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ART. I.—*The Case of the Dissenters, in a Letter addressed to the Lord Chancellor.* Fifth edition, London.

AT present, no subject excites a deeper interest in Great Britain, than that of church-reform. The success which attended the late effort to promote a civil reform in the constitution of the empire, has not satisfied the friends of liberty and equal rights, but has rather stimulated and encouraged them, to render their work perfect, by extending the reform to the ecclesiastical establishment of the nation. It is a singular, and we believe, an anomalous fact, in the history of the world, that three different forms of Christianity should be established by law in the same empire; so that he who in England enjoys the privileges of a member of the established church, in Scotland is subjected to all the privations and inconveniences of a Dissenter; and, *vice versa*, the legitimate member of the Scotch establishment is a Dissenter as soon as he crosses the Tweed. But in Canada, Roman Catholics, who are barely tolerated in Great Britain, enjoy the patronage and favour of the Government.

As the bulk of American readers have a very imperfect knowledge of the history and present condition of that large body of British subjects, who conscientiously dissent from some things in the established church of England; and as the merits of the important question which is now agitated in that country, has not, to our knowledge, been exhibited in any publication, on this side the Atlantic, we judge it to be expedient, to lay before our readers, "THE CASE OF THE DISSENTERS" entire; or if any thing be omitted, it will be something which can have no bearing on the general argument. The writer of this sensible and decorous pamphlet, is now in this country; and as far as an opportunity has been afforded to become acquainted with him, has conciliated the high regard of the good and intelligent. He is certainly a writer of no mean abilities, and it will be difficult for any one to find a flaw in the arguments by which he ingeniously and strongly sustains the high claims of the Dissenters. The only doubt which can be entertained in this country, is, whether it would be safe to make at once so great a change, as would be the effect of obtaining all that they ask for, and to which, abstractly, they have an undoubted right.

Previously to our laying "the case" before our readers, we propose to furnish them with a rapid sketch of the history, and present condition of the English Dissenters.

It is known to all, that the English Reformers did not proceed so far in throwing off the yoke of Popish ceremonies, as other branches of the Protestant church. And it is also well known to our readers, that a large body of the most pious and conscientious persons in the kingdom, were scrupulous about many things contained in the liturgy and book of common prayer; and that this dissatisfaction continued to increase and spread, until a majority of the nation became ripe for a reform. The persons, who entertained these opinions, were called Puritans, or Nonconformists.

During the bloody reign of Queen Mary, many of the most distinguished leaders of the English Reformation took refuge in Germany, Geneva, and Switzerland. Here they had the opportunity of observing the simplicity and purity of that form of worship and discipline, which had been introduced into the Reformed churches on the continent of Europe, by the celebrated Calvin. But while some of the British theologians became the zealous admirers of the simplicity of the worship of these churches, others were of opinion that by them the principles of the Reformation were pushed too far; and they still adhered with pertinacity, to the liturgy of the English church, as it had been established in the reign of Edward VI. Hence arose an

unhappy dispute among the exiles, which on both sides was conducted with an unbecoming warmth and asperity; and which eventuated in the separation of the parties. The principal seat of this controversy was Frankfort, where a large number of these persecuted men had found a hospitable asylum. Upon the decease of Mary, when Elizabeth ascended the throne, these exiles had the opportunity of returning, and the parties who had contended so furiously when in a foreign country, were not likely to cease from contention when they came home. Accordingly, both aimed at getting their own views received and established by the supreme power of the nation. Elizabeth was altogether inclined to favour those who wished to retain the ceremonies which had been permitted to remain in the time of Edward, her brother; and Parker, who was her prime counsellor in ecclesiastical affairs, was a zealous patron of ceremony and pomp, in the worship of God. No indulgence, therefore, was shown to those who could not be reconciled to Popish dresses, and superstitious ceremonies. Thus, a large number of the most pious and learned of the British Reformers were excluded from the church by the establishment of rules and forms, to which they could not conscientiously conform. These, after a while, began to meet in separate assemblies, and to conduct divine worship agreeably to their own views. At first there seems to have been little controversy about church government; the difference between presbyters and bishops was not considered, even by most of the dignitaries of the English church, as of divine appointment, but was defended as an expedient ecclesiastical arrangement, calculated to preserve peace and promote unity; and in this view the Puritans, for some time, were willing to submit to Episcopal government, if those parts of the liturgy which were objectionable should be removed. But it was not long before the Brownists arose, from whom proceeded the Independents. Their distinguishing tenet was, that every distinct church possessed in itself all the powers of self-government, independently of all other churches; although they did not deny, that sister churches should cultivate friendly intercourse, and might counsel and advise one another.

As soon as the Brownists had, under the guidance of their leader, organized a visible society upon their own plan, they became the objects of persecution in that intolerant age; and entertaining no prospect of enjoying peace and liberty in their native country, the whole congregation manifested the sincerity of their religious principles, by emigrating in a body to Holland. Here, however, unhappy dissensions arose in the congregation of Brown; several of the leading men, and some of the most

learned, separated from their brethren, and formed another church, according to their own plan. But the most extraordinary fact in the history of the Brownists is, that their founder and leader, Robert Brown, forsook them, returned to England, and lived the remainder of his life in the communion of the established church. But the new sect found a much more excellent leader in Mr. Robinson, who formed an Independent congregation at Leyden, and adopting more liberal views than were first entertained by the society, has been commonly considered as the founder of the Independents, as distinguished from the Brownists; but it does not appear that he made any material alteration in the system. Mr. Robinson finding that his congregation was in danger of becoming amalgamated with the natives of the country, by frequent intermarriages, formed the bold enterprise of removing with his people to the wilds of North America. He himself, it is true, never reached this country; for remaining behind to settle some matters of importance, his valuable life was cut short; but the congregation arrived at Plymouth in Massachusetts, in the year 1620, where they formed the germ of the Puritan colonies in America.

It is not to be understood, however, that all the Independents emigrated to Holland. A church was formed in London as early as 1592, in Nicholas-lane, and they increased so rapidly throughout the kingdom, that in the 35th year of Elizabeth, Sir Walter Raleigh said in parliament, "that there are now twenty thousand of these men." They were, however, harassed by unceasing persecutions, and while many of them were cast into prison, a few sealed their testimony with their blood.

Before the rise of the Independents in England, the Puritans, as we have seen, had adopted the ideas of Calvin about church discipline and public worship; but hoping for a change in the established church, they did not immediately form separate congregations. The first church on Presbyterian principles was formed at Wandsworth 1572, by a Mr. Field, minister of the place. Soon, however, churches of this description were multiplied in most parts of England; so that before the close of Elizabeth's reign, the Presbyterians are said to have amounted to a hundred thousand persons. Many of these also, were driven from their native land by the intolerance of government. They followed the Independents across the Atlantic, but settled for the most part in the middle and southern colonies. These emigrants were the founders of the Presbyterian church in the United States, which has now grown to be so large a body, that it embraces more than a hundred Presbyteries. It may be remarked, in this place, that the Presbyterian theory of church

government has never been carried fully into practice in England, although the system now in force in Scotland and America, was composed and perfected by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and adopted by the parliament. In the earlier stages of their existence, the Presbyterians were so oppressed, and so scattered through the kingdom, that they had not the opportunity of holding regular Synods; and the restoration of Charles II. put an end to the power given them by the parliament, before there was time to establish the system to any considerable extent. It is a remarkable fact, however, that the Westminster Assembly, although the whole of the English members had received ordination from the hands of bishops, and had been educated in the established church, yet with a few exceptions, concurred in the adoption of a Presbyterian system of church government. We will not attempt in this place, to give the character of this venerable assembly; although we may be permitted in passing, to say, that in our opinion, no more venerable and learned an assembly has met, in any country, since the days of the apostles.

Here is the proper place to remark, that during the disorders of the civil wars, while the king and parliament were contending by force of arms for the supremacy, a multitude of sects arose in England, characterized for the most part, by a wild spirit of enthusiasm; but as many of these were ephemeral, and have left no vestige of their existence, except on the page of history, we shall pass them by without further notice. But during this period, two sects arose, which are still conspicuous among the Dissenters of England. The first was the denomination of Baptists; the other the Quakers. There were indeed some Anabaptists in England during the reign of Edward VI. who had fled from Germany on account of the rustic war. These, however, were persecuted with unrelenting rigour; and in the reign of Elizabeth, they were, by proclamation of the government, banished. They then fled to Holland. But the respectable denomination of English Baptists, though holding some tenets in common with the Anabaptists of Germany, ought not to be confounded with them. The first regular Baptist church formed in England, was made by a division of the church of Mr. Jacob, and was constituted under the pastoral care of Mr. John Spilsbury, according to Crosby, their historian. Since that time they have advanced rapidly, and now form a very respectable part of the body of Dissenters.

The Quakers were at first characterized by a wild, fanatical zeal; but they soon settled down into an orderly and well governed society. Their increase at first was rapid; but for the

last half century their numbers in England have rather diminished than increased. It must be remembered, however, that a very large portion of the sect emigrated to Pennsylvania, under the auspices of William Penn; and this cis-atlantic part of the society has flourished exceedingly, and continued a united and harmonious body, until the late division, which has severed the society into nearly two equal parts.

