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The Moulding of the Scottish Nation¹

AT the death of Alexander III. in 1286 Scotland made territorially one country; the first of Scottish kings, Alexander ruled in fact, as well as in name, from the Pentland Firth to the Solway. His own special achievement had been not only to rule the mainland with a firm hand, but to add the Hebrides and even the Isle of Man to the territory he had inherited. It had taken well-nigh eight centuries to complete the work of consolidation to which Alexander put the finishing touch—a work that had its origin about the beginning of the sixth century, when in the modern Argyleshire a band of Celts from Ireland founded the Dalriadic Kingdom. Some two centuries and a half elapse, and one kingdom is formed to the north of the Forth by the union of the Picts and Scots under Kenneth Macalpine; and within two centuries more one king nominally ruled over the whole mainland of Scotland. It was in 1018 that this end was achieved; and the whole intervening period between that date and the accession of Alexander III. had been needed to make Scotland a territorial unit. It was a great work that had been accomplished, and, with the exception of England, no other country in Europe had attained a similar degree of territorial cohesion.

But though Scotland was territorially one, it would be an abuse of words to speak of it as a nation. The bond of common memories, common hopes and aspirations, which is requisite to the evolution of a national consciousness, did not and could not yet exist. The heterogeneous elements that composed its population had only the tradition of mutual estrangement or hereditary

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hostility. Located in different regions and speaking different tongues, what common interests could exist between the Briton of Strathclyde, the Gael of the Highlands, and the Saxon of Lothian? Of all the countries in Western Europe, indeed, there were none where greater obstacles existed to prevent the formation of a united people than in Scotland. Diverse races, diverse tongues, a land by its distribution of mountain, river, and sea almost destined by nature to permanent regional division—such were some of the impediments to be overcome before a nation in any real sense of the term could take shape and consistency within its boundaries. The process, it is evident, must needs be a protracted one, and, as in all human evolution, what we call accident must play a large part in it. However inherent and powerful the tendency towards unity, events over which the incipient nation had no control might intervene and dash the fair prospect of national growth. The object of the present lecture is to trace the growth of a national consciousness in the Scottish people, and to note the main causes that forwarded or impeded it.

In the development of nations there is of necessity much that is common to all of them. The same common instincts of human nature must everywhere be at work, and in the case of a society like that of Western Christendom similar agencies must have gone to the common result. Under the régime of feudalism and the medieval church, the different countries possessed common institutions, were informed by common ideals, and by community of interests were borne unconsciously onward to the same goal. Though in the evolution of national consciousness, however, there was thus a general uniformity, there were peculiarities in the process which constitute the essential difference between the national history of one country and another, and like other countries Scotland had a development specifically its own. It must be our object in the present discussion, therefore, to note at once what was common to Scotland with other countries in their respective national developments, and what was peculiar to herself in her national growth.

Amid the disasters that fell so thick on the country after the death of Alexander III., the most far-sighted contemporary could only have predicted the undoing of the work that had been accomplished by that king and the long line of his predecessors. As the history of the previous century had shown, it was only under such strong and sagacious rulers as David I.

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and the last two Alexanders that the heterogeneous elements of the kingdom could be held together. On the death of Alexander III. there followed the extinction of a dynasty, a disputed succession in the most aggravated form, and a war for bare existence against a foreign invader. In all human probability the result must be either the absorption of the kingdom by its hereditary enemy and rival, or its relapse into the original elements that composed it. From both of these dangers it had in reality the narrowest escape. Alexander had hardly been dead before civil war broke out. Robert Bruce, Lord of Annandale, who claimed the Crown on the ground of nomination and descent, sought to make good his claim by the sword, but it is impossible to imagine that in the existing circumstances he could ever have established himself as the acknowledged King of Scots. The intervention of Edward I. had at least this immediate result—it arrested civil war and for the time prevented national disintegration. The grandson of the Lord of Annandale, the hero-king Robert I., succeeded in making himself sole ruler of the kingdom, but it was only his own remarkable career and the new experience the country had undergone that had made this consummation possible. In the war of deliverance which he carried to so glorious a conclusion, the various sections of the Scottish people were drawn together by common interests, which in large degree modified hereditary antagonisms, and disposed them to find a common head. The greatness of Bruce's achievement placed him in a position which left no opening for a successful rival, and through constraint or self-interest or affection the majority of the people recognised in him the only safeguard against internecine war and a foreign enemy.

