

THE REV. DR. DONALD FRASER ON DIS-ESTABLISHMENT

The following letter from Dr. Donald Fraser, of London, England, to a friend who had asked for his opinion on the Disestablishment question, appears in the "Northern Chronicle" and other Scotch papers. It will interest many of our readers who are watching the course of the discussion:—

MY DEAR SIR,—I am reluctant to enter on the topic you place before me, because I am now out of the current of Scottish ecclesiastical life, and do not pay minute attention to your controversies. It is my happiness to be connected with a Church which aims at reconciling Presbyterian differences, not embittering or prolonging them. As an English Presbyterian, I have no strictures to pass on any of the three Churches in Scotland by which our congregations are reinforced; but as you wish to know my opinion as a Scotchman, and as one who endeavoured to serve the Free Church for eleven years, I will frankly say that, in my view, the crusade for Disestablishment is unworthy of the Free Church of Scotland, and is likely to hurt its highest interests.

The whole problem of the better arrangement of Scottish Presbytery is one which requires large consideration, generous treatment, and a grand burial of prejudices. To approach it in a peevish sectarian spirit, counting communists, and squabbling over statistics, is not the way to make a happy end. Let it be assured that the present divisions need not be, and ought not to be, perpetual. The basis of a better adjustment is surely to be found in a candid and serious recognition of the essential oneness of Scottish Presbytery. Usage makes it possible to think of the Church of Scotland, the Free Church, and the United Presbyterian Church as three separate Churches, each having the Lord Jesus Christ for its Head, though each has a controversy with the others. But is it not dawning on a good many minds that all this is a mistake? Christian communities occupying the same ground, having the same creed and polity, are really not separate Churches, but compartments of one and the same Church. Their separation may do some good in stimulating vigilance and enterprise; but it also does much harm by provoking jealousy, wasting resources, and playing into the hands of those who are adversaries to the Presbyterian Church.

All Episcopalians are not adversaries. I know excellent clergymen and members of the Church of England who, far from glorying over the Presbyterian dissensions in the north, grieve over them, because they are anxious about evangelical and Protestant truth, and are persuaded that such truth would find a strong fortress in a united and powerful Church of the Presbyterian order. Others, however, are certainly unfriendly; and I have often noticed what a point they make of the broken condition of Scottish Presbytery. They are very careful to speak of the Church of Scotland as "The Kirk," and the Free Church as the "Free Kirk," and have quite a stock of stories—apocryphal or otherwise—in circulation about the unchristian feeling which still prevails between these "Kirks." Certain it is that to such unfriendly onlookers as these a reconciliation of the Kirks would deal a heavy blow and sore discouragement.

I am quite aware that the plea for continued separation is that of "disjunctive principles." But what grieves me is to see that Church antipathies have been nursed so long and obstinately that there is no willingness to hail any approximation to common ground, but rather a disposition to strain distinctions to the utmost. I do not refer to the United Presbyterian Church so much as to the Free, which has been for a much shorter time than the former separated from the Church of Scotland. Has the Free Church so soon become irreconcilable? Has it come to be proud of separation? Has it acquired the temper of a sect?

It vexes me sorely to write these words, because I love and value the Free Church, and I do not think that those who have followed its leaders in recent years are at all aware how much the prestige of that Church has been lowered by the language that was used and the course that was taken when the Anti-Patronage Act was under the consideration of Parliament. That the measure in question was, to a large extent at all events, an adoption of Free Church principles, was obvious to every one; yet the Free Church deputations to London tried to defeat it, and, failing to induce any influential Presbyterian member to lead the opposition, took as their champion the hon. member for Montrose, who is an Independent and a Voluntary. They raised a cry that the Church of Scotland was influenced by nothing higher than a desire to popularise itself, though it was not clearly explained why it was so wicked a thing in that Church, and not wicked in others, to desire popular confidence and support. The only result was to spread an impression that the Free Church was rather nervous about its own position, and betrayed a small and shabby spirit. At a critical moment it might have played a noble and memorable part; but it was misled, and got nothing out of the occasion but discredit.

The present agitation for Disestablishment seems to mean unhappy exhibition of the same sectarian temper; and I have a strong impression that it is a movement of ecclesiastical policy far more than of popular desire. I am, of course, aware that there has long been a Voluntary party in Scotland, disapproving of any union of Church and State, and working in harmony with the English Liberation Society for the overthrow of Church Establishments. I can pay due respect to their conscientious and consistent action. But I cannot even feel respect for the movement which has been initiated within the Free Church.

