

proved. But I wave them for the present ; hoping this may suffice to show any fair and candid inquirer, that it is very possible to be united to Christ and to the Church of England at the same time ; that we need not separate from the Church, in order to preserve our allegiance to Christ ; but may be firm members thereof, and yet “have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.”

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant,

JOHN WESLEY.

BRISTOL,

January 10, 1758.

SERIOUS THOUGHTS

CONCERNING

GODFATHERS AND GODMOTHERS.

1. In the ancient Church, when baptism was administered, there were usually two or more sponsors (so Tertullian calls them, an hundred years after the death of St. John) for every person to be baptized. As these were witnesses, before God and the Church, of the solemn engagement those persons then entered into, so they undertook (as the very word implies) to watch over those souls in a peculiar manner, to instruct, admonish, exhort, and build them up in the faith once delivered to the saints. These were considered as a kind of spiritual parents to the baptized, whether they were infants or at man's estate ; and were expected to supply whatever spiritual helps were wanting either through the death or neglect of the natural parents.

2. These have been retained in the Christian Church from the earliest times, as the reason for them was the same in all ages. In our Church they are termed, by a proper and

expressive name, godfathers and godmothers. And it is appointed, "that there shall be for every male child to be baptized, two godfathers and one godmother; and for every female, one godfather and two godmothers."

3. But it is objected against these, (1.) That there is no mention of godfathers and godmothers in Scripture. (2.) That many undertake this without ever considering what they undertake, or once seriously thinking how to perform it. And, (3.) That no serious man would undertake it, because it is impossible to perform it.

4. I answer, First, it is undoubtedly true, godfathers and godmothers are not mentioned in Scripture; and therefore it cannot be said they are absolutely necessary, or that baptism cannot be administered without them. But yet it may be said they are highly expedient; for when they are prudently chosen, they may be of unspeakable use to the persons baptized, and a great relief and comfort to the parents of them.

5. I answer, Secondly, it is too true that many undertake this solemn office without ever considering what they undertake; giddy, ignorant persons, if not openly vicious, who never once seriously think how to perform it. But whose fault is this? It is not the fault of the Church, which carefully guards against this very thing, by ordering "that none but communicants be admitted to be godfathers or godmothers." Now, communicants we may presume to be serious persons who will both consider and perform what they undertake. It is altogether the fault of those foolish parents who will, on any account whatever, either desire or suffer those to be sponsors for their children, that do not take care of their own souls. It is these inconsiderate and cruel men, who have no compassion for their own flesh, that deprive their children of all the benefits of this wise institution, and bring a scandal on the institution itself, by their wicked abuse of it. I therefore earnestly exhort all who have any concern, either for their own or their children's souls, at all hazards to procure such persons to be sponsors, as truly fear God. Regard not whether they are rich or poor; and if they are poor, see that it be no expense to them. You will then tear up by the roots one of the most plausible objections which can be made against this primitive custom.

6. For, Thirdly, there is no reason why any truly serious man should scruple to undertake the office. If you suppose

godfathers and godmothers undertake what is impossible to perform, you entirely mistake. And your mistake lies here: You think they undertake what they do not. Do not you think the sponsors themselves undertake or promise that the child shall "renounce the devil and all his works, constantly believe God's holy word, and obediently keep his commandments?" Whereas in truth they neither undertake nor promise any such thing. When they answer, "I renounce them all," "This I steadfastly believe," "I will" (obediently keep God's holy will and commandments), they promise nothing at all; they engage for nothing; it is another person that promises all this. Whatever is then promised or undertaken, it is not by them, but by the child. It is his part, not theirs. So the Church tells you expressly: "This infant must for *his* part promise." It is he promises in these words, not they. So again: "This child hath promised to renounce the devil, to believe in God, and to serve him." If it be said, "But why are those questions inserted, which seem to mean what they really do not?" I answer, I did not insert them, and should not be sorry had they not been inserted at all. I believe the compilers of our Liturgy inserted them because they were used in all the ancient Liturgies. And their deep reverence for the primitive Church made them excuse some impropriety of expression.

7. What then is your part, who are sponsors for the child? This likewise is expressly told you: "It is your part to see that this infant be taught, so soon as he shall be able to learn, what a solemn vow, promise, and profession he hath here made by you. You shall call upon him to hear sermons, and shall provide that he may learn the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Ten Commandments, and all other things which a Christian ought to know and believe to his soul's health; and that this child may be virtuously brought up, to lead a godly and a Christian life."

8. Can anything then be plainer than what you do not, and what you do, undertake? You do not undertake that he shall renounce the devil and serve God; this the baptized himself undertakes. You do undertake to see that he be taught what things a Christian ought to know and believe. And what is there in this which is impossible? which any serious person may not perform?

9. If then you that are parents will be so wise and kind to

your children as to wave every other consideration, and to choose for their sponsors those persons alone who truly fear and serve God; if some of you who love God, and love one another, agree to perform this office of love for each other's children; and if all you who undertake it perform it faithfully, with all the wisdom and power God hath given you; what a foundation of holiness and happiness may be laid, even to your late posterity! Then it may justly be hoped, that not only you and your house, but also the children which shall be born, shall serve the Lord.

ATHLONE,
August 6, 1752.

THOUGHTS

ON

THE CONSECRATION OF CHURCHES AND BURIAL-GROUNDS.

1. It has been a custom for some ages, in Roman Catholic countries, to have a particular form of consecration for all churches and chapels: And not for these only, but for every thing pertaining to them; such as fonts, chalices, bells, sacerdotal vestments, and churchyards in particular. And all these customs universally prevailed in England, as long as it was under the Papal power.

2. From the time of our Reformation from Popery, most of these customs fell into disuse. Unconsecrated bells were rung without scruple, and unconsecrated vestments worn. But some of them remained still; the consecration of churches and churchyards in particular; and many scrupled the performing divine service in an unconsecrated church,