

TO THE CHRISTIANS

WHO HEARD, OR MAY HAVE READ

MR VENN'S SERMON,

Preached at Hereford, December 9th, 1838.

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LEOMINSTER:

PRINTED BY JAMES V. CHILCOTT,
BROAD-STREET.

TO THE CHRISTIANS WHO HEARD, OR
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PREACHED DECEMBER 9TH, 1838.

Dear Brethren in Christ,

I address you, with the hope of removing the hindrances that exist in your minds to the reception of some of the most important truth of Scripture, and which may have been increased or confirmed by Mr Venn's recent appeal to you; an appeal so challenging a reply, that I may fairly use it to gain access to you.

Dear brethren, if there are differences of judgment and conduct among us, there must be wrong somewhere, and it is not well for any of us to be satisfied until we have ascertained whether the wrong be chargeable on us or not:—for “herein are we called to exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man.” And how can we obtain rest in such an enquiry as this, except by appealing to the word of God; to that word God will appeal in His judgments, and it is the only unerring and unchanging standard, while others are always mutable and often false. I know it is urged, both by Protestants and Roman Catholics, that the variety of interpretations given to that word, destroy the certainty of its decisions to us, and render such appeals vain: but you will not, I am sure, be satisfied with such reasoning as this, for while all of us may readily allow, that these differences make our path more perplexing, they in no way remove the burden from any: by that word we must stand or fall; for what reference have we beyond or above it? Councils have erred, and as your 19th article says, “the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred,” and men and teachers of all kinds have erred, and do constantly err, and neither the one or the other can screen us from the consequences of any error they may lead us into. The word of God says, “prove all things, hold fast that

which is good.”—1 Thess. v. 21 ; and this precept is not given to rulers and teachers, as though they were to do this for others, but to the whole church of the Thessalonians, and even to them as distinct from their overseers, as may be seen by a reference to the 12th verse, “and we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, &c. ;” so that the responsibility plainly belongs to each and all to “prove all things.”

Dear brethren, Mr Venn says, that the truths we present to you, are “unscriptural and dangerous” and “non-essential” also. He gives you, however, no scriptural proof that they are so, and though it is true they may possibly be the former ; I know not how they can be the latter, if they have been the cause of such a change of opinion and conduct on the part of a large number of blameless christian men in this city, and to oppose which, he has preached his sermon. He bears testimony, indeed, to their immense importance for good or ill beyond any other, “they have caused” (he says) “more strifes and alienations of heart in the Church of Christ, than any other denomination perhaps that has existed since the days of the Apostles :” this is a solemn and heavy charge ; but I see not how it can be reconciled with the opinion that these statements are “non essential.” If the things declared have done such havoc, surely they claim the serious attention of every christian man, and obedience to the precept, “prove ALL things, hold fast that which is good,” becomes more urgent : if the sermon asserts that some of you are incompetent to the enquiry as wanting education or cleverness, I can but repeat again, and it is addressed to ALL Christians, “prove ALL things, hold fast that which is good” : if it be asked by any, how am I to do so ? I answer, by the word of God ; or as your 6th Article says, “Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary for salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein, or may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the faith” : if it should be said, this may be true, but we have no sure interpreter of those Scriptures, I reply, indeed you have, but it is not learning or

cleverness, but the spirit of God dwelling in the true believer, and in such only, for that spirit "searcheth all things, yea even the deep things of God." "For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." "But he that is spiritual judgeth all things."—1 Cor. ii. 2, 10, 11, 12, 15. And by this word we may learn, if we are wise, that the reason of the differences of our interpretation and conduct, is to be found in the fact, that the worldliness and deference to human opinion merely, on the part of the people of God, has "grieved," if not "quenched," that only sure guide and teacher.—1 John, ii. 27. I add to this the word of St Paul to the Galatians, c. vi. v. 4, 5: "But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another": "For every man shall bear his own burden." What can be more explicit than this, let *every man prove*, for *every man shall bear*.

