

K Pearson

REMARKS

ON

An Appendix to an "Appeal to the Public," in the Case of the Old Meeting House, Wol- verhampton.

THE professed design of this "Appendix," which bears the signature of Mr. Charles Mander, is to give a minute detail of circumstances connected with the Old Meeting House; but its real object is to calumniate the Trustees at large, and myself in particular. This must be evident to the most superficial reader. The chief allegations are, in substance,—that I have furnished Mr. Bransby with a wilful misstatement of facts; that I have all along been the bitter enemy of Mr. Steward; that I prevented Mr. John Mander, who was extremely desirous of settling the disputes between Mr. Steward and the Congregation in an amicable way, from accomplishing his purpose; that in the affair of the election of Mr. Jameson (1781), the minority, that is, the Antitrinitarians, took violent possession of the chapel, and wrested its endowments and appurtenances out of the hands of their rightful owners; and that the treatment of Mr. Steward by Mr. Bradshaw has been shamefully cruel and oppressive.

Some other matters of minor importance are brought forward; for the most part the production of the writer's distempered brain. Many of these charges have appeared before, in a very singular performance, sent forth to the public through the medium of the "Congregational Magazine," and circulated, in the shape of a printed letter, in the year 1817, signed by ten Calvinistic Ministers, whose names it may not be amiss again to record, as the promoters and abettors of religious persecution in the nineteenth century: "J. A. James, Birmingham; Wm. Thorpe, Bristol; Thos. Scales, Wolverhampton; John Steward,

Wolverhampton; James Cooper, West-Bromwich; John Hudson, West-Bromwich; J. Hammond, Handsworth; John Berry, Handsworth; John Richards, Stourbridge; J. Dawson, Dudley. Subscriptions received in aid of this good, this great undertaking, by Mr. James Pearsall*, Cheapside, London, and John Mander, esq. Wolverhampton." In subsequent addresses and appeals, the name of W. Thorpe, Bristol, does not appear. It may be, that gentleman has found reason to be ashamed of the cause; or he wishes no longer to be seen in company with some of his former associates.

As to the fundamental charge against me, of having furnished Mr. Bransby with what I knew to be a false statement, in respect of the monies belonging to the Meeting House; I answer, The statement which I gave to Mr. Bransby, so far as relates to 400*l.*, was grounded on the written representation of one who was a most worthy and respectable inhabitant of this town, Mr. John Hickcox, a trustee, and an attendant at the Meeting House, for, I believe, forty years. He was the chapel-warden, knew every transaction well, and was respected by all parties. Mr. Hickcox thus expresses himself to the Rev. S. Griffiths, on the 23d of May 1782, (fourteen months after Mr. Cole had left Wolverhampton,) in a letter which accompanied the invitation from the Society: "There are likewise two legacies of 200*l.* each, left by two persons of the congregation, *at their decease* to the interest; one is in the eighty-eighth year of his age, and the other is near seventy." These are precisely Mr. Hickcox's words. The other 100*l.* mentioned, was bequeathed by the late Mr. Corson, in a will dated 15th October 1799. Mr. Cole had then resigned the ministry at Wolverhampton eighteen years, and Mr. Corson had sat seventeen years under the ministry of Mr. Griffiths. Our opponents—in other words, the family of the Manders—have sworn in their affidavits that Mr. Griffiths came to Wolverhampton, in 1782, an avowed *Antitrinitarian**.

* Mr. Pearsall is the son-in-law of Mr. Benjamin Mander.

† Verax, to serve his particular purpose, denies that Mr. Griffiths was an avowed Antitrinitarian.

