as we see is known to the doctor. Others, by their frequent discourses, and their own practice. And, to my observation, divers of them have in their sermons made it much their business to dispose the minds of their hearers to a truly Catholic Christian union, as I have been much pleased to take notice, some of the conforming clergy do also. But if this be the doctor's quarrel with any of our ministers (who think such communion lawful) that they do not constantly, in every sermon, inculcate the business of communicating in the ceremonial way, for my part, I shall blame them as much as he, when once he hath made it very evident, that the ceremonies are more profitable, and likely to do more good to the souls of men, than repentance, the faith of the gospel, the fear of God, a good life in this world, and eternal life in the other; which I confess are the more usual subjects, so far as I have had the opportunity to observe, of their preaching.

And, let me add, that I can tell you of a secret, which some might be apt to think (as it is really so) is industriously and much more unrighteously kept up in one man's breast, that may be conscious of a great design in it. The author of the book, entitled, *The Weapon Salve, or Irenicum*, seems to have found it some inconveniency to him, to have been the author of so good a book; whereupon, in a certain soliloquy, (though he is pleased to represent it as a tripartite dialogue) he asks

† Sermon on Josh. 24. 15.

himself his own opinion of it, and gives himself this answer; I will tell you freely (as you know men use great liberty in talking with themselves, though prudence would direct that to be done in some cases, with great caution, and not to talk inconvenient things too loud, lest they be too much overheard) I believe there are many things in it, which if Dr. Stillingfleet were to write now, he would not have said, for there are some things which shew his youth, and want of due consideration; others, in which he yielded too far, &c. Now here (though I believe he had begun to be inclined to throw away his salve, and use only the weapon for the wounding of sound parts, not the cutting off the incurable, yet) I conceive one may safely enough take it for granted, his intention was not to retract the whole book. But whereas he tells us not what he doth: how would the doctor take it if one should ask, Why is this kept up as such a mighty secret in his own breast? Or, say the tenderness of his mind might, it is likely, out of mere shamefacedness, keep him from declaring against what his own conscience tells him is truth? However, this retraction cannot make that which was true become false. The reason of things is sullen, and will not alter to serve men's conveniencies. Perhaps, indeed, his judgment is really altered. If therefore he would acquit himself like an honest and conscientious man, let him tell the world plainly, which be the pernicious principles of that book, that honest and conscientious men, who have thought well of many things in it, (and perhaps the same things which he now disapproves) may not always be deceived by the shews of reason that deceived himself, and by which he deceived them. The same justice that obliges not to lay a stumbling-block in the way of the blind, doth also oblige him to remove it who hath laid it: which is to be done, not by professing another opinion, for we depend not on his authority, which he hath himself so much diminished; but on the reasons he alleged, which if they were fallacious, let him shew wherein, and answer his own reasons. To say the truth, the gravity and seriousness wherewith that book was written, appears to have so little of the youth in it, in comparison of the jocularly, and sportful humour of some of his latter writings, when he hath been discussing the most weighty and important cases of conscience, that it seems as a prodigy in nature, and that he began his life at the wrong end; that he was old in his youth, and reserved his puerility to his more grown age. But we hope there is a great residue behind, wherein he may have opportunity and inclination to shew the world, that he did not repent the pious design of that book: or, at least, with a repentance that (can as well as that) ought to be repented of.

(4.) And whereas such of the dissenting ministers, as have

most openly declared for communicating at some times with some of the parochial churches, have also declared their judgment of the lawfulness and necessity of preaching and hearing, and doing other religious duties in other congregations also. If now either the doctor discern not the inconsistency of these things, or they discern not their inconsistency; is there nothing to be said or thought, but that they acquit not themselves like honest and conscientious men? Must it be taken for a demonstration of a man's want of honesty and conscience, not to be presently of the doctor's opinion in every thing? or not to see every consequence which he sees, or thinks he sees?

