

K. Brandy U. H. /

OLD DISSENTING MEETING-HOUSE,

Wolverhampton.

SO much has been written about the affairs of the Meeting-house in John's-street, Wolverhampton, that I feel very reluctant again to address the public upon the subject; and it is only in compliance with the wishes of friends whom I am bound to esteem, that I thus offer a reply to some parts of "A minute detail of circumstances," as it is called, which has appeared under the signature of Mr. Charles Mander.* For the information of those into whose hands Mr. Charles Mander's production may not fall, I would just observe, that in the month of July, 1818, his uncle, Mr. John Mander, addressed a Letter to me, the substance of which he has printed, respecting the money left by different individuals, towards the support of public worship, in the Meeting-house. I immediately acknowledged the receipt of this letter, and stated that as the business was before the public, I should decline entering into any private discussion.

To Mr. John Mander's Letter, and to one or two other points, in which I seem to be personally interested, my remarks will be confined.

I am highly diverted at the bold unhesitating tone which our adversaries assume, and at the dexterity with which they

* Printed at the end of an "Appeal to the Public, in answer to the Remarks of the Rev. James Robertson."

recover themselves, when their charges are disproved and they are convicted of ignorance or misrepresentation. In the "Case of Great Importance," signed by ten "Orthodox Ministers," in October, 1817, we are told that "in the year 1781, the Rev. Mr. Cole, a professed Calvinist, resigned."—VERAX affirms that "Mr. Cole always professed himself a Calvinist."—"Miss Elizabeth Newnham, of Birmingham, spinster, made oath that she was aged sixty-five years and upwards; that she well knew the Rev. John Cole, and was on very intimate terms with him and his family, and was very frequently at his house; that *his religious doctrines, both in the pulpit and private discourse, were Calvinistic.*"*

These statements, which, in reality, have nothing to do with the great question at issue, were intended to show that there was no gradual change, no gradual progress of religious opinion, in the society; but that "the Minister and Congregation were decidedly Trinitarians, and that Trinitarian doctrines were inculcated till the year 1781, at which time certain persons of Arian and Socinian tenets obtained possession of the chapel by stratagem."† In my reply to VERAX, though I did not know

* See "Appeal to the Public." Appendix, page 80.

† See a paper, of which I must again declare my opinion that it reflects no credit on the judgment, the taste or the moral feelings of the individual by whom it was drawn up, in the Congregational Magazine for May, 1818, page 275.

I have called on the nine "Orthodox Ministers" whose names are subscribed to that paper—Messrs. James, Scales, Steward, Hudson, Cooper, Dawson, Berry, Hammond and Richards—either to prove that "in the year 1781, certain persons of Arian and Socinian tenets obtained possession of the chapel by stratagem," or ingenuously and openly to retract the charge. What am I to infer from their silence? Shall I be forgiven if I say that, notwithstanding their belief to the contrary, ("Appeal," page 17,) there really is "another individual in the kingdom, besides Mr. Robertson, who suspects" their "enlightened attachment to the great principles of religious liberty?"

In the "Preface" of the "Appeal to the Public," the nine "Orthodox Ministers" speak of themselves (page 5) "as men whose word by every one, besides their accuser (Mr. Robertson,) would be received as their bond." While I was reading

at the time, that "Miss Elizabeth Newnham, of Birmingham, spinster, aged sixty-five years and upwards," had "made oath," I disputed the accuracy of these confident assertions, and engaged to prove "that MR. COLE *had ceased to be a Calvinist and a Trinitarian, long before his resignation.*"—

Does Mr. Charles Mander challenge me to the proof? or does he apologize for the error into which the zeal of his friends had betrayed them, and acknowledge that, the premises being withdrawn, the conclusion falls to the ground? Had such been his magnanimity, *I would have applauded him to the very echo that should applaud again.*

On the contrary, all that he says is, "In this particular Mr. Bransby's statement adds great weight to our case, and throws a peculiar colouring of justice upon the proceedings of those whom he is pleased to brand with the opprobrious epithet of zealots." "Can it then be a matter of wonder," he afterwards asks, "that when Mr. Cole began 'to wax cold,' and instead of animated and experimental discourses, he delivered them in nothing but a 'practical strain,' that *then* there should be some found, whose zeal was called into action, and who should earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

this passage, I recollected the printed declaration of Mr. Steward, who still retains possession of the Meeting-house, that "being introduced to the chapel an Unitarian and by Unitarians, he was bound both by the principles of honour and Christianity to give it up to them again." Surely, when the "Preface" was presented to him for his signature, he could not be an entire stranger to the feelings so beautifully described by the poet:

"O write it not, my hand!--the name appears
Already written--wash it out, my tears!"