Now, the congregation did not receive either of the legacies, previously to Mr. Griffiths's settling in this town. All the legatees were living when he came hither; and I appeal to an impartial public, whether I was not justified in asserting, that three gentlemen, while Mr. Griffiths was minister, bequeathed legacies to the amount of 500*l*. I stated things as, after diligent examination, I found them stated. Mr. John Mander's representation of the business, in his letter to Mr. Bransby, may or may not be correct; but of this I am certain, that we have no documents whatever, in any book belonging to the Meeting House, which show that any sum was irrevocably appropriated, before Mr. Cole left Wolverhampton. Mr. John Mander affects to give an air of great consequence to his manner of elucidating these circumstances, and schools Mr. Bransby about examining the accounts "so carefully," telling him, that had he given them for a few succeeding years, it might have saved him (Mr. John Mander) the trouble of explaining it. And in what, I would ask, does this explanation differ from Mr. Bransby's statement—that no money or interest was received by the Society, until the decease of the individuals by whom it was bestowed? Besides, even according to Mr. John Mander himself, 400*l*. of the 3 per cents was not appropriated till June 1780, nine months before Mr. Cole resigned; and Mr. Mander adds, (because such an assertion was necessary to complete his argument,) that it was "before Mr. Cole had any thoughts of leaving."

I beg permission here to introduce an extract from a very curious letter, addressed to Mr. Cole by Mr. John Mander and two other young members of the Society, only four months after this last appropriation. This letter clearly proves, what is abundantly evident from other documents, that Mr. Cole had long been made uncomfortable in his situation, and that his retirement was owing to the troublesome interference of the Mander family, at that time. Mr. John Mander (who was, I apprehend, even in his youthful days, "a friend and a promoter of peace!") and his two worthy coadjutors begin their letter with saying

"You have no doubt heard a report of a Meeting House being

about to be built in this town; and that we are the principal actors therein, being led thereto by the following reasons." Here follows a list of reasons, grounded entirely on Mr. Cole's having long ceased to preach agreeably to the views which these writers entertained of religious doctrine. "We also think," they go on to say, "your connexions with some neighbouring ministers another great means of injury; for *however bigoted we may seem to you*, we cannot but observe with sorrow, that you not only associate with, but also seem to drink deep into their spirit. Your unwillingness to lend your pulpit, and treatment of those ministers that profess the doctrine of Calvinism, (which we apprehend to be the doctrines of the Gospel,) induced us to offer to the Barn-Street people, that if they would get a more convenient place to meet in, we would assist them, that we might enjoy the labours of our friends in it."

The reader will observe, that this letter is written to Mr. Cole, a long time, it is true, after he had "drunk deep into an heretical spirit," but very soon after the appropriation of the 400*l.* as stated in Mr. Mander's account.

Those who had attended for years on Mr. Cole's ministry, must have been well acquainted with his real sentiments:—hence their legacies, and hence our conclusion that the legacies were applied in conformity with the intention of those by whom they were given.

I believe that neither the writer of the "Appendix" nor Mr. John Mander goes so far as to deny that the sum of 200*l.* was laid out by the Congregation and their friends. This requires no further notice. I shall therefore confidently assert that the 600*l.* was intended for the support of public worship in the Meeting House, while the doctrines which Mr. Griffiths avowed were preached there, and among them it is certain the doctrine of the Trinity had no place.

Mr. John Mander called upon me on business, as his nephew Mr. C. Mander says; and when I had occasion to open my desk, he saw lying in it, the letter which he had addressed to Mr. Bardsby. He certainly asked some such question as he is said in

the "Appendix" to have asked: but in regard to the reply, he has altogether mistaken it. I will not in this instance employ a harsher term: still it seems no more than fair, as he is so desirous of making the answer public, that the public should have my version of it too. I was determined, from motives which I need not explain, to have no conversation upon congregational matters with Mr. Mander, beyond what was forced upon me: and to his question (put in a careless manner) "Well! I suppose you have found matters much as I have stated them?" my reply was "*Very likely.*" This, to serve his purpose for publicity, is interpreted "I believe they are." I had no intention, and he must have been aware of it at the time, to enter upon the discussion of the subject: for, had I been inclined to say any thing respecting his letter to Mr. Bransby, I should have denied the truth (as I now deny it) of his assertion, that I asked him for the money belonging to the Trustees. When it was no longer convenient for him to pay 5 per cent. for it, he requested me to take it off his hands, saying that the security might lie as it did.