Dear brethren, if I am referred to wise and holy men of past days, am I safe? I do not deny either their wisdom or holiness, but, revere them for both: yet have they erred in some things, they may have erred in many. I revere the memory of Calvin, and of Luther too; so also of Fenelon, Archbishop Leighton, and John Knox. Our Fathers abhorred Popery, though surely they loved the gentle and holy spirit of Fenelon. Our fathers contended to blood, the one for Episcopacy, the other for their Presbyteries; they were not both right, and their differences, which Mr Venn would perhaps call "non-essential," prevented that unity, he rightly makes so essential. Still I revere the holy men, who held fast as some of them did, [tho' I believe all did so with the hope of brighter days] to the ceremonies and constitution of the National Establishment; yet do I revere with deeper reverence the 1500 blameless men, who forsook both, with their wives and little ones,—changing earthly comfort and reputation, for persecution and poverty; yet were they both perhaps wise and

holy; but they differed, and one party must have erred, perhaps both. What an uncertain ground then of reference is this, tho' as it is taken so often and by so many as it is by Mr Venn, it may be well for me to refer you to Mr Baptist Noel's tract on the Church's Unity, where you will find the National Establishment rightly spoken of as containing but a small portion of the Church of God; even supposing all in it to be Christians. We often think of England as tho' the name of Christ were confined to its shores; it would perhaps give a humbler and clearer judgment to many, if they took a wider scope, and remembered the churches in Scotland, America, the Continent of Europe, and while returning again and again to the solemn thought that whatever others may do or have done, that it is a light thing to be judged by any judgment but the Lord's; who, when He cometh will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.—1. Cor. iv. 5. For He has said, he that receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.—John xii. 48.

The first part of Mr Venn's sermon presses on our souls the responsibility of each to further the church's unity; this we seek to do, and tho' our efforts may be erring ones, and productive of strife, I know not how on his own shewing any part of the word used to this end can be called "non-essential"; the remainder, however, which contains heavy charges and his own judgment, unsupported by the word of God: [for not once does he quote it] or by proof, must have its value tested by that word, ere any heart really submissive to God can receive it.

Dear Brethren, the general charge of a "proselyting spirit," I am not careful to disavow for myself, or others; because in a certain sense I rejoice in it, and am only ashamed of a want of that zeal which should "eat us up," I say in a certain sense, for as St John speaks with reference to temporal kindness: "whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him;

how dwelleth the love of God in him." So I doubt not all of us will agree in saying, if we have spiritual good and see our brother have need, and shut up our bowels of compassion from him: how, in a [far fuller sense] dwelleth the love of God in us?

It is no answer to say, "we do not want your compassion," so will the poor lost world ever say, "keep your religion to yourself;" but truth is compassionately aggressive, and cannot be so denied; and as the christian must in very love go to the world, tho' never welcome by it; so must he in a stronger love go to his brother, if he sees him kept back by ignorance or prejudice from the light, and liberty, and extended truth, which God in His sovereignty may have imparted to him. Dear brethren, we ought all to have this "proselyting spirit," for it is the very nature of Truth to spread itself by the energy of the love that it imparts, and we do say to you all, if we are in error, if our course of conduct is "unscriptural and dangerous," as Mr Venn says, come and prove it to us. Is it not written, "If any of you (Christians) do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins?" I speak before God in Christ, I desire to do the will of God at all cost, and through all suffering, and am ready to sit at the feet of any who will in charity bring me Scripture proofs, and not hard and taunting accusations. But if you will not so consider us, why do you retire into the fastnesses of silence, as Mr Venn counsels you? Do you know all things? May not some fuller light and knowledge be imparted to you? Remember I pray you the word of your Lord to those whom he gives the truth to convey to others.—"He that receiveth you, receiveth me, and he that rejecteth you, rejecteth me." It is perilous to shut the ear to any truth. Mr Venn says, we only bring you "doubtful disputations." Is it really so? Ask those who come to Bridge Street, if this be true. But if the only question agitated there, was the unity of the church of God, is that a doubtful disputation? He, himself, presses it from the Scriptures in the

early part of his sermon, and I ask you, is the church, the true church of God united? Ought it not be so? and if it ought, surely every thing that may be urged as conducive to such an end, (even though proved mistaken) ought to be listened to, fairly considered, and weighed by every member of that church, and not met without a hearing. I do not accuse you of it, but there has been such a condition, and still may be, of "loving darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil." "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."—John iii. 20, 21. Bold and happy state!

