

These rhymers, as they were called, were not personally opposed to the system itself, for it had their countenance on other occasions. But they both felt and gave pleasure by turning into ridicule the opinions and customs of the priests. Although such exposures were imperceptibly producing effects most injurious to the interests of Popery, yet they were overlooked for a time, both by the clergy and by the influential among the laity as unworthy of notice. And although, from the alarm at length produced by them, prohibitory laws against what were called "seditious rhymes and blasphemous ballads," were sometimes enacted, yet such effusions continued to be written, read, and relished by the people at large, and insensibly produced a dislike to the monstrous system of Popery by which the country had been so long deceived.

By the year 1540 the converts to the reformed doctrines were numerous, and included not only many of the lower orders, but not a few of the wealthy. This did not arise, as the friends of Popery alleged, from an expectation of reaping benefit by the overthrow of the system, when the lands and revenues of the Priesthood would be confiscated, and restored to their original possessors, or otherwise disposed of; but from a sincere wish to see the iniquitous system demolished, and the pure truths of the gospel introduced in its place.

At this time, however, much progress remained to be made; but God was preparing instruments fitted to advance His cause. It will fall to another speaker to notice the principal characters who figured in the work of Reformation. But in referring to the causes which led on to the change it is impossible not to mention the name, though we omit describing the character, of the celebrated John Knox. Whilst he taught philosophy in the College of St. Andrews his mind underwent an important change, and he was led to the Scriptures in search of religious truth. His new sentiments appeared to his pupils, and doubtless had a salutary influence; but it was not till 1542 that he professed himself a Protestant. When this was known he could not with safety remain in St. Andrews, which was now wholly under the power of Cardinal Beaton, a most determined supporter of the Romish Church. In the meantime the death of James V., which took place at the end of 1542, had much favourable influence on the Reformation. For although the Cardinal attempted to secure the Regency to himself during the minority of Queen Mary, yet the Earl of Arran, who was favourable to the Reformation, obtained it, and his counsellors were all of similar views with himself. In consequence, the Parliament declared it lawful for the subjects to read the Scriptures in the vulgar language. After this the Bible was seen on every gentleman's table; and the New Testament was in the hands of almost every individual. The Reformation which had been so far advanced by books imported from England, was now furthered by the influence of the Scottish press. Besides, the Regent having reformed preachers as chaplains, the doctrines of the Reformation, under the sanction of his authority, were proclaimed throughout the kingdom.

But the Romish Church had still much power. The Regent was of a timid and irresolute disposition, and his professed attachment to the Reformation did not continue. The Cardinal, whose power was still great, gained him over to his measures, and thus the cause of true religion received a temporary check.

But other and better instruments were brought into the field. The learned and celebrated George Wishart, having returned from England to his native country, in 1544, did much by his itinerant preaching to spread