But if there had been the narrowest risk of dismemberment, there had been an equally narrow risk of absorption by England. Had Edward II. been cast in the mould of his father, and had Edward III. not been diverted by other schemes of conquest, Scotland must either have bled to death or reluctantly surrendered her independence.

As it was, she emerged from the long struggle an independent and a united kingdom. Her material loss had been great. For a full century and a half after the War of Independence the Scottish people cast regretful eyes backward to the golden age of Alexander III. But if the material sacrifice had been disastrous, the spiritual gain was an adequate compensation. 'A people without an epopee,' says Goethe, 'can never become

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much worth,' and Scotland now possessed the materials of an epopee which in due time was to become a national possession. First the deeds of Bruce were commemorated in the soberly-imaginative poem of Barbour, and at a later date Wallace was transfigured by Blind Harry with the lineaments and proportions requisite to make a historic personage pass into the popular imagination. Wallace, says Wordsworth, left his name

'Like a wild flower
All over his dear country,'

and his deeds, he goes on to say, created

'A local soul
Of independence and stern liberty.'

Such was the impression Wordsworth gained from his tour in Scotland in 1814, and his words fitly describe the moral and spiritual gain of the War of Independence. In a degree far beyond what she had been in the prosperous days of Alexander III., Scotland had now become a united people, with the common traditions and aspirations which go to form a national consciousness.

Even yet, however, Scotland could hardly be described as a nation in the sense in which we now understand the term. In the conditions of society, as they then existed in every country of Christendom, there were inherent forces at work which inevitably tended to hold apart the constituent elements of any people and to prevent their fusion into a uniform whole. Of these separative forces the chief were the conditions imposed by the feudal system and by the economic conditions of trade and commerce. Within his own domain each feudal lord was a petty king, who for the most part regarded his neighbours as his natural rivals or enemies. As were his own feelings, so were those of all dependent on him. They virtually composed a self-subsistent society with little concern in the greater world around them. 'Such law and justice as were to be had were mainly administered by their feudal superior; and the necessities of life were found in the cultivation of his domains. So long, therefore, as a country was subdivided among such isolated societies, the close national union that can only come of interdependence was practically unattainable.

If the dwellers in the country districts were thus held apart by the conditions of feudal tenure, the towns were equally

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isolated by the conditions of trade and commerce. A conclusive proof of this fact is that every town of any consequence was surrounded by a line of defence, which it was one of the chief duties of the citizens to maintain in an effective state of repair. These lines of defence, it is to be noted, served a double purpose. They provided security against actual violence—violence from rival towns, from neighbouring feudal potentates, from foreign invaders. In the present connection, however, it is more important to note the second object which they served. By the conditions under which the mediaeval towns had grown up, each to a large degree was an independent centre, living its own life, and disposed to regard every similar community as a rival or rather as an enemy. The reason for this attitude is simple. At one time or other the town had received certain trading privileges from its superior—king, ecclesiastic, or feudal lord—and on the conservation of these privileges its existence and prosperity depended. It would be irrelevant to discuss the nature and origin of these privileges, and it is sufficient to note for our present purpose that the lines of defence that surrounded the towns were indispensable for their preservation. At the different gates in the wall or dyke every stranger could be questioned as to the motives that brought him there. If he was suspected of any intention of infringing the town privileges, he was either refused admittance or placed under proper surveillance. Only on one occasion did the townsmen freely open their arms to all and sundry. At the annual fair all barriers were thrown down, and absolute freedom of trade prevailed so long as it lasted. Among the forces that made for national as opposed to municipal ends, therefore, these fairs must be assigned their due place. In Scotland, as in other countries, every town of any consequence had the right of holding its fair either by royal grant or immemorial prescription. As on the occasion of its celebration merchants and traders flocked to the town from every part of the kingdom, it was then borne in upon its citizens that they formed part of a larger whole in which all had a common interest. Still the normal attitude of every citizen was that his own community was an isolated society surrounded by dangerous rivals against whose encroachment he must ever be on his guard. Such being the relations of every town in the kingdom to each other, it is evident that the growth of a national consciousness in the most enterprising portion of the inhabitants of every country must of necessity

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be a slow and gradual process. Till new economic conditions arose, in fact, collective endeavour was impossible, and a fully-developed nation could not in the nature of things be formed. In due time, as we shall see, these new conditions did arise, and Scotland, like its neighbours, did not fail to profit by them.

