

It was the most conformable to the word of God of any existing church. Suppose this to have been really, prominently, the case, with regard to some one of them, and that this particular church had also possessed what all aimed at—the possession of superior zeal and prudence—had these things been so, we may suppose that this particular church might have been specially favoured as an instrument for the diffusion of the gospel; that it might have spread over the land, and have gradually absorbed within its body, not only other dissenting sects, but the established church itself, which losing their votaries would at length be obliged to relinquish the funds placed in their hands for religious purposes, and become altogether extinct. Such a church, if not a government church, would at least be a national church, and would naturally seek to make its funds as effective as possible for what would stand out before it as the great object of its existence—the training up the people in religion. Its churches would be large, numerous, durable; so would the houses of its clergy. As it would be economical, so, to avoid waste of its means, it is likely that in country places small glebes would be attached to these dwellings. The educational establishments of such a church would assuredly be extensive in their facilities, and liberal in their endowments. Nor, surely were there any portion of the people unable from poverty to procure for themselves the ministrations of religion, would it neglect to provide these for them. In this case it would hold it out to the rich, as their duty, to provide for the necessities of their poor brethren. Such a church could not be called voluntary, in the proper meaning of the term—in the sense of each individual in the community paying the pecuniary outlay, which the religious advantages he enjoyed actually cost. On the contrary, each really religious man, in as far as money was concerned, would owe the religion he enjoyed to contributions paid in years or ages before; and he himself in his contributions, would be making provision for religion reaching generations then unborn.

Such a church would approach in many particulars very nearly to our conceptions of an established church. It would differ from these in others.

The members of the community, neither as united into a whole civil body or state, nor as individuals, would be obliged in any shape to contribute to the support of the generally professed religion. The essence of its voluntarism would consist in this, that any one who chose to stand altogether aloof from the church, might avoid contributing towards it. We conceive that this is by

no means a desirable distinction. It seems to us contrary to the plainest principles of justice, in as much as these require an equivalent to be given for every advantage received. Now, in the first place, in such a community, there might be many individuals before whom religion was continually brought, and all its comforts presented, who yet defrayed not in the smallest degree the expenses of the establishment. Until they united themselves to the church, they would not contribute to its support. But besides this, whoever lives in a religious community, though he himself may live without religion, draws yet advantages—worldly advantages—from it, in the security, tranquility, and morality existing around him. The truth of this is manifested in the cause which men of this stamp have assigned for the existence of religion—in their assertion, that it owes its foundation to the wisdom of legislators, who have established it as a check to keep the passions of the multitude in salutary restraint. On these two accounts, therefore, it seems to us that it were an injustice—a thing essentially, and in itself wrong for individuals or a religious community not to contribute to the support of that religion. But, injustice is of a contagious nature. Where wrong is permitted among men, it seldom fails to breed wrong. We fear experience shows that such would be the case here. That the fact of many untaxed reaping the advantages which religion bestows on a community, would have the deplorable effect of turning the religious feelings of the community to perform the office of the tax gatherer. Men without religion would be marked, and so marked, that they would find their worldly prosperity and comfort injured by their apparent neglect of religion. Some would be driven into the fold in the garb of hypocrisy, others would stand out, exclaiming against, and conceiving themselves to be the victims of what they would term, priestcraft. Nothing more injurious to the cause of true religion can, we think, be conceived than such results. It saps the very root of the religion of love, when other feelings than pity predominate at the view of those who are void of religion. The evils and disorders which the being devoid of it may in this world give birth to, may indeed be the proper subject of indignation, but at the contemplation of the condition itself, christian charity smothers every feeling but commiseration. On this head therefore, giving to what is termed the voluntary principle all the extent, and all the success conceivable, we apprehend it would be seriously defective.

There is another head also on which it seems to us that a church established under this so named principle is naturally defective. When a church