It was my intention to have offered a few remarks on the election of Mr. Jameson; but Mr. Bransby's detail of all this transaction, taken from original documents, is so perspicuous and so impartial, that even the writer of the "Appendix" has not dared to call its accuracy into question; except in a single instance, and in that instance, as in every other, Mr. Bransby's statement may set both sophistry and slander at defiance. "Mr. Bransby," says the writer of the Appendix, "denies that the Meeting House was locked and guarded, but does not *disprove it*: and when I recollect that his only means of information was through a person who was too young at the time it occurred to have any distinct remembrance of it, to what credit, I would ask, is he entitled?"—If Mr. C. Mander will trouble himself to "recollect," Mr. Bransby declares at the very beginning of his reply to Verax, that in relating what passed about Mr. Jameson, "he would not write a single syllable upon hearsay evidence." Whatever may be Mr. Charles Mander's ideas on the subject, I know to "what credit" Mr. Bransby "is entitled;"

and I also know that, independently of any "remembrance" of mine, it is in his power to demonstrate, notwithstanding the "pledge of honour" preferred by "those who were interested at the time," and who peradventure are interested even now!—that the Meeting House was open for religious service as usual, and that Mr. Jameson, finding that a supply was provided for the pulpit, went to West-Bromwich with Mr. Hanbury, to preach for Mr. Hanbury's brother-in-law, the Rev. J. Humphrys.

I will now pass on to Mr. Steward. Of his settling here as a minister, a pretty full account is given in the *Monthly Repository* for February 1818. I beg, in the outset, to have it understood that I never had any personal enmity towards him. I opposed his coming; but that opposition was dictated by no hostile or malignant feelings, although Mr. C. Mander is pleased to say I was "his bitter enemy." I disapproved of him as a minister; and, without taking to myself credit for any wonderful sagacity, I formed that judgement of his talents and character which subsequent events have so fully justified. I shall not detain the reader long with the history of this gentleman, in whom Mr. C. Mander's penetration has discovered so much "mildness" and so much of the "Christian spirit." It is public enough; and in the very face of the fine encomiums on Mr. Steward, scattered here and there through this "Appendix," I will be bold to say that only one opinion exists about him*. He came to the Society an avowed zealous Unitarian; he continued such till the end of the three years for which he was invited. As the individual through whose hands the endowments passed, at the expiration of that time, I paid to Mr. Steward what was due; informing

* "We cannot refrain from expressing it as our decided opinion, that Mr. Steward, who engaged with the congregation to serve them as a Unitarian, was bound to relinquish his possession of the pulpit, as soon as he found he could not occupy it according to the terms of his original contract—whether those terms were expressed or implied."—See Review of Pamphlets on the Wolverhampton Case, in the "*Christian Instructor, or Congregational Magazine*," for February 1819.

"Mr. Steward was guilty of a deplorable violation of honour and justice." See "*Infringements of Religious Liberty exposed*," by James Robertson.

him, by letter, that as his engagement had then closed, it would be necessary for him to receive another invitation from the Society; as, otherwise, I should not consider him to be the Minister: and I added, that should an invitation be given him, which I did not expect would be the case, I should decline attending on his services. It would have been but justice towards me, in those who furnished the materials for this "Appendix,"—if, indeed, I had any justice to expect from such a quarter,—to have laid this letter of mine before the public.

Mr. Steward continued without invitation to officiate; and several of the congregation suspended their attendance at the Meeting House. Within less than a month, a discovery was made, not by his public services—he had too much of the "Christian spirit," I suppose, to make known his real belief from the pulpit—that a change had, for a considerable time, taken place in his religious views. I was going from home for several weeks, and had no opportunity of stating to the Society the facts which had come to my knowledge. Soon after my return, a meeting was held, agreeably to public notice given in the chapel. This was on September 1, 1816; and at the meeting, among other resolutions, it was agreed, "that Mr. Steward was not considered the Minister of the Congregation after the expiration of his term of three years; and, that in consequence of its being ascertained that a change had taken place in his religious opinions, it was not the wish or inclination of the Trustees and Congregation to renew the connexion."

