



# ST GILES' LECTURES.

---

*FIRST SERIES—THE SCOTTISH CHURCH.*

---

## *LECTURE XII.*

### THE CHURCH OF THE PRESENT DAY :

HOW FAR AN OUTGROWTH FROM THE PAST, AND AN EXPRESSION  
OF THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND LIFE OF SCOTLAND.

By the Rev. JAMES MACGREGOR, D.D., Senior Minister of St Cuthbert's  
Parish, Edinburgh.

I N discharging the duty which has been imposed upon me, I have, in this concluding lecture, to review the ground traversed by my predecessors ; to trace the historic links which connect the existing Church of Scotland with the distant past ; and to indicate its present position, aims, and prospects.

It is historically certain that a pure Christian faith reached the Scottish shores some time before the close of the fourth century. The same St Ninian who brought us the great gift, and who built his Candida Casa, or White House, within the roar of the racing Solway, seems to have been the first who carried it to Ireland. It was a time when the Bishops of Rome, though powerful, had not as yet attained to supreme jurisdiction, and when the ministers of religion still claimed to derive their authority from Christ alone. It was the faith of the great Councils of Nice and Constantinople ; the faith of Jerome and Ambrose and

Augustine. The isolation of the British Churches from communion with those of Western Europe, consequent upon the withdrawal of the Roman power from Britain in 410 A.D., tended to preserve their pristine purity. In the hundred and fifty years that followed, it is faintest twilight, the movements uncertain, the forms shadowy and dim. The twilight broadens into dawn on the arrival of Columba with his twelve disciples at Iona in 563, the greatest character and the greatest event in the history of the Scottish Church next to Knox and the Reformation. Thanks to the industry of his successor and biographer Adamnan, that great figure stands out, in sharp relief against the darkness that preceded and followed, in a light almost modern in its clearness; and we can see distinctly, what kind of man he was, what he thought, believed, and taught, and how he lived and wrought and died. To all time he will be known as the great apostle of Scottish Christianity, and his lonely, beautiful, and soft-aired Iona as its mother-shrine. We have one strong link which binds the early Celtic Church which he founded with the Church of our modern day, in the fact attested by Columbanus, that 'he received nought but the doctrine of the evangelists and apostles;' and in the evidence of Adamnan, that 'the foundation of Columba's preaching, and his great instrument in the conversion of the heathen, was the Word of God.' No fact could be more significant or prophetic. It was the pure and unadulterated religion of Jesus that was first offered to our forefathers, and that first broke in upon the gloom of our ancient forests. The first strong foundations of the Scottish Church were laid broad and deep, where they rest to-day, on the solid rock of Scripture. It was with this book in their hands that Columba fought and won the battle with Paganism; Knox, the battle with Popery; Melville, the first battle of Presbytery with Episcopacy—the three great struggles which shaped the form and determined the fortunes of the Scottish Church. It has been the living contact of the Scottish mind with its life-giving words which more than all other forces

put together have made this country what it is. With the exception of the Roman Catholic period, this note runs all through the history of the Scottish Church.

From the coming of Columba there is light for one hundred and fifty years, and we know with considerable certainty what is going on. It radiates from Iona and spreads over the greater part of Scotland north of the Forth and Clyde. Then comes a long, dark, and much-confused period of four hundred years. One fact stands clear out to the student of that misty time, that from the days of Columba to the death of Malcolm Canmore, Scotland had a National Church peculiarly her own, which was neither Roman Catholic nor Episcopalian nor Presbyterian, and whose direct paternity it is folly for any Christian Church of this day to claim. When the light died out with Adamnan in 704, it was monastic, not parochial nor diocesan; when the light came in with Saxon Margaret and her sons, it was monastic still. All through, it was tribal, not territorial; it was Celtic, not Roman. Its rulers were abbots, to whom the bishops were often subject. Its clergy were not always celibate. They owned no subjection to Rome; and they bore no resemblance to either the secular or the regular clergy of the Western Church. We can also see through those dim years that this Celtic Church has been made familiar with suffering; that its clergy have tasted the bitterness of exile; that it has lost its churches and been stripped of its property. We find traces, too, of that independent spirit—that passionate love of freedom, that jealousy of foreign interference and dictation, that capacity of suffering for what they believed to be right—which a little later were to be tried and tempered in the long war with England, and which have come down to us as one of our richest inheritances from those ancient times.

In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, owing to decay from within and to English influence from without, there came a slow and silent, but important revolution. The monastic system was giving place to the diocesan, and over the whole

of the Lowlands of Scotland, the Celtic to the Saxon tongue. The year in which King Malcolm, the saintly Margaret, and Fothad, the last native Bishop of Alban, died—1093—may be said to date the passing away of the Celtic Church. With the establishment of the Benedictines in Iona in 1203, the Roman rule became universal in Scotland. In 1286, the stumble of a horse on the crags of Kinghorn completed the process, by bringing to an end the ancient dynasty of our Celtic kings.

Of the great revolution which then took place, two results have lived on to our day, and distinctly connect the living present with the distant past. Few things in this world of change have vitality enough to carry them over a period of seven hundred years. There are at least two parts of the present Church system of Scotland which go back without a break through that long period of time. The one is our elastic territorial and parochial system, capable of readjustment to the varying needs of the population. No better system ever was or ever will be devised for securing the spiritual supervision of a country, and the whole body of its people. The other is the provision for religious ordinances by the principle of tithe or teind, which was originally the voluntary assignment, not by the State, but by the great lords who owned the soil, of the tenth part of the produce of the parish for the supply of its religious wants; and which thus became the property of the Church by an indefeasible title. So ancient is this system of tithe, that Blackstone emphatically declares that no beginning can be found for it. According to Bede, there was as early as the seventh century a 'kirk sest,' which very probably resembled tithes. In Scotland, there belonged to the Church, besides the teinds, extensive property in land, which had also been the voluntary gift of the great landowners, and which continued to belong to the Church, first in its Celtic, and then in its Roman form, down to the Reformation. In 1587, by what can only be described as a great act of spoliation, this property passed to the crown, and through it

became the possession, in too many instances, of worthless nobles. The teinds were not seriously touched, and as rearranged by Charles I. in 1633, still continue as a national provision for religious ordinances. The entire yearly income of the rightful property of the Church from the ancient endowments would amount at the present value to an enormous sum. What has escaped spoliation amounts to only £275,000, which is less than the income of many single noblemen. How many properties in this land are held to-day by so long and so strong a tenure, as the fragment that still remains of that ancient provision for the spiritual wants of the people, and especially of the poor of Scotland; and of what properties can it be said that they have been so faithfully and so consistently employed for the public good? Should the nation ever resolve to reconsider the purposes to which this property is applied, it would be an interesting inquiry to try to ascertain what became of those vast landed estates which, unbought by money or by service, passed from public into private hands, what national interests they have subserved, and whether any portion of them might not still be recovered for national purposes.

