

curacy: the coloured sketches of figures are better, and do him credit, with the exception of the Calmuc. On the whole, we dismiss Mr. P.'s travels as a book, which will seldom find a place in a library, but may lie without offence on a table; which, if not the best, is far from the worst account of one of the most interesting countries in the world. If he ever publishes again, we entreat for more drawings, and fewer travelling sketches; nor shall we be displeased to see him pay some little attention to the finishing of the first, and the spelling of the latter; above all, we warn him to shun the tomb of Homer, and

Interfusa nitentes
Vitare æquora Cycladas.

ART. VI. *Intolerance the Disgrace of Christians, not the fault of their Religion.* By the Rev. Christopher Wyvill. pp. 112. Johnson. London.

IT is of the first importance towards accuracy of reasoning, to define terms before we assent to propositions.—Intolerance, Mr. Wyvill tells us in his title-page, is the disgrace of Christians. If the term be used in the accepted sense—i. e. of a disposition to force the consciences of men, to propagate religious tenets by fire and sword, and to persecute and destroy for matter of faith, we trust that there are few members of the church of England who do not fully accede to the truth of this proposition. But what is Mr. Wyvill's understanding of it? When our readers are informed that he is pleased to brand with this opprobrious title, those laws against the admission of dissenters into offices of trust and power, by which the framers of our constitution thought proper to guard the Established Church, we apprehend that their unwillingness to assent to the proposition in *this* sense, may probably bear an exact proportion to the readiness, with which they acceded to its truth in the other.

Of Mr. Wyvill, we are disposed to know nothing more than what is unfolded in the work before us. It were an act of injustice to suppose him otherwise than sincere in the plans which he proposes. We give him full credit for sincerity; but here we must stop: for we can neither approve the cause which he undertakes, nor commend the temper and manner in which he thinks proper to discuss the question. We greatly wish that age had matured his judgment, and cooled his ardour for crude and chimerical plans of innovation: we wish it had taught him to deal more in solid reasoning, and less in vague declamation; above all we wish, that experience had impressed upon him how little any cause can

can gain with considerate persons by the unnecessary use of coarse and virulent invective. As it is, we are nearly at a loss to discover, amidst the confused materials of which his work consists, any semblance of real argument for the cause which he labours to support.

Mr. W. begins his pamphlet (p. 1—30), with a general view of the evidences of the Christian religion, of its successful propagation, and of its effects in improving society. In such a preparatory sketch, novelty of remark is scarcely to be expected: the author, however, appears to write under a full conviction of the truth and excellency of Christianity, and he expresses himself in sufficiently clear and flowing language. He proceeds to vindicate the endowment and establishment of Christian churches (30—36), laments the barbarous workings of that intolerant spirit, from which characters, otherwise great and noble, have not been exempt (36—46), and traces the gradual developement of more mild and truly Christian principles.

He now arrives at his main purpose, that of destroying what he is pleased to term the remains of intolerance and persecution. He throws completely out of the question (p. 54) any sanguinary laws against dissenters, which may be still lurking in our statute books, a mere dead letter, scarcely known to exist, and never likely to be enforced. We gladly join with him in keeping these in the back ground, and think that the circumstance of their not being repealed in name, as they have long been in practice, is really too unimportant to be made matter of serious regret. Under the head of relics of intolerance, he means solely those restraints and disabilities, which the law imposes on dissenters; and against these he pours forth the phials of his wrath, as being contrary to justice, religion, &c. &c. &c. p. 55.

There are two modes of conducting an attack adopted by controversial writers. The one is to bring forward reasonings in the first instance, and then to draw inferences, and make comments. The other is, to begin by assuming the matter in dispute, and applying hard names and free invectives; and not to attempt anything in the shape of reasoning, till these shall have produced their due effect on the reader's mind. Now if the first of these methods of proceeding be the most regular and efficient, provided the cause itself be a good one; the second, it will be readily allowed, is incomparably the best in a cause which incurs the suspicion of being radically unsound, and in which the understanding has little chance of being fairly convinced if the passions be not previously warmed and prejudices excited.

It is the latter of these modes, which Mr. W. has thought proper to adopt in his attack upon the test laws. He first assumes
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the fact, that they are fit objects of reprobation—avails himself freely of this assumption to deal out his abuse and invective—and then, when he has reason to suppose the reader's mind is properly prepared, he condescends to answer the specious, but hollow plausibilities, (p. 68,) by which he thinks it possible that their advocates may have the hardihood to hazard their defence.

