

## THE DUTY OF MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS IN RESPECT TO THE SUPPORT OF THE GOSPEL.

### No. II. HYPOCRITICAL VOLUNTARISM.

The free-will offerings of the people of God, are the only means which the Scriptures recognise for the support and extension of the ordinances of the Gospel. And by such means God's cause has been legitimately supported in all past ages. The Tabernacle was raised, and all the sacred utensils provided—the Temple was built, and all its costly furniture constructed, by this means. And this means was never wanting when the heart was right with God. The people of God gave so liberally for the construction and erection of the Tabernacle, that they had to be restrained. Even in the provision made for the support of the ministers of religion, under the Old Testament dispensation, there were nothing like compulsory measures permitted. The people were told that it was their duty to give for this purpose, a specific portion of the produce of the land, viz: a tenth part, but the civil Ruler was not told to enforce this duty by pains and penalties. The Supreme Ruler took into his own hand the punishment of delinquents, and he punished them in his own way. See Mat. iii. 7-12.

Under the New Testament dispensation, the ordinances of religion are to be supported by the same means; and the law is only adapted to the Spirit of the Gospel, not changed. It is still the same in respect to the *persons* who are required to give—in respect to the *dispositions* with which they are to give—and in respect to the *amount* which they should give. Those who know and believe the truth of God, in reference to the support of the Gospel, do not need to be told that this is a duty as obligatory as any other command of God. They know and do their duty. To those persons, under God, we owe much of the life and activity that exist among the Churches of this land. They sustain the Gospel among themselves—they support all missionary and benevolent efforts—their Voluntaryism is of the right kind.

But there are not a few in connection with the congregations of all denominations of Christians in Canada, whose professed principles are the same, but whose conduct is greatly different. These persons may be truly designated *Hypocritical Voluntaryists*. And as we have a few things to say *about* them, and *to* them, we ask their special attention. And in order that our readers may be able to judge for themselves whether any of them belong to the same class, the following are some of the peculiarities by which hypocritical voluntaryists may be known:—

They are strong advocates for the voluntary support of the Gospel; but whether from selfishness or a belief of the truth, we will not presently stop to determine. As there are many "who hold the truth in unrighteousness, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness," so these false voluntaryists hold the truth in respect to the support of the Gospel, though in practice they are woefully deficient. They are acquainted with all the arguments, both for and against State-Churchism—they declare such policy foolish, unjust, and unscriptural—they profess to regard the receivers of State support and Government grants for religious purposes, as lovers of filthy lucre, political hirelings, not the shepherds of Christ's flock. And there is no term of obloquy too harsh to be applied to these objects of their professed dislike. Those who hear their professions of voluntaryism, and their indignant expressions of anger against all who receive State support, might be led, if they knew them not, to suppose that they were very liberal, that they never could be satisfied with much less than a tithe of their income. And more especially so, when it is known, that many of them profess that they receive from God all that they possess, and are indebted to him for all: occupying the position of "stewards of the manifold grace of God." All this would naturally lead any one to suppose that they were very consistent and liberal in their conduct. But what are the facts? Are there not many of those who hold the truth, and loudly profess it, that contribute little to the support of either religion or any other benevolent object? Managers of congregations, Deacons' Courts, and Sessions are witnesses of the truth of this accusation—so that this is not the experience of a solitary individual, but of many who take an interest in the progress of the Gospel. If the truth were fully known, some who stand high in the estimation of their brethren, as consistent Christians, would be regarded as fit subjects for Church censure. The spirit of the Gospel, when possessed, will lead

all to give freely, and as God has prospered them. This is true voluntaryism.

To those who are thus inconsistent, the following words of remonstrance are addressed:—

1. *Think how inconsistent your conduct and profession are.*—You profess a love for the truth—a strong regard for the Gospel as the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation. You profess to believe, that the voluntary offerings of God's people are the only Scriptural means by which the Gospel can be scripturally supported where it is already, and extended to those places which are still in ignorance and misery. Why is it that your conduct is so opposed to your principles? If you give at all to the support of the Gospel, it is both sparingly and grudgingly. You do not make God's bounty to you the measure of your liberality in his cause. Your ability is the standard of your duty.—Your obligations to God should be the motives of your exertions—not what men may think or say of your conduct. Have you, then, conscientiously served God with part of his own? But there is another view which you might advantageously take of your conduct, and here you may see the *injustice* as well as *inconsistency* of it. In a community of Christians, the ordinances of religion must be sustained. Now, in what way would this be done, if all acted as you do? How could churches be built, ministers sustained, and the incidental expenses of the congregation met? You would either let the cause expire, or apply to the state for aid, and then farewell to all professions of Voluntaryism. You say you contribute to the current expenses of the congregation! well, but to what extent, or with what dispositions? Small in proportion to your ability, and given grudgingly. This is evident from your conduct in certain circumstances. For example, should any untoward incidents arise in the congregation, or any movement occur that goes contrary to your wishes, you make these a pretext for withholding your pittance. This is not a fictitious sketch. It is the statement of fact. Nor is it a solitary case in a single congregation. There are not a few such cases in almost all congregations. You who act thus in such circumstances, seem to think that if the majority of the congregation in which you exist do not obey your will, they cannot have your aid. How inconsistent and unamiable does your conduct appear? How unlike His of whom it was written, "For our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich?" Your conduct plainly shows that your professed attachment to the Scriptural method of supporting the Gospel is all hypocrisy.

2. *Reflect on some of the evils which flow from your conduct—these are evils to the church or congregation of which you are members.*—Generally, all the efforts of the members of congregations, are required to sustain the ordinances of religion in a becoming manner, even when each member does his duty; and when each performs his part aright, all things work harmoniously and successfully. But when some either withhold their contributions, which are reasonably expected from, and honestly due by them, or when they give about the fifth or third part of what they should contribute, they are thus the cause of not a few of the evils which exist in congregations. Those who contribute their due share to support the ordinances of religion, must come forward and contribute in addition to what they have already given, or the cause sinks, and ultimately expires. This ruin is from the hands of such loud professors and mean performers of their duty. Even should the congregation survive such blighting influences, how mean and poverty stricken does the whole affair appear—the church is in a state deplorable to look at, like some forsaken ruin, hastening to decay, into which the snows drift during winter, and the ruins find ready access during summer, and neither comfort nor cleanliness are to be thought of at any time. Now, why are things thus in a land where there is such an abundance of wealth? It is evident that some must be very deficient in the performance of their duty—this must be charged on those who have abundance and do so little. And one of the aggravations of their sin is, that they know all this, and will make no effort to remedy it. They know that it takes all that can be raised, from those who are willing to contribute, to support the minister, and that by no means in luxury, so that the expenses necessary for the repairs, cleansing, and warming the church, are seldom obtained. These things fall as an extra burden upon the time or liberality of a few who do their duty. Is not this a very deplorable condition for congregations to be in, and especially for those whose members are known voluntaryists? This state of matters is attributable to those who make such boasting of