

AN ANSWER

TO

THE REV. MR. CHURCH'S REMARKS ON THE REV. MR. JOHN WESLEY'S LAST JOURNAL

IN A LETTER TO THAT GENTLEMAN.

"Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off."
(1 Kings xx. 11.)

REVEREND SIR,

1. My first desire and prayer to God is, that I may live peaceably with all men: My next, that if I must dispute at all, it may be with a man of understanding. Thus far, therefore, I rejoice on the present occasion. I rejoice also in that I have confidence of your sincerity, of your real desire to promote the glory of God, by peace and good-will among men. I am likewise thankful to God for your calm manner of writing; (a few paragraphs excepted;) and yet more for this,—that such an opponent should, by writing in such a manner, give me an opportunity of explaining myself on those very heads whereon I wanted an occasion so to do.

2. I do not want, indeed, (though perhaps you think I do,) to widen the breach between us, or to represent the difference of the doctrines we severally teach as greater than it really is. So far from it, that I earnestly wish there were none at all; or, if there must be some, that it may be as small as possible; being fully persuaded, that, could we once agree in doctrines, other differences would soon fall to the ground.

3. In order to contribute, as I am able, to this, it will be my endeavour to acknowledge what I think you have spoken right, and to answer what I cannot think right as yet, with what

brevity and clearness I can. I desire to do this in as inoffensive a manner as the nature of the thing will bear, and consistently with that brotherly love which I cannot deny you without wronging my own soul.

4. You sum up your charge thus: "You have now, Sir, my sentiments.—It is impossible for you to put an entire stop to the enormities of the Moravians, while you still, I. Too much commend these men: II. Hold principles in common with them, from which these enormities naturally follow: And, III. Maintain other errors more than theirs, and are guilty of enthusiasm to the highest degree." (*Remarks*, pp. 73, 74.)

I. 1. You, First, charge me with too much commending the Moravians. That the case may be fully understood, I will transcribe the passages which you cite from the Journal concerning them, and then give a general answer:—

"She told me Mr. Molther had advised her, till she received faith, to be still, ceasing from outward works. In the evening, Mr. Bray also was highly commending the being still: He likewise spoke largely of the great danger that attended the doing of outward works, and of the folly of people that keep running about to church and sacrament." (Vol. I. p. 247.)

"Sunday, November 4. Our society met, and continued silent till eight." (*Ibid.*)

"Sunday, June 22. I spoke thus: Eight or nine months ago, certain men arose, who affirmed that there is no such thing as any means of grace, and that we ought to leave off these works of the law." (*Ibid.* p. 275.)

"You, Mr. Molther, believe that the way to attain faith, is, not to go to church, not to communicate, not to fast, not to use so much private prayer, not to read the Scripture, not to do temporal good, or attempt to do spiritual good." (*Ibid.* p. 257.)

You undervalue good works, especially works of outward mercy, never publicly insisting on the necessity of them." (*Ibid.* p. 380.)

"Some of our brethren asserted, (1.) That till they had true faith, they ought to be still; that is, (as they explained themselves,) to abstain from the means of grace, as they are called, the Lord's supper in particular. (2.) That the ordinances are not means of grace, there being no other means than Christ." (*Ibid.* p. 247.)

"I could not agree, either that none has any faith, so long

as he is liable to any doubt or fear; or that, till we have it, we ought to abstain from the ordinances of God." (*Ibid.*)

"Mr. Br—d speaks so slightly of the means of grace, that many are much grieved to hear him; but others are greatly delighted with him. Ten or fourteen of them meet at our brother Clarke's, with Mr. Molther, and make a mere jest of going to the church or to the sacrament." (*Ibid.* p. 255.)

"You, Mr. Molther, believe it is impossible for a man to use these means, without trusting in them." (*Ibid.* p. 258.)

"'Believers,' said Mr. Simpson, 'are not subject to ordinances, and unbelievers have nothing to do with them.'" (*Ibid.* p. 269.)

"'Believers need not, and unbelievers may not, use them. These do not sin when they abstain from them; but those do sin when they do not abstain.'" (*Ibid.* p. 277.)

"'For one who is not born of God to read the Scriptures, or to pray, or to communicate, or to do any outward work, is deadly poison. If he does any of these things, he destroys himself.' Mr. Bell earnestly defended this." (*Ibid.* p. 281.)

"At eight, the society at Nottingham met: I could not but observe that not one who came in used any prayer at all. I looked for one of our Hymn-books; but both that and the Bible were vanished away, and in the room thereof lay the Moravian Hymns and the Count's Sermons." (*Ibid.* p. 314.)