Dear brethren, my object is the same, go where I may; (I speak of myself thus, because so directly alluded to in the sermon,) my Lord has sent me to preach His gospel to the ungodly; yea, woe is unto me if I preach it not: and He has sent me also to do my utmost to sustain the unity of His people, where they are united, and to seek that unity where they are disunited. With these objects before me I was led, as I believe, by His hand to Hereford, and I found the church disunited. I did not divide it, I found it divided; it was my place, as Mr Venn shews, to endeavour to bring into unity what was already severed. There were some Christians worshipping here, some there; and this was clearly wrong, however it had been brought about, and what was worse, those who worshipped in the same place were divided in heart and judgment, as you know, about many things, yet I did not do this, I found it so. Dear brethren, I ask you to listen to me, while leading you along the course of my own soul's exercises in seeking to obey the evident mind of the Lord, as Mr Venn shews, in cases exactly similar to those I have met with in Hereford. I looked first and most readily to the National Establishment where I had been brought up, and to which all my natural feelings were of old attached, to see if fairly worked, unity could be brought about there: as to facts all were against such a hope; it received its present form in the sixteenth century, and from that day to this, separations from it had been increasing, thousands were cast out by the so

called Act of Uniformity, and now there is scarcely a parish without its one or many places of Dissent. It is true, however, that all this might have been the fault of the Separatists only, and so I went from these facts to the word of God, and there I found that the charge of most of these separations was to be laid at the door of the National Establishment. I refer you to the whole of the fourteenth of Romans, trusting to the knowledge that many of you have, that the statutes of the National Establishment are so rigid as to leave no way of escape for either a weak conscience, or a more enlightened one; and, that the Prayer Book with its contents from first to last has been the cause of perpetual secessions. "Schism" says Archbishop Laud, 'must needs be theirs, whose the cause of it is. The woe runs full out of the mouth of Christ against him that gives the offence, not against him that takes it; it is ill done of those whoever they are, who first make a separation not actual but causal, for the Schism is theirs whose the cause of it is, and he makes the separation who gives the first cause of it, not he that makes an actual separation from a just cause proceeding."

But, brethren, even this would not have rendered it hopeless; but when I came to compare it in its constitution, ministries, &c., with what the church of God is declared to be in the Bible, I found them so entirely in every part at variance, so altogether in opposition, that I could not but consider it to be the very "world," from which I was charged to separate and flee. For if it be not "the world," then where is "the world" in England?

Let me prove this to you by the Scriptures.—The Church of England [so called] is a body having for its members, every person born an Englishman; that is, every one belonging to the nation, if subjected in infancy to its baptismal ceremony, and to which all are subjected, except the Dissenters; thus constituting it a body composed of those "born of blood, of the will of the flesh, of the will of man."—John i. 13. "Now that which is born of the flesh, is flesh."—John iii. 6. And "they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans viii. 7, 8; and out of this state, every one

“must be born again, or he cannot see the kingdom of God.”—John iii. 3. 5. I do not at all deny, but that there are many members of the body of Christ within it, but if *they* were to forsake it, its functions would be the same, its compliment of officers, ceremonies, and services, would be filled up as much as ever; for it no way needs *spiritual members* for its existence or activity. As a religious corporation, it is independent of the “spirit of life.” It has its articles, formularies, its terms of adoption, its privileges altogether and alike independent of the Spirit of God; and if the Spirit of God were utterly to forsake the earth, babes born of the flesh, would become still its members; its revenues would be duly paid, its temples well and regularly filled, and its graveyards too, and with the same precision and order. In its constitution, therefore, it is at variance with what the Scriptures state of the church of God.

The church of God is composed of those born “not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,” John i. 13: and whether the title of Church be given in its widest extent, to the whole mystical body of Christ, or in its narrow import to persons gathered together in a town, village, or house, yet in every case it speaks only of those, who are “born again of the spirit,” or as your article scripturally expresses it, “a congregation of faithful men”; *and the visible union of such only, are we called to seek.* I address myself to the proof of this, though briefly, taking the simplest and most evident passages, “gave him [Christ] to be head over all things to the *Church*, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”—Ephes. i. 22, 23. “For the husband is the head of the body, even as Christ is the head of the *Church*, and he is the saviour of the body; for we [true believers] are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones: this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church.”—Ephes. v. 23, 33: and, “he is the head of the body the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead,” and St Paul says he fills up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for his body’s sake which is the church.”

And the constitution of this body, or church, is spoken of throughout the xiith of 1st Corinthians. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ, for by one spirit, are we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit."—"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular;" forgetfulness of membership in this body, dear brethren, association in worship with the world, to the dishonor and grief of this body, is the occasion of that schism spoken of, and [only this once spoken of in the scriptures] in the 25th verse of this chapter.

