

A
BRIEF VINDICATION
OF
THE NONCONFORMISTS
FROM THE
CHARGE OF SCHISM:

AS IT WAS MANAGED AGAINST THEM IN A SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE
LORD MAYOR; BY DR. STILLINGFLEET, DEAN OF ST. PAULS.

Coitio Christianorum merito sane illicita, si illicitis par; merito damnanda, si quis de ea queritur eo titulo quo de factionibus querela est. In cujus perniciem aliquando convenimus? Hoc sumus congregati quod et dispersi; hoc universi quod et singuli; neminem lædentes, neminem contristantes; quum probi, cum boni coeunt, cum pii, cum casti congregantur, non est factio dicenda, sed curia.—Tertul.

BY
JOHN OWEN

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It was no small surprise unto many, first to hear of, and then to see in print, the late sermon of the Rev. Dean of St. Paul's, preached at Guildhall, May 2, 1680, being the first Sunday in Easter Term, before the Lord Mayor, &c.

Whatever there might be of truth in it, yet they judged the time both of the one and the other, the preaching and printing of it, to be somewhat unseasonable. For, they say, that this is a time wherein the agreement of all Protestants, so far as they have attained, is made more than ordinarily necessary. And whereas the nonconformists do agree in religion with all the sober Protestant people of the nation, which is the church of England, they do suppose that ordinary prudence would advise unto a forbearance of them in those few things wherein they dissent, not indeed from the body of the Protestant people, but from some that would impose them on their consciences and practices. Who knows not that the present danger of this nation is from popery, and the endeavours that are used both to introduce it and enthrone it, or give it power and authority among us? And it is no part of the popish design to take away and destroy those things wherein the nonconformists do dissent from the present ecclesiastical establishment, but rather to confirm them. Their contrivance is to ruin and destroy the religion of the body of the Protestants in this kingdom, wherein the nonconformists are one with them, and equally concerned with any of them. Wherefore it cannot but be grievous

unto them, as well as useless unto the common interest of the Protestant religion, that at such a time and season they should be reflected on, charged and severely treated on the account of those lesser differences which no way disenable them from being useful and serviceable unto the government and nation in the defence and preservation of the Protestant religion. And that it is their resolution so to be, they have given sufficient evidence, equal at least with that given by any sort of people in the nation; yea, of their diligence in opposition unto popery, and their readiness to observe the direction of the magistrates therein whilst the plot hath been in agitation; they suppose the honourable person unto whom this sermon is dedicated, can and will bear them witness.

In these circumstances, to be required severely to change their judgments and practices, as it were ‘*momento turbinis*,’ immediately and in an instant; or else to be looked on and treated as adversaries; many do think as unseasonable, as to command a good part of an army when it is actually engaged against an enemy, to change all their order, postures, discipline, and advantages, or immediately to depart out of the field. And they do withal suppose that such a sudden change is least of all to be expected to be wrought by such severe charges and reflections as are made on all nonconformists in this discourse. Such like things as these do men talk concerning the season of the preaching and publishing of this sermon: but in such things every man is to be left unto his own prudence, whereof he may not esteem himself obliged to give an account.

For my part, I judge it not so unseasonable as some others do. For it is meet that honest men should understand the state of those things wherein they are greatly and deeply concerned. Nonconformists might possibly suppose, that the common danger of all Protestants had reconciled the minds of the conforming ministry unto them, so as that they were more than formerly inclined unto their forbearance, and I was really of the same judgment myself. If it be not so, it is well they are fairly warned what they have to expect, that they may prepare themselves to undergo it with patience. But we shall pass by these things, and attend a little unto the consideration of the sermon itself.

The design of this discourse seems to consist in these three things, or to aim at them.

1. To prove all the nonconformists to be guilty of schism, and a sinful separation from the church of England.

2. To aggravate their supposed guilt and crime, both in its nature, and all the pernicious consequences of it that can be imagined.

3. To charge them, especially their ministers, with want of sincerity and honesty in the management of their dissent from the church of England, with reference unto the people that hear them. What there is of truth in these things, or what there may be of mistake in them, it is the duty of nonconformists to try and examine. But some few things must have a previous consideration before we come to the merits of the cause itself.

1. The reverend author of this discourse affirms, that in the preaching of this sermon he was 'far from intending to stir up the magistrates and judges unto a persecution of dissenters, as some ill men have reported.' Epist. Ded. Without this information I confess I could not but judge it would have been as liable unto a supposition of such a design, as the actings of the nonconformists in the management of their cause, are unto that of insincerity in the judgment of this reverend author. For,

(1.) It was not preached unto nonconformists, perhaps not one of them being present; so that the intention of preaching it could not be their conviction. They were not likely either to hear the charge, or the reasons of it.

(2.) It was preached unto them who were no way guilty of the pretended crime reproved; but peculiarly such as were intrusted with the execution of the penal laws against them that were supposed guilty, magistrates and judges, which in another would have but an ill aspect. If a man should go unto a justice of the peace, and complain that his neighbour is a thief, or a swearer, or a murderer; though he should give the justice never so many arguments to prove that his neighbour did very ill in being so and doing so, yet his business would seem to be the execution of the law upon him. But let the will of God be done, nonconformists are not much concerned in these things.

We are likewise informed in the same epistle, that there

are 'no sharp and provoking expressions' on the persons of any. It is indeed beneath the gravity and dignity of this reverend author, to bring reviling or railing accusations against any; neither will he, I am sure, give countenance to such a practice in others, which is seldom used but by men of very mean consideration. But I am not satisfied that he hath not used even great severity in reflections on a whole party of men, and that unprovoked. Nor do I know how persons on a religious account can be more severely reflected on, and that not only as unto their opinions and practices, but also as unto the sincerity of their hearts and honesty of their designs, than the nonconformists are in this sermon.

I have seen a collection made of such reflections by the hand of a person of honour, a member of the church of England, with his judgment upon them; wherein they appear to me not to be a true resemblance or representation of Christian love and charity.

2. A great part of this discourse being such as became a popular auditor, consisting in generals on all hands acknowledged, as the good of union, the evil of schism, and causeless separation, &c. which will indifferently serve any party until it be determined where the original fault and mistake doth lie; I shall not at all take notice of it, though it be so dressed, as to be laid at the door of nonconformists in a readiness for an application unto their disadvantage: but nothing that by way of argument, testimony, or instance is produced, to prove the charge mentioned, and the consequences of it, shall be omitted.

3. Some few things may be taken notice of in the passage of the author unto his text; of that nature is his complaint, p. 2. 'There is just cause for many sad reflections, when neither the miseries we have felt, nor the calamities we fear; neither the terrible judgments of God upon us, nor the unexpected deliverance vouchsafed unto us, nor the common danger we are yet in, have abated men's hearts, or allayed their passions, or made them more willing to unite with our established church and religion: but instead of that, some stand at a greater distance, if not defiance.' It is acknowledged willingly by us, that the warnings and calls of God unto this nation have been great and marvellous, and yet continue so to be. But it is worthy our inquiry, whether

this be to be looked on as the only end and design of them, that the nonconformists do immediately in all things comply with the established church and religion, and are evidences of God's displeasure because they do not so; when he who searcheth their hearts doth know that they would do it, were it not for fear of his displeasure? What if it should be the design of God in them to call the nation and so the church of England unto repentance and reformation, which when all is done, is the only way of reconciling all Protestant dissenters? What if God should in them testify against all the atheism, profaneness, sensuality, that abound in this nation, unto the public scandal of it, with the dread and terror of those by whom they are duly considered, the persons guilty of them being no way proceeded against by any discipline of the church, nor any reformation of the church itself, from such horrible pollutions once attempted? Every man who knows any thing of Christ, of his law, gospel, rule, and discipline, of the nature, end, and use of them, with the worship of God to be performed in them and by them, and doth withal consider the terror of the Lord unto whom an account is to be given of these things, must acknowledge, that both in persons and things there is a necessity of reformation among us, on the utmost perils of the displeasure of Christ Jesus; yet no such reformation is so much as endeavoured in a due manner. It is no encouragement unto conscientious men to unite themselves absolutely and in all things unto such a church as doth not, as will not, or as cannot, reform itself in such a degenerate state as that which many churches in the world are at this day openly and visibly fallen into. And to deal plainly with our brethren (if they will allow us to call them so), that they may know what to expect, and, if it be the will of God, be directed unto the only true way of uniting all Protestants in the only bands of evangelical union, order, and communion, unless those who are concerned will endeavour, and until they are enabled in some measure to effect a reformation in the ministry and people, as unto their relation to the church as also in some things in the worship of God itself, it is vain to expect that the nonconformists should unite with the church, however established. And may we not think that those many warnings and calls of God may have some respect unto these abominations that are found in the

nation, yea, such as without a due reformation of them will issue in our desolation? I do know, that with the nonconformists also, there are ‘sins against the Lord their God;’ and it will be a great addition unto their sins, as also an aggravation of their guilt, if they comply not with the warnings of God, as they are here expressed by this reverend author, so as to reform whatever is amiss in them, and return wholly unto God from all their wanderings. But as unto those things which are usually charged on them, they are such as interest, hatred, and the desire of their ruin, suggest unto the minds of their adversaries; or are used by some against their science and conscience to further that end, without the least pretence to be raised from any thing in them, their opinions, practices, or conversation in the world. Doth atheism abound among us? it is from the differences in religion made by nonconformists. Is there danger of popery? it is because of the nonconformists. Are the judgments of God coming on the nation? it is for nonconformity. So was it of old with the Christians; ‘*Si Tybris ascendit in mœnia, si Nilus non ascendit in arva, si cœlum stetit, si terra movit, si fames, si lues; statim Christianos ad leonem.*’

4. The immediate introduction unto the opening of his text, is an account of the differences and divisions that were in the primitive churches occasioned by the Judaizing Christians, who contended for the observation of the ceremonies of the law; but some things may be added unto his account which are necessary unto the right stating of that case, as it may have any respect unto our present differences. And we may observe,

(1.) That those with and concerning whom the apostle dealeth in his epistle, were principally those of the Jewish church and nation, who had owned the gospel, professed faith in Christ Jesus, had received (many of them) spiritual gifts, or ‘tasted of the powers of the world to come,’ and did join in the worship of God in the assemblies of the Christians. I only mention this, because some places quoted usually in this matter, do relate directly unto the unbelieving Jews, which went up and down to oppose the preaching of Christ and the gospel in rage and fury, stirring up persecution everywhere against them that were employed in it.

