

DIVISION IN THE FREE CHURCH.

The symptoms of an approaching crisis in the Free Church of Scotland are daily becoming more manifest and marked. There is obviously a strong contrariety of opinion among its leading ministers and lay-members on many prevailing questions; and without very careful management the approaching Assembly will be characterized not only by animated debate, but by a disunion and strife which will bode no good to the church. Already some very violent passages of arms have occurred at the respective Presbyteries and Synods; and now a sort of paper war has been commenced which is to be deprecated.

One of the most recent evidences or outbursts of the prevailing feeling is to be found in an address which has been issued "to the members of the Free Church of Scotland, inviting them to prayer for the Church, and especially for the Divine guidance of the ensuing General Assembly in the present alarming crisis." This address is signed by a large number of influential ministers, amongst whom are the Rev. S. Miller, D. D., of Glasgow; the Rev. W. Fraser, L.L.D., of Paisley; the Rev. J. Kennedy, D.D., Dingwall; and the Rev. G. McKay, Inverness; and it purports to have been prepared at the request of a recent meeting of ministers. Alike, therefore, for its authors and its subjects, the address has a special claim to public attention; and it need not surprise anybody that so far from allaying the excitement already produced it is only acting as so much fuel to the fire of controversy which has begun to blaze.

In the estimation of the framers of this address there are two chief causes for anxiety. The first respects the foundation of the Christian faith, and has its origin in the discussion anent the article of professor Smith on the Bible. The Divine inspiration of the Bible, it is thought, is being called in question, or

virtually explained away; and if such teaching be allowed, it is feared the most disastrous consequences will follow to the office-bearers and members of the church. Such questions are said not to have been raised in the church so manifestly since the days of Knox; and the godly people of the land, and of other lands, are naturally looking on with deep anxiety, as the principles adopted and avowed at the ensuing meeting of the Assembly, will, most probably, rule the procedure of the Church in all similar instances. The people are, therefore, importuned to invoke the Divine guidance that the Assembly may be led to the adoption of measures which will vindicate the Divine authority of Holy Scripture.

The second cause of anxiety, however, is evidently regarded with a deeper concern. This, it is claimed, relates to the fundamental Scriptural doctrine on which the Free Church was based in 1843. That two-fold doctrine is, that Christ shall be practically owned and served as both King in Zion and King of Nations. The propriety of ecclesiastical establishments in alliance with the State is openly avowed and defended; and the present agitation for Disestablishment is denounced as unworthy, and to be lamented. This is said to be so on general religious grounds, and then peculiarly so on the part of the Free Church; for, to quote the language of the document, "it is really a request that the Church should ask the State to do away with the grounds on which our 'Claim of Rights' rests; and it is, therefore, an attempt to sweep into oblivion the principles on which the separate position of our church is founded."

Now it is impossible not to see that in this proceeding there are the germs of evil. A discord in the Church is at once openly proclaimed, and that in matters what are vital to the Church's existence. Such a contrariety of opinion will naturally engender strong and antagonistic