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THE JUBILEE OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND DISRUPTION.

BY JAMES STALKER, D.D., IN 'SUNDAY MAGAZINE.'

This year the Free Church of Scotland—the church of Chalmers and Candlish, of Dr. Guthrie and Hugh Miller—is celebrating its jubilee. As a matter of course the



DR. GUTHRIE.

events in which it took its rise are being recalled throughout all its own borders; but they have also a wider interest as incidents of achievement and sacrifice creditable to human nature.

The Free Church separated from the State in 1843, after a struggle which is remembered under the name of the Ten Years' Conflict. At first the question in dispute was how far the Church was at liberty to give effect to the mind of the congregation in the settlement of a minister, but, as time went on, the area of conflict widened, until, in the opinion of those at least who surrendered their connection with the State, the whole question of the freedom of the Church to act upon her own views of the mind of Christ even in the most spiritual matters was involved.

As early as the close of 1842 it had become manifest that events were tending towards a disruption of the Church; and in November of that year an important meeting of ministers, remembered as the Convocation, was held in Edinburgh, at which many pledged themselves to quit the Establishment, unless they obtained the redress of their grievances. Early in 1843, attempts were made in both Houses of Parliament to secure such legislation as might still avert the calamity, but without avail. The Scottish members in the House of Commons, indeed, gave the Church a majority of two to one; but they were overwhelmed by the votes of the English members. On the back of this disappointment quickly followed two decisions of the House of Lords on appeals sent up from the Scotch courts, which riveted more closely than ever the fetters of the Church. It was therefore amidst a great tension of the public mind that the General Assembly met in 1843.

The General Assembly is in Edinburgh the concentrated essence of what the May Meetings are in London. The opening day is a holiday, when the city exhibits some-

thing of the appearance presented by London on Lord Mayor's Day. The Lord High Commissioner, a peer representing Her Majesty, holds a levee in the morning in the ancient Palace of Holyrood; thence he drives to church in procession through streets lined with soldiers, while cannons thunder from the Castle; and finally he proceeds with his retinue to occupy the Throne Gallery in the General Assembly.

But on May 18, 1843, everything was intensified far beyond the ordinary. The number of strangers, especially of ministers, who had flocked into the city was unprecedented. The holiday was more complete than usual, and the crowds in the streets were not only larger but of a wholly different composition from the throng of boys and idlers who generally assemble to see the show. Grave and responsible citi-



HUGH MILLER.

zens were mingled with the lighter elements, along with numbers of solid country people. As early as four or five in the morning the doors of St. Andrew's church, where the Assembly was to meet, were besieged by those determined to be present at the impending event.

The levee at Holyrood over, the procession took its way to the High Church, where divine service was conducted by the retiring Moderator, as the chairman or president of the General Assembly is called, who happened on this occasion to be the Rev. Dr. Welsh, Professor of Church History in the University of Glasgow, a clergyman of high character and accomplishments, who was expected to come out and, in doing so, to forfeit not only his professorship but also the secretaryship of the Bible Board, worth about £600 a year. Meantime St. Andrew's church, in George street, was crammed from floor to ceiling by a waiting crowd; and the seats on the right hand of the chair, generally occupied by the party opposed to the reforming movement, gradually filled up with the Moderates, as they were called, who had not gone to church to listen to the Evangelical Moderator's sermon. They have been described, as they appeared that day, before their opponents arrived, by the graphic but biting pen of Hugh Miller:

'What seemed most fitted to catch the eye of a stranger was the rosy appearance of the men, and their rounded contour of face and feature. Moderatism in the present day is evidently not injuring its complexion by the composition of "Histories of Scotland" like that of Robertson, or by prosecuting such "Inquiries into the Human Mind" as those instituted by Reid. We were reminded, in glancing over the benches, of a bed of full-blown piony-roses, glistening after a shower.' But soon the blare of the Commissioner's approach was heard outside; the vacant seats of the Evangelicals, whose more distinguished members were greeted as they entered with hearty applause, were filled up, and the Moderator appeared in his place, arrayed in the quaint costume of his office—gown and bands, with court dress beneath, ruffles at the sleeves, silk stockings, and buckled shoes.

Instead, however, of opening a proceedings in the usual way and proposing a successor to himself, he rose with a paper in his hand, which he proceeded to read. This was a document, remembered as the Protest, which, after setting forth in ample and dignified terms the invasions of her jurisdiction which the Church had suffered in the preceding years at the hands of the civil courts, proceeded to state that, a free meeting of the General Assembly being no longer possible on the old conditions, the Church withdrew from the scene, to constitute its Assembly elsewhere on an independent footing. Laying this protest on the table, the Moderator lifted his three-



DR. CHALMERS.

cornered hat of office and made for the door. Dr. Chalmers hurriedly rose to follow, and the bustle of departure spread through the ranks of the Evangelicals. A burst of applause broke out from the galleries, but was instantly repressed by more solemn and overpowering emotions. The occupants of bench after bench rose and departed; till the portion of the house belonging to the reforming party was left empty.

Outside, as the leaders emerged from the church, a great burst of applause greeted them from a vast crowd in the street; and, as more and ever more appeared, it swelled louder and louder, and ran from street to

street. In the public mind there had been the greatest dubiety both as to whether there would be a disruption at all and as to what dimensions it would assume. Although in the previous year more than two hundred had pledged themselves to come out, unless their demands were conceded, the utmost scepticism prevailed as to the carrying out of this resolution. The organs of public opinion maintained that their zeal would be found to have effervesced before the hour of sacrifice arrived. The Government of the day was, it is believed, of the same opinion; and this was why no effective measures were taken to meet the necessities of the case. Even the friends of the movement suspected that the disruption would be 'more respectable in character than in numbers.' When, therefore, the seceding ministers were seen issuing from St. Andrew's church in hundreds, accompanied by still larger numbers of elders—for the Church courts in Scotland are composed in equal numbers of ministers and laymen—the enthusiasm of the multitude knew no bounds. Some were too overcome with deeper emotions to applaud, but looked on with tear-filled eyes. Here and there a man or woman would rush out of the crowd and wring the hand of an acquaintance recognized among the seceders. All felt that they were looking upon a historical scene, in which human nature, and especially the character of the ministers of Christ, was vindicated. It is said that, when someone ran with the news to Lord Jeffrey that over four hundred ministers had come out, he started to his feet exclaiming, "I am proud of my country; this could not have taken place in any other country upon earth." And another occupant of the bench, Lord Cockburn, wrote in his journal a few days later: "I know no parallel to it. It is the most honorable fact for Scotland that its whole history supplies."

It had not been intended to march in any imposing way from St. Andrew's church. But, as the members emerged, they were compelled by a narrow passage left between the masses of people on either side of the



DR. DUFF.