But let us consider the goodness of this consequence, which it must be so great a piece of dishonesty not to discern. If it be the duty of some to communicate sometimes with some parish churches, (for this is the most the doctor could make of that re-lator's concession, whom he cites page 21, 22. of his sermon) therefore it is the duty of every one to communicate with any parish church where his abode is, so constantly and entirely as never to have any communion with any otherwise constituted congregation.

This is the thing, must be to his purpose inferred; yea and he would have it be from somewhat a lower premise. For he tells us, page 37. "that he dare say, if most of the preachers at this day in the separate meetings were soberly asked their judgment, whether it were lawful (only) for the people to join with us in the public assemblies, they would not deny it." He surely dares not say that their meaning was, that it was lawful constantly to join with them in all their parochial assemblies, unless he dares say, what he hath not, from any of them, the least ground to think. Now hereupon he collects, page 38. that our ministers cannot declare so much in a separate congregation, but this truth must fly in their faces: because he supposeth it repugnant to it, to preach at all in a separate congregation, and yet afterwards on the same page, he so well agrees with himself, as to bid them, if they would acquit themselves like honest and conscientious men, tell the people plainly that they look on our churches as true churches, and that they may lawfully communicate with us in prayers and sacraments. And where are they to tell them so, but in the separate congregations? Singly and severally he knows it were impossible. Nor do I think he would reckon honesty and conscience obliged them to come and tell the people so in their congregations.

Now I am afraid there are but a very few honest and conscientious men in the world at this day, if none are to go for such, but who can perceive the strength and reasonableness of the above-mentioned consequence.

And that you may further see what reasons our ministers may

have, notwithstanding all the alleged concessions, to administer in the worship of God in our assemblies; though it were never so much their common universal judgment, that they and we might sometimes communicate in some of the parochial; let us consider, that in the more populous and frequented places, as with you at London for instance, the churches cannot receive, some not a tenth part, some not half the people belonging to them, few can receive all. Methinks good men should not be offended that multitudes do in this distress relieve themselves by resorting to other places for necessary instruction. And though they be the inclinations of the people that divide them this way and that (as it can be nothing else) though places for their resort be not every where most conveniently situate for their resort, where there is most need, (which must be taken not always where it were most desirable, but where they can be had) yet they that have a mind, had better go to places at a more inconvenient distance, than have no whither to go; and it is better the necessities of many should be provided for in such an exigency, than of none. In the mean time, the churches of worthy conforming ministers in such populous places are generally filled, as I have been informed, and have sometimes had occasion to observe.

Do not necessities of a much lower nature oblige us to recede from stated human rules? It is well known there is a law against relieving such as beg out of their own parishes. But if one find upon the road such a poor wretch ready to perish, am I not bound, notwithstanding, if I can, to relieve him? And who would think in such a case, I transgressed the true intention of the law?

Yea and God's own laws respecting rituals, common order, and the external part of religion, were by his own direction to yield to far less urgent necessities. To the plucking an ass or an ox out of a ditch, how much more the souls of men? Have we not read what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him, how he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shew-bread, which it was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? How expressly is it alleged by our blessed Saviour, against those nice and punctillious observers and urgers of the letter of the law, the pharisees, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. And if he were willing to abate a sacrifice to himself, that there might be room for the exercise of mercy towards men's bodies, how monitory and apprehensive should that be to such merciless persons, as would have the very souls of men themselves be sacrificed to their stiff and unyielding humours! Positive laws cease to bind when, by accident, they thwart the law of nature.

Which binds to nothing more deeply than the endeavour of saving one's own soul, and (within the bounds of his calling) his neighbour's as his own.

