

SOME
CONSIDERATION
OF A
PREFACE TO AN INQUIRY,
CONCERNING THE OCCASIONAL
CONFORMITY OF DISSENTERS, &c.



CONSIDERATION ON A PREFACE, &c.

I hope your public challenge, Mr. Prefacer, (as you only allow me to call you) was given with an honest intention. Yet with what kindness or equity, you could make your first onset in the view of the world; by hiding your own name, and exposing mine, designing yourself to fight in the dark, and expecting me to do it in open light, I leave to your own (perhaps calmer) second thoughts. I might hereupon, as I promise myself, be justified in the opinion of competent and impartial judges, if I had disappointed you in not writing; but I am apt to think I shall disappoint you more, in what I shall write upon this occasion. Yet not at all for this reason; for I thank God, I hold no opinion which I am ashamed to own to the world; but for what is with me of far greater weight. I have, for a long time, had an habitual aversion in my own mind, from perplexing myself, or disturbing others, by being concerned in agitating the controversies that have been on foot, about the circumstantial of our religion. I hope it will offend nobody, if I recite somewhat of what I wrote almost thirty years ago, in the epistle prefixed to a treatise of delighting in God, namely, thus;

“I have reflected and considered with some satisfaction, that this hath been my way, and the temper of my mind among you,* namely, to recommend the serious practice of the great

* The inhabitants of Torrington, magistrates and people, to whom this discourse was dedicated.

things of religion, which are known, and least liable to question, without designing to engage you to, or against, any party of them that differ about circumstantial matters. Great reason I have to repent, that I have not with greater earnestness pressed upon you, the known and important things wherein serious christians do generally agree: but I repent not, that I have so little engaged in the hot contests of our age, about the things wherein they differ, for as I pretend to little light in these things (whence I could not have much confidence to fortify me unto such an undertaking; so I must profess have little inclination to contend about matters of that kind. Nor yet am I indifferent as to those smaller things, that I cannot discern to be in their own nature so. But though I cannot avoid to think that course right, which I have deliberately chosen therein, I do yet esteem that but a small thing, upon which to ground an opinion of my excelling them that think otherwise, as if I knew more than they. For I have often recounted thus seriously with myself, that of every differing party (in those circumstantial matters) I do particularly know some persons, by whom I find myself much excelled, in far greater things, than is the matter of that difference. I cannot (it is true) thereupon say, and think every thing that they do; which is impossible, since they differ from one another as well as me. And I understand well, there are other measures of truth, than this or that excellent person's opinion: but I therefore reckon, I have little reason to be conceited of any advantage I have of such, in point of knowledge, (even as little as he should have, that can sing, or play well on a lute, of him that knows how to command armies, or govern a kingdom;) and can with the less confidence differ from them, or contend with them. Being thereby, though I cannot find, that I err in these matters, constrained to have suspicion lest I do; and to admit it possible enough, that some of them who differ from me, having much more light in greater matters, may have so, in these also. Besides, that I most seriously think, humility, charity, and patience would more contribute to the composing of these lesser differences, or to the good estate of the Christian interest under them, than the most fervent disputes and contestations. I have upon such considerations little concerned myself, in contending for one way, or another, whilst I was among you; or in censuring such as have differed from me in such notions or practices as might consist with our common great end; or as imported not manifest hostility thereto. Contenting myself to follow the course, that to my (preponderating) judgment seemed best, without stepping out of my way to jostle others."

This was long before, and hath been ever since the constant

temper of my mind, in reference to matters of this kind. I have contented myself by the best means I could be furnished with, and the best use God enabled me to make of them, so far to form, and settle my judgment, as was absolutely necessary to my own practice: not taking my measures from what I was to hope or fear, of worldly advantage, or disadvantage; reputation or disreputation; but in what way, as my case was to be circumstanced, I might walk most agreeably to the common Christian rule, the holy word of God, and best serve the proper ends of life: do most good in the world, and, as my calling obliged me, most promote the common salvation. And that judgment, once formed, and preponderating to the way I chose, I have endeavoured faithfully to follow. Herein my heart reproaches me not, and I hope, shall not, as long as I live.

In the mean time, I have abstained from censuring others, who have taken a different way. I have rejoiced in the seriousness and success of any such, in their ministerial work, and in the liberty they had for public service, which I had not. I usually pray for a blessing upon their labours, as upon my own. My converse hath been as free, and pleasant, with divers of them, as with others, that were entirely agreed with me in circumstantial matters. Nor have I felt any inclination in my mind, to controvert with them the matters of difference between us, but have even, in our converse, forgot what we differed, having no more cause to suspect hurt from them, than they from me. Where is the man that can say, I ever persuaded him to conform, or not to conform?

