

ters proceed to define to themselves what it is they desire to accomplish, and how it is to be effected. The second resolution carried at Wednesday's meeting brings us face to face with what is perhaps the chief difficulty—viz., what plan is to be substituted for the existing system of patronage? It is easy to show that evils have resulted from the abuses of patronage, and that by cutting off the source of these we may hope for a beneficent widening of the circle of activity of the Church, which will enable her to become a greater power for practical good. But it is not so easy to devise a system of election which shall be alike free from these and from the opposite evils that flow from an unregulated and unlimited popular election. Anything that retains the act of election in the category of acts which are convertible with civil rights, therefore, which deprives the choice of a minister of the character of being purely 'spiritual,' will be declared by Free Churchmen to contain the elements of Erastianism. Yet we can hardly think that the Church of Scotland would be prepared simply to follow the example of, say, the Free Church, and introduce popular election *simpliciter* as a substitute for lay patronage. It is here that would come in the perilous question of 'spiritual independence,' which, though in no sense likely to become a practical, might very easily be made a very serious theoretical difficulty. We must hope that the present conductors of the movement in favour of abolition, who have shown themselves so wise and prudent hitherto, will be found capable of meeting and overcoming the difficulty in question when the proper time comes for dealing with it. In the meantime, their course is clear enough, and they have not, so far as we can see, been guilty of any act of imprudence which is likely to compromise or perplex their future proceedings. It is first of all desirable to bring the question before the country in such a way that an intelligent interest in it may be excited, and that the effort may attract as much and as wide a sympathy as possible, among Dissenters as well as Churchmen. There must afterwards be an application to Parliament, and it is only when that will have the support of the great mass of the people of Scotland who take any concern in such matters, that we can hope to receive the sanction and support of Parliament and the Government. Having that support, however, there should be no risk of refusal to be apprehended in these quarters. It is hardly to be anticipated, that even Scottish Dissenters will actively oppose the attempt to gain for the congregations of the Established Church a privilege which is already enjoyed by the con-

gregations of Dissenters. There are not very many, it may be hoped, who will be found of the same mind with Mr. Duncan M'Laren, whose Voluntary zeal withholds him from approving the granting of a boon which he believes to be the right of all Christian congregations, simply because it might incidentally become the means of strengthening the Church as a national and established institution.

"This, however, is the one point from which the danger of external opposition to the anti-patronage movement is most likely now to arise. While we cordially concur with the member for Bute in the belief that it is no fear of the Church being about to fall which prompts to the present effort, it is yet impossible to ignore the fact that there will be some—we trust not very many—who will throw obstacles in its way in case the removal of patronage might strengthen the State Church. As to such, we fear that no argument we could address to them would avail to convince them of the narrowness and essential intolerance of their view. The zeal of Voluntaryism eats them up; and although they cannot but see that Voluntaryism has quite failed to overtake the spiritual destitution of the country, they would rather imperil the best interests of the country than see an Established Church growing stronger in the possession of popular support and affection. But there surely cannot be many of this disposition. We ought, at least, to be able to appeal to Free Churchmen against any such narrowness of feeling and vision. The position of the Free Church has been, and partially still is, a protest against the idea that there can be no alternative between Voluntaryism and Erastianism. They maintain that the National Church ought to be a 'free' Church, and the attempt to realise what was their own idea should receive all their sympathies and support. And we are not without hope that it ultimately will. They have not yet forgotten the practical mischiefs and evils of Voluntaryism.

"And if there is any testimony to be borne to the reality of our collective responsibility as a community and as a nation, it can only be through a National and State Church. No other substitute has yet been invented. Voluntaryism runs naturally and necessarily into individualism, and therefore into a practical negation of the idea of any collective religious consciousness, and hence of any national or communal responsibility. Yet never more than now did that great truth require to be reasserted. We appeal to all loyal Free Churchmen who understand and appreciate the historical testimony of their own Church to help her to reassert this idea, and to join hands with