He perhaps may deem it a compliment to be told, that he betrays no diffidence in roundly expressing his opinions, and freely stigmatizing what he disapproves. He tells us (p. 59,) that our test laws are 'relics of intolerance, no less contrary to justice and religion, than those murderous laws, which we have rejected with abhorrence.' They are 'a system of corrupt influence; a mean monopoly of civil patronage,' (p. 60.) The conduct of the church in continuing them is 'inhuman and illegal,' (p. 79.) Our statesmen, who do not abolish them, have their conduct honoured with the gentle titles of 'infatuated,' 'political absurdity,' &c. (p. 63.) Now, we are willing, on common occasions, to make allowance for the effects of excessive and intemperate zeal in any cause. We know now easily the passions become heated, and hurry a man farther than his sober reason can approve. But really when we find such coarse and outrageous expressions used in reprobating laws, which have long formed an important part of our constitution, and in stigmatizing statesmen of all parties who have sanctioned them with their approbation; we are tempted to put the question whether the person, who assumes this license, stands on that commanding eminence of reputation either for judgment, acuteness, or genius, which can make such consummate arrogance at all palatable or excusable.

It is no less amusing than instructive to observe that notable style of argument called begging the question, with which the work before us abounds. When Mr. W. has been bestowing his hard names, and degrading epithets on the test laws, he informs us in a note, with some semblance of an apology, that he applies these strong expressions, *because he trusts they are just*. Now, the question whether they are just or not, viz. whether the test laws are good or bad, is evidently the whole matter in dispute. To apply these expressions therefore, because they are asserted to be just, before any attempt is made to prove them such, is to assume the whole business, to leave us exactly where we were without advancing one step towards a right conclusion.

But that we may duly appreciate the representations of Mr. W. it may be advisable just to recall to our reader's recollection, what the test laws really enact, in what principle they originate, and on what grounds they are to be justified and defended.

The test laws require that every person, who holds offices in the
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state, shall be a member of the Church of England, and they consider that a more certain and convenient proof of his being such cannot be found, than that he should have attended, within a prescribed time, the celebration of the sacrament according to the rites of that church.

As to the general right, which a state possesses of excluding from its offices any portion of its subjects for just and satisfactory reasons, we apprehend there can be no dispute. It is a first principle with every society of men, that the good of the whole should preponderate over the interests of individuals—and, in whatever case, more advantage arises to the community from the exclusion of individuals from office, than detriment to the individuals themselves, in that case the exclusion is just. None would contend that persons of known disaffection should be admitted into offices of trust. A papist is excluded from the throne. Females (one half of the population) can hold no offices whatever. Persons below a certain stature are excluded from military situations.

Thus, then, in excluding dissenters from offices of trust, the question of right resolves itself into the question of expediency. It must be shewn that the general advantage resulting from the measure overbalances the particular inconvenience. The particular inconvenience is the placing of so many subjects in a situation of inferiority to the rest. The general advantage is the security of the constitution, and the maintenance in consequence of that peace and good order, in which the whole community partakes.

To estimate this general advantage, it must be recollected, that our constitution consists of two parts, civil and ecclesiastical,—supported by the same laws, closely allied and intimately united into one indivisible whole. Those who dissent from the state ecclesiastical, are but imperfect members of the whole. Acknowledging the authority of one part of the constitution, they reject that of the other. True subjects as to the state political, they are aliens as to the state ecclesiastical. Hence, their claim to the full rights and privileges of citizens cannot be on an equal footing with the claim of others. A presumption must always arise, that, however well affected toward the civil part of the constitution, they cannot have equally friendly dispositions towards the ecclesiastical, from which they separate themselves. Again, the idea of an established church necessarily implies that legal provision should be made for ministers of religion, to whose support dissenters from the church must contribute. This may be defended on the soundest principles. But, in such an arrangement, the dissenters, considered separately, are a party aggrieved: they suffer partial hardship from the operation of a measure, which is indisputably necessary for the whole community. Hence it may be apprehended, that,

that, having a present feeling of their particular inconvenience, and partial views of the general expediency of such a measure; they may labour under an irritation of mind tending to generate an hostility to this part at least of our established laws.

From these presumptions, arising from the situation and circumstances in which dissenters from any established church must be placed, let us turn to facts. Has it appeared that our dissenters, taken as a body, have been less loyal and trustworthy subjects than the members of the church? History too plainly tells us that they once largely contributed towards the complete overthrow of the constitution, and have more than once brought its existence into danger. But if this be allowed for times past,—are they not now far more moderate in their political principles, and worthy of public trust? It is a matter on which we wish to touch with tenderness. We are aware that amongst the dissenters, are to be found many *individuals*, faithful, loyal, and honourable. We wish to avoid as much as possible, all those sweeping expressions, which cast imputations on collected bodies of men. But, when we are called upon to speak openly, we must not dissemble. When we recollect that the hostility of the dissenters to our church establishment, so essential a part of the constitution, is not left to be indirectly inferred from the presumptions above stated, but confessedly subsists, and has been, on some occasions, plainly and openly avowed,—when we know that peculiar political tenets adverse to the state, have been usually maintained among them, and that, on all party questions, they have systematically embraced the side most opposed to the government—when we find that they industriously form themselves into a party, act with common views, use every exertion to strengthen their interests by detaching members from the church, and are always on the watch for the attainment of political influence; we apprehend that more solid grounds will not be required to justify the continuance of those restraints, which the wisdom of our legislature has imposed, as needful measures of precaution or defence.

