

their demands, though sanctioned by the law of the land, are stigmatised as unjust, unchristian, and sacrilegious. (3.) I should have no hesitation in avowing that, in my judgment, it would be a great boon to Scotland if, in the present divided state of its ecclesiastical idiosyncrasy, it had no State Church at all; and I contend that to pamper at the general expense of all the inhabitants a ministry, which is in many districts entirely useless, and which where it is efficient, ought to be supported by its own congregations, is a source of grievous and just heartburning to a great majority of the aggregate population, and one of the most powerful, most plausible, and most perilous stumbling-blocks to the mass of thinking and intelligent infidels, whose numerical strength and antipathy to our existing church systems, are, I believe, continually and alarmingly on the increase. I may add that I am one of those, be they few or many, who are convinced that the restoration of the Free Church to its former dependence on a compulsory State provision for its maintenance and efficiency, is neither practicable nor desirable.—Believe me to remain, very truly yours,

GEORGE SINCLAIR.

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LETTER II.

THURSO CASTLE, December 7, 1855.

It seems to me that one or both of two requisites are indispensable, in order to render a church "national." It must either be *professed* by a large majority of the inhabitants or supported at the expense of the State. The former of these advantages is not at this time possessed by any single denomination in Scotland—because each is greatly outnumbered by the aggregate adherents of the sections, which do not belong to it. In the other sense, that designation unquestionably appertains to the Established Church, as there are parties in every district, who (however entirely they may be opposed to its doctrines and polity) are legally compelled to maintain its functionaries—so as not only to provide them with a yearly income, but to build houses, furnish glebes, repair broken windows or garden walls, in short, fulfil every duty towards them, except that of levying any money out of their pockets for supporting the poor, in common with such of their parishioners as are not involved in absolute indigence.

Excepting in regard to the proportion of its members, the Establishment is not in a worse condition than that in which it has stood ever since the re-enactment of the law of patronage in the reign of Queen Anne, including, of course, the period at which many of the brightest ornaments of the Free Church, both deceased and surviving, were received within its pale, and took part in all the proceedings of its courts. No one dreamt of denying that it was the national church, even where Moderatism prevailed in a great majority of its pulpits, exercised an almost uncontrolled supremacy in its judicatures, and called in the aid of the civil magistrate to "honor Christ," by forcing, at the point of the bayonet, the despised and hated hirelings of the State Church upon reluctant and reclaiming congregations. A strenuous attempt was made, on the part of a zealous and devoted section of ministers and laymen, to abolish and abridge these anomalies and abuses. The power of the church to carry out certain changes without the sanction and concurrence of the State, with which it stood connected, was contested and brought under the review of the supreme civil authorities. Many eminent and respected judges maintained the legality of the course pursued by the church. A majority, however, of their brethren gave an opposite decision, and that decision was ratified by an unanimous verdict of the House of Lords. Now, I cannot help thinking that those who acquiesced in that judgment, and retained their position as members of the national church—I mean of the church acknowledged as such by the legislature—are alone entitled to be recognised in that capacity; and I must reiterate my conviction, that this view is entertained, I would almost venture to say, by every individual of every class and of every communion, not included within the pale of the Free Church. It is, therefore, in my opinion, not only useless, on our part, to urge such a pretension as that of being either numerically, or legally, or by general consent, regarded as the national church—but I fear that by urging such a claim, we bring upon ourselves the hostility, the distrust, and I had almost added the ridicule, of all ministers and members of every other denomination, and render it utterly impossible