HISTORY
OF DISSENTERS,
FROM THE
REVOLUTION TO THE YEAR 1838
Vol. III
HISTORY
OF DISSENTERS,
FROM THE
REVOLUTION TO THE YEAR 1838
by
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IN THREE VOLUMES.
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PREFACE

Thirty years having elapsed since the first edition of the History of Dissenters was published, during which period one of the Authors has been permitted, in a good old age, to rest from his various useful labours; the survivor has attempted to bring down the work to the present time, by recording the events which have since formed an extraordinary æra, deeply interesting to Dissenters, and amply sufficient to fill another volume. New sects have continued to arise, to swell the catalogue of those who have separated from the Establishment; a grand legislative change has, after mighty struggles, altered and improved their position in society; theological controversies of great importance have called forth the polemical powers of dissenting writers; the statistics of the several denominations have exhibited important alterations; the dissenting colleges, multiplied and improved, have diffused the advantages of an educated ministry among those who are excluded from Oxford and Cambridge; and the biography of Dissenters has been enlarged by the memoirs of distinguished men who have left behind them names “that posterity will not willingly let die.”

Short as is the chapter on new sects, it is longer than the lover of Christian union could wish to see it; while the disproportionate extent of the history of religious liberty requires no apology, as it is the result of conflicts that have left more cause for gratitude than regret. Posterity will be benefited by a detail of improvements in the legislation of our country, which formerly exhibited a strange contrast of practical liberty with legislative intolerance. If the records of the theological seminaries should prove less interesting to general readers, ministers will be gratified with the history of institutions which gave them access to the fountains of sacred learning, and fitted them more efficiently to serve the church, and control the movements of the world. In the controversies that are recorded, the spirit of the times will appear; and if the more ephemeral or less important are unnoticed, those polemical publications are enumerated which have had most influence on the principal
questions in debate. The external condition of Dissenters belongs to
the department of statistics, which, however improved in modern times,
has yet done but little in the domain of religion, and still less in that of
dissent. All that can now be effected to secure accuracy and extent of
information leaves still more to be desired; and while individuals may,
in their own locality, correct errors and supply defects, they who have
attempted this, on a large scale, will be most sensible that an
approximation to perfect statistical details is the utmost that can be
honestly professed.

Of the inward state of Dissenters, or their personal piety, which is
the primary object of consideration in the history of a people that exist
only for religion, it would have been easy to speak at random; but instead
of vague eulogies, or censures, facts have been specified; and such an
attempt has been made to reason upon them, as will assist the reader
to form his own estimate. The difficulty of this task is attested by the
variety, and inaccuracy of the opinions entertained concerning the
religion of the first Christians, though recorded by an inspired pen; and
no two independent minds will form exactly the same estimate of the
religious state of any portion, or period, of the church.

The chapter of Biography proves how truly it is said, “That
abundance may create a sense of want.” Numerous were the endeared
names that had been marked out for insertion; but when the respective
limits came to be assigned to each division of the history, it was found
impossible to afford space for one tenth of those whom the partialities
of friends might pronounce worthy of this preference. A proportionate
number has been selected from each denomination; and distinguished
worth, or extensive usefulness, has turned the scale in favour of each
name. The Memoirs of Tutors in Colleges, who died in their office, being
introduced into the history of their several institutions, the Biographical
list is really more comprehensive than it appears. A long catalogue of
names and dates might have been attempted; but as it must have
omitted more than it recorded, it would have provoked rather than
satisfied the demand for, “honour to whom honour is due.”

This last period, which brings down the history of Dissenters to the
present day, is necessarily less recondite than the three former; but it
has been scarcely less embarrassing by the redundance, than they were
by the paucity of materials; and though the present generation may
not feel so much interest in that which many already knew, every day
will give additional value to the history of a people, that proves as it advances in years, the immortality of its principles, and the salutary extent of its influence on our country, on the church of God, and on the world.

