

A

SERMON

CONCERNING

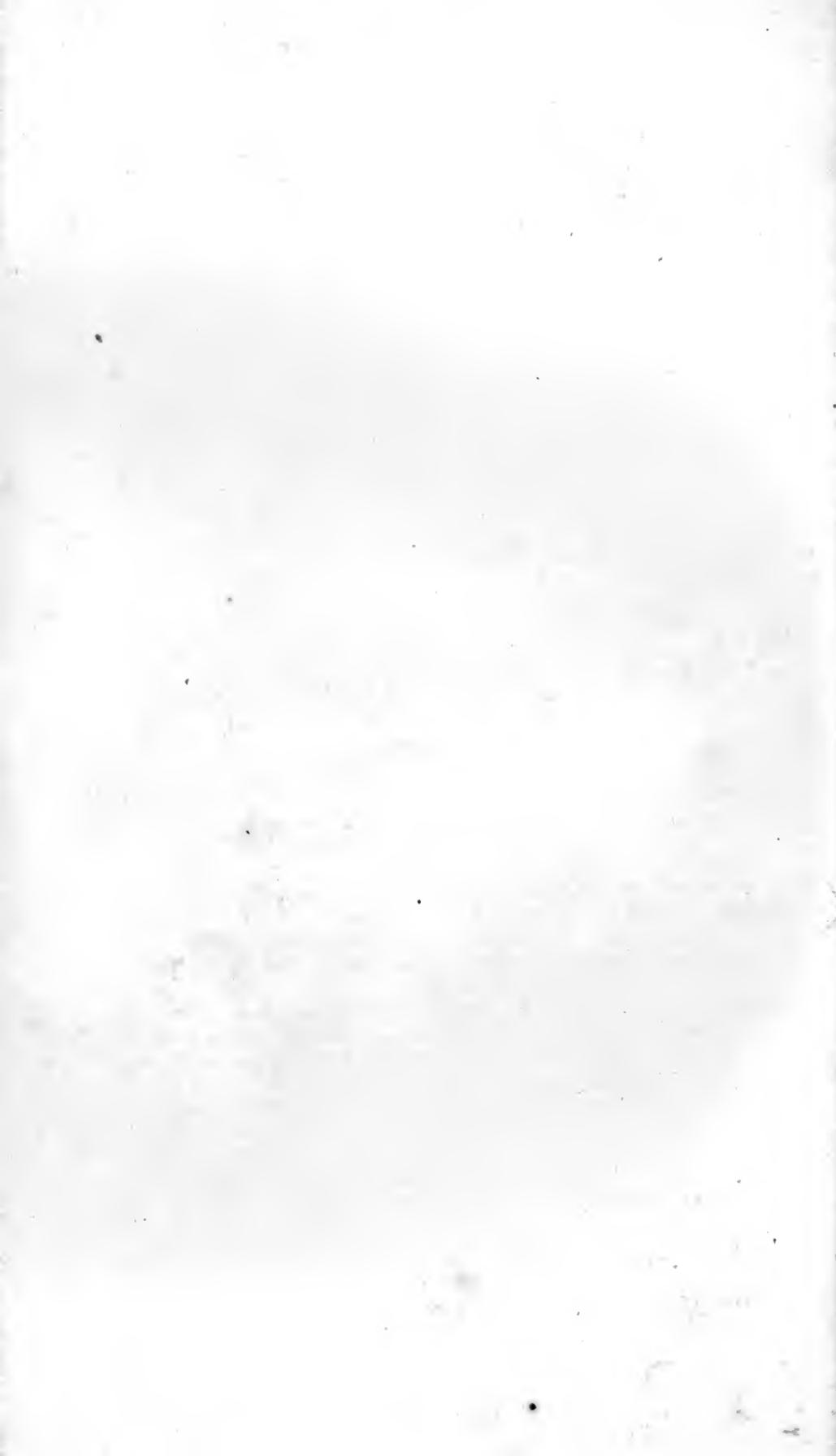
UNION AMONG PROTESTANTS;

BEING

A DISCOURSE

ANSWERING THE FOLLOWING QUESTION.

“WHAT MAY MOST HOPEFULLY BE ATTEMPTED TO ALLAY ANI-
MOSITIES AMONG PROTESTANTS, THAT OUR DIVISIONS
MAY NOT BE OUR RUIN?”



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Coloss. 11. 2.

X *That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*

THIS question is propounded to me; "What may most hopefully be attempted to allay animosities among protestants, that our divisions may not be our ruin?" I must here, in the first place, tell you how I understand this question. First as to the *end*, the preventing of our ruin; I take the meaning chiefly to be, not the ruin of our estates, trade, houses, families; not *our* ruin, in these respects, who are christians, but our ruin as we are christians, that is, the ruin of our Christianity itself, or of the truly Christian interest among us. Secondly as for the *means* inquired after, I understand not the question to intend, what is to be done or attempted by laws, and

public constitutions, as if our business were to teach our absent rulers, or prescribe to them what they should do, to whom we have no present call, or opportunity, to apply ourselves. Nor again can it be thought our business, to discuss the several questions that are controverted among us, and shew, in each, what is the truth and right, wherewith every man's conscience ought to be satisfied, and in which we should all meet and unite: as if we had the vanity to think of performing, by an hour's discourse, what the voluminous writings of some ages have not performed. Much less are we to attempt the persuading of any to go against an already formed judgment in these points of difference, for the sake of union; and to seek the peace of the church, by breaking their peace with God, and their own consciences.

But I take the question only to intend, what serious christians may, and ought, to endeavour, in their private capacities, and agreeably with their own principles, towards the proposed end. And so I conceive the words read to you, contain the materials of a direct and full answer to the question. Which I reckon will appear,—by opening the case the apostle's words have reference to; that will be found a case like our own; and—by opening the words, whereby their suitableness to *that case* will be seen, and consequently to *our case* also.

First. The Case which these words have reference to (as indeed the general aspect of the epistle, and in great part of the other apostolical letters, looks much the same way) was in short this: That a numerous sect was already sprung up, that began (so early) to corrupt the simplicity and purity of the Christian religion, and very much to disturb the peace of the Christian church. A sort they were of partly judaizing, partly paganizing christians, the disciples, as they are reputed, of Simon Magus, who joined with the name christian the rites and ceremonies of the jews, with the impurities (even in worship) of the gentiles, denying the more principal doctrines, and hating the holy design of Christianity itself, while they seemed to have assumed, or to retain the name, as it were on purpose the more effectually to wound and injure the Christian cause and interest. Men of high pretence to knowledge (whence they had the title of gnostics) filched partly from the jewish cabbalism, partly from the pythagorean. By which pretence they insinuated the more plausibly with such as affected the knowledge of more hidden mysteries. Whereto the apostle seems to have reference: where he adds immediately after the text, that in Christ were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, ver. 3. And says, he did purposely add it, lest any man should beguile them with enticing words; intimating,

there was no need to follow those vain pretenders, out of an affectation of sublimer knowledge, and forsake Christ in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hid.

Of the progress and genius of this sect, not only some of the fathers of the church give an account,* but even a noted philosopher† among the heathens, who writes professedly against them (though not a word against christians as such) both making it his business to refute their absurd doctrines (that the world was in its nature evil, and not made by God, but by some evil angel, &c.) and representing them as men of most immoral principles and practices; worse, both in respect of their notions and morals, than Epicurus himself. It appears this sort of men did, in the apostles' days, not only set themselves, with great art and industry, to pervert as many professors of Christianity as they could, but found means (as they might by their compliances with the jews, who were then much spread, and numerous seated in sundry principal cities under the Roman power, and who were every where the bitterest enemies to Christianity) to raise persecution against those whom they could not pervert, which some passages seem to intimate in the epistle to the Galatians (who, as that whole epistle shews, were much leavened by this sect, insomuch that the apostle is put to travel as in birth again, to have Christ formed in them, and to reduce them back to sincere Christianity,) namely, that some leaders of this sect, so set the people's minds even against the apostle himself, that he began to be reputed by them as an enemy, (chap. 4. 16.) and was persecuted under that notion, because he would not comply with them in the matter of circumcision (urged as an engagement to the whole law of Moses,) chap. 5. 11. If I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution? then is the offence of the cross ceased. And that they were as mischievous as they could be, to fellow-christians, on the same account, biting and devouring them that received not their corrupting additions to Christianity, as the circumstances of the text shew, ver. 15.

How like a case this is to ours, with our popish enemies, I need not tell you. And now in this case; when the faith of many was overthrown, so much hurt was already done, and the danger of greater was so manifest, partly by the most insinuating methods of seduction, partly by the terror of persecution, the great care was to secure the uncorrupted residue, and preserve unextinct the true Christian interest.

The urgency of this case puts the solicitous, concerned spi-

* Clemens Alexandr. Irenæus Epiphanius, &c.

