

VIEWS
OF THE
VOLUNTARY PRINCIPLE,

In Four Series.

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PREFACE.

THE series of papers here presented to the reader, and which originally appeared in the columns of the *NONCONFORMIST*, were written upon the suggestion of a friend, as a kind of counterpart to "The Nonconformist's Sketch Book." In the essays contained in that volume, the writer aimed at exhibiting the evils, political and religious, produced by the connection between the church and the state. It was represented to him that, however necessary such a work might be, it was far from being all that so grave a question demanded; and that thinking men, whose minds were yet in doubt, would require some reasonable assurance of the sufficiency of the "voluntary principle" for the maintenance and extension of the church of Christ. This little volume, then, is designed to give that assurance; and if the "Views" it contains may be regarded as correct, they may serve to dispel much of that lurking scepticism as to the vitality and energy of Christian willinghood, which in modern times, is not more prevalent in the world than in the church.

The measure recently introduced to parliament by her Majesty's government, for the permanent endowment of Maynooth College—a measure which can only be taken as preliminary to the payment by the state of the Roman Catholic priesthood—will drive many conscientious men to inquire into the soundness of a principle which works out results so seemingly hostile to Christianity. The essential injustice involved in state churchism is now making itself *felt*, where, until now, it was not even apprehended. Persecution always shows itself in its true light to those who suffer it; and the legal compulsion which forces men to support and propagate what they deem error, may be stoutly defended until it comes in turn to be applied to themselves. Churchmen can hardly suppose that Roman Catholics and Dissenters are wholly devoid of conscience, or that their objections to the forms and faith of the endowed church are mere political pretences; and yet no reasoning could convince them that the appropriation of national funds to the maintenance of *their* church, inflicted any hardship upon those who differed from them. They are now called to look at the question from another position; the Maynooth Endowment Bill, with its promise of “an hereafter” puts them, in regard to the Roman Catholic church, upon the ground occupied by dissentients from their own. Marvelously has their apprehension been quickened! Aptly,

and as if by instinct, they have caught up the arguments, and fallen into the very modes of expression, which, when used against themselves, they scarcely heeded, and often ridiculed! Their semi-conversion is matter of much joy to all who wish well to them and to truth, and, surely whatever can be done to help them onward in their inquiries, ought to be done with right earnest will.

To those Dissenters who profess, but can hardly be said to appreciate the voluntary principle, to the members of the Free Church of Scotland, who repudiate it in theory, whilst they adopt it in practice, and to the now numerous and still increasing class of Episcopalians, whom late events have forced from their anchorage, and drifted out to sea, it is hoped that these "Views" may suggest some profitable trains of thought. They are presented to the readers merely as "aids to reflection." They must be looked upon as brief hints, the sole purport of which is to point out some of the roads by which thought may travel to a sure conclusion on the subject under notice. They are designed to guide, rather than to supersede assiduous inquiry. The question of which they treat is evidently becoming *the* question of the age. All the lines of politics meet in this one centre. To remain in ignorance of, or indifference to, the merits of this grand controversy, will, in a few years at most, be justly esteemed a reproach. The time, therefore, seems