Beyond the institution of parishes and of parochial endowments; the effect on the national character of the long and bitter war of independence; and the scattered remains of the great ecclesiastical edifices, no existing link connects the four hundred years of papal domination with the Church of the present day. It was a period which, not without promise at its commencement, darkened deeply towards its close. The Romish Church was everywhere growing more degraded and corrupt, at the very time when, through the revival of letters, a new light and a new life were dawning on the world. There are probably two main reasons why, when the work of Reformation came, it was more thoroughly effected in Scotland than in any other country of Europe; because nowhere had Romanism attained to a condition of more unmitigated vileness, and because nowhere was the work of

cleansing more thoroughly the work of the people, and a people, too, whose habit has ever been to do with their might what their hand findeth to do.

The form which the Scottish Church took amid the throes of the Reformation, and which it will probably always maintain, was due to the two greatest and most fruitful facts to be found in the whole range of its history—that the battle of Protestantism was fought by the people, and that the principal weapon used in the conflict was, as we have seen, the Word of God. The result was a Church essentially popular and Scriptural, which recognised in the education and intelligence of the people the best ally of religion, which was built in the main upon a Presbyterian basis, and which (17th August 1560) was established by law.

From the Reformation till the Revolution, a period of one hundred and thirty years, the spectacle which our country presents is that of a people at war with their rulers for their religious rights. During five successive reigns, from Mary to James VII., every ruler who sat upon the throne did his very utmost to thrust his religious views upon the people, with the invariable result of leaving the victory with them. The war of Protestantism with Popery had scarcely ended when the war of Presbytery with Prelacy began (at the Concordat of Leith on Feb. 1, 1572), and raged with ever-varying fortunes through one hundred and eighteen troubled and turbulent years, till in June 1690 it ended in the victory of Presbytery as the permanent and legal form of Church government. Since the war of independence, no struggle so protracted, so fierce, so bloody, has been waged by the Scottish people. The war of independence began with the passing away of the Celtic Dynasty and the establishment of the House of Stuart. The religious war ended in their expulsion from the throne. The inborn love of freedom was the motive cause of both, and both have left their ineffaceable marks on the character of the Scottish people.

So far as the legal establishment of the opposing systems went, the attitude of affairs was this :

PRESBYTERY.	EPISCOPACY.
Aug. 17, 1560—Feb. 1, 1572.	Feb. 1, 1572—June 1592.
June 1592—Oct. 1612.	Oct. 1612—June 1640.
June 1640—May 1661.	May 1661—June 1690.

Of these one hundred and thirty years, Presbytery was the legal system at three different periods, covering, in round numbers, fifty-two years ; Episcopacy was the legal system at three different periods, covering in round numbers seventy-eight years. But the periods of possession are no indication of the relative hold of the systems upon the minds of the people generally. In every instance, Episcopacy was violently imposed by the sovereign, and was overthrown by the people. It thus became in their minds the symbol of despotism. There can be no doubt that all through, the feelings and convictions of the mass of the people, except in the North, were on the side of Presbytery. In not one of the many ups and downs of that period of strife was Presbytery overthrown and Episcopacy imposed by the people's will. 'The rational inference' which Macaulay draws from the facts of the case is this, that at the Revolution 'more than nineteen-twentieths of those Scotchmen whose consciences were interested in the matter were Presbyterians, and that not one Scotchman in twenty was decidedly and on conviction an Episcopalian.'

It was not Episcopacy in itself which they resisted, so much as the royal and priestly despotism of which it was the symbol. It was the gross Erastianism, servility, and tyranny with which it was associated, which made it an abomination to the Scottish people. Such is the calm verdict of impartial history.

Another fact must be borne in mind. At none of the periods during which the system was established was it Episcopacy

pure and simple. It was Episcopacy overlying a Presbyterian ground-work. The Kirk-session and the Presbytery lived on through the whole period of strife. In matters of creed, worship, and discipline, there was very little difference between the rival systems. Of the two collegiate ministers of the Tron Kirk, Edinburgh, in 1692, one was Episcopalian and the other Presbyterian. There were rival kirk-sessions as well as rival ministers, and the service was conducted at the different diets according to the different forms. Beyond the institution of Bishops, the present Anglicanised Episcopal Church in Scotland bears little resemblance to that which fought so hard a battle with Presbytery in the seventeenth century, and lost.

At the Revolution Settlement in 1690, it was finally determined that Presbytery was to be the future and permanent form of the Scottish Reformed Church, and that there was not to be a union of the two National Churches, even with the union of the two kingdoms; and the first chapter of its history came to an end.

Was it a gain or was it a loss that the struggle ended as it did? That question has been asked before. Of the influence which the issue had, not merely upon Scotland, but upon the United Kingdom, the verdict of one who, though himself a Scotchman, and a grandson of the manse, had certainly no prejudice in favour of his native Church or land, may be taken as probably not very far from the truth. 'There can be no doubt,' says Macaulay, 'that a religious union (between Scotland and England in 1689) would have been one of the greatest calamities that could have befallen either kingdom. The union accomplished in 1707 has indeed been a great blessing to both England and Scotland. But it has been a blessing, because, in constituting one State, it left two Churches. . . . Had there been an amalgamation of the hierarchies, there never would have been an amalgamation of the nations. . . . Those marvellous improvements which have changed the face of Scotland would never have been effected. Plains now rich

with harvests would have remained barren moors. . . . New Lanark would still have been a sheep-walk, and Greenock a fishing-village. What little strength Scotland could, under such a system, have possessed must, in an estimate of the resources of Great Britain, have not been added, but deducted. So encumbered, our country never could have held, either in peace or in war, a place in the first rank of nations.’<sup>1</sup>

Can as high an estimate be formed of the value of the Presbyterian victory as regards the Church? In answer to that question, we must see what that form of Church government was which then became the permanent polity.

