

Hints Illustrative of the Duty of Dissent

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HINTS
ILLUSTRATIVE
OF THE
DUTY OF DISSENT.

BY THE
REV. THOMAS BINNEY.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE substance of the following address was recently delivered at the Settlement of a Minister. Its publication was very strongly urged by many who heard it. The writer as strongly declined compliance. For this he had several reasons, of which he shall only mention one; namely, his wish not to publish on the subject in debate, unless he could go fully and argumentatively into the whole question. To this it has been replied, that the *brevity* and *popular* character of the present address, is just the circumstance which produces the wish for its appearance. He has been assured, too, that many small pieces are at present industriously circulated by the opponents of our pure and apostolical order, calculated to deceive the ignorant and unwary as to the nature of our principles, and even calumniating the character of those who hold them. He has consented, therefore, so far as to allow his observations to appear in the present form—as a small tract, without reference to the particular place in which they were delivered, thus

generally addressing themselves to any, anywhere, who might turn from larger and more laboured productions.

ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE THIRD EDITION.

THIS tract, which was published anonymously about twelve years ago, has been long out of print. The reason assigned in the preceding advertisement for the author's hesitation to publish it then, is of tenfold force at the present period. It is by no means what the necessities of the times require. He has been asked, however, for permission to re-print it, and he has given that permission, though with some reluctance. His hope is, that even these few weak and inadequate words may lead some to reflect on that, which, if ever a "duty," is a duty now—the duty of those, who, adhering to scriptural truth and spiritual religion, would be known to *protest* against the revival of Roman and anti-christian errors.

March, 1842.

HINTS,

&C.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS,

On occasions like the present, when, as *Congregational Nonconformists*, we assemble together for the express purpose of acting upon our peculiar principles, it is usual to commence the service by a statement of what these principles are, and *why* we attach to them such importance as actually either to secede from, or to refuse a connexion with, the Established Church. In the arrangements of this day, this duty devolves on me; and, after a few *preliminary observations*, I shall endeavour with great plainness and brevity to discharge it.

1. I observe, in the *first* place, that we think it neither *seemly* nor *wise* to dissent from the Established Church, *if it can be avoided*.

A 2

It is not *seemly*; because, it certainly would be well, at least at first sight it appears so, if not only all the Christians in one kingdom, but if all the Christians throughout the world, constituted one united denomination, "preserving the unity of the spirit," enjoying "the communion of saints," and presenting to all observers a harmony in doctrine, discipline, and ceremony. Besides, it is not seemly, because it *does* look *as if* we were not subject to "the powers that be as if we presumptuously opposed ourselves to the law of the land and "the wisdom of our ancestors;" as *if*, in fact, we were ungrateful to the king for the religion and the means of religion which he offers to his people, and, by thus rejecting his gifts, deserve to be deemed as but "half-Englishmen." It is not to be denied, that it does seem desirable that *both* these appearances could be avoided, and therefore we assert, that, so far as *we* are concerned, our feelings, both as Christians and as Britons, would, if they *could* be avoided, lead us to avoid them.

It is not *wise*, I mean *politic*, in the usual

sense of the term, because, (whatever may be the case with individuals,) as a *body* we gain nothing by it, but we lose much. We stand a grade lower, in the general estimation of our fellow countrymen, than we should do if we did not dissent. Our ministers are sometimes exposed to insult, often to ridicule, and always regarded as officially inferior to the established clergy. Our people voluntarily burthen themselves, in addition to all that they are compelled to contribute to the national religion, with—what indeed they do not think a burthen, but what they might avoid—the positive expense of building places of worship, maintaining that worship, and supporting the men “who are over them in the Lord.”

2. Now, I observe, secondly, that, on the *first* of these accounts, we *ought* not to dissent unless we believed we had good reason for it; unless we felt it to be a positive duty, and were fully persuaded that, in doing so, *we* neither violated the unity of the church, nor yet departed from our political

allegiance. And, I observe, also, that on the *second* of these accounts, we have a right to claim—I will not say the candour, but the *justice*, of our fellow Christians and our fellow countrymen, in judging of our conduct; for, no thoughtful man *would* dissent if he did not think that he *had* good reasons for it, seeing that, by such an act, he entails upon himself much, which it is both natural and proper to desire to avoid.

3. It is to be next observed, that we are by no means chargeable with the perpetual inculcation, or even the perpetual eulogy of our principles, in the course of our customary services. No: themes of higher moment—subjects directly connected with the conversion of sinners and the sanctification of the faithful, are those which occupy our energy and zeal. I will undertake to assert, that if, in any part of the kingdom you please to select, you were to attend the services of fifty parish congregations, and of fifty dissenting churches, you would find just this difference between them

—that, in the latter, there would be far *more* proofs of their uniformity of faith, and far *fewer* allusions to their “truly pure and apostolical worship.”

4. On this account, therefore, I further observe, that there *is* a propriety in taking advantage of occasions like these, to explain, establish, or defend those sentiments “which are most assuredly believed among us”—sentiments which, while we regard them as important, we yet do not suffer to interfere with the spiritual aim of our sabbath ministrations.