This disinclination with me to controversies of any such kind, hath proceeded from sundry reasons. My judgment was already so far settled in these things, as was necessary to my own practice. I reckoned an unproportionable measure of the short time we have to live in this world, was not to be taken up about them: that it consisted not with a man's designed progress towards his end, to be always, or too long inquiring about his way: that disputes of that kind have little savour in them, compared with the great, agreed matters of our faith and hope. I was loath to disquiet others, or cast stumbling-blocks before them, who seemed as well satisfied, in their way, as I was in mine. I observed such altercations seldom better men's spirits, but that often they make them worse. I had a great reverence for divers that differed from me in these things; I knew several of them to be much superior to me, in all sorts of more valuable knowledge; as also I did of them that therein agreed with me. Comparisons I thought odious and vain. I could not be of every worthy and good man's mind, when they were

not all of the same mind. I had enough, I thought, to satisfy myself in reference to my own practice, not enough to change theirs; or enable me to set up to be a decider of such controversies. It was remote from me to think sincere religion, either confined to any party, distinguished by these little things, or excluded from any. That the kingdom of God consisted not in them, but in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. I have thought, that as things that were most necessary, were most plain; so things that were so very little plain, were the less necessary. Those particles of matter must have very little of real entity in them, that escape the acies, and discerning, of the finest, and quickest eye. I have hardly known any point in metaphysics or scholastic divinity, disputed with greater niceness and subtilty, than our controversy about the ceremonies; and though I never thought myself to be any of the quickest in the art of disputing, yet I think, taking which side I will in this disputation, I could easily puzzle the most, of plain people, and that are but of an ordinary understanding, about them; much more easily, than I could convince, or satisfy them (or perhaps, did myself) the one way, or the other.

The matter were indeed easy, if (for instance) in a select gathered church (of one or other whereof I suppose you are) one conscience, or a few men's, would serve for the whole body; or by parity of cases, of a whole parish or nation. But when we consider, that every one must give an account of himself to God; and that in matters which concern our own duty Godward, we are no more capable of having it done by another for us, than (as a noted person in our time aptly speaks) of being represented by another in the day of judgment; this will bring the matter, with weight, upon our own spirits, lest we should be found transgressors in Bethel, and to have offered strange fire, instead of a sacrifice, on the one hand; or needlessly, on the other hand, set on fire the temple itself. This will, in God's time; I doubt not, be considered by such as can make the occasion cease, of such difficulties. In the mean time, it is of great consolation to those that sincerely fear God, that if with upright minds they principally study to approve themselves to him, and if they mistake, do only err for fear of erring; he will not with severity animadvert upon the infirmity of a weak and merely misguided judgment.

It is a most sure truth, and worth all this world, that to an honest unbiassed heart, it is a far easier thing to please God, than men.—I have also considered, that some that can contend fervently, and conclude positively, concerning church-power, where it is lodged, and how far it can extend, in making rules, and inflicting censures, discover too often more confidence

than knowledge and solid judgment, in those very things themselves; but much oftener, little of the Spirit of Christ, and the gospel; little of that meekness, humility, charity, that are most essential, and inward to true Christianity; and are too apt to magnify the—tithing of mint, annis, and cummin, above faith, mercy,, and the love of God.—I have sometimes thought that to be somewhat instructive, which is storied of Plato, * that having one in his academy that had great skill in driving a chariot, with that exactness, as not to swerve one jot, from the lines on which the wheels were, very swiftly, to move; nor could be satisfied until he had prevailed with that great man to be the spectator of his performance herein; he was so far from applauding him, that turning away with contempt, he said, “They that mind, with such exactness, little things, will never mind great.”—I detract nothing from the exact care, that ought to be had in observing God’s own revelations and injunctions, if you understand aright, under what notion, and for what ends he intended them. Nothing is to be thought little in religion, that truly belongs to it. But, Sir, if you should take upon you to devise rules, and measures of your own; and then put a sacredness upon them; yea more, insist to have them observed with greater strictness, and for more distinguishing purposes, than ever God intended divers of his own revelations for: this I must tell you were bold, and extravagant. And how you are concerned herein, we shall see in the progress of this discourse.

To come somewhat closer to you therefore, Mr. Prefacer, I shall first consider how reasonably, and justly you offer to engage me in this quarrel; and this will lead me on to take a view of your treatment of that honourable person, against whom your quarrel is more principally meant. As to your endeavour to involve me in this affair, I think before you had offered at it, you should have been well assured of these two things; at least of the one or the other of them. First—that I really did concern myself to advise, one way or other, as to the lawfulness or unlawfulness of that occasional conformity, about which you contend: Secondly,—that I ought to have done so. If neither of these can be made to appear, I cannot but think it was a distemper of mind, an immoderate scripturiency, or what shall I call it? too great an affectation of intermeddling beyond any call you had, that could lead you to it. And whereas you think you have not exceeded, herein, the rules of charity or good manners: as to the point of manners, I will not take upon me to be your judge; I believe you guess me to be no master of ceremo-

* Æl. Var. Hist.

nies. But as to the, much greater, business of charity, I must talk with you more about that, before we part. For it is a matter of much greater compass. And in your measures, and exercise whereof, the generality of serious christians are concerned as well as I. But as concerning myself, can you make either of these appear?

As to the *first*, I am sure you cannot, nor any man. Nor ought you to have presumed it, unless you had been sure of the *second*, that I ought. I, for my part, judged I ought not. Whether I did truly judge, or no, that leads into the main cause, that will lie between us, wherein I shall be no less cautious than you, though therein I shall not so far compliment you, as to pretend I more follow your example in it, than my own inclination, that is, I shall not undertake to determine, whether the action, (as circumstanced) of that honourable personage you principally reflect upon, were lawful or unlawful. This I meddle not with; and you pretend to decline it too (either you, or the author you recommend and follow, which is all one to me) namely, the question, whether this or that communion be lawful or unlawful; but are so little true to that pretence, as to judge that person who occasionally partakes in the legally established church's communion, unfit, ever after to be received, otherwise than as a penitent to any other Christian communion. And I think no man is to do the part of a penitent, but for what was unlawful, or a fault.