Much seems to be made of the fact, or alleged fact, that the Church of Scotland is outnumbered by the Free and United Presbyterian Churches taken together. It is represented as an injustice to the latter and to other Dissenters (I remember a time when Free Churchmen were not so willing to be flung into the heap of miscellaneous Dissent), that the former should any longer retain the position and advantage of an Establishment. But what has given such

sudden urgency to this consideration? If the numerical superiority now claimed be a fact, it is no new fact. It was as good for this kind of argument twenty years ago as it is now. Why was it not made use of then? Is it because the traditions of the Disruption period were even then too strong? Even at that era of hot excitement, the great men who led the Free Church movement shrank from the attempt to pull down ancient institutions, and desired nothing better than to see an Establishment in which the principles which they held dear should be secured. How singular it is that so long as the Church of Scotland made no approximation to those principles, its position was not called in question; but so soon as it moved towards them, the attitude of patience was changed for one of impatience on the part of the Free Church, and it was discovered that the more the Church of Scotland is improved, the less it should be tolerated! Well, good Christians in private life approximate in their principles and practice, they turn towards each other, and, if they have been at variance, are so no longer; but when the Church of Scotland obtained for the people the choice of their ministers, and secured by statute a recognition of the independent jurisdiction of Church courts in the settlement of such ministers, lo! the Free Church took fresh umbrage, imputed unworthy motives, and now begins to beat the drum for Disestablishment. How can men be kept from regarding such conduct as petty and peevish?

"But was it not petty and unfair," I may be asked, "on the part of the Church of Scotland to adopt, so far as it did, the very principles which it disowned in 1843, and that, too, merely from a desire to outvie the Free Church in popularity?" My answer is, that I do not admire this constant imputation of motives; and that I know no reason why a Church, which in its long history has often changed its policy on matters of administration, should not, after due consideration, do so again and again.

Sometimes I have seen complaint made against the State. It has been urged that if the State now sanctions Free Church principles, it ought to replace and compensate Free Church ministers. Is there any serious meaning in this? Does any sane person hold that if Parliament should alter the law of entail, it would be bound to compensate all persons who, thirty or forty years ago, suffered loss because the law was not altered then? Nay, even if a claim in the present instance were admitted, who are they that possess it? Only the few remaining Disruption ministers. And so, because there cannot be general replacement, forsooth, there must be universal displacement; parish ministers of the present day, who had no more to do with the Disruption than the great majority of the present Free Church ministers had, must suffer; and the Church of Scotland, because it has dared to popularise itself in a perfectly constitutional way, must be pulled down.

A strange notion seems to float in the minds of certain Free Churchmen that a sort of public *amende* is due to them. They cannot be satisfied unless the Courts of Law recall and reverse judgments passed long ago in extinct suits, and Parliament or Government confesses that a former Parliament or former Government was much to blame for compelling conscientious men to leave the Church of Scotland. What unpractical folly is this? Not so are the errors and wrongs of the past repaired. The tide of affairs rolls on, and cannot be rolled back. Things are done, wisely or unwisely, by those who are in power at the period; and they are done. A later generation sees things otherwise, and makes better arrangements, if it can; but there always are consequences of former mistakes which cannot be helped, and must be endured. Better to think of the present and future, and try to make them brighter than the past.

It is proclaimed by some prominent Free Churchmen that what they ultimately aim at is a general Presbyterian union in Scotland—a truly national Church; but that in order to bring this about, the Church of Scotland must be disestablished and disendowed. Out of regard for those who have spoken in this sense, I have tried to take their view, but cannot. They tell us that there can be no union with a "State Church." Now, there is some propriety in calling the Church of England the State Church; but that epithet as applied to the Church of Scotland seems to me a mere piece of imported controversial slang. They tell us that "State pay" must be abolished; yet surely every one is aware that the Church of Scotland derives its stipends not from any State subvention, but from funds which have been devoted to sacred uses from time immemorial. The proposal to deprive the Church of these, in order to reduce school-rates, looks like the device of some political manager for catching voters by their pockets, though, doubtless, to some minds it may appear a most enlightened and patriotic suggestion.

The line of battle is drawn up, and a heavy fire is opened; and we are told that this is the way, the only way, to peace. What! Do men really fancy that the hard controversy which they are now pushing, and the ringing blow of Disestablishment which they hope to inflict, pave the way for a happier understanding and an all-embracing union? To me this seems the sure way to breed ill-will, and to excite a sense of wrong which fifty years of sweet palaver afterwards will not be able to soothe. Better, in my opinion, to attack no one, to pull down nothing, but conserve all that has been devoted to God's service in Scotland, whether ancient endowments or the contributions of modern liberality, and try to draw Churches of the same faith and order into closer relations with each other in a way and spirit not unworthy of neighbours and fellow-Christians.

As I have no idea of continuing in this controversy, let me be as explicit as possible.

I am against the demolition of historical institutions, especially when they are improving. I am against the abandonment of the system of a national Church which was dear to Knox, Henderson, Carstairs, and Chalmers, in order to parcel out the people among competing sects.