What if many of our ministers think it lawful, and, at some times, a duty to join in some of the public assemblies? It is not then their duty, when an inviting opportunity, and so urging necessities lay before them greater duty. This reverend author tells us, very pertinently to this purpose, when he was declaiming against us and our ministers, page 31. of his sermon: "It is a great fault among some who pretend to great niceness in some positive duties, that they have little regard to some comparative duties: for that which may be a duty in one case, when it comes to thwart a greater duty, may be none. This doctrine we learn from our blessed Saviour in the case of the obligation of the sabbath; which he makes to yield to duties of mercy. And can we think that a duty lying upon us, which, in our circumstances, makes a far greater duty impracticable? We acknowledge order and unity very lovely and desirable things, but we think it of greater importance that the ministers with whom such fault is found, conduct men, though not in so accurate order, (which they cannot help) to heaven, than let them go in the best order, yea (and as the case is) without any at all, to hell.

And what though the necessity of many of us arise from our own scruples, and what though those scruples, were without ground, doth it therefore follow we must be abandoned to perish? when our very error, if we be willing to admit conviction (as we sincerely are, could the matter admit it) is not imputable to us for a sin? This author was once pleased to make it one of his proposals for accommodation, page 64. of his *Irenicum*; "That no sanctions be made, nor mulct or penalties be inflicted on such, who only dissent from the use of some things, whose lawfulness they at present scruple, until sufficient time and means be used for the information of the nature and indifferency of the things, that it may be seen whether it be out of wilful contempt, and obstinacy of spirit, or only weakness of conscience, and dissatisfaction concerning the things themselves, that they disobey. And if it be made evident to be out of contempt, that only such penalties be inflicted as answer to the nature of the offence." Where he adds, "I am sure it is contrary to the primitive practice, and the moderation then used, to suspend and deprive men of their ministerial function for not conforming in habits, gestures, or the like." Which he makes good by following instances beyond his own present contradictions. It is strange that for such like things, now, it is thought so highly just, that our ministers are

totally to be kept out of the ministry, and we out of the church, and way of salvation! Are these unproportionable penalties even where contempt appears? And what are they when, through God's mercy, there appears not the least colour of it?

Is mere scrupling a human device in the worship of God, and an inability to see with other men's eyes, and to mould and form our judgment and consciences, as some other men can do theirs, a crime so inexpiable, that nothing less than our eternal ruin can satisfy for it? They know, who have read the Turkish history, that mere scruple brought that necessity upon the garrison of Sfetigrade in Scanderbeg's days, that rather than drink of water which they thought polluted, they must either surrender or perish. If another possible way could have been found to supply them, was it fit they and the town should rather be lost, than their unreasonable scruple be borne with? Or should they, in that exigency, be still held to it, to drink of that very water or none? We think we have greater reason to urge for our scruples, we think our necessity is greater, the case more important, and God deliver us from such pastors, as will not think so too, and value souls at a higher rate.

Our case being thus, we apply ourselves to ministers, bound by their calling and office to attend the affairs of the souls of men, they are at leisure, have nothing else to do, they may not live idle and useless in the world. This is their proper business. Whatever their opinion is about the things we scruple (and we believe it is mostly the same with ours) we see not how they can, or dare, deny us the help of their ministerial labours: we thank God that they dare not. And should they daily spend their pains upon us to urge us to the ceremonial way, as we believe they would do it very heartlessly (wishing things to be in that respect, otherwise in the Christian church, as well as we) so would their labour in that kind be unprofitable, and therefore ungrateful to us. Nor do we think it needs any sort of mortifiedness in them (as we find they are jeered under that notion) not to send us away unedified and grieved from their congregations; so much as a mortifiedness in their love of souls, and their sense of eternal concernments; wherein too many others, have attained to a great degree of mortification.