(2.) This sort of persons were freely allowed by the

apostle to continue in the use of those rites and ceremonies which they esteemed themselves obliged unto by virtue of Moses's law, granting them in all other things the privilege of believers, and such as whom they would not in any thing offend. So do James, and the elders of the church declare themselves, Acts xxi. 21, &c.

Yea, (3.) Out of tenderness unto them, and to prevent all offence to be taken by them at the liberty of the Gentiles, they did order that the believers of the Gentiles, should forbear for a season the use of their natural liberty in some few things, whereby the other were, in their common meetings, as in eating and drinking together, usually scandalized ; giving them also unto the same end, direction concerning one thing evil in itself, whose long usage and practice among the Gentiles had obliterated a sense of its guilt, wherewith they could not but be much offended.

(4.) With this determination, or state of things thus settled by the apostles, (no doubt but that) a multitude of the Jewish believers did rest content and satisfied. But certain it is, that with many of them it was otherwise. They were no way pleased that they were left unto the freedom of their own judgment and practice, in the use and observance of the legal ceremonies, but they would impose the observation of them on all the churches of the Gentiles wherever they came. Nothing would serve their turn, but that all other churches must observe their ceremonies, or they would not admit them unto communion with them. And in the pursuit of this design, they prevailed for a season on whole churches, to forego the liberty wherein Christ had made them free, and to take on them the yoke of bondage which they imposed on them, as it was with the churches of the Galatians.

I have mentioned these things, only to shew how remote we are from any access unto those opinions and practices which caused the first divisions in Christian churches, and among all sorts of believers. We agree with our brethren in the faith of the gospel, as the Gentiles did with the believing Jews ; we have nothing to impose in religion, on the consciences or practices of any other churches or persons ; we are not offended that others, be they many or few, should use their own choice, liberty, and judgment, in the govern-

ment, discipline, worship, and ceremonies of pretended order, nor do envy them the advantages which they have thereby; we desire nothing but what the churches of the Gentiles desired of old, as the only means to prevent division in them, namely, that they might not be imposed on to observe those things which they were not satisfied that it was the mind of Christ they should observe; for he had taken all the churches under his own power, requiring that they should be taught to do and observe all that he commanded them, and nothing else that we know of. We desire no more of our governors, rulers, brethren (if they think so) in the ministry, but that we be not with outward force, and destructive penalties, compelled to comply with and practise in the worship of God, such things as for our lives, and to save ourselves from the greatest ruin, we cannot conceive that it is the mind of Christ that we should do and observe; that whilst we are peaceable and useful in our places, firmly united unto the body of the Protestants in this nation (which, as this author tells us, is the church of England), in confession of the same faith, and common interest, for the maintenance and preservation of that one religion which we profess, we be not deprived of that liberty, which God and nature, Christ and the gospel, the example of the primitive churches, and the present Protestant interest of this nation do testify to be our due.

These things being premised, because I have no design to except against any thing in the discourse of the reverend author of this sermon, wherein the merit of the cause is not immediately concerned; nor to seek for advantages from expressions; nor to draw a saw of contention about things not necessary unto that defence of our innocency which alone I have undertaken (as is the way of the most in the management of controversies), I shall pass on unto the charge itself, or the consideration of the arguments and reasons, whereon all nonconformists are charged with schism, &c.

But yet because there are some things insisted on by the author, in the progress of his discourse, according as he judged the method to be most convenient for the managing of his charge, which I judge not so convenient unto the present defence, I shall speak briefly unto them, or some of

them, before I proceed unto what is more expressly argumentative. As,

1. He chargeth the nonconformist ministers, for concealing their opinions and judgments from the people, about the lawfulness of their communion with the church, and that for ends easily to be discerned (that is, their own advantage); that is, they do indeed judge that it is lawful for the people to hold communion with the church of England, but will not let them know so much, lest they should forsake their ministry.

Pages 19, 20. 'I do not intend to speak of the terms upon which persons are to be admitted among us to the exercise of the function of the ministry, but of the terms of lay-communion, i. e. those which are necessary for all persons to join in our prayers and sacraments, and other offices of divine worship. I will not say, there hath been a great deal of art to confound these two (and it is easy to discern to what purpose it is), but I dare say the people's not understanding the difference of these two cases, hath been a great occasion of the present separation. For in the judgment of some of the most impartial men of the dissenters at this day, although they think the case of the ministers very hard on account of subscriptions and declarations required of them; yet they confess very little is to be said on the behalf of the people, from whom none of those things are required. So that the people are condemned in their separation, by their own teachers; but how they can preach lawfully to a people who commit a fault in hearing them, I do not understand.'

And the same thing is yet managed with more severity, pp. 37, 38. in words that I shall at large transcribe.

'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; and therefore if they thought it were lawful for them to comply with the laws, they would do it. But why then is this kept up as such a mighty secret in the breasts of their teachers? Why do

they not preach to them in their congregations? Is it for fear they should have none left to preach to?—that is not to be imagined of mortified and conscientious men. Is it lest they should seem to condemn themselves, whilst they preach against separation in a separate congregation?

‘This, I confess, looks oddly, and the tenderness of a man’s mind in such a case, may out of mere shamefacedness keep him from declaring a truth which flies in his face while he speaks it.

‘Is it that they fear the reproaches of the people? Which some few of the most eminent persons among them have found they must undergo, if they touch upon this subject (for I know not how it comes to pass, that the most godly people among them, can the least endure to be told of their faults). But is it not as plainly written by St. Paul,^a ‘If I yet serve men, I should not be the servant of Christ;’ as, ‘Woe be unto me if I preach not the gospel?’ If they therefore would acquit themselves like honest and conscientious men, let them 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 I do not question but in time, if they find it lawful, they will judge it to be their duty. For it is the apostle’s command here, ‘Whereto we have already attained let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same things.’

A crime this is which, if true, is not easily to be expiated: nor can men give greater evidence of their own hypocrisy, insincerity, and government by corrupt ends and designs, than by such abominable arts and contrivances. So if it should prove not to be true, it cannot but be looked on as animated by such an evil surmise as is of no small provocation in the sight of God and men.

This reverend author makes a distinction about communion with the church, p. 20. between what is required of ministers, and that which is called lay-communion, which is the foundation of this charge.

‘I do 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

^a Gal. i. 1.

they judge to be lawful,² and proceeding to [the forming of separate congregations, i. e. under other teachers, and by other rules than what the established religion allows. And this is the present case of separation which I intend to consider, and to make the sinfulness and mischief of it appear.]

But he knows that by the communion and uniting ourselves unto the church, which is pressed either on ministers or people, a total submission unto the rule as established in the Book of Canons, and Rubrick of the Liturgy, is required of them all. When this is once engaged in, there is no suspending of communion in particular rites to be allowed; they who give up themselves hereunto, must observe the whole rule to a tittle. Nor is it in the power of this reverend author, who is of great dignity in the church, and as like as any man I know to be inclined thereunto, to give indulgence unto them in their abstinence from the least ceremony enjoined. Wherefore the question about lay-communion, is concerning that which is absolute and total, according unto all that is enjoined by the laws of the land, or by the canons, constitutions, and orders of the church. Hereby are they obliged to bring their children to be baptized with the use of the aerial sign of the cross; to kneel at the communion; to the religious observation of holy-days; to the constant use of the Liturgy in all the public offices of the church, unto the exclusion of the exercise of those gifts which Christ continues to communicate for its edification; to forego all means of public edification, besides that in their parish churches, where, to speak with modesty, it is oftentimes scanty and wanting; to renounce all other assemblies wherein they have had great experience of spiritual advantage unto their souls; to desert the observation of many useful gospel duties, in their mutual watch that believers of the same church ought to have one over another; to divest themselves of all interest of a voluntary consent in the discipline of the church, and choice of their own pastors; and to submit unto an ecclesiastical rule and discipline, which not one in a thousand of them can apprehend to have any thing in it of the authority of Christ or rule of the gospel; and other things of the like nature may be added.

This being the true state of lay-communion, which will admit of no indulgence if the rule be observed, I must say,

that I do not believe that there are six nonconformist ministers in England that do believe this communion to be lawful for the people to embrace. And on the other hand, they cease not to instruct them wherein their true communion with the church of England doth consist, namely, in faith and love, and all the fruits of them unto the glory of God.

