

**OUR COUNTRY; OR, THE  
SPIRITUAL  
DESTITUTION OF  
ENGLAND CONSIDERED**

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Our Country; Or, the Spiritual Destitution of England Considered by James Matheson

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**JAMES MATHESON**

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# OUR COUNTRY;

OR,

THE SPIRITUAL DESTITUTION OF ENGLAND  
CONSIDERED;

AND HOW FAR IT CAN BE SUPPLIED THROUGH LAY AGENCY,

ESPECIALLY AS EMPLOYED BY

**Congregational Churches.**

By JAMES MATHESON, D.D.

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## ADVERTISEMENT

BY THE

COMMITTEE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION  
OF ENGLAND AND WALES.

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THE public are indebted for the following Essay to the generous zeal of a Christian philanthropist, whose mind was influenced by a deep concern for the further evangelization of his native land. He felt also a strong anxiety that the Congregational churches of his country should bear a more vigorous and a more adequate part in this great and urgently necessary work. In order to this, it appeared to him indispensable that the Independent churches and pastors should employ, to a greater extent than heretofore, the zeal and activity of brethren qualified for useful labours among their ignorant countrymen, though not regularly educated for the Christian ministry. To invite attention to this important object, and to elicit discussion on the best methods for accomplishing it, he determined to offer a prize of one hundred guineas for the best Essay on the subject of Lay Agency. That additional interest and sanction might be given to the proceeding, he proposed that the management of it should be undertaken by the Committee of the Congregational Union. The Committee, prepared to promote whatever might seem adapted to advance the efficiency of the Independent churches, ob-

tained the sanction of the Annual Assembly of the Union in the year 1838, for the proposal of their generous friend, and for their co-operation in carrying it into effect. A second prize of twenty-five guineas, for the Essay that might be adjudged next in merit, was also added on the part of the Union. The necessary publicity was then given to the proposal in the name of the Committee of the Union; and the Rev. J. BENNETT, D.D., the Rev. J. FLETCHER, D.D., and JOSHUA WILSON, Esq., were appointed to be adjudicators of the merits of such Essays as might be presented on the subject. To those gentlemen, it was matter of high satisfaction, that many of the compositions submitted to their examination were so eminently indicative of the piety, zeal, and talent of their respective authors; and while they endeavoured to decide with the utmost regard to impartiality and justice, they hope that some of the writers will give the results of their labours to the public. The *second* prize has been awarded to the following Essay. Of course, neither the Committee of the Union, nor the adjudicators, incur responsibility for all the sentiments it may contain; but they unite in the hope that it may contribute to more zealous efforts, never more needed than now, for the spread of pure and undefiled religion among the neglected population of our own country; and throw light on the main question to be discussed, namely, how Congregational churches may most efficiently, in harmony with their own polity, order, and prosperity, employ their non-ministerial brethren in active labours for the spread of the Gospel around them.

ALGERNON WELLS,

Secretary to the Union.

Congregational Library,  
14th August, 1839.



TO THE  
CHURCHES AND MINISTERS OF CHRIST,  
OF  
**The Congregational Order,**  
IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

MY CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

THE following pages have been written under the conviction that our denomination, while professing to seek the spiritual welfare of England, had not as yet brought fully into operation the moral strength which it possessed. How far the hints offered in this Essay for the improvement of existing plans of Christian Agency, and the scheme proposed for the religious benefit of the agricultural districts, may commend themselves to your favourable attention, the future alone can show. That some additional efforts must be made before England can be adequately instructed, all will admit. The difficulty is to get the churches to act simultaneously and vigor-

ously. I am glad that, in the present instance, the responsibility of suggesting plans of usefulness, and of making appeals to our denomination, does not rest solely with myself.

If no other result should attend the publication of the *Essays on Lay Agency*, than to direct the attention of ministers and people more decidedly and more definitely to the immense field of labour still requiring moral cultivation, the attempt will not have been made in vain. Of this I am convinced, that if our churches can only be aroused to their solemn duties, suitable means will be employed, and an amount of good accomplished, beyond our most sanguine expectations.

J. M.

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