† Plotinus, Ennead, 2. 1. 9.

rit of this great apostle, into an inexpressible agony, as his words do intimate: I would you knew what conflict I have, and not for these Colossians only, but for them of Laodicea (which was not very remote from Colosse) and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh: for it was a common case, and upon him lay the care of all the churches. So that hence his musing, meditative mind, could not but be revolving many thoughts, and casting about for expedients, how the threatening danger might be obviated and averted. And these in the text, which he fastens upon, and wherein his thoughts centre, how apt and proper they were to that case (and consequently to ours which so little differs) will be seen,

Secondly. By our opening and viewing the import of the text itself: Wherein he

1. Proposes to himself *the end* which he apprehended was most desirable, and above all things to be coveted for them; That their hearts might be comforted. A word of much larger signification than in vulgar acceptation it is understood to be. Παρηκολέω signifies (with profane as well as the sacred writers) not only to administer consolation to a grieved mind, but to exhort, quicken, excite, and animate, to plead and strive with dull and stupid, wavering and unresolved minds. It was thought indeed comprehensive enough to express all the operations of the divine Spirit upon the souls of men, when not only the Christian church, but the world, yet to be christianized, was to be the subject of them, as we see John 16. 8. In respect whereof that Holy Spirit hath its name of office, *the paraclete*, from this word. And it being the passive that is here used, it signifies not only the endeavours themselves, which are used to the purpose here intended, but the effect of them wherein they all terminate, a lively, vigorous, confirmed state and habit of souls: and that not indennite, but determined to one thing, the Christian faith and profession, which the apostle's drift and scope plainly shew. It is not to be thought, he so earnestly coveted and strove, that they might be jocund, cheerful, abounding with joy and courage, in any course, right or wrong; but that they might be encouraged, established, confirmed in their Christianity. And if the word he here uses were large enough to signify (as was noted above) all that was necessary to make men christians, it may as well, all that is necessary to continue them such.

In short, the end which the apostle aims at, *απακλήσις* intended to these christians, was their establishment and confirmed state in their Christianity, as the effect of all apostolical or ministerial exhortations, persuasions, encouragements, or any whatsoever endeavours; made efficacious to that purpose by

the powerful influence, and operation, of the Holy Ghost. And that it was no lower thing than this, we have sufficient evidence, by comparing the close of the foregoing chapter with the beginning of this. Where we find, chap. 1. 28. the avowed design of his preaching, warning, and teaching in all wisdom, was that he might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. That whereas there were various arts and endeavours used, to adulterate the Christian religion, and pervert men from the simplicity of it, he might lose none, but to his very uttermost keep all in a possibility of being presented perfect in Christ Jesus at last, that is, that they might be all entire, complete and persevering christians to the end. And for this he adds, ver. 29. he did labour, striving according to his working, which wrought in him mightily. All his labour, and the strivings of his soul, acted by divine power, and by a Spirit greater than his own, did aim at this end. And now hereupon he intimates how fervid these his strivings were, chap. 2. 1. I would you did but know (what it is not for me to say) *ἡλικὸν ἀγῶνα*, what an *agony* I endure! how great this my conflict is for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh! And for what? That their hearts might be comforted (as we read) meaning manifestly the same thing he had expressed before; that notwithstanding all endeavours of others to the contrary they might be complete and confirmed christians to the last.

2. We have next to consider in the text the means or what expedients the apostle conceives would be most effectually conducing to this blessed purpose. They are two,—Mutual love to one another;—and a clear, certain, efficacious faith of the gospel. The former is shortly and plainly expressed the other by a copious and most emphatical *periphrasis*, or circumlocution. He most earnestly covets to have them knit together by both *συμπεδωθῆναι* *compacted*, as the word imports, in the one *ἐν ἀγαπῇ*, and unto or into the other, as that particle signifies *εἰς πᾶσι*, &c.

(1.) Mutual love to one another: as though he had said, The thing were done, or much were done towards it, if they were knit together in love, compacted; made all of a piece, if by love they did firmly cohere, and cleave to one another: for then it would be one and all: and it is scarce ever supposable they should all agree to quit their religion at once. But if that were to be supposed, he adds another thing that would put all out of doubt.

(2.) A clear, certain, efficacious faith of the gospel. For the several expressions that follow are but a description of such a faith. Where we are to note,—what he would have them apprehend:—and the apprehensive principle.

[1.] What he would have them apprehend : namely, the sum and substance of the Christian doctrine, which he calls a mystery, both because it was so in itself, and it is often spoken of under that name, by our Lord himself, Mat. 13. 11. and familiarly by this apostle, Rom. 16. 25. Ephes. 3. 3, 9. Col. 1. 26. and elsewhere : and because of the high pretence of the gnostics to the knowledge of mysteries, which sometimes he slights : especially being unaccompanied with love, as, with them, it most eminently was. Though I understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and have no charity, I am nothing, 1 Cor. 13. 2. Knowledge puffeth up, love edifies, chap. 8. 1. Sometimes, as here, he makes the sincere doctrine of the gospel to outvie theirs herein, intimating that such as made profession of it could have no temptation to go over to them for the knowledge of mysteries (unless a mystery of iniquity were more pleasing to them) whose very religion was that great mystery of godliness. God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory, 1 Tim. 3. 16.

Now this mystery he, first, more generally characterizes, by calling it the mystery of God, a divine mystery, not made one, by merely human fiction ; and then he very distinctly specifies it in the following words, and of the Father and of Christ. Where the former *and*, needs not be thought copulative, but exegetical and might be read *even*, or *to wit*, or it may be read, both, as it is usual with the Greeks as well as Latins when the copulative is to be repeated, so to read the former. As if it were said, By the mystery of God I mean, not of God alone, and abstractly considered ; as if it were enough to you to be mere deists : and that the whole superadded revelation concerning the Mediator, might be looked upon with indifferency or neglect (as by the gnostics it was known then to be, and afterwards by some of their great leaders, in the substance of it, with downright hatred and opposition) but that which I so earnestly covet for you and wherein I would have you unite, and be all one, is the acknowledgment of the whole mystery of God ; that is, both of Father and of Christ.

[2.] The apprehensive principle ; which we may, by a general name, call faith, and accommodately enough to the name here given us of its object, a mystery which is elsewhere called the mystery of faith, (1. Tim. 3. 9.) or a mystery to be believed : faith being the known principle of receiving the gospel revelation. But he here expresses it by words that signify knowledge *γνωσις* and *επιγνωσις*, thereby intimating that the faith of christians is not to be a blind and unintelligent principle, but that though there were contained in the gospel, mysteries never

to be understood, if God had not afforded a special revelation of them on purpose; yet being revealed, we ought to have a clear and distinct, as well as lively and practical perception of them. By these two words, and the other expressions he joins in with the former, he seems to intimate two sorts of properties which belong to that faith of the gospel which he wishes to them. First, The rectitude, clearness and certainty of notion.

Secondly, The efficacy, impressiveness, and immediate aptitude to have influence upon practice, which he would have it carry with it. The latter properties supposing, and depending on the former, he there highly exaggerates the matter, and heaps together expressions that might with most lively emphasis set forth the kind of that knowledge which he conceives would be of so great use to them. He wishes them a *συνεσις* a clear, perspicacious knowledge, and an assurance, even to a *plerophory*, a *fulness of assurance*, in their knowledge of the truth of the gospel. Yea he wishes them the *riches*, *πλετον*, yea and *all riches*, *παντα πλετον της πληροφοριας*, of that full assurance, or *plerophory* of understanding, and knowledge of that truth; apprehending that this would certainly fix them in their faith and profession, so as they would never recede from it. As when in Christ's own days many went back and walked no more with him, John. 6. 66. That which retained others so that when Christ asks, "Will ye also go away?" (ver. 67.) they presently answer, "Lord to whom shall we go?" could entertain no such thought, was, that, besides what they believed of him was of greatest importance to them, Thou hast the words of eternal life, ver. 68. So their belief was with that assurance as to exclude all suspicion or doubt in the case, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God, ver. 69. And therefore neither canst want power to confer eternal life, as all thy words do import thy design and promise to do, nor truth to make good thy own plain words. And then he also knew that such a *συνεσις* or *knowledge* would produce, what he further wishes them an *επιγνωσις*, an *acknowledgment*, an inward, vital owning, a cordial embrace, a lively perception of the same blessed truths, which must needs further most abundantly contribute, to this their so much desired joint and unanimous stability.