As the restoration of Charles II. was brought about mainly through the influence of the Presbyterians, into whose hands the power of the government had fallen, they fully expected that such a plan of the church would be adopted, as would comprehend them, without a violation of their consciences. But in this expectation they were sadly disappointed, and the unprincipled monarch added to all his other crimes, that of the basest ingratitude towards the men who had exerted themselves most effectively in bringing him back to his throne and kingdom. In a short time after the restoration, such rigid principles of high-churchism, and such intolerant principles towards all who refused a complete conformity, were adopted, that in one day, about two thousand of the most learned, and most pious ministers in England, were ejected from their places; and these men, who had spent their lives in the faithful preaching of the Gospel, were now forbidden even to meet for worship with a few of their neighbours, and were prosecuted often, for having a few friends collected in their own houses in time of family worship. And not only so, but they were prohibited upon the severest penalties, from approaching within five miles of any incorporated town. Never, perhaps, was any persecution more wanton, and characterized by more impiety than this; for while these learned and pious men were driven out to starve, and prohibited from instructing the people, there were no competent teachers to supply their places. Such men, as Baxter, Owen, Manton, Flavel, Henry, and a host of others, of like character, were pursued as if they had been thieves or robbers, dragged to the unrighteous courts as criminals, and subjected to imprisonment and heavy mulcts, while the means of comfortable subsistence were taken away. Their only opportunity of exercising the ministry which they had received, was commonly in the dead hour of the night, or in some retired spot; where, however, they were often interrupted and dispersed by the unceremonious intrusion of constables and bailiffs.

The only relief which the non-conformists obtained, in the reign of James II. was owing to a cause which they could not approve. This monarch being a devoted and avowed Papist, sought to have the laws against Popish recusants relaxed, intend-

ing, as soon as it could be done, to overthrow the Protestant establishment, and to re-establish the supreme dominion of the Pope in England. While prosecuting this object, without a grain of affection for the Dissenters, he found it convenient, for the sake of appearances, to extend indulgence to these sufferers also. It is to their honour, that they preferred to remain in a state of oppression, rather than that the Papists should again be restored to power; and during this critical period of the church, the Dissenters came forward, in conjunction with the divines of the establishment, in opposition to Popery. But this danger was soon over. The revolution of 1688, which drove the family of Stuart from the English throne, and brought in William III., relieved the Dissenters from the most oppressive of their burdens. The act of toleration was passed, by which the severe laws against Dissenters were—not repealed—but suspended, on certain conditions, with which they were required to comply; and by a subscription to the doctrinal articles of the church, they were permitted to exercise their ministry in houses duly licensed. But by the test-act, they were still excluded from all offices, civil and military, and were also excluded from the Universities, in order to be admitted to which, such oaths and subscriptions were required, as no Dissenter could conscientiously submit to. They were also still subjected to the same necessity of paying tithes and church rates, as though they attended the established churches.

Although the Dissenters were still left under many civil disabilities, they were glad to obtain toleration upon any terms which did not commit their consciences. They, therefore, were grateful for the privileges conferred on them by the act of toleration, and did not complain of the injustice which, as British subjects, they still suffered, on account of the deprivation of their rights. Their principal controversial writings, in relation to this subject, were purely in self-defence, intended to show that they had sufficient reasons for dissent from many things required by the established church. But for a long time; they made no effort to obtain an improvement of their condition; but seemed to be well satisfied as long as they should be permitted to enjoy the toleration which had been granted. The prejudices against the Dissenters, which had been virulent while the house of Stuart held the reins of government, were greatly diminished under the house of Hanover. Instead of being considered as the enemies of the government, they now began to be regarded among its firmest friends. In consequence of their improved condition, their numbers and congregations increased rapidly. But from the year 1730 until 1760 a great declension

took place among the Dissenters, as appears from pamphlets published by Gough, Orton, and Dr. Doddridge. The principal cause of this declension is said to have been the introduction and prevalence of Arminian and Arian errors. About this time also, many of the younger preachers of the Dissenters went over to the established church: as many as thirty names are given of ministers who pursued this course. These declensions and errors were principally confined to the Presbyterian branch of the dissenting body; but this cannot be ascribed in any degree to the nature of Presbyterian government. The truth is, that genuine Presbyterianism has not existed among the Dissenters called by that name in England. If the discipline of Presbyterianism had been in force, it would have been a barrier in the way of error; but there, as in this country, a spurious liberality prevailed, and communion was freely held with ministers who rejected some of the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel. It is difficult, however, to assign a satisfactory reason for the remarkable difference between the Independent and Presbyterian congregations, in regard to orthodoxy. It cannot be accounted for by a reference to their ecclesiastical polity; for in this country the very contrary has been the fact; for while Unitarianism has prevailed among the Congregationalists, it has scarcely found an entrance into any branch of the Presbyterian church in America.

But it is time that we should notice some sects of Dissenters, that arose long after those already mentioned. The chief of these is the large and increasing body to which the name of Methodists has been given. The origin and history of this powerful society is so recent, that it will be unnecessary to enter into much detail. Those denominated Calvinistic Methodists do not properly come into the account, as they have never been completely separated from the established church; and as long as Mr. John Wesley lived, the numerous societies under his authority received the sacraments from ordained ministers of the church of England; but since his decease, the Wesleyan Methodists, and those who have separated from them, have effected a complete separation from the establishment, and are now, to all intents and purposes, Dissenters. The separation between the Calvinistic and Arminian Methodists took place, A. D. 1741, when a difference arose between the two great founders of Methodism, respecting certain points of doctrine; but in the year 1750, this breach was in some measure healed; but except Lady Huntington's connexion, the Calvinistic Methodists never formed any thing like a regular sect. Whitefield always set himself in opposition to sectarian measures. They had, however,

many distinct places of worship, which were frequented by numerous audiences, and as far as we know, this is still the fact, in London and some other places.

The Wesleyan Methodists, when their connexion with the church of England was completely dissolved, fell into difficulty in regard to toleration; for their ministers could not conscientiously make the declaration required of Dissenters by the act of toleration; that is, they were not conscientiously scrupulous about those rites and practices to which the Dissenters objected; and some who were inimical to the society, actually began to put in force against them the old laws which had been long obsolete by the operation of the act of toleration. This led the society, now grown large and respectable, to apply to ministers for a special act to protect their members from persecution. This law was carried through parliament by Mr. Percival, when prime minister, and secures for the Methodist society privileges fully as ample as those enjoyed by other Dissenters; and, indeed, by this act all Dissenters are placed, in some respects, in a more favourable situation than by the act of toleration.

The Moravians, or "the Unity of Evangelical Brethren," are also Dissenters, and have several congregations in England, but their number is too small to require any further notice; but in one respect they stand in a relation to the established church which other denominations of Dissenters do not. Their bishops are acknowledged to be apostolical bishops, and consequently their ordinations are not repeated, as is the case when other dissenting ministers join the church of England.

We have not spoken of the Unitarians as a distinct body, because for a long time they were identified with those called Presbyterians; but of late, the latter name seems to have fallen much into desuetude, and the former to be commonly adopted by both Arians and Socinians.

There are also several small sects, such as the Sandemanians, Swedenborgians, &c. whose numbers and influence are too inconsiderable to render it proper to notice them in this brief historical sketch.

We do not find, that after the revolution, when the Dissenters obtained toleration, any effort was made for an improvement of their condition, until the year 1772; at which time a bill was introduced into the House of Commons, the object of which was to release the Dissenters from the obligation of subscribing the doctrinal articles of the church of England, which was required by the act of toleration. This bill, after passing the lower house by a considerable majority, was contemptuously thrown out by the House of Lords, not more than thirty of the peers voting in its

favour; and the next year it met with the same fate; for after passing almost unanimously in the House of Commons, it was again rejected by the Lords. But in the year 1779, the same bill as to its essential provisions, passed through both Houses with very inconsiderable opposition. In the place of subscription to doctrinal articles, this law required dissenting ministers to make a declaration that they were Christians and Protestants, and received the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, as the revealed will of God, and as the rule of their doctrine and practice.

As the reasons for making such a change applied only to such dissenting ministers, as had departed from the doctrines of the Reformation, many conscientious, orthodox men judged it to be wrong, to join in the application to parliament for this relief; but the majority were of opinion that all men ought to enjoy liberty of conscience; and others maintained, that any subscription to articles of faith exacted by the Government was unlawful, even if believed to be true. Many pamphlets were published while this subject was under discussion, in which much variety of sentiment appears.

The Dissenters, encouraged by their success in obtaining a release from subscription in 1779, were emboldened in the year 1787, to apply to parliament, for the repeal of the corporation and test acts; but in this they were unsuccessful; a majority appearing against them, even in the House of Commons. Not discouraged, however, they had the proposal again brought forward in 1789, when Mr. Fox advocated their cause in a powerful speech; but Lord North and Mr. Pitt opposed it in every stage. Much greater efforts were now made by the Dissenters than on any former occasion. Pamphlets, almost innumerable, were printed and circulated, and public meetings were held, and resolutions passed; but these proceedings stirred up a spirit of opposition, and a powerful re-action took place; the result was, that the motion was lost. Among the speakers against the repeal of these acts, besides Pitt and Lord North, Burke, and Wilberforce exerted themselves with effect.

The Dissenters were much disappointed and chagrined at the result of this application to parliament; but the spirit of liberty was more increasingly diffused through their congregations, and they would not desist from their efforts to obtain the repeal of oppressive laws; therefore, in 1789, an attempt was made in the house of Lords to obtain the repeal of those statutes which inflict penalties on persons who absent themselves from the service of the church of England, or who speak in derogation of the Book of Common Prayer; but this motion, introduced by Lord Stanhope,

failed of success; for the bishops considered it to be a direct attack on the church, and calculated to open wide a door for irreligion.