5. I observe, *lastly*, that in doing this, we do not do it by way of *apology*. We do not consent to be looked down upon from the high places of the Establishment, as persons chargeable with some weakness or guilty of some wrong, and who need therefore to advance some extenuating plea, for the purpose of evading reproof, or of mitigating censure. No, by no means. We consider that *we* are right, and that the Es-

tablishment is wrong. We are far more disposed to pity or to reprove *its* supporters, than to think of accepting pity or reproof from *them*. We know, indeed, that they are superior to us in many things that are “highly esteemed among men but, we conscientiously believe that we are superior to them in that “which is approved of God”—that, we mean, which directly relates to the present subject:—*our's* we think is the superiority of truth, *their's* the superiority of external distinction.

II.

I now proceed to the matter immediately before me.

I propose simply to present an outline of the principal reasons why we do *not* belong to the Established Church: this will, of course, involve an answer to the question, why we *do* belong to the churches of the Congregational order.

Our objections to the Church of England consist of three separate series of arguments, which, for the sake of distinction, we shall call the POPULAR, the ECCLESIAS-

TICAL, and the EVANGELICAL. The first is sufficient to make a man dissatisfied with things as they are: the second to lead him to object to the constitution of the Church of England specifically; and the third to compel him to renounce all national churches whatsoever. *We* feel the force of all three. Their accumulated amount weighs with our reason, and their combined power compels the obedience of our conscience and conduct.

Now, in proceeding to explain our meaning more fully, let us suppose that

A BENEVOLENT FRIEND

was at our side, exhorting us, from his own persuasion of the propriety of the act, to conform to the Church *just as it is*. To such an exhortation we should reply, that it was utterly impossible; that we could not do it, on account of a series of objections, which we should denominate

THE POPULAR:

in illustration of which, we should pursue a train of remark something like this.

By this term we mean to designate all those objections which arise from such things in the *practice* or in the *formularies* of the Church, which are seen to be wrong even by the vulgar; which are so palpably inconsistent with common sense and common virtue, that they are universally stigmatized as errors and defects; which often provoke the ridicule of the profane, strengthen the unbelief of the infidel, and occasion sorrow to the serious and the good. In this list we should place such things as pluralities, non-residence, patronage, tithes, wealth of the superior and poverty of the working clergy—baptismal regeneration, priestly absolution, the pretence of conferring the Holy Ghost on clerical candidates, and the laxity of the mode of admission both to office and to membership. These are some of the things which go to make up the Popular Objection to the Church as established by law. They by no means constitute in our view the *strongest* ground of objection, yet we do feel their force; we feel it in common with the great mass of the people;

every one that has an eye to observe, and a head to think, feels it; members and ministers of the Church itself feel it; they mourn and lament, some of them in private, some of them in print, (witness Nihill, Riland, Acaster,) over these monstrous parts of their own system. We do *more*. We could not be satisfied with lamentations. We dare not call such a system *our's*. We should think it wrong to sanction it by our example. We stand aloof, therefore, from its adherents and from *it*: and by doing so, it is our design thus *to offer a constant public protest* against the support and continuance of such flagrant enormities.

It is not my intention to expatiate at large on the *particulars* I may enumerate under each of the classes of objections to which I must advert. My purpose, as I have said, is to put you in possession of the Outline of our views, and to leave the filling up principally to yourselves. I shall not, therefore, attempt to expose, by any extended observations, the great evil of those things which I have just mentioned—the mere

mention, in fact, of most of them is exposure enough. What more, for instance, do we want, than to hear or read these words?—
“We yield thee hearty thanks, Most Merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee *to regenerate this infant by thy Holy Spirit; to receive him for thine own child by adoption; and to incorporate him into thy holy church.*” Or, what more do we need, than to hear that infant afterwards taught to say, that *“in baptism it was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and the inheritor of the kingdom of heaven?”* Or, what more do we need, than to listen, a little afterwards, to this description of that infant and others, in a solemn address to Deity?—
“*Almighty and everlasting God, who hast vouchsafed to regenerate these thy servants by water AND THE HOLY GHOST, and hast given unto them forgiveness of all their sins!*” Or, what more do we need, than to hear one sinful man thus express himself to another?—
“Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him,

of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences, and, *by his authority, committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost!*" Or, what more do we need, than to know that the following expressions are invariably employed at the burial of the dead?—first, "*Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed:*" then, "*Almighty God—we give thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world, &c.*"—Now, if any sentences can be framed to express and to foster error, these are such sentences; yet, every minister of the Church expresses, in the presence of God, his unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing in the book from which they are taken; and every member of the Church sanctions the system of which it is a part.

To a conscientious evangelical churchman, I would urge, in relation to these ex-

pressions, such remarks as the following: Either these expressions mean what they say, or they mean nothing—they are mere words. If they mean nothing, they are known to do so, either by both parties—those who pronounce and those who hear them; or only by one, namely, those by whom they are employed. Take any of these suppositions you please, and you will find yourself on the horns of a double dilemma. *If they mean what they say*, they express that which is unscriptural and false, and they perpetually repeat it; they meet us in every important crisis from the cradle to the grave, and always in the form of a dangerous delusion.—If they mean *nothing*, and are thus universally understood by *both* parties, then they are a solemn mockery, than which nothing can be conceived more tremendously awful.—But, if they mean nothing, and are known to do so only by *one* party, then, in addition to this attribute of awfulness, they are the means of conveying, to the minds of numbers, ideas, which *must* be injurious and *may* be fatal.