If the following pages betray the mind of a Dissenter towards the Establishment, and of an Independent towards other denominations beyond its pale, the author alone is responsible to the public and the church, while he can reiterate the sentiments of the preface he wrote thirty years ago—that opposition to an ecclesiastical system, far from implying the condemnation of those who espouse it, may be combined with esteem, not only sincere, but ardent, for Christian excellence, wherever it may be found; and happy is he to see it often so eminent in those who are most remote from his own communion, that he cannot but say, “Such they are, that I wish they were our own.” While labouring, sometimes, perhaps, unsuccessfully, to do justice to all, nothing has been more consoling to the historian of Dissenters than the recollection, that the differences among Christians, though numerous, and not unimportant, are far outweighed by the greater considerations, which constitute them “all one in Christ Jesus.”
HISTORY OF DISSENTERS

CHAP. I.—NEW SECTS.

The history of Dissenters opened with an account of the four religious communions that formed the general body, for whose sake the legislature passed what is called the Toleration Act, our first charter of religious freedom. To the Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers, were added, in the second period, the Methodists and Moravians; and, in the third, the Sandemanians and Swedenborgians. The fourth, on which we now enter, has been as fertile in new denominations as any period of equal length, though the increasing, liberality of the times has suffered to pass unnoticed such an event as the rise of a sect, which formerly shook society to its centre. As, however, some of the new communions are little else but modifications, or amalgamations, of those that already existed, it will not be necessary to enlarge on their principles; and a religious society that is but of yesterday, and has never been persecuted into importance, can afford but scanty annals. Priority of time claims the precedence for those with whom we commence.

The Scotch Baptists.

If, as might naturally have been supposed, this title merely designated Scotchmen who adopt the principles of the Baptists, they would not have constituted a new sect; but they form a body of Dissenters in England, which is not confined to the natives of North Britain, and they hold tenets which completely separate them from the English Baptists. This new denomination of English Dissenters may, perhaps, be most compendiously and clearly described as a compound of Sandemanianism with Antipædobaptism. The Sandemanians arose in Scotland, and the sect before us, which combines some of the peculiarities of Glas and Sandeman with those of the Baptists, sprang from the same country. Coming into the south, its adherents were
distinguished from others who reject infant baptism, by the designation of Scotch Baptists, even when the societies were composed of Englishmen. Sandeman's strenuous opposition to the principles of the Baptists, neither prevented his followers from becoming Baptists, nor hindered Baptists from becoming Sandemanians; till, at length, a modification of the two sects produced a third, which, in Scotland, includes the majority of those who reject infant baptism, and, in England, constitutes a body of Baptists, separated from the rest as by a brazen wall.

The Scotch Baptists entertain Sandemanian views of the pastoral office, almost sinking it in the mutual exhortations of the brethren; and while the English Baptists are becoming more liberal, admitting Paedobaptists to the Lord's supper, the sect before us excludes, not only Independents, but also those Baptists who do not adopt Sandemanian church polity.

With an honourable zeal for the sole authority of Christ in the church, and a laudable diligence in the study of the Scriptures, this communion is not distinguished, either for diffusing the knowledge of the Word of God among the ignorant, or for displaying its harmonising effects on those who enter into their views. Their societies have been recruited, chiefly by proselytes from other sects; and as the attention they pay to the points on which they differ from their fellow Christians, naturally engenders a disputatious spirit, they explode and send off again to proximate communions those who become tired of endless discussion and minute division. Intent on forming a perfect church, they are diverted from the end for which the church exists on earth, the glory of Christ in the propagation of the Gospel. The consequences of this error are beginning to appear, in a disposition to make adult immersion essential, not only to Christian communion, but also to salvation; and as extremes meet, some of these ultra Protestants are verging towards the Popish tenet which inseparably associates, if not absolutely identifies, baptism with remission of sins. The originator of this divergence from the previous orthodoxy of the sect, is a Mr. Campbell of America, whose views, though not clearly defined, have been, to a considerable extent, adopted by some of the Scotch Baptists in England, much however to the grief of others, who now denounce the man they had highly extolled.