Again in 1792, an attempt was made to obtain a repeal of those penal statutes, which still hung over the heads of those who impugned the doctrine of the Trinity. Mr. Fox, ever the friend of religious liberty, again appeared, as the advocate of Dissenters; and again, Mr. Pitt exerted his mighty influence in opposition to the motion; grounding his arguments on the unsuitableness of the time, as the public mind was exceedingly disturbed by the extraordinary political events which were taking place on the continent. The motion of Mr. Fox was lost by a considerable majority. No other effort was made by the Dissenters to better their condition for a number of years, but an attempt was made in parliament, during this period, to have some alterations made in the act of toleration, the effect of which would have been to abridge the privileges of Dissenters; but it did not succeed. The object was to restrict the liberty of preaching the Gospel, and seems to have been intended to prevent Methodists and Dissenters from preaching in the fields and villages.

Within a few years past, however, the Dissenters made a combined and successful effort to obtain relief from the oppression of the odious test-act; the worst feature in which was the profanation of the holy sacrament of the eucharist, by requiring all persons who took office, civil or military, to partake of this holy ordinance, as a prerequisite qualification. Thus, infidel statesmen, and profane and licentious officers in the army, were tempted to bow with hypocritical devotion at the sacred altar of the Most High. It is, indeed, wonderful, that a law so unrighteous, and leading to such profanation of holy things, should have so long stood its ground, while the light of religious liberty was so generally diffused among the people. But to the honour of the British legislature, the act for its repeal now passed both Houses by large majorities.

When men of intelligence and religion came to understand their rights, nothing but the hand of hard necessity will induce them to be contented under their deprivation: and success in the achievement of one victory over the unrighteous principles of oppression, only serves to encourage them to make new efforts for the recovery of such as may be withheld. It might, perhaps, have been expected by the Government, and the friends of the established church, that the Dissenters would have remained quiet and contented, after obtaining an exemption from the operation of penal laws, the repeal of which they had long

sought in vain. But if such expectations were entertained by any part of the community, they have not been realized. Instead of acquiescence under the civil disabilities which still remain, they have come forward with a zeal and firm determination, never equalled at any former period; and have demanded from the Government, not exemption from this and that burden, but a full participation of the privileges and immunities of British subjects. They have put in their claim to an equal freedom of access to the universities, as other citizens. They have also demanded that the right of burial in the parish cemeteries should no longer be withheld, and that their marriages, celebrated by their own clergymen, should be admitted to registration in the same manner as marriages solemnized by clergymen of the church of England. But they have at length ventured boldly to occupy ground never taken by the Dissenters before; and which, until lately, as a body, they were never disposed to take. They now, with reason and justice on their side, but whether with prudence and sound policy remains to be proved, complain "*That they are compelled to contribute towards a church from which they have withdrawn, and from which they derive no benefit.*" And not only have they proceeded thus far, but they now boldly demand, that one denomination of religionists should not by the State be preferred to another. In short, the present aim of the Dissenters is to have the union between church and state dissolved, and religion left free from state interference or control, as in this country. Their object is, in short, that all laws by which a particular religion is patronized and established, be repealed.

In regard to these demands, the existing ministry have lent a favourable ear to some of them; and already the universities are thrown open to Dissenters: but they appear determined to oppose their higher claims. Already the Lord Chancellor, hitherto the fearless advocate of the rights of Dissenters, has protested in the strongest terms against the project of overthrowing the establishment; and unless the Dissenters have actually become a majority of the nation, there is no hope of their success at present. But undoubtedly the struggle will be violent, and the agitation great.

That our readers may be able to form some judgment of the strength of the Dissenters in England, we will now give a summary of the number of their congregations, taken from the last volume of "*Bogue and Bennett's History of the Dissenters;*" to which work we acknowledge our obligations, for much that is contained in this historical sketch.

In England, the number of dissenting congregations is 1583,

and in Wales 419, making a sum total of 2002. Of these 252, in England, are denominated Presbyterians; 799 Independents; 532 Baptists.

In Wales, the Presbyterians are no more than 18; the Independents 225; the Baptists 176.

Besides these, there are upwards of 20 congregations of Scotch Seceders, besides those connected with the established church of Scotland.

The General, or Arminian Baptists, and the Sandemanians, are included in the summary of the Baptist congregations. Of the former, the number is about 100; of the latter probably not more than 20.

The Quakers are not included in the above summary. Their number is calculated to be about 20,000, and is rather diminishing than increasing; but they are in the possession of much wealth and intelligence. The Moravians are not an increasing body in England. Of all sects, they have the least of a proselyting spirit. Their noble aim is the conversion of the heathen, and therefore they take no pains to bring over other denominations of Christians to join their society. The number of their congregations is no more than 16; and most of these are probably small.

Now when we consider that the number of parishes belonging to the established church in England and Wales, is upwards of 10,000, the number of Dissenters, amounting to no more than two or three thousand congregations, bears apparently a small proportion to the whole body of the established church. But there are several things to be here taken into the account. It may be calculated, that most of the Dissenters are people who have some conscientious regard to religion, as they can have no reason for continuing to be Dissenters, except their conscientious attachment to their own principles of religion; whereas multitudes in England, as well as in this country, pay scarcely any attention to religion, and care nothing about it. The Dissenters are mostly from the middle class of society, which is the bone and sinew of the country. The higher classes have never been, as a body, remarkable for religion, and the vast mass which contains the dregs of the people, are, in England especially, utterly irreligious, and seldom or never attend any public worship. So that if you compare the Dissenters with the population which frequents the parish churches, the difference will not be so immense, as it would seem from the comparison of numbers in the foregoing statement. Many of the parish churches are rather nominal than real places of worship. Their income is too small to support a curate; and in many places the Dissenters have

drawn to themselves nearly all the people. In some large districts of London, there are six to one, of those who are in the habit of attending public worship, attached to the chapels of the Dissenters. And taking the immense population of this grand emporium, it is believed, that the Dissenters form a majority of those who pay any regard to religion.

It is deemed best to give "THE CASE OF THE DISSENTERS," which is here published, with very little curtailment; that our readers may fully understand the reasons on which they depend in support of their claims.



THE CASE OF THE DISSENTERS IN A LETTER ADDRESSED TO
THE LORD CHANCELLOR.

My Lord,—Permit me to hope, that, in addressing this communication to your Lordship, your office will redeem me from the charge of obtrusiveness, and that your liberality will secure, for the brief statement, a candid and just consideration.

It is quite evident to all that the time is come, when the reform so happily effected in our civil institutions, must be carried into our ecclesiastical polity. It is equally evident, that this has happened, without any movement on the part of the Dissenters; for hitherto, with the exception of Scotland, they have been both silent and still. They may have memorialized the ministers on some particular evil; but they have declined to publish even such memorial to the world. At this moment their whole case is neither before the public nor the Government. Many may blame them for not having spoken *earlier*; none can blame them for speaking *now*. It is a crisis they have not made; it is a crisis they must not neglect.

It has indeed been said, that the reform of the church belongs to churchmen only, and that it would be mere impertinence in the Dissenter to interfere. To this objection I readily yield, so far as to admit, that we have nothing to do with any question affecting the church, *except as it affects ourselves*. But such is the relative position of the two interests, that it will be exceedingly difficult, in any one instance, to regard them separately. If indeed the Episcopal church could be considered only as a *religious institution* for the *spiritual welfare* of the people, other denominations could have no more right to interfere with it, than it would have to interfere with them. It might have any number of bishops; it might command any measure of property; it might adopt any methods of advancement and of usefulness; and the Dissenter would have nothing to do with it, ex-

cept to desire for it increasing peace and prosperity. But it is a *national* church; it is established on the fiction of claiming every subject of the State as a member of itself; it asserts its right when it has lost its power to enforce it; it exacts recognition and contribution from those who claim to be independent; it refuses to acknowledge a dissenting ministry, or a dissenting church; and it places the Dissenter uniformly in a state of comparative subjection, and of decided inferiority.

That the Dissenters have patiently endured these evils, while there was no remedy for them, is to their praise; if they should choose to endure them a moment longer, it would be to their disgrace. They are not unmindful of that consideration, which from time to time has enlarged their privileges; and they are especially grateful for the efforts of those noble-minded men who felt for their wrong, though they did not suffer by it, and who gave themselves no rest till the Test and Corporation Acts were expunged from the statute-book of the realm; but still they are not satisfied. No, my Lord, the Dissenters are not satisfied—they *cannot* be satisfied with their present position. They claim the *equality* of citizens. They do not ask to be placed above the churchman; they cannot submit to be placed beneath him. They claim, that no man shall be the worse, either in *purse*, *reputation*, or *privilege*, on the account of his religious opinions. This is what they seek. They will be grateful for any grant that may improve their condition—WITH THIS ALONE CAN THEY BE SATISFIED.

Allow me to refer the attention of your Lordship to some of those particulars, which unite to destroy this equality; and which, on this account, fall properly under the denomination of *grievances*.