If it should be objected that this alterna-

tive is not fair, and that these expressions *do* mean something—something between the all and the nothing—to that I should reply, that—it seems difficult to conceive it;—but that, if it be so, it must be difficult to decide what that something is; there must hence be perpetual danger of very serious misconception; and this, to the mind of a conscientious man, must be a constant source of anxiety and grief.

To such a man I should further say, Would you expunge these passages if you could? or would you cease to use them if you might?—If so, can you wonder that we, whose hearts are not burthened by the compulsion to repeat them, should “stand fast in the liberty” which it is our happiness to enjoy, and should resist a conformity that would bring us into bondage?

We shall now briefly notice one or two of the particulars which constitute the other half of the class of Popular Objections. These are to be found, as we observed, in certain *practices* of the Church, and here again our

exposure shall be little more than the bare and brief mention of the facts themselves.

What more then, we ask, can be required, beyond the simple statement of such things as the following? Hundreds and thousands of persons—moral, intelligent, accountable beings—who are charged in the words, or by the authority of Christ, whose laws they have in their hands, and to whom they are responsible—who are charged, “to take heed what they hear;” “to beware of false prophets;” “to prove all things;” “to try the spirits whether they be of God”—these persons will all be transferred by one man to another, neither of whom they may have ever seen; they will be transferred, without their consent and without being consulted; they will be transferred, and will be compelled to regard themselves as the spiritual possession of this stranger, and to receive and submit to him as their spiritual guide, even though he should prove both incompetent and immoral: and sometimes this will be done by way of sale—in consequence of advertise-

ments in the public prints, and as the result of pecuniary arrangement. Then, after this transfer is made, the person to whose spiritual care all these people are committed, may seldom go near them; he may receive at a distance and spend as he pleases the proceeds of the flock, but he may perform the work of the pastor by proxy; and, still farther, it may happen, that, to a certain extent, he cannot do otherwise, for, he may sustain this same relation to other flocks, and as no mortal possesses the attribute of ubiquity, he *must* be present somewhere only by his representative.

Now, nothing, we repeat, is required beyond the simple statement of these astounding facts. The mere mention of them shocks and lacerates our moral sense; if that moral sense be cultivated and improved, by a knowledge of apostolic Christianity, and of the customs of the primitive church, the shock it sustains is proportionally severe; the facts are then seen to be as inconsistent with the spirit of our Faith, as they are felt to be repugnant to the conclu-

sions of our reason. By looking back to the days of the Apostles, we find that there might indeed be more *ministers* than one to the same congregation, but there never was more *congregations* than one to the same minister. We find, that the duties arising from the pastoral relation, are described to be such, as never *could* and never *can* be discharged but by the pastor in person. And we find, from Christian antiquity, that the voice of the people in the election of the pastor was unquestionably heard in the primitive church; but, what is better than this, we find that the commands of Christ are obviously such, as to constitute this power on the part of the people, not only a right, but a duty; it is a thing which no Christian is authorized to give up even if he would, for he is amenable to the Lord for its proper exercise; and it is one which no man or body of men should be allowed to usurp, for such usurpation is not only an infringement upon Christian liberty, but an obstacle to the discharge of Christian obligations. This, however, *is* done, and done

most extensively, in the Church as established by law. I have seen it stated that, out of the 10,891 livings which are comprehended in the Church, there are just 64 in the gift of the inhabitants: all the rest are in the hands of public bodies; the Universities; Government; the Church itself; and individuals.—We separate from such a church, or we stand separate. We either positively secede by our own advised and voluntary act, or we retain, from principle, the position we occupy by the accident of birth. We can neither sanction a system of delusion, nor countenance the mockery of worship. We *will* not yield our privilege, and we *dare* not disobey our Master.

Such would be the train of observation, or something like it, which we should offer to the person, whom we formerly supposed to be standing at our side, and asking us to conform to things *as they are*. We should say, “Whatever may be *your* judgment of these things, *our’s* is such as to render your request useless—useless absolutely and for

ever. It cannot for a moment be entertained. Our repugnance to it is increased by every renewed observation of those matters to which we have adverted—matters which, from their plain and obvious character, constitute what we term the *Popular Argument* for Protestant Dissent.”

III.

But we now advance a step further. Let us imagine the individual to whom we should address ourselves, to address us in return, and to do so in these words.—“I have listened to your objections. Without referring to the impression which they make on *my* mind, (which is not the question,) it is enough that I admit them to be formidable to *your's*. I do admit that. And now, upon such admission, I ask you, suppose I had the power to destroy them—these errors, defects, abuses, or whatever they may be—and suppose I actually did so; suppose I could entirely remove, and *did* remove, both from the *Formularies* and the *Practices* of the Church, those things of which you

complain—would that satisfy you? Would you conform then?”—We should reply, “No:”—for then we should produce another class of objections, of a kind less popular than that hitherto employed, but more forcible to some minds. This would be what we should denominate

THE ECCLESIASTICAL:

that is, we should say, that Diocesan Episcopacy is *not*, according to our views, the form of church order and government which was sanctioned by the Apostles, and prevailed, under their observation, among the primitive believers.