But now, my honoured friend, What think you of our cause? Let us seriously consider it, not according to the appearance which it will have to a captious sophistical wit; but as you will apprehend it to look in the eyes of our supreme and final Judge; considering also the same blessed Jesus, as that mighty Redeemer and Lover of souls, who once suffered, the just for the unjust, to bring them to God. Bring the matter before him, with whom you are to expect no tricks, but most plain

and equal dealing. And bethink yourself, whether of these two things he will be more likely to have regard unto, the saving of souls, which he bought with his blood; or, the preserving inviolate certain human institutions and rules, confessed by the devisers of them not to be necessary to the being of the church, which common reason sees unnecessary to its well being, to its external order and decency (evidently as great without them) which this author makes foreign thereto, when he tells us, that matters of order and decency are allowable and fitting, but ceremonies properly taken for actions significative, and therefore appointed because significative, their lawfulness may with better ground be scrupled, *Iren.* page 68. And which experience shews to be destructive. As whereby so great numbers, not only of his labourers are to be discarded, but of living, flourishing plants to be torn up by the roots, and all thrown out of his vineyard together?

For my own part, I must profess not to have the least doubt concerning the thing itself which we and our minister do, and practise, it is only our common great concern, to be very careful with what temper of spirit, and with what design we do it. It should to the uttermost be endeavoured to be done with all meekness and humility, with all possible reverence to authority, abhorrence of the least real contempt, and unfeigned regret there should be any appearance of it, though never so unavoidable; with a design only to glorify God, and promote the common salvation: not to make or serve a party, or advance any other interest than that of mere substantial Christianity and godliness. Let us covet this temper of mind, and where we see persons of real worth, and of a true latitude and largeness of spirit, commensurate to the Christian interest, that fall in with the public constitution, value and love them nothing the less, than if their judgments about these lesser things were never so exactly squared with our own, and so much more, by how much they may excel us in far greater and more valuable things. And if it be our lot to suffer under the notion of evil doers for doing what we take to be our duty, let it be according to the doctor's wholesome counsel, with an unrepining patience, and with much thankfulness both to God and our rulers, that we have enjoyed so much tranquillity; and with that cheerfulness that becomes those that expect a blessed eternity; and to be translated ere long into a pure and peaceful region, where we are to serve God, in society even with many of them who have been offended with us, without scruple or trouble to ourselves or them. If with such dispositions and aims we persist in our course, while our case is attended with such circumstances as now it is; I have no fear, I sincerely profess to you, of our

acceptance with God, and, sooner or later, with all good men.

Upon the whole matter, I conceive the honest cause you were so deeply concerned for, is really unharmed, and I hope you apprehend it too ; and that therefore your fear and despondency was causeless, as if it could not outlive this attempt against it by Doctor Stillingfleet. As you therefore see how capable it is of defence against him, I shall not forget the other part of my undertaking : but shall,

*Secondly.* Say somewhat (as your's sufficiently lets me see there is cause) in his just defence against you. And really, Sir, though that be an untoward thing to dispute against, I find it needful to defend him only against your anger, that is, the excess of it : which, although it can no more harm him, than he hath done the cause ; and consequently the blunting and breaking its edge (which is the thing I aim at) cannot advantage him, yet it will do him right ; and (which was the thing I first intended) it will be an advantage and kindness to you.

I must here indeed tell you, that I cannot blame you for being in some measure offended, as I can excuse the doctor but in part. I do dislike, as well as you, two things especially in his way of managing this business ; namely, his too great acrimony, and too little seriousness.

For the former, it is too evident, and I heartily pity him for it, that he should so forget, and suffer himself to be transported beyond the rules of Christianity and prudence ; neither of which would allow him, (and I am sure within the compass of the former, his text would not) so as to make himself a standard to all other men, and to suppose no man can be honest or conscientious that is not of his mind in the matters he then undertook to controvert, or that should not judge of the connections of things as he did. I cannot think it hath added to his reputation to reflect so grossly before such an assembly, upon a whole party of men that are, many of them, well known in the world ; and who, in point of integrity, are so little liable to be suspected, that an attempt to blemish them upon so slight a pretence, and in matter of fact, so untrue, could not but recoil upon himself ; especially with them that shall impartially compare their inducements to prevaricate with what he hath.