These obstacles to the growth of national feeling—the isolating tendencies of feudalism and of trade—were common to Scotland and all other countries. But there were other impeding forces which in her case were of special significance. From the nature of her climate and surface intercommunication was attended with peculiar difficulties. The construction and maintenance of roads implied an amount of labour and expense far beyond what was necessary in such countries as England and France. In no country in the Middle Ages were the roads such as to render communication an easy matter, but in Scotland, with its obstructing mountains, rivers, and bogs, they were practically impassable during a great portion of the year. But without rapid and frequent intercommunication, the intercourse necessary to weld a people into a united whole was impossible, and not till past the middle of the eighteenth century can this obstacle be said to have been tolerably overcome.

But besides these physical impediments there were other hindrances to national fusion which formed a special difficulty in the case of Scotland. Though acknowledging a common head, the various portions of which the kingdom was composed continued to be inhabited by distinct peoples speaking different tongues.

Between the natives of the wide district of Galloway, the Gael of the Highlands, and the Teuton of Lothian and the Eastern coast, there could be little community of feeling, few palpable common interests, and except on rare occasions of general peril but little united action towards a common end. In the case of Galloway, the wild nature of the country and the fighting instincts of its people, perpetuated by the rivalries of the clans who divided its territory among them, long availed to hold it apart from the main stream of national development. Even into the fifteenth century Galloway was governed by laws of its own, and till the beginning of the eighteenth it clung to the Celtic language, which it had inherited from before the days of St. Columba. Still more estranging were the conditions of the Highland section of the kingdom. Of wider extent and

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still more inaccessible from its natural features, the region of the Highlands seemed destined by nature to independence. In greater degree than Galloway, its inhabitants had a tradition of hostility toward the Lowlands which only the slow growth of time and the pervasive influences of modern civilisation have been able to overcome. Till the opening of the fifteenth century the Lords of the Isles regarded themselves as independent sovereigns, and made common cause with England against their nominal head the King of Scots.

Such were some of the forces that made against the development of a united Scottish people. Yet, as the issue was to prove, the centripetal tendencies must have been more powerful than those that made for decentralisation. First we have to note that in all the countries that made up Christendom there had from the beginning been a tendency towards the formation of distinct kingdoms, ruled by one head, and inhabited by peoples bound by ever-strengthening ties of common interest. For special reasons, which need not now be considered, Italy and Germany were exceptions to the general rule, but by the close of the fifteenth century three great kingdoms, France, Spain, and England, had been formed on the same general lines of development. As an integral part of Christendom, Scotland had been subjected to the same influences as these other countries. Consciously and unconsciously, therefore, she was pushing for the same goal. From the War of Independence onwards she had been more or less in the current of European politics, and this was in itself a powerful stimulus towards the national unity which alone could give her a voice in the general affairs of Europe.

Among the unifying influences that went to create distinct nations, that exercised by the Church can hardly be exaggerated. In the case of Scotland the teaching of the Church was almost the sole common influence to which its people were subjected. Trade and commerce, in the Middle Ages, as we have seen, were separative as well as unifying agencies; but such powers as the Church exerted were wholly in the direction of cohesion. From the teaching of its religion, by the ministry of its officials, the Gael was taught that he was of the same flesh as the Saxon, that he was placed in the world for the same purpose, and that the same final destiny was the lot of both. By the organisation of the Church, which bound in a common whole the length and breadth of the kingdom, the idea of unity was brought

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home to every subject with a force and persuasiveness which no other agency could exert to the same degree. The parish church, with its ministrants, was at once the symbol of unity, and the most effective factor in enforcing it.

In England national unity had been greatly furthered by the development of its representative assembly; to the Parliament of Scotland, on the other hand, a similar degree of influence cannot be attributed. At no time were the Scottish people greatly exercised regarding the privileges of their representative assembly; and it was only on occasions when their own interests were specially involved that the sovereign and nobles manifested any lively desire to improve its constitution. During the fifteenth century, when its constituent parts were fully developed, the Scottish Parliament had but little prestige and little real importance; and for two excellent reasons. Through the weakness of the Crown it became the mere tool of successive factions; and through the weakness of the executive its laws were made only to be set at nought. To the Scottish Parliament, therefore, we can assign but a subsidiary part in the moulding of the Scottish nation.

After the Church as a power tending to unity is probably to be reckoned the administration of law and justice. When it was brought home to the Highlander that he must seek justice from the Sheriffs' Courts at Dingwall and Tarbert, and to the Lowlander that he must seek it in Edinburgh, Perth, and Aberdeen, he realised that he was part of a great mechanism, with the working of which he must find himself in harmony. It was the misfortune of Scotland, however, that the royal judicatories were permanently enfeebled by a weak executive; and thus was lost that confidence in a central source of justice which makes so large a composite in what we call a national consciousness.