‘Three elements exist in the Presbyterian system—the authority of presbyters, more especially as subordinate to no office-bearer of higher rank in the Church; the representation of the Laity in its government; and the provision made for its external unity in courts of review.’ The reason why not the Church of Scotland merely, but all the Churches of the Reformation, had naturally the tendency to assume the Presbyterian form, and did so wherever they were not thwarted, as in England, by external circumstances, was simply this—that while breaking with the immediate, the Reformers went back to the remoter and purer past, and drew their system from the fountain-head of Holy Scripture. Like the primitive Apostolic Church on which it was modelled, the Presbyterian Church recognises but two permanent offices, that of presbyters or elders, and that of deacons—the one for things spiritual, the other for things temporal; its basis, unit, and type being the congregation, with its court of associated elders called the kirk-session. Like it, it regards the Christian people as the only Christian Church and the only Christian priests. Like it, it unites the congregations of a locality for purposes of government into a higher court called the Presbytery, which consists of a clerical and

<sup>1</sup> *History of England*, vol. iii., p. 257.

lay representative from each kirk-session. Each member of the Presbytery is also a member of a higher court representing a province, and known as the Provincial Synod. The highest court of all is the General Assembly, which is composed of representatives or commissioners, both lay and clerical, appointed by the various Presbyteries, and also of representatives from the royal burghs and universities. Each of these courts in the National Church has its jurisdiction, status, and functions secured by the law of the land. From the decisions of the Supreme Court on matters within its own province, there is no appeal. The Church is thus a perfect organic whole; its every separate congregation being not only an integral part, but a fully equipped type or model of the whole Church. There is thus also a simple and orderly gradation in the system of government, one court rising above another, from that which represents a single congregation to that which represents the whole Church, and each and all of them containing that large infusion of the lay element which prevents the governing power from being wielded by a class; and by its practical wisdom, its knowledge of affairs, its variety of status, intellect, and character, constitutes the beauty, the stability, and the freedom of the National Church of Scotland—a Church which is thus in perfect harmony at once with Apostolic practice and with the representative institutions of modern times. What has been declared to be the great want of the Church of England is admirably supplied by the General Assembly—namely, ‘a continuously acting organ by which to adjust itself to the needs which changing times must bring upon every living and working society of men.’ For capacity of self-extension, self-adjustment, and self-government, for adaptation to widely different circumstances and conditions, for elasticity and catholicity, no system could be more admirable. As a consequence, it is found in somewhat different forms among many different peoples and in widely distant lands. If we

leave out the Lutherans of Germany and elsewhere, who are not Prelatical nor even Episcopal, in the sense attached to that word by the Anglican Church, the Presbyterians of the world outnumber the Protestant Episcopalians. 'Of all organisations in the Christian Church,' says Dr Hill Burton, 'Presbytery is, next to the Romish Hierarchy, the most powerful. In places entirely isolated from external aid and countenance, it is far more accomplished in organisation than any other Church.'

There are two eminent advantages which flow from its essentially popular character, and from the large lay element in its government. It requires, and therefore fosters as an essential element in its success, an all-pervading intelligence in the community. In this respect, as in many others, it was admirably suited to a country which could boast that it was not only the best, but the only educated nation in the world. Above all, it renders practically impossible the growth of that sacerdotalism and superstition, whose only logical resting-place is Rome, and which events have proved to be the incurable taint and defect of Episcopacy, wherever it has been held to be divinely authoritative to the exclusion of all other systems of church government. When a Scotchman, from whatever cause, breaks off from Presbyterianism in his own land, he breaks off from the Church of Scottish history, the Church to which we owe so much both of our civil and religious light and freedom, and with whose fortunes and misfortunes the brightest pages of the national annals have been identified.

The system, so theoretically perfect, is not without grave practical defects. There is a want of central control; a want of the unity, concentration, and cohesiveness which diocesan Episcopacy gives. The principle of equality errs by excess. There is no natural initiative; there is no firm and responsible executive; there is no permanent authority. While the system is free from prelatic despotism, it is by no means

free from the danger of clerical and popular oppression. When democracy becomes tyrannical, its tyranny is often of the worst kind.

With the Revolution Settlement and the Treaty of Union, a new chapter in the history of the Scottish Church began which is not yet completed; new questions emerged which are not yet answered. The fruitful and far-reaching influence of a great national wrong was never more strikingly illustrated than in the long train of miserable and not yet exhausted consequences which followed the ill-omened Act of Queen Anne, whereby, in 1712, against the unanimous will of the Church, Patronage was restored. A strong consensus of opinion points to this Act, against which the Church continued to protest for more than seventy years, as the principal root of the troubles which followed. It would be difficult to find an Act of Parliament against which so heavy a bill of indictment can be brought. It directly led to the first secession in 1733, which within fourteen years was itself split into two by the Burghers' oath. It had a principal share in the formation of the two great parties known as the Moderates and the Populars, and their long and bitter contentions regarding the presentation and the call. The harsh deposition of the gentle Gillespie in 1752, and the consequent founding of the first Relief Presbytery in 1761, were due to it. A wise voice in 1782 declared that this Act and the Church of Scotland could not stand together. But for it, the Church would never have been induced to go beyond her province, and to exceed the rights secured to her by statute, by passing the Chapel Act and the Veto Act of 1834, and thus to embark upon the most unwise and fatal conflict to be found in the whole range of her history. In spite of the great and honoured men who took part in it, and of the splendid act of self-sacrifice to which it led, no conflict better shews to how large an extent human frailty, passion, and prejudice are factors in ecclesiastical history. No good man

can wish that his country should pass through such a time again.