I do not hesitate to add that I am especially indisposed to see a Presbyterian Establishment pulled down. If you lived in England, some reasons for this would occur to you that you may not think of in Scotland. You would perceive that it is peculiarly imprudent in Presbyterians themselves to remove the check which the existence of the

northern Establishment gives to the proud assumption of English and Scottish Episcopacy.

The way to bring about a comprehensive Presbyterian union is, in my judgment, the very opposite of that which is at present recommended to the Free Church. Drop the swords of controversy; cease from plotting against each other. Instead of pointing the eager finger at one another's defects or mishaps, try, for a change, the way of charity. How long, how short a time it might take to draw the sons of the old Church of Scotland into one by the road of charity, no man may tell; but I am sure that the result so much desired would come far more quickly, as well as more pleasantly, than through the violent methods which are now proposed.

Of course, this is at once stigmatised as fanciful and Quixotic by men who are resolved on their own solution of the ecclesiastical problem, and will not fairly face any other proposal. But I venture to say—you, at least, will believe that I do not say it unadvisedly—that if only there were an honest disposition to be reconciled, an arrangement could be drawn up in a few hours, and any measure necessary to give it full effect could be carried through Parliament in a few weeks, which would give to Scotland a homogeneous Presbyterian Church, without any disestablishment or endowment. Some cry out, "We can never submit to State control." We would answer—There is no control by the State in spirituals; and if further security for this were desired, it would be given. Others think it impossible for non-endowed Churches to amalgamate with one that is endowed. But this is absurd. Both classes of congregations are found together in the Church of Scotland, and far more largely in the Church of England. Some have endowments while others depend entirely on the voluntary system. There is no reason why this arrangement should not be tried on a large scale in Scotland. If any hold that hereditary endowments are so wicked that it would be wrong to combine with a Church which held them, I should observe that no such scruple has prevented general Presbyterian unions in Canada and Victoria. In those colonies Free Churchmen and United Presbyterians did not demand that the endowments of the Church of Scotland should be abandoned or secularised as a preliminary to union. Why should they do so in the mother country?

What a blessing a comprehensive union should be to our dear old land! What a burial of strife and jealousy! What a lifting of men's minds out of narrow antipathies! What an opportunity to economise resources, and turn them to the best advantage! What a concentration of evangelical life and power! What an answer to those who taunt us with our disputations and separating propensities! Yet the word goes forth for more contention; and few seem to care for the benediction on "the peace-makers."

I am not disposed to say much on the political bearing of this new crusade. It is an ominous thing for the spiritual life of the Free Church that it should be so much occupied with political calculations. So far as my individual sympathies go, as you are aware, I support the Liberal Government. The policy of the last Administration in Turkey, India, and Africa made me more a Liberal than ever. It is therefore with me an additional reason for disliking the present agitation in Scotland, that it is charged with serious peril to the Liberal party. It can bring to that party no accessions, for all the Voluntaries in Great Britain are with the party already, and the pressing forward of Disestablishment can only have the effect of annoying and alienating Liberals who belong to the Established Churches, and all those who for various reasons think that sectarian disintegration has gone far enough, and do not desire to give it any fresh facilities.

As I have been led on to state my views at such length, you may make any use of this letter that you may think proper. Believe me, yours faithfully,

D. FRASER.
London, 9th February, 1882.

FARMING IN SWITZERLAND.

I have wondered if there are such awkward ways of doing things outside of Egypt as are practised here. The farming implements would be laughable if they were not monstrous. Tubal-Cain certainly made better-formed scythes than are used here. The axes are simply long sharp wedges with a hole near the top, and a short, straight stick in the hole for a handle. Hay-forks are big and awkward and twice as heavy as our stable forks. Grain is often threshed with the old-fashioned flail than otherwise. The ploughs are the climax of agricultural monstrosities. They are great cumbersome things, made almost wholly of wood, with the beam mounted on two wooden wheels big enough for coal-carts. My friend used just such a plough yesterday on our farm. I half deny ownership now, when I think of it. It was pulled by six cows. Two men were driving the cows, and two men were holding the plough up. I followed and looked on. They were half a day ploughing half an acre. I am glad the whole concern, ploughmen, cow-drivers, and all, were hired, and not a part proper of the farm. I sat on a stone wall for half an hour and reflected whether it were possible Americans could not make small special farming profitable, with their soil and complete implements for farming, in the face of the fact that these people not only make a living, but save money, on a poor soil, and with the old-fashioned tools of Egypt to work it. I am certain the whole secret lies in economy—in the saving of a hundred little things that shall outbalance even the waste of these awkward implements and these slow methods. There will not a blade of grass be seen among the vines here, or a weed on the farm; there will not be a twig of wood left to rot, or a potato undug. A gentleman's private garden could not be cleaner or better kept than is the whole farm in Switzerland, and cultivation, such as is bestowed only on hot-houses in America, is common here to every farm. Not one foot of ground is left uncared for. *Harper's Magazine.*

MORMON missionaries at Berne are labouring to proselyte the German Swiss.