In support of this opinion, we should urge such considerations as the following.

1st. That Bishop and Presbyter were different names for the same office.

Paul sent for the *Elders* of the church, and addressed them as *Bishops*. Titus, in ordaining *Elders*, was to see that they were blameless, for a *Bishop* must be such. The

Elders are exhorted by Peter to the performance of the duties of a *Bishop*.★

2nd. That the word *church* literally signifies an assembly; that, in its ecclesiastical use in the New Testament, it signifies an assembly or “congregation of faithful men”—persons voluntarily united together in the profession of the gospel and the enjoyment of ordinances; and that it is never applied to a *number* of such assemblies spread over a province.

We read, not of the church, but of the “*churches* of Galatia;” “the *churches* of Asia” “the *churches* throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria.”†

3rd. That in each of such congregations there might be, and that in many of them there were, several Bishops, Elders, and Presbyters, as at Ephesus and Philippi.‡

4th. That Timothy and Titus were not

★ Acts, xx. 17, 28. Titus, i. 5-7. 1 Peter, v. 1, 2.

† Gal. i. 2. 1 Cor. xvi. 19. Acts, ix. 31.

‡ Acts, xx. 17. Philippians, i. 1.

Bishops, either in the New Testament sense of the term, or in the modern; but, that they sustained an extraordinary office, between an Apostle and a Bishop.*

5th. That *Priests* are not known in the New Testament at all as *officers* of the church.†

6th. That the Apostles, as such, left no successors; and that Bishops and Deacons, the one class spiritual, and the other principally secular, are all that appear to have a divine sanction, as ordinary and permanent officers in the Church of Christ.

By these and such like considerations, we should say, that, to us, it appears esta-

* They had no specific charge. They were sent to *various* places, to perform a particular work. When they left those places the churches were complete without them; their office therefore was not necessary to that completeness.

† Christ is "the Great High Priest," and the whole church are "a royal priesthood;" there is no *order* of priests distinct from the body of the faithful. One Christian is as much a priest as another.

blished, beyond the possibility of question, that the primitive Elder, or Bishop, was simply the Pastor, or one of the Pastors, of a single congregation or church; that he was the Bishop of a people, but never of a place; and that, the New Testament describes no other, except as it describes Christ the universal Bishop, and *Anti-Christ*, "the man of sin." We should say also, that it appears to us further established, that the primitive congregations or churches were independent of each other; that the ministers were *all* Bishops, and, all officially equal; and that they could exercise no power, authoritatively, either over each other, or beyond the society with which they were connected.

These conclusions we consider to be directly derived from Scripture, and, therefore, with us they have the weight of God's authority, and *that* of itself is all that is required to justify the rejection of what is opposed to them. We might refer, however, in confirmation of our conclusions, to some statements in the writings of the Fa-

thers, and to the repeated acknowledgments of Episcopalians themselves. The one would be found expressly to assert that Bishop and Presbyter were *at first* the same; and the other to confess, that Diocesan Episcopacy is not of Christ—that it is not of the Apostles—that it is not of the first age; but that it is an *expedient* adopted by the wisdom of man, for the better regulation of the Church of God.

Now, we question the propriety of adopting this expedient. We think, that, although a complete system of church polity, down to every iota, may not be revealed in the New Testament, yet, that so much as *is* revealed has, in its great general principles, the character of law;—that there may be something, perhaps, more nearly approaching to a system on this subject than many imagine, although it be not systematically revealed, for it is admitted there is a system of doctrines, yet *they* are not systematically revealed;—that, if there be anything like a primitive model at all, the nearer we can approach that model the better;—that va-

riations from it should only be in matters of absolute necessity, should never be opposed to or violate what is positively known, and should extend only to circumstantials, leaving general principles, and admitted institutions untouched, and in fact aiding their operation;—that the principle of expediency can never be allowed to such an extent as to destroy *these*;—that, in the constitution of the English Church, it *is* thus allowed—it has virtually annihilated one office of apostolical appointment, and divided the other into three orders, if not into more;★—and, we think, moreover, that it

★ Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, are the three orders of ecclesiastical officers in the Church of England: but neither the first nor the last bears any resemblance to the offices described by these names in the New Testament; and the second is not a New Testament term at all. The fact seems to be, that they are three *degrees* into which the primitive office of Presbyter has been divided, while the primitive deacon has disappeared altogether, except as his duties are discharged by the churchwarden. Prebendaries, Deans, Sub-deans, &c. &c. belong to the second order, and constitute gradations in *that*; they look, however, like offices superior to it, and thus *appear* to multiply the divisions of the primitive institute.

has not been found expedient, in *fact*, thus to have departed from the original idea, Diocesan Episcopacy having been the commencement of Popery when it begun, and being the remains of Popery wherever it continues.

On all these considerations, therefore, we should be compelled to say to the friend who invited us to conform to things as they *are*, that we could not even conform to things as they *might* be;—that believing a scrupulous adherence to the will of Christ, in the constitution and order of the Church, to be imperatively demanded of those “who profess and call themselves Christians;”—and, believing that Diocesan Episcopacy is an unauthorized and great departure from that will,—we could not belong to a church *which claims for it the character of a Divine constitution*; no, not even if all the evils which give rise to the popular outcry were benevolently swept away, to make room for our cordial conformity.