Had the bitter leaven which wrought so much mischief, and which was purged out in 1874, been removed in 1834, the story of the Disruption would never have been written. But what was right in 1834 could not be wrong in 1874. When the Church embraced a favourable opportunity presented to it, and sought for its people the restoration of an ancient and much-prized privilege, which had been violently wrested from it; when it obtained from Parliament the removal of an incubus which Parliament had itself imposed, and which had weighed it down for a hundred and sixty years; when it sought to get nearer the hearts of its alienated children by the removal of the one great cause of their alienation—was that, in the eye of everlasting righteousness, right or wrong? Even granting that the motive was the desire to lessen Dissent, to bring the Churches closer together, and to hasten the day when our broken Presbyterianism shall again be one, and when they who now stand far apart shall see each other eye to eye—was that a mean and ignoble motive? Is schism in itself a blessing? Is Dissent divine? Is the desire to remove the cause of schism in itself a wrong? True! it might have been well for all parties had the boon come earlier. But it is surely true of blessings that they are better late than never. True, too, that the evils which an Act of Parliament can do, another Act may not wholly undo. The stream of tendency which has been set aflowing can never perhaps be wholly dried up or rolled back to its fountain-head. It is easy to divide; it is not easy to unite. But surely an unjust Act, pregnant with mischief, is better off than on the statute-book. It is hard, no doubt, for the Free Church to feel, ‘If Patronage had been done away with in time, there would have been no occasion to suffer as we have done.’ But it is not a high or noble or justifiable ground for even a suffering Church to take with regard to another—‘because we did not get a loaf of bread when we were hungry, we shall

take care that you do not get it either.' On no intelligible ground can the abolition of Patronage be made, as it has openly been, the occasion of an attack upon the National Church, save on the principle that Dissenters have a vested interest in the defects and abuses of the Establishment. A more disingenuous or a more repulsive doctrine was never fashioned in the brain of Christian men.

On no part of its long and chequered history may the Church of Scotland look back with more unfeigned thankfulness to Almighty God than on the period that has elapsed since 1843, and during no period have there rested on its labours more manifest tokens of the Divine blessing. 'In quietness and confidence has been its strength.' Because 'peace has been within its walls,' there has been 'prosperity within its palaces.' Itself habitually maligned and traduced, its bitterest enemy cannot charge it with having ever, even in the heat of the strife, uttered a harsh word or done a harsh deed to those who left its communion, and whose very nearness of relationship, as so often happens, seems to have intensified their enmity. A common danger past, drew its members closer together. A meeker and more patient, a more temperate, tolerant, and united spirit, was born of the sorrows of a troubled time. Clearly recognising that its faithfulness to its great principle and mission as a national Church is its one permanent title to the nation's respect and confidence, it has done its very best, through its Endowment and Home Mission Schemes, to provide the ministrations of religion to every destitute locality of the land. To this quiet and steadfast devotion to its national duty, and to freedom from the curse of internal strife, is mainly owing that astonishing success which has marked the Church during recent years, and which unhappily, in the eyes of some, is its most obnoxious feature and its worst offence.

By far the best evidence with regard to the numerical strength of the different Churches would have been that ecclesiastical column in the census returns which the two Established

Churches have repeatedly sought, but which the Nonconformists have steadily and successfully resisted. We find, however, from their own returns that the communicants of the Free Church are about 230,000, and those of the United Presbyterian Church about 172,000; while from her own and parliamentary returns, those of the Church of Scotland are about 500,000, or more than the other two put together. This would give it 1,750,000 adherents at the ordinary reckoning, or close upon a half of the entire population. It has been shewn, too, that the increase of membership of the Established Church is 8000 a year, or in eight years, 64,000; while in the Report of the Secretary of the Sustentation Fund of the Free Church in December 1875 there are these words: 'It may be assumed that our membership should have shewn an increase over 1867 of 22,100. But it is shewn above, on the basis of Presbyterian returns, that the increase was only 7062. There is, therefore, a deficit of 15,000, or  $7\frac{1}{2}$  per cent.' The Report of the United Presbyterian Church presented to their Synod in 1877, declares: 'On the whole, the United Presbyterian Church may have maintained, but has not improved or strengthened, its position in relation to the total population of the country.' In fifteen of the Established churches in Edinburgh and Leith, the membership in 1874 was 17,064, and in 1879 it was 19,485, an increase of 2421; whereas in fifteen Free churches in Edinburgh and Leith, occupying the same localities, and bearing the same names, the numbers were 7430 in 1874, and 7761 in 1879, an increase of only 331. The proportion in these churches is therefore two and a half to one in favour of the Established Church; and her increase in five years is more than seven times greater—and this in a city supposed to be the stronghold of the Free Church. In the same way, the increase in Sunday scholars in the Established Church during twenty-six years ending 1877, exceeded by 20,681 the increase of both the other denominations put together. During the six years ending 1877, the free-will

offerings of the Established Church, including £500,000 from the late James Baird, amounted to £2,431,779. All this is a sufficient answer to the common platform assertion that the Established Church is 'moribund,' and confirms the statement that 'it is yearly gaining in numbers, in influence for good, and in the recognition of its merits by the general body of the people.' There can be no doubt that where other things are equal, the drift of the Scottish people is towards the Church of their fathers.

But there are facts far more important than any figures, and whose value no figures can estimate, underlying and explaining these external marks of success. These facts are mainly these—the Church's evangelical doctrine, spiritual earnestness, and tolerant and comprehensive spirit. Such experience as has been given me by a ministry of five-and-twenty years in important centres of influence, is the ground and warrant of my belief that through all these years there has been a gradual deepening of the Church's spiritual life, and that it was never more healthy than at the present day. Never was there more of genuine piety, never more of personal love and loyalty to the Lord Jesus, than there is now among its ministers and people. Never was there a more faithful preaching in its pulpits of the love of God in the redemption of the world through Jesus Christ; never a more faithful ministration of the doctrines of grace throughout the length and the breadth of the land. Never was its worship more comely and reverent, nor its parochial system better manned and wrought, than it is at the present day. Never were its clergy more alive to their duty, more pure in life and doctrine, more abounding in zeal and good works based upon a personal devotion to their great Master. If there are exceptions, they are exceedingly rare; and at what period and in what Church have there not been such?

Another marked and growing feature of the National Church is its breadth and comprehensiveness. All through, it has sought to maintain a friendly relation with other churches.