"One of our English brethren, joined with you, said in his public expounding, 'As many go to hell by praying as by thieving.' Another, 'I knew one who, leaning over the back of a chair, received a great gift. But he must kneel down to give God thanks: So he lost it immediately; and I know not whether he will ever have it again.' And yet another: 'You have lost your first joy. Therefore, you pray: That is the devil. You read the Bible: That is the devil. You communicate: That is the devil.'" (*Ibid.* p. 329.)

"They affirmed that there is no commandment in the New Testament but to believe; that no other duty lies upon us; and that, when a man does believe, he is not bound or obliged to do anything which is commanded there." (*Ibid.* p. 275.)

"Mr. St— told me, 'No one has any degree of faith till he is perfect as God is perfect.'" (*Ibid.* p. 270.)

"You believe there are no degrees in faith." (*Ibid.*)

"I have heard Mr. Molther affirm, that there is no justifying faith where there is ever any doubt." (*Ibid.* p. 328.)

“The moment a man is justified, he is sanctified wholly. Thenceforth, till death, he is neither more nor less holy.” (*Ibid.* p. 324.)

“We are to grow in grace, but not in holiness.” (*Ibid.* p. 325.)

2. I have frequently observed that I wholly disapprove of a these positions: “That there are no degrees in faith; that in order to attain faith we must abstain from all the ordinances of God; that a believer does not grow in holiness; and that he is not obliged to keep the commandments of God.” But I must also observe, (1.) That you ought not to charge the Moravian Church with the first of these; since in the very page from which you quote those words, “There is no justifying faith where there is ever any doubt,” that note occurs: “In the preface to the Second Journal, the Moravian Church is cleared from this mistake.” (2.) That with respect to the ordinances of God, their practice is better than their principle. They do use them themselves, I am a witness; and that with reverence and godly fear. Those expressions, however, of our own countrymen are utterly indefensible; as I think are Mr. Molther’s also; who was quickly after recalled into Germany. The great fault of the Moravian Church seems to lie in not openly disclaiming all he had said; which in all probability they would have done, had they not leaned to the same opinion. I must, (3.) Observe that I never knew one of the Moravian Church, but that single person, affirm that a believer does not grow in holiness. And perhaps he would not affirm it on reflection. But I am still afraid their whole Church is tainted with Quietism, Universal Salvation, and Antinomianism: I speak, as I said elsewhere, of Antinomian opinions, abstracted from practice, good or bad.

3. But I should rejoice if there lay no other objection against them, than that of erroneous opinions. I know in some measure how to have compassion on the ignorant: I know the incredible force of prepossession. And God only knows, what ignorance or error (all things considered) is invincible; and what allowance his mercy will make, in such cases, to those who desire to be led into all truth. But how far what follows may be imputed to invincible ignorance or prepossession, I cannot tell.

Many of “you greatly, yea, above measure, exalt yourselves, (as a Church,) and despise others. I have scarce heard one Moravian brother own his Church to be wrong in anything. Many of you I have heard speak of it, as if it were infallible.

Some of you have set it up as the judge of all the earth, of all persons as well as doctrines. Some of you have said, that there is no true Church but yours; yea, that there are no true Christians out of it. And your own members you require to have implicit faith in her decisions, and to pay implicit obedience to her directions." (Vol. I. p. 329.)

I can in no degree justify these things. And yet neither can I look upon them in the same light that you do, as "some of the very worst things which are objected to the Church of Rome." (*Remarks*, p. 7.) They are exceeding great mistakes: Yet in as great mistakes have holy men both lived and died;—Thomas à Kempis, for instance, and Francis Sales. And yet I doubt not they are now in Abraham's bosom.

4. I am more concerned for their "despising and decrying self-denial;" for their "extending Christian liberty beyond all warrant of holy writ;" for their "want of zeal for good works;" and, above all, for their supposing, that "we may, on some accounts, use guile;" in consequence of which they do "use guile or dissimulation in many cases." "Nay, in many of them I have found" (not in all, nor in most) "much subtlety, much evasion and disguise; so 'becoming all things to all men,' as to take the colour and shape of any that were near them." (*Ibid.* pp. 307, 258, 332, 327.)

I can neither defend nor excuse those among the Moravians whom I have found guilty of this. But neither can I condemn all for the sake of some. Every man shall give an account of himself to God.

But you say, "Your protesting against some of their opinions is not sufficient to discharge you. Have you not prepared the way for these Moravians, by countenancing and commending them; and by still speaking of them as if they were in the main the best Christians in the world, and only deluded or mistaken in a few points?" (*Remarks*, pp. 11, 12.)