IV.

But we must advance further than this. Let us suppose that the kind and accommodating friend, who offered, if he had the power, to remove the Popular stumbling block out of our way,—let us suppose him advancing along with us, and actually offering to remove the Ecclesiastical one as well. As he addressed us before he may address us now:—“I have again listened to your objections, and I again remark, that, without stating what may be their impression on *my* mind, it is enough that I admit them to be formidable to *your's*. I do so. But I repeat my offer to remove them. I will not only do away with all the evils which you formerly complained of, but I will do away with Episcopacy too, and will *that* satisfy you?—will you conform *then?*” We should reply, “At the hazard of being thought both ungrateful and captious, we are compelled to state that *even then we could not conform.*” “Not conform

then!—why?” “Why,” we should say, “because of an objection which we term

THE EVANGELICAL,

the strongest objection of all—one arising from the very nature of the Evangelical Dispensation itself; a dispensation which presents religion under such a form, places it under such laws, and upholds it by such institutions, as *do not admit* the interference of secular power, in the way that an Establishment requires it. The exercise of this power on your behalf is the very thing in which you glory, but, in our estimation ‘such glorying is not good.’”

We are thus brought to the last line of argument—the last of the three to which we formerly referred. Nothing but a mere sketch of it can be given, and nothing else should be expected, in an address so limited as this. We shall confine our attention to a few specific points, arising from the views we entertain of the Church of Christ.

It *might* be shown, indeed, on general

principles, that secular establishments of religion, if proper under one government, are proper under all; that, if one king has the right to decide in religious matters for his subjects, every king has it; that a right of imposition implies the duty of obedience; and that hence, disobedience, in *any* instance, must be wrong. The principle ultimately leads to this: that the Apostles, who certainly were *not* subject to the higher powers in religious matters, were guilty of a sinful and schismatical dissent:—nay, I do not know hut that it might he proved, from this principle, that God has made it the right of some men to impose falsehood, and the duty of others to believe it.—It might be shown, that the authoritative imposition of religion by the magistrate involves an absurdity, by attaching a fundamental contradiction to the constitution of nature; for, it must be admitted, that whatever laws human legislators have the *right* to make, they must be in possession of the *power* to enforce: but they have *not* the power to enforce religious laws; they may enforce

outward conformity, but that is not obedience to laws establishing articles of faith; conviction is the only obedience to what prescribes opinion, and *this* they cannot compel;—such is the constitution of the nature of man, and such therefore is the voice of God, uttering its pointed opposition to the presumption and the absurdity of governors, when they dare to touch what is beyond their province.—It might be shown, that religious establishments are inconsistent with the exercise of certain virtues, which are *assuredly known* to be incumbent on governors—such as economy and justice: with the first, because they offer an expensive premium for what could be better and abundantly supplied without them; and with the second, because they impose a tax which interferes with conscience, and which no government therefore has a right to impose.—It might be shown, that establishments are even dangerous to religion; that they are a temptation to its being professed without conviction; that they do not leave it to the moral

means which are exclusively sanctioned by God, and are alone agreeable to the nature of truth and the nature of man; and that they at once provoke infidelity, and propagate delusion.—It might be shown, that establishments of Christianity not only derive no countenance from that of Judaism, but are actually condemned by it when properly understood; for, not to mention that God has abrogated that system, and thus forbidden our taking it as a model—that he is not the Political Head of our nation, or of any nation, as he was of the Jews—that though it was right for *Him* to establish a religion, it cannot from that be proved to be right in *us*—without mentioning these matters, or at least dwelling upon them, it may be observed, that the state of things under the ancient economy was probably typical of what ought to be the state of things under the gospel: that is to say, that, just as the Jewish nation was separated from all others, and placed under one Lord and Lawgiver,—so is the Church now to be separate from all foreign interference, and to acknow-

ledge one Lawgiver and Lord—Jesus Christ. It might be shown, that this principle, inculcated by every thing in the Old Testament and every thing in the New, is just that thing which establishments necessarily set at defiance.—It might be shown, that establishments have always impeded the active and energetic diffusion of religion; that, when they have had nothing to contend with, the public mind, of which they were then the sole guardians, has invariably been in its worst state of ignorance and debasement; that it has only been by the stimulus of rival sects that their apathy has been aroused, and shamed into exertion; that all measures of any thing like enlightened and apostolic philanthropy have been doomed to encounter their prolonged opposition, and that even to this day their sons who support them are regarded as hardly true to their colours and their clan.—It might be shown—but I have done with generalities. I will come to direct “revelations of the Lord.” I will advert to matters on which the authority of Scripture seems very

express, and on these I will rest the force of the Evangelical Objection.