And for the other, it were indeed to have been wished, that upon so grave and solemn an occasion he had forborne jests, especially of that nature ; as for instance, such mortified and conscientious men, and the most godly—can least endure to be told of their faults, &c. Which expressions, any one that considers his scope, will understand to be ironical ; and that considers the matter, to be somewhat bold ironies ; and the occasion, to be causeless ones. Inasmuch as it is not impossible,

that truly mortified and conscientious men may desire opportunities to do God service in the world, in a way that he dislikes. And it may consist with real godliness not to count all those things faults which he takes to be such. And indeed, in his dedication, his way of averting the report of those ill men, that he intended to stir up the magistrates and judges to a persecution of the dissenters, is, to any considering man, sportful and ludicrous; namely, offering them only such a way of escaping persecution, as whereupon a man may shun suffering, if he please, from any party of men in the world, as such, by being in every thing of their mind and way: but which in effect grants the charge which he would avoid, that if we will not be so united to his party, we were to expect nothing but utmost rigour. One would rather have thought he should have bedewed that discourse with tears, which had in itself, most manifestly so awful, and tremendous a design, as not only the devoting of so great numbers, that might possibly not be convinced, and persuaded by him, to a temporal ruin; but the depriving them of the ordinary means of their salvation. And that, if he thought it necessary for the preserving of order in the church, they should be so dealt with; he should have spoken of their case with the greatest compassion and tenderness, not with derision and contempt.

Yet I would have you use lenitives with yourself, and calm your own spirit; and I wish you were capable of contributing any thing to the moderating and pacifying his too. That though he have been angry unprovoked, and with a sort of men that have ever respected and honoured him, as if he had been of themselves; his anger that hath been without cause, (as you know perhaps who in a like expression blames the exorbitancy of another passion) may not also be without end. At least, I pray you take heed you do not deserve the like sharp repartee, which the cynick met with from that noble philosopher, that he taxed his pride with greater pride; that you exceed not the heats whereof you complain. If he will still retain his fervour, let him be angry alone: and his displeasure have its continuance, with as little influence or concomitancy of yours, (and I could wish of any other man's) as (for ought I know) it had its beginning. And that since he thinks of being a sacrifice, he may only burn gently in his own flame, which he may moderate as he please, and I hope will seasonably extinguish, before he hath suffered much harm by it.

For the qualifying of your own too great resentment and offence; I would have you consider how great reason you have to believe, that this blow came only from the (somewhat misgoverned) hand of a pious and good man. Be it far from you

to imagine otherwise. If you think he was to blame for intimating suspicions of their sincerity whom he opposes, make not yourself equally blamable, by admitting hereupon any concerning his. Which would argue a mean narrow spirit, and a most unwarrantable fondness of a party, as if all true religion and godliness were bound up in it.

And if it look unlovely in your eyes to see one of so much avowed latitude and enlargedness of mind, and capable upon that account of being the more universally serviceable to the Christian church, forsaking that comprehensive interest, so far as to be engulfed into a party upon a private and distinct basis, consider what aspect the same thing would have in yourself. And never make his difference with you in this matter, a reason to yourself of a hard judgment concerning him; who can, you must consider, differ no more from us, than we do from him.

Believe him, in the substance of what he said, to speak according to his present judgment. Think how gradually and insensibly men's judgments alter, and are formed by their converse: that his circumstances have made it necessary to him to converse most for a long time, with those who are fully of that mind which he here discovers, that his own real worth must have drawn into his acquaintance the best and most valuable of them, and such for whom he might not only have a kindness, but a reverence; and who, therefore, must have the more power and influence upon him, to conform his sentiments to their own.

We ourselves do not know, had we been, by our circumstances, led to associate and converse mostly with men of another judgment, what our own would have been. And they that are wont to discover most confidence of themselves, do usually but discover most ignorance of the nature of man; and how little they consider the power of external objects and inducements to draw men's minds this way or that. Nor indeed, as to matters of this nature, can any man be confident that the grace of God shall certainly incline him to be of this, or another opinion or practice in these matters; because we find those that we have no reason to believe have great assistances of divine grace are divided about them, and go not all one way.