I. The first thing which may be named is *the state of the registration*. The Dissenter, on the one hand, has been shut out from the parochial registry, except at the price of conformity; and, on the other hand, his own registry, which was forced upon him, has been discredited and rejected, so as to prevent the confidence of the people. The evil, however, of wanting an authorized evidence of birth is sometimes so great, as to induce many parents to sacrifice their consistency rather than expose their children to it, at some distant time. Great numbers have been tempted to trouble their consciences by declining the sacrament of baptism in their own community, where it is administered as they approve, and by submitting their offspring to it under a form to which they object; while others, who have had too much respect for their pastor and the community with which they were united to slight the institution of their own church, have pre-

sented their children in both communions for baptism ; but with very different objects before them. In their own church they sought for baptism and disregarded the registry ; in the national church they sought for registration, and submitted to baptism only as a form necessary to its attainment. It is proper under any circumstances to condemn such conduct, as a profanation of sacred things to secular purposes ; but it is yet more proper to condemn *the system* under which persons, who have too much conscience to neglect the means of religion, have nevertheless too little to resist the powerful temptations it presents to them.

The truth is, as your Lordship is well aware, that our whole system of registration is bad ; and it is so, in relation to the churchman as well as to the Dissenter. Our registry of baptism, either in church or chapel, is no legal evidence of *birth*, nor can it be ; it is proof of baptism and of nothing more. But, in all serious questions of law, what is wanted is evidence of birth and not of baptism. In the want of this, defective evidence has, at one time, been received, rather than expose the innocent to injury ; but, at other times, that defective evidence has been disallowed, and the party concerned has been left without a remedy.

For the sake then, not of a party, but of the commonwealth, we require to have the registration of the country placed on a simple and uniform basis. It should be a *civil*, and not a religious institution. It should embrace entries of birth, marriage, and death, by uniform methods. The duty should be discharged by a civil functionary in each parish or district ; a copy of the entries made in each parish should be forwarded monthly or quarterly to county courts ; and these again should transfer, at given periods, a copy of their entries to a *central* or *ultimate* court in the metropolis.

II. Another head of grievance by which the Dissenters suffer, is the *present state of the marriage law*. The English Church, in common with all protestant bodies, professes to acknowledge only two sacraments ; but in reality marriage has with her, as fully as with the Roman Church, the form and place of a sacrament. It is adopted with little variation from the mother church ; and it is so open to objection, from its superstitious and indelicate character, that few clergymen commit themselves to the use of the whole service. To this form, however, the Dissenters must submit. Although they have withdrawn from the church ; although the State has sanctioned them in so doing ; although they evince their sincerity by considerable daily sacrifices ; in this instance they must still conform. They must virtually, and for the occasion, profess themselves members of a community from which they have conscientiously separated ; or they must forego

all the sweetest relations of life. This imposition is the more galling, because it falls on the English Dissenter only; and it is still more so, because he was once as free to seek the privilege at the hands of his own pastor, as is the Nonconformist now in Scotland and in Ireland.

I am aware, my Lord, that this subject has been supposed to be encumbered with many difficulties; but I confess I perceive none, except what arise from the jealousy and intermeddling natural to a dominant church. Marriage is either a civil or a religious rite; or it is both. If it is civil, it belongs to the magistrate and not to the clergyman; if it is religious, then it belongs properly to the acknowledged pastor of the party using it: if it is composed of both, then it should be divided between the civil functionary and the pastor. Among the Dissenters it is, I believe, generally regarded as purely a *civil contract*, but demanding, from its importance, *religious observances*. If this is the correct judgment, the arrangement cannot be difficult. The State has to see that the contract is made with sufficient *publicity*, before a *civil officer* and *competent witnesses*, and is subject to an *exact registration*; and it has to refer any *religious exercise* proper to such solemn engagements to the *minister* of the *contracting parties*.

Change on this subject must quickly transpire. It is not to be supposed that the Dissenters can endure, that they shall be driven into an act of conformity which more than any thing desecrates the service, by leaving the will out of the action; or that the best feelings of the heart shall be embittered at a season most prepared of any to elicit all the tender charities of life.*

III. Another instance of forced conformity, of which Dissenters may properly complain, relates to the *burial of their dead*. It may be thought that this declaration, if suitable to the former case, is too strong to be justified here; since the Dissenter is at liberty to provide his own burial-ground, and to adopt that mode of sepulture which his conscience or affection may dictate. But this liberty will be found mostly to exist only in *name*. Frequently it happens that the Dissenter has no other place of interment than the parochial ground; when he has the choice of place, it is often overruled by the passion he has to bury his dead where his fathers and his father's fathers slumber; but if he yields himself to the call either of affection or of necessity, he must pay the price of conformity. The law of the land gives him an equal interest with others in the church-yard; but the

* See an excellent Pamphlet on this subject by Joshua Wilson, Esq.

law of the church prevents his enjoying this right either as a citizen or as a Christian; he must become a *churchman*.

Nothing can be more vexatious than the manner in which this frequently operates. It not only withholds an undoubted right; it disturbs and troubles the sympathies of social life at a time when to do them violence amounts to profanation. Some years since, it became my painful duty to commit the remains of a revered parent to the grave. It was many miles from the metropolis; and the only place that presented itself as suitable for the interment was the parochial ground. The pastor of my parent, and other ministers, from the respect and love they bore him, attended on the solemn occasion, but of course no one of them could be allowed to participate in the service. This was committed to cold and official hands; to the only person present who was ignorant of the deceased, and uninterested in the event; and on that account to the very last person who would have been chosen by the mourning relatives to officiate. Is it hoped by such forced compliances to renovate a sinking cause? For myself I felt that it required no small share of charity, not to resent the provisions of a *system* which carried its sectarian distinctions to the very grave; and which, in this case, sought to degrade equally, the Christian pastor by restraining him from the duties for which he was best qualified, and the parish priest by obliging him to officiate where his presence could only be regarded as an unwelcome intrusion.

The Dissenters of Ireland, who are not disposed to submit so quietly to the yoke as are the Dissenters of England, have resisted this interference with their most sacred affections. Their efforts were effectual: in this particular they are free; and no evil has been found to result to any party from the change. As precedent is thought to remove one half the difficulty from a subject, it is hoped that this matter, small in itself, but considerable in its influences, may be readily adjusted.

IV. Another serious cause of complaint to the Dissenters, is *their exclusion from the Universities*. Undoubtedly the restrictions which exist, when first imposed, were meant to act on the Dissenters, like those of Pharaoh on the Israelites; but, like his, they have wrought to a different issue. Shut out from the existing repositories of learning, they have provided, and are still providing, others for themselves. The practical good, therefore, of throwing open the Universities might be less to them now, than at any former time; still they are keenly sensible of the wrong *meant* to be inflicted; and it is the more keenly felt, because it affects the noblest aspirations and pursuits of our intellectual nature. Indeed, as the case now stands, if the Dissenter

is dishonoured, the church and the country are disgraced, in the sight of the civilized world. Is it to be endured, my Lord, at this time of day, that an Englishman, before he is permitted to study law, or medicine, or chemistry, or geometry, or Greek, must not only acknowledge himself a Christian, but a churchman? Is it to be endured, that the great seats of learning in foreign lands, should invite him to privileges which are jealously denied to him at home, and which are deemed the birthright of every scholar?

It has been repeatedly suggested that the complicated nature of the property involved in the university foundations, would make it impossible to throw them open. But, as your Lordship well knows, there is no *impossibility* in the case; there are no difficulties except such as may easily be overruled by Parliament; and all the pretences of the clergy against the admission of the Nonconformist, would operate just as effectually in the lips of the Catholic, to the exclusion of the Protestant.

Happily your Lordship's opinions on this subject are known to be both just and firm; and the country is hoping, that your elevation to power may qualify your Lordship to apply them, so as to renovate our great national institutions. Already our universities and public schools are, considering their advantages, greatly lower in the scale of advancement, than they ought to be; and if they are left under the present system, they will soon cease to be numbered amongst living things. If you would save them, my Lord, throw them open to the light and air; to the free circulation of opinion and the disencumbered pursuit of truth. Science, like light, dies in confinement, grows and brightens by radiation; make it their duty to *teach all*, and they will soon be taught *above all*.

V. The Dissenters have especially to complain, *that they are compelled to contribute towards a church from which they have withdrawn, and from which they derive no benefit.* This reference to the subject of compulsory payments is purposely limited to its effect on the Nonconformist, since there will be occasion afterwards to treat of it as a general principle. As a mere money question, there can be no doubt, that, if the churchman wishes to uphold his church, and if he fears his own generosity is not to be trusted in the matter, he is at liberty to invite the State to tax him for that purpose; but for the State to compel the Dissenter to contribute, either by tithe or church-rate, to the same object, while he is left to bear the burdens of his own church alone, is an outrage on righteous government and manly feeling. It is taking away his property without an equivalent, which is robbery; it is applying it to uphold a system

which his conscience condemns, which is sacrilege. In the case of Canada, when Romanism was made the state religion, the Episcopalians and Presbyterians protested against being taxed for its support as an intolerable abomination, and they were exonerated. Unhappily, the act of compelling the seceder at home to support Episcopacy and Presbyterianism, has not struck them as so flagrant an evil; but it is equally abominable and unjust; and, like every evil deed, it is bringing after it the sad and sure hour of retribution.

The less need be said of this monstrosity, since the public mind is evidently awake to it. The whole nation now resents it as an offence against common equity; and the more generous and religious portions of the establishments demand that their religion should be upheld by their own constituents. Parliament must deal with the subject fairly and firmly; and, if it shall still *assume* the right of taxing the Dissenter, it is impossible that it should alienate his contributions from his own to a foreign community. Now that attention is strongly directed to the subject, the only wonder is, that the State has tolerated so great an abuse; that the Dissenters have borne such a burden so long; that the clergyman has so readily lived on bread withdrawn from the seceder's table; and that the churchman has reconciled the manly and independent parts of his nature to meet and worship complacently in temples which other hands have reluctantly reared and garnished for his use!

