

Free Church Jubilee.

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I.

HAPPILY our generation is not one of disruption but of reunion. Centrifugal forces in Christianity seem to have spent themselves, and centripetal forces are reasserting themselves. And we are thankful. Nevertheless, division is not always an evil, or, if an evil, not always the greater, but sometimes the less. Acquiescence in wrong may be a greater sin than separation. Every division must be judged on its own merits.

What were the motives which led to the disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843? Ambition? Hardly, for the most prominent men of the Church came out of it, those who had nothing to gain and much to lose by any change. The rash obstinacy of leaders who would risk all rather than yield a point? Nay verily. For it was only after a long struggle, after hopes often deferred and grievously disappointed, that with reluctance and with heartache both leaders and followers came to the momentous decision to abandon their beloved homes and churches and trust themselves upon the uncertain sea of separation. Obedience to conscience, loyalty to what they deemed, and what the issue has amply proved to be, the cause of Christ — this was the star which they followed, this was the motive which impelled them.

He who would understand the Scotch disruption, must understand the Scotch character and the Scotch history. Scotchmen have a characteristic aptitude for speculative thought, a rare fondness for "metaphysics," a stubborn adherence to principles. They are no lovers of expedient compromises, but are ready to follow principles to their logical consequences. They may sometimes be obstinate, impracticable, unamiable, but they are capable of a heroism which is sublimely careless of all selfish considerations. And Scotch history is full of memories that thrilled the men of the disruption. That

"Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood."

has been no more jealous of interference with its national rights than the Church of Knox and the Reformation has been jealous of encroachment upon its spiritual independence.

From the first that Church has asserted the grand principle of the spiritual independence of the Church of Christ. This fact is the key of modern Scotch history.

The Second Book of Discipline (1578) declares:

"The power ecclesiastical is an authority granted by God the Father, through the Mediator Jesus Christ, unto His Church, and having its ground in the Word of God; to put into execution by them unto whom the spiritual government of the Church is by lawful calling committed. The power ecclesiastical flows immediately from God and the Mediator Jesus Christ, and is spiritual, not having a temporal head upon earth, but only Christ, the only spiritual King and Governor of His Church."

Now, how shall this spiritual authority be practically exercised? Through the channel of the freely appointed officers of the Church, whose call to their office comes from God, and whose rule of action is in the Word of God, free from the interference of any secular magistrate, parliament, or king. The Book of Discipline proceeds:

"The magistrate neither ought to preach, minister the sacraments, nor execute the censures of the Church, nor yet prescribe any rule how it should be done."

The authority of civil government in things secular is freely granted, but in things spiritual is stoutly denied. The Scotch Church courted the alliance of the State in the way of endowment and support, but demanded untrammelled freedom in the exercise of her own spiritual prerogatives.

When it was proposed to make the holding of general assemblies depend upon the royal permission, John Knox exclaimed: "Take from us the liberty of assemblies, and take from us the Gospel!" In various ways and at various stirring epochs in her history, the Church vindicated these glorious principles. When assemblies were bidden, under pain of being counted rebels, to desist from the ecclesiastical trial of certain of their members, the assemblies resented the interference, completed the trials and passed sentence. In 1638, for instance, the Moderator Welsh said boldly to the Royal Commissioner:

"Whatever is ours we shall render to his Majesty — even our lives, lands, liberties, and all — but for that which is God's and the liberties of His house, we do think neither will his Majesty's piety suffer him to crave, neither may we grant them though he should crave it."

And these men did more. When the worst came to the worst they died for their principles and "The Crown Rights of the Redeemer," with their latest breath proclaiming Jesus Christ the only Head of the Church.

It cannot be held that the Church was always and absolutely consistent with its own principles. Sometimes it bent slightly before the storm. The inherent difficulty of the situation was great. How can the Church on the one hand enter into a close alliance with the State, thereby securing the financial and social benefit of establishment, and on the other perfectly maintain her autonomy in the spiritual sphere? This difficulty appears in its most acute form in the history of patronage. As complementary to the State duty of supporting the Church, appears the State claim of patronage, i. e., the right of directly or indirectly nominating pastors. In the seventh century the recognition began in the Christian Church of the right of founders, those who had bestowed endowments upon churches, to present pastors to these churches. Under various forms this right has been very widely recognized since. Those nobles or other landed proprietors, whose ancestors

have endowed churches, or whose states support them, not unnaturally perhaps, claim the right of presentation to the livings.

In Scotland, immediately after the Reformation, this question of patronage had to be faced. The claim of the First Book of Discipline (1560) is, that "it appertaineth to the people, and to every several congregation, to elect their minister." Patronage could not be altogether avoided. But, when the opportunity presented itself in 1649, patronage was abolished as a "grievance." With the Restoration came back patronage and many another evil. At the Revolution of 1689 it was provided that the heritors and elders should "propose" a pastor to the people. If the people objected the Presbytery determined the issue. This plan worked fairly well, and was guaranteed by the Act of Union in 1707. But in 1711 this guarantee was ignored; patronage in full was restored, as Bishop Burnet says, "on design to weaken and undermine the Presbyterian establishment." The Scotch Church continued for years to utter its protest against this breach of faith. But the voice of this protest gradually became fainter and fainter, until at last it died away in the growth and ascendancy of Moderatism (To be continued.)



THE MARCH TO TASHILL HALL, MAY 18, 1843.