I cannot speak of them otherwise than I think. And I still think, (1.) That God has some thousands in our own Church who have the faith and love which is among them, without those errors either of judgment or practice. (2.) That, next to these, the body of the Moravian Church, however mistaken some of them are, are in the main, of all whom I have seen, the best Christians in the world.

5. Because I am continually charged with inconsistency

herein, even by the Moravians themselves, it may be "needful to give a short account of what has occurred between us from the beginning.

"My first acquaintance with the Moravian brethren began in my voyage to Georgia. Being then with many of them in the same ship, I narrowly observed their whole behaviour. And I greatly approved of all I saw." (The particulars are related in the First Journal.)

"From February 14, 1735, to December 2, 1737, being with them (except when I went to Frederica or Carolina) twice or thrice every day, I loved and esteemed them more and more. Yet a few things I could not approve of. These I mentioned to them from time to time, and then commended the cause to God.

"In February following I met with Peter Böhler. My heart clave to him as soon as he spoke. And the more we conversed, so much the more did I esteem both him and the Moravian Church. So that I had no rest in my spirit till I executed the design which I had formed long before; till, after a short stay in Holland, I hastened forward, first to Marienborn, and then to Hernhuth." *

It may be observed, that I had before seen a few things in the Moravians which I could not approve of. In this journey I saw a few more, in the midst of many excellent things; in consequence whereof, "in September, 1738, soon after my return to England, I began the following letter to the Moravian Church. But being fearful of trusting my own judgment, I determined to wait yet a little longer, and so laid it by unfinished:—

"MY DEAR BRETHREN,

"I CANNOT but rejoice in your steadfast faith, in your love to our blessed Redeemer, your deadness to the world, your meekness, temperance, chastity, and love of one another. I greatly approve of your Conferences and Bands,† of your methods of instructing children; and, in general, of your great care of the souls committed to your charge.

"But of some other things I stand in doubt, which I will mention in love and meekness. And I wish that, in order to

* These are the words of the Fourth Journal, Vol. I. page 381, &c.

† The Band society in London began May 1, some time before I set out for Germany.

remove those doubts, you would, on each of those heads, First, plainly answer whether the fact be as I suppose; and if so, Secondly, consider whether it be right.

“‘ Is not the Count all in all among you ?

“‘ Do you not magnify your own Church too much ?

“‘ Do you not use guile and dissimulation in many cases ?

“‘ Are you not of a close, dark, reserved temper and behaviour ?’

“ It may easily be seen, that my objections then were nearly the same as now.” Only with this difference,—I was not then assured that the facts were as I supposed. “ Yet I cannot say my affection was lessened at all: (For I did not dare to determine anything :) But from November 1, I could not but see more and more things which I could not reconcile with the gospel.”

“ These I have set down with all simplicity. Yet do I this, because I love them not? God knoweth: Yea, and in part, I esteem them still; because I verily believe they have a sincere desire to serve God; because many of them have tasted of his love, and some retain it in simplicity; because they love one another; because they have so much of the truth of the gospel, and so far abstain from outward sin. And lastly, because their discipline is, in most respects, so truly excellent; notwithstanding that visible blemish, the paying too much regard to their great patron and benefactor, Count Zinzendorf.”

6. I believe, if you coolly consider this account, you will not find, either that it is inconsistent with itself, or that it lays you under any necessity of speaking in the following manner: “ What charms there may be in a demure look and a sour behaviour, I know not. But sure they must be in your eye very extraordinary, as they can be sufficient to cover such a multitude of errors and crimes, and keep up the same regard and affection for the authors and abettors of them. I doubt your regard for them was not lessened, till they began to interfere with what you thought your province. You was influenced, not by a just resentment to see the honour of religion and virtue so injuriously and scandalously trampled upon, but by a fear of losing your own authority.” (*Remarks*, pp. 18, 19.)

I doubt, there is scarce one line of all these which is consistent either with truth or love. But I will transcribe a few more, before I answer: “ How could you so long and so intimately converse with, so much commend, and give such countenance to,

such desperately wicked people as the Moravians, according to your own account, were known by you to be? And you still speak of them, as if they were, in the main, the best Christians in the world. In one place you say, 'A few things I could not approve of;' but in God's name, Sir, is the contempt of almost the whole of our duty, of every Christian ordinance, to be so gently touched? Can detestation in such a case be too strongly expressed? Either they are some of the vilest wretches in the world, or you are the falsest accuser in the world. Christian charity has scarce an allowance to make for them as you have described them. If you have done this truly, they ought to be discouraged by all means that can be imagined."