It is actuated by no narrow aims, and by no sectarian jealousies; its pulpits are open to ministers of all evangelical denominations, and it welcomes to its communion and to a share of its endowments any Presbyterian minister and congregation who may care to take them. It embraces within its membership a wider range of society, a more equal balance of political parties, a richer intellectual life, and a greater variety of religious type than any other Church. It is a striking fact that no considerable secession ever took place from its ranks on the ground of doctrine. With a folly of which it has long since repented, it expelled two of the best men it ever had, Edward Irving and John Macleod Campbell. With an enviable nobility of soul, they both loved it to the last; and Campbell died in its communion. It is of the very nature of a national Church that it be politically, socially, religiously, as broad and comprehensive as the national life which it represents; not bound to one hard and fast line of Christian thought and sentiment, but tolerating and comprehending all shades and types of thought that are consistent with the great root doctrines of Christianity; recognising, respecting, and fostering whatever agencies and forces are at work for the general good, whether within or without itself. A national Church is fulfilling one of its very highest functions when it seeks to utilise and to consecrate all the forces which are at work in the nation—its wealth, its æsthetic taste, its literature, its changing currents of opinion, its political movements, its thought, its culture—to imbue them, as far as it may, with a Christian spirit, and to guide them to high and noble ends. A national Church is, or ought to be, and none but a national Church can be, the spiritual leaven of the nation.

In the Church's contributions to literature, and in the general intelligence and culture of the clergy, the period under review will contrast not unfavourably with any past time.

Such changes as have taken place in the current of opinion and teaching have been in the direction of a gentler theology,

more in keeping with the softened manners of a milder time. Far more than in former times is the love of God in Christ the great theme of the pulpit, and far less the terrors of the law; far more the Fatherhood, and far less the Magistracy of God. It is a question whether this milder form of teaching is not carried to excess. A freer but not less reverential handling of the Word of God; a wider latitude of opinion, not as to the fact, but as to the *modus operandi* of the Atonement; a less stern and rigid view of Sabbath obligation and observance; a more merciful and hopeful view of the future destiny, not only of the millions outside the Christian Church, but of mankind in general—these are changes which have come more or less over all churches alike. There are two main directions in which the tide seems strongly running; one is towards a relaxed subscription of the Confession of Faith, the creed of Presbyterians throughout the world, and, all in all, perhaps the noblest creed of Christendom. The consensus of opinion is clearly towards the maintenance of the Confession intact, as too valuable and too venerable to be safely tampered with. That some latitude of interpretation is allowable seems evident from the very nature of the document itself, and from the circumstance that when it was approved by the Assembly of 1647, it was expressly on the ground that it was 'in nothing contrary to the received doctrine, &c., of this Kirk'—that received doctrine being the old Scots Confession of 1560, 'which has never been repealed, modified, or departed from.' If it was expressly allowable to the men of 1647 to treat the new Confession in the light of the old, the same liberty seems allowable to the men of 1881. All that the statute of 1693 requires in the matter of subscription is, that the subscriber accept it as 'the confession of his faith.' Whatever additional stringency has been added to these terms, has been the work of the Assembly; and what the Assembly has done, it can also undo.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See this whole subject powerfully handled in the paper on Disestablishment, by the Duke of Argyll. Strahan & Co., London.

In looking back over these five-and-twenty years, nothing strikes me more than the marked change which has taken place for the better in public worship, and especially in the matter and manner of public prayer. Few things more nearly affect the welfare of a Church than that form of worship by which it gives expression to its faith in, its dependence on, and its communion with God; and few things have done our own Church more harm than its long and slovenly neglect of this important department of its work, and its departure in this respect from its earlier and better ways. Among the historical facts which it is neither to our credit nor to our welfare to forget, one is, that for the first hundred years of its existence the Reformed Church of Scotland had a richer and more varied service than it has ever had since. It had its Prayer-book, its order for the administration of the sacraments, its service of praise with Hymns as well as Psalms and appropriate tunes. The loss of all this was due not to Scottish, but to English influence. As time advances and taste improves, there is a growing tendency to return to the moderate and enlightened views of Knox and the early Reformers. The Assembly has sanctioned the use of the Prose Psalter, a Hymnal, and an Anthem book. Instrumental music is being widely introduced as a help to psalmody. Church architecture has been immensely improved throughout Scotland. Fast-days are going; and it is not unlikely that in the course of time their place will be taken by the days commemorative of those great facts and events which secured the redemption of the world. While the privilege of extempore prayer will never be abandoned in Scotland, there are good men in all the churches, and these the very men who have the highest conception of what public prayer is, who would be thankful for the use of a modified and permissive Liturgy, as a blessing to themselves, and some security for a more reverent and decorous worship over the length and breadth of the land.

The story which has now been brought to a close is one of

which every Scotchman may well be proud. If we leave out Palestine and Greece, no country of equal size has played a more prominent and beneficial part in human affairs than our own. In theology, in philosophy, in literature, in science, in jurisprudence, in government, in art, in mechanical invention, in war, in every element that tends to human progress, her children have taken and are taking a foremost place. Though her skies are cold, her soil poor, her advantages in comparison with other countries very small, history will never forget what Scotland has done. In the measure in which we are proud of our country we must be proud of our Church, for until a recent period the country and the Church were one.

One question remains: What is to be the future of the Church whose present condition and past fortunes have now been traced? Is she to be preserved and strengthened with a view to continued and increasing usefulness, or is she to be uprooted as the National Church? We have seen that the three main inheritances which the past has handed down to the present, and of which the National Church is the sacred depositary and guardian, are evangelical doctrine, Presbyterian polity, and legal establishment and endowment. The first of these was restored at and secured by the Reformation; the second was permanently secured by the Revolution Settlement; the third has been the unbroken possession of the Church from the beginning. There was a time when her doctrine was not evangelical. There was a time when her polity was not Presbyterian. There never was a time when she was severed from the State. Wars have raged around her doctrine; wars have raged around her polity; but until recent times there has been no war about that State connection, which is the strong security for both. No account of the Church of Scotland would be historically just which left out of view the most remarkable feature of modern ecclesiastical life.