No member can say, except to his own loss, to another living member of that body, "I have no need of you," and though Mr Venn may forbid your intercourse with your fellow members; God calls this *SCHISM*, and it is as tho' he had bid you cut off your hand, saying, I have no need of thee, but is it therefore not of the body? Brethren, would your separation from the *dead members* of the body you boast in cause you loss? nay! you know it would not, but gain, for your God charges it on you.—2 Cor. vi. 11. to the end; but if you hold no intercourse with those who seek it with you, and whom you know to be real Christians, read the 25th verse of 1 Cor. xii. and see if you are not the schismatics spoken of there:—

But further, the church of God is spoken of as purchased with "His own blood."—Acts xx. 28. "The house of God." "The church of the living God." "The pillar and ground of the truth."—1st Timothy, iii. 15. In a minor sense, this blessed title is applied to a part of that comprehensive body, yet that part has only a right to the name, and is alone so addressed in the Scriptures, because it is a living part of the living whole; a member of the part is so only, because he is a member of the whole; and the title of church is only then given to *ALL* the members of the body of Christ in the place, or to a few while not separating from the general assemblies of the rest; but yet meeting socially, or perhaps as families in their own

houses. The name is never given by the Holy Ghost to the inhabitants of a district or nation, they are called the churches of Judea, Gal. i. 22; the churches of Asia, 1 Cor. xvi. 19; the church of Ephesus, Rev. ii. 1; "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," 1 Cor. i. It is in this latter sense, that the remarkable passage in Matthew xviii is used, and while I am glad of the opportunity of charging the whole chapter on your consciences, dear brethren, I would further ask you, how you obey the word of the Lord in the 15, 16, 17 verses? To what church in Hereford can you refer for its decisions on the conduct of your brother? Surely not to the multitude of the unconverted, entitled like yourselves to membership in the National Establishment; surely not to the rulers of that Establishment, for would a decision of theirs make any one in the sight of God, as a heathen man and a publican? Or would their decision be ratified in heaven, and do you set aside this plain command?—I beg of you as honest men to look at the whole passage, and see if the gathering of the two or three spiritual men in the name of Jesus, does not so secure to them, the presence of Christ, as to enable them to give a spiritual judgment, by which an impenitent offender becomes really and truly in the judgment of God, a heathen man and a publican; and while his temporal blessings remain untouched, his spiritual privileges are withheld, and he left to take his part among those with whom you daily worship, and who if not really born of God, are however they may be called Christians, in sober and sad truth, heathen men and publicans, for, if any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of His.

Dear Brethren, what says the word of God concerning those who have not called Jesus, Lord, by the power of the Holy Ghost? It says, "they are condemned already, the wrath of God abideth on them." John iii. 18. 36. "Walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: by nature, children of wrath."--Ephes. ii. 2, 3.

The apostle John says, "we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."—1 John, v. 19. Cannot the true church of God now and ever say this? Can the Church of England? What is the world lying in the wicked one in England? Are not the mass of unregenerate and unbelieving with whom you worship, *fellow-members* with you of that body, which by mistake you call "a church?" If you seek the unity of God's church, you must seek it in separation from the world; if not how can either its peculiar existence, or its unity be known?

Dear brethren, the ministries and offices of the National Establishment are filled, if not entirely, yet in a large measure with unconverted men.

But the church of God, to whom God has given abundant ministers and overseers, has none but those which are spiritual, and is charged to avoid and reject all pretenders in the exercise of its spiritual discernment. For unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ, wherefore He saith when he ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men: "and he gave some, apostles; and some prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, &c. &c.—growing up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ; from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

—Ephes. iv. 7, 16. "Now there are diversities of gifts but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations; but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit *is given* to every man to profit withal. For to one *is given*, by the spirit, the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge, by the same spirit, &c. &c."—1 Cor. xii.

4-8. "But all these worketh that one and the self-same spirit, *dividing to every man severally as He will.*" 1 Cor. xii. 11. And as it is said with reference to a man's becoming a living member of the body of Christ, and the place he has in that body, "But now *hath God set the members, every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.*" So also as to ministries, "God hath set some in the church, &c."—1 Corinthians, xii throughout.

If you ask me, how I am to know those whom God hath set as overseers and ministers in his living church, I ask you, how do you know those whom God has set to be *members* of that church? The spirit of God is the power in both; and the spirit of God in you, can alone discern that work; but the word gives its rules also; if you read in these chapters, that none but those who are gifted immediately by the Spirit, are set by God in the church;—so also you read, that the effect of their ministries will always be "the perfecting of the saints, and the edifying of the body of Christ, and the increase of their spiritual nourishment."—Coloss. ii. 19. If this is not the fruit of their labor, then God has not set them in the place they have taken, and what mere worldly scheme of ecclesiastical order can supply the deficiency of this ministry of the spirit of righteousness and of glory?—[2 Cor. iii throughout.] May the Lord pardon the rebellious rejection of His own blessed gifts.

