

**ON THE REVENUES OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND;
EXHIBITING THE RISE AND
PROGRESS OF ECCLESIASTICAL
TAXATION**

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On the Revenues of the Church of England; Exhibiting the Rise and Progress of Ecclesiastical
Taxation by George Coventry

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GEORGE COVENTRY

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ECCLESIASTICAL TAXATION**

ON THE *J. 1030*
REVENUES
OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND;
EXAMINING
THE RISE AND PROGRESS
OF
ECCLESIASTICAL TAXATION.

BY GEORGE COVENTRY,

AUTHOR OF AN ENQUIRY RELATIVE TO JUNIUS.

"The exacting of Tithes is no better than tyranny, the weaker hand being obliged to submit to the powerful arm of the law."

ERASMUS.

"The first Christian emperors supplied the wants of the clergy out of their own imperial revenue."

EUSEBIUS.

"Till towards the end of the first four hundred years after the Christian era, no payment of Tithes can be proved to have been in use."

JOHN SELDEN.

LONDON:
EFFINGHAM WILSON, ROYAL EXCHANGE,
CORNHILL.

1830.

451.

“ Si nous regardons curieusement, nous connoissons que plusieurs institutions de notre religion ont été prises et traduites des ceremonies Egyptiennes et des Gentils ; comme sont les tuniques et surpells ; les couronnes qui font les prêtres, les inclinations de tête autour de l'autel ; la pompe sacrificale ; la musique des temples, adorations, prières, supplications, litanies, et plusieurs autres choses, que nos prêtres usurpent en nos mystères, et referent à un seul Dieu, Jesus Christ, ce qui l'ignorance des Gentils, fausse religion et folle presumptive, representoit à leurs faux Dieux, et aux hommes mortels apres leur consecration.”

GUILLAUME DU CHOUX, 1556.

“ God, who is the fountain of truth, is not pleased with dissimulation or outward forms : hence, every ceremony founded upon fiction is unpleasing in his divine sight.”

TERTULLIAN.



TO THE READER.

"The three great things that govern mankind, are reason, passion and superstition; the first governs a few, the two last share the bulk of mankind and possess them in turn; but superstition is most powerful, and produces the greatest mischiefs." Locke.

THE design of the following pages, is to point out the simple mode of worship in the beginning of the world, and the contrivances of designing men in successive ages, (who had deviated from the intentions of their Creator,) to render religion abstruse, by making a traffic of it.

That these innovations were to be done away by the introduction of a new gospel dispensation, cannot be doubted: nor can we hesitate for a moment in the decision, that such doctrines were to be promulgated free, 'without

‘ money and without price.’ — but man, degenerated from this pure principle, restored the forms, customs, ceremonies, ordonnances and emoluments of the heathen priests, which have continued to be upheld by the church through successive ages, down to the present era.

There is no law, but that of superstition, which warrants such an innovation upon society at large; the nature and design of which, is, as Grotius so beautifully points out, that ‘ Every one should quietly enjoy his own, with the help, and by the united force of the whole community.’ — Therefore, if a priest seizes upon the property of others, under whatever name or pretensions to religion they may be, for a supposed prescriptive right, he transgresses against the fundamental laws of society, inasmuch, as he has not only no divine law to countenance him, but no human law of equity or justice.

In a country avowedly professing the principles of Christianity, particularly among those who promulgate its tenets, a sense of propriety

ought to predominate, not only in accordance with the tenor of true religion, but in strict conformity to justice, honour, and the sacred ties of civilized society.

There are unerring rules of conduct towards man, and devotion towards God, implanted within the human breast by the great Creator from the beginning, which still continues down to the present era, without any alteration or change. These secret laws existed in the nature of things, without any written precept or human interference,—before religion became a trade, or the cause of oppression to a country; for as Judge Blackstone truly observes, ‘ This law being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other.—No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid, derive all their force and all their authority, mediately or immediately from this original.’ Therefore, as the learned Commentator has asserted in another place, that ‘ the law relative to tithes is not founded upon this original,’ it follows as matter of

course, connected with his authority, that it is oppressive and unjust, and consequently ought to be abolished—for how can a nation prosper, or cease to utter complaints, whilst the clergy derive such immense emoluments from the industry of its inhabitants, amounting to one-fifth of the annual revenue of the country.

This oppressive tax, levied in the days of superstition, has been for centuries, and still continues, the primary cause of the discontents which prevail in that unfortunate country—Ireland. It is in vain for the Legislature to frame laws or to attempt to keep the people under subjection, whilst the canker-worm of corruption is feeding upon their vitals. Once remove this odious impost, all social order and industry would be restored; and instead of being encircled and overshadowed with the clouds and mists of dissatisfaction—the sunshine of prosperity would soon smile around its borders.

The same happy results would extend to our own shores, which now groan under a similar

burthen. Instead of our farmers and agriculturists leaving a soil bountifully enriched by Heaven, and emigrating with their families from the land of their forefathers to foreign countries, because the locust devours the fruits of their industry,—we should witness a new era: the original designs of the great Creator would soon be manifested, and joy and gladness once more beam around the hearts of a people now bowed down with anxiety, penury, misery and despair.