What must be the feelings of the reader when the answer of this man of "mildness and Christian spirit" is laid before him? In a letter bearing date September 8, 1816, addressed to me, in reply to a letter of mine, which accompanied the resolutions, he begins,

"Sir,—This is to acknowledge the receipt of your papers, and I must confess that I was *struck with astonishment* when I perceived the charge which the Meeting brought against me—a charge which it had no means of substantiating."

"I conceive that I am, according to every principle of right permanently fixt."

What can the writer of the "Appendix" mean, when in speaking (p. 80) of the original deed, he says, "which they carefully conceal from us." "However loosely the deed may be expressed," it was produced in the Court of Chancery; the plaintiffs, Messrs. Mander and Steward, were furnished with a copy of it; and at page 60, in the very "Appeal" to which the "Appendix" is attached, the nine Ministers say "The deeds have at length been produced in court;" and the nine ministers moreover are driven to the confession—a confession which they ought to have made with bitter feelings of remorse for the part they have acted,— "that these deeds are not so explicit as they might have been."

Previously to the Trustees putting new locks upon the doors, every attempt was made to induce Mr. Steward to withdraw quietly and peaceably. The Congregation, at a general meeting, deputed Mr. Taylor and Mr. Bradshaw, who were at that time his intimate acquaintances, together with myself, to prevail on him to retire, or at least to fix some specific time for going. At this interview, he told us that his friends were endeavouring to procure a situation for him; but he hinted that he would suit his own convenience. We had a good deal of conversation with him, and before we parted he said he would see us again on the subject within a few days. "I acknowledge," said he, "that I have behaved very ill, and had I been in the hands of the Calvinists I should not have been treated so liberally." We left him under the pleasing idea that the affair would be settled in an amicable manner. Accordingly, I received the following note from him, dated Tuesday morning, 8th October, 1816, five days after this interview:—"Sir, This is to say, that I shall have no objection to see you next Friday, on the subject upon which you and your friends called on me, last Friday. My only wish is your happiness John Steward."

Mr. Bradshaw and myself went, as Mr. Steward had appointed, in the hope that every thing might be arranged to the satisfaction of all parties. But what was our surprise when we found Mr. Benjamin Mander summoned on the occasion; and

when Mr. Steward said, "that he had not made up his mind about going, that it was a matter of uncertainty, that when he could get a situation he would remove." To our question "Have you any thing else to say or to propose?" his answer was "No." Of course, we immediately withdrew; and nothing further transpired. From that moment, however, the Trustees determined what course to pursue.

As this anecdote did not suit the purpose of the writer of the "Appendix," he has omitted it. His friend Steward perhaps did not think proper to communicate it.

Much has been said by the nine ministers about "the violence of the Unitarians;" and the writer of the "Appendix" calls on "the Unitarians" to "blush at the mention of the Wolverhampton Case." What will they think of this confession of Mr. Steward, that "if he had been in the hands of the Calvinists he should not have been treated so liberally?" I am disposed to believe, that henceforth Mr. Charles Mander will not plume himself quite so much on his friend's "Christian spirit." Neither was this the only occasion on which Mr. Steward gave utterance to the same feelings.

A highly valued minister, from a distance, called on him some time after the Chancery proceedings had taken place. He urged Mr. Steward, on the score of former acquaintance, to favour him with the reasons that operated in bringing about his relapse into Trinitarianism; and asked him, what kind of congregation he had under the auspices of his new friends. Mr. Steward declined entering into an explanation of the grounds of his change; and said "As to a congregation I have none at all, nor am I likely to have a congregation; those* who have taken the lead in this business are no friends of mine; it is no part of their intention to serve me; they have no influence, and are too little respected to be able to get me a congregation."

