

who desire friendly intercourse, and even union, if practicable on Scriptural grounds, to follow out, as they see cause, what are meant as mere suggestions.

The whole difference—if difference there be—is still, we think, connected with the power of the Civil Magistrate in matters of religion. Now, our brethren disclaim, they have told us often, all compulsion by the civil magistrate in spiritual matters as much as we do. We shall not imitate any of themselves by putting another construction on their words, and denying that this is true. We shall take them on their own declarations; and, therefore, to call ourselves Voluntaries and them Compulsories must be incorrect. What, then, is the difference? We agree on the great doctrines of grace; and in ecclesiastical worship, government, and discipline, there seems to be sufficient coincidence to warrant incorporation. Still the difference turns on the civil magistrate's power in matters of religion. What, then, is it? We apprehend the entire difference is more in words than in sentiments, and perhaps it rests a little on political views, slightly different. The difference appears to us to be simply and solely that in some things the action of the magistrate would by us be considered as out-stepping his prerogative (which is legislation only in civil matters), and interfering with the rights of conscience; whereas, in these things, our brethren conceive that he is acting within his prerogative, and no way interfering with the rights of conscience. Thus it is not in abstract principle that the difference lies, but in the application of the abstract principle. This difference—we hope the only one between the two Churches—so slight surely as should be a matter of entire forbearance, will be best illustrated by a few examples.

First of all, our brethren hold it to be lawful (they now say “in some circumstances”) for the magistrate to endow the Church. We hold, that in no circumstances whatever can this be lawful. Still these different opinions are held whilst the abstract principle—that the magistrate's duties are all civil, and that he has no right to trespass on the rights of conscience, is acknowledged and maintained by both Churches. And how is this made out? The Free Church, which has come a great length towards what we hold to be truth on the subject of Endowments since the Disruption, and is now in a great degree opposed to the civil endowment of religion—still hold that the magistrate presiding over the nation for its peace and prosperity, has a right to apply the funds, levied by taxes, or otherwise at his disposal, to what he conceives to be for the general good; these funds being brought into the exchequer, and having, as it were, become his own; and therefore that it is no compulsion, but the voluntary act of the legislature to grant what is thought necessary to endow the Church. But we, on the other hand, consider these funds as the property of the nation at large, and although at the disposal of the magistrate for civil purposes, even of some of which all may not approve, yet to dispose of any of them for religious purposes is overstretching his province, and interfering with the rights of conscience, because there may be many who conscientiously disapprove of the system of religion which is thus patronized, by indirectly compelling all the subjects to contribute to its support.

Take another case:—the Free Church think that the magistrate should provide religious education for the young, and, in order to this, should judge for his subjects between what is true and false in religion (which, it should be remembered, he must do also if he endow the Church). Here they think there is no compulsion, and no interference with conscientious rights. For if the education provided is not approved of by certain parties, they are not obliged to avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining it. But we object to this arrangement, not because we think the young should not be taught the principles of religion, but because it belongs to parents, and the different Christian denominations, to give their own children religious instruction, and because the magistrate has no right, as a magistrate, to decide as to what is