An Established Church, then, I observe is opposed to the *spiritual constitution* of the Church of Christ, for, of *that* church men become members, not by birth—not by ink biting a certain territory, but by profession of the faith. Of the Church of England every Englishman as such is a part—every member of the commonwealth is a member of the church; for, the church (according to Hooker) is the commonwealth itself, viewed under another aspect, and distinguished by another name.—It is opposed to the *purity* of the Church of Christ; for it is an injunction, partaking of the nature of a permanent law, that unworthy members are to be cut off. In the Church of England this cannot possibly be done; the great majority of its members *are* unworthy; they cannot be excluded, or, if they were, it would not be by the church properly so called—It is opposed to the *benevolence* of the

Church of Christ in the exercise of discipline; for, of that church, "*sufficient* is the punishment which is inflicted of many." In the Church of England it is *not* sufficient; excision is followed by disastrous consequences of a secular nature; the spirit of James and John, which Jesus condemned, is substituted for that which he imparted to Paul.—It is opposed to the *independence* of the Church of Christ; in the Church of England all has been fixed, and nothing can be improved or altered but by act of Parliament—that is, a secular assembly, an assembly composed for the most part of worldly and of wicked men, has the power of dealing with this church as they please: they could alter her Articles; they could change her form; they could remodel her priesthood; they could abrogate her ceremonies;—even a prayer cannot be legally offered by her, until a secular council commands her highest spiritual functionary to prepare it! and all this, observe, according to the constitution of the Church of England, is lawful and right. If Parliament *did*

all that we have mentioned, churchmen, to be consistent with themselves, should meekly submit to it, and display their subjection to the powers that be.—An Established Church is opposed to the *unity* of the Church of Christ; the unity enforced by St. Paul, is substantial agreement in essential things, with mutual liberty in matters of subordinate concern} we are not bound to receive and hold communion with those who deny what we believe to be the former, but we *are* bound to receive those who, as to the latter, may differ from us, but who are “fully persuaded in their own minds—all this, the Church of England subverts; while it includes as its members all of every creed and of no creed, who have not been legally excommunicated, it holds communion with no part of the Universal Church whatsoever; it is essentially and necessarily schismatic; its terms are, conformity to *it*—conformity without the liberty of difference on points non-essential; it holds communion with no dissenting church;—it holds communion with no established church;—nay, it does

not even hold communion with the *Episcopal* Church of Scotland;★ it *cuts itself off* from the whole Christian body—*separates* itself from all who will not acknowledge in it a power the exercise of which Christ has forbidden!—It surrenders, in fact, its catholicity as a church, and becomes a union of sectaries—of separatists—of schismatics! Individuals in it are holy and excellent; but *the principle* of the confederacy of which they are a part, (an exclusive establishment,) involves in it, necessarily, the element of *schism*.

Again:—an Established Church is inadequate to the purposes for which it is proposed. These purposes are said to be to preserve uniformity of faith in its ministers, and to provide religious instruction for the people. That of this country does neither. It includes all possible forms of error—every grade of doctrine, from the hottest antinomianism down to the most freezing socinianism—and this too among the men (may God forgive them!) who have all solemnly

★ This state of things was recently put an end to by *Act of Parliament*.

signed the very same Articles! And, as to the *instruction* it furnishes, it is insufficient in *quantity*; not only is it inadequate to the wants of the people, but numbers of those who receive pay for the purpose supply comparatively nothing; and, as to its general *quality*, I appeal to the conscience of any evangelical churchman to say, whether nine-tenths of it be not as bad—aye, worse than none?—In fact, such churchmen themselves proclaim it. In London and large towns they violate their own principles and act upon *our's*. Not one in a hundred accepts of the instruction which the State provides. They wander from their parish, and elect their own ministers by deciding for themselves on whom they will attend: and so far they are right. But they are wrong in not dissenting altogether, and thus, like honest men, protesting against a system which they have ceased practically to respect—a system whose laws they violate, whose authority they despise, whose constitution they condemn. They *do* all this—and they ought to say it.

We *do* say it. We condemn and we separate from a system, which we feel persuaded is inconsistent with the nature of the kingdom of Christ. The evils we have enumerated result from the secular alliance of Church and State; and such ever *will* result as long as the adulterous connexion continues. To the friend, therefore, whom we suppose to be soliciting our conformity, we should be compelled to declare that it was still impossible;—that, believing the connexion adverted to to be displeasing to God—dangerous to religion—destructive of the imperative duties and of the distinguishing attributes of the true church—inimical to the argumentative and moral triumph of truth—and inconsistent with the rights which Christianity recognises in man—we *dare* not conform to any established community whatever—no, not even if that community were our own. *Our* principles, indeed, are incapable of coalescing with human power and parliamentary establishments; but, supposing it were possible for the State to offer to us its alliance

and its rewards,—it would be our duty to say, and we trust we should have virtue to say it, “Thy gifts be unto thyself: the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but spiritual; and so long as they remain so—and only so long—we expect them to prove mighty through God.”