This was the opinion, or, at least, it was the language, of Mr. Steward, in the autumn of 1817. What degree of gratitude, and

* Messrs. Benjamin, John, and Charles Mander.

what measure of the "Christian spirit" it discovers, I leave Mr. Charles Mander and his father and uncle to determine.

The writer of the "Appendix" brings a heavy charge against Mr. Bradshaw, and calls his treatment of Mr. Steward "a masterpiece of oppression and cruelty." I fear a paltry artifice has here been used, to impose upon the public. For what honourable purpose are all dates omitted in this part of Mr. C. Mander's "*clear detail of circumstances*," and even in the copy of the letter sent to Mr. Steward by the attorney? It must be obvious to every one, that the merits of the case depend in no trifling degree on dates. "The Trustees and Congregation of John-street chapel" are represented as "owing to Mr. Steward about 34*l*." but they deny that they owed him a single farthing. His salary had been faithfully paid by them up to the time when his engagement expired; and they no longer recognised him as their minister. Mr. Steward had put himself under the guidance and protection of the Manders, and had bidden defiance to the Trustees and the Congregation. Mr. Bradshaw had been a most kind and generous friend to Mr. Steward; he had, however, seen what were Mr. Steward's principles of "honour" and what his practical ideas of "the Christian spirit." Is it surprising then, that he began to be desirous of having a long standing account settled?

As to the proof so triumphantly insisted on by Mr. Charles Mander, that Mr. Steward was still thought worthy of confidence, because Mr. Bradshaw "gave him a receipt upon unstamped paper,"—while I wonder at the imprudence of Mr. Bradshaw, I congratulate Mr. Steward on the victory which he achieved over his resentment, and leave the argument to operate in all its influence on those whom it may concern.

I have been dragged, much against my inclination, into this controversy, and have transgressed the limits which I prescribed to myself: yet I cannot lay down my pen, without expressing in my own behalf, and in that of the Congregation, the sense we entertain of the sympathy which has been so kindly manifested towards us, both in our own neighbourhood and at a distance.

We are excluded, it is true, from the house of prayer in which our forefathers were accustomed to worship, and to which we feel ourselves attached by some of the strongest and most interesting ties; but we desire to be thankful that we can still assemble ourselves together, as a Society of Christians. I rejoice too that a most able advocate has stood up from among their own body, in the person of the Rev. James Robertson, to assert those great principles of religious liberty which our opponents are so outrageously infringing; and it gives me sincere pleasure to record, that the most numerous Society of Protestant Dissenters—of the Independent denomination*—in this town, take no share in the proceedings of which we have so much reason to complain, and refuse to furnish any contribution whatever, towards the enormous expense which Mr. Mander and his adherents have thought proper to incur.

JOSEPH PEARSON.

Wolverhampton,

Feb. 22, 1819.

P. S.—I have received the following letter from Mr. T. Eyre Lee; and as it refers to some part of Mr. C. Mander's statements, upon which I have not animadverted, I take the liberty of thus laying it before the public.

To Mr. Joseph Pearson, Wolverhampton.

Dear Sir;—I have been not a little amused with the attempt made by Mr. Charles Mander, (in the "Appendix" lately published by him, relative to the Meeting-house in John-street, Wolverhampton), to invalidate the statement made by our respected friend Mr. Bransby, as to the amounts given by Mr. Marshall and Mr. Hill to the Meeting-house. It matters little whether the funds were bequeathed or not; but it is evident that they came into operation for the benefit of the Meeting-house during the

* Under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Godwin.