I perceive that in a republication of their "Case of great Importance," the nine "Orthodox Ministers" no longer recommend it "as a *valuable precedent*:" the phrase is quietly withdrawn. I consider this to be a most costly and splendid sacrifice, on the altar of public opinion.

I shall give myself no further trouble about Mr. Charles Mander's "peculiar colouring of justice." It is, beyond all question, "a peculiar colouring!"

"MR. BRANSBY, says MR. CHARLES MANDER, *denies* that the Meeting-house was locked and guarded, but does not *disprove* it; and when I recollect that his only means of information is through a person who was too young at the time this occurred, to have any distinct remembrance of it, to what credit, I would ask, is he entitled? I have also this part of VERAX's statement confirmed by some of those who were interested at the time, and who would not *pledge* their *honour* to a falsehood."

In this instance, as in many other instances, MR. CHARLES MANDER's "recollection" has sadly failed him. When I entered upon a history of the circumstances as they arose, from the time of MR. COLE's being first led to think of withdrawing himself from the pastoral office at Wolverhampton, till MR. GRIFFITHS became the minister of the congregation, I promised "not to write a single syllable upon hearsay-evidence;" and to this engagement with the public, I most faithfully adhered.

The character of MR. HICKCOX, for correctness and impartiality, I believe, is beyond suspicion. My representation of the point in question was founded upon his authority; and MR. CHARLES MANDER must excuse me, if upon that authority, whilst I decline a "pledge of honour" from "those who were interested at the time," I still persist in stating my belief that the Meeting-house was opened for public worship as usual.

"To the surprise of many," (I transcribe the very words of MR. HICKCOX, from a Narrative in his own hand writing,) MR. JAMESON, with his wife and four children came to Wolverhampton, April 24, 1781. Upon which, MR. CHARLES HUNTER asked MR. MARSHALL, if they would admit him to preach in

the Meeting-house, who answered that a supply had been provided for the ensuing sabbath. MR. JAMESON was conducted by J. HANBURY, to West-Bromwich, where he preached for MR. HUMPHRYS."

In a subsequent part of the same Narrative, Mr. Hickcox says, "By advice of their friends in London, they (Mr. B. Mander and his party,) applied to Counsel for his opinion in the matter. There were two circumstances mentioned in the Case as stated to the Counsel, by their Attorney, that were false, as that of the Meeting-house being shut up, and nine non-subscribers to twenty-one to the invitation."

The reader will now judge "to what credit," I am "entitled."

Before I offer any remarks on the statements in the Letter addressed to me, by Mr. John Mander, I feel myself called upon to say, that in style and language, the Letter as it appears in the "Appendix," is materially different from that which I received. Almost every sentence has been dressed up for the public eye:—a proceeding which I apprehend to be unusual in such cases, and which I cannot think quite ingenuous, especially when I see what advantage has been taken of unguarded and hastily written notes, in other parts of this "Appendix."

The object of Mr. Mander's communication is to show, that my account of the endowments belonging to the Meeting-house, is erroneous. "Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill," says he, gave each of them £200. in Mr. Cole's time, and before he had any thoughts of leaving Wolverhampton, for the support of the interest, reserving the proceeds to themselves during their lives."

I had been led to conceive, from a diligent examination of all the documents within my reach, that these two gentlemen, in the prospect of its being necessary to invite a new

minister, had made the trustees acquainted with their design of leaving £200. each, towards the support of public worship in the Meeting-house. I was confirmed in this idea by the language employed in the invitation to Mr. Griffiths. "There are two legacies of £200. each, left by two persons of the Congregation at their decease, to the interest. One of the persons is in the eightieth year of his age, and the other is near seventy."

Mr. Mander's letter convinces me, *though I had previously no means of gaining a knowledge of the circumstance*, that Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill had actually placed £400. in the hands of Mr. Hickcox, while Mr. Cole was the minister of the Congregation; but I have seen no evidence which is sufficient to prove either that these sums were "irrevocably given," or that they were given "before Mr. Cole had any thoughts of leaving Wolverhampton:" still less has it been shown that "they were contributed for the support of Trinitarian worship."