Seriously viewed in all its lights and bearings, there is

perhaps no more melancholy chapter in the long and chequered history of the Scottish Church than that which is now in the process of being written. In none of all the struggles which have been under review would it be so difficult to detect any trace of moral grandeur, of genuine nobility, of far-sighted patriotism, as in that agitation for the destruction of the National Church which has already begun. This ancient and stately edifice, whose history has been traced in these lectures, which was built by the pious wisdom and hallowed by the blood of our forefathers, within whose friendly shelter was reared and fostered all that has made Scotland great and free, the Scottish people of to-day are asked to destroy. Before they lend themselves to this unhallowed work, there are several questions which they would do well to consider.

1. What is the work which they are asked to do? It is simply the destruction of the Church of Scotland, the oldest, the greatest, and the best of all our national institutions, which, once swept away, can never be restored. No cloud of soft words should be allowed to obscure the real issue. Her connection with the State, as the expression of national religion, is the very thing which, next to her doctrine and her polity, and to her allegiance to her spiritual Head and King, is her glory, her strength, and her joy. It is one of the three strong links which bind the Church of to-day to the Church of the remotest past. To sever that long-continued connection, so fruitful in blessing to Church and State alike, is to lay her in ruins. She would still be a Church of Christ, but she would no longer be the Church of Scotland. Our country would have one sect more, but no longer a national religion nor a national Church; and as nowhere has the relation between Church and State—those two divine ordinances for human good—been closer than in Scotland, so nowhere has the influence of their interaction told more upon the habits of the people and the history of the land. The continuity of our national life would be broken by their

severance, and a religious, social, and political revolution accomplished—the greatest that has taken place since the Reformation. Lord Moncreiff, whose family holds a high place in Scottish ecclesiastical history, and who is himself the most eminent of living Free Churchmen, has said that this would be to ‘undo the work of three hundred years.’ It would be the greatest possible impulse which could be given to the revolutionary tendencies of the times, to the levelling and communistic spirit which is in the air. There are not a few who think that if the oldest and best of our institutions goes, there will not be much left that is worth the keeping. ‘For it must not be forgotten,’ he further says, ‘that changes of this nature are seldom confined in their operation to the object for which they were effected, but frequently find their main development in results the most unexpected, and sometimes in those which are least desired. It is impossible to root out an old tree without disturbing the soil round it; and the abolition of the Established Church would bring with it many results, religious, public, and social, extending far beyond our subjects of controversy.’ The Confession of Faith would no longer be the law of the land. One of the most solemn and binding articles in the Treaty of Union would be erased from the statute-book. The first oath of the sovereign on accession to the throne would no longer be to uphold the Church of Scotland. With the solitary exception of our law-courts, not one vestige of our ancient institutions would be left to remind our children of the day when we were a separate people. When these law-courts shall have been transferred to Westminster, Edinburgh will be a second-rate provincial city, and Scotland a mere appanage of England. As England was a party to the Treaty of Union as well as Scotland, England must be a party as well as Scotland to any interference or tampering with it. It is a question on which more than a few Scotchmen, and more than a political party, are entitled to be heard; it is one in which the whole nation is concerned. The aims of

the Liberationists are well known. To them the humble and inoffensive Church of Scotland is a matter of little concern. But they know that as the principle which underlies the Establishment north of the Tweed is the principle which underlies the Establishment south of the Tweed, the destruction of the one would greatly hasten the destruction of the other. And what would then follow? There would follow of logical necessity the repeal of the laws fencing the Protestant succession to the throne; the repeal of the laws for Sabbath observance; the repeal of the laws against blasphemy; the repeal of every law on our statute-book which has been the outcome of a national recognition of God and of His laws. For the nation having disestablished its churches, and thereby ceased as a nation to recognise religion, every law founded on religious considerations would be a tyrannical oppression and persecution of those who do not believe in God and who refuse to recognise His laws. To all this, every one in either country to whom national religion is dear will have a word to say.

In Scotland, too, along with State connection, the ancient parochial system would come to an end, and with it the spiritual provision of the Scottish people, and especially of the poor. Every parish throughout the land would be deprived of a property that has belonged to it since parishes were made; a property held by the very oldest and most sacred of tenures, and designed to secure to it for ever the free administration of the ordinances of religion. The tens of thousands of our Scottish poor who can raise no voice loud enough to be heard amid the din of ecclesiastical and political war, would see in silent sorrow their religious patrimony wrested from them. With such facts before us as this, that, out of the 1032 charges of the Free Church in 1878, only 320 are self-supporting—‘that is, yield £157 each to the common stipend fund’—it is idle to suppose that any system at all approaching the parochial system will ever be devised and successfully carried out for securing the ministry of educated Christian gentlemen, and

the free and faithful preaching of the Gospel over the length and the breadth of the land. If the mass of the Scottish people should ever consent to such a work of revolution and spoliation, they will belie their whole history. One thing is certain: no such upheaval of the social fabric as this can be accomplished without fierce and bitter ecclesiastical war, and the heart-burning, the dissension, the misery, and the serious injury to spiritual life which such wars always entail. A whole generation would bear upon its breast the scars of the strife.

2. What, I ask, is the time which has been chosen for this unholy war—for this destruction of the Church, this alienation of religious property? In spite of the Church's great success, in spite of the good work that is being done by other denominations, look at what still remains to do. Is there not work and room and need for all? There are 500,000 Scotchmen outside all Church influence. Our intemperance and impurity as a people are scandalously high. Over-churching in some districts, and under-churching in others, prevail to a lamentable extent. The Romish Church is making progress. It has restored its Hierarchy. Since 1851 it has increased its priesthood in England and Scotland from 958 to 2282; its churches, from 683 to 1461; its monasteries, from 17 to 160. In 1851 there was not one monastery in Scotland; there are 15 now. It has already accomplished that supposed impossible feat of directly, and through no intermediate steps, drawing to its bosom members of our Presbyterian Church, both high and humble born. There is an Irish Roman Catholic population seething in the centres of our large towns, as much cut off from all elevating wholesome Christian influence as if they were in the wilds of Connemara, and by God's law of influence dragging our people down to their level because we have not lifted them up to ours. There are much worse things than Romanism making progress among us. Rationalism of the worst kind is poisoning to an inconceivable extent large masses of our intelligent artisans. The last five-