time of Mr. Griffiths's ministry; and it is no less evident that the parties giving the money retained a control over it during their lives, as they received, according to Mr. John Mander's account, the interest from Mr. Hickcox; and it was not till 1785, when both of them were dead, that Mr. Hickcox was at liberty to give security for the sum so as to attach it to the chapel. Mr. Cole retired in 1781, and Mr. C. Mander admits that he had changed his religious sentiments, which is further proved by Mr. J. Mander and others having written a letter to him on the subject; the stock was bought in 1778 and 1780. Mr. Marshall signed the invitation to Mr. Griffiths, which is a sufficient proof of his sentiments, and Mr. Hill lived till 1785, without making any objection to Mr. Griffiths or his sentiments, as far as Mr. Bransby or any of us can tell. Mr. Cole's invitation to Wolverhampton is dated March 4th, 1759. He was ordained July 4th, 1764: and therefore what Mr. J. Mander means by saying the monies were given *before Mr. Cole's time* is not intelligible. My reply to Verax was therefore well founded. But it is rather strange that Mr. C. Mander should let it be known that Verax is Mr. Hanbury* who was elected a trustee with you in 1793, while the congregation was decidedly anti-trinitarian. How inconsistent are Mr. Charles Mander and his allies in their observations?—in one place he denies the election of trustees in 1793 to have been valid; and in another, quotes the opinion of Verax as one having authority because he was a trustee.

Our opponents are so profound in their legal knowledge, that not only do they imagine that their Case can be supported without the arguments used by their legal advisers, but Mr. Charles Mander takes upon himself to declare that the deed by which yourself and others were appointed trustees is not a *legal* deed: whereas that eminent lawyer Sir Samuel Romilly declared in court, that you were legally appointed trustees, under the forms

* Mr. Hanbury has denied to Mr. Pearson having written the paper signed Verax.

prescribed in the trust-deed of 1701, having been elected by the majority of trustees for the time being ; and that his clients did not contend that you were not trustees, but that being trustees you had committed a breach of trust in permitting anti-trinitarian doctrines to be preached in the place. Sir Samuel Romilly's legal knowledge is not however to be put in competition with that of Mr. Charles Mander ; for it was further said by Sir Samuel Romilly, that if the ejectment were persisted in, you would recover the legal estate of so many parts as had been conveyed to you, but that the mere recovery of the legal estate would not settle the question as to the breach of trust. As to what may have passed between yourself and the other parties as individuals, I know not ; nor has the warmth of expression used by parties on either side any thing to do with the real question before the public and the courts of equity. No lawyer ever denied that a portion of the legal estate was vested in Mr. Benjamin Mander ; but the legal estate and equitable estate are two distinct things. The Master of the Rolls did not decline to interfere in this business for want of jurisdiction, because both he and the Chancellor have a summary authority in all matters of this sort, if brought before them on petition, as we attempted to do ; and the Master of the Rolls would have heard the petition and decided the question in a short time, if Mr. Mander and his friends had not chosen to relinquish the benefit of the late act of parliament relative to suits respecting charity estates, and have preferred the tedious and more expensive process of filing a bill and information, during the existence of which the Master of the Rolls thought it disrespectful to the Chancellor to interfere. But he showed his opinion of Mr. Mander's conduct, by obliging him to pay his own costs. The magistrates having bound you over to prosecute Mander and others for a forcible entry, proves their opinion of the conduct of the parties held to bail ; and as the discussion of the subsequent proceedings redounds little to the credit of the jury at the sessions, or to that of the parties who used their influence to mislead the jury, it is useless to discuss them, or to notice them further than to say that the

offer to Mr. Thompson was made not from fear, but from a desire of putting an end to disputes in an inferior court, upon a subject which was under investigation in a court of superior jurisdiction.—I have merely put down these few observations in consequence of Mr. Charles Mander's assumed air of triumphant answer to our friend Mr. Bransby, whose statement is substantially correct. I have no objection to Mr. John Mander's seeing this letter, without the trouble of peeping into the desk of your counting-house, or that of any other person—and

I am, dear Sir,

your most obedient servant,

T. EYRE LEE.

Birmingham,
February 20, 1819.