Mr. Mander admits that Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill received the *proceeds* of these sums, during their lives. That they retained a controul over the *principal* is, in my judgment, rendered highly probable by two facts. First; there is no entry of these sums in the Chapel-wardens' accounts, till Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill respectively died. Secondly; as soon as both these individuals were dead, and not before, Mr. Hickcox gave the congregation his Security for the amount.

Mr. Mander informs us, that of the money given by Mr. Marshall, and Mr. Hill, one portion was invested in the public Funds, November 6, 1778, and the other, June 7, 1780. I shall lay before the public, at the end of this paper, a copy of a letter—Mr. Hickcox describes it as "an extraordinary epistolary address"—to Mr. Cole, dated September, 1780; from which, among other important facts, it will abundantly appear that long before he resigned, Mr. Cole, had ceased to

be a Calvinist and a Trinitarian, that on this account, some individuals, (Mr. Charles Mander is very angry at my having ventured to call them "zealots,") were dissatisfied with his ministry. One of the most active of these individuals, was my correspondent, Mr. John Mander. No doubt, his "worthy father-in-law Mr. Charles Hunter" was also in the number.* In Mr. Cole's reputed heresy will be found, I imagine, the true reason for Mr. Hunter's declining to leave a legacy to the Meeting-house, in John's-street; and for his making a bequest "towards paying the debt of the Temple-street Chapel," the Meeting house to which the Calvinistic part of Mr. Cole's congregation eventually united themselves.

Mr. Griffiths, when he preached as a candidate at Wolverhampton, spent nearly four weeks at Mr. Marshall's house; and Mr. Marshall's name stands first in the invitation to Mr. Griffiths. Mr. Marshall furnished no proof of his "orthodoxy" by leaving a "legacy to Temple-street Chapel!" nor can it, for a single moment, be questioned that his money was applied in exact conformity to his wishes.

Of Mr. Hill's religious sentiments, I know but little; for I have not, I must confess, the sagacity to see that any inference, on that score, can be drawn from the circumstance (upon which Mr. John Mander lays so ludicrous a stress,) of his having been "a Scotchman." I have heard from "those who were old enough at the time to have a distinct remembrance of

* "I well remember my worthy Father-in-law, Mr. Charles Hunter, mentioning this" (Mr. Marshall's and Mr. Hill's having each given £200.) "to me, and that they wished him to do the same, but he declined it, saying, He would have the controul of his own money during his life, but would leave a legacy for the same purpose. This he probably did, but the unhappy business respecting Mr. Jameson occasioned him (if done) to alter it. He afterwards left a legacy towards paying the debt of Temple-street Chapel, if not paid before his death, but it having been paid previous to that event, the legacy lapsed."

it," that, for several years before his death, he was in a very infirm state of body. He probably took no active part in congregational affairs. Be that as it may, he left no "legacy to Temple-street Chapel!" and there is not the shadow of evidence, that he disapproved of the application of his grant to the Meeting-house, in John's-street.

I beg leave here to remind the reader, that the sum of £100. was bequeathed to the Meeting-house, in John's-street, by Mr. Corson, (a member of Mr. Griffiths's congregation,) who died in December, 1799. Mr. Mander does not profess to maintain that this sum was designed for the support of Trinitarian worship.

It was also during the ministry of Mr. Griffiths, that various improvements were made in the Meeting house, at an expence of £200. raised by voluntary subscription, among the members of the society and their friends.

Of these sums, then,—in all £700. I have not the least hesitation, after having "read and investigated" Mr. John Mander's "statement," quite as "carefully" as he could wish, in once more repeating my conviction, that no part was contributed for the support of Trinitarian worship. And I am free to add, that Mr. John Mander must "throw a peculiar colouring" indeed "of justice" over this part of the case, before I shall regard the measures which he and his friends have adopted, with any feelings but those of unspeakable shame and disgust.