But dear brethren the word is yet more express; unconverted men took the place of God's Ministry in the church's earliest days; and the church was charged to reject them, not on the ground of irregularity, but because of their deficiencies or errors. "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles and are not: and hast found them liars," was the Lord's approving word to Ephesus.—Rev. ii. 2. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but *try* the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."—1 John iv. 1. 6; [and this is addressed to all Christians]:—"Now I beseech you brethren mark them which cause divisions and offences *contrary to the doctrine* which ye have learned and *avoid them*. Rom. xvi. 17.

Here then were those who caused divisions in the true church, by teaching doctrines, subversive of scripture; subversive of the doctrines of grace, as taught in your 11th and 17th articles; and all the Christians at Rome, [see the address in the 1st chap. "To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints"] are *commanded* by the word of the Lord to avoid such; how they came there, or by what authority they taught, was not the question; they were to be tried by their doctrines, and if they taught contrary to what all had before learned as truth, they were to be avoided. Again, St Paul writes to all the churches of Galatia, saying, "there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ; but though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, [and which, having so learned, they were to use in the trial of all else they might hear] *let him be accursed*. As we said before, so say I now again, if any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, *let him be accursed*."—Gal. i.

Dear brethren, these heavy words, are not mine, they are the Lord's; and are surely addressed to you as much as to the Galatians; and, can you deny, with such evidence, that it is the duty of every christian man to try the doctrine proposed to him, by the truth which he learnt in becoming a Christian: and on hearing any thing contrary to that truth, promptly to avoid both the teaching and the teacher; nay, heavy and awful as the thought is, to feel and say with the apostle, "I would they were even cut off that trouble you." I pray you to remember the words of Jesus your Lord, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say"—he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth: against which, the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."—(Luke vi. 46, &c. and the parallel passage in Matthew vii.)

I own to you, I dare not pass by the word of the Lord which puts me into this place of responsibility, "for every man must bear his own burden," and, therefore

how could I do else than come to the conclusion that the National Establishment was unscriptural and defective in constitution ; I do not speak of its corrupt practices ; but, of its corrupt and unscriptural constitution. For first, I repeat, it does not require of its members the only test of admission to the true church ; such faith in the name of Jesus, as the Holy Ghost alone can give ; and therefore is not a Church of God at all.

And, secondly, its ministries are alike constitutionally carnal ; (for if otherwise, it is a mere accident of God's mercy.) Neither conversion of soul, nor special gift of the Holy Ghost being really required of any ; and if they were required, those called to determine are in almost every instance the most unfit judges ; and this is again easily to be traced to the first and radical wrong—its members are not required to be members of God's living church.

Without hope then from the Church of England, I turned away in sorrow to the other parties who had forsaken it, and without entering into the sad and prostrate condition of them all practically, I looked to their constitutions, as I had done to the National Establishment, and found, what might be obvious to all, that each platform was too narrow for the church's unity ; each assembled in the name and on the ground of some particular opinion, and unless that opinion were deferred to, none could be acknowledged as members of their bodies, while yet fully acknowledged to be members of the body of Christ. Looking to scripture I saw most of the early divisions of the church traced to this : and while the apostle calls such a state of the church a " carnal " one, he also seeks to remove it, by the assertion that Christ only was crucified for us, and that we are baptized in the name of Christ only ; and there also I learnt, if in that name but two or three meet together, He has pledged himself to be in the midst of them : enabling them by His presence, to worship in spirit and in truth, to edify one another, and keep themselves pure, by casting out into the world again, the disobedient and immoral.—Matthew xviii.

Any basis so narrow as not to admit the whole of Christ's mystical body, must be wrong ; any so wide,

as wilfully to admit more than that body, must be worse. I look for one large enough for all contrarieties and differences to meet on, and I find it in the ground of our admission to heaven,—FAITH IN THE NAME OF JESUS; and to this, therefore, I am bound to seek to lead all true christians, believing it to be the *only one* in which they can be visibly united, as it is the only one given for our rule in the Scriptures.

Dear brethren, I have never disavowed this wish and intention from the very first, but I did not, nor do I now, desire any one to come to me, or to us, as Mr Venn says. I wish all the people of God to meet together: I know both from Scripture and experience, that they cannot do so, unless they meet as we do in Bridge Street, in the name of Jesus only: freely receiving all christians, refusing all others, and without denying the spirit's sovereignty to minister His word by whom He will.