VI. The final grievance with which I shall trouble the attention of your Lordship, is *that of the State preferring one denomination of religionists before others.*

I am perfectly aware that this reference commits me to the subject of national establishments generally: and I am also aware that one cannot, at the present time, give free and calm utterance to dissenting principles on this subject without, on the one hand, being assailed by every expression which scandal and prejudice can invent; and, on the other hand, of finding oneself associated with persons of infidel and extreme opinions. But the Dissenters are not to be drawn from a *right course* by accidental disadvantages. In the question of reform, it was our lot to be united with such as painfully differed from us; they sought perhaps for revolution, we sought for reformation; and we obtained our object and prevented theirs. So in the church question it may happen, that some who move with us, may desire its overthrow, while we seek its renovation; and we shall not be less earnest in our labours from the conviction that its renovation, on Christian principles, will prevent its destruction. At least such a temper is what the occasion requires. Those only

are fit to deal with the jarring state of ecclesiastical affairs in this great country, who can rise above momentary clamour, and look steadily forth on the serene elements, when their differences shall have been adjusted, and they shall have found their equilibrium.

It has been frequently asked, What is meant by a national establishment? and, as there has been manifest difference of opinion, it may be well to dispose at once of this question. An establishment, as it exists in Britain, is the selection of one denomination of Christians from amongst many, to participate in the favour of the State. As an expression of this favour, it is taken into close alliance with the State; it is supported by the property of the State; it has not only a virtual, but a positive and personal representation in the parliament of the State; its discipline is enforced by the power of the State; and it is indulged by the State, with manifold and exclusive privileges. Now it is evident, that such a civil establishment of *religion* is not to be confounded with *religion itself*. It is not a *part* of religion; it is not *co-extensive* with the subjects of true religion, or the members of the true church. If these favours of the State were transferred to the seceders, it would not make them more a church than they are; and were they withdrawn from the Episcopalians, it could not make them less so. The episcopal church would still have her bishops, her priests, her deacons, her temples, her congregations, her formularies, and her private endowments. She would only be left, as the dissenting communities now are, to be guided by her own counsels, and to be sustained by her own resources. Whether a body of Christians, then, is the better or the worse for such a *civil* establishment, is fairly open to opinion and discussion. The churchman, while the distinction is his, may think it beneficial, but he libels his church when he makes it essential to her life and prosperity; and the Dissenter may think it injurious; and in that judgment, while conscientiously opposing all civil establishments of religion, he may be truly seeking to promote the interests of the church at large, and of the episcopal portion of it in particular.

The arguments in support of national establishments have usually been based either on the principle of *right*, or on that of *expediency*; and since the time of Paley, the latter principle has been chiefly, if not wholly, relied on by the *discreet* advocate. This is certainly a happy circumstance. The proper test of the principle of expediency is to be found in *experiment*, and not in subtle discussion; and no man can now say, that the experiment is yet to be tried. No, my Lord, the experiment has been fully tried; it has brought us to the present crisis; all the results

are before us. If any might have thought it rashness to have formed a decision at an earlier period; all must agree, that it would be mere pusillanimity now, not to arrive at a deliberate judgment. Allow me with confidence to run over the surface of the subject.

1. In the first place, it will be admitted, without any difficulty, that, whatever may be the pretensions of a national establishment, *it must work injuriously to the Dissenter of every description.* This is my title for introducing it into a communication professedly exposing the *grievances* of Dissenters; and this title I am sorry to say is too easily justified. To do so, it is not even necessary that I should refer to those exactions of conformity and contribution already specified; these are *effects* springing from one great cause; the predominant evil is that of UNIFORM, EXPRESSED, IMPLIED DEGRADATION.

Partiality has ever been denounced as of the essence of bad government; it is bad in civil affairs, it is intolerable in those of religion. Yet to this evil an establishment exposes us. The professor of the State religion is, on the mere ground of his profession, placed nearer to Majesty; he is one of a privileged fraternity; he is pointed out to the community as the more correct, the safer, and every way the better man; and exaction, in some form or other, is at hand to uphold his pretensions. As he is exalted, the seceder is necessarily degraded. A cloud stands between him and the face of royalty: he does not belong to the king's church, and he is hardly thought to be true to the king's person; and he is treated as though he held a "divided allegiance," and was not to be fully trusted; certainly not to be trusted equally with a conformist. It is impossible to say what he has not suffered from this cause in *estate*, in *reputation*, and in *good fellowship*.

And can any thing exceed this in exasperation? If it were some one definite evil, to be endured at some one time of one's life, for worshipping according to one's conscience, however great, it might be bravely borne; but when it is an evil pursuing one, in its subtle and malignant influence, through every path and every hour of life; when it gives one a *lower place* in the *settled* opinion of one's fellow citizens; when it dishonours us at the exchange, at the college, in the senate, in the pulpit; when it worms itself into the paradise of home and breeds discord or indifference between parent and child, brother and sister; who can bear it? It is the continual dropping that wears the stone. The storm might fall on it—the lightning might strike it—it is unhurt; but this continued vexation chafes and corrodes even a stone!

And it is to be observed, that this evil, the greatest a generous spirit can know, must exist under the *mildest form* of an establishment. Wherever there is such an establishment there must be *toleration*; and toleration, though the boast of the churchman, is the abhorrence of the Dissenter. To tolerate a man in a given action is to *permit* him to do it; and to permit him involves the right to *prevent* him; and when these relate to an act *purely religious*, they are alike odious and execrable. To permit a man, forsooth, to worship God according to his conscience!

Besides, toleration in every form, is *inconsistent* with a national establishment. It is, in fact, a *license to disobedience*. A religious establishment rests on royal authority; but toleration says, in a given instance, this authority may be disregarded. Is not this placing the prerogative in a strange predicament? What should we say of a civil establishment, with an express license for all who desired it, to neglect its provisions? Indeed, my Lord, we are in a perilous condition. We must travel back, *if we can*, from our present position, which is called a *perfect toleration*, to an *imperfect toleration*; and as quickly as may be, we must make our escape from an *imperfect toleration* to an *exclusive* establishment, such as it was in the worst days of the worst Stuarts. The Romanist, after all our self-complacency, is the only *right man* for an establishment; *it* is essentially exclusive, and *he* is essentially exclusive; and, at this moment, Spain is his glorious example. France indeed has lately adopted a new course; instead of establishing one religion, she establishes all. There is but one other method left, as possible to any government, and that is the wiser and "more excellent way"—it is *just to let religion alone!*

2. It would undoubtedly have been some consolation to the Dissenter, if he had found, after all he had suffered on the account of an establishment, that it had, in the same proportion, benefited the church. But he is deprived even of this relief; for, to say the least, it has been as *injurious to the church herself*, as to those who withdraw from her communion. Establishments, where other sects are found, act on an *oppressive* principle; and it is of the nature of oppression, in its mildest form, to injure the oppressor quite as much as the oppressed. If it is the tendency of a national establishment to create irritation, discontent, and resentment on the mind of the separatist; it as certainly leads, on the part of the favoured conformist, to pride, contempt, and intolerance. Sad and abundant proof, that it has worked, *as a system*, most powerfully to such an end, is everywhere to be found. I rejoice to know that there are

most charming exceptions, but we have now, not to treat of the exceptions, but of the rule. The Dissenters *as a body*, have uniformly been treated by the endowed church *as a body*, with scorn, contumely and hate. No epithets, however low, have been too low, by which to degrade their profession, their pastors, and their institutions: whatever exemptions they have obtained from the cruellest exactions and the most unjust persecutions, they have obtained, not at the Christian intercession of the church, but in the face of her frowning and determined resistance: and had the high and true churchman had his way, not a resting-place would have been left to them on British soil.

Besides, the *patronage* and State endowment, which are a part of the establishment, are a source of awful and extensive *corruption* to a religious and spiritual community. They attract to it continually the worldly, the ambitious, the indolent; while the evil is perpetuated and increased, by placing the whole economy above the wholesome influence of public opinion. So great is the evil arising from this system, that it would have reached an extremity long before the present time, had it not have been for the interposition of a *redeeming power*. This power is none other than that of an *independent* and *voluntary* effort, on the part of a number of pious churchmen, to buy up livings as they fell vacant, that they might secure to the people a pious and efficient ministry. It is not saying too much, that the church owes three-fifths of her most laborious and pious clergymen to the action of this counteracting principle; a principle, be it observed, my lord, of *dissenting* character, though here subjected to strange functions. That *system* must indeed work badly, which requires a standing act of simony to preserve it from universal incapacity and dishonour.

But still it is urged, that the church, whether by this or other means, *has done good*. I cheerfully admit it. It has done *great good*; and it has not been, since the Reformation, so well prepared to accomplish good and great things, as it is at this time. I rejoice in this; but I am at liberty to maintain, that it has not done the good it *might have done*. It may indeed be said, that to maintain this assertion, I require to know, not what the church has done, but what it would have done under different circumstances, and that this is not possible. I am sensible the case is greatly one of comparison; but it is so plain and tangible that it demands no great nicety in disposing of it. For instance, when we look to Ireland, there is no difficulty in saying, that *less* could not have been done for the Protestant religion, in the last two centuries, by *any* system or by *no* sys-

tem, than has been done by the endowed and dignified establishment of that unhappy land!