Now I, for my part, shall not take so much upon me as to determine, not being called, if I were never so competent, whether there were any thing faulty in that action or no. But in this I am neither in doubt, nor without a sufficient occasion to declare, that I can judge it no such fault, (if it be one) as should exclude one, that in all other respects appears a serious and an orderly christian, from any other Christian communion, to which he may have thought fit to adjoin himself. And that I may set in view the ground for my not judging otherwise, and for the following discourse, we must distinguish,

I. Of the obligation of precepts negative, and affirmative, or against sins, and unto duties, namely, against or unto, such things; as, by those precepts, become sins or duties. And of these, I shall speak only so far, as concerns our present purpose, that is, as they are to come under consideration, in *foro ecclesiæ*, or in a visible church of Christ. And so, there are sins consistent with the Christian state. And there are sins inconsistent with it; or destructive of it. Duties that are matter of simple precept, and duties that are also conditions of Christian communion. We are also to distinguish the obligation of negative and affirmative precepts, as it is usual and common,

namely, that the former bind (unless the precept were repealed) *semper*, &c. *ad semper*, always, and to every point of time. The latter, always, while the precept stands in force, but not to every point of time. Of this we shall make the proper use, in the fit place.

II. Of the different notions, under which, or causes, for which, men of different sentiments, or persuasions, may decline the communion of this, or that church, namely, *Some* may decline the communion of this, or that church, as judging it essentially defective; so as not to have in it the essentials of a Christian church. (Whether that judgment be right or wrong, true or false, is not now the question; or under our present consideration.) *Others* may decline it, as judging it defective in respect of some accidentals, or circumstances; either simply considered, or compared with some other Christian church, that they may apprehend to come nearer the Christian rule; and wherein the administration of Christ's ordinances may be more profitable, and tend more to their advantage and benefit, in their spiritual concerns.

These distinctions we shall consider severally, both by way of explication and application to the present case.

For the former, When we speak of sins consistent, or inconsistent with the Christian state; of duties that are merely such; or that also are required, as necessary to Christian communion, we intend the distinction, as referring to visible Christianity. And mean, that as there are sins inconsistent with visible Christianity: avowed atheism, open idolatry, infidelity, apostasy, total, or in respect of some or other known fundamental or Christian religion; contumacious, and continuing rebellion against the authority and known laws of Christ; which without visibly serious repentance and reformation, slur, and deface a man's character, as a visible christian; so there may be faults that do it not; which may yet come under common notice, or view. I only instance in what is more agreeable to our present case, as misjudging in some circumstantial matters, and very disputable, that are extra-essential to the substance of Christianity; and practising according to that erring and mistaken judgment; even though the mistake be continued, never discerned, and never repented of, or reformed as long as one lives.

Such were the differences in judgment and practice about meats and days, Rom. 14. 2. &c. wherein there could not but be right and wrong. Both sides could not be in the right, that is, referring their practice to their judgment. The question being, whether such and such things were lawful, or unlawful, and that the one side judged them lawful; the other,

unlawful. The one side must be in the wrong. The things about which they differed, could not be both lawful and unlawful. It must be sin to judge and do amiss ; duty, to judge aright, and practise accordingly. And what was now to be done in this case. ? Were they to excommunicate and curse, and damn one another ? Some that presided in the Christian church did, it is true, in process of time, come to use an unchristian severity in such cases. As when some tied themselves to the eating of herbs only, and abstained from flesh (whether they derived their opinion from the school of Pythagoras, or however they came by it, matters not.) And it was determined concerning them, (I could shew where and when, were it needful) that if they would use abstinence, upon other considerations, they might ? but if upon a judgment, or opinion, that the eating of flesh was unlawful ; they should be excommunicated. And this was thought a sufficient reason for that hard censure, because they denied Christ to have given that liberty, as to meats, which he had really given. But was this according to the mind of God ? No, quite contrary ; we see it otherwise determined by apostolical authority, Him that is weak in the faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations, Rom. 14. 1. The case follows. The charge is, Receive them, take them into your communion, and dispute not his doubting judgment with him, or pass you no judgment upon it, so as to vex or disquiet him with it. Let him alone with his judgment and practice together ; but receive him. And the forementioned rigour, we find to have been corrected in after-time.

And the like charges are elsewhere given in reference to the differences between the jewish and the gentile christians ; the circumcised and the uncircumcised, that is, that in the Christian state, no distinction was to be made of Jews, or greeks ; circumcision, or uncircumcision ; them that used, or disused the jewish rites and ceremonies ; but all were to be esteemed as one in Christ Jesus, or Christ to be all in all among them, Gal. 3. 28. Col. 3. 11. that is, God makes no difference, supposing they be good men, sincere christians, or become new creatures ; he stands neither upon their being circumcised, or uncircumcised. Gal. 6. 15. Retaining or quitting the subsequent judaical observances ; so tenderly, and by so gentle a hand, did the divine wisdom and goodness draw off the judaizing christians from those things, whereof he designed the total abolition ; whereof they had more pretence to be tenacious, being things enjoined by God himself. Therefore God treats them with more indulgence. And what example should we rather choose to follow ? especially, what indulgence doth the case itself challenge, in not pressing, under penalty, what there

can be no pretence of divine authority for? And we find this is the measure according to which we are to go, in receiving persons into our communion. We are to receive such as we have reason to think God receives; in the forecited, Rom. 14. 3.—Do not judge, but receive him, for God hath received him.