Great public events, involving the welfare of a whole people, must also play a chief part in national development. For a century and a half after the War of Independence, however, there was hardly an outstanding event that exercised a powerful influence in invigorating national sentiment. No great movement absorbed the mind of the people; and no public calamity or triumph set their hearts beating in unison with common fear or exultation. In the protracted struggle between the Crown and the nobility, which is the dominant characteristic of the period, there was little to stimulate patriotism or to bind in

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closer union the different sections of the kingdom. To the people in general it was indifferent which faction gained a temporary ascendancy, though the debasement of the coinage by James III. appears to have evoked a popular feeling which strengthened the successive rebellions against his authority. There was, indeed, one permanent feeling in the breasts of the Scottish people which must be reckoned among the most effectual influences in fusing them into a nation. Since the War of Independence England had never lost sight of its aim of re-attaching the country which had once been in its grasp. Its own troubles had prevented the repetition of the concentrated attempts of Edward I.; but persistently, though intermittently, almost every English king had shown that he only wanted the opportunity to repeat Edward's work. Hatred and fear of an inveterate and formidable enemy, therefore, were feelings shared by the great mass of the Scottish people, and which were bound to strengthen the sentiment of a common nationality. The animating motive of Blind Harry's poem, produced at the close of the fifteenth century, is sheer detestation of England—a motive which finds expression even in Acts of Parliament and other documents of the period.

With the opening of the sixteenth century begins a new phase in the development of the European countries. The new departure was due to the widened scope of thought and action in almost every sphere of human experience. In speculation the scholastic philosophy ceased to be a living interest for the most active minds; before the century was long begun Luther shook Christendom to its foundations; trade and commerce passed under new laws and regulations, becoming national instead of merely municipal concerns; and the very limits of the earth were extended by the discovery of another hemisphere. Under the influence of such facts and ideas individuals and peoples were quickened to a degree of self-consciousness which had been impossible under the comparative routine of the Middle Age. In different measures and by different manifestations we see the vivifying forces at work in England, Spain, and France—now consolidated kingdoms under the direction of virtually absolute rulers. Isolated as she was by nature and circumstances, Scotland could not share to the same extent as these countries in the general movement that was ushering in the new time. Later in the century, indeed, she had an experience of her own to pass through which supplied the spiritual momentum requisite

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to reveal a people to itself and give a direction to its destinies. Yet under James IV., at the opening of the century, Scotland made a notable stride forward in national development.

It was a fortunate dispensation that gave her a king like James at this special period. Though somewhat lacking in the sense of royal responsibility, he possessed many qualities that fitted him to govern a people when novelties were in the air. Intelligent, curious, and enterprising, he was peculiarly open to new ideas, and even unduly eager to see them put in practice. The work he accomplished in consolidating his kingdom gives him a notable place among our princes. Beyond any of his predecessors, James succeeded in making the Highlands and Islands an integral part of his dominion. He definitively broke the power of the Lords of the Isles, thus ridding the Crown of a power that had been virtually a formidable rival, and he reduced the Highlands generally to a state of peace and order which they had never previously known. It has just been said that one of the chief forces that tend to create a nation is the sense of a supreme fountain of justice over which the prince is the presiding divinity, and among our kings few did more to deepen this sense throughout every class of his subjects. He was indefatigable in his attendance on the justice-eyes, by which justice was administered at regular intervals throughout every quarter of the kingdom. Above all he gave a local place and habitation to the Supreme Court of Justice—known as the 'Daily Council'—by virtually making Edinburgh its permanent abode. And in passing, the significance of this step deserves to be specially noted. Till the close of the fifteenth century Scotland could hardly be said to have possessed a capital. Before that period parliaments and conventions had met indifferently in the chief towns of the kingdom as the exigencies of the moment had dictated. The kings, also, had no fixed place of abode, and took up their residence wherever state business or their own pleasure called them. Henceforward, however, Edinburgh became the settled home of the sovereign; except on rare occasions Parliament now met there; and there, as we have seen, James fixed the head-quarters of law. The significance of this concentration was that Scotland now possessed an acknowledged centre from which could radiate all the inappreciable influences that bind a people to a common goal and destiny. What the possession of an undisputed capital implied for the growth of national feeling is abundantly proved in the history

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of every country. We are now carefully warned against the use of physical illustrations in reference to history, but it seems an innocent analogy to compare the function of the capital in the body politic to the function of the heart in the animal body.