And now these are the two expedients by which he reckons they would be so closely compacted together as that no subtilty or violence could endanger them; mutual love and a clear, certain, operative faith of the gospel; if, by the one they did cohere with each other; and by the other, adhere to God in Christ; if the one might have with them the place, power and

bindingness of a cement, the other of a continual inclination, yieldingness, and compliance to the magnetism of the centre, they would never so fall asunder; as to give any enemies opportunity to be the successful authors, or the gratified spectators of their ruin. Thus therefore I would sum up, the sense of this scripture, and the answer to the question proposed.—“That the maintaining of sincere love among christians, and the improving of their faith to greater measures of clearness, certainty, and efficacy in reference to the substantial of Christianity, are to be endeavoured as the best means to unite, establish and preserve them, against such as design the ruin of the truly Christian interest.”—The case was at that time urging and important. A great and numerous party was formed, of such as did nauseate the simplicity of the Christian religion, and hate the true design of it. All the care was what course was most proper and suitable to preserve the rest. And you see what was then thought most proper. Counsel was not taken to this effect (and therefore christians in a private capacity should not covet to have it so) “Let us bind them by certain devised preter-evangelical canons to things never thought fit to be enjoined by Christ himself, severely urge the strict and uniform observance of them, make the terms of Christian communion straiter than he ever made them, add new rituals of our own to his institutions, and cut off from us all that (never so conscientiously) scruple them.” No, this was the practice of their common enemies, and it was to narrow and weaken the too much already diminished Christian interest. The order mentioned ver. 5. might be comely enough, without things, that were both unnecessary and offensive.

Nor was it consulted and resolved to agitate the controversy about this power and practice, in perpetual, endless disputations, and stigmatize them that should not be enlightened and satisfied in these matters, as schismatical and wilful; though they never so sincerely adhered to the doctrine, and observed the laws of Christ, that is, it was neither thought fit to urge the unsatisfied upon doubtful things, against their consciences; nor to take order that continual endeavours should be used from age to age to satisfy them, or that the church should be always vexed with vain controversies about needless things; that, if they were never so lawful, might as well be let alone, without detriment to the Christian cause, and perhaps to its greater advantage. Yea the attempt of imposing any thing upon the disciples but what was necessary, is judged a tempting of God, (Acts 15. 10.) a bringing the matter to a trial of skill with him, whether he could keep the church quiet, when they took so direct a course to distemper and trouble it. But it was thought

necessary, and sufficient, that all did unite, and were knit together in the mutual love of one another, and in a joint adherence to the great mysteries of faith and salvation.

In the same case, when there were so many antichrists abroad, and (it is likely) Ebion with his partakers made it their business to pervert the Christian doctrine, the same course is taken by the blessed apostle St. John, only to endeavour the strengthening of these two vital principles, faith in Christ and love to fellow-christians, as may be seen at large in his epistles. These he presses, as the great commandments, upon the observation whereof he seems to account, the safety and peace of the sincere did entirely depend. This is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment, 1 Epistle, 3. 23. He puts upon Christians no other distinguishing test, but Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God: and Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him: (chap. 5. 1.) is only solicitous that they did practise the commandment they had from the beginning, that is that they loved one another, (2 Epist. 5.) and that they did abide in the doctrine of Christ, ver. 9.

The prudence and piety of those unerring guides of the church, (themselves under the certain guidance of the Spirit of truth) directed them to bring the things wherein they would have christians unite, within as narrow a compass as was possible, neither multiplying articles of faith, nor rites of worship. These two principles (as they were thought to answer the apostles) would fully answer our design and present inquiry. And we may adventure to say of them that they are both sufficient, and necessary, the apt and the only means to heal and save us; such as would effect our cure, and without which nothing will.

Nor shall I give other answer to the proposed question, than what may be deduced from these two, considered according to what they are in themselves, and what they naturally lead and tend unto. I shall consider them in the order wherein the apostle here mentions them, who you see reserves the more important of them to the latter place.

First. The sincere love of christians to one another, would be a happy means of preserving the truly Christian interest among us. That this may be understood, we must rightly apprehend what kind of love it is that is here meant. It is specified by what we find in conjunction with it, the understanding, and acknowledgment of the mystery of Christianity. Therefore it must be the love of christians to one another as such.

Whence we collect, lest we too much extend the object of it on the one hand, or contract it on the other,

1. That it is not the love only which we owe to one another as men, or human creatures merely, that is intended here. That were too much to enlarge it, as to our present consideration of it. For under that common notion, we should be as much obliged to love the enemies we are to unite against, as the friends of religion we are to unite with, since all partake equally in human nature. It must be a more special love that shall have the desired influence in the present case. We cannot be peculiarly endeared and united to some more than to others, upon a reason that is common to them with others. We are to love them that are born of God, and are his children, otherwise than the children of men, or such of whom it may be said they are of their father the devil; them that appear to have been partakers of a divine nature at another rate, than them who have received a mere human, or also the diabolical nature, 1 John. 5. 1. Yet this peculiar love is not to be exclusive of the other which is common, but must suppose it, and be superadded to it, as the reason of it is superadded. For Christianity supposes humanity; and divine grace, human nature.

2. Nor is it a love to christians of this or that party or denomination only. That were as much unduly to straiten and confine it. The love that is owing to christians as such, as it belongs to them only, so it belongs to all them who, in profession and practice, do own sincere and incorrupt Christianity. To limit our Christian love to a party of christians, truly so called, is so far from serving the purpose now to be aimed at, that it resists and defeats it; and instead of a preservative union, infers most destructive divisions. It scatters what it should collect and gather. It is to love factiously; and with an unjust love, that refuses to give indifferently to every one his due: (for is there no love due to a disciple of Christ in the name of a disciple?) it is founded in falsehood, and a lie, denies them to be of the Christian community who really are so. It presumes to remove the ancient land-marks, not civil but sacred, and draws on, not the people's curse only, but that of God himself. It is true (and who doubts it?) that I may and ought upon special reasons to love some more than others; as relation, acquaintance, obligation by favours received from them, more eminent degrees of true worth, and real goodness; but that signifies nothing to the withholding of that love which is due to a christian as such, as that also ought not to prejudice the love I owe to a man, as he is a man.

Nor am I so promiscuously to distribute this holy love, as to place it at random, upon every one that thinks it convenient for him to call himself a christian, though I ought to love the

very profession, while I know not who sincerely makes it, and do plainly see that jews and pagans were never worse enemies to Christ and his religion, than a great part of the Christian world. But let my apprehensions be once set right concerning the true essentials of Christianity, (whether consisting in doctrinal or vital principles,) then will my love be duly carried to all in whom they are found under one common notion, which I come actually to apply to this or that person, as particular occasions do occur. And so shall always be in a preparation of mind, actually to unite in Christian love with every such person, whensoever such occasions do invite me to it. And do we now need to be told what such an impartial truly Christian love, would do to our common preservation, and to prevent the ruin of the Christian interest?

(1.) How greatly would it contribute to the vigour of the Christian life? For so we should all equally "hold the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment, ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God:" as afterwards in this chapter, ver. 19. Thus (as it is in that other parallel text of Scripture) speaking the truth in love, we shall grow up into him in all things, which is the head even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love, Eph. 4. 15, 16. Obstructions that hinder the free circulation of blood and spirits, do not more certainly infer languishings in the natural body, than the want of such a diffusive love, shuts up, and shrivels the destitute parts, and hinders the diffusion of a nutritive vital influence, in the body of Christ.

(2.) It would inspire christians generally with a sacred courage and fortitude, when they should know, and even feel themselves knit together in love. How doth the revolt of any considerable part of an army, discourage the rest! or if they be not entire, and of a piece! Mutual love animates them, as nothing more, when they are prepared to live and die together, and love hath before joined, whom now, their common danger also joins. They otherwise signify but as so many single persons, each one but caring and contriving how to shift for himself. Love makes them significant to one another. So as that every one understands himself to be the common care of all the rest. It makes christians the more resolute in their adherence to truth and goodness, when (from their not-doubted love) they are sure of the help, the counsels and prayers of the Christian community, and apprehend, by their declining, they shall grieve those whom they love, and who they know love

them. If any imagine themselves intended to be given up, as sacrifices, to the rage of the common enemy, their hearts are the apter to sink, they are most exposed to temptations to prevaricate, and the rest will be apt to expect the like usage from them, if themselves be reduced to the like exigency, and be liable to the same temptations.

(3.) It would certainly in our present case, extinguish or abate the so contrary unhallowed fire of our anger and wrath towards one another, as the celestial beams do the baser culinary fire, which burns more fervently when the sun hath less power. Then would debates, if there must be any, be managed without intemperate heat. We should be remote from being angry that we cannot convey our own sentiments into another's mind; which, when we are, our business is the more remote; we make ourselves less capable of reasoning aptly to convince, and (because anger begets anger, as love doth love) render the other less susceptible of conviction. Why are we yet to learn that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God? What is gained by it? So little doth angry contention about small matters avail, that even they that happen to have the better cause lose by it, and their advantage cannot recompence the damage and hurt that ensues to the church and to themselves. Our famous Davenant (Sent. ad Dur.) speaking of the noted controversy between Stephen bishop of Rome, who, he says, as much as in him lay, did with a schismatical spirit tear the church, and Cyprian who with great lenity and Christian charity professes that he would not break the Lord's peace for diversity of opinion, nor remove any from the right of communion, concludes that erring Cyprian deserved better of the church of Christ than orthodox Stephen. He thought him the schismatic, whom he thought in the right, and that his orthodoxy (as it was accompanied) was more mischievous to the church, than the other's error. Nor can a man do that hurt to others, without suffering it more principally. The distemper of his own spirit, what can recompence! and how apt is it to grow in him; and, while it grows in himself, to propagate itself among others! Whereupon, if the want of love hinders the nourishment of the body, much more do the things, which, when it is wanting, are wont to fill up its place. For as naturally as love begets love, so do wrath, envy, malice, calumny, beget one another, and spread a poison and virulency through the body, which necessarily wastes and tends to destroy it. How soon did the Christian church cease to be itself! and the early vigour of primitive Christianity degenerate into insipid, spiritless formality, when once it became contentious! It broke into

parties, sects multiplied, animosities grew high, and the grieved Spirit of love retired from it! which is grieved by nothing more than by bitterness, wrath, anger, &c. as the connexion of these two verses intimates, Eph. 4. 30, 31. Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice. And to the same purpose is that, 1 Pet. 2. 1, 2. Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. By this means religion, once dispirited, loses its majesty and awfulness, and even tempts and invites the assaults and insultation of enemies.