7. Let us now weigh these assertions. "They" (that is, "the charms of their *sour* behaviour") "must be in your eye very extraordinary."—Do not you stumble at the threshold? The Moravians excel in sweetness of behaviour. "As they can be sufficient to cover such a multitude of errors and crimes." *Such a multitude of errors and crimes!* I believe, as to errors, they hold universal salvation, and are partly Antinomians, (in opinion,) and partly Quietists; and for this cause I cannot join with them. But where is the multitude of errors? Whosoever knows two or three hundred more, let him please to mention them. *Such a multitude of crimes* too! That some of them have used guile, and are of a close reserved behaviour, I know. And I excuse them not. But to this multitude of crimes I am an utter stranger. Let him prove this charge upon them who can. For me, I declare I cannot.

"To keep up the same regard and affection."—Not so. I say, my affection was not lessened, till after September, 1739, till I had proof of what I had feared before. But I had not the same degree of regard for them when I saw the dark as well as the bright side of their character. "I doubt your regard for them was not lessened till they began to interfere with what you thought your province." If this were only a doubt, it were not much amiss; but it presently shoots up into an assertion, equally groundless: For my regard for them lessened, even while I was in Georgia; but it increased again after my return from thence, especially while I was at Hernhuth; and it gradually lessened again for some years, as I saw more and more which I approved not. How then does it appear that "I was influenced herein by a fear of losing my own authority; not by a just resentment to see

the honour of religion and virtue so scandalously trampled upon?"—*Trampled upon!* By whom? Not by the Moravians: I never saw any such thing among them.

But what do you mean by "a just resentment?" I hope you do not mean what is commonly called *zeal*; a flame which often "sets on fire the whole course of nature, and is itself set on fire of hell!" "Rivers of water run from my eyes, because men keep not thy law." This resentment on such an occasion I understand. From all other may God deliver me!

8. You go on: "How could you so long and so intimately converse with—such desperately wicked people as the Moravians, according to your own account, were known by you to be?" O Sir, what another assertion is this! "The Moravians, according to your *own account*, were known by you to be desperately wicked people, while you intimately conversed with them!" Utterly false and injurious. I never gave any such account. I conversed intimately with them, both at Savannah and Hernhuth. But neither then, nor at any other time, did I know, or think, or say, they were "desperately wicked people." I think and say, nay, you blame me for saying, just the reverse, viz., that though I soon "found among them a few things which I could not approve;" yet I believe they are "in the main some of the best Christians in the world."

You surprise me yet more in going on thus: "In God's name, Sir, is the contempt of almost the whole of our duty, of every Christian ordinance, to be so very gently touched?" Sir, this is not the case. This charge no more belongs to the Moravians, than that of murder. Some of our countrymen spoke very wicked things. The Moravians did not sufficiently disavow them. These are the premises. By what art can you extort so dreadful a conclusion from them?

"Can detestation, in such a case, be too strongly expressed?" Indeed it can; even were the case as you suppose. "Either they are some of the vilest wretches in the world, or you are the falsest accuser in the world." Neither one nor the other: Though I prove what I allege, yet they may be, in the main, good men. "Charity has scarce an allowance to make for them, as you have described them." I have described them as of a mixed character, with much evil among them, but more good. Is it not a strange kind of charity, which cannot find an allowance to make in such a case? "If you have described

them truly, they ought to be discouraged by all means that can be imagined." *By all means!* I hope not by fire and faggot; though the *house of mercy* imagines these to be, of all means, most effectual.

9. You proceed: "How can you justify the many good things you say of the Moravians, notwithstanding this character? You say they love God: But how can this be, when they even plead against keeping most of his commandments? You say, you believe they have a sincere desire to serve God. How, then, can they despise his service in so many instances? You declare some of them much holier than any people you had yet known. Strange! if they fail in so many prime points of Christian duty, and this not only habitually and presumptuously, but even to the denying their use and necessity. You praise them for trampling under foot 'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:' And yet you make them a close, reserved, insincere, deceitful people.

"How you will explain those things, I know not." (*Remarks*, pp. 20, 21.) By nakedly declaring each thing as it is. They are, I believe, the most self-inconsistent people now under the sun: And I describe them just as I find them; neither better nor worse, but leaving the good and bad together. Upon this ground I can very easily justify the saying many good things of them, as well as bad. For instance: I am still persuaded that they (many of them) love God; although many others of them ignorantly "plead against the keeping," not "most," but some, "of his commandments." I believe "they have a sincere desire to serve God:" And yet, in several instances, some of them, I think, despise that manner of serving him which I know God hath ordained. I believe some of them are much holier than any people I had known in August, 1740: Yet sure I am that others among them fail, not indeed in the "prime points of Christian duty," (for these are faith, and the love of God and man,) but in several points of no small importance. Not that they herein sin presumptuously, neither; for they are fully, though erroneously, persuaded in their own minds. From the same persuasion they act, when they, in some sense, deny the use or necessity of those ordinances. How far that persuasion will justify or excuse them, I leave to Him who knoweth their hearts. Lastly. I believe they trample under foot, in a good degree, "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life:" And yet many of

them use reserve, yea, guile. Therefore, my soul mourns for them in secret places.