In still another sphere of his activity James did an important work in consolidating his kingdom, though, as the future was to show, it was a work attended by unhappy as well as benign results. In the three contemporary kingdoms—England, France, and Spain—there was an equally marked endeavour on the part of their rulers to make themselves absolute princes. Henry VIII., Francis I., and Charles V., all in greater or less degree succeeded in achieving this object. The policy of James IV. shows that he consciously aimed at the same result, and the history of his reign proves that he in a great degree attained it. From the time that he reached his majority he appears to have set himself to dispense with Parliaments, and to govern through the Privy Council, which, though it dates from David II., first took definite shape in James's own reign. But, as the members of this Council were his own nominees, he thus made himself virtually the uncontrolled master of his kingdom. The immediate outcome of this policy was in the true interests of the country. The great national evil of the preceding century had been the over-riding of the Crown by the nobles, with the result that effective administration and a consecutive public policy had been equally rendered impossible. In these conditions the tendency towards national unity had been inevitably checked and retarded. When James found himself in a position to govern through a docile Privy Council, this evil came to a temporary end. From the time that he reached manhood, the nobles ceased to play a leading part in the affairs of the kingdom; and he is himself the one dominating figure to his reign's disastrous close. But though the immediate consequences of his policy were beneficent, it was fraught with sinister results for the future. It was the example of James IV. that inspired James VI. and Charles I. in imposing their will on their subjects through a Council which simply existed to register their behests.

Such were the important results of James's rule in knitting his kingdom to a closer unity. Yet of all the actions and events of his reign, it was perhaps its closing disaster that most effectually served the happy end. Such a calamity as that of Flodden has a power to evoke a consentaneous national feeling

which no other experience can produce. It is the misfortunes of the household that bind its members in the closest bonds of interest and affection, and, as all history shows, it is the sense of common calamity that gives to a nation one heart and soul and mind. On the field of Flodden, as we have been so often told, there was hardly a family of name that did not lose father, brother, or son. From the remotest Hebrides, from Highlands and Lowlands, the ill-starred host had come, on an errand from which human foresight and 'metaphysical aid' seemed alike to dissuade the infatuated king, yet was it precisely this sense of inevitable doom, combined with overwhelming disaster, that gave the memory of Flodden an undying place in the heart and imagination of the Scottish people.

The sobriquets by which James V. was known among his subjects—'The Gaberlunzie King,' the 'Red Tod,' the 'King of the Commons'—show that he held a permanent place in their affections, but his public policy cannot be said to have forwarded the work of consolidating the nation. His reign saw the beginnings of a new chapter in the national history. A fateful question was now presented to the country, the decision of which must determine the direction of its future development. The question was—what were to be its future relations to England and France respectively? For more than two centuries England had been regarded as a natural enemy, against whose insatiable cupidity Scotland must ever be on its guard. As an ally against their common enemy she had cultivated France, and the last fruit of the alliance had been the disaster of Flodden. In the people at large that disaster had only intensified the hereditary hatred of its instrument, but thinking men had already begun to be of opinion that the time had come when a new policy would be in the best interests of the country. John Major, the historian, and later Sir David Lyndsay, the poet, both 'kindly Scots,' if ever there were such, publicly argued that England and not France was Scotland's natural ally. Henry VIII.'s breach with Rome, however, at first seemed to put reconciliation further off than ever, though, in the gyration of events, it was to be the main cause of drawing the two countries together. James V. had never any hesitation as to which of the two paths he should follow. His first marriage with Magdalen of France and his second with Mary of Lorraine committed not only himself but his successor Mary to the hereditary policy of antagonism to

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England and alliance with France. In this policy James had the sympathies of his people behind him, and the character and conduct of Henry VIII. deepened the estrangement between the two peoples. What we have to note in connection with our present purpose, however, is that James had not inherited his father's gifts of conciliating or repressing a turbulent nobility. The disgraceful affair of Solway Moss is the final commentary on his conduct of affairs both at home and abroad. At the call of James IV. noble and commoner had followed him across the English border; despite entreaties and threats his son could not collect a force to attend him on a similar adventure. In the opposition of the nobles, there were doubtless very mixed motives, but the motive which they themselves put forward had its ground in fact and reason; in their king's eagerness to carry fire and sword into England he was serving France better than his own kingdom.