(4.) It would oblige us to all acts of mutual kindness and friendship. If such a love did govern in us, we should be always ready to serve one another in love, to bear each other's burdens, to afford our mutual counsel and help to one another, even in our private affairs if called thereto: especially in that which is our common concern, the preserving and promoting the interest of religion; and to our uttermost strengthen each other's hands herein. It would engage us to a free, amicable conversation with one another, upon this account; would not let us do so absurd a thing as to confine our friendship to those of our own party, which we might as reasonably, to men of our own stature, or to those whose voice and air, and look, and mien, were likest our own. It would make us not be ashamed to be seen in each other's company, or be shy of owning one another. We should not be to one another as Jews and Samaritans that had no dealing with one another, or as the poet notes they were to other nations; *Non monstrare vias eadem nisi sacra colenti, not so much as to shew the way to one not of their religion.* There would be no partition-wall through which love would not easily open a way of friendly commerce, by which we should insensibly slide, more and more, into one another's hearts. Whence also,

(5.) Prejudices would cease, and jealousies concerning each other. A mutual confidence would be begotten. We should no more suspect one another of ill designs upon each other, than lest our right hand should wait an opportunity of cutting off the left. We should believe one another in our mutual professions, of whatsoever sort, both of kindness to one another, and that we really doubt and scruple the things which we say we do.

(6.) This would hence make us earnestly covet an entire union in all the things wherein we differ, and contribute greatly

to it. We are too prone many times to dislike things, for the disliked persons' sake who practise them. And a prevailing disaffection makes us unapt to understand one another; precludes our entrance into one another's mind and sense: which, if love did once open, and inclined us more to consider the matters of difference themselves, than to imagine some reserved meaning and design of the persons that differ from us: it is likely we might find ourselves much nearer to one another, than we did apprehend we were; and that it were a much easier step for the one side to go quite over to the other. But if that cannot be,

(7.) It would make us much more apt to yield to one another, and abate all that ever we can, in order to as full an accommodation as is any way possible, that if we cannot agree upon either extreme, we might at least meet in the middle. It would cause an emulation who should be larger in their grants to this purpose: as it was professed by Luther when so much was done at Marpurg towards an agreement between him and the Helvetians, that he would not allow that praise to the other party that they should be more desirous of peace and concord than he. Of which amicable conference, and of that afterwards at Wittenburg, and several other negotiations to that purpose, account is given by divers:* and insisted on by some of our own great divines as precedential to the concord they endeavoured between the Saxon and the Helvetian churches of later time, as bishop Moreton, bishop Hall, bishop Davenant, in their several sentences or judgments written to Mr. Dury upon that subject.

And indeed when I have read the pacific writings of those eminent worthies, for the composing of those differences abroad, I could not but wonder that the same peaceable spirit did not endeavour with more effect the composing of our own much lesser differences at home. But the things of our peace were (as they still are) hid from our eyes, with the more visibly just severity, by how much they have been nearer us, and more obvious to the easy view of any but an averse eye. It is not for us to prescribe (as was said) to persons that are now in so eminent stations as these were at that time. But may we not hope to find with such (and where should we rather expect to find it?) that compassion and mercifulness in imitation of the blessed Jesus, their Lord and ours, as to consider and study the necessities of souls in these respects, and at least, wil-

* Hospinian. *Histor. Sacramentar.* Thuanus, &c. Though by Scultetus's account, that pretence was too little answered.

lingly to connive at, and very heartily approve some indulgences and abatements in the administrations of the inferior clergy, as they may not think fit themselves positively to order and enjoin? Otherwise I believe it could not but give some trouble to a conscientious conforming minister, if a sober pious person, sound in the faith, and of a regular life, should tell him he is willing to use his ministry, in some of the ordinances of Christ, if only he would abate or dispense with some annexed ceremony which in conscience he dare not use or admit of. I believe it would trouble such a minister to deal with a person of this character as a pagan because of his scruple, and put him upon considering whether he ought not rather to dispense with man's rule, than with God's. I know what the same bishop Davenant hath expressly said, that "He that believes the things contained in the apostle's creed, and endeavours to live a life agreeable to the precepts of Christ, ought not to be expunged from the roll of christians, nor be driven from communion with the other members of any church whatsoever." (Ibid) However, truly Christian love would do herein, all that it can, supplying the rest by grief that it can do no more.

(8.) It would certainly make us abstain from mutual censures of one another as insincere for our remaining differences. Charity that thinks no evil, would make us not need the reproof, Rom. 14. 4. Who art thou that judgest another's servant? The common aptness hereunto among us shews how little that divine principle rules in our hearts, that in defiance of our rule and the authority of the great God and our blessed Redeemer, to whom all judgment is committed, and who hath so expressly forbidden us, to judge lest we be judged, (Mat. 7. 1.) we give ourselves so vast a liberty! and set no other bounds to our usurped licence of judging, than nature hath set to our power of thinking, that is, think all the mischievous thoughts of them that differ from us that we know how to devise or invent, as if we would say "Our thoughts (and then by an easy advance, our tongues) are our own, who is Lord over us?" I animadvert not on this as the fault of one party, but wheresoever it lies, as God knows how diffused a poison this is, among them that are satisfied with the public constitutions towards them that dissent from them, and with these back again towards them, and with the several parties of both these towards one another. This uniting, knitting love would make us refrain, not merely from the restraint of God's laws in this case, but from a benign disposition, as that which the temper of our spirits would abhor from. So that such as are well content with the public forms and rites of worship, would have no inclination to judge them that apprehend not things with their understandings,

nor relish with their taste, as persons that therefore have cut themselves off from Christ, and the body of Christ. They might learn from the Cassandrian moderation, and from the avowed sentiments of that man * (whose temper is better to be liked than his terms of union) who speaking of such as being formerly rejected (meaning the protestants) for finding fault with abuses in the church, had by the urgency of their conscience altered somewhat in the way of their teaching, and the form of their service, and are therefore said to have fallen off from the church, and are numbered among heretics and schismatics. It is, saith he, to be inquired how rightly and justly this is determined of them. For there is to be considered, as to the church, the head and the body. From the head there is no departure but by doctrine disagreeable to Christ the head; from the body there is no departure by diversity of rites and opinions, but only by the defect of charity. So that this learned romanist neither thinks them heretics that hold the head, nor schismatics, for such differences as ours are, from the rest of the body, if love and charity towards them remain. And again, where this love remains, and bears rule, it can as little be, that they who are unsatisfied with the way of worship that more generally obtains, should censure them that are satisfied as insincere, merely because of this difference. It cannot permit that we should think all the black thoughts we can invent of them, as if because they have not our consciences they had none, or because they see not with our eyes, they were therefore both utterly, and wilfully blind. To be here more particular, the most, you know, are for the public way of worship; and of these, some are for it as tolerable only, others as the best way, and think all other ways of worshipping God in assemblies (being forbidden as they think by a just law) sinful. Others, dissenting, are of several sorts. Some think the conformity required of ministers sinful, because of previous terms required of them which they judge to be so, but not that which is required of the people. Of which sort, some that think it not simply unlawful, find it however less edifying to them, and though they can therefore partake in it at some times, think themselves more ordinarily bound to attend such other means as they find more conducing to their spiritual profit and advantage, judging they have an undoubted right from Christ, anciently allowed from age to age in the best times of the Christian church, and never justly taken from them, of choosing the pastors to whose ordinary care and conduct, they shall

* Cassander de officio pii ac publicæ Tranquillitatis vere amanti viri. Cassander on the offices of a pious man and one who truly loves the public peace.

commit their souls. Others judge the public way simply unlawful, and therefore judge themselves bound to decline it wholly; and are the more averse to any participation in it, as apprehending it to have no suitableness or aptitude to profit their souls: wherein they are the more confirmed that they believe not God will ever bless the means which he hath not appointed. Now how apt all these are unto very severe censures of one another, he knows not the age, who is ignorant. One sort censuring the other as humoursome, factious, schismatical; the others them back again, as formal, popishly affected, destitute of any savour of spiritual things, having nothing of God in them, or of the life and power of godliness.