We may indeed be confident that had the same considerations occurred to us which have, we should have been of the same mind and judgment that we are. But it is very supposable that some accidental occasions might possibly have happened, that might hinder our actual taking up such considerations, though the things to be considered were not unknown to us. And not that only, but that might prevent our knowing even

matters of fact, that have signified not a little to the determining our judgments that way which they now incline to.

And I do particularly believe (as I doubt not but God is graciously present with those that in the sincerity of their hearts have chosen to serve him in the way which the law prescribes so) that if Dr. Stillingfleet had known what proofs there are of that same gracious presence, in these so much censured meetings, his thoughts would have been very different of them from what they are. I do not speak of proselyting men to a party, which I heartily despise as a mean and inconsiderable thing: but have known some, and heard of many instances of very ignorant and profane persons, that have been led, perhaps by their own curiosity, or it may be, by the persuasion of some neighbour or friend, to hear and see what was done in such meetings, that have (through God's blessing, upon so despised means) become very much reformed men, and (for ought that could be judged) serious and sincere christians. And whereas some, that have very prejudicial thoughts of all that frequent such meetings, may be apt to suspect all effects of that kind, to be nothing else but illusions of fancy, or a disposition (at least) to enthusiasm, or an artificial and industrious hypocrisy; I am very confident that if the doctor had had the opportunity, frequently to observe and converse with such, as we have had, and heard the sobriety and consistency of their discourse, and seen the unaffected simplicity, humility, and heavenliness of their conversation, he could not have allowed himself the liberty of such hard censures, but would have judged of many such persons as you and I do.

Upon supposition of all which, I make little question but it would have been very remote from him to wish that so many persons had rather lived in sin, and perished for ever; than have been brought to repentance and a good life, by being now and then at a separate meeting.

So that for the substance of what he hath said against such meetings, we have reason to impute it to his judgment; and his judgment to such circumstances, very much, as I have mentioned, that have led him the way he hath taken; and not given him opportunity to know what might have begot a better opinion in him of the way which he opposes.

But for the manner of his treating of this subject, that I impute to the prevalency of some present temptation; and hope he did not express in that sermon his habitual temper. And am highly confident, notwithstanding what he hath said in it; if it were in his power, we might even safely trust him to prescribe us terms, and should receive no hard ones from him.

Somewhat it is likely he was expected (and might be urged)

to say to this business. And his own thoughts being set a work, fermented into an intemperate heat, which, it is to be hoped, will in time evaporate.

If I may freely speak to you my own thoughts, he seems to deal in this business, as one that forced himself to say somewhat. For though I apprehend he speaks his judgment, yet the expressing it in this time and manner he might regret. And because it might appear a becoming thing to him to seem earnest, the temptation prevailed with him (against his habitual inclination) to supply with sharpness the defect of reason; which the poverty of the cause afforded not. For really his reasonings are faint, unconcluding, and unlike Dr. Stillingfleet. So that if any expected this performance from him, one may think (and this ought in some part to excuse him) that, besides some little flourishes of his reading and wit, he seems only to have lent them his name. Which however I pray you let still be of great value with you. And turn your displeasure into serious earnest praying for him, and that his spirit may not be further harmed; that, amidst his many temptations, he may be delivered and preserved from being at all puffed up, or any way embittered; and that so valuable a person be not lost, or in the least degree, rendered less useful to the church of God. And that all that know his more inward conversation, may discern in his frequent savoury discourses, in his continued serious calling upon God in his family, in his readiness to do good, especially to the souls of men, in his aptness to condescend to those that are much beneath him, how great the efficacy is of divine grace. And that, through the power of it, a great measure of wit, learning, applause, and secular advantages, may not only consist with vivid godliness, and sincere devotedness to the interest of religion, but contribute abundantly to the service and diffusion thereof in the world. I am very serious in this advice to you. Nor, thanks be to God, have so low or profane thoughts of prayer (which hath ever borne so great a part in the religion of all times, notions, and sorts of men) as to think it will signify nothing, especially when the design of it is not mean and private, but such wherein all good men will unite.