Let us now turn to Mr. Wyvill,—according to him, (p. 98) the test laws punish dissenters, and brand them with infamy for not believing as we do, (p. 79 & 98.) Now, when he makes this assertion, he must either believe it to be true or false. If he knows it to be false, and merely advances it for the purpose of colouring an argument, he forfeits every claim to the character of an honest writer. If, as we have no wish to doubt, he believes that he is asserting a truth, we must be at liberty to say, that he betrays a want of right conception on the subject, which marks him wholly unfit to instruct or convince others. The representation, that the law inflicts punishment on a person for being a dissenter, is decidedly

cidedly false. The legislature does not say to him,—‘because you are a dissenter, we hold you to be a criminal—and we adjudge you to be punished for your offence with such and such disabilities.’ It holds a widely different language. It tells him, that, because he is not a member of the state ecclesiastical, he is held to be an imperfect member of the whole constitution—because he is connected with a particular party, he incurs a share of those suspicions, to which that party have been, and still are obnoxious. On these accounts, and these alone, it does not admit him to the full rights and privileges which other subjects enjoy. Mr. W. may contend that, in the end, it is all the same—that the broad fact remains, that a dissenter is deprived of certain privileges, because he is not a member of the Church of England. Now, we contend that the difference in the statement of the ground on which the matter rests, makes the whole difference in the justice or injustice of the case. To inflict penalties for matters of faith, is real injustice—it is intolerance in the old and justly detested sense of the word. But, to deny certain privileges to a particular class of subjects, for reasons specified and alleged as sufficient to justify the measure,—carries on the face of it no injustice, and must take its character altogether from the sufficiency and validity of the reasons alleged.

Again—Mr. W. tells us—the legislature destroys liberty of conscience; it tempts men by the lure of political privileges, to violate their principles, and to embrace doctrines which they do not approve, (p. 99.) We have here to regret an error no less gross, in stating that to be the intention of the legislature in framing its enactments, which is, or may be, an accidental consequence arising out of them. We can positively state that the idea of throwing out a lure to conscientious dissenters, is wholly excluded from its motives and intentions. That the test laws may, in some instances, operate in this manner, we do not deny: when this occurs, it is an evil much to be deprecated and lamented. The great fault, however, lies in the persons who are tempted, not in the law, whose wholesome provisions are unduly perverted into means of temptation. The State has no such end in its contemplation. The church would willingly eject from its bosom those who, from motives of worldly emolument, seek to take shelter in it.

Let us then have done with these false views and representations of the test laws. They are not ‘relics of intolerance;’ they are not ‘intended to punish men for being dissenters, to preserve to the church a monopoly of civil emoluments, or to allure men to the violation of their consciences by the hope of political privileges.’ They are designed to be, and in their main operation they are, wholesome guards and fences for ensuring the safety of the constitution.

stitution. It is principally in this view that their merit or demerit ought to be discussed. Framed in no narrow spirit of intolerance or of selfishness, they may be defended on the broad ground of a just and liberal policy.

It will be observed, that we are talking of conscientious Dissenters, of those who really differ in sentiment and doctrine from the Church of England, and who could not, without doing violence to their consciences, come within its pale. We respect the feelings of such, and should be truly unwilling to utter any expressions which might wound them. But we must not conceal, that we by no means deem these to form any large proportion of the nominal Dissenters from our church. Many are so entirely from caprice and whim, many from spleen and spite, many from no assignable motive whatever. Now, as to Dissenters of these descriptions, we trust we shall not be accused of an intolerant spirit when we say, that if the legislature were to punish them for the needless and mischievous spreading of religious schism, it would do nothing more than might be fully justified. However, it understands too well the principles of a free toleration in matters of religion, to think of inflicting punishment in any instance. It deems it preferable (though we must express our fears as to the consequences of so broad an indulgence) to give full scope and licence to every illiterate field-preacher who may start up, to permit the wildest fanatics to practise at will their low arts in seducing the ignorant and vulgar, rather than to set an example of interference which might be drawn, in any circumstances, into a sanction and precedent for the adoption of harsh and intolerant measures.