There are therefore two plain rules, laid down by that great apostle, in reference to such dubious, and small matters; namely concerning such scrupulous persons themselves, that they be fully persuaded in their own minds, (ver. 5,) and do nothing against the judgment of their own consciences, in those matters; which he enforces, verse 23. the other concerning the carriage of fellow christians, towards them, that they judge them not, but receive them, verse 1, 2, 3,—10. Whereupon, Mr. Prefacer, I conceive myself clear in not judging. And you will be clear in judging, if not only, you are an abler judge (which I will never dispute with you) but also, that you were called to judge; and that your judgment is most assuredly true. If God have authorized you, and revealed to you, not only what was right or wrong, in the case itself, but the secrets of his heart, whom you judge; and that he practised what he thought to be wrong: that is, that he is a hypocrite, and that he hath against his conscience, yielded to do that for (an unprofitable) preferment, probably to his great loss, (as some have found it) which he himself thought unlawful: if you know him to be of so vain and light a mind, that, not for any real advantage, but for a little temporary, evanid honour and gaiety; he hath offered this violence to the judgment of his own conscience; if God revealed this to you, and charged you to proclaim it to the world; then hath he indeed set you over him, and far above him; placed you in a much higher seat of judicature, than that wherein he is seated; dignified you with an authority superior to what he ever conferred upon any apostle, or on the whole Christian church, or on any, besides his own Son.

But if there be nothing of all this; then, though your judgment should happen to be true, yet if it were without any ground, upon which you could know it to be true; and so it were only right by chance: if it were without call; if you had nothing to do with the matter; if it come among the exempted cases reserved by the great God to his own tribunal; and which he hath subjected to no ecclesiastical, nor human cognizance; being, as to the matter itself, very minute, not so much as a doubtful action: but the circumstance of an action, and that touches not any vital of religion: as to the lawfulness of that circumstance, disputable; a ceremony; one of them, that were not less disputed, by men of excellent wisdom, and piety on both sides, than the jewish ones, in the time when they were matter of controversy to the Christian church: and after all that dis-

putation, determinable, for ought I know, chiefly, by the *majus* or *minus bonum ecclesiæ*; greater or less good of the church; as in the time when that jewish rite of circumcision was the occasion of so much disquiet to the primitive christians, St. Paul circumcised Timothy, for the greater service of the Christian interest; and being, as to the inward intention, motive, and inducement, secret, and liable only to the divine view; then, I say, upon all this, even supposing the thing you censure were faulty, yet it is no such fault as can slur the character of a man, otherwise appearing, a serious christian. If the contrary were duty, it is no such duty as is necessary to entitle a man to any Christian communion. Yea, and I add, your censuring it, as you do, is a thousand-fold (even unconceivably) more faulty. And if you could truly say, as Diogenes did, trampling upon Plato's rich bed, *calco platonis fastum, I tread upon Plato's pride*, it might more justly be replied, as the latter did reply, *sed majori fastu, but you do it with greater pride*. You take upon you to invade the throne of the most high; and may take that assaid to you, Who art thou that judgest another's servant? Why dost thou judge thy brother? We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, Rom. 14. 4—10. And I wonder you did not dread those awful words, of that very Judge, Mat. 7. 1. Judge not that ye be not judged. And shall more wonder, if yet you perceive not, when you thought a mote was in another's eye, that there was a beam in your own, as verse 3. A thing that among heathens* has been animadverted on with just severity. Nor shall I recharge you in the following words, Thou hypocrite (for I know not your heart in this matter) but I would have you re-consider, with how little warrant you have broadly charged that worthy person your quarrel is about, with hypocrisy; that he acted against his own conscience, because he acted not according to yours: as if yours were to be the standard, and the conscience-general to mankind! But that you may apprehend it not impossible for a man to follow the dictate of conscience, and perhaps as good a one as yours, though he do not follow yours; I shall yet have recourse to a second distinction, before laid down, namely, between the different notions, under which, of causes for which, men of different sentiments may decline the communion of this, or that church, namely, some, as thinking it essentially defective—others, as judging it defective in some circumstances only.—Now, Sir, if any man decline the communion of what is (however) vulgar-

* Cum tua pervideas oculis mala lippus inunctis.

Cur in amicorum vitiis tam cernis acutum.

Quam aut aquila, aut serpens Epidaurius?—Hor. lib. 1. Sat. 3, l. 25.

(And many others of them abound with like passages.)

ly called a church, as counting it really no church at all, his withdrawing or abstaining from its communion, must be total and constant, he can have no communion with it, as a Christian church, at all. But if one avoid more ordinary communion with a church, as judging it, though not essentially defective, yet to want, or err in some circumstances, so considerable, as that he counts another church comes nearer the common Christian rule, the holy Scriptures; and finds its administrations more conducing to his spiritual advantage; he may be led, by the judgment of his conscience; both, sometimes, upon weighty and important reasons, to communicate with the former, and continue therein, according as these reasons shall continue urgent upon him; and yet, sometimes, as the cessant, or diminished weight of such reasons shall allow, to communicate with the other.