Now is this suitable to the love that should rule among christians? or to the reverence we ought to have for that authority that forbids such judging? It ought to be considered both that all have not the same understanding, nor the same gust and relish of things.

[1.] Not the same understanding. And therefore where conscience hath the same rule, it cannot have, with every one the same actual latitude, that rule, being so very diversely understood, which different estimate of consciences, the apostle hath express reference to, in that large and most healing discourse of his, Rom. 14. One (saith he, ver. 2.) believeth that he may eat all things, another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Nor doth he, in reference to such doubted things, determine what all should do, or not do, by particular rules, concerning every such case, that was then depending, which it seems he reckoned was not necessary, or that might afterwards fall out, which was little to be expected. But he lays down one general rule, against judging one another, which he presses with that authority, and such awful reasons as might make a Christian heart tremble to be guilty of it.

And in reference to the mentioned differences among ourselves (as well as others no nearer to the substantials and vitals of our religion) there is somewhat else to be done than to conclude against a man's sincerity because of such differing sentiments and practices, and which certainly would be done, if truly Christian love, or even justice itself, did take place as they ought; that is, it would be considered what these several differing parties have to say for themselves, what reasons they may alledge, and whether though they be not sufficient to justify their several opinions and practices (as all cannot be in the right) they be not such as by which a conscientious man, a sincere fearer of God, may be swayed, so as to take the way which he is found in by the ducture of an upright (though misguided) conscience, and not as being under the government of

depraved vicious inclination. As those that can, and do, yield the conformity that is required of ministers, though perhaps they wish some things altered, why may it not be supposed they sincerely think (though it should be mistakingly) that the things more liable to exception are capable of a sense wherein they are not unlawful: and not being so, they think themselves bound to take the opportunity which they this way obtain of doing good to the souls of men? others also apprehending it lawful, how possible is it to them from a certain reverence they have for antiquity, and for our own first reformers, to think it best and fittest to be continued! Nor is it unsupposable that many of the laity may upon the same grounds have the same apprehensions.

Again, divers in the ministry judging the terms unlawful upon which only they can have liberty for the public exercise of it; is it not possible they may, with a sincere conscience, think themselves not therefore obliged wholly to renounce their calling and office, to which they were duly set apart, and had by their own solemn vow given up themselves; but to do so much of the work of it as they can have opportunity for? And whereas the people, some may think the public forms and ways of worship not simply unlawful, but find them less edifying to them than other means which the providence of God affords them: and therefore do more ordinarily attend those, though sometimes also the other. Why should it be thought on the one hand, or the other, that it is so little possible they should be guided by reasonable and conscientious considerations herein, that nothing but corrupt inclination must be understood to govern them? Is it not supposable, that accounting the public worship substantially agreeable to divine institution, though in some accidentals too disagreeable, they may think there is more to incline them at some times to attend it, than totally to disown it? For what worship is there on earth that is in all things incorrupt? And they may apprehend it fit to testify their union with the sincere christians, that may be stately under that form, and especially in a time when the contest is so high in the world, between them that profess the substance of reformed Christianity, and them that have so much deformed it; and may conceive it becoming them, at some times, to express their own unconfinedness to a party, and to use that liberty which, they think, should not be judged by another man's conscience, which yet they would have regard to, where there are not greater reasons to preponderate. They are indeed under a disadvantage (with them that are apt to use a greater liberty in their censures, than they do in their practice in these matters) when it falls out that their partial compliance is the means of their security from penalties;

and their disadvantage is greater, whose judgment to this purpose hath not been formerly declared and made known. But they for shame ought to be silent whose total compliance gains them not only immunity, but great emoluments. And that perhaps yielded, not according to a former, but (at that time when the opportunity occurred) a new and altered judgment. They may however know themselves to be moved by greater ends than secular interest: and so may these we now speak of, and yet may think the preservation of their earthly portion, wherewith they are to glorify God in this world, not too little an end to be designed and endeavoured by lawful means. It were a very uncouth and sinful thing to do a spiritual action for a carnal end, but if the thing sincerely and supremely designed, be the glory of God, that is the most spiritual end: if it be not, that ought to be changed which is wrong, not that which is right: the unlawful end, not the lawful action, if it be lawful. If it be not, their good end will not justify their action, but it will their sincerity; which is all that this discourse intends.

And then for such as decline the public worship totally, as judging it simply unlawful; is it not possible they may be led to that practice by somewhat else than humour and factious inclination? Have they not that to say, which may at least seem solid and strong to a conscientious man? How jealous God did heretofore show himself in all the affairs of his worship! How particular in the appointment even of the smallest things he would have appertain to it! How unsuitable multiplied ceremonies are to the mature state of the church! and how sensibly burdensome they were to the disciples of the first age as a yoke not to be borne; and that therefore God himself, when the season of maturity, and the fulness of time came, thought fit to abrogate those of his own former appointment, with no (probable) design to allow men the liberty of substituting others in their room. Why is it not to be thought that the fear of the great God withholds them from doing what they judge would offend him? And that, if they err, it is for fear of erring? Why can nothing be thought on whereto to impute their practice, but peevish humour? Especially if that be considered (which is common to these two last mentioned sorts of men) that they sensibly find other means more edifying to them, or expect them only to be so, if the other be thought unlawful. If they be thought merely lawful, and such as may therefore be used upon weighty reasons at some times, but are found less edifying, who can doubt but I ought to use for my soul (at least in an ordinary course) the aptest means that I can ordinarily have for the promoting its edification and salvation? Do we not reckon ourselves to owe so

much even to our bodies? And what is another man's opinion to signify against my sense and constant experience? Is there not such a thing as a mental *idiosyncrasy* (or peculiarity of temper) as well as a bodily? and whereto what is most agreeable, any man that is not destitute of ordinary understanding is the fittest judge himself: as every one, that is not a mere fool is so much a physician as to know what diet suits him best.

And if it be said against the former of these two sorts, Are they not at all times obliged to use the means which are most edifying? They may say, At all times when they have nothing to outweigh their own present edification. But it is not impossible that a conscientious judgment may esteem all the fore-mentioned considerations concurring, to be of more weight than the greater advantage hoped to be gained in that one hour. Nor need any man be ashamed professedly to avow that which may seem the least of them, the saving of himself from temporal ruin. For he is to be accountable to God for what portion he hath intrusted him with of the good things of this life, and is not to throw it away without sufficient cause. Who sees not that more is allowed and ordinarily done without scruple or censure upon the like account? As to omit the hearing of a sermon, if at that time one's house be on fire, yea or if it be to save my neighbour's, or the plucking of an ox or sheep out of a ditch on the Lord's-day, when I might have been employed at that time in the solemn worship of God to my spiritual advantage. A mere commutation unto less advantage upon an equally or more urgent necessity is less than omission. And they that shall have learned, as our Saviour directs, "What that means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice," will not condemn the guiltless.

Only such are concerned first to search well and be satisfied concerning the lawfulness of their action in itself, that they do it not with a self-condemning conscience, nor with a groundlessly self-justifying one. And then especially to see to it that their end be right: God's interest, not their own, otherwise than in a due, entire subordination to his. We can never act innocently or comfortably in any thing, till he be in every thing more absolutely our all in all; and have much more reason to be scrupulous, and (if others knew our hearts) were much more liable to censure, that, in our common affairs, he is so much forgotten, that we live not more entirely to him; which we little animadvert upon, and are very officious to cast motes out of our brother's eye, when this beam is in our own.

The design of mentioning these hints of reasons for so different judgments and practices, is not to shew which are strongest, and ought to prevail, which cannot be the business of so

short a discourse as this, and so much of another nature; but, to shew that while there is any thing colourable to be alledged for this or that way, true Christian love, compassion of common human frailty, and a duly humble sense of a man's own, would oblige him to think that conscience towards God may have a greater hand (though with some misguided itself) in guiding men the different ways they take, than is commonly thought. And to consider though such and such reasons seem not weighty to me, they may to some others, who are as much afraid of sinning against God as I; and perhaps their understandings as good in other matters as mine. It would be considered how really difficult the controversy is about the ceremonies, and some other parts of conformity. Perhaps few metaphysical questions are disputed with more subtilty than that controversy is managed with, by Arch-bishop Whitgift, bishop Morton, doctor Burgesse, doctor Ames, Cartwright, Calverwood, and others. And how very easily possible and pardonable is it to unlearned persons, or of weaker intellectuals, being obliged in order to their practice to give a judgment in reference to these things one way or other, to judge amiss! Why should we expect every sincerely pious man to be able to hit the very point of truth, and right, in matters that belong, as bishop Davenant once said in another case *non ad fidem fundamentalem, sed ad peritiam Theologicam, & fortasse ne ad hanc quidem, sed aliquando ad curiositatem Theologorum, not to the foundation of our faith, but to the skill of divines, and perhaps not to this neither, but sometimes only to their curiosity*. What were to be done in reference to so nicely disputable things made part of the terms of Christian communion, is more the matter of our wish than hope, till by a gracious influence God better men's minds, or by a more deeply felt necessity bring us to understand what is to be done. Our case is ill when only *vexatio dat intellectum*, when *nothing but sorrow and suffering will make us wise*, which is very likely from the righteous hand of God to be our common lot.