and-twenty years have been in some respects the most fateful which the Church of Christ has yet seen. Never since Christianity began has there been a period of equal extent equally prolific in free speculations on religious subjects and in questionings of those fundamental truths on which religion rests. The remarkable thing is the vast area of intelligence which, through means of the periodical press, these speculations reach and influence. It is a time of general upheaval, doubt, and drift. The Bible is subjected to a rationalistic treatment which leaves it an empty and worthless shell, whose ultimate and not very distant destiny is declared to be the shelves of some antiquarian museum. All creeds and all churches are on their trial. In a day like this, when some of the most powerful forces at work in society are not only hostile, but fiercely hostile to all churches alike, and to those dear and blessed interests which they represent; when men of high culture and learning are calling upon those like-minded with themselves to apply the axe to the very roots of Christianity, and to tear it up as a pestilent and accursed thing; when some of the leaders of public opinion, whose words are heard to the ends of the world, live and die acknowledged atheists; when the highest science of the time is growing more avowedly materialistic; when the authority of Scripture, the Divinity of Christ, the immortality of the soul, are day by day more widely denied; when between the aggressive efforts of Romanism on the one hand, and Rationalism on the other, it would almost seem as if the Reformation-force had spent itself, and the tide were on the turn; when some of the ablest and most pious minds in Christendom are seeing in all this 'that downward sweep into religious doubt which is only the long-predicted and mystic harbinger of the beginning of the end'—in a day like this, it is treachery to their Master and suicidal faithlessness to themselves for the churches in Scotland, so closely akin to one another, to enter on a war that might easily be avoided, and to waste in fighting about Church

arrangements those energies which are more than needed to repel the common enemy—the enemy of God and of the best interests of men—who is thundering at all their doors.

3. Who are they who at such a time are summoning the people to such a work, and seeking to spread over a peaceful land the horrors of a fierce and unnatural war?

The agitation is more of English than of Scottish origin. It is stirred and sustained by the Liberation Society, who supply the sinews of war, and who seek to strike through the Scottish, a blow at the English Establishment. Measured by that delicate and accurate gauge of a Scotchman's feelings and convictions—the amount of his contributions—the agitation has a very slender hold on him indeed. So far as Scotland is concerned, it is mainly clerical. As the Free Church General Assembly is largely clerical in tone, its sweeping majorities in favour of Disestablishment are very far indeed from being a certain indication of the convictions of the great body of her people, who do not forget that the principle of Establishment is ineradicably rooted in her own constitution, and that, in 1843, she went forth with the banner flying over her, 'We are no Voluntaries.' With regard to the state of matters at the parliamentary polls, it is enough to say that the question has not yet been generally regarded as coming within the range of practical politics, and that Liberal Churchmen have not abandoned their party on account of a danger which they do not seriously apprehend. Disestablishment meetings have not been remarkable either for number, or influence, or enthusiasm. To the mass of the intelligent laity in all our churches, the agitation is simply distasteful and distressing. They see that the points which divide are trifles in comparison with the points which unite, and they are weary and sick of ecclesiastical strife. On 31st March last, it was said by Lord Provost Ure of Glasgow, himself a United Presbyterian: 'There is no one who can look back on the history of the country for three hundred years, who would think for a moment

of blotting out the Established Church of Scotland; without it, our country would be in nothing better than a state of barbarism. There cannot be the slightest doubt, that without the Church of Scotland, we would not be the people that we are. I, for one, feel the greatest gratitude to that Church, that it has done what it has for the country to which we belong.'

4. Why to such a work, at such a time, and by such men, are the people summoned?

It may well be asked of the Institution which it is sought to destroy—why, what evil hath it done? It occupies to-day no other position than it has always occupied; it holds no other principles than it has always held. Does it bear upon its forehead the manifest tokens of a Church doomed to, because deserving destruction? What are the reasons on which rests the enormous conclusion that this ancient historic Church should cease to be? It has been asserted that the connection between Church and State is unscriptural, and sinful, and injurious to religion and morality. It must be a poor cause which could use such weapons. One remark may suffice. Whatever is unscriptural and sinful *now*, must *always* have been so: therefore, the Church of Scotland and the Church of England, back to the Reformation, have been unscriptural and sinful; and Knox, and Melville, and Chalmers, all alike fall under this dreadful appellation.

There is one argument against the National Church as being established and endowed, which is worth looking at. It is this, that it gives the Church an unfair advantage over Nonconformists, and is therefore so far unjust. It contradicts, it is said, the principle of religious equality. This is an argument which is capable of being presented in a very plausible form, and which would not be without some force if the case stood thus—that out of a number of widely different sects competing for the popular favour, the State chose *at the present day, and for the first time*, not to endow—for that it does not—but to select one, and to

recognise it as the National Church. That might, with some show of reason, be called a violation of religious equality. But the case is not so. The Church is not a sect now entering into competition with other sects. The root idea of it is, that it is a national institution as old as the State itself, and therefore going back to a time long before sects had any existence, employing its own resources to the best of its ability for the very highest national purposes, and offering its benefits equally to all. It is the friend and the ally, not the creature nor the pensioner of the State. It would be as true to say that it made the State as to say that the State made it. It costs the State nothing. The small portion of its endowments which the State pays in grants from the Exchequer, is only part of what it receives from Church property in the form of Bishops' rents. So far as there are pecuniary transactions between them, it is the State, not the Church, which is the gainer. The Church is simply the owner, or if you will, the trustee of a fragment of a much larger property conferred upon it by private voluntary gift in times far remote, and since then faithfully employed for the maintenance of religion throughout the land. To say anything else, is to say what is not true. Unlike the Irish Church—of whose destruction this at least can be said, that it has not made Ireland any better—it is no mark of conquest, no symbol of external force or dictation, no privileged Church of an alien race, no State-paid propagator of an alien faith. In its doctrine, in its discipline, in its government, it represents the religious convictions of eighty-two per cent. of the Scottish people. Unlike the Church of England, it does not overwhelm by its bulk those who differ from it. Its superiority does not amount to an offence. It is not the author of a social ostracism. It creates no social chasm between its own people and Dissenters. They visit freely in each other's houses. They pass with ease from one Church to another. The social strata from which its clergy and those of the Dissenting Churches are drawn, do not lie far

apart. They study at the same universities ; they preach in each other's pulpits. The Church hurts no one ; it tyrannises over no one ; it speaks ill of no one ; it is willing to associate with all. Its doors and its heart are open to all. Whatever its privileges and its poor endowments, all are welcome to share them who will, and this because it has ever been the Church, not of a sect, but of the nation.