Mr Venn has given in the Appendix to his Sermon, an account of a disorderly meeting of Christian people in Ireland; and it is so arranged, though I do not think intentionally, that the Brethren or Plymouth Church [as he calls them] are represented as the persons so spoken of. I can but say, if it were so, I know no such mistaken title, as one of "The Brethren," but that of "Christian" only; and a Christian Church at Hereford, is not responsible for disorder at Plymouth, more than at Galatia. Yet it is quite true, that all the Lord's people, meeting on the principles I have stated, are objects of special interest to us; and it would be very fair to argue, that if these principles had produced no better fruits, than those he mentions, it would be well to be more on our guard against them; but the fact is simply this,—*we know nothing of the parties so mentioned*;—and this letter will, I hope, prove to you, that there is little or no agreement in principle between us, and I may fairly add, what Mr Baylee has forgotten to say any thing about, that God has been faithful to His promise, and at this time, there is a large assembly of His people, in Dublin, meeting as we do in union and order.

Mr Venn says, "where there are strifes and conten-

tions among truly pious people, the fault always lies with the people themselves, not with religion." Would it not be just to extend this argument to the disorderly people in Ireland, and ascertain the value of their principles, by a reference to the Bible, and not to their conduct?

That there are always difficulties in the way of peace and unity under any circumstances, is most true, and I may refer Mr Venn and Mr Baylee to a church of older date, than that in Ireland, and perhaps, as bad, at Corinth; but his remedy of creeds and formularies was not prescribed by the apostle, but more attention to the word of God, and an increase of spiritual wisdom and grace.

My dear brethren, the disorder of life is better than the cold mockery of orderly death; but where spiritual life is in any power, there will be beautiful order in result;—to stand in the energy of inward power, we must have much spiritual life; if that dies away, we must have something to lean on to keep us from falling; some outward prop to supply the inward deficiency; but, alas, it is but a poor substitute, and all it is worth is to make us contented to go on without the spirit's power. The lack of spiritual life in the church reduces it to the poor alternative of props and buttresses, lest it should fall into the disorder Mr Venn so rightly deploras in his Appendix; would it not be happier to regain its nature, life, and health, and so be rid both of its disorders and its props? Of this I am sure; a man may need crutches in feebleness, but when his vigour returns he will throw them away: though perhaps it is better to have crutches than to fall. I would not be unkind, but I am sure this has been Mr Baylee's case; he has tried [without spiritual power among the people he has been with,] to go on as he says, for ten years. I doubt not he has become weaker, and may need what he has now got; but, let him compare his state with the Bible, and not with the faulty practices of others, and he will see a more excellent way than the one he has chosen,—even if that be better than the one he has left. The church of God in the Scriptures is separate from the world, and without formal arrangement (as the church at Corinth

shows) where it is sustained in unity and strength by the spirit of life. It little matters whether others have failed, if we err, it is "because we know not the Scriptures nor the power of God."

If we have in the Bible a pattern of God's ways in His church, surely the spirit of God has power enough at any time to carry us back to it; nay, if we are not following it, it is but a proof that we are fallen and sinning: and yet who amongst us will confess this? "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works," is the word of the Lord; and what lower standard may we take? There is such a thing as relative or church sin, which we appear to forget, and how is the depth of that to be either known or measured, but by a reference to what the church was in its apostolic form and strength. The apostle says, "we dare not make ourselves of the number of those, who measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise." Do not Mr Baylee and others dare to do what St. Paul shrunk from? in speaking of the Friends, Mennonites, &c. but not of the Bible. I am not the advocate of Friends, or Mennonites, he may, perhaps, be better off where he is; I am only sure of this, that all systems are bad, except so far as they have that in them which is in accordance with the word of God; and to this word I again make my appeal, and again cite you before it. Let us leave the errors of others alone, while we honestly judge our own.