In the mean time it is hard to think that he cannot be a sincerely pious man whose understanding is not capable of so difficult things, as to make a certainly right judgment about them. *In absoluto & facili stat eternitas, to make things perfect and distinct is the property of eternity*. And why should not the communion of persons going into a blessed eternity have the same measure?

And besides the different size, and capacity of men's understandings, and consequently of their conscientious determinations.

[2.] There are also as differing relishes of these things, which Christian love would oblige a man to consider with equanimi-

ty, so as thereupon to refrain hard censures. All good men have not the same relish of the various forms and modes of dispensing the truths and ordinances of Christ. Some of our suffering brethren in Q. Mary's days are said to have found great spiritual refreshing by the common prayer. And, in our own days, some may profess to have their hearts warmed, their affections raised and elevated by it. They are no rule to us; but it would less become us, hereupon to suspect their sincerity, than our own. Others again cannot relish such modes of worship, when in the ministry of such as use them not, they find a very sensible delight and savour.

And this, by the way, shews the great difference between such things as have their evidence and goodness from God himself, and those that borrow their recommendableness only from human device. All good men, in all the times and ages of the Christian church, have a constant value and love for the great substantial of religion, which have in them that inward evidence and excellency, as command and captivate a rectified mind and heart, whereas the mere external forms of it, the outward dress and garb, are variously esteemed and despised, liked and disliked by the same sort of men, that is, by very sincere lovers of God, not only in divers times and ages, but even in the same time. How different hath the esteem been of the liturgic forms with them who bear the same mind, full of reverence and love towards religion itself! as that habit is thought decent at one time, which in another is despicably ridiculous; whereas a person in himself comely and graceful, is always accounted so, by all, and at all times.

Now this various gust and relish cannot but have influence, more remotely, upon the conscientious determination of our choice, concerning our usual way of worshipping God. For how should I edify by what is disgustful to me? Though it be true that our spiritual edification lies more in the informing of our judgments, and confirming our resolutions, than in the gusts and relishes of affection, yet who sees not that these are of great use even to the other? and that it is necessary that at least there be not a disgust or antipathy? What is constantly less grateful, will certainly be less nutritive. That is usually necessary to nourishment; though, alone, it be not sufficient, as it is in the matter of bodily repasts. Who can without great prejudice be bound to eat always of a food that he disrelishes though he may without much inconvenience, for a valuable reason, do it at some time.

And they that think all this alleged difference is but fancy, shew they understand little of human nature, and less of religion: though they may have that in themselves too which they

do not so distinctly reflect upon, even that peculiar gust and relish, which they make so little account of. For, have they not as great a disgust of the others, way, as they have of theirs? Would they not as much regret to be tied to theirs? Have they not as great a liking of their own? And doth not common experience shew that there are as different mental relishes as bodily? How comes one man in the matters of literature to savour metaphysics? another mathematics, another history, and the like? and no man's genius can be forced in these things. Why may there not be the like difference in the matters of religion? And I would fain know what that religion is worth that is without a gust and savour, that is insipid and unpleasant, much more that would, being used in a constant course, this or that way, be nauseous and offensive?

If indeed men nauseate that which is necessary for them, the gospel, for instance, or religion itself, that is certainly such a distemper, as if the grace of God overcome it not, will be mortal to them, and we are not to think of relieving them, by withdrawing the offending object, which itself must be the means of their cure. But is there any parity between the substance of religion, which is of God's appointing, and the superadded modes of it, that are of our own?

Upon the whole, nothing is more agreeable, either to this divine principle of love, nothing (within our compass) more conducive to our end, the ceasing of our differences (which are most likely to die and vanish by neglect) or their ceasing to be inconvenient to us, than to bear calm and placid minds towards one another under them, to banish all hard thoughts because of them. If I can contribute no way else to union, from this holy dictate and law of the spirit of love, I can at least abstain from censuring my fellow christians. It is the easiest thing in the world one would think not to do, especially not to do a thing of itself ungrateful to a well tempered mind; and a great privilege not to be obliged to judge another man's conscience and practice, when it is so easy to misjudge and do wrong. Most of all when the matter wherein I presume to sit in judgment upon another is of so high a nature, as the posture of his heart God-ward: a matter peculiarly belonging to another tribunal, of divine cognizance, and which we all confess to be only known to God himself. And if I would take upon me to conclude a man insincere, and a hypocrite, only because he is not of my mind in these smaller things that are controverted among us, how would I form my argument? No one can, with sincerity, differ from that man whose understanding is so good and clear, as to apprehend all things with absolute certainty, just as they are: and then go

on to assume (and a strange assuming it must be) But my understanding is so good and clear as, &c. It is hard to say whether the uncharitableness of the one assertion, or the arrogance of the other is greater; and whether both be more immoral, or absurd. But the impiety is worst of all, for how insolently doth such a man take upon him to make a new gospel! and other terms of salvation than God hath made! when his sentiments and determinations of things which God hath never made necessary, must be the measure and rule of life and death to men! How is the throne and judicial power of the Redeemer usurped which he hath founded in his blood. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Rom. 14. 4. Yea, he shall be holden up, for God is able to make him stand, (ver. 9.) For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. ver. 10. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, ver. 11. For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. One would think they that lay no restraint upon themselves in this matter of judging their brethren, upon every light occasion, reckon this chapter came by chance into the Bible. And that our Lord spake himself, at random, words that had no meaning, when he said, Mat. 7. 1. Judge not that you be not judged, &c. What man that fears God would not dread to be the framer of a new gospel, and of new terms of salvation? It is a great solace indeed to a sincere mind, but implies a severe rebuke, in the mean time, to such a self-assuming censorious spirit, that it may, in such a case, be so truly said, it is a much easier thing to please God than man.

They that find this measure will have the better of it, if they can abstain from retaliating, when as the reason of it is the same on both sides. For they may say, You are to remember I differ no more from you in this matter, than you do from me, and if I judge not you about it, what greater reason have you to judge me? And they have little reason to value such a man's judgment concerning their duty in a doubtful matter, who cannot see his own in so plain a case. The matter for which they judge me may be very doubtful, but nothing can be plainer than that they ought not so to judge.

(9.) A due Christian love would oblige us, after competent endeavours of mutual satisfaction about the matters wherein we differ, to forbear further urging of one another concerning them. Which urging may be two ways: either by application to our affections, or to our reason and judgment.

Some perhaps find it more suitable to their own temper and measure of understanding and conscience, to go the former way; and only vehemently persuade to do the thing, wherein the other shall comply with them, and in some sort justify the course which they have taken, without regard to the other's conscience, press them right or wrong to fall in with them. Sometimes labouring to work upon their kindness, by flattery, sometimes upon their fear, by threats and menaces. Sincere love would certainly abhor to do thus. Would it let me violate another's conscience any way? The love I bear to a fellow-christian, if it be true, having for its measure that wherewith I love myself, would no more let me do it than hurt the apple of mine own eye. An inspirited waking conscience is as tender a thing, and capable of a worse sort of hurt. If some have more latitude than I, and think what they may do, in present circumstances so far as they may, they must, would it not be the dictate of love patiently to admit it, especially when it comes to suffering. For let me put my own soul in his soul's stead, and would I be willing to suffer upon another man's conscience, and not upon my own? and forfeit the consolations which in a suffering condition belong to them who for conscience towards God endure grief, would I, if I loved them, be content they had the grief, and did want the consolation? There will be still found in a state of suffering, somewhat that will prove a common cause to good men wherein they will most entirely agree, whatsoever smaller things they may differ in. As the pious bishops Ridley and Hooper well agreed upon a martyrdom at the stake, in the same important cause, who before, had differed (somewhat angrily) about some ceremonies. Concerning which difference how pathetic is the letter * of the former of these to the other, when both were prisoners (the one at Oxford the other at London) on the same account. But now, my dear brother (saith he) forasmuch as we thoroughly agree and wholly consent together in those things which are the grounds, and substantial points of our religion; against the which the world so furiously rageth in these our days, howsoever, in time past, by certain by-matters and circumstances of religion, your wisdom, and my simplicity (I grant) have a little jarred; each of us following the abundance of his own sense and judgment. Now, I say, be you assured, that even with my whole heart, God is my witness, in the bowels of Christ, I love you in the truth, and for the truth's sake, which abideth in us, and as I am persuaded shall, by the grace of God, abide in us for evermore.

* Fox Martyr.