Then, if the matter is to be one of *comparison*; although we cannot compare the church as she *is*, with the church as she *would have been*; we may fairly compare the church as she *is* with the sister communions around her as *they are*. It is only doing her justice to suppose, that if her character is as apostolic and her forms as scriptural as her constituents believe, that she ought, at least, to be *equal* in piety and efficiency to any; and that the privileges with which she is indulged by the State, should be so many advantages for her and against dissent. But what is the fact? Our churches, whether Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan or Methodist, have more purity, more concord, more efficiency by far, than the endowed church. All the mighty movements in the cause of our common religion during the last fifty years, which more than any thing will distinguish the period in future history,—whence have they sprung? Who first carried Sabbath and daily education for the poor, over the face of the land,—the Churchman or Dissenter? Who originated and chiefly sustained the Bible Society,—the Churchman or the Dissenter? Who planned and upheld our earliest and most efficient Missionary Institutions,—the Churchman or the Dissenter? Again, our Tract Societies, our Christian Instruction or Visiting Societies, our Benevolent Societies, our modern Charitable Institutions,—whence are they? There is but one reply to these inquiries, and sorry I am that that reply is decidedly against the State religion. All, whether it be religion, education, or charity; whether devoted labour at home or abroad, have found their origin or their encouragement chiefly with the Dissenter, and not with the Churchman.

It is true, that there are thousands of noble-minded persons in the Episcopal community, who, not able to witness these Christian efforts in our day without participation, have risen superior to the spirit of party, and have united as they could to promote and to imitate them; but for their redeeming services, they have been marked as dishonoured men in their own communion, and they are so to this hour. The church, properly so called, in the very presence of all these wonderful efforts of piety and zeal, has been not merely neutral; it has positively resisted them, so long as there was hope in resistance. When resistance was vain and disgraceful, it has either sought to unite itself to our popular institutions, rather for the ungracious purpose of inoculating them with the virus of party, than for giving freedom and power to their labours; or it has attempted an imitation in its own community—an imitation for the most part of

such success as painfully to remind the beholder of the efforts of Pharaoh's magicians when compared with the inspired performances of Moses and Aaron.

But how is it, my Lord, that this difference, which none can question, should exist? If the church, in the great conflict which is now waging against the powers of darkness, superstition and oppression, is the last in the field and the first weary; if her efforts have been constrained and feeble; and if too often she has thrown her dead weight as a protection to the adversary,—to what are we to ascribe it? To her episcopal form and principles? Were I the veriest round-head that ever breathed, I could not believe so much! No, my Lord, it is *state favour* which is alone guilty of the evil. This has taught her to sleep in silky indolence while others worked; this has diverted her attention from the things that are spiritual and proper to her, to the things that are worldly and improper; this has made her reluctant and unprepared to descend from her altitude, and to unite with the common friends of religion and virtue in hostility to the common foe. Treat Independency or Methodism as you have treated Episcopacy, and it would become the same feeble, worldly thing. Set the church free, my Lord; in behalf of the church, I say, set her free; and I answer for it, she shall run as fair a course, and put forth as strong an arm, and obtain as rich a spoil, as any of the children of the Reformation.

3. There is the more propriety in making this representation to your Lordship, because, what is thus shown to be injurious to the church, is in like manner *injurious to the State itself*.

If there would have been truth in this declaration at any time, it so happens that there is more truth in it now than there could be at any former period. While the government of this country was conducted on a principle of patronage, and that not of the purest kind, it might seem very statesmanlike to secure so large a portion as the church supplied; and while that government steadily inclined to high, monarchical principles, it might be confident, that the worldly influence created by the State in favour of the church, would be used in favour of itself. But this time, in both respects, is gone, and gone for ever. Never again can this country be governed on the principle of patronage; if governed safely and prosperously, it must be on the principle of the *common good*; and to be so governed, there must be an exact sympathy with the common mind. The patronage, therefore, which was useful to the government, under other circumstances, may become a serious evil now: it may stand between the ruling power and the people, and prevent it from

perceiving the general wants, or feeling with the general mind, of the community.

Then our view of the case is still more serious. It is doing no disservice to the church to say, that, as it is now constituted, it is unlike every institution by which it is surrounded. It is essentially *arbitrary* and *despotic* in its form. Even its constituents have no direct influence over it. Its bishops are appointed, without the consent of the clergy; its clergy, without the consent of the people. It has a natural and necessary antipathy to liberal principles and opinions. To be consistent, the Churchman *must* be, in the strictest sense of the term, a tory, as the Dissenter *must* be a whig. This may work no great harm, while the State is ruled by men of high and illiberal principles; but let it pass into other hands, and the church will be found amongst its bitterest foes. It will not avail that government, for the time being, has the power of patronage in its hands; the church will conclude on its safety in any case; and it will prefer to receive it from those it loves, rather than from those it hates. Between such a government and such a church there cannot be any peaceful alliance. The government may promise and prefer; the church may yield and accept; but she cannot be won; she is only waiting for the first occasion, when working with other antagonist powers, she may "trip up its heels" and laugh at its overthrow.

What have we seen during the last three eventful years, my Lord, but evidence in "confirmation strong" of this, and more than this? Of all the enemies the present government has had, is there one that has shown more determined opposition? Has it not uniformly and strenuously opposed every method of reform, of melioration? Has it not chiefly sought, by all this opposition, to get rid of a liberal government? and to accomplish this, has it not, more than once, put in peril the peace of the whole empire?

But why is this? Why should Episcopacy have this power to trouble the State, when no form of dissent has it? It is simply because it is taken into *alliance* with the State. In the changes which must happen to the church, it is this alone that makes them, in the least degree, difficult or dangerous. And, to look beyond ourselves, it is this alliance of the church with the State, which, in half the countries in Europe, is, more than any thing else, obstructing reformation and threatening revolution. Let our government then be wise. Let it deprive the church of its *civil* power; and it will increase in the inverse proportion its *religious* power. This act would have, at once, a double effect; it would convey a great benefit to the

people, and redeem the State from as great an evil. I deprecate, for the sake of a government I admire, an opposite course. They have found things as they are, and so far are not responsible; but let them *confirm* them on their present principle, and then let them prepare to suffer as the first victim. The eagle will then fall; but it will be by an arrow feathered from his own wing.

4. The remaining notice on this subject is the most weighty; *it is the injurious effect of a national establishment on the state of religion generally.* Most of what has been already stated, would naturally lead to this conclusion; but its importance demands some additional remarks.

Observe its influence on *Infidelity*. All the friends of religion are now called to contend, and in no mean warfare, with this demon of unrighteousness; and all who have committed themselves to this contest, are sensible of the prejudice and disadvantage arising to the cause, by the position of the establishment. This is the form of religion which most strikes the attention of the adversary; and some of the noblest champions of revealed truth have fought under the cover of its shield; and signal victory has repeatedly attended their arms. But the unbeliever has concealed his wounds by his raillery, and has half persuaded himself, that he has been beaten only because he fought at *disadvantage*. "Let us meet," he has exclaimed, "on equal terms. You say that your religion is divine; and that it can stand on its own testimony. Why then is it upheld by the State, and defended by the sword? At present you commit yourselves to the absurdity of supporting what you deem to be the word of God, by an act of Parliament; and exact from reluctant hands the sustenance your church would not otherwise command. In opposing us, you are only labouring in your vocation; and struggling to secure your worldly wealth and dignities. Put your pretensions to the proof. Let your religion stand on its own merits; let your principles, like our own, rest only on the convictions and contributions of the sincere disciple, and then see who will have the best of the field." Who does not deeply regret, that such men as Barrow, and Paley, and Skelton, and Butler, who have brought moral evidence, as near as may be, to a demonstration, should have had their argument rejected from the prejudice created by their connexion with an objectionable system?

Look at its influence in producing *delusion* on the spirit of the people. The national establishment rests, as Hooker observes, on the principle of making every member of the State a member of the church. But there are at least two-fifths of the people who have no just sense of religion, and who even profess to

have none, who are nevertheless encouraged on this principle to consider themselves as attached to the church, and as *secure* by such attachment. They are received into it by baptism, and are "made Christians;" they can claim, as Christians, the other privileges of the church, though they may choose to neglect them through life; and, at last, they may expect, as Christians, to enjoy burial by a service which expresses assured and "certain hope of their resurrection to eternal life." It is not for me to know, whether this more religious view of the effect produced by a *national* establishment, has struck the mind of your Lordship; but I do know, that the Dissenters, as the friends of serious religion, are greatly more afflicted by this evil, than by all the personal wrongs under which they suffer. They are constantly brought into contact with persons under this delusion; it is complete; it remains with them to the last. They have lived, and they are dying, without any regard to true religion of any form; but they are recognized by the church; they deem themselves secure in that recognition; and they die in peace. No evil is so appalling as this! Were the evils of sectarianism a thousand-fold greater than they are, all the evils of all the sectaries, would bear no comparison with this! In the course of a generation, **THREE MILLIONS** of our people are dying under this delusion—with "a lie in their right hand!" This is really frightful, to a mind at all prepared to appreciate the value of religion and the solemnities of a future world. Blood, "the blood of souls," is on the church that propagates such delusion; and it is on the State, if the State makes itself accessory to such delusion!

