

the testimony, always weighty, of Mr. Granville Sharp. The question, however, is still to be asked, whether a Bible Society, however planned, might be innocently formed? We have no hesitation to answer in the affirmative;—and for the primary ground of this judgment we must revert to the constitution of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge. This, as we have already seen, maintains, as one of its leading and characteristic principles, the confinement of the power of subscription to the members of the Established Church. It is obvious, that the strictness and purity of its ecclesiastical management were the objects of that regulation, and that these are of very great importance. Under the impossibility, therefore, of obtaining admission into this Society, the Dissenters were either obliged to abstain altogether from the distribution of the Scriptures, through an excess of reverence towards the claims of the ancient Society, or to form a separate association for that purpose. No person, whose mind is free from the most narrow and degrading bigotry, will argue that Bibles are not to be given by Dissenters thus circumstanced. If there is a void in Christian knowledge not filled up by any other institution, we know no law, human or divine, which prohibits an attempt to supply the defect. It is impossible, indeed, to look through the Christian world without perceiving how much ignorance still remains to be remedied, notwithstanding the long and most laudable exertions of the Church. And similar will be the confession, after the additional efforts of the new Society. Mr. Spry may lament that, if the clergyman is too poor, and his rich parishioners too careless, to give Bibles, the ignorant should be instructed by a present from any other hand. We cannot descend to this jealous exclusion; and we regard the Dissenters, under the circumstances above described, as at full liberty, in point of conscience, to form associations for the purpose of distributing Bibles. This indeed is very properly allowed by Dr. Wordsworth.

‘The institution of the Bible Society was first projected among the Dissenters; and had it been happily left in their hands, all would have been well, and preserved exactly as it should be. The right, the necessity, the expediency, the wisdom, and praise and salutary fruits of such a society, I, for one, would never have impeached and questioned. I should have rejoiced in it exceedingly. I can hardly conceive any case in which it could ever have occurred to me to draw my pen against it. The Bibles, thus dispersed, whether at home or abroad, would have come, at least so far as we of the Church of England were concerned, an unmixed offering of good into the common stock and treasure-house for the refreshment and relief of afflicted humanity,’ &c. Letter, p. 53.

It is true, that, in other parts of his Letter, Dr. Wordsworth states his principal complaint to be against the distribution of Bibles