Again, if others have less latitude; it would be far from us to add to the affliction they are liable to, upon that very account, by a vexatious urging and importuning them. Especially to do it with insulting threats, and menaces, and labour to overawe their brethren, against their consciences, into the embracing of their sentiments and way. Is it possible a christian should not understand how necessary it is to every one's duty and peace that he exactly follow that direction of the apostle's, and esteem it most sacred, Rom. 14. 5. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind? and that we firmly resolve never to do any thing with regret or a misgiving heart, at least. Not against a prevailing doubt, for in very doubtful cases to be rid of all *formido oppositi or suspicion* that the matter may be otherwise, is perhaps impossible to me, but to do any thing against the preponderating inclination of my judgment and conscience, were great wickedness, and such as, if it were known, would make me unfit for any communion whatsoever. And I do here appeal to you who most severely blame any of us for our dissent from you, whether if we should thus declare to you, "That it is truly against our consciences to communicate with you upon your terms, we believe we should greatly offend God in it, and draw upon us his displeasure, but yet to please you, and prevent our temporal inconvenience, or ruin, we will do it:" I appeal to you, I say, whether we should not hereby make ourselves incapable of any Christian communion with you or any others? This is then the plain state of the case, and you do even put these words into our mouths: "If we follow the dictate of our consciences we must decline you; if we go against it, you must decline us; supposing we declare it, if we declare it not, we have nothing to qualify us for your communion but hypocrisy and dissimulation! and what do you gain by such an accession to the church? you have gained, in any such case, not half the man, the outside, the carcass only, or the shadow of the man, that is, when you have debauched our consciences, when you have spoiled us, and made us worth nothing, then we are yours, wherein you shew nothing of love, either to us, or to yourselves!"

Others again that are, themselves, men of more reason and conscience, take the somewhat more manly and Christian course; and bend themselves by argument to convince the reason, and satisfy the consciences of such as differ from them. But herein also there may be an excess, that is unprofitable and grievous to those they would work upon by this course: and from which therefore Christian love, studying the peace and quiet of their brethren would restrain them. I say from the ungrateful excess of such an endeavour, for I would fain know, can there not herein be an excess? Is it not supposable that they who differ

from me, in such lesser things, may be sometime arrived to a settlement and fixedness of judgment in them, as well as I? Is it not possible they have weighed the moments of things as much as I have done? Is such a cause infinite? Is it not possible that all may have been said in it which is to be said, and the matter have been sifted to the very bran? So that all my further arguings may serve but to argue my vain self-confidence, or abound- ingness in my own sense, as if all wisdom were to die with me, Or what if they serve at length, but to shew the incapacity of the subject to be wrought upon, and the different complexion of his mind I am treating with. All cannot receive all things: we cannot make our sentiments enter with every one. Perhaps they shew the weakness of his understanding, and then hath that direction of the apostle no authority with us? Him that is weak in the faith receive, but not to doubtful disputations. Rom. 14. 1. He whom we account our weaker brother, and of slower understanding, must be received, (not cast out of communion) and because God himself hath received him, as ver. 3. (as though he had said, Is he thought fit for God's communion, notwithstanding his unsatisfied scruple, and is he unfit for yours?) and he is not to be vexed and importuned with continual disputation, if that apostolical precept be of any value with us. Sometime at least, we should think, we have tried in such a case as far as is fit, and driven the nail as far as it will go. Is it not possible such a matter may be agitated beyond the value of it, and that more time and pains may be spent upon it than it is worth? The obscurity, and perplexity of the controversy shews the less necessity. Things most necessary are most plain. Must we always in matters of confessedly little moment, be inculcating the same thing, rolling endlessly the returning stone, and obtruding our offensive crambe? Perhaps as no good is done, we do much hurt. When is the saw of disputation long drawn, about one thing, without ill effects? reason having at length spent its strength grows (as weak people are) peevish and froward; degenerates into anger and clamour. In greater differences than our present ones, between the protestant churches abroad: some of more prudent and peaceable minds have earnestly pressed the laying aside of disputes, and putting a period by consent to their theological wars. *Solitarum disputationum labyrinthos ne ingredi quidem conentur, they did not wish even to enter into the labyrinths of these unprofitable disputations*, said a great divine,† in his days, in reference to those controversies that he would have had composed by an amicable brotherly conference. And that king of Navarre, who, at that time, seemed highly concerned for the

† Davenant Sent. ad. Dureum.

peace and welfare of the reformed churches (afterwards Henry the 4th of France) in his negotiations with divers princes to that purpose, gave special instructions to his ambassador much to insist upon this, *Ut acerbis illis contentionibus, quibus, et verbis rixati sunt inter se Theologi, et scriptis : et ejusmodi disputationibus silentio tandem finis imponatur, ut Christiana charitas, et animorum fraterna conjunctio revocetur.* (Mandat. Hen. Reg. Naver. Jacobo Siguriæ Legato suo, &c. Apud Goldastum.) that, till other remedies could be used, an end might be put to bitter contentions and disputations, that Christian love and a brotherly union might be restored. And who sees not how much this would conduce to peace and union in our case too? who sees it not that is a hearty lover of peace? and that is not intent upon continuing and keeping a-foot a controversy, not so much as a means to that, but as an end, contending for contention's sake, and as a thing which he loves and delights in for itself? I am sure love to our brethren would not let us continually molest and importune them to no purpose. And it is fit they that urge to us, these are little things, which they importune us about, should know we have great things to mind, of eternal concernment to us. And that we cannot be always at leisure to mind little things, beyond the proportion of our little time on earth, and the little value of the things themselves.

(10.) Sincere love restored and exercised more among us, would certainly make us forbear reviling, and exposing one another, and the industrious seeking one another's, ruin. For such as can allow themselves to do any thing that hath this tendency; not to preserve public order, but to gratify their private ill-will, not in a sudden heat and passion, but deliberately, and so as to pursue a formed design to this purpose; if such men were capable of being reasoned with (though it were to as good purpose, to talk to a storm, or reason with a whirlwind, or a flame of fire) I would ask them "What are you altogether un-atonable? will nothing divert you from this pursuit? If any thing, what will? What more gentle thing than our destruction do you seek, or will content you? Is it our communion? And do you so recommend yourselves? Do you not know Cain is said to have been of that wicked one who slew his brother? 1 John 3. 10. And that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him? Is it not said, John 8. 44. That such are of their father the devil, and the lusts of their father they will do, who was a murderer from the beginning? And in the forementioned, 1 John 3. 10. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother? If all

were like you, under what notion were we to unite with them?" The apostle tells us, 1 Cor. 10. 20. 21. I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils, ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils. And in good earnest, incarnate devils (though that text do not directly speak of such) have too much of devil in them, to be participants in a communion, that can seem desirable, or is likely to be grateful to serious christians. I must avow it to all the world, it is not this or that external form I so much consider in the matter of Christian union and communion, as what spirit reigns in them with whom I would associate myself. How can I endure to approach those holy mysteries, wherein all are to drink into one spirit, and declare their union with the God of love, with the Immanuel, God most nearly approaching us, God with us, collecting and gathering us in unto him as our common centre, whence the blessed spirit of holy love is to diffuse itself through the whole body, all enlivened by that spirit, and formed by it unto all kindness, benignity, goodness and sweetness! With what significancy can I do so (though I were never so well satisfied with the external forms and modes myself) if it be apparent (I say if apparent) I must cast in my lot and join myself with them (were they generally such) whose souls are under the dominion of the quite contrary spirit, that fills them with malignity, with mischievous dispositions, and purposes, towards many a sincere lover of God, that cannot be satisfied with those forms and modes, and who decline them only from a sense of duty to God, and a fear of offending against the high authority of their blessed, glorious Redeemer!

I know many are apt to justify themselves in their animosity, and bitterness of spirit towards others, upon a pretence that they bear the same disaffected mind towards them. But besides that it is the most manifest, and indefensible injustice; if they charge the innocent, or such as they are not sure are guilty, if their own wrath and enmity be so potent in them as to enable their tainted vicious imagination to create its object, or so to disguise and falsely clothe it, as to render it such to themselves, as whereupon they may more plausibly pour out their fury. I say besides that, how contrary is this vindictive spirit to the rules and spirit, of the Christian religion! Is this to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and despitefully use us, &c.? How unlike the example of our blessed Lord when, even in dying agonies, he breathed forth these words and his soul almost at once, Father forgive them, &c: or of the holy martyr Stephen, Lord lay not this sin to their charge?

How unlike is that aptness to the retaliating of injuries, to the Christian temper which the renowned Calvin discovers in an epistle to Bullenger, speaking of Luther's severity towards him. If Luther a thousand times (saith he) call me devil, I will acknowledge him for a famous servant of God; which passage both bishop Moreton and bishop Davenant, magnify him for; and the former saith, he herein spake so calmly, so placidly, so indulgently, as if it were not a man, but humanity itself that uttered the words.

Yea, and such retaliation is what paganism itself hath declaimed against. (*Maxim. Tyr. Dissert. 2.*) A noted philosopher urges that against it, that, one would think, should not need to be suggested to christians, somewhat so prudential as might not only work upon the principle of love to others, but even that of self-love, that then the evil must perpetually circulate, and so must again and again return upon ourselves. As indeed if that must be the measure to revile them that revile us, (1 Pet. 2. 23 chap. 3. 9.) and render evil for evil, railing for railing, we should never have done. It were a course which once begun, could by that rule, never find an end.