Such are the three series of Objections—the Popular, the Ecclesiastical, and the Evangelical—each of which appears to us powerful in itself, but all of which, when combined, are to our minds utterly irresistible, convincing us, with a force approaching to demonstration, that we *ought not* to belong to the church, “as established by law.” Observe, however, that we condemn no man who conscientiously believes that it is his duty to belong to it; we extend to him the same liberty which we claim for ourselves. In all the remarks which we have made, however strongly we have spoken, let it be remembered that we condemn the *system*, not the men;—to them we owe charity, but we owe none to their

errors:★ we feel therefore that love to churchmen is perfectly consistent with opposition to the church. We believe and know, that in an Establishment there are many holy and excellent individuals,—men of apostolic zeal, eminent spirituality, and extensive usefulness; we honour and esteem them; but, at the same time, we do not hesitate to express our conviction, that such persons are what they are, and accom-

★ This distinction should never be forgotten. It should never be forgotten in practice; and it should never be forgotten in judging of controversial writings, as it may prevent the injustice which would be committed by interpreting expressions relating to *things* as if intended to be applied to men. Dissenters and Churchmen may mutually respect each other's persons, though neither can think the error of the other indifferent. They may unite in every good work as far as they agree, and, in doing so, neither is to be regarded as either deserting his own peculiarities, or as approving those of the other. The consistent and candid of both parties will feel that there is no separation between *them*, though there is an irreconcilable separation between their *systems*. A Churchman *might* not to think Dissent a trifle, and a Dissenter *cannot* think an Establishment one: but this need be no obstacle to the most cordial esteem and attachment between the persons as individuals, and their voluntary union as such in the promotion of the principles and ends of their common Christianity.

plish what they do, in *spite* of their system, and not as the result of it. In preaching, for instance, they are useful by the exhibition of truths *common* to every portion of the Universal Church; and in private means of improving their flocks, they succeed just in proportion as they become irregular; the more they employ customs which prevail among us, or approach to our's, the more they find themselves "blessed in their work." If it be said, that many hear them in the church who would not enter a conventicle for the purpose,—we reply,—that that is a prejudice for which the church herself is accountable. It proves nothing hut the schismatical tendency of such institutions.

V.

We must now draw these observations to a close; and, in doing so, let us suppose the friend who has all along kindly listened to them, and who formerly proposed to remove out of our way both the Popular and the Ecclesiastical Objection,—let us suppose

him to address us again, and to address us thus—"If you were really to get rid of all that you oppose,

WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE LEFT?"

To such a question we should reply, that we should have left—*this*—nothing more than this—and that we wanted nothing more:—That is, we should have left—"a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure word of God would be preached, and the sacraments be duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same;" we should have these persons united together in the voluntary profession of the Christian Faith; we should have them formed into a society or church with a Bishop or Bishops over them, to preach, to dispense the ordinances, and to interpret and execute the law of Christ in the government of the Church; with Deacons, to attend principally to serving of tables,—to matters of pecuniary contribution and expense,—in some degree to the sick, and in a great degree to the poor;—

we should have persons added to the church because they believed, and because they voluntarily desired thus to express their belief, and to obey their Lord;—and we should have persons who behaved disorderly cut off from the church, and *that* as a punishment purely spiritual, and inflicted of many; we should have a people who *could* “try the spirits”—*could* “take heed to what they heard,” and who *would* do it—who would choose those who, as the Bishop or Bishops of the church, were to rule over them, and who, in doing this, would feel that they at once exercised a right and discharged a duty; and finally, we should have a people who would voluntarily minister of their substance to those that taught them, and whose only request of the Government would be—“Let us alone—do not injure us by unjust partiality to others—do not encumber us by proffering aid that we do not want—do not cripple, and corrupt, and bribe us, by immunities and gifts which will diminish our purity and destroy our independence—LET US ALONE—we ask nothing else from *you*—

whatever else we *do* want we can have it from heaven.”

This is what we should have left, if all and every thing were removed to which we have objected. We should have many such churches. They would be *very* like those which the Apostles organized,—which originally multiplied with amazing rapidity,—and which by this time would have filled the whole earth, had they not first departed from their primitive simplicity, and then formed a criminal alliance with secular power. A church constituted in the manner described, forms, we believe, the safest sanctuary for the truth, and the most efficient instrument for its perpetuity and diffusion, for it is most congenial both with the properties of truth and with the nature of man.

Such are our sentiments, and such in some measure are our churches. Such churches we believe will continue to multiply, and such sentiments to prevail, in proportion as knowledge is extended and the gospel understood. We do not assert,

observe, that we think one certain form of the church, in every minute particular, will ever universally prevail: but we *do* assert, that it is our firm belief that all national establishments will fall; that the spirituality of Christ's kingdom will come one day to be fully acknowledged, and the legalized interference of worldly men be utterly and for ever expelled from it. Then,—freed from such earthly adhesions as enter into the essence of a state-religion; adhesions which, while they aggravate its pomp, defile its beauty and darken its lustre—delivered from *these*, “it will shine forth clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and to its enemies terrible as an army with banners.”

VI.

Christian brethren—members of this church, *you* are united together upon the principles we have endeavoured to state; you have *acted* upon them; and you are met this day to ratify such action, and to supplicate the blessing of Almighty God upon your conduct and your choice. May

the principles upon which your fellowship is founded, and in accordance with which our churches are regulated, ever be dear to you. Prove this, by discharging the obligations which Christian communion creates—by constant attendance with the church in all its services—by enlarged scriptural acquaintance with your principles themselves, and by not being ashamed either to hear, to profess, or to teach them. Next to pure doctrine in a church, pure and primitive order is important. There are many, professedly among ourselves, who think too little and too lightly of this—who betray a leaning towards a more splendid ceremonial, and who seem half afraid of the simplicity of our pure and apostolical churches; while many of those who are devotedly attached—some from mistaken judgment, and others from uninquiring prejudice—to the form and fact of an endowed establishment, are ever ready to show something like contempt towards our truly venerable because primitive Episcopacy. Let none of these things move *you*. Connect the universal

prevalence of the faith with the practical triumph of the *voluntary principle*, and you will then feel that you do not live in vain if, as *secondary* to the possession of evangelical doctrine, you afford *that principle* your active support.

