

The Athenian Mercury.

Quest. 1. **W**Hat is the meaning of the present Union between the Presbyterians and Independents? And whether a Universal Accommodation amongst Protestants may ever be expected?

Ans. The Proposer of this Question has branch'd it into two parts, either of which require a distinct Answer, which we shall endeavour to give him as succinctly (and yet as fully) as may be.

For the first, (*viz.*) What is the meaning of the present union between the Presbyterians and Independents; let him take this Briefly.

'Twas the Honourable Character of the Primitive Christians, that they did glory in an undissembled affection, which the fiercest Storms of Persecution could not abate; insomuch that those who were Enemies both to their Persons and Doctrin, observ'd of them, *Videte ut hi Christiani mutuo flagrantur amore: See how these Christians love one another!* And certainly if Christian Unity was so commendable a Virtue, when the Church of Christ was (as it were) in its infancy, there is no reason why it should be look'd upon with a less favourable aspect now, when being arriv'd to a greater Maturity, a perfection of Graces cannot be esteemed unnecessary to compleat its lustre: Especially if we reflect upon the ill consequences that have attended at a disunion of Persons adoring the same Deity, and professing the same Faith in all ages and places of the World.

All Disunion in Religious Worship is founded upon a difference of Opinion, either in things Fundamental, or things Circumstantial; now as 'tis highly culpable to be circumstantial in Fundamentals, so 'tis equally absurd to be fundamental in Circumstantials. We frequently perceive that passionate Disputes darken our Reasons, but seldom that they enlighten our Understandings, and 'tis no small step towards a Friendship, to manage a Controversy with Moderation, for in all contests of this nature, that Pacifick Spirit which the Gospel requires, (founded upon Humility) ought to be extended to its utmost Latitude.

We find it recorded in History, as a glorious instance of Self-conquest in Aristippus, that having been engag'd in a Quarrel with the Philosopher *Æschines*, (though perhaps imagining himself in the right) he came to petition for a Reconciliation; yet adding, that being the Elder Man, he supposed it the duty of the other who was his Inferiour, to make the first step towards it. But *Æschines* replied, By this I am sensible of your Superiority, not in Years only, but in Wisdom; in that when I began the Feud, You are the Person that ended it.

These now United Brethren, the Presbyterians and Independents, have imitated *Aristippus* in making equal advances to demolish that partition Wall of disunion which a long time has been the subject of so general a lamentation; and this have they done not for any private ends, or by respects, but only to analogize themselves to those blessed Spirits composing the Church of Christ above, in whose Hearts perfect love and unity are the most predominant affections. To conclude then, they having before differed chiefly in point of Ecclesiastical Government and Congregational Worship, their Aims and Intentions are now (if we may believe their own Words,) to be Debtors to each others in nothing but Love.

Now for the second Question, Whether a universal accommodation amongst Protestants may ever be expected, we think not so rightly stated by the Querist, as if he had ask'd whether it might ever be effected? However being a more comprehensive Question than the other, it will require a suitable Answer; in giving which, we hope, prolixity will not be look'd upon as burdensom.

We suppose (without the censure of passing a rash undeliberate judgment, submitting to those who are endued with better understandings) we may resolve it in the affirmative, that it may be not only expected, but effected, if Providence so pleases, especially since the truth of our Assertion is corroborated with such a cloud of Witnesses.

To answer this, we shall therefore lay down diverse Positions, illustrating and clearing the matter in question, to which many eminent Divines and others of the Church of England, (Men no less eminent for the Piety of their Conversations, than remarkable for the greatness of their Learning,) have given their Suffrages, as we shall prove out of their own Writings; and then as a Corollary subjoin the feasibility of it by way of Inference from the Premises.

To begin then and demonstrate, that 'tis a great abatement of our Rancour, and no small step towards an accommodation, when we believe our Adversaries to be Gods Friends; we shall borrow the words of Reverend Dr. Cave, (whom the Lives of the Primitive Fathers have rendered so illustrious) in his Gospel Preach'd, p. 98. *Many of the Presbyterian Perswasion, (says he,) are not only sound and orthodox in the main Articles of the Reformed Religion, but learned and able Defenders of it, zealous Protesters against all the horrid wickedness of this day (speaking of the 30th of Jan.) and active Instruments in bringing home our Banish'd King.*

We shall from the words of Learned Dr. Sherlock, shew you, that though 'tis the property and practice of Papists to exclude those from Heaven who are not Members of their Communion, yet Protestants allow such equally capable of Salvation with themselves, if right in the main, though they do not comply with their super-added modes of Worship. Dr. Sherlock in *Rel. Assen.* p. 96. *Others (says he) are scandalized at the great variety of Religions; but if wise, seeing there is so much dispute which is the true Religion, they would use the greater diligence and honesty to find it out, and hope that God would pardon those mistakes which are meerly the errors of their Understandings, when they offer unto him a pious and devout Soul.*

Dr. Wake lets us know, that 'tis the generally received Opinion of the moderate Conformists, that most others, though branch'd into several Sects, and disagreeing in Circumstantials, are yet united in Fundamentals. Dr. Wake's Sermon on Rom. 15. 5, 6, 7. p. 16, 17. *Our Differences do not at all concern the foundations either of Faith or Worship, and are therefore such in which good Men if they be otherwise diligent and sincere in their Enquiry, may differ without any prejudice to themselves, or any just reflection upon the truth of their common Profession.*

We shall shew you from the words of Bishop Pierse, that though we differ in less momentous things, we are united in one common summary of our Faith (*viz.* in that we call the Apostles Creed) comprehending all the truths necessary for Salvation. Bishop Pierse in *Pref. to Expos. of Apostles Creed.* The Creed (saith he,) without Controversy, is a brief comprehension of the objects of our Christian Faith, &c.