I heartily wish these things had been omitted, that they had not been spoken; not to cover any guilt in the nonconformists, whose consciences are unto them a thousand witnesses against such imputations: but whereas the ground of them is only surmises and suspicions, and the evil charged of the highest nature that any men can involve themselves in the guilt of, it argues such a frame of spirit, such a habit of mind, as evidenceth men to be very remote from that Christian love and charity, which on all hands we sometimes pretend unto. Of the same nature is another charge of the like want of sincerity, p. 46. 'Those,' saith he, 'who speak now most against the magistrate's power in matters of religion, had ten substantial reasons for it, when they thought the magistrates on their own side.' For which is quoted an answer unto two questions, 1659, that is, they change their opinions according to their interest. I know not directly whom he intends. Those who are commonly called Independents, expressed their apprehension of the magistrate's power in and about religion, in their confession made 1659. That any of them have, on what hath ensued, changed their opinion therein, I know not. And for my part, I have on this occasion perused the answer unto the two questions directed unto, and do profess myself at this day to be of the same judgment with the author of them, as it is expressed in that paper. There are things not easily to be numbered, wherein we acknowledge the magistrate's power and duty in matters of religion, as much as ever was in the godly kings of Judah of old, or was at first claimed by the first Christian emperors. Yet are there some who, although they are fed and warmed, promoted and dignified by the effects of the magistrate's power in and about religion, who will not allow that any thing is ascribed unto him, unless we grant that it is in his rightful power, and his duty, to coerce and punish with all sorts of mulcts, spoiling of goods, imprisonments, banishments, and in some cases death itself, such persons

as hold the head and all the fundamental principles of Christian religion entire, whose worship is free from idolatry, whose conversations are peaceable and useful, unless in all things they comply with themselves; when possibly some of them may be as useful in and unto the church of God, as those that would have them so dealt withal. And it may be common prudence would advise a forbearance of too much severity in charges on others for changing their opinions, lest a provocation unto a recrimination on them that make them should arise, of changing their opinions also, not without an appearing aspect to their own interests: but we have some among the nonconformists who are so accustomed not only unto such undue charges as that here insisted on, but unto such unjust accusations, false reports, malicious untruths, concerning them, their words, doctrine, and practices, which being invented by a few ill men, are trumpeted abroad with triumph by many, as that they are come to a resolution never to concern themselves in them any more.

2. As unto the state of the question we are told, 'That he speaks not of the separation or distinct communion of whole churches from each other, which, according to the Scripture, antiquity, and reason, have a just right and power to govern and reform themselves. By whole churches, I mean the churches of such nations, which upon the decay of the Roman empire, resumed their just right 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;' p. 16.

I do suppose that particular churches or congregations are hereby exempted from all guilt of schism, in not complying with rules of communion imposed on them by other churches; I am sure according unto the principles of nonconformists they are so. For they judge that particular or congregational churches stated with their officers according to the order of the gospel, are entire churches that have a just right and power to govern and reform themselves. Until this be disproved, until it be proved, either that they are not churches because they are congregational, or that although they are churches, yet they have not power to govern and reform themselves, they are free from the guilt of schism in their so doing.

But the reverend author seems in the ensuing discourse to appropriate this right and power unto national churches, whose rise he assigns unto the dissolution of the Roman empire, and the alteration of the church government, unto that of distinct kingdoms and provinces. But this is a thing that fell out so long after the institution of churches, and propagation of Christian religion, that we are not at all concerned in it; especially considering, that the occasion and means of the constitution of such churches, was wholly foreign unto religion, and the concerns of it.

The right and power of governing and reforming themselves here spoken of, is that which is given by Christ himself unto his churches; nor do I know else where they should have it. Wherefore those national provincial churches which arose upon the dissolution of the Roman empire, must first be proved to be of his institution, before they can be allowed to have their power given them by Jesus Christ. In what kings, potentates, and other supreme magistrates might do, to accommodate the outward profession of religion unto their rule, and the interest thereof, we are not at all concerned; nor will give interruption unto any of them, whilst they impose not the religious observation of their constitutions unto that end, upon our consciences and practice. Our sole inquiry is, what our Lord Jesus Christ hath ordained, and which if we are compliant withal, we shall fear neither this nor any other charge of the like nature.

But to give strength hereunto, it is added; ‘Just as several families united make one kingdom, which at first had a distinct and independent power; but it would make strange confusion in the world, to reduce kingdoms back again to families, because at first they were made up of them;’ p. 17. Which is again insisted on, p. 31. But the case is not the same. For if indeed God had appointed no other civil government in the world but that of families, I should not much oppose them who would endeavour peaceably to reduce all government thereunto. But whereas we are certain, that God, by the light of the law of nature, by the ends and use of the creation of man, and by express revelation in his word, hath by his own authority appointed and approved other sorts of civil government, in kingdoms

and common-weals, we esteem it not only a madness to endeavour a reduction of all government into families, as unto the possibility of the thing; but a direct opposition unto the authority, command, and institution of God. So if these national churches were of the immediate institution of Christ himself, we should no more plead the exemption of particular churches from any power given them by Christ, as such, than we do to exempt private families from the lawful government of public magistrates. And we must also add, that whatever be their original and constitution, if all their governors were as the apostles, yet have they no power but what is for edification, and not for destruction. If they do or shall appoint and impose on men what tends unto the destruction of their souls, and not unto their edification, as it is fallen out in the church of Rome; not only particular churches, but every individual believer is warranted to withdraw from their communion; and hereon we ground the lawfulness of our separation from the church of Rome, without any need of a retreat unto the late device of the power of provincial churches to reform themselves. Let none mistake themselves herein, believers are not made for churches, but churches are appointed for believers. Their edification, their guidance and direction in the profession of the faith and performance of divine worship in assemblies according to the mind of God, is their use and end; without which they are of no signification. The end of Christ in the constitution of his churches, was not the moulding of his disciples into such ecclesiastical shapes, as might be subservient unto the power, interest, advantages, and dignity of them that may in any season come to be over them; but to constitute a way and order of giving such officers unto them, as might be in all things useful and subservient unto their edification; as is expressly affirmed, Eph. iv. 11—14.

As it should seem, an opinion opposite unto this notion of national churches, is examined and confuted, p. 17. 'And it is a great mistake to make the notion of a church barely to relate to acts of worship; and consequently that the adequate notion of a church, is an assembly for divine worship; by which means they appropriate the name of churches to particular congregations. Whereas, if this hold true, the church must be dissolved as soon as the congregation is

broken up; 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.' I am far from pretending to have read the writings of all men upon this subject; nay, I can say, I have read very few of them; though I never avoided the reading of any thing written against the way and order which I approve of. Wherefore there may be some, as far as I know, who have maintained this notion of a church, or that it is only an assembly for divine worship; but for my part I never read nor heard of any who was of this judgment. Assemblies for divine worship we account indispensably necessary for the edification of the churches; but that this is that which gives them their constitution and formeth that which is the bond of their union, none of the nonconformists, as I know of, do judge. For it will not only hence follow, as the reverend author observes, 'that the church is dissolved when the congregation is broken up' (on which account churches at this time would be dissolved almost every week whether they would or no); but that any sort of persons who have no church relation unto one another, meeting occasionally for divine worship, do constitute a church, which it may be within an hour, they cease to be. It is not therefore on this account that we appropriate the name of churches unto particular congregations; there is quite another way and means, another bond of union whereby particular churches are constituted; which hath been sufficiently declared. But if the meaning of the 'appropriating the name of churches' unto particular congregations be, that those societies which have not, or which cannot have, assemblies for divine worship are not churches properly so called, it is a thing of another consideration, that need not here be insisted on. But when such societies as whose bounds and limits are not of divine institution, as were those of the national church of the Jews; no nor yet of the prudence and wisdom of men, as were the distribution of the ancient church into patriarchates and diocesses; but a mere natural and necessary consequent of that prevailing sword, which on the dissolution of the Roman empire erected distinct kingdoms and dominions, as men were able; such societies as are not capable of any religious

assemblies for divine worship, and the ministration of Christian discipline in them; such as are forced to invent and maintain a union by ways and means, and officers and orders, which the Scripture knows nothing of, are proved to be churches of Christ's institution, I shall embrace them as such : in the mean time let them pass at their own proper rate and value, which the stamp of civil authority hath put upon them. What is farther discoursed by the author on this subject, proceeding no farther but why may it not be so and so, we are not concerned in.

3. Pages 23, 24. there is a distribution of all dissenters into two parties; (1.) Such as say, 'That although they are in a state of separation from our church, yet this separation is no sin.' (2.) Such as say, 'That a state of separation would be sin, but notwithstanding their meeting in different places, yet they are not in a state of separation.' The difference of these two parties seems to me, to be only in the different ways of expressing themselves, the one granting the use of the word separation in this case, which others will not admit. For their practice, so far as I can observe, is one and the same, and therefore their principles must be so also, though they choose several ways of expressing them. Both sorts intended, do plead, that in sundry things they have communion with the church of England, and in some things they have not, nor can have it so. Some knowing the word separation to be of an indifferent signification, and to be determined as unto its sense by what it is applied unto, do not contend but that if any will have it so, the state wherein they are, should be denominated from their dissent unto those things wherein they cannot hold communion with the church of England; and so are not offended if you call it a state of separation; howbeit this hinders not but that they continue their communion with the church of England as was before mentioned. Others seem to take separation in the same sense with schism, which is always evil; or at least they pretend it is their right to have the denomination of their state taken from what they agree in with the church of England, and not from their dissent in other things from it. And therefore they continue in a practice suitable unto that dissent Wherefore I judge that there is no need of this distinction, but both parties in-

tended are equally concerned in the charge that is laid against them for their dissent in some things from the church.

These things being premised, that we may not be diverted from the substance of the cause in hand, as they would otherwise occur unto us in our progress, I shall proceed unto the consideration of the charge itself laid against the nonconformists, and the arguings whereby it is endeavoured to be confirmed.

The charge is, ‘ That all the nonconformists of one sort or another, that is, Presbyterians and Independents, are guilty of sin, of a sinful separation from the church of England;’ and therefore as they live in a known sin, so they are the cause thereby of great evils, confusion, disturbances among ourselves, and of danger unto the whole Protestant religion; whence it is meet, that they should, &c.