With reference to open ministry, however scriptural it may be proved to be, it is said there must be disorder, because all are allowed to do as they like, and speak when they please; but, no dear brethren, it is not so. A mitred bishop would not be allowed to speak, if he taught false doctrine, and contradicted the Scriptures, and his own articles of faith, [such as 11th, 17th, &c.] while an "ignorant and unlearned man," (Acts iv. 13) would, if he spoke according to the oracles of God, (1 Peter iv. 11.) If you ask who is the judge? I answer, the spirit of God in the church; and, although all will allow, that it would be far easier and happier for us to have discriminating Apostles, yet as we have them not,

it is well to be faithful in the use of the least measure of the grace we have ; and I boldly state to you, what I am sure you cannot gainsay, that in a question of discernment concerning spiritual gifts, the feeblest or most uneducated woman or child, in whom the spirit of God dwells, is more capable of judging and appointing, than the most learned and accomplished unconverted man—for it is beyond his sphere : he of course, would be the best judge in the “ things of a man ;” but the things of God are not within reach of natural judgment, “ for the things of God knoweth no man but the spirit of God.”—1 Cor. ii. I would not that you should mistake me, I only state this comparatively ; I do not say that it would be well such a question should be left to the decision of a child, but I do say, this would be *infinitely* [I use this word with a due sense of its meaning,] infinitely better than that an unconverted man however wise and learned, should be called to the task ; the child might be right, the other could not, except by what is called chance. Alas brethren, we are reduced to disorder indeed, if in the absence of full spiritual discrimination, we take instead the “ carnal mind, which is enmity against God.”—Rom. viii ; and which “ cannot discern the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to it.”—1 Cor. ii.

Mr Baylee says in the Appendix, that “ every body which has rejected forms has become more or less tainted with soul-destroying heresies” :—have no other bodies done so ? If he alludes to creeds and articles, this statement is not true ; for the confessions of faith, on the part of the Mennonites, and I doubt not of the Irish Presbyterians, are generally received as orthodox, if he means the persons composing those bodies, he may well take a wider range. The Swiss National Church has become tainted with Socinianism. The Lutheran with Neology, &c. ; and may he not look nearer home, where is heresy more abounding than in that communion which Mr Venn calls so pure and scriptural ? [page 24] surely he must think others blind ; are there not accredited dignitaries notoriously heretical in his body ? What are the champions of the new Oxford Popery, “ springing” as one of them says “ from the ground

like armed men all over the country?" What are the tracts of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, subversive as they are of the beautiful articles which many of their distributors have sworn to teach? I am as well acquainted with Mr Baylee's new communion as he is perhaps, and I do know what he cannot deny, that it is far and wide, not only tainted with, but deluged by false doctrine, heresy, and indifference, tho' it is all covered by a great deal of blessed truth in its articles and formularies; but then there is this sad difference between heretics of all other kinds and themselves, the others are soon forsaken, set aside, and forgotten, while the carefully arranged and provided for systems of National Churches uphold, establish, and pay a large number of educated men, who, statedly declare false doctrine of every kind.

The statement, that I personally, and the Plymouth Church [as it is called] agree with the Mennonites, "in looking upon the governments of the world, as under the guidance of the devil," *is not true*. Most distinctly do we avow our submission to the word of God, which declares the magistrate to be the minister of God; and as so reckoning "the powers that be, to be ordained of God," we ask no question as to their politics or character, but implicitly obey them, whichever side they take; and therefore differ with the churchman who speaks evil of one government, and the dissenter, who speaks evil of the other; believing both alike to transgress against the word of God, so charging us to reverence and obey the powers *that be*. All this is distinctly stated, in the pamphlet he refers to, "Discipleship;" also in another pamphlet published in Dublin in reply to Mr Baylee himself, which I saw to day for the first time, and which may be had with the others in Broad Street; and is it just, is it christian, so to libel others? Let him shew the word of God we disobey, and by God's help, I, for one, will change both my opinions and my conduct. But whether it be the question of war, or taking office, or oaths, or dress, or furniture, &c. &c. I would once for all state to you dear brethren, that not one of these things, or any other thing, is a test of communion.

Though the fullest devotedness and separation from the world are enjoined as a privilege and duty, yet gladly would we have admitted the late emperor of Russia before he died, as we would the archbishop Fenelon, without obliging or calling upon either to give up their thrones. The **ONLY** ground of communion is real faith in Jesus; and I readily acknowledge, we hold differing opinions upon many other subjects, while devoutly desiring "all to hold and to speak the same thing, and to be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment."—1 Cor. i. 10. Yet this we have learnt from the same word, can only be attained by forbearance, prayer, and searching the Scriptures; and I would add, that all of you, who are really Christians, are free to come to the communion in Bridge-street, without yielding any of your opinions, and even while continuing to attend any other place of worship.