5. After these summary statements it may be needless to advance additional evidence on that portion of the argument which relates to the *expediency* of a national establishment; and if the subject be disposed of as a question of expediency, it may be thought unnecessary to make it a question of *right*. Perhaps, however, your Lordship will bear with me while I glance at it under this aspect.

The Dissenters maintain, not that a civil establishment of religion is wrong *because* it is inexpedient, but that, if it were thought to be expedient, it is *still wrong*. They believe, that the government ought not to interfere; and that, in the state of this empire, they cannot consistently interfere with the worship and religious opinions of the people. They believe that the State *ought* not to interfere with the religion and worship of the people. Those who have recently ventured to argue for an establishment on the ground of *right*, have exposed the weakness of the cause more effectually than an adversary could have done. They have quoted Abraham and Melchisedec! They have appealed

to an antiquated dispensation, which they admit to be abrogated ; and which was every way peculiar while it lasted ! They have argued from the right of a parent to provide religion and worship for his children ; as though the cases of a child and an adult were parallel ! As though the government of a family, which is necessarily despotic, and which nature has supplied with special checks against abuse, were the proper model for a commonwealth !

As a scriptural argument, the only document for a just appeal is the New Testament ; and this, for the most part, has been carefully avoided. There the warmest advocates of a national religion do not pretend to find a precept, or the fragment of a precept, in their favour ; while every candid observer must find, that the *whole spirit* of the book is against them. The kingdom of God, or the church, is not of this world ; it cometh not—is not promoted—by might or power or observation ; Christ is its head, and not a temporal prince ; it falls under the denomination of the “things which are God’s,” and not “the things which are Cæsar’s ;” and it claims to stand and move independent of all human authority—troubling none except as they trouble it. Its acknowledged disciples were such not by compulsion ; not while indifferent ; but by a *voluntary* act of the mind ; and its resources were found, not in the taxed, but the free contributions of its disciples ; and while this was its state, there was no virtue, which it did not exemplify—there was no victory which it did not achieve.

And, what is thus asserted for the economy of the New Testament, is in substance true even of the Jewish dispensation. Peculiar and peremptory as it was, the contributions of the people to the support of religion, were not *compulsory* but *voluntary*. They were bound, then, as we are now, by the command of God, but they were free from civil exaction. Even the Jewish tithe was not enforced by the power of the magistrate. It would have been contrary to the genius of religion so to have enforced it. Religion looks rather to the posture of the mind than to the overt action ; while the State looks not to the inclination, but to the action only : and by compelling service to religion while the spirit remains averse, it has gone as far as human power could go in desecrating the things which we all hold to be most sacred.

To turn from this scriptural reference. In the complicated science of government, there certainly is no distinction clearer and broader than that existing between what is *civil* and what is *religious* ; and one should suppose that no proposition could be more palpably just than that *what is civil alone, falls within the province of civil government, and that what is religious*

is, from its very character, necessarily beyond its control. But it is confounding to find, that a truth which might be deemed self-evident, has not yet become a principle of government; and that, with all the disastrous evidence of an opposite course before them, no statesmen have been found wise enough to shun the evil and pursue the good. A state religion under Pagan governments, brought on the early Christians all their severe persecutions; yet the Christians no sooner obtained power, than they allied their religion with the civil establishment. A state religion brought on Europe all the curses of Popery; yet the Reformers sought to elevate Protestantism in its stead. A state religion in our own land brought Charles to the scaffold, and spread massacre, martyrdom and proscription over the empire; yet the "pilgrim fathers" who fled from it for life to foreign shores, were scarcely weaned from this folly, and left much for their noble offspring to effect. A state religion, at this moment, is threatening us with convulsion at home; and abroad—in China, in India, in Spain, wherever it exists—with the greatest obstacle to missionary labour we know; and still we cling to the luscious error. How hard is it for any man, however enlightened and wise, to deliver himself from the seductions of error, when it seeks to retain its possession of the mind by flattering his pride and enlarging the region of his power!

I am aware that a distinction has been adopted by the modern advocate of establishments, in order to neutralize a portion of the evidence on this subject. It has been said, with some confidence, that the right of the State, though it cannot extend to the support of a false religion, does extend to the support of the *true* religion. This however is a mere sophism. If the right is a prerogative of the State at all, then the State must be sole judge of the manner in which that prerogative is to be used; this is the only way in which it can be employed. To support the opposite of this, is to support an absurdity; it is saying, for instance, that the emperor of China has not the right to establish the religion which he and his people believe to be true; but that he must establish only the Christian religion, because we believe it to be true, while he and his people believe it to be false.

Look at the working of this right in our own empire, where, from its tolerant character, it has had to contend with difficulties unnatural to it. If the king of England has the right to establish only the true religion, then how is it that his majesty has established *several*—Episcopacy, Presbyterianism and Romanism? Again, if it is the prerogative of the king to establish religion, then it is his highest prerogative, and I, as his subject, am under the highest obligations to submit to him in this parti-

cular; but how shall I render an exact and full obedience? His majesty equally sanctions all; but I cannot conscientiously profess all; yet if I chose one, then my obedience to my sovereign is not so ample and full as his prerogative. Suppose, because Episcopacy is his established religion in England, I become an Episcopalian; I pass into Scotland, and I am denounced as a separatist; I cross over to Canada, and am denounced as a heretic, by the very institutions of the sovereign, and when I sought to place myself nearest to his favour. But it is enough, more than enough. Such folly, though it has continued long, cannot, it is evident, continue much longer. "Then," said the immortal Milton ages past, "then both commonwealth and religion will at length, if ever, flourish, when either they who govern discern between civil and religious, or they only who so discern, shall be admitted to govern." That time is now coming.

I have thus, my Lord, submitted, with what brevity and clearness I could command, the case of the Dissenters to your attention. I have shown it to be one of intolerable grievance; as it is unjust to them; as it acts injuriously on every other party; and as it relates exclusively to a subject which rests between God and the conscience, and with which no earthly government has the right or competency to interfere. To a mind like your Lordship's, I am fully persuaded that such a case cannot suffer from the presence of difficulty and objection; but as I desire to make this statement as complete as may be, and as some objections have been pressed into popular circulation with the hope of withdrawing a calm attention from the whole case, it may be proper to refer to them by a slight notice. Slight notice is all they will require.

1. It is said, that the principle of allowing religion to stand independently of the State, and to make its way by its own merits, is the *novel* opinion of unpractised minds, and is not to be trusted. A dignitary of the church, from whose erudition and liberality better things might have been expected, has recently asserted, that it is altogether a new opinion, and that it owes its origin to the French Revolution.* This, however, is as a declaration untrue, and as an insinuation, ungenerous. There is indeed a connexion in which the opinion may be said to be new. To the churchman, and to the statesman, who have found the church in union with the State, and are contented to have it so; and who have thought dissent from what is established too insignificant in any form for inquiry, it may appear to be a crude novelty. But it is not a *new*, it is a *revived* opinion. True it is,

* See Dr. Dealtry's Sermon.

it was lost in the dark ages of the world, when every thing else most precious to man was lost; true it is, that the reformers, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and Cranmer, did not avow it—did not appreciate it. But this principle was the principle on which the church lived and flourished during the first three centuries. Afterwards, when religion became wholly a matter of priestcraft and state policy, it lived, where alone in fact it was allowed to live, in the deserts and fastnesses of Europe. At the Reformation it came from its hiding places; and, though it could not prevail at once over the force of custom and prejudice in the majority, it found entertainment in the bosom of a respectable minority. It has flourished and expanded from that time to the present, and it is now the parent of all the thriving and unendowed communities of the land, as it is also of the whole church in America. Is it fair then to denounce such a principle as an untried novelty?—as the child of the French Revolution? Can such assertions do harm to any party except to the party which ventures to make them?

2. It is also maintained against this principle and the equality which the Dissenter claims, that it would necessarily involve an act of *spoliation and confiscation*, which would be unjust in itself and dangerous as an example. This is a subject on which much has been said, and with much vehement and vituperative declamation. It may be disposed of in a few sentences. In the first place, rely only on it, my Lord, that the Dissenter is too just to desire, in seeking justice for himself, to do or to see done an act of injustice to another party.

Then, secondly, it should be distinctly understood, so far as it is thought to be a matter of spoliation, the Dissenters are asking for *no share* of the spoil. Much unworthy insinuation has been directed to this point; but the Dissenters cast it from them as unjust to themselves, as unworthy in the accusers. In most cases, it is not believed when uttered. They feel indeed, that if there is to be endowment, they have as much right to their share as others: but they deny the right altogether. If the government were to propose to place them on the footing of Episcopacy to-morrow, to-morrow they would respectfully decline the offer. They would not receive it, if they could; they cannot receive it, if they would. They were the basest of men, if, after professing to take high and holy ground, and contending against State endowment as an evil, they could consent to participate in that evil. No, my Lord, this is the exultation of the Dissenter, and no man shall destroy this boasting; he seeks for nothing, of all the church possesses, for himself. Whatever shall become of what is called church property, he asks not a fraction, nor will he receive it.

Then, thirdly, as it is an affair between the church and the State, the Dissenter desires to witness nothing that shall be entitled to the name of *confiscation*. We say in this, as in every case, respect private property and private endowment as always sacred; and deal only with that property which is *public*, with which the State has repeatedly dealt; and which is of the nature of State allowance for services rendered to the religion of the State. Even here, we say, in looking firmly to a wiser and more economical arrangement, let the evils incident to a state of transition be as few as possible. Let the new state of things come in, as the life interest in the old system dies away; and where it may be needful to anticipate the slow but effectual working of this principle, and where parties suffer by the deviation, let them be open to fair compensation. Nothing can work well for the Dissenters, or for religion, which works unrighteously to the Churchman.