The matter of fact being thus far mutually acknowledged, that there is such a stated difference between the church of England and the nonconformists, the next inquiry naturally should be on these two heads:

1. Who or what is the cause of this difference or distance; without which we cannot judge aright, on whom the blame of it is to be charged? For that all men are not presently to be condemned for the withdrawing from the communion of any church, because they do so, without a due examination of the causes for which they do it, will be acknowledged by all Protestants. In plain terms, our inquiry is, Whether the cause hereof be on the one hand, the imposition of terms of communion without any obligation in conscience to make that imposition so much as pleaded or pretended from the nature of the things imposed; or the refusal of compliance with those impositions, under a profession that such a compliance would be against the light of conscience and the best understanding in them who so refuse, which they can attain of the mind and will of God in the Scripture.

2. Whereas the parties at difference do agree in all substantial parts of religion, and in a common interest as unto the preservation and defence of the Protestant religion, living alike peaceably under the same supreme authority and civil government; whether the evils and inconveni-

encies mentioned, are necessary and inseparable effects of such a difference; or whether they do not wholly owe themselves unto passions, corrupt affections, and carnal interests of men, which ought on all hands to be mortified and subdued. For as, it may be, few wise men who know the nature of conscience, how delicate and tender it is, what care is required in all men to keep it as a precious jewel, whose preservation from defilements and affronts, God hath committed unto us, under the pain of his eternal displeasure; how unable honest men are to contravene the light of their own minds, in things of the smallest importance, for any outward advantages whatever; how great care, diligence and accuracy ought to be used in all things relating unto the worship of God, about which he so frequently declares his jealousy, and displeasure against those who in any thing corrupt or debase it; with sundry other things of the like nature, will admire that these differences are not ended among us, by an absolute acquiescency of the one party in the judgments, dictates, and impositions of the other; so upon the supposition before mentioned, of an agreement in all the foundations of religion, in all things from themselves and God's appointment necessary unto salvation; of that union of affections, which our joint interest in the unity of the faith doth require, and of that union of interest which both parties have in the preservation of the Protestant religion, and that of obedience and subjection unto the same civil government; and on the satisfaction which the dissenting parties have, in that the other do enjoy all those great advantages which the public profession of religion in this kingdom is accompanied withal, not in the least pretending to or contending for any share therein; many wise men do and cannot but admire, that the inconveniencies and evils pretended should ensue on this difference as it is stated among us, and that the dissenters should be pursued with so much vehemency as they have been, even unto their ruin. But we must proceed in the way and method here proposed unto us.

1. The foundation whereon the reverend author manageth his charge of schism with all its consequents against the nonconformists, is taken from the words of his text, and declared, pp. 10—14. of his book. I shall not transcribe

his words, principally because I would not oblige myself to take notice of any thing that is *ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος*, which in such discourses do commonly administer occasion of unnecessary strife. The force of the argument unto the best of my understanding consists in the things that follow. (1.) That all churches and the members of them, by virtue of the apostolical precept contained in the text, ought to walk according unto rule. (2.) That the rule here intended is not the rule of charity and mutual forbearance in the things wherein they who agree in the foundation, are differently minded or otherwise than one another. But, (3.) This was a standing rule for agreement and uniformity in practice in church-order and worship, which the apostles had given and delivered unto them. (4.) That this rule they did not give only as apostles, but as governors of the church; as appears from Acts xv. (5.) Wherefore what the apostles so did, that any church hath power to do, and ought to do, namely, to establish a rule of all practice in their communion. (6.) That not to comply with this rule in all things is schism, the schism whereof nonconformists are guilty. This to the best of my understanding is the entire force of the argument insisted on, and that proposed unto the best advantage for the apprehension of its force and strength, &c.

Let us therefore hereon a little inquire, whether this will bear the weight of so great a charge as that which is built upon it and resolved into it, with all the dismal consequents pretended to ensue thereon; and we shall not pass by in so doing, any thing that is offered to give an especial enforcement unto the charge itself. But in our entrance into the consideration of these things, I must needs say, it is somewhat surprising unto me, to see a charge wherein the consciences, reputations, liberty, &c. of so many are concerned, founded on the exposition of a text, which no sober expositor, that I know of, did ever find out, propose, or embrace. But if it be true and according unto the mind of the Holy Ghost, this ought to be no disparagement unto it, though it be applied unto such an end. This is that which we are to examine. I say, therefore,

(1.) We no way doubt but that the apostles did give rules of faith, obedience, and worship, not only unto private Christians, but to whole churches also, which we find

recorded in the Scripture. Unto all these rules we do declare our assent and consent, with an entire conformity; and do hope that with indifferent unbiassed persons this is enough to free us from the charge of schism. (2.) For the rule here intended, some take it to be the rule of faith in general, or divine revelation; some to be the rule of charity and brotherly condescension; some to be the particular rule here laid down of walking together in the different measures of faith, light, and knowledge, which we do attain unto. The apostle in the foregoing verses having given an account of the glorious excellencies of the mysteries of the gospel, and of his own endeavour after the full attainment of them, yet affirms that he had not attained unto that perfection in the comprehension of them, which he designed and aimed at. Herein in the instance of himself he declares the condition of the best believers in this life, which is not a full measure and perfection in the comprehension of the truths of the gospel, or enjoyment of the things themselves contained in them. But withal he declares their duty in pressing continually by all means after that measure of attainment which is proposed unto their acquisition. Hereupon he supposes what will certainly ensue on the common pursuit of this design, which is, that men will come unto different attainments, have different measures of light and knowledge, yea, and different conceptions or opinions about these things; some will be otherwise minded than other some will be, in some things only. Hereupon he gives direction how they should walk, and behave themselves in this state and condition. And unto those who have attained that measure, whence in comparison of others they may be styled perfect, that they press on unanimously towards the end proposed. And as for those who in any things differed from others, he encourageth them to wait on the teachings of God, in that use of the means of instruction which they enjoyed. And having prescribed to each supposed party their especial duties as such, he lays down the duty of them both in common; which is, that in and with respect unto what they had attained, they should 'walk by the same rule,' namely, which he had now laid down, and 'mind the same things' as he had before enjoined them. Wherefore these words of the apostle are so far from being

a foundation to charge them with schism who agreeing in the substance of the doctrine of the gospel, do yet dissent from others (probably the greater part of the church are intended) in some things; that it enjoins a mutual forbearance among those who are so differently minded. (4.) But our author affirms that it cannot be a rule of charity and mutual forbearance that is intended, because the apostle had spoken of that just before. But it is apparent that he speaks these words, with reference unto what he had said just before; and if this be that which those who are otherwise minded are not obliged unto, then are they not obliged at all to walk by the rule intended, which is not the mind of the apostle; so himself declares out of Cajetan, that ‘the apostle subjoins the last words to the former, lest the persons he there speaks unto should think themselves excused from going as far as they can in the same rule;’ p. 37.

But ‘a rule,’ he says, ‘it is limiting and determining the practice, requiring uniformity in observing the same standing rule.’ The nonconformists hereon do say, that if the apostles, or any one apostle, did appoint such a rule as this intended, let it be produced with any probability of proof to be theirs, and they are all ready to subscribe and conform unto it. On supposition that any rule of this nature was appointed by the apostles, and declared unto the churches, as the reverend author I suppose doth intimate that it was (though I dare not affix a determinate sense unto his words in this place), all that can be required of us, is that we do conform, and walk according unto that rule, so appointed and declared by them. This we are always ready to do. Sundry general rules we find in the Scripture given unto us, relating unto the constitution and edification of churches, to their order and worship, and government; sundry particular rules for ministers and others, how they should behave themselves in church societies and assemblies, are also laid down therein; all which we embrace and submit unto the authority of Christ in them. And if any other government or particular rule can be produced, given by them, which is not recorded in the Scripture, so it can be proved to be theirs, we will engage to conform unto it.

(5.) If the rule pretended to be given by the apostle be of any use in this case, or can give any force unto the argu-

ment in hand, it must be such a one as appointed and required things to be observed in the worship of God that were never divinely appointed, imposing the observation of them on the consciences and practices of all members of the church, under penalties spiritual and temporal; a rule constituting national churches, with a government and discipline suited unto that constitution; with modes and ceremonies of worship nowhere intimated in the Scripture, nor any way necessary in the light of reason. Such a rule, I say, it must be; since although I should grant (which yet I do not), that the consequent is good, that because the apostles made rules for the practice of the church that believers were bound in conscience to submit unto, therefore other ordinary governors of the church may do so also; yet it will by no means follow that because the apostles appointed a rule of one sort, present church governors may appoint those of another. We know full well, and it is on all hands agreed, what is the rule that our conformity is required unto. If this be done from any rule given by the apostles, it must be a rule of the same nature or to the same purpose; otherwise, by a pretence of their pattern or example, rules may be made directly contrary unto and destructive of all the rules they ever really gave, as it is actually fallen out in the church of Rome. But,

(6.) We deny that the apostles made or gave any such rules to the churches present in their days; or for the use of the churches in future ages, as should appoint and determine outward modes of worship, with ceremonies in their observation; stated feasts and fasts, beyond what is of divine institution, liturgies or forms of prayer, or discipline to be exercised in law courts, subservient unto a national ecclesiastical government. What use then they are or may be of, what benefit or advantage may come to the church by them, what is the authority of the superior magistrate about them, we do not now inquire or determine. Only we say, that no rule unto these ends was ever prescribed by the apostles. For,

(1.) There is not the least intimation of any such rule to be given by them in the Scripture. There are in it, as was before observed, many express rules both general and particular, about churches, their faith, worship, and men's walk-

ing in them, thoroughly sufficient to direct the duty and practice of all believers in all cases and occurrences relating to them. But of any such rule as that here pretended, there is no mention; which certainly if it had been given, and of the importance which now it is pleaded to be of, such as that without it neither peace, nor unity, nor order can be preserved in churches, some intimation at least would have been made of it therein. Especially we may judge it would have been so, seeing sundry things (every thing so far as we can understand) wherein the edification of the church is any way concerned, are recorded in it, though of little or no use in comparison of what so great and general a rule would be of. Besides, there is that doctrine delivered, and those directions given by them in the Scripture, concerning the liberty of believers and forbearance of dissenters, as is inconsistent with such a rule and the imposition of it.