Will ye yet admit of the Suffrage and Testimony of another Prelate (if the former be insufficient,) and that is Bishop Andrews, from whose words we shall make it obvious to every common Understanding, that most of our Quarrels have been founded upon things indifferent, and that scarce any of the sober Conformists ever assum'd the liberty to censure their Dissenting Brethren, for asserting Heretical and Damnable Positions. Bishop Andr. Cited in *Append. to the 3d. p. of Friendly Deb.* Let but obstinacy and perverseness be wanting, it will be not Heresy; and if it be Heresy, being about a point not of Faith, but of Dispute, whether Episcopacy be a distinct order from Presbytery, it will not be amongst those things that St. Peter calls Damnable Heresie.

The Reverend Prelate of Armagh, Holy Usher, does almost in terminis deliver it as his Opinion, that the Doors of the publick Assemblies ought not to be shut against such whose Offence is only to be guilty of lesser errors: And his moderation was none of the least of his Vertues. In his *Directions concerning Liturgies and Episcopal Government*, he prescribes, that none might be excommunicated but by the Bishop himself, with the consent of the Pastor in whose Parish the Delinquent dwells, and that for heinous and scandalous crimes, joined with obstinacy and wilful contempt. *Idea in lib. 7. Body of Divinity.*

The celebrated Master of Trinity Colledge, that Prodigy of Learning and Ingenuity, Dr. Barrow, acquaints us, that as it is our privilege to be united under one Head, so it is our Duty to unite our selves to one another; in his *Sermons on the Epistle, to the Romans*, p. 231, 232. Pursue Peace with all, without any exception, with Men of all Nations, Jews and Greeks and Barbarians of all Sects and Religions, Persecuting Jews, and Idolatrous Heathens (as at that time) Men of all Judgments and Persuasions, neither is there any evading our Obligation to this duty, by pretending of others, that they entertain Opinions erroneous, and contrary to ours, and that they adhere to Sects, and Parties which we dislike and disavow; that they are not so Virtuous, so Religious, so Holy as they should be, or at least not in a manner as we would have them.

The Author of the whole Duty of Man, whose Modesty in concealing his Name, is not inferior to his other excellencies, assures us, that mutual forbearances of one another in Love, is necessary amongst Christians. The lesser differences (saith he,) in Opinion may be born with on both sides, and must not in the least abate our Brotherly Charity to each other. King Charles the First, in his *Eikon Basilike*, has this Expression upon calling the Scots, and their coming in; Surely in matters of Religion, those truths gain most on Mens Judgments and Consciences, which are least urg'd with secular violence, which weakens truth with prejudices; Idem upon the Covenant, *Ejac. 2.* Nothing violent or injurious can be Religious; which plainly intimates, that as 'twas never the Method used by the Primitive Christians (whose Weapons, were Preces & Lacrimæ) in former Ages, to convince their gain-sayers by rugged Methods, so neither ought it to be the practice of the moderate ones. 'Twas a celebrated Expression of Judge Milton, at a Charge (which we our selves heard) that Moderation has made many a Christian, but Severity never made any. And 'tis the Expression of Bishop Taylor in his *Advice to his Clergy*, p. 25, Use no Violence to any Man, to bring him to your Opinion, but by the Word of your Ministry, &c.

From that great good Man Judge Hale, we may learn that even where their Confessions of Faith have differ'd, they have entertain'd Peaceable Sentiments for each other, in his *Disc. of Rel.* p. 11. The wise and sober sort of Conformists, (says he,) know and profess this, that a Man may be a good and excellent Christian, under this Episcopal, or any other form of Church Government.

And that their desire has been Peace and Unity, may be easily inferr'd from these pathetic Words of that pious Man, Bishop Hall, in his *Works*, p. 426. Yea (says he) let me beg Peace as for Life, &c. and though our Brains be different, let our Heart be one.

