

## Free Church Jubilee.

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## IV.

THE spirit in which those men faced their difficulties is well portrayed in the words of one of them, within three years after the event, the words of Dr. Burns, of Kilsyth:

"The breaking up of intercourse with the gentry of the vicinity: the loss of a commodious manse, where, for twenty-three years much comfort was enjoyed, a good glebe of ten acres, a living of about £300 per annum, an elegant church, a status in society."

What is all this compared with the approbation of conscience, and the peace of God keeping the heart and mind, the honour of taking a part in upholding the crown rights of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of co-operating with the best of the ministers and elders in this land, the freedom from the most galling yoke of servitude being forced upon us, and last, not least, deliverance from the incubus and unequal yoking of what has been called 'Moderatism,' impeding us in every spiritual and zealous movement, hedging us up from every attempt to benefit the poor people of any contemned district."

This spirit of deep piety, of entire devotion to duty and to God, the love of souls, the earnest Evangelical theology of the whole movement, was the radical secret of its marvellous and abiding success. During the long years of the conflict a strong hereditary sentiment, favourable to the Gospel and alive to the principles of Church liberty, rendered a large portion of the Scotch people susceptible to the appeals of the great men who wrote and spoke. Men felt that the movement was in the spirit and powers of the Covenanters. That the Free Church was the heir of the Church of the Reformation. The descendants of the martyrs were prepared to do and suffer for the old cause—as they felt the new cause to be. History repeated itself, when vast congregations, lacking a church, gathered to hear the Word of God in bleak upland meadows. The Lord's Supper was celebrated in the Highland glens, and children were baptized "in the open air on the bare hillside." In the years preceding the disruption, great revivals of religion had swept over large sections of Scotland. A very large proportion of the recent converts felt their hearts glow with sympathy with the Non-Intrusion movement and found their home in the Free Church. The most saintly men of the Church, whose whole work seemed to be the evangelizing of the land, eagerly joined in the discussions of the time, for they felt that the questions agitated were not partisan, secular, trivial, but profound, vital and spiritual.

It was not for the success of a faction, but for the sacred prerogatives, "The Crown Rights of the Redeemer" that such saintly Christians and devoted evangelists as McChesno and W. C. Burns contended. The Free Church was the child of the most heroic conscientiousness, the most unhesitating faith, the most fervent piety. And all these were demonstrated before the eyes of men, in the bold, decisive act of self sacrifice, with which the evangelical ministers made good their profession of principles. Men felt that there must be something real in a religion which could be so heroic. Dr. Guthrie grandly said:

"There is something more eloquent than speech. I am bold to say that Hall, Foster or Chalmers never preached a sermon so impressive or sublime as the humblest minister of our Church did on the 18th of May, when he gave up his living to retain his principles and joined the crowd which, bursting from the doors of St. Andrew's church, with Chalmers at its head, marched out, file by file, in steady ranks, giving God's people a reason to weep tears, not of grief but of joy."

The disruption became a new evidence of Christianity; and from the first day even until now, the spiritual power of the Free Church has been blessedly manifested in great revivals at home, and in great missionary triumphs abroad.

But the success of the Free Church was also due in part to the wide, wise plans of such great Church statesmen as Thomas Chalmers. Had the enthusiasm of the moment lacked thorough organization, it might have died out. Had there been no proper, general, generous provision for the support of the ministry, had those heroic men been left to abject, abiding poverty, then a beggarly support would gradually have made a beggarly ministry, for no initial impulse of heroic faith will suffice, generation after generation, to fill the ranks of the ministry with the most desirable men, unless provision is in some way made for their descent support, the education of their families, the replenishing of their libraries. Pauper ministers, dwelling amid an intelligent and comfortable community, will not long command respect and wield influence; and here were 474 ministers thrown upon the world, with no visible means of support.

But for this emergency, the man and the method were ready. Chalmers was a genius of organization. Under his magic touch such a financial organization sprang up as the Christian Church had never before seen. He organized victory. The Sustentation Fund was, and is, the successful peculiarity of the Free Church methods. At the convocation which prepared for the disruption, Dr. Chalmers unfolded his scheme, but the men were simply incredulous. Now the time was come to try it. In brief, the plan was this: To gather in from the Free Church people over all the land a general fund for material support, which should then be divided equally among all the ministers, while in each congregation the people should freely supplement this equal minimum allowance, according to their pleasure and ability, by a Congregational Fund. A grand scheme on paper, at least, maintaining, in most unparalleled fashion, the unity of the Church and the fraternity of the band of ministers. "The life-boat," said one "looked almost better than the ship." But would the scheme work? Could the life-boat breast the waves? All depends upon the liberality of the people and the harmonious

and energetic working of details. And Chalmers furnished not only the genius for the bold conception, but the energy of the successful execution. Chalmers touched the hearts and opened the pockets of the people; taught them the secret of local associations to regularly collect the money and forward it to Edinburgh, and inspired the whole enterprise with his own noble enthusiasm.