(2.) The first churches after their times knew nothing of any such rule given by them, and therefore after they began to depart from the simplicity of the gospel in any things, as unto worship, order and rule, or discipline, they fell into a great variety of outward observances, orders, and ceremonies, every church almost differing in some thing or other from others, in some such observations; yet all keeping 'the unity of the faith in the bond of peace.' This they would not have done if the apostles had prescribed any one certain rule of such things that all must conform unto, especially considering how scrupulously they did adhere unto every thing that was reported to be done or spoken by any of the apostles, were the report true or false.

(3.) In particular, when a difference fell out amongst them, in a business of this nature, namely, in a thing of outward order, nowhere appointed by the authority of Christ, namely, about the observation of Easter, the parties at variance appealed on the one side to the practice of Peter, on the other to the practice of John; both vainly enough; yet was it never pretended by any of them on either side, that the apostles had constituted any rule in the case; and therefore is it not probable that they esteemed them to have done so in things of an alike nature, seeing they laid more weight on this, than on any other instance of the like kind.

(4.) It is expressly denied by good and sufficient tes-

timony among them, that the apostles made any law or rule about outward rites, ceremonies, times, and the like. See Socrat. lib. 5. cap. 21.

However then the apostles might, by their epistles and presence with the churches, reform abuses that were creeping or crept in among them, and set things in order among them, with renewed directions for their walking; and that all Christians were obliged unto the observation of those rules, as all those still are unto whom they are applicable in their circumstances; yet all this proves nothing of their appointing such a general rule as is pretended, and such a rule alone would be pleadable in this case; and yet not this neither, until either it were produced in a scheme of canons, or it were proved because they had power to make such a rule, so others may do the like, adding unto what they prescribed, leaving place unto others to add to their rule by the same right, and so endlessly.

The truth is, if God would be pleased to help us on all hands to lay aside prejudices, passions, secular interests, fears, and every other distempered affection, which obstruct our minds in passing a right judgment on things of the nature treated on; we find in the text and context spoken unto, a sacred truth divinely directive of such a practice as would give peace and rest unto us all. For it is supposed that men in a sincere endeavour after acquaintance with the truths and mysteries of the gospel, with an enjoyment of the good things represented and exhibited in them, may fall in some things, into different apprehensions about what belongs unto faith and practice in religion. But whilst they are such as do not destroy nor overthrow the foundation, nor hinder men from 'pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,' that which the apostle directs unto them, who are supposed to be ignorant of, or to mistake in the things wherein they do differ from others; is only that they wait for divine instruction in the use of the means appointed for that end, practising in the mean time according to what they have received. And as unto both parties the advice he gives them is, that 'whereunto they have attained,' wherein they do agree, which were all those principles of faith and obedience which were necessary unto their acceptance with God, they should 'walk by the same rule, and mind the

same things ;' that is, 'forbearing one another' in the things wherein they differ ; which is the substance of what is pleaded for by the nonconformists.

And that this is the meaning and intention of the apostle in this place, is evident from the prescription of the same rules in an alike case, Rom. xiv. This the reverend author saw, namely, that the rule there laid down, is such as expressly requires mutual forbearance in such cases, where men are unsatisfied in conscience about any practice in religion ; which seems in the same case to be quite another rule, than that which he supposeth to be intended in this place to the Philippians. But hereunto he answers, 'That the apostle did act like a prudent governor, and in such a manner, as he thought did most tend to the propagation of the gospel, and the good of particular churches. In some churches that consisted most of Jews, as the church of Rome at this time did, and where they did not impose the necessity of keeping of the law on the Gentile Christians (as we do not find they did at Rome), the apostle was willing to have the law buried as decently, and with as little noise as might be ; and therefore in this case he persuades both parties to forbearance and charity, in avoiding the judging and censuring one another, since they had an equal regard unto the honour of God in what they did. But in those churches where the false apostles made use of this pretence, of the Levitical law being still in force, to divide the churches and to separate the communion of Christians ; these the apostle bids them beware of them and their practices, as being of a dangerous and pernicious consequence ;' pp. 14, 15. (1.) No man ever doubted of the prudence of the apostle as a governor, though in this place he acts only as a teacher divinely inspired, instructing the churches in the mind of God, as unto the differences that were among them. (2.) The difference then among the Romans was about the observation of the Mosaical ceremonies and worship, that is, so far as they might be observed, in the countries of the Gentiles out of the limits of the church, the land of Canaan. It could not be therefore concerning such things as whose discharge and practice was confined unto the temple or that land, which yet the Jews of Jerusalem adhered unto ; Acts xx. 21—24. Their controversy therefore was principally about meats and drinks, days of feast-

ing or fasting, and the like; all founded in a supposed necessity of circumcision. (3.) It is well observed by our author that the Judaizing Christians (which in all probability at this time were the greatest number at Rome, the Gentile church not making any great increase before the coming of the apostle thither) did not impose the necessity of keeping the law on the Gentile Christians, at least not in that manner as was done by the false teachers, who troubled the churches of the Galatians and others, so as to reject them who complied not with them out of church-communion, and from all hopes of salvation. But yet both parties continued in their different practices, which through want of instruction what was their duty in such cases, produced many inconveniencies among them; as judging or despising one another, contrary to the rule of Christian love and charity. In this state the apostle prescribes unto them the rule of their duty; which is plainly, to bear with one another, to love one another, and according to the nature of charity to believe all things, to believe that each party was accepted with God, whilst they served him according unto the light which they had received. And as it is to be thought that upon the giving of this rule and direction, they utterly laid aside all the animosities in judging and despising one another, which they had been guilty of; so it is certain that they continued in their different practice a long time after without any rebuke or reproof. Yea, some learned men do judge, and that not on grounds to be despised, that the parties who differed were gathered into distinct churches, and so continued to walk, even to the days of Adrian the emperor, when the last and final destruction of the whole nation of the Jews did befall them; after which, those who were not hardened to the utmost, gave off all expectation of any respect to be had with God, of their old institutions.

I do not know how the present case between the church of England and the nonconformists, could have possibly been more plainly and distinctly stated and exemplified in any thing that the churches were capable of or liable unto in those days, than it is in this case here stated and determined by the apostle; in whose direction, rule, and determination we do fully acquiesce. But, (4.) It is true also which this reverend author observes, that when the false apostles, or any other Judaizing teachers pretending to au-

thority, did impose the observation of the rites and ceremonies of the Levitical law on any churches unto their disturbance and division; the apostle looks hereon, as that which so far altered the case, that he gives other rules and directions about it. And if such impositions might be yet forborn in the like case, especially as accompanied with the severe supplement and addition of all sorts of outward penalties to be inflicted on them who cannot comply with them, an open door would appear into all that agreement, peace, and quietness among us, which are desired.

I have treated thus far of these things, not to manage a controversy with this author, or any other, but only to shew that there is no ground to be taken from this text or its context; to give countenance unto the severe censure of schism and all the evil consequents of it, as maintained by ill arts and practices, upon the nonconformists.

The procedure of our author in the management of his charge, is in a way of proving from the assertions and concessions of the several parties whereinto he hath distinguished nonconformists, that they have no just cause to withhold full communion from the church of England, especially in its parochial assemblies. And as unto the first party whom he affirms to grant that they are in a state of separation, he quotes some sayings out of a discourse of a nameless author, concerning Evangelical Love, Church-Peace, and Unity. And together with some concessions of his, he adds his judgment, that communion in ordinances must be only in such churches as Christ himself instituted by unalterable rules, which were only particular and congregational churches. As I remember, that author hath at large declared in his discourse, what communion believers ought to have with the church, or all churches, the church in every sense wherein that name is used in the Scripture. But I shall not trouble myself to inquire into his assertions or concessions; nor at present can I do so, not having that book with me where I now am. My business is only to examine on this occasion what this reverend author excepteth against, or opposeth unto his assertion about congregational churches, and the answering his charge of schism, notwithstanding this plea of the institution of particular churches for the celebration of divine ordinances. This he doth p. 25. ‘Granting this to be true, how doth

it hence appear not to be a sin to separate from our parochial churches ; which, according to their own concessions, have all the essentials of true churches ? And what ground can they have to separate and divide those churches, which for all that we can see, are of the same nature with the churches planted by the apostles at Corinth, Philippi, or Thessalonica ?

Ans. (1.) We will allow at present that the parochial churches, at least some of them in this nation, are true churches; that is, that they are not guilty of any such heinous errors in doctrine or idolatrous practice in worship, as should utterly deprive them of the being and nature of churches. Yet we suppose it will not be made a rule, that communion may not be withheld or withdrawn from any church in any thing, so long as it continues as unto the essence of it to be so. This author knows that testimonies may be produced out of very learned Protestant writers to the contrary.

(2.) We do not say, it is not pleaded, that because communion in ordinances must be only in such churches as Christ himself hath instituted, &c. that therefore it is lawful and necessary to separate from parochial churches; but it may be pleaded thence, that if it be on other grounds necessary to so separate or withhold communion from them; it is the duty of them who do so, to join themselves in or unto some other particular congregations.