A small Baptist church existed in Scotland from the time that Cromwell's victory at Dunbar made him the lord of that land; but, at
the Restoration, this society, which was probably composed of soldiers who were Baptists, expired. About the year 1765, Mr. Robert Carmichael, and Archibald Maclean of Glasgow, left the Independents, and formed the first Scotch Baptist church in Edinburgh. Several kindred societies afterwards arose, in Glasgow, Dundee, Montrose, and other places. They were much reduced by separations, and agitated by the question of the eternal sonship of Christ; and some of their number fell into Socinianism. They received, however, frequent accessions, and Mr. Charles Stuart, who had given up the charge of the parish of Cramond and become a physician, joined the church in Edinburgh, on which he conferred some distinction. But though he was a man of property, of considerable learning, and critical skill in the Scriptures, he afforded little aid to the cause; for he was restless, disputatious, and not long satisfied with anything. He separated at last from their communion, though he continued to defend their views. Mr. Moncrief, who had much increased the church at Glasgow, was taken away by an early death. There were societies on similar principles formed at Whitehaven, Chester, Hull, Beverley, and London; but in 1795 their whole number north of the Tweed did not amount to four hundred.

After they had existed some time in Scotland, without making much noise, or progress, they were excited to greater activity, about the beginning of the 19th century, by the Messrs. Haldanes, who had quitted the establishment and devoted themselves to the propagation of the Gospel. Having commenced their benevolent efforts, without any definite sentiments on Church government, they afterwards adopted, with the ardour of a new conviction, those of the Independents, and becoming at length Scotch Baptists, they laboured to extend this sect, not only among their own countrymen, but also in England and Ireland. They sent preachers to London, Portsmouth, Nottingham, and other towns; but the congregations which were raised were small, and in many instances betrayed symptoms of dissolution, rather than of extension, or even of continuance. As a sect of Dissenters in England, the Scotch Baptists are not entitled to a large space in history, either for their numbers, the eminence of their preachers and writers, or their influence on the public mind. Not indigenous, they seem not likely to be naturalised; but accord better with the genius of the Scotch, who enter keenly into minute distinctions, than with the temper of the south, which has never shown much taste for the Sandemanian leaven.
As the object of this history was to record the principles and struggles of those who have formed religious communions separate from the English hierarchy, little notice was taken of the ecclesiastical affairs of Scotland; and as the powerful bodies of seceders in that country generally approved the constitution of the national church, from whose corruptions alone they professed to separate, they were not, in the strictest sense, Dissenters. But the Independent churches that have been formed beyond the Tweed, during the last thirty years, are so identified with those in the south, that this chapter would scarcely be complete without a sketch of that branch of Independency which has arisen in Scotland, during the former part of the nineteenth century.

Sandemanianism has been called Scotch Independency; and, for many years, Scotland contained scarcely any other modification of the system. After the decisive battle of Dunbar, in 1640, an order passed the House of Commons, “for Mr. Joseph Caryl and Mr. Owen to proceed to the army in Scotland, agreeably to the desire of the general.”1 As the Scotch had declared themselves bound by the Covenant to avenge the King’s death, and were sworn enemies to all Sectaries, by which term the Independents were specially designated, the Parliament and Cromwell seem to have aimed at giving a better idea of Independency, by sending northward the principal Independent divines, in hopes, probably, of producing the same progress from the Presbyterian to the Independent system, as was then exhibited in England. To the declaration of the Parliament, was added another by Cromwell, addressed “to all that are saints, and partakers of the faith of God’s elect in Scotland,” assigning reasons for rejecting Presbyterian church government, and defending the army against the charges of heresy and blasphemy. There is sufficient evidence that Owen did not much approve his anomalous position in the train of a conqueror. We have on record two sermons preached by that celebrated divine, while on this expedition, and they give proofs of a wise forbearance on the points in which he differed from the Scotch and of a devout consecration to the objects in which all Christians agree. One was preached at Berwick, and the other at Edinburgh but they are printed together, as a single

1 Whitelock, p. 450.