They that will not admit of this distinction, thus generally proposed, as a ground of such different practice in the general, as is here expressed; but judge not only essential perfection, but a perfection by the concurrence of all desirable accidents to be necessary also unto Christian communion, can have no communion with any Christian church on earth; for where is any to be found every way perfect? It is true, that accidental defects may be more or less, and it requires great accuracy to apply what is here generally said to particular cases; nor shall that be my present business; I have somewhat else of greater importance to do. All that I concern myself for, is only to have it considered, that a man of conscience may, upon the grounds generally mentioned, vary his communion, as hath been said, while he keeps himself within the limits of a Christian church, essentially true, and that hath no additions destructive of that essence. And if he mistake in making application hereof, to a particular case, it proves him not to be a man of a profligate conscience, or of none at all. He may have arguments so specious, that supposing he err, may impose upon the judgment, and thereby direct the practice of a very intelligent, discerning, and upright-hearted man: so as to make him think that which is perhaps an error, his present duty; and so not offer violence to his conscience, in what he so doth. As, judging such a church true, as to essentials, he may think (occasion inviting) he hath greater reason, though it be defective in accidents, to communicate with it sometimes, than to shun its communion always; since those christians that agree in all the essentials of Christianity, agree in far greater things than it is possible for them to disagree in. He must have mean and mishapen thoughts of Christian religion, that thinks not the great doctrines of faith, ordinances of worship, and rules of

daily practice (common to us all) unspeakably more valuable, than this or that external mode, or form, of religion, that is but accidentally, and mutably, adherent thereto. And what if some have thought that alone, a sufficient reason for their occasional communion with a church, with which they have not constant communion, that they may do it and themselves, that right before the world, as to testify, they decline it not as no church; but so far, practically, own it, as the reason of the thing requires: why may they not be supposed to do this, as thinking it a good reason, whether it really be so or no, without going against conscience herein? And yet the same person may, perhaps, think the communion of another church preferable, and, for ordinary resort, rather to be chosen, as wherein he finds the same essence, with more regular, grateful, and advantageous modes, and ways of administration.

And if hereupon it should be said, But since Sir, you think it not unlawful to communicate with such a church sometimes, why should you not for common order's sake, do it always?

May he not reply, Pardon me in that, good Sir, if I think I owe more, to what I take for Christ's rule, and to the discernible advantage of my own soul; judging, in these respects, that communion to be best, which I more constantly adhere to. I say, why may not an honest well-meaning man reason thus; and do accordingly, (whether his sentiments herein be right or wrong) without gainsaying his own conscience? And the rather, for that the church itself, with which he more ordinarily communicates not, (as comprehended in the states of the realm) so far gives him the liberty of his choice, as to reckon his doing herein what is more for his satisfaction, and advantage, no punishable thing. Why may he not, conscientiously say, Let me be excused, if I do not compliment away, things that are, to me, of so great importance? And which they to whom I give it, cannot but count a profane sort of compliment?

Question. But should not the latitude of a christian carry him to fix his communion with the larger, and more extensive church?

Answer. What! Should the latitude of a christian bind him to one sort of christians, with exclusion of all other? Never was that noble principle of true Christian latitude, more perverted, or turned even against itself, than if it be used to train men into a religious bigotry! As if the apostle's professing to be all men; to the Jews as a Jew, &c. must signify, that he take one side, and engage with the Jews, against the gentiles! They that refuse confinement to the largest church may avoid

it, not because they should, otherwise, express too much latitude, but too little.

Some may here, perhaps, say, "What one judges best, ought to be chosen always." And indeed nothing is more easy, or ordinary, than for them that have little compass of thought, to pronounce hastily, and conclude peremptorily, even beyond seven men that can render a reason. How would such a one stare, if one should oppose a downright negative to his confident assertion! and say, What is best, in matter of practice, is not to be chosen, and done always? It is not enough to justify such a choice, and practice, that it be in itself, or simply best; but that it be best, in present circumstances, and all things considered, that ought to be considered, in the present juncture.

Let here another distinction be remembered, before laid down. Negative precepts oblige to every point of time. Affirmative do not so. He that is always under obligation to pray solemnly, is not obliged to be always solemnly at prayer. The worship of God is better than most actions of our lives, yet the saving of a town, or house from fire, yea, the plucking of a sheep or an ox out of a ditch, is, sometimes, to be preferred. The most sacred, external act of duty becomes a sin, when it excludes that which is more a duty at that time. How fatal! how totally destructive an error might it have proved, before, to the Jewish nation, always to have thought it unlawful to defend themselves on the Sabbath-day! * How long was sacramental obsequiation in the wilderness omitted! How much more may, attending upon such an institution, in, what some may think, a more eligible manner; if there be a reason that outweighs; when, not the substance of the ordinance is wanting, but what is counted (perhaps by you) a fitter modus!

To be plain with you, Mr. Prefacer, suppose you judge kneeling at the Lord's table, a sin, (as cautious as you are, not to seem to take this, or that side, in these controversies, wherein you, however, unwarily betrayed yourself as hath been noted; yet my supposing it doth you no hurt) and suppose you judge another gesture a duty; suppose you judge concurrence in the use of the liturgy, a sin, and the unprescribed way (by human authority) a duty; yet who hath empowered you to make such sins (if they were such) exclusive from Christian communion? or such duties, conditions of it? Sometimes, surely it will be understood how bold an adventure it is, to make terms of Christian communion, which Christ hath never made. There are sins and duties, immediately by God's law itself, that he

* As it was once said to have been, Plutarch de Superst.

never intended to be so characteristical, namely, of the unfit or fit subjects of Christian communion. For what! Hath God forbidden any to be admitted to Christian communion, but such as are perfect in knowledge and holiness? How bold a self-assuming then is it in you, not only to make sins and duties which God hath never made so; but also to make them distinguishing terms of Christian communion! which is far higher, and the more insolent usurpation! You know, or it is meet for you so to judge, that many pious men dare not partake of the Lord's supper, otherwise, than kneeling. And I have been sufficiently assured concerning divers of eminent sanctity, that they have been as greatly affected, and had as high elevations of soul, in the use of the common prayer, as others in any other way of devotion.