The liberality of the people was astounding, especially in view of the fact that they had never before been trained to give, the Church being supported by the State. The rich contributed their thousands of pounds, the poor their humble shillings—and many a poor widow gave more than they all. In the first year the amount raised for the Sustentation Fund was £81,000. The aim was to secure £200 a year for each minister from this fund. But for many a long year, though the Fund went on steadily increasing, the extension of the Church was so rapid, and the multiplication of claimants so great, that nothing like this sum was realized. For the first year the dividend to each member was £105. Now, however, each of the present 1,181 ministers of the Free Church receives his £200 a year from this general fund, irrespective of the supply ment direct from his own congregation.

But what should be done for churches? Where could the people meet? Nothing could be sadder than the solemn, tearful farewell of so many ministers and of so large a part of the people to the dear old parish church which they loved so well. Some congregations were fortunate enough to secure old disused churches or chapels, some met in barns or school-houses, some erected (a great curiosity in that land of stone) light wooden churches, many were forced to meet beneath the open sky, on the hill side or on the sea-shore. A great movement was inaugurated for building churches, and a few years dotted all Scotland with decent, sometimes beautiful Free churches. Sometimes the contrast, however, between the old building and the new was not favourable to the new. In a certain parish the minister of the Establishment jocularly described the rival building of the Free Church as

"The Free Kirk, the wee kirk, the kirk without a steeple."

But the Free Church man was ready with his rejoinder:

"The auld Kirk, the cauld kirk, the kirk without a people."

In many Highland parishes this reproach was literally, or almost literally, true. The Establishment had the building and no people to occupy it; the Free Church had the people and no building in which to house them. And over large tracts of country the landed proprietors refused sites for the Free Church. In "The Cruise of the Betsy," Hugh Miller has graphically described the manner in which a Free Church minister, denied so much as a home for himself and his family in his old parish, on one of the smaller Hebrides, settled his family on another island far distant, and took refuge himself in a crazy craft, that he might carry the Gospel to his old parishioners, who had followed him in the Disruption, but, by a tyrannical landlord, were refused a site for a new church.

The hardships and the heroism of those days we must not attempt to depict. It was in many a rural parish a leaf out of the old Covenanting history. Exposure amid the winter storms, on bleak hillsides, proved fatal to some of the ministers and some of the people. The narrow despotism which sought to drive Free men from their conscientious choices back to the Establishment, was met with dogged patience and perseverance, and so was gradually overcome. In four years more than 700 churches were erected.

In 1845 Dr. Guthrie undertook to raise a fund for the building of manse. In six weeks he raised £35,000 for the purpose in Glasgow and its neighbourhood; and, after a year of arduous toil over all Scotland, he reported to the Assembly of 1846 a total of over £116,000. Out of this general fund the individual congregations were helped in the task of providing homes for the ministers.

The next enterprise was the founding of new parochial schools. The Free Church people were soon made to feel that there was no longer a place for them in the old schools, which were under the control of the Establishment. Right and left efficient teachers were dismissed for no other fault than their Free Churchism. Mr. Macdonald was commissioned to raise money for the founding of Free Church day schools throughout the country. With characteristic Scotch liberality in the cause of education, the people, in the very midst of the struggle for sustentation, for the building of churches, and for all other necessities of the new situation, welcomed Mr. Macdonald everywhere, and put into his hand in the first year of the Disruption the princely sum of £52,000. Up to 1869, according to an authoritative parliamentary statement, the Free Church had expended for such educational purposes, buildings and maintenance, not less than £600,000.

Nor was the education of the ministry neglected. All depended upon a supply of godly, well-trained ministers. The national universities made ample provision for their Arts education. But for theological education the Church herself must provide. Chalmers and Welsh resigned their chairs in the University of Edinburgh. The "New College" of the Free Church was at once opened, with Chalmers, Welsh, Duncan and Cunningham as professors, and nearly 180 earnest candidates for the ministry as students. The need of suitable buildings and of endowment was soon felt. In 1844 the canvass was begun. An imposing and commodious building was erected at an expense of over £46,000. Endowments were gathered of about £44,000. A library of 35,000 volumes was procured. And the New College to this day attracts students, not only from all Scotland, but from all parts of the Empire, and also from the United States of America. Sister theological colleges have been established in Aberdeen and Glasgow at a large expense; and the results have been a ministry distinguished by both fervent piety and ripe scholarship.

(To be continued.)