This then is the first part of the answer to the proposed question. What may be most hopefully done, &c. The endeavour of having our hearts knit together in love would surely do much towards it. And this is agreeable to any the most private capacity. No man can pretend his sphere is too narrow (if his soul be not) for the exercise of love towards fellow-christians. And I hope it is agreeable to all our principles. Sure no man will say it is against his conscience to love his brother. And the same must be said of,

Secondly. That other expedient, the endeavour to have our souls possessed with a more clear, efficacious, practical faith of the gospel, which was to make the other part of the answer to our question. And though this is the more important part, it is also so very evident, that we do not need to make this discourse swell to a bulk too unproportionable to the rest it is to be joined with by speaking largely to it.

Although we have not the name of faith in this text, we have the thing. It is not named, but it is described, so as that it may easily be understood, both what it is, and how necessary to our purpose.

1. What it is, or what measure and degree of it, that would be of so great use in such a case. We are told with great emphasis, The riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ. Such as whereby,

(I.) Our understandings are duly enlightened so as mentally

to entertain aright the doctrines of the gospel, that is, first distinctly to apprehend the meaning and design of this mysterious revelation of God in Christ. And secondly to be fully assured of the truth of it.

(2.) Such again, as whereby our hearts are overcome, so as practically and vitally to receive it, that is, to acknowledge, receive, resign, entrust and subject ourselves unto God in Christ revealed in it.

(3.) And of how vast importance this is towards our establishment, the confirming, fortifying and uniting of our hearts, and our joint preservation in our Christian state (the main thing we are to design, and be solicitous for) we may see in these particulars.

[1.] Hereby we should apprehend the things to be truly great wherein we are to unite. That union is not like to be firm and lasting, the centre whereof is a trifle. It must be somewhat that is of itself apt to attract and hold our hearts strongly to it. To attempt with excessive earnestness a union in external formalities that have not a value and goodness in themselves; when the labour and difficulty is so great, and the advantage so little, how hopeless and insignificant would it be! The mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ, how potently and constantly attractive would it be, if aright understood and acknowledged! Here we should understand is our life and our all.

[2.] Hereby we should, in comparison apprehend all things else to be little. And so our differences about little things would languish and vanish. We should not only know, but consider and feelingly apprehend, that we agree in far greater things than we differ in; and thence be more strongly inclined to hold together, by the things wherein we agree, than to contend with one another about the things wherein we differ.

[3.] Hereby our religion would revive, and become a vital powerful thing; and consequently more grateful to God, and awful to men.

First, More grateful to God, who is not pleased with the stench of carcasses, or with the dead shews of religion instead of the living substance. We should hereupon not be deserted of the divine presence, which we cannot but reckon will retire, when we entertain him but with insipid formalities. What became of the Christian interest in the world, when christians had so sensibly diverted from minding the great things of religion to little minute circumstances, about which they affected to busy themselves, or to the pursuit of worldly advantages and delight?

Secondly, More awful to men; They who are tempted to despise

the faint languid appearances of an impotent inefficacious, spiritless religion, discern a majesty in that which is visibly living, powerful, and productive of suitable fruits. Who that shall consider the state of the Christian church, and the gradual declining of religion for that three hundred years from Constantine's time to that of Phocas, but shall see cause at once to lament the sin and folly of men, and adore the righteous severity of God? For as christians grew gradually to be loose, wanton, sensual, and their leaders contentious, luxurious, covetous, proud, ambitious affecters of domination, so was the Christian church gradually forsaken of the divine presence. Inasmuch as that at the same time when Boniface obtained from Phocas the title of universal bishop, in defiance of the severe sentence of his predecessor Gregory the great, sprang up the dreadful delusion of Mahomet. (*Brerewood's enquiries.*) And so spread itself to this day, through Asia, Africa, and too considerable a part of Europe, that where christians were twenty or thirty to one, there was now scarce one christian to twenty or thirty mahometans or grosser pagans. And what between the mahometan infatuation, and the popish tyranny, good Lord! What is christendom become! when by the one, the very name is lost, and by the other, little else left but the name?

[1.] Hereby we shall be enabled most resolutely to suffer being called to it, when it is for the great things of the gospel, the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, clearly and with assurance understood and acknowledged. Such a faith will not be without its pleasant relishes. It is an uncomfortable thing to suffer either for the mere spiritless, uncertain, unoperative notions and opinions, or for the unenlivened outward forms of religion, that we never felt to do us good, in which we never tasted sweetness, or felt power, that we were really nothing ever the better for. But who will hesitate at suffering for so great things as the substantial of the gospel, which he hath clearly understood, whereof he is fully assured, and which he hath practically acknowledged, and embraced, so as to feel the energy and power of them, and relish their delicious sweetness in his soul! And though by such suffering he himself perish from off this earth, his religion lives, is spread the more in the present age and propagated to after ages: so seminal and fruitful a thing is the blood of martyrs! as hath always been observed. And as such a faith of the mystery of the gospel appears to have this tendency to the best, firmest, and most lasting union among christians, and the consequent preservation of the Christian interest, this mystery being more generally considered only; so this tendency of it would be more distinctly seen, if we should consider the more eminent and remarka-

ble parts of it ; the mystery of the Redeemer's person : the Immanuel, God uniting himself with the nature of man ; his office ; as reconciler of God and man to each other ; his death, as a propitiatory sacrifice to slay all enmity ; his victory and conquest over it, wherein is founded his universal empire over all ; his triumphant entrance into heaven, whither he is to collect all that ever loved, trusted, and obeyed him, to dwell and be conversant together in his eternal love and praises. How directly do all these tend to endear and bind the hearts and souls of christians to God, and him, and one another in everlasting bonds !

Thus then we have the answer to our question in the two parts of the text. The former pointing out to us the subjects of our union, with the uniting principle by which they are to be combined with one another : the other the centre of it with the uniting principle, whereby they are all to be united in that centre.

Use, And what now remains but that we lament the decay of these two principles, and, to our uttermost, endeavour the revival of them.

1. We have great cause to lament their decay ; for how visible is it ! and how destructive to the common truly Christian interest ! It was once the usual cognisance of those of this holy profession, "See how these christians love one another, and even refuse not to die for each other !" Now it may be, "How do they hate ! and are like to die and perish by the hands of one another !" Our Lord himself gave it them to be their distinguishing character. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if you love one another." Good Lord ! what are they now to be known by !

And what a cloudy, wavering, uncertain, lank, spiritless thing is the faith of Christians in this age become ! How little are the ascertaining grounds of it understood, or endeavoured to be understood ! Most content themselves to profess it only as the religion of their country, and which was delivered to them by their forefathers. And so are christians, but upon the same terms, as other nations are mahometans or more gross pagans, as a worthy writer some time since took notice. * How few make it their business to see things with their own eyes, to believe, and be sure that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God ! How far are we from the riches of the full assurance of understanding ! How little practical, and governing is the faith of the most ! How little doth it import of an acknowledgment of the mystery of God, namely, of the Father, and of Christ ! How little effectual is it ! which it can be but in proportion to the grounds upon which it rests. When the gospel is received, not as the word of man, but of God, it works effectually in them that so believe it, 1 Thes. 2. 13.

* Pink's trial of a christian's love to Christ.

2. Let us endeavour the revival of these principles. This is that in reference whereto we need no human laws. We need not edicts of princes to be our warrant for this practice, of loving one another, and cleaving with a more grounded lively faith to God and his Christ. Here is no place for scruple of conscience in this matter. And as to this mutual love: What if others will not do their parts to make it so? What shall we only love them that love us, and be fair to them that are fair to us, salute them that salute us? Do not even the publicans the same? what then do we more than others? as was the just expostulation of our Saviour upon this supposition, Mat. 5. 47.

And let us endeavour the more thorough deep radication of our faith, that it may be more lively and fruitful: which this apostle you see (not forgetting his scope and aim) further presses in the following verses, testifying his joy for what he understood there was of it among these christians. Though I be absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ, ver. 5. And exhorting them to pursue the same course, As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him; rooted and built up in him, stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving ver. 6. 7.

And what also, must we suspend the exercise and improvement of our faith in the great mysteries of the gospel, till all others will agree upon the same thing! Let us do our own part, so as we may be able to say, "*Per me non stetit, it was not my fault*, but christians had been combined, and entirely one with each other, but they had been more thoroughly Christian, and more entirely united with God in Christ, that Christianity had been a more lively, powerful, awful, amiable thing. If the Christian community moulder, decay, be enfeebled, broken, dispirited, ruined in great part, this ruin shall not rest under my hand." We shall have abundant consolation in our own souls, if we can acquit ourselves that as to these two things, we lamented the decay and loss, and endeavoured the restitution of them, and therein as much as in us was, of the Christian interest.