I little doubt, but if ever there shall be good days, and a happy state of things on earth, a factious zeal for parties will become a contemptible thing: and all the discriminative accretions to religion, which are severally scandalous to all other parties except their own, who embrace any sort of them (too probably for the sake of some secular interest or other, which is hoped to be gratified and engaged thereby) will be spontaneously quitted and abandoned by all parties, from an overpow-

ering sense and grateful relish of substantial religion itself ; that is, entire devotedness to God and the Redeemer, with the joyful expectation of the blessedness of the other world : and so all become one.

But is this to be done while we sleep and do nothing ? Or, have we in our circumstances, any thing to do, by which we may hope to contribute so much towards it, as by prayer ? By this means (if men of sincere and pious minds, did with universal and abstracted aims, apply themselves to this great duty) we are to reckon the blessed spirit of holiness, love, and peace, would be more and more drawn into consent. Do you your own part herein, you will find your own present advantage by it ; it will fill you with good thoughts, hopes, and expectations. The kindly benign influences whereof, will pleasantly qualify and temper your spirit, and make you know how much more grateful an inhabitant that charity is, which thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, than frowardness, discontent, vexation, and anger, at any one that thinks and speaks otherwise, than you did expect or wish. Insist upon such things in prayer, as wherein it may reasonably be expected good men shall generally agree with you. You have the more reason to expect being heard ; yea, and ought to hope the spirit of this person, whom you have taken such offence at, will be rescued out of temptation, and be drawn into full consent with you. For you have no cause to doubt, but that he hath those principles wrought into the temper of his mind, which need only resuscitation, that they may dispose him to union with the whole body of sober and serious christians of his own way, or of others, (whosoever that can be seasonably endeavoured for) upon more probable and hopeful terms than he hath proposed in this sermon. Therefore be you serious and fervent in requests to this purpose, as you have that love to God and his church, which you profess ; and that value for this worthy person, which I reckon you still ought to have : or (if that can be fit to be added) any kindness for

*SIR,*

Your affectionate Servant, &c.

**S**INCE my writing these pages, I hear of answers to the dean's sermon ; which, in so remote a corner, I have had no opportunity to see : what is here written may therefore (upon comparing) be communicated, or suppressed, as shall be thought fit.

And so I should take leave of you, but that it may be needful, whereas I have principally considered in these papers, the case of such as think it unlawful to join in the public assemblies ; to add somewhat (whomsoever it may serve) in reference to their case that think otherwise. For to say the truth, this is here the more common case. And though the doctor believes they that frequent the separate meetings, do generally judge it unlawful to join in the public ; howsoever it is with you, (and it is likely the doctor speaks of what is more within the compass of his own knowledge, or theirs who inform him :) it is with us in this part of the country quite contrary. And I may truly say, that in this place (and others where I have sometimes occasionally been) the generality of them who come to the other meetings do also attend the public.

Now these may perhaps think themselves left under blame, and may apprehend the doctor's consequence is strong against them, (that if occasional communion be lawful, constant communion must be a duty :) which he no doubt, understands exclusively of any distinct way of communion.

And if indeed they judge that consequence strong, I would fain know what hurt they can think it doth them ? Why should any man be afraid of his duty ? Or of the truth which makes it known ? And, if hereupon, they can, with the satisfaction of their own consciences, wave all other opportunities of worshipping God with others of his people, they have the less to do : and why should they complain who are satisfied ?

But in short, either they apprehend such other additional means, a real necessary help and advantage to them, or they do not. If they do not, they have no cause to trouble themselves, nor to grudge that so much is said for others; whose, for ought I know, may, as the doctor thinks, (for I cannot make an estimate from this or that little spot) be the much more common case. If they do, they have little reason to be concerned about the doctor's consequence: which I must wonder if he himself can think strong. It hath not, you see, been altogether overlooked in the foregoing discourse: and if any feel themselves wounded by it; he is so great an Achilles, that they may have their wound and healing from the same hand.