Where is the religious inequality here ? Even if there were, it is not the Church that would be responsible, for it stands precisely where it always stood, but those who chose to leave it, and who are welcome to return. It is not fair for those, who of their own free will refuse to take the benefits of an ancient institution, to turn round and say that they are unfairly treated, because others choose to take and enjoy what their fathers handed down to them, but which they choose to decline. Because they have become Voluntaries by choice, is it fair that they should try to make others Voluntary by compulsion ?

One other specious argument is used. After the war, it is said, the combatants will embrace. On the ruins of the Establishment a great United Presbyterian Church will rise. It is difficult to believe that there are men who seriously believe that. They little know how dear the Church of Scotland is to her clergy and her people who could dream this foolish dream. Disestablishment would be the greatest blow ever struck not only at Presbyterian Union, but, so far as Scotland is concerned, at Presbyterianism itself. There is no barrier to hearty fellowship between the clergy and the churches *now* ; there would be an insuperable obstacle *then*. Among the few things certain in such an event, one at least is this, that the best of her people and the best of her clergy would never unite with those who causelessly inflicted what they would regard as one of the greatest calamities which ever befell the Scottish people. That were a wrong whose memory would live on for many a generation.

5. Who will be the gainers by the strife, end how it may ?

Who will be the gainers, especially if it end in the accomplishment of its destructive aims? Not the poor, whose spiritual provision will have gone. Not the two Churches, the principal Scottish agents in the work. There will be no addition to their numbers, nor to the social status of their clergy, nor to their income, their influence, and their prestige; and certainly none to the existing Church of Scotland, which values a national recognition of religion expressed by State connection as a good thing for it, a better thing for the poor, and the best thing of all for the land we live in. To some extent, perhaps to a large extent, Scottish Episcopacy will gain, within whose more peaceful fold many good men are even now seeking shelter from the strife of Presbyterian tongues. Religious intolerance and bigotry will gain. The day was when Scotland was not a pleasant place to live in; that day may come again. Secularism and infidelity will gain, for they have no better recruiting-sergeants than ecclesiastical wars. Revolutionary principles will gain. The disestablishment of the Church will be one long stride towards the rule of democracy, the abolition of Protestant sovereigns, and the disestablishment of the throne.

6. There is one last question: Supposing Disestablishment, what then? What is the programme? What is the new and superior system which is to take the place of the old? Is the new order of things to be shaped by chaos or by chance? Where is the new Knox who is to guide the new Reformation towards far nobler issues than the old? Let Lord Moncreiff reply: 'The adjustment of the new order of things would not be wholly or mainly in Presbyterian hands; and it were difficult to predict what kind of fabric might or might not arise on the ruins of our Revolution Settlement and the Treaty of Union.' If this, or anything like this, is a true representation of the facts of the case, there never was in the whole course of ecclesiastical history a more wanton, reckless, and suicidal work of destruction to which a Christian people were asked to

set themselves, than the proposed abolition of the National Church of our land.

There is one conclusion to be drawn from all that has gone before in this and the preceding lectures—namely, that if ever there was an ancient institution which was worth preserving for what it has done, for what it is doing, for what it has the promise of being yet able to do, it is that institution ‘which alone bears on its front, without note or comment, the title of the Church of Scotland.’ It is the fullest embodiment of the traditions of the past; it is the fullest expression of the thought and life of the present; it has by far the richest promise of the future. It is the common heritage of Scotchmen.

It is worth preserving, because its friendly compact with the State is, in the conditions of modern society, the only substantial and the only possible security for spiritual independence.<sup>1</sup>

It is worth preserving, because it provides the best security, especially in a Presbyterian Church, for a cultured, free, and independent clergy.

It is worth preserving as a solid guarantee for the continued purity of the national faith, and for the prevalence throughout the land of a religion that will neither be latitudinarian on the one hand, nor narrow, fanatical, or intolerant on the other.

<sup>1</sup> Such a case as that of *Jones v. Stannard*, which was tried in the Chancery Division of the High Court of Justice, and which lasted seven days, as reported in the *Times*, Feb. 2, 1881, puts beyond dispute the following points: (1) That all Dissenting Churches are subject to the jurisdiction of the civil courts. (2) That the creed of any non-established Church may be considered, and its true interpretation decided, by the civil court. (3) That the civil court may decide questions involving the removal of a minister of a Dissenting Church from his pastoral charge on the ground of doctrine. (4) That no human foresight or skill can prevent the recurrence in Dissenting Churches of similar questions with similar issues. (5) That absolute spiritual independence cannot be secured in a Dissenting Church. As the decision of all such cases in the supreme court of the Church of Scotland is final, with no appeal to the civil courts, which are precluded by statute from reviewing its decisions, all who value spiritual independence are logically and morally bound to oppose the abolition of that Church.

It is worth preserving as the only security that the religious wants of the nation shall be provided for in the generations to come.

It is worth preserving as the only visible rallying point of our distracted Presbyterianism.

It is worth preserving as the nation's testimony to its faith in Almighty God, and in His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. The State is not a fortuitous concourse of men and women, but a living and organic whole, with functions, privileges, and obligations. In a sense different from that which applies to the separate individuals who compose it, it is the subject of the providential government; it is accountable to God; it is by Him rewarded and punished. In its organic and corporate life this State is Christian. That is its very highest characteristic. Its people, its structure, its laws, customs, and institutions are Christian. To the prevalence of Christian principles and ways of living, it owes its commanding place among the nations of the world. It is the duty of a State thus organically constituted, 'through the only channels open to it, its legislature and its laws,' to honour Christ, to acknowledge the source whence national blessings flow, and to support and advance to the utmost of its power that divine religion which is the principal factor of its greatness and strength. For hundreds of years the Church of Scotland has been the authoritative expression of the fact, that the State and the Constitution are Christian. Long may it continue so; for no truth stands out with sharper distinctness upon the page of history—no truth is written in deeper lines across the times we live in than this truth: 'The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee, shall perish.' . . . 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.'

THE END.