The reasons why the nonconformists cannot join in that communion with those parochial churches which were before described, are quite of another nature, which are not here to be pleaded; however some of them may be mentioned, to deliver us from this mistake, that the ground of separation from them, is the institution of particular congregational churches. And they are such as these :

1. There are many things in all parochial churches that openly stand in need of reformation. What these are both with respect unto persons and things, hath been before intimated, and shall be farther declared if occasion require. But these parochial churches neither do, nor indeed can, nor have power in themselves to reform the things that ought by the rule of the Scripture to be reformed. For none among us will plead, that they are intrusted with power for their own government and reformation.

In this case we judge it lawful for any man peaceably

to withdraw communion from such churches, to provide for his own edification in others.

2. That there are many things in the constant total communion of parochial churches imposed on the consciences and practices of men, which are not according to the mind of Christ. The things of this nature I shall not here mention in particular.

3. There is no evangelical church discipline administered in such parochial churches, which yet is a necessary means unto the edification of the churches appointed by Christ himself, and sacredly attended unto by the primitive churches. And we dare not renounce our interest in so blessed an ordinance of Christ in the gospel.

4. The rule and government which such parochial churches are absolutely under, in the room of that rule and discipline which ought to be in and among themselves, namely, that by the courts of bishops, chancellors, commissaries, &c. is unknown to the Scriptures, and in its administration is very remote from giving a true representation of the authority, wisdom, love, and care of Christ to his church; which is the sole end of all church rules and discipline. The yoke hereof many account themselves not obliged to submit unto.

5. There is in such churches a total deprivation of the liberty of the people secured unto them by the rules and practices of several ages from the beginning, of choosing their own pastors; whereby they are also deprived of all use of their light and knowledge of the gospel, in providing for their own edification.

6. It cannot be denied, but that there is want of due means of edification in many of those parochial churches, and yet provision is made by the government that those churches are under, that none shall by any way provide themselves of better means, for that great end of all church society.

It is on these and the like reasons that the nonconformists cannot join in total communion such as the rule pleaded for requireth, with parochial churches. In this state, as was said, the Lord Christ having instituted particular congregations requiring all believers to walk in them; it is the duty of those who are necessitated to decline the communion of parochial churches, as they are stated at present, to

join themselves in and unto such congregations, as wherein their edification and liberty may be better provided for according unto rule.

But hereon the reverend author proceeds to oppose such particular congregations or churches, I think, as unto their original and necessity; for so he speaks, pp. 25, 26. ‘But I must needs say farther, I have never yet seen any tolerable proof, that the churches planted by the apostles were limited to congregations.’ Howbeit this seems to be so clear and evident in matter of fact, and so necessary from the nature of the thing itself, that many wise men, wholly unconcerned in our controversies, do take it for a thing to be granted by all without dispute. So speaks chief justice Hobart, p. 149. in the case of Colt and Glover cont. bishop Coventry and Litchfield. ‘And we know well that the primitive church in its greatest purity, was but voluntary congregations of believers, submitting themselves to the apostles, and after to other pastors, to whom they did minister of their temporals as God did move them.’ Of the same judgment are those who esteemed the first government of the church to be democratical. So speaks Paulus Sharpius, ‘In the beginning the government of the holy church had altogether a democratical form, all the faithful intervening in the chiefest deliberations; thus we see that all did intervene at the election of Matthias unto the apostleship, and in the election of the six deacons; and when St. Peter received Cornelius, a heathen centurion, unto the faith, he gave an account of it to all the church: likewise in the council celebrated in Jerusalem, the apostles, the priests, and the other faithful brethren, did intervene, and the letters were written in the name of all these three orders. In success of time, when the church increased in number, the faithful retiring themselves to the affairs of their families, and having left those of the congregation, the government retained only in the ministers, and became aristocratical, saving the election which was popular.’ And others also of the same judgment may be added.

But let us hear the reasoning of this learned author against this apprehension; this he enters upon, p. 26. ‘It is possible, at first, there might be no more Christians in one city than could meet in one assembly for worship; but where doth it appear, that when they multiplied into more

congregations, they did make new and distinct churches, under new officers, with a separate power of government? Of this, I am well assured, there is no marks nor footsteps in the New Testament, or the whole history of the primitive church. I do not think it will appear credible to any considerate man, that the five thousand Christians in the church of Jerusalem made one stated and fixed congregation for divine worship; not if we make all the allowances for strangers which can be desired: but if this were granted, where are the unalterable rules that as soon as the company became too great for one particular assembly, they must become a new church under peculiar officers and an independent authority? It is very strange that those who contend so much for the Scripture's being a perfect rule of all things pertaining to worship and discipline, should be able to produce nothing in so necessary a point.'

I answer, (1.) It is possible that an impartial account may ere long be given of the state and ways of the first churches after the decease of the apostles; wherein it will be made to appear how they did insensibly deviate in many things from the rule of their first institution; so as that though their mistakes were of small moment, and not prejudicial unto their faith and order, yet occasion was administered to succeeding ages to increase those deviations until they issued in a fatal apostacy. An eminent instance hereof is given us in the discourse of Paulus Sharpius about matters beneficiary, lately made public in our own language.

(2.) The matter of fact herein seems to me evidently to be exemplified in the Scripture. For although it may be there is not express mention made that these or those particular churches did divide themselves into more congregations with new officers; yet are there instances of the erection of new particular congregations in the same province, as distinct churches with a separate power of government. So the first church in the province of Judea was in Jerusalem; but when that church was complete, as to the number of them who might communicate therein unto their edification, the apostle did not add the believers of the adjacent towns and places unto that church, but erected other particular congregations all the country over: so there were different churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria; that is, many in each of them; Acts ix. 31. So the apostle mentions the

‘churches of God that were in Judea,’ 1 Thess. ii. 14. and nowhere speaks of them as one church, for worship, order, and government. So he speaks again, that is constantly, Gal. i. 22. ‘I was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea.’ And that these churches were neither national nor diocesan, but particular congregations, is, as I suppose, sufficiently evident. So was it in the province of Galatia; there is no mention of any church therein, that should be comprehensive of all the believers in that province. But many particular churches there were, as it is testified chap. i. 2. So was it also in Macedonia, the first church planted in that province was at Philippi, as it is declared Acts xvi. And it was quickly brought into complete order, so as that when the apostle wrote unto it, there were in it the saints whereof it was constituted, with ‘bishops and deacons;’ Phil. i. 1. But that church being so complete, the apostle appointed other particular congregational churches, in the same province, who had officers of their own, with a power of government; these he mentions and calls the ‘churches of Macedonia;’ 2 Cor. viii. 1. 23. Wherefore we need no more directions in this matter, than what are given us by the apostle’s authority in the name and authority of Jesus Christ; nor are concerned in the practice of those who afterward took another course, of adding believers from other places unto the church first planted, unless it were in case of a disability to enjoy church-communion among themselves elsewhere. Whatever therefore is pretended unto the contrary, we have plain Scripture evidence and practice, for the erecting particular distinct congregations, with power for their own rule and edification, in the same province, be it as small as those that were of Samaria or Galilee. It cannot surely be said that these churches were national, whereof there were many in one small province of a small nation, nor yet metropolitanical or diocesan; nor I suppose will it be denied but that they were intrusted with power to rule and govern themselves in all ordinary cases; especially when in every one of them, elders were ordained, which the apostles were careful to see done; Acts xiv. 22. This is the substance of what we plead as unto particular congregations.

(3.) It is not probable, that any of the first churches did for a long time increase in any city unto such a number, as

might exceed the bounds of a particular church or congregation. For such they might continue to be, notwithstanding a multiplication of bishops or elders in them, and occasional distinct assemblies for some acts of divine worship. And it seems if they did begin to exceed in number beyond a just proportion for their edification, they did immediately erect other churches among them or near them. So whereas there was a mighty increase of believers at Corinth, Acts xviii. 10. there was quickly planted a distinct church at Cenchrea, which was the port of the city; Rom. xvi. 1. And notwithstanding the great number of five thousand that were converted at Jerusalem, upon the first preaching of the gospel; yet were they so disposed of or so dispersed, that some years after this there was such a church only there, as did meet together in one place as occasion did require, even the whole multitude of the brethren, who are called the church, in distinction from the apostles and elders who were their governors; Acts xv. 4. 12. xxi. 22. Nor was that church of any greater number, when they all departed afterward, and went out unto Pella, a village beyond Jordan, before the destruction of the people, city, and temple. And though many alterations were before that time introduced into the order and rule of the churches, yet it appears that when Cyprian was bishop of the church at Carthage, that the whole community of the members of that church did meet together to determine of things that were for their common interests, according unto what was judged to be their right and liberty in those days; which they could not have done, had they not all of them belonged unto the same particular church and congregation. But these things may be pleaded elsewhere if occasion be given thereunto. But yet,

(4.) I must say, that I cannot discern the least necessity of any positive rule or direction in this matter, nor is any such thing required by us on the like occasion. For this distribution of believers into particular congregations, is that which the nature of the thing itself, and the duty of men with respect unto the end of such churches, doth indispensably require. For what is the end of all churches for which they are instituted? Is it not the edification of them that do believe? They will find themselves mistaken, who suppose that they were designed to be subservient unto the secular interest of any sort of men. What are the

means appointed of Christ in such churches for that end? Are they not 'doctrines and fellowship, breaking bread and prayer,' that is, the joint celebration of the ordinances of Christ in the gospel, in preaching the word, administering the sacraments, mutual watchfulness over one another, and the exercise of that discipline which he hath appointed unto his disciples? I desire to know whether there be any need of a new revelation to direct men who are obliged to preserve churches in their use unto their proper end, to take care of such things, as would obstruct and hinder them in the use of means unto that end of their edification? Whereas, therefore, it is manifest that ordinarily these means cannot be used in a due manner, but in such churches as wherein all may be acquainted with what all are concerned in, the very institution itself is a plain command, to plant, erect, and keep all churches in such a state, as wherein this end may be attained. And therefore, if believers in any place are so few, or so destitute of spiritual gifts, as not to be able of themselves jointly to observe these means for their edification; it is their duty not to join by themselves in a church-state, but to add themselves as members unto other churches; and so when they are so many as that they cannot orderly communicate together in all these ordinances, in the way of their administration appointed in the Scripture unto the edification of them, it is their duty, by virtue of the divine institution of churches, to dispose of their church-state and relation into that way which will answer the ends of it; that is, unto more particular churches or congregations.