For, as hath been noted from him in his preface to the *Irenicum*, he seems plainly to intimate, that men have no charter, or grant of divine power, to make other conditions of church communion than Christ hath made. If so, then the conditions by which this way of communion is distinguished from the other, (supposing they be lawful) are still, in themselves matter of liberty, not of duty: and so it is left to the prudence of a christian to determine him (as in all like cases) this way or that; as will make most for the common good, consistently with that of his own soul. That is sin or duty, which in this or that case, will do more hurt or good. There being no particular rule to guide a man's practise, he must have recourse to that general one: by which it may be my duty, upon some great reason, to do that, at one time; which for as great reason, I ought not to do in a continued course. And it is highly commendable, when a christian understands the latitude which the law of Christ hath left him; is, in his own spirit, exempt from servile restraints, by other imagined bonds: and can with a generous liberty (pure from base self-respects) turn himself this way or that, as shall make most for the service of the ends he lives for. And when any accordingly use that liberty, it is a fancy of none but half-witted persons, to think they must therefore addict themselves to this or that party.

If a man's case come to be so stated, that he hath reason to apprehend it will do more good than hurt to others, that he own a sort of christians, who have particularly modified themselves, otherwise than they needed, by any divine injunction (or by any that God hath impowered men to put them under) by communicating with them under the common notion of christians, only, not as so modified: he doth but express the genuine complexion of a truly Christian spirit. But he is not to do so in

a continued course, if he find it will be a real damage to his own soul, in comparison of another way that he finds more edifying. Perhaps if he will be religious only, after the mode of this or that party, his fare may be either too fine or too coarse for his constant diet. I may, besides my own inclination, drink a single glass of wine out of civility to one person, or of water, to another, when I am not, for any man's pleasure, to destroy my health by trying myself to drink nothing else. And whatever Christian condescendingness and goodness of temper may prompt a man to, who makes not what others do, but what they ought to do his rule and measure: they have least reason to expect much compliance from others, who bind themselves up within their own party, are enwrapt as leviathan in his scales, call themselves the church (as many say, Here is Christ and there is Christ) and call all men separatists that will not be of their church. And perhaps they assume, and appropriate the name with no more pretence or colour, and with no better sense, than if a humoursome company of men, should distinguish themselves from others, by wearing a blue or a yellow girdle, and call themselves mankind? Do not too many in our days distinguish their church and Christian communion, by things no more belonging to a church, or to Christianity, than a girdle of this or that colour to human nature? And which no more qualify for Christian society, than that doth for human? If however, an ingenuous, free spirited man, out of respect to his present company, or for any other valuable reason, should in such a case put on the blue girdle, I shall find no fault with him. But if any should go about to pinch him too close with it, so as would be inconvenient to his ease and health, or oblige him to protest against the true humanity of all that neglect it, I doubt not he would throw it away with scorn. Much less would he be a confederate with them that use it, if they professedly combine for the destruction of the rest of mankind that use it not, when many of them that refuse it apprehend it a real grievance. Especially, when they that would impose it, live with many of the rest under the government of a just and sovereign prince, from whom they have no charter for their imposition, but who hath declared he will not have his subjects so imposed upon.

In sum, we are all indispensably obliged by our Lord Jesus Christ, the sovereign Prince and Ruler of his church, to the substance of all Christian ordinances. As to uninstituted modes thereof, we are free. And they that understand their liberty, may use or not use them as is more for their own, and the common good. They that understand it not, and think them-

selves under an obligation from Christ not to admit questionable, devised additions into their worship; they are not therefore to deprive themselves of the substantial ordinances of the Christian religion, whereof there is no question.

I shut up all with the words of the great apostle, Rom. 14. 3, 4. One believeth that he may eat all things; another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not, for God hath received him, verse 13. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: But judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.