With respect to the £400. for which the congregation was indebted to the kindness of Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill, I have already acknowledged my mistake, in supposing that sum to have been "bequeathed, while Mr. Griffiths was the minister," or indeed to have been *bequeathed* at all. I have endeavoured, to show that the mistake was unimportant, and I hope the

reader will admit that it was pardonable. If further evidence be required to prove that it was simply a mistake, and not "a glaring misrepresentation of facts,"* that it was the current opinion upon the subject, and not, what has been so ungenerously insinuated, a story invented for the occasion, such further evidence is at hand. In a Deed which assigned two Leasehold Tenements, adjoining the Meeting-house, from Mr. JOHN MANDER to the Trustees, and which was executed in the month of June, 1807, occurs the following passage.—
 "Which said purchase money, it is hereby agreed, by and between the said parties, shall be paid out of the following monies now vested in the hands of the said Trustees, for the use of the said Society—that is to say—the sum of £200. heretofore *given and bequeathed* to and for the use of the said Society, *by the will* of John Marshall, heretofore of Wolverhampton aforesaid, banker, deceased; the sum of £200. *given and bequeathed* to and for the use of the said Society, by Abraham Hill, heretofore of Wolverhampton, aforesaid, gentleman, deceased, and the sum of £99. 15s. given or left at different times, by other persons to or for the use of the said Society, which said several sums of £200. £200. and £99. 15s. were invested in the purchase of £800. stock, in the 3 per cent. annuities, in the name of John Hickcox, heretofore of Wolverhampton, aforesaid, mercer, deceased."

To this Deed, (could the reader have supposed it?) the name of Mr. JOHN MANDER is affixed, in his own hand writing! I now leave the public to judge of the candour which could dictate such a communication as I received from Mr. John Mander. It would, I must think, have been well for that gentleman, if instead of "recognizing his letter to me, as Mr.

* These candid expressions, which Mr. Charles Mander adopts with triumph, were originally employed by "VERAX"—in Mr. Charles Mander's opinion, "a most respectable gentleman;" in mine, a mirror of accuracy and politeness!

Pearson opened his desk,"* he had made himself sure that there was no document in his own possession which might afterwards bear witness against him. I remember to have been greatly amused, when I was a boy, with Plutarch's account of "certain Lamian witches, who, whilst they stayed at home, put up their eyes in a box; but put them on, when they went abroad."

Mr. John Mander subscribes himself at the conclusion of his Letter, "a Friend and a Promoter of Peace." Will he allow me, as I take my leave of him, to recommend to his perusal, an admirable little Book, written more than a century ago, by Dr. Webbe, Bishop of Limerick? It is entitled "The Practice of Quietness, directing a Christian how to live quietly in this troublesome world." "O then," says the good Bishop, "if we love peace or would practise quietness, beware of busie curiosity!"

JAMES HEWS BRANSBY.

Dudley, March 22, 1819.

* "Some few days after Mr. Mander had written to Mr. Bransby, he had occasion to call on Mr. Pearson upon private business. Mr. Pearson opened his desk, in which Mr. Mander immediately recognized his letter to Mr. Bransby; and said----I see you have got my letter to Mr. Bransby."

THE following Letter, which is printed, word for word, as it was written, has a peculiar value, inasmuch as it shows, that long before the dispute respecting Mr. Jameson, arrangements were on foot for a division in the congregation. The writers of the letter, it is observable, bring no charge against Mr. Cole, as being illegally in possession of the pulpit, because his doctrinal belief differed from that of the original members of the society; on the other hand, they signify their own intention, provided their remonstrance should be ineffectual, to withdraw from the Meeting-house, and to join a Society whose religious views were more congenial with their own. Such a secession is the universal practice, under similar circumstances, among Protestant Dissenters.

A Letter to the Rev. John Cole.

REVEREND SIR,

WE whose names you will see subscribed, having, we trust, a desire to promote the glory of God and the welfare of immortal souls, are desirous of taking every christian and prudent method for that purpose.

You, no doubt have heard a report of a Meeting-house being about to be built in this town, and that we were the instigators and principal actors therein. Such a report, however, we have frequently heard, and something of the kind has