I speak not these things in opposition unto any other church-state, which men may erect or establish out of an opinion of its usefulness and conveniency; much less against that communion which ought to be among those particular churches, or their associations for their common rule and government in and by their officers; but only to manifest, that those nonconformists, which are supposed to adhere unto the institution of particular churches in a peculiar way, do not thereby deserve the imputation of so great and intolerable a guilt as they are here charged withal. And whereas I have hereby discharged all that I designed with respect unto the first sort of nonconformists, as they are here distinguished, I might here give over the pursuit of

this argument. But because I seek after truth and satisfaction also in these things, I shall a little farther consider what is offered by this reverend author unto the same purpose with what we have passed through. So therefore he proceeds, pp. 26, 27. 'If that of which we read the clearest instances in Scripture, must be the standard of all future ages, much more might be said for limiting churches to private families, than to particular congregations. For do we not read of the church that was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila at Rome; of the church that was of the house of Nymphas at Colosse; and in the house of Philemon at Laodicea? Why then should not churches be reduced to particular families, when by that means they may fully enjoy the liberty of their consciences, and avoid the scandal of breaking the laws? But if notwithstanding such plain examples, men will extend churches to congregations of many families; why may not others extend churches to those societies which consist of many congregations?'

I answer, (1.) Possibly a church may be in a family, or consist only of the persons that belong to a family. But a family, as a family, neither is nor can be a church. For as such it is constituted by natural and civil relations. But a church hath its form and being from the voluntary spiritual consent of those whereof it consists, unto church-order: they gave, saith the apostle, 'their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God;' 2 Cor. viii. 5. Neither is there any mention at all in the Scripture of the constitution of churches in private families, so as that they should be limited thereunto.

(2.) What is spoken of the church in the house of Aquila, Nymphas, and Philemon, doth not at all prove that there was a particular church in each of their houses, consisting only of their own families, as such; but only that there was a church which usually assembled in their respective houses. Wherefore,

(3.) Here is no such example given of churches in private families in the whole Scripture, as should restrain the extent of churches from congregations of many families. And the inquiry hereon, that 'if men will extend churches to congregations of many families, why may not others extend churches unto societies which consist of many congregations,' hath not any force in it. For they who extended

churches unto congregations of many families, were the apostles themselves, acting in the name and authority of Jesus Christ. It cannot be proved that ever they stated, erected, or planted any one church, but it was composed of persons out of many families; nor that ever they confined a church unto a family; or taught, that families, though all of them believers and baptized, were churches on the account of their being families. So others may extend churches unto those societies which consist of many congregations; yet not so, as those who cannot comply or join with them, should thereon be esteemed schismatics; seeing such societies were not appointed by Christ and his apostles. If such societies be so constituted, as that there is but a probable plea that they are ordained by Christ; there may be danger in a dissent from them, merely on this account, that they consist of many congregations; but this is not our case, as hath been before declared.

The remainder of this section consists in an account of the practice of the churches in some things in following ages. This though of importance in itself, and deserving a full inquiry into, yet belongeth not unto our present case; and will, it may be, in due time be more fully spoken unto.

Those supposed of the first way and judgment, who grant a separation from the established form of the church of England, are dismissed with one charge more on, and plea against, their practice, not without a mixture of some severity in expression; p. 30. 'But suppose the first churches were barely congregated, by reason of the small number of believers at that time, yet what obligation lies upon us to disturb the peace of the church we live in, to reduce churches to their infant state?' Which is pressed with sundry considerations in the two following pages. But we say, (1.) That the first churches were not congregated by reason of the small number of believers, but because the Lord Christ had limited and determined, that such a state of his churches should be under the New Testament, as best suited unto all the ends of their institution. (2.) That which is called the infant state of churches, was in truth their sole perfect estate; what they grew up unto afterward, most of them, we know well enough. For leaving, as it is called, their infant state by degrees, they brought forth at last the man of sin. (3.) No obligation lies upon us from hence

to disturb the peace of any church ; nor do we do so, let what will be pretended to the contrary. If any such disturbance do ensue upon the differences that are between them and us, as far as I know the blame will be found lying upon them, who not being satisfied that they may leave the first state of the churches under a pretence of its infancy, and bring them into a greater perfection than was given them by Christ and his disciples ; but compel others also to forego their primitive constitution, and comply with them in their alteration thereof.

The remainder of the discourse of this section, so far as I can understand, proceeds on this principle, that the sole reason and cause of our nonconformity, is this persuasion of the divine institution of particular churches ; but all men know that this is otherwise. This of all things is least pleaded, and commonly in the last place, and but by some, among the causes and reasons of our withholding communion, so far as we do so, from the church of England, as unto the way and manner wherein it is required of us. Those reasons have been pleaded already, and may yet be so farther, in due time. For the rest of the discourse, we do not, we cannot believe, that the due and peaceable observation of the institutions of Christ, doth of itself give any disturbance unto any churches or persons whatever ; nor that a peaceable endeavour to practise ourselves according unto those institutions, without imposing that practice on them, can be justly blameable ; we do not, we cannot believe, that our refusal of a total compliance with a rule for order, discipline, worship, and ceremonies in the church, not given by Christ and his apostles, but requiring of us sundry things either in themselves, or, as required of us, directly contrary unto or inconsistent with the rules and directions given us by them unto those ends (as in our judgment and light of our consciences is done in and by this rule), is either schism or blameable separation. We do judge ourselves obliged to preserve peace and unity among Christians, by all the means that Christ hath appointed for that end, by the exercise of all grace, the performance of all duties, the observation of all rules and directions given us for that end ; but we do not, we cannot believe, that to neglect the means of our own edification, appointed unto us by Christ himself, to cast away the liberty wherewith he hath made us free,

and to destroy our own souls for ever, by acting against his authority in his word, and our own consciences guided thereby, in a total complying with the rule proposed unto us, is a way or means for the attaining of that end. And we do believe that in the present state of the differences among us, an issue whereof is not suddenly to be expected in an absolute agreement in opinion and judgment about them, that the rule of the Scripture, the example of the first churches, the nature of Christian religion, and the present interest of the Protestant religion among us, doth call for mutual forbearance, with mutual love, and peaceable walking therein. And we begin to hope, that whereas it is confessed that the foundations of Christian religion are preserved entire among us all; and it is evident that those who dissent from the present ecclesiastical establishments, or any of them, are as ready to do and suffer what they shall be lawfully called unto, in the defence and for the preservation of the Protestant religion; wise men will begin to think that it is better for them, to take up quietly in what the law hath provided for them, and not turmoil themselves and others, in seeking to put an end unto these differences by force and compulsion, which by these ways they will never whilst they live attain unto. And we do suppose that many of them who do cordially own and seek the preservation of the Protestant religion in this nation; men I mean of authority, power, and interest, will be no more instrumental to help one party ruin and destroy another, unduly weakening the whole interest of protestantism thereby; but considering how little the concern of themselves, or their posterity can be in these lesser differences, in comparison of what it is in the whole Protestant cause, will endeavour their utmost to procure an equal liberty (though not equal outward advantages) for all that are firm and stable in their profession of that Protestant religion which is established by law in this kingdom. I know that learned and eloquent men, such as this author is, are able to declaim against mutual forbearance in these things, with probable pleas and pretences of evil consequents which will ensue thereon. And I do know that others, though not with equal learning or eloquence, do declare and set forth the inequality, unrighteousness, and destructive events of a contrary course, or the use of force and compulsion in this cause. But it

must be granted that the evil consequences pretended on a mutual forbearance, do follow from the corrupt affections and passions of men, and not from the thing itself; but all the evils which will follow on force and compulsion, do naturally arise from the thing itself.

I shall close this part of my discourse with an observation on that wherewith it is closed by this author, in his management of it. Saith he, 'To withdraw from each other into separate congregations, tempts some to spiritual pride, and scorn and contempt of others, as of a more carnal and worldly church than themselves; and provokes others to lay open the follies and indiscretions and immoralities of those who pretend to so much purity and spirituality above their brethren;' pp. 32, 33. If there be any unto whom this is such a temptation as is mentioned in the first place, and being so, doth prevail upon them; it is their sin, arising from their own lusts, by which every man is tempted, and is not at all occasioned by the thing itself; and for the other part, let those who delight in that work proceed as they shall see cause. For if they charge upon us things that are really foolish, indiscreet, and immoral, as in many things we sin all, we hope we shall learn what to amend, and to be diligent therein, as for other reasons, so because of our observers. But if they do what some have done, and others yet continue to do, fill their discourses with false malicious defamations, with scorn, contempt, railing, and revilings, scandalous unto Christian religion; like a sermon lately preached before my Lord Mayor, and since put in print (I intend not that under consideration), we are no way concerned in what they do or say; nor do, as we know of, suffer any disadvantage thereby; yea, such persons are beneath the offence and contempt of all men, pretending unto the least wisdom and sobriety.

For what remains of this discourse, I esteem not myself concerned to insist on the examination of it. For I would not so express my judgment in these things, as some are here represented to declare themselves. And I know that those who are principally reflected on, are able to defend both their principles and practices. And besides I hear (in the retirement wherein I live, and wherein I die daily), that some of those most immediately concerned, have returned an answer, unto this part of the discourse under

consideration. I shall therefore only observe some few things that may abate the edge of this charge. For although we judge the defence of the truth which we profess to be necessary when we are called thereunto; yet, at present, for the reasons intimated at the entrance of this discourse, we should choose that it might not be brought under debate. But the defence of our innocency, when the charge against us is such as in itself tends to our distress and ruin, is that alone which is our present design; and which wise men, no way concerned in our nonconformity, for the sake of Protestant religion and public peace of the nation, have judged necessary.