10. "But I must observe," you say, "that you fall not only into inconsistencies, but into direct contradictions. You commend them for 'loving one another in a manner the world knoweth not of;' and yet you charge them with being 'in the utmost confusion, biting and devouring one another.' You say, 'They caution us against natural love of one another; and had well-nigh destroyed brotherly love from among us.'

"You praise them for 'using no diversions, but such as become saints;' and for 'not regarding outward adorning:' Yet you say they 'conform to the world in wearing gold and costly apparel; and by joining in worldly diversions, in order to do good.'

"You call their discipline, 'in most respects, truly excellent.' I wish you had more fully explained yourself. I am sure it is no sign of good discipline, to permit such abominations. And you tell them yourself, 'I can show you such a subordination as answers all Christian purposes, and yet is as distant from that among you as the heavens are from the earth.'

"You mention it as a good effect of their discipline, that 'every one knows and keeps his proper rank.' Soon after, as if it were with a design to confute yourself, you say, 'Our brethren have neither wisdom enough to guide, nor prudence enough to let it alone.'

"And now, Sir, how can you reconcile these opposite descriptions?" (*Ibid.* pp. 21, 22.) Just as easily as those before, by simply declaring the thing as it is. "You commend them" (the Moravians) "for loving one another; and yet charge them with biting and devouring one another." (Vol. I. pp. 245, 256.) *Them!* Whom? Not the Moravians; but the English brethren of Fetter-Lane, before their union with the Moravians. Here, then, is no shadow of contradiction. For the two sentences do not relate to the same persons.

"You say, 'They had well-nigh destroyed brotherly love from among us;' partly by 'cautions against natural love.'" (*Ibid.* p. 330.) It is a melancholy truth; so they had. But we had then no connexion with them. Neither, therefore, does this contradict their "loving one another in a manner the world knoweth not of."

"You praise them for using no diversions but such as become saints;" (*Ibid.* p. 245;) "and yet say," (I recite the whole sen-

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tence,) "I have heard some of you affirm, that 'Christian salvation implies liberty to conform to the world, by joining in worldly diversions in order to do good.'" (*Ibid.* p. 327.) And both these are true. The Moravians, in general, "use no diversions but such as become saints;" and yet I have heard some of them affirm, in contradiction to their own practice, that "one then mentioned did well, when he joined in playing at tennis in order to do good."

11. "You praise them for not 'regarding outward adorning.'" (*Ibid.* p. 245.) So I do, the bulk of the congregation. "And yet you say," (I again recite the whole sentence,) "I have heard some of you affirm, that 'Christian salvation implies liberty to conform to the world, by putting on of gold and costly apparel.'" (*Ibid.* p. 327.) I have so. And I blame them the more, because they are condemned by the general practice of their own Church.

"You call their discipline 'in most respects truly excellent.'" (*Ibid.* p. 245.) I could wish you had more fully explained yourself." I have, in the Second Journal. (*Ibid.* pp. 115-147.) "It is no sign of good discipline to permit such abominations;" that is, error in opinion, and guile in practice. True, it is not; nor is it any demonstration against it. For there may be good discipline even in a College of Jesuits. Another fault is, too great a deference to the Count. And yet, "in most respects, their discipline is truly excellent."

"You mention it as a good effect of their discipline, that 'every one knows and keeps his proper rank.'" (*Ibid.* p. 245.) Soon after, as it were with a design to confute yourself, you say, 'Our brethren have neither wisdom enough to guide, nor prudence enough to let it alone.'" (*Ibid.* p. 255.) Pardon me, Sir. I have no design either to confute or to contradict myself in these words. The former sentence is spoken of the Moravian brethren; the latter, of the English brethren of Fetter-Lane.

12. You need not therefore "imagine, that either the strong pretences or warm professions of the Moravians," or their "agreeing with me on some favourite topics," (for my love to them was antecedent to any such agreement,) "induce me to overlook their iniquity, and to forgive their other crimes." (*Remarks*, p. 23.) No. I love them upon quite different grounds; even because I believe, notwithstanding all their faults, they "love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," and have a measure of "the mind that was in him." And I am in great earnest when I declare once more,