Mr. Wyvill professes himself to be aware, p. 84, that many persons may oppose his plan from the dread of its becoming a prelude to further innovations. On this head he distinctly avows, that he has other 'ecclesiastical reformations in view,' p. 89. He talks of changes and omissions in the liturgy, and seems desirous of abolishing subscription to the articles, p. 91. He does not explain his meaning clearly or definitely. He tells us, however, that he wishes for no other changes than those which many moderate and eminent churchmen have approved. Be it so. Be it allowed, for the sake of argument, that the views of Mr. Wyvill himself are (at least for the present) neither immoderate nor unreasonable. Still it must be asked, what are the views of the person who stands next him? What say the rest of the train who join him in the loud cry for the repeal of the test laws? What will he himself say, if his appetite for innovation be once whetted by concession? One person, perhaps, thinks it hard that Dissenters from the church should contribute to the church establishment; another

is scandalised at the great revenues of some of the clergy ; a third deems the episcopacy an useless and burthensome incumbrance. Mr. W. himself may now only propose some trivial alterations in the liturgy ; he might soon advance to the abolishing of subscription to the articles, to the discarding of our creeds, &c. Now we by no means allow the general fairness of the argument, that a measure, reasonable in itself, ought to be rejected, because it may eventually lead to other measures which we wish to resist. We should make a firm stand exactly where we perceive that good ends, and evil begins. But it certainly forms a very just and reasonable ground of objection against any plan, that the persons who urge it have in view other vague, undefined innovations, to which they intend that it should lead. The wild spirit of speculative reformation must not be too readily indulged. The first step of concession may indeed be the opening of a floodgate ; and if political power is once granted to Dissenters, we may afterwards find every barrier against their encroachments and innovations feeble and unavailing.

In Mr. Wyvill's judgment, the repeal of the test laws would produce unheard-of wonders. It would be the dawning of golden days upon the Christian world. Learned and philosophical infidels would become believers ! p. 70. Religion would be brought to an enviable state by the spreading of mutual confidence, charity, and candour ! p. 73. The sources of animosity would be cut off which have exposed the empire to ruin !—Papists would be converted to Protestantism ! &c., p. 109.

We should be well satisfied if we could be induced to believe, on good grounds, that any of these numerous advantages could be expected from the measure. We should be found amongst its most decided advocates, if it were indeed likely to increase in any degree, or by any consequence, the stability of the empire, and to make Christians of different denominations more moderate, charitable, and candid. We apprehend effects directly the reverse. We perceive many modes by which the concession would tend to generate disorder, to inflame animosity, to widen division ; and scarcely one by which its tendency may, with a fair colouring of probability, be presumed to be of an opposite nature.

As to the argument that the admission of Dissenters to political privileges would give strength to the established church, we can scarcely believe a person to be serious when he advances it.

‘ A common interest,’ says Mr. Wyvill, ‘ may, and it probably will, unite them (the Dissenters) against intolerance ; but, liberty of conscience once obtained, no common interest would be found to unite them

them in any measure of reformation against the will of the establishment.' p. 88.

Papæ ! Would *no common interest* remain to unite the Dissenters against the church, after they had obtained the concession of political privileges ? Can it be doubted for a moment, that the attainment of an establishment at least on an equal footing with our church, is the grand object towards which the views and exertions of all Dissenters are ultimately directed ? The admission to political privileges, considered in itself, is but a feeble and remote object of desire to individuals : it is only when considered as a mean towards an end, and that end the attainment of a legal establishment, that it becomes of first-rate value and importance. What, then, is the sum of Mr. Wyvill's advice ? Grant, he tells us, to the Dissenters that boon of political power which will give them confidence and strength, which will inflame their hopes of further concession, and place the accomplishment of those hopes more within their grasp ; you will then find them so grateful for your kind indulgence, so completely satisfied with what they have already gained, that they will sit down at once quietly and contentedly, unite with you in the most warm and cordial friendship, never think of urging any further claim against you, or give you future disturbance ! How does this consist with the usual movements of the human disposition, and with the common principles of human action ?

It is intimated, p. 106, that an intention prevailed of presenting a petition to Parliament, for the repeal of the test laws, during the last session. The session has passed, and no such petition has been presented. Have Mr. Wyvill's arguments and declamations failed of producing their desired effect, or is the prosecution of the design only for a time postponed ? If a discussion of this subject should be brought on, we have one request to make. It is, that no member of the Legislature will give a suffrage on the question, without previously perusing a small tract of Bishop Sherlock on this subject, a tract first drawn up in the Bangorian controversy, and lately reprinted in a separate pamphlet. We care not if everything be read over and over again that was ever written against the test laws ; but shall be amply satisfied if only this small treatise be read in their defence. Let a plain understanding, biassed by no prejudices, be brought to the discussion ; and we shall have no fears as to the result.