Now, Mr. Prefacer, ought another man's gust to have been the measure of theirs? would you have these men excluded from all Christian worship, namely, in society with Christian worshippers? To say, Let them worship God with those of their own way, is to say you know not what. For if (as by your rule it seems to be determined) the things are unlawful and exclusive from all Christian communion in worship, there ought to be none of any such way, that they can worship with. And now, Sir, if that be your conscience, that supposing there be never so many thousands in a Christian nation that cannot worship God in your way, you would have them paganized, made as heathens and publicans, God bless me from your conscience! And shall this be your way of recommending yourself to Christian communion? Wheresoever such a spirit appears of zeal against such and such external forms; (or if it be for them, it is all one to me) of pride and self-esteem, for so contemptibly little things; of malice and cruelty, that they could persecute even to the death, if it were in their power, or into strange countries, such as differ from them in things of no greater moment: I would sooner be of a fellowship with drunkards, or other sensualists, (though I hope God will keep me from both) than with them; as much, as I count a devil somewhat a worse thing than a brute. Nor can it be said, that herein Satan is transformed into an angel of light; his transformation is, at least, in this, very inartificial. He apparently enough shews himself to belong to the darkest region. And whereas some such may talk of offering strange fire, because it comes not from their altar; their fire is as much stranger than Nadab's and Abihu's, as common unconsecrated fire differs from infernal.

You will say, These human forms, and other devices they are so much set upon, are sins. Sins! but I ask, Do they unchristian a man? They will be much more over-magnified, by so

fervent opposition, than by serious use. But what would I do in such a case? would I not reject a man from the Lord's table, how serious soever, that would not communicate otherwise than kneeling? No, God forbid! let him use his own freedom; and be fully persuaded in his own mind; he shall not offend me. And though there was a time when christians were forbidden kneeling at all on the Lord's day: I had rather that human institution were neglected, than any good man debarred of so useful an ordinance. I should never quarrel with any man for that gesture itself. But I should like no one's choice of it the better, that should pretend to choose it for a moral reason. For instance, as expressive of greater reverence; because a moral reason must immediately bind conscience; and is of universal extent, must equally concern all; whence, this would imply an accusation of all other Christian churches that use not this gesture, as irreverend, or less reverend than they ought to be. Nor can there be any other measure of *debitum*, or of that which ought to be, but some law or other; nor can there be any law of universal obligation, but by a universal law-giver. This would therefore insinuate an accusation of our Lord himself of neglect, in not making such a law, and in allowing a different gesture to his disciples, when he first appointed that ordinance. For though their gesture was not sitting, it is more probable to have been such, as was used in those times and countries for their ordinary table-gesture. And this other I should use, being in communion with those that use it, rather not to offend them, than please the master of the house, or to satisfy my own conscience, as if it were in itself a sin not to use it. But for them that use it on that account, that is, of conscience towards God; I should, according to the mentioned rule, not judge, but receive them.

And whereas some may think it would introduce confusion into the church, that all should not be confined to one gesture in such an act of worship, it would be a worse confusion to have serious christians, because their conscience obliges them to kneel, when others do not, mingled with turks and infidels. Nor is that oneness of gesture more necessary to any order that is itself necessary, than that all that partake together in such an ordinance, be of one stature, size, or sex; or wear all garments of the same shape or colour. I hope for a time, when Christianity will be the religion of the world. While it is cramped it will never grow. I hope it not, to prevail in the world, by having all the world, in every minute thing, reduced to the model of this or that party. How absurdly arrogant would he be, that should pray that all the world might be of one mind, by being all brought to be, in every nice punctilio,

of his mind. When I see partition-walls taken down, truly Catholic Christianity coming into repute, a readiness and promptness of mind, to be all things to all men in the apostle's true meaning: when the great things of religion do more engage men's minds, and they cease to magnify trifles, when as to faults, (real or supposed,) men no longer strain at gnats and swallow camels; when the love of God comes to govern the Christian church, and reign in the hearts of men; then will the kingdom of God come with power. For I am sure the spirit of love is the spirit of power, and of a sound mind. In the mean time, I declare myself (as I have often) to be of no party, self-distinguished by so little things. Nor, when the visible church of Christ on earth comes to be confessedly composed (as of old) only of three sorts, catechumens, penitents, and the fideles, with their infants, can it be any great or insuperable difficulty, whom we are to receive into our communions, and whom we are to exclude.

And thus, Mr. Prefacer, I have said all I intend, as to the main of your cause, that is, Whether they that shall not be of your mind, when such a case occurs to them, as that about which you litigate, and shall practise otherwise (that is, shall not please you) should therefore, except they repent, be excluded all other Christian communion? I shall say no more to it, except what may occasionally fall in, upon my giving some short remarks as to the manner of your treating such worthy persons, whose judgment and practice agree not with yours. Herein, because I never intended to answer your book, (thinking what I have said makes that needless) I shall only note some passages from it, here and there.