3. Another objection taken to the views of Dissenters is, that if the principle of State allowance were abandoned, the *principle of voluntary contribution is not adequate to the proposed end*. An accidental weight has been given to this objection, by the zeal with which it has been put forth by one of the best men of the day. That admirable man, though never wrong in intention, is too often so in argument; it will not be difficult to release the subject from the verbiage in which it has been enveloped, and to show that its charm lay in words and in nothing more.

It seems, as far as we can gather up the opinion, that the voluntary principle is not worthy of confidence because it is not so efficacious, so uniform, or so permanent in its operation, as the principle of endowment. Let us look at these points.

It will not work, it is said, so *efficaciously*. This, as a general assertion, is so strange and so directly in the teeth of evidence, that one is disposed to ask, can we and our opponents be agreed on the import of the term? If by not being so efficacious, is meant, that it will not so readily provide some 12, 20, or 30,000*l.* per annum, for the bishop or archbishop; that it will not provide for some 4000 clergy without cure of souls; that it will not supply some 300,000*l.* for sinecure allowances, then undoubtedly it is not so efficacious; but if it is meant that it will not so well provide the means of instruction and worship to the people, then we wonder at the boldness which can commit any man to the declaration. The facts, my Lord, are all on one side. In London and its adjacent boroughs we have 459 places of worship; of these, though London is the strong-hold of churches, 265 are dissenting and only 194 are established places. Dissent has spread over the country about 8000 chapels, besides

school-houses and preaching-rooms; it has provided for the respectable education and sustenance of a ministry, commensurate with this demand; while it has done this, it has been made to contribute its proportion towards the support of an endowed church; and yet it has, as if refreshed by its exertions, greatly surpassed that church in its contributions of service and money to those great efforts of Christian benevolence which are not of a sectarian but of a general character.

But it is urged, that the voluntary principle will not work *uniformly*; that though it should provide for the large towns, it could not carry the means of religion into our *small villages* and agricultural districts. There is something plausible in this argument, and it rests on many conscientious minds as a real difficulty. A simple question or two is sufficient, however, to rectify the judgment. If by preference, any parts of our country were selected as poor and thinly populated, they would be Cornwall and Wales. Who has carried religion over these unpromising districts,—the endowed or the dissenting teacher? One more question: There are in England and Wales 3000 stations at which the curates who serve them have less than 100*l.* a year; these are certainly the smallest and poorest in the country;—could the voluntary principle *do less* for them? is it not certain, if they deserved to hold their stations at all, that it would do *much more* for them?

Then it is said, that whatever is allowed in favour of the voluntary principle, it is not sufficiently *steady* and *permanent* to be relied on. If by its want of permanence is meant, that it will not continue its support irrespective of the State of religion, and of the services and merits of its ministers, then I claim this as a peculiar excellence. It is a faithful indicator of the presence and power of religion; it fails where it is not, and shows the true state of the place; and it lives and flourishes where it is, and in its turn contributes eminently to its expansion and permanence. To do more than this; to supply the outward form and body of religion, except as true religion is near to sustain and animate it, is to do too much; it is to deceive the eye with the appearances of life, when there is no life; and it is to propagate death age after age. The small portion of the dissenting church which is endowed, is rather like a sepulchre than a sanctuary. Germany has an endowed church, where religion is on the surface, but where neology is beneath. France has an endowed church, where religion is professed, but where infidelity is real; and every where it is found to present the most formidable obstacle to the spread of vital religion.

After all, the principle has not had fair trial in our land. It

has been more fully and extensively tried in America; and although attempts have been made to depreciate the state of religion in that land, I am prepared to say advisedly, *that it is better supplied with the means of religion than any other land under heaven.* One of its small and new towns, for instance, as an ordinary sample, contains 6,000 persons; it has five churches; and half the population attends them. New York has 200,000 inhabitants; it has 101 churches; this will give, at an average attendance of 500 each, a fourth of the population as church-going; and that of London by the same estimate would give only one-seventh. It has 15,000 churches raised amongst a population of 12,000,000; and the average attendance cannot be taken at less than one in four, while that of Great Britain cannot be taken at any thing like that amount. And what is remarkable is, that it has achieved this with a population *doubling itself in fourteen years; and instead of appealing to the principle of state endowment, as in an emergency, it has renounced it as inefficient where it did exist.* Thus we have a land, under the greatest disadvantages; without any endowment for the purposes of religious worship; provided with more churches, with a more efficient ministry, and with a better average reward for ministration, than we have in our own country, where every advantage has been possessed for ages, and where some three millions a-year are given to uphold an establishment!

If such facts settle the question, they will not create surprise; for this, after all, is the ordinary mode in which these principles work, the one to evil, the other to good. The principle of endowment makes a place for the man; the voluntary principle makes a man for the place. The one is a premium to indolence; the other is the reward of service. The one is indiscriminate, and falls alike on the evil and the good; the other is a nice discerner of character, and apportions remuneration to worth. The one is deceptive, and leads you to conclude on religion where it does not exist; the other shows you things as they are with unerring certainty. The one is deadly, it not only has no life, its tendency is to destroy life where it is; while the other is vivacious, where it is there is life, to that life it imparts additional vigour; it has an expansive power, which prepares it for emergency, and teaches it to gather confidence from difficulty, and life from exertion. This is true with remarkable uniformity. Endowment withers every thing it touches. Endow a royal academy, my Lord, and genius disappears; and commonplace men are drawn together, who wash each other's hands and repeat each other's praises, while the world leaves them to their monopoly and their insignificance. Endow a hospital, and

charity seeks some other sphere where she may offer voluntary service and spontaneous sympathy; while her place is filled by perfunctory persons who crave the place, not to pity the miserable, but to live in comfort. Endow a church, and religion declines and withers and dies; and formality, worldliness, and ultimately infidelity, take its place; except as this may be prevented by the action of different and *extrinsic* causes.

4. Finally it is objected, that it is an admitted principle of government that the *majority* must legislate for the *minority*, and that as the sectaries *are a minority* they must submit to their situation. If this question were of a *civil* nature, it would be subject to such a rule; but it is *wholly religious*, and the Dissenters deny, firmly deny, that the State has any right to come between a man's conscience and his supreme Judge on any pretence whatever.

But, assuming the right to act on such a principle in religious worship, it may then be inquired, Is this the principle which has settled the religion of Ireland?

Again, if the right is admitted, and if that right is to be exercised in favour of the majority, then the churchman must yield his place to the Dissenter, *for he has the majority*. Take the United Empire, and the majority is overwhelming;* take Great Britain, and it is very considerable; take only England and Wales, and it is still decided. The Dissenters have the larger congregations; they have the more communicants; their strength is in the middle classes; and the middle classes are proverbially the strength and beauty of the land.

If figures are demanded on this subject they are at hand; and they shall be supplied by the churchman rather than by the Dissenter. The Bishop of London, who is more enlightened on such matters than many, has stated several times in Parliament, that the Dissenters compose one-fourth of the people; and the expectation has been that the mind would pass to the conclusion, that the remaining three-fourths were churchmen. But such a conclusion is inadmissible. It appears by other evidence from the same quarter, that in the returns from one diocese, which may be taken as an average specimen, there were 110,000 persons composing the population; and that out of these only 19,069 were attendants at church, and only 4,134 attended the communion. This gives only about one-seventh as going to church, and about one in thirty-eight as using the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This would give, then, for the nation at large, scarcely 350,000 persons as in communion with the

* It is in round numbers as FIFTEEN MILLIONS to SEVEN MILLIONS!

church; and taking the proportion of attendants not at one-seventh but at one-sixth, it would give, in a population of 12,000,000, only 2,000,000; while, by the Bishop of London's low estimate (which we are far from allowing) the proportion of Dissenters is 3,000,000. But suppose it is insisted, that the gross numbers of the people must be made to tell on this question; then, my Lord, I boldly affirm, if it were submitted to the sense of the whole nation, whether the Episcopal church should stand on its merits, or be supported by the present State endowments, that the large majority would determine against a civil establishment of religion. And if this would be the issue when an expenditure of some 5,000,000*l.* annually in the United Kingdom is silently employing its amazing influence in favour of an establishment, what would be the size of the majority, if the nation were left to a disinterested and conscientious opinion?*****

Great men, it is said, are made for great occasions; but great occasions do not always attend them. Never, my Lord, was a government more happy in this particular than that with which you are connected. Already it has had opportunities of service, which ages might fail to supply; and still there are opportunities before it which might be sufficient to distinguish ages. Rightly improved, there are no blessings that the country needs, which, under Providence, they may not bestow. Religion may be freed from her encumbrances, and the State from her embarrassments. Sectarian animosities may be not only subdued but destroyed, and the fellowship of good citizens may be made complete. A fresh and mighty stimulus may be given to the piety, the education, the industry, the commerce of the land; and England's commonwealth may, in advanced age, renew her strength like the eagle; and all coming generations may point to the present passing page of her history as the brightest and the best which even she ever saw!

But it is proper to such patriotic expectations to remember, that the *opportunity* is equalled by the *responsibility*. Wellington's official life was too long for his official reputation; and what he lost has made the nation itself the poorer.