The principal strength of this part of the reverend author's discourse, consists in his application of the reasons of the assembly against those who desired forbearance in distinct communion from the rule sought then to be established, unto those who now desire the same forbearance from the church of England. I will not immerse myself in that controversy; nor have any contention with the dead. This only I say, that the case then between the Presbyterians and those who dissented from them, is so vastly different from that now between the church of England and the nonconformists, and that in so many material instances and circumstances, that no light can be communicated unto the right determination of the latter, from what was pleaded in the former. In brief, those who pleaded then for a kind of uniformity or agreement in total communion, did propose no one of those things, as the condition of it, which are now pleaded as the only reasons of withholding the same kind of conformity from the church of England; and the nonimposition of any such things, they made the foundation of their plea for the compliance of others with them. And those on the other side, who pleaded for liberty and forbearance in such a case as wherein there were no such impositions, did it mostly on the common liberty which, as they judged, they had with their other brethren, to abide by the way which they had declared and practised, long before any rule was established unto its prejudice. And these things are sufficient to give us, as unto the present case under debate, an absolute unconcernment in what was then pleaded on the one side or the other; and so it shall be here dismissed.

The especial charge here managed against the nonconformists is, that they allow that to 'live a state of separation from such churches, as many at least of ours are, is a sin;' yet that themselves so do, which is manifest in their practice. But it may be said, (1.) That this concession respects only parochial churches, and that some of them only. But the conformity in general required of us, respects the constitution, government, discipline, worship, and communion of the national church and diocesan churches therein. (2.) Persons who thus express themselves are to be allowed the interpretation of their own minds, words, and expressions. For if they do judge that such things do belong unto a state of separation from any churches, as namely, a causeless renouncing of all communion with them; a condemnation of them as no church, and on that ground setting up churches against them, which they know themselves not to be guilty of, they may both honestly and wisely deny themselves to be in a state of separation, nor will their present practice prove them so to be. And on the other hand, those who do acknowledge a separation as unto distinct local presential communion with the church of England, yet do all of them deny those things, which in the judgment of those now intended, are necessary to constitute a state of separation. But on this account, I cannot see the least contradiction between the principles and practice of these brethren, nor wherein they are blame-worthy in their concessions, unless to be in too much earnestness to keep up all possible communion with the church of England: 'forgive them that wrong.' Yet I say not this, as though these who are here supposed to own a state of separation, were not as zealous also for communion in faith, love, and doctrine of truth with the body of Protestants in this nation, as they are. (3.) That which animates this part of the discourse, and which is the edge of this charge is, that 'the ministers do conceal from the people what their judgment is about the lawfulness of communion with the church of England.' How this can be known to be so, I cannot understand; for that it is their judgment that they may do so, is proved only, so far as I know, from what they have written and published in print unto that purpose. And certainly what men so publish of their own accord, they can have no design to conceal from any; especially not from them who

usually attended on their ministry, who are most likely to read their books with diligence ; but this hath been spoken unto before.

In these things we seek for no shelter nor countenance from what is pleaded by any concerning the obliging power of an 'erroneous conscience,' which the reverend author insists on, pp. 42—44. For we acknowledge no rule of conscience in these things which concern churches, their state, power, order, and worship, but divine revelation only ; that is, the Scripture, the written word of God ; and sure enough we are not deceived in the choice of our rule, so as that we desire no greater assurance in any concerns of religion. And by the Scripture as our rule we understand both the express words of it, and whatever may by just and lawful consequences be educed from them. This rule we attend unto, and inquire into the mind of God in it, with all the diligence we are able, and in the use of all the means that are usually and truly pleaded as necessary unto the attainment of a right understanding thereof. And if any one can inform us of any thing required of us thereby, which yet we have not received, we shall with all readiness comply therewithal. We have no prejudices, no outward temptations, that should bias our minds and inclinations unto those principles and practices on them, which we judge ourselves guided and directed unto by this rule ; but all such considerations as might be taken from the most moderate desires, even of food and raiment, do lie against us. We are hereon fully satisfied, that we have attained that knowledge in the mind of God about these things, as will preserve us from evil or sin against him, from being hurtful or useless unto the rest of mankind, if we submit unto the light and conduct of it. Wherefore we seek no relief in, we plead no excuse from, the obligation of an erroneous conscience ; but do abide by it that our consciences are rightly informed in these things ; and then it is confessed on all hands, what is their power, and what their force to oblige us, with respect unto all human commands.

I know not of any farther concern that the nonconformists have in the discourse of this reverend author ; unless it be in the considerations which he proposeth unto them, and the advice which he gives them in the close of it. I shall only say concerning the one and the other, that having

weighed them impartially unto the best of my understanding, I find not any thing in them, that should make it the duty of any man, to invent and constitute such a rule of church communion, as that which is proposed unto the nonconformists for their absolute compliance withal ; nor any thing that should move the nonconformists unto such compliance, against the light of their consciences, and understanding in the mind of Christ ; which alone are the things in debate between us. But if the design of the author, in the proposal of these considerations and the particulars of his advice, be that we should take heed to ourselves, that during these differences among us, we give no offence unto others, so far as it is possible, nor entertain severe thoughts in ourselves of them from whom we differ, we shall be glad that both he and we should be found in the due observance of such advice. One head of his advice I confess might be, if I am not mistaken, more acceptable with some of the nonconformists, if it had not come in the close of such a discourse as this is ; and it is, that ‘ they should not be always complaining of their hardships and persecution ;’ p. 54. For they say, after so many of them have died in common gaols, so many have endured long imprisonments, not a few being at this day in the same durance ; so many driven from their habitations into a wandering condition, to preserve for awhile the liberty of their persons ; so many have been reduced unto want and penury, by the taking away of their goods ; and from some the very instruments of their livelihood ; after the prosecutions which have been against them in all courts of justice in this nation, on informations, indictments, and suits, to the great charge of all of them who are so persecuted, and ruin of some ; after so many ministers and their families have been brought into the utmost outward straits which nature can subsist under ; after all their perpetual fears and dangers wherewith they have been exercised and disquieted, they think it hard they should be complained of for complaining, by them who are at ease. It may be remembered what one speaks very gravely in the Comedian.

Sed, Demea, hoc tu facito ; cum animo cogites,
 Quam vos facillime agitis ; quam estis maxume
 Potentes, dites, fortunati, nobiles ;
 Tum maxume vos æquo animo æqua noscere
 Oportet, si vos vultis perhiberi probos.

Indeed, men who are encompassed with an affluence of all earthly enjoyments, and in the secure possession of the good things of this life, do not well understand what they say, when they speak of other men's sufferings. This I dare undertake for all the nonconformists; let others leave beating them, and they shall all leave complaining. She is thought but a curst mother who beats her child for crying, and will not cease beating until the child leaves crying, which it cannot do whilst it is continually beaten. Neither do I know that the nonconformists are 'always complaining of their sufferings;' nor what are their complaints that they make, nor to whom. Yea, I do suppose that all impartial men will judge that they have borne their sufferings with as much patience and silence, as any who have gone before them in the like state and condition. And they do hope, that men will not be angry with them, if they cry unto God for deliverance from those troubles which they judge they undergo for his sake. Thankful also they are unto God and men, for any release they have received from their sufferings; wherein their chief respect amongst men hitherto is unto the king himself. But that they should be very thankful to those who esteem all their past and present sufferings to be light, and do really endeavour to have them continued and increased (among whom I do not reckon this reverend author, for I do not know that I can truly do so), is not to be expected.

I shall add no more, but that whereas the nonconformists intended in this defence, are one, or do completely agree with the body of the people in this nation that are Protestants, or the church of England, in the entire doctrine of faith and obedience, in all the instances whereby it hath been publicly declared or established by law; which agreement in the unity of faith, is the principal foundation of all other union and agreement among Christians, and without which every other way or means of any such union or agreement is of no worth or value, and which if it be not impeached is in itself a sufficient bond of union, whatever other differences may arise among men, and ought to be so esteemed among all Christians: and whereas they are one with the same body of the people, that is, in its magistracy, and those who are under rule in one common interest for the maintenance and preservation of Protestant religion,

whereunto they are secured by a sense of their duty and safety; and without whose orderly and regular concurrence in all lawful ways and actings unto that end, it will not be so easily attained as some imagine; and whereas also they are one with them in all due legal subjection unto the same supreme power amongst us, and are equally ready with any sort of persons of their respective qualities or condition in the nation, to contribute their assistance unto the preservation of its peace and liberty; and whereas in their several capacities they are useful unto the public faith and trust of the nation, the maintenance and increase of the wealth and prosperity of it; considering what evidences there are of the will of God in the constitution of our natures under the conduct of conscience in immediate subordination unto himself, the different measures of light, knowledge, and understanding which he communicates unto men, as also of the spirit, rule, and will of Jesus Christ, with the example of the apostles and the primitive churches for mutual forbearance, in such different apprehensions of and practices about religion, as no way intrencheth on the unity of faith, or any good of public society; I cannot but judge (in which persuasion I now live, and shall shortly die) that all writings tending to exasperate and provoke the dissenting parties one against another, are at this day highly unseasonable; and all endeavours of what sort soever, to disquiet, discourage, trouble, punish, or distress such as dissent from the public rule, in the way before described, are contrary to the will of God, obstructive of the welfare of the nation, and dangerous unto the Protestant religion.

END OF VOL. XIX