And, as to actually conforming—leaving the Meeting-house for the Church—to any Dissenter who understands his principles or respects himself, the proposition is absurd—almost ridiculous. To what should we conform? Look at the signs of the times—listen to the deep mutterings of the voice of the people, and you will gather the reply. The Structure to which we are invited is tottering to its base; its own weight is oppressing it; age has marred its magnificence, and impaired its strength, and rendered it a crazy and uncomfortable habitation: the night of its power and its repose is past: now that the morn has arisen some begin to wonder at the thing which awed them; and others to weep that its weakness is discovered; and others who have hitherto been comfortable within it

to confess that they feel the chill damps which it gathered in the darkness. Many are beginning to be alarmed, and to cry for help to those that are without. Through thinks and crevices which time has made, light has penetrated,—it has fallen upon the floor and the walls and the roof,—and it has discovered, to some of its inmates more observant than the rest, the four-footed beasts and creeping things which are delineated there, and, as might be expected from their position, they have given more tearful descriptions of their deformity than were ever attempted by its enemies themselves!—And the rough grasp of public opinion is felt by the Edifice,—it is seen to yield to the seizure; those who made it what it is, and can *unmake*, are alive to the necessity of action, and begin to bow before the hand that is held over them. Many are the principles now generally admitted inimical to the perpetuity of *much* that we oppose;—principles which commend themselves to simple faith and enlightened reason;—principles, which have recently been

discovered by many intelligent and conscientious reformers, and which are nothing the worse for having been familiar to us for a hundred years. To what then should we conform? The Church *is* in danger, and in danger "from itself." It begins to be known, and in proportion as it is known the danger increases. Every movement among the nations—every cloud raised by their advance and their activity—is dreaded by its supporters as big with the elements of certain destruction. It is *of the world*, and *therefore* the convulsions of the world alarm it. It depends upon *it* for its existence. Its basis—if it can be called such,—is the shifting sand of political prescription, and not the rock of Divine authority. In all that is occurring, or likely to occur, we see nothing to excite apprehension for ourselves. *Our church* is *not* in danger. It is not the creature of legislators; it does not exist by legal compulsion; a thousand events, therefore, which might materially affect *that church* whose boast it is to be "established by law," would only be to us like the sound

of thunder heard at a distance:—they would awaken no terrors; we should be beyond the reach of their *injuries*, but not of their *benefits*:—they would leave behind them a healthier atmosphere and a purer sky, of which advantages the whole commonwealth *as such* would participate. *You*, therefore, “need not fear though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”

*** The writer will perhaps be excused saying, that many of the topics hinted at in this tract have been more fully expounded by him in some of his subsequent publications, to which, if the reader feels interested in the matter, he begs to refer him; particularly to “*Dissent not Schism*;” “*The ultimate object of Evangelical Dissenters*;” “*An Address on laying the first stone of New King’s Weigh House Chapel*;” and “*Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity*.”

When this tract was first published, the controversies of the day were Church Reform and Ecclesiastical Establishments. Many were willing to surrender much to save something; but some, stung by the thought of being reduced to a level with others, by losing distinction as an *Establishment*, betook themselves to the sanctuary of “Church principles,” to secure distinction *of another kind*. Hence, in some degree at least, Puseyism. This party admitted our ar-

guments and adopted our objections against political and parliamentary interference with religion; it did so, however, in connexion with the revival of that priestly and popish spirit, which had slumbered during the days of Erastian submission and Evangelical inconsistency,* but which is as necessarily inherent in the formularies of the Church, as fire in flint, love in God, or malignity in the devil. On a superficial view, Dissenters may appear to have achieved à perilous triumph, casting out one demon, but raising another ten times stronger and more terrible than he. The fact is, however, the present state of things *must* have come. The Reformation in the Church of England was never completed; and what was done, was done more by the secular power than the spiritual will; while the Establishment, therefore, by fixing the thing, certainly stayed reform, it also, it should be remembered, restrained the outbreaks of the spirit that was left. But that spirit was not dead, and it never would die without a struggle. The struggle is begun. It is between the *principle* of Protestantism and of Popery. The contest will be long and arduous, but it is one the commencement of which is rather to be hailed than regretted,—to have accelerated or provoked it, is much more of a virtue than a crime.

* “Inconsistency:—that is, *as it appears to us*. In the author’s “Conscientious Clerical Nonconformity,” this is illustrated by a person of *Evangelical* principles, being described as looking at the church from without, examining its “offices,” &c., and saying, such and such things are there, I do not believe them, *therefore* I will not go in.” Some months since, a letter was addressed by a churchman to the Bishop of Winchester, in the “Morning Post,” in which the writer went over precisely the same points I have adverted to—took exactly the same view of them—and argued “such and such things are there—and you, Bishop Sumner, *ought* to believe them, because you *are* in.” This coincidence of opinion, in persons taking up the same subject from opposite sides, is curious. It looks very like as if there was something in it.

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