And I begin with the title page. Where, I pray you inquire of your own heart, what you meant by that suggestion "in cases of preferment;" Was it not to insinuate, that preferment was the inducement to; that worthy person, to act against his own conscience in that case? when it was his known judgment, testified by his practice several years before. Herein you should have been sure. You meddled with a two-edged weapon, wherewith you vainly aimed to wound him (for a sincere conscience is invulnerable) but have most certainly wounded yourself. You may in time feel the wound; it is worse while you donot. If he can sincerely appeal to the Searcher of hearts (as for ought you know, he can) Lord, thou knowest this man hath wronged me: I would not have such an appeal lying in heaven against me for all the world! How can you tell but that such a thing was designed, and done with a sincere aim, and intention of mind? Among heathens it hath not been unknown, that some having honorary coronets conferred upon

them, consecrated them to their Gods. * Is it impossible somewhat like it should be done by a christian to the true and living God? Are you so much a stranger to a devoted life, as not to think this possible? You have wronged him, when without ground, you judged otherwise: but you wronged the great God infinitely more, whose throne you presumed to usurp. And you should have been able, before you concluded with so rash confidence, to prove the act in its circumstance unlawful. If it were lawful: go among them you thought to gratify, and inquire who of them will think a consequent preference could make it unlawful? Therefore your insinuation, except wherein it is spiteful and mischievous, is idle and vain.

Again, your subjoined text of scripture, "If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal"—for what purpose was it set there? What! To signify, that the God of the dissenters, and of the established church, differ as the living God and Baal? Did you take this for a piece of wit? it was uncharitable. Uncharitable! that is a trifle in comparison; it was profane and most impious wit; yet you are mighty fond of the conceit, and we have it over and over in the book, that the conformists and dissenters serve two Gods (as the one of them is miscalled) and have two religions! The Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, and as truly the congregations of England, to place his name in them (and whom, as invocated in many, and for ought appears you intend, in most of them, you blaspheme as a senseless idol) rebuke, and forgive you!

This may occasion some idle people to cry out "What! at church in the forenoon, and at a meeting-house in the afternoon! This is fine! and what will now become of our religion?" And what is, already, become of his religion who so exclaims? Do the religion of the church, and of the meeting-house, make two religions? Wherein do they differ? The substance of the same religion is common to them both. Therefore the modes and accidents, wherein only they differ, are this man's religion. And can any man be the better for such a religion, that consists of modes and accidents? It is true, that religion may possibly be so ludicrously disguised and misrepresented, as scarce to be fitly owned for any religion at all. But this cannot be said of most (if of any) of the congregations of England, of either sort. And they that have any thing of charity, or the fear of God, about them, will be very wary how, for a misplaced word, or indecent action, or expression, they censure one or another of these two sorts of solemn worshipping assemblies, as having nothing of God, or true religion, among them.

* Athen. deipnos. cum animadvers. is casaub.

Thirty nine articles are given us for the summary of our religion, and of what is thought to appertain to it. Thirty six contain the substance of it, wherein we agree : three, the additional appendices, about which we have some difference. With such a man, the three weigh more than all the thirty six. And if his eyes and understanding were useable things with him, he would see the church is a meeting-house, and the meeting-house a church. How remote are these men from the temper of spirit they were directed to be of, that had far greater differences among them than ours, to count themselves all one in Christ Jesus ! But throughout the book, such as are of this Christian latitude, and benignity of mind towards one another, and not so stingily bigotted to a party, as he, are treated with this sort of charity, to be styled painted hypocrites ; such as play bo-peep with God Almighty ; that, if such an occasion offer itself to any of them to serve God and their country, in a public station, do what the law requires, and which they think they may sinlessly do in order to it, do trespass upon their consciences, and damn their own souls to serve their country. And they that censure them not, as he doth, are induced to forbear it, only by their gold ring, or fine apparel.

And that he would have all such as use that liberty, which their consciences and the divine law, as they think, allow them in order to their serving God and their country, to be disfranchised, and made incapable of doing public service to either, that is, for doing that, which as wise men as he, count indifferent ; and which can therefore make no one, either a better or worse man, or christian. And would draw that odium upon the established church, to represent it as if it sought to engross all power to itself, as such, even in civil affairs, upon so insignificant a pretence ! than which he could not attempt doing it a greater mischief, or more directly tending to make it intolerable to the prince, nobility, gentry, and to the whole body of the nation itself. No such arts need to be used to expose the clergy to the ill-will of the people, and raise in nobler minds, what some may count a just and generous disdain of being so enslaved. The nature of man, in his lapsed state, is so alienated from God, as to have little regard for any sacredness of persons and things, by which only they become related to him.

The church of Rome hath not gained much upon kings and princes, of later years, by affecting to make them dependent on her. And it is not difficult to pre-apprehend, what may at length engage them against her, to her final ruin : that is, to make them hate her, eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. In that church, this caprice first began in their *dominium temporale, in gratia fundatum* ; and thence by a strangely

wide sort of stride or skip, even of a heavenly width, from pole to pole, it was got quite among another sort of men, treading antipodes to the former, in the immodest, rude claim, and appropriation to themselves, of the entire privilege and prerogative of the saints' reign. It is the easiest thing in the world, when any sort or party of men have got power into their hands, to saint themselves, and unsaint all other men, at their own pleasure. But do the civil rights of men depend upon such (that is, so easily abusable) pretences? We are saying nothing now of their rights, claimable from God himself, but from one another; and even such rights none could have, that is, that are claimable from their fellow-creatures, or their (conceive) fellow-members, under any government, but by some original grant, one way or other conveyed from the Supreme Ruler, who is the Fountain of all rights.