At the death of James V. it might seem that Scotland was less a united nation than it had been at the death of his father. In point of fact she had but entered on one of those momentous crises in which a nation comes to a full consciousness of itself, and with fully opened eyes chooses the path which its instincts impel it to follow. The reign of Mary had not well begun when her people had to face another dilemma besides that of the French or English alliance. The choice between two policies was complicated by the choice between two religions. With the details of the revolution in policy and religion we are not here concerned. The question before us is, in what manner and degree the double revolution influenced the development of the people that carried it through.

The one governing fact is that for the first time in their history the Scottish people had to determine a question which demanded the forthputting of their whole heart and mind. But here it is well to remember that when we speak of a nation we do not mean the number of heads that make up the population. The nation of any country is that section of the population which, by its capacity of thought and feeling, by the strength of its convictions and the strenuousness of its action, determines the main current of the general life and presents the characteristics which specifically distinguish one nation from another. Understood in this sense, the Scottish nation during the reign of Mary consisted of a few thousands, mainly to be found in the chief towns of the kingdom. On this elect few it devolved to

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choose the course which the whole people were to follow and to develop those national traits by which the Scottish character is known to the world. But of this chosen number it was not to be expected that all would see eye to eye on the momentous questions that were submitted to them. Some by natural instinct favoured the old order, and wished to abide in the ways of their fathers. To such it seemed the wisest and safest policy to hold by the ancient religion and the traditional alliance, and not to venture on courses which might lead no man knew whither. Wherever the new faith had appeared, these persons argued—in France, in Germany, in England—civil discord and revolution had been the invariable result. On the other hand, the greater number of the select body of the people came to be of a different mind. To them the teaching of the new religion appeared to be a revelation from Heaven which no individual or nation could reject without forfeiture both in this world and the next. But if the new faith were to be adopted, it was with Protestant England and not with Catholic France that the destinies of Scotland must be linked. It was in the collision of thought and feeling between these two classes of persons that a Scottish nation in the strict sense of the term became a real entity, conscious of itself and with a destiny to fulfil. In the imbroglio of the Reformation struggle we are apt to lose sight of this fact. In the maze of statecraft and diplomacy we see only the failure and success of one and another stroke of policy, and we are bewildered into imagining that these were the determining factors in the final issue. In point of fact, statesmen and diplomatists were but the conscious or unconscious instruments of the new forces that were working in society, and which were impelling the various peoples along the paths which long-inherited instincts marked out for them. The French people, says Michelet, would not have the Reformation; Scotland, on the other hand, wished to have it; and the different choice of the two peoples is only to be explained by their respective idiosyncrasies which had been evolved in the long process of time.

The essential significance of the Scottish Reformation, therefore, is that for the first time in our history we find a great question submitted to a public opinion sufficiently developed to understand and realise its importance. The result, as has been said, was a collision of thought and feeling which evoked into clear day the latent instincts and propensions which had been

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evolved in the past history of the people. Character in the individual is formed in the conflict of warring impulses, and so it is with nations. Whenever a nation attains to self-consciousness, the same phenomena invariably appear. If the nation is truly alive, there will be division on fundamental questions; when such division ceases, it implies that the nation has ceased to exist, either through its own paralysis or the tyranny of external circumstance.

The course of Scottish history subsequent to the Reformation is the sufficient illustration of the foregoing remarks. During the century and a half which elapsed from the Reformation to the Revolution, Scotland was engaged in seeking a political equilibrium which had been disturbed by the overthrow of the ancient religion. The successive sovereigns of Scotland and the most strenuous section of their subjects held incompatible views regarding the relations of Church and State, and as each of the parties believed their opinions to be the absolute will of God, compromise was impossible so long as this state of things endured. But the very existence of such a permanent crisis is the proof that in Scotland there now existed a nation in the strictest sense of the term. In the period prior to the Reformation we have no parallel to the situation that had been created by that event. Down to the middle of the sixteenth century we find occasional popular discontent and chronic disputes between the Crown and the feudal lords, but we find no great national question evoking a public opinion divided alike by reason and passion; in other words, previous to the change of religion, Scotland cannot be regarded as a nation in the true sense of the term. If we fix our eyes on the most remarkable event in Scottish history during the seventeenth century, we realise what in its fullest sense is implied in the distinction. In the portentous uprising which produced the National Covenant we find all the manifestations which characterise a national act—unity of action determined by reason and passion towards a fully apprehended goal.

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