And now to conclude; we shall shew you that their practice has been conformable to these (above, recited) Opinions, from that celebrated Example of Ridley and Hooper, which you meet in *Fox's Acts and Monuments*, p. 121. *New Edition.* These two Eminent Lights of the Church having before had some disagreement about the Ceremonial Worship, that was then strenuously asserted by some, when it pleased God that for the Truths sake they were both cast into Bonds in Prison, they presently united in the Bonds of Peace; as is evident from these words of Ridley, But now my dear Brother, forasmuch as I understand by your Works, which I have but superficially seen, that we thoroughly agree, and wholly consent together in those things which are the grounds and substantial points of our Religion, against the which the World so furiously rageth in these our days; howsoever in times past, by certain by-matters and circumstances of Religion, you Wisdom and my Simplicity (I grant) hath a little jarred, each of us following the abundance of his own Sense and Judgment: Now I say, be you assured, that even with my whole Heart (God is my Witness) in the Bowels of Christ, I love you in the truth, and for the truths sake which abideth in us, and as I am persuaded, shall by the Grace of God abide in us for ever more, &c. Farewell, N. Ridley.

We shall tire your Patience but with one Instance more, and that is of Bishop Greenham, who being ask'd by the Lord Treasurer Cecil, what it was that occasion'd the divisions of that Age; The fault (says he) is on both sides, and on neither side; for the Godly-wise on both sides bear with each other, and concur in the main; but there are some selfish, peevish Spirits on both sides, and these make the Quarrel.

To be brief then, do we wish that which is (or ought to be) the desire and endeavours of all good Men, viz. to see the Protestant Religion flourish as in Truth and Peace, so

in Unity? then let us endeavour to establish an amnestie or Act of Oblivion in every one of our Breasts, totally obliterating whatever general Injuries or personal affronts, have been given or received on either side; which is the readiest, (if not the only way) to effect so glorious a work as an universal Accommodation.

And now to put a period to the matter, and so fulfil our promise, Have we the word of a King on our side, the suffrages of an Arch bishop, and several other Prelates, and this also confirm'd by the concurrent Notes of a Lord Chief Justice, and divers eminent Divines; we may certainly be allowed to aver, that an universal agreement among Protestants is very possible if not equally probable, which we lay down not dogmatically, reserving to our selves a liberty of retracting this opinion whenever we shall see reason to conform to a better; nam non erit pudor ad meliora transire.

Quest. 2. Whether is there such a thing as a Petrification of Wood, &c. and how is it effected?

Ans. Instances are, — Kornman (*de Mir. Mort.*) says he saw a Body of a Man in the River Anien, near Tybur, that was petrified; Titus Celsus a Patrician of Rome, affirms, that he hath also seen this Body. There are found upon the Sands of that River, petrified Almonds, Fenel Seeds, and Annise, with other things: the Naturalists thereabout give this Reason; The River arises from cold Sulphureous Veins, derived from Subterranean Metals, and therefore by a kind of Natural Virtue, it consolidates and agglutinates all kind of Bodies, as Sticks, Leaves, &c. and passing over Solid Bodies, it by degrees, wraps them about with a Stony Bark. — Schenk. *Obs. lib. 4.* Says a Woman of Sens in Burgundy, went 28 Years, with a dead Child in her Womb; at last dying her self, she was opened, and in her Belly, there was found a Stone, having all the Limbs and exact proportions of a Child of nine Months old: The Physicians gave this reason for its petrification; the slimy matter of a Childs Body retains a natural aptitude for consolidation, when it meets with an extraordinary heat of the Matrix. We have Instances enough in our own Country of petrification by Cold Water, as in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, &c. which no doubt have the Quality of the fore-mentioned River Anien, and the same reason for Petrification.

Quest. 3. Whether Babel's Builders had attained their desired ends, if their Languages had not been Confounded; seeing it is written, now nothing will be restrained from them which they have Imagined to do?

Ans. 'Tis impossible a Tower should be built up to Heaven, if by Heaven is meant the Cælum Stellatum, or Firmament, because the Air would be too much rarified and thin for respiration, and consequently to live in. But upon a supposition, that the Air would be as proper and natural to breath in some Thousand Miles high, as upon Teneriffe, whose perpendicular is Seven Miles in height, yet the Builders must Dye, and then the Work must stand still, it coming in time to be above an Ages Travail; and therefore whoever went on purpose to carry on the Work, would dye by the way, or be too old for the Work when he came there. The meaning of those words, Now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do, seems to import thus much, That the wickedness of that Age was arrived to that degree, that the law of Nature was too much effaced to give any Check to the Exorbitancy of their Imagination; but that they would push on without any Controul, whatever the Devil or their own Devices could suggest. Not that they had power to accomplish, but a precipitate readiness to undertake any thing that was not vertuous.

Quest. 4. Why are Springs found at the top of the highest Mountains?

Ans. That the World is round, tho something irregular by reason of Mountains, Plains and Valleys, is granted on all hands; as also, that the Earth and Water makes this Rotundity, or round Globe, whose Center is just in the middle of itself. But now according to that Maxim of Hydranlick, Water cannot ascend higher than the place of its Original; so that we must find some other Original than the Sea. Virtuoso's grant, that in a transmutation of Elements, ten Measures of Air will produce one of Water. Now all Vacuities in the Earth, are supplied by Air, and Mountains have more than Plains, being not so much compressed on every side; wherefore this Air stagnates for want of Motion, and by the Coldness of the Earth, condenses into Water, and supplies or gives Life to the Springs in those Mountainous Places, and that without any Subterraneous Passages thither.