But hath he ever given christians (or saints) as such, a right to seize the rights and properties of other men? The notion of the saints' reign, because we find it in the Holy Bible, is not to be torn out, but must have its true sense assigned it. And if there be a time yet to come, wherein it shall have place; it must mean, that a more general pouring forth of the Spirit shall introduce a supervening sanctity upon rulers, as well as others; not to give every man a right to rule, (for who should then be ruled?) but to enable and incline them that shall duly have a right, to rule better. And so the kingdom will be the saints, when it is administered, by some, and for others, who are so. If God have allowed to men, as men, any rights, that is, that are claimable against other men; and should again give a right to christians in other men's properties; to what a strait and distress were the rest of the world reduced? Might not any of them say, Since one must be a man before he can be a christian, what am I to do in this case? must I unman myself, and lose the rights I have, as such, that I may recover them by being a christian? I had them as a man before, sufficiently to secure me against the claim of all others. What! But not against christians? Then are they an unmanned sort of men! And whereas obligations accompany rights, what lawless men are these christians?

But whereas God hath in great compassion to the world, appointed it to be Christianized, he hath with equal wisdom, chosen the fittest methods for it; that is, not to commission christians to divest other men of their all, unless they become christians; but to let men see, Christianity had no design to disturb the world, or disquiet them in their former possessions, though they should not be christians; but that they might enjoy them with higher advantage, if they be, in order to another

world. If God had made Christianity the measure of civil rights to mankind, his sovereignty were not to be disputed; but he never exerts acts of sovereignty, but by the direction of his wisdom. Wheresoever the sound of the Christian name comes, if it carried that avowed principle with it, that christians, as such, had a right to out all other men of their birth-rights; instead of becoming the religion of the world, nothing could more directly tend to engage and inflame all the world against it, and make them endeavour its utter extirpation, as a thing intolerable to mankind. Nor could they have any so plausible pretence against it besides; having nothing in itself, but what must render it most amiable and self-recommending. Did the Spaniards' methods for Christianizing America, recommend the Christian faith to that miserable people? And if God himself would never give such a power, for introducing the very substance of Christian religion itself; how intolerable must it be for any sort or church of christians, to claim and use it for the introduction of their own additions to Christianity, as the church of Rome hath notoriously long done! And time will shew the event, as common reason doth the tendency of it.

And, Sir, though the strain of your discourse shews your no great kindness to this established church, the compliments which here and there you bestow upon it, too broadly shew, as if, under a colour of kindness, you would tempt it, to aim at loading itself with such a weight of power and greatness, as you may think, must finally sink it. Its more real friends, our civil rulers, are more wisely kind to it, and give it no more interest in the civil government, than it may, more safely bear. They never exact in order to any one's having a share therein, a total, constant conformity to all its rites, as you would have them. And have only designed by the limits they have set, the excluding that sort of men, whose known principles make them more incapable of human society, than mere pagans. But especially, it is not to be let pass, that you, or your author, industriously represent the primitive English puritans (concerning whom it were in some respects well for you, if, as the great author you mention, speaks, your soul were with theirs) as if they were generally of your stingy narrow spirit. I wonder how you could think to impose upon the world in a matter of so recent memory. This attempt had been more prudently deferred, till three or four ages hence; especially if great care had been taken, in the mean time, that all books were burnt, or buried, that give any account of them. How notorious is it, that generally they that continued in their native land, as far the greater number did, looked not upon the church of England, as no church? That they wished her more reformed; but in great part kept in her communion: (their principal leaders and,

the people) taking other opportunities of spiritual improvement, as they could; for which they often ran great hazards. In 62, the same spirit and sentiment afresh appeared; when most of the considerable ejected London ministers met, and agreed to hold occasional communion with the (now) re-established church: not quitting their own ministry, or declining the exercise of it, as they could have opportunity. And as far as I could by inquiry learn, I can little doubt this to have been the judgment of their fellow-sufferers through the nation, in great part, ever since. How could you have the confidence to represent this as a new thing; and an apostacy from primitive puritanism! that hath so much in it of the spirit of primitive Christianity; such largeness of mind! such reverence of what bears any divine stamp and signature upon it, undefaced! such benignity, even towards them by whom they suffered! How strangely inverted, Sir, do things lie in your mind! must we accordingly transpose the names of virtue and vice? And by how much more illustrious any render themselves by the eminent virtues of pride, fury, self-conceit, censoriousness, to the damning of every body, that in all things do not think, and do, as they! Are these things with you, characters of the most excellent sort of christians?

If I had seen any thing in your book, that needed, or deserved a particular answer, I should not have balked it. But seeing nothing that looks like reasoning, but what is so idly sophistical, that any one of common sense can see through it; such as that, "How can a man dissent and conform at the same time?" when all the world knows, or may, conformity consists of numerous parts; and is it such a miracle for a man to conform, in some part, and not in every part? conscientiously to scruple constant entire conformity, and not scruple some part of it, at some time? If any think such talk needs further answering, let them seek it elsewhere. And for your replying; I shall not prescribe to you; only I can assure you, that thereby, neither you, nor any man else, shall divert me from my much more important, pleasant work; unless I see somewhat that shall make it worth my while. The person you criminate, may yet, notwithstanding what you have said, be in the right for ought I see. And therefore to any such, whose case this is, or may be; I can only say, that their rule having been consulted with serious diligence, as I hope it hath; and their end a secret between God and them, which, if it be sincere, is enough for them they have no cause to be discouraged, but go on, and prosper. But, Mr. Prefacer, if your judgment, upon the case itself, be true; I conceive that truth, accompanied with your temper of spirit, is much worse than their error.