come under our consideration, being led thereto by the following reasons :—

We have with concern for some time past looked upon the congregation as dwindling in numbers and destitute of those christian graces, that were the beauty and excellency of dissenting congregations, when our ancestors for conscience sake, and for Christ's sake became dissenters, and which we now see among those congregations where those doctrines are proclaimed. We cannot also but lament the present unpromising prospect of our's being otherwise. True it is, a Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but all to no purpose, without it please God to bless and prosper their labours. We would therefore learn not to depend upon man, as the Lord can make the weakest instrument subservient to the greatest good; but without his blessing the most zealous and laborious of the servants of Christ will labour but in vain. We do not in this, attempt to lay any blame upon you, as we cannot but hope that what you have received of the Lord, that you have delivered unto us. Yet, as we here see and know but in part, it appears to us that you have not those views, at least, do not proclaim those truths which we think a minister of the gospel should have and do, we mean such as we think Paul and other of the disciples and ministers of Christ had and did. Here, dear Sir, we hope you will not stop and censure us, as positive and dogmatical, but beg your candid hearing whilst engaged in this task in which we think it is our duty to be full and faithful. We apprehend you do not, agreeable to the word of God, in that express manner which the gospel seems to point out, inform sinners of their lost and undone state by nature and practice, nor display their wretchedness whilst in such a state of nature, and their danger of perishing for ever, if found out of Christ at death; and that you do not in that full and express manner which we apprehend the gospel does, invite, encourage, allure and drive sinners to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only refuge and only hope; nor do we think you sufficiently set forth the beauty, excellency, sufficiency and

fitness of the Lord Jesus Christ as very God and very man, so as to encourage the sinner and comfort the people of God. These, reverend Sir, we look upon as essential truths, and truths of the greatest consequence and importance to be insisted on; nor can we see that the Lord does or will cause his spirit to work conviction and conversion in the hearts of sinners but by the means of such preaching as thus lays man low, as a sinner, and exalts the Lord Jesus Christ in his person, offices, word and works, as the Lord our righteousness; and this, Sir, we think is one great reason no more success attends your labours. We also think your connections with some neighbouring ministers another great means of injury to you and your people; for however bigoted we may seem to you by so saying, yet we do think them to be such as rather hinder the cause of Christ and the conversion of souls, than otherwise,* by their labour to make those important truths (as mentioned on the other side) matters of indifference and non-importance; though of such, many have testified their importance and necessity, by giving up their lives rather than give them up. We think it evidently appears to be the appointed means of Jehovah, both from the word of God and the innumerable actual evidences, that the preaching of such truths he owns for making wise unto salvation. And we cannot but observe with sorrow, that you not only associate with, but also seem to drink deep into their spirit, by your endeavouring to make those truths appear as non-essential to your people, as your discourses of late have testified, and which we think has a very dangerous tendency to souls—to which we must add as another reason for our conduct, your apparent unwillingness to lend your pulpit to, and your treatment of, those ministers

* We trust you will see sufficient proof of this, if you look among neighbouring congregations where modern candour is so much insisted upon, as we can't find by our enquiries, the appearance of vital Christianity flourishes among them, or that they increase in numbers and graces.

that profess the doctrines of Calvinism, which we apprehend to be the doctrines of the gospel.

Such have been the doctrines that have been of use to us, and what we look upon to be that for which we are commanded to strive earnestly, and as such 'tis our desire to have them proclaimed, as we think it is apparent that those only are what the Lord owns and succeeds. Your conduct in this affair, is what at first made way for these reports; we found it so disagreeable to ask for the pulpit by the reluctance with which it was lent, and not willing our friends should pass through the town without preaching, induced us to offer the Barn-street people, that if they would get a more convenient place to meet in, we would assist them in the rent of it, that we might enjoy the labours of our friends in it. A convenient one they could not meet with, which induced them, after we had made them that offer, to think of building a place, and they began a subscription for that purpose. How it will end, we know not; they have postponed it till Spring, but seem determined, if Providence permits us, to begin one then, if a place cannot be rented.

We are sorry it should be the means of hurting your interest or peace. Such we did not mean to be the cause of; but as things have so unexpectedly turned out, and we have been the means of it, we thought proper to let you know our reasons for so doing; and here we hope you will suspend all censure. We think such doctrines as above related, to be the truth, and what the Lord ordinarily owns; we therefore think it our duty to get such means when we can, as is most likely to be of service to our own and others' souls; and may the Lord cause all things, whatever may be the issue, to work together for good, that more of the light, life and power of genuine vital Christianity may be seen in this town. Sure we are no personal pique and disapprobation of MR. COLE, as a neighbour or friend was the cause; in many things we love and admire him, and hope the best things of him, even those that

accompany salvation; though as a minister for the above reasons, we can't but differ from him. We must add, that though we only sign our names on account of the part we have taken in the affair, these are the sentiments of others of the congregation.

We are, reverend Sir,

Your friends and well wishers,

JOHN MANDER,
JOSEPH LINNEY,
JOHN HANBURY.

Wolverhampton, September, 1780.

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