Dear brethren, Mr Venn is as misinformed as Mr Baylee, concerning both our sentiments and practices; the charge he makes against me and others, of exclusively bringing before the minds of the people in this place, "the abuses and supposed evils of the Established Church," is not true: I scarcely spoke of it at all on first coming here, except when questions were proposed to me, and rarely ever at any time. I did then teach, and do still, about the church of God out of the Bible, and leave others to draw their conclusions. I state truth, and the truth detects the error, and I seldom depart from this course, except when called upon to do so, as I have now been by Mr Venn. But when he comes to state the "nature of the new system and its practical working," he is indeed still more mistaken. *It is not true* that we reject "all human interference as an infringement upon the free and immediate exercise of the spirit." *It is true* that we reject the interference of unconverted and therefore incompetent persons: but we also know that God's spirit dwells in His people, and that by their agency the church is both instructed and controlled; and we seek to recognize all His gifts to men, (Ephes. iv.) and to use them to profit.

It is not true that "we allow every man in commu-

nion to be judge of his own spiritual fitness for the ministry." Ministry is always, and must necessarily be judged by the church, which though in other days possessing fuller powers of judgment, (the absence of which we deplore) yet still holds possession of the only competency to be found for the task; tho' every man's judgment of himself [if he were spiritual] would be far better than the decision of one or many unconverted men.

Though it is true that we have no written formularies or articles, yet have we the source whence all those, which are orthodox, are drawn. The use of them may be apparent to you all in the fact, that those who subscribe them, as readily deny them: and perhaps you know that in the trust deeds of the chapel of Lady Southampton, in this neighbourhood, the teachers are required to hold the articles of the National Church, "calvinistically understood." It may be thought strange, that articles intended to define Scripture truth, should be so indefinite that hundreds of volumes have been written to determine what they mean.

It is not true that we have "a broad and definite line of separation between our own members [as they are wrongly called] and other children of God;" indeed if we hold any one truth more prominently than another it is the contradiction of this statement; for, we welcome the lowest and feeblest real Christian, even though they continue in much worldliness both of worship and practice, though of course we would that it were otherwise.

I trust, dear brethren, I have said enough both to dispossess your minds of mistake, and to give you the ground of our conduct; I beg you to try it by the word of the Lord, and by that only, and if you find it contrary to that, in charity come and prove it to us, gladly and thankfully shall I welcome any and all on such an errand.

I confess to you, I greatly desired not to take notice of Mr Venn's Sermon, the rather hoping to put to silence his unintentional ignorance, by a good conversation, but I should have wronged you if I had been silent, and him too; he will surely one day be

sorry that party spirit has driven him to attribute the charities of the grace of God in (ministering to the poor,) to a love of proselyting. He who ever says, "I know thy works" will, I am sure shame this hasty thought, by a different judgment soon.

I conclude, by recommending to you the careful reading of some of the tracts mentioned on the other side, for which purpose, any or all of them may be obtained *gratuitously*, at the Depôt in Broad-street.

I am, dear brethren,

Yours faithfully,

PERCY F. HALL.

Hereford, January, 1839.

LIST OF BOOKS, ETC.
AT THE
BIBLE, CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND TRACT
DEPOT,
WILLIAM YAPP'S,
Broad-street, Hereford.

- 1 What is a Church?
- 2 Church Canons. The Commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His Apostles, for ordering of the Church of God, as well as the conduct of individuals.
- 3 Discipleship, or Reasons for resigning his Naval rank and pay, by Percy F. Hall, 2nd edition.
- 4 On the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ.
- 5 Parochial Arrangement destructive of Order in the Church.
- 6 On Christian Ministry.
- 7 The Apostleship of St. Paul.
- 8 First Resurrection.
- 9 Conformity to the World.
- 10 Is Exercise of Worldly Authority consistent with Discipleship?
- 11 The Promise of the Lord, Matt. xviii. 20.
- 12 Resurrection, not Death, the Hope of the Believer.
- 13 Christian Liberty of Preaching and Teaching the Lord Jesus.
- 14 Elder and Bishop the same Office (Extract from Dwight).
- 15 To all who love our Lord Jesus in Sincerity.
- 16 Reasons for not entering the Ministry in the Church of England.
- 17 Open Communion with Liberty of Ministry, the only practicable Ground for real Union among Christians.
- 18 Thoughts on the Lord's Supper, or the Table of the Lord shewn to be for Believers only.
- 19 Principles of the Jewish Dispensation contrasted with those delivered to the Church.
- 20 Address to the Saints (J. W. Peters)
- 21 Schismatic Tendency of Sectional Membership.
- 22 Letters to the Christians gathered at. . . .
- 23 Answers to 16 questions proposed by a Clergyman.