

In the evening a

PUBLIC MEETING

was held, at which Lord Moncrieff presided. His remarks, he thought, though not profound, would represent the thoughts of the laity regarding what might be called the secular effect of Presbyterian Church government. They were met in the spirit of brotherhood and mutual sympathy and respect. Presbyterian communities, like all other communities, had their own distinctive sections, their own pronounced opinions, their own subjects of difference. Differences were laid aside, and they were met for the purpose of union and co-operation respecting even the differences which, though they existed, could not separate those who were one in object and heart. This conference was well-timed in the present juncture of religious opinion and belief. There were those who looked with some despondency, apprehension, and foreboding upon the state of opinion throughout the world. It was no doubt an age of bold inquiry—an age when many forgotten dogmas were revived, and many received truths were decried or derided. He had no apprehension of the tendency of the present age. So far as one could read the future, he thought these signs were not in the last discouraging. While he wished to extend that freedom of opinion to others which he demanded for himself, he could not help remarking that there were some who seemed to try, belonging as they did to the Presbyterian Church, how far they could stray from the Presbyterian faith without wishing to be deserters from it. He thought those people should remember that the freedom of conscience, the liberty of opinion, the toleration, which enabled them to express their own mind, was the fruit, wholly and solely, of the Reformation. The heresies which were dug up in one age, refuted in the next, and discovered again in the third, simply indicated the tendency of the human mind. He did not

think there was anything in present speculations to lead men to despond in the slightest degree for the future opinions of the world. That spirit which not only could maintain itself, but which leavened the whole mind of Europe when the powers of earth were against it, was quite able to hold its own; nothing but its own supineness was against it. He had rather have an age of inquiry and disputation like the present than an age of lethargy and indifference. Earnestness was really the foundation of all success, and they might depend upon it that out of the contact of earnest minds the spark of truth was to be elicited. Men must be met with their own weapons, and if the challengers of anciently received opinions were to be met with success, they must be met on their own ground; learning must be brought against learning, knowledge against knowledge, earnestness against earnestness. If those were stirred up who had the power, he thought there would be no necessity in the end to regret the collision of opinion. Presbyterian Church government was cosmopolitan; it was not provincial—not a Church numbering only amongst its adherents those who spoke one language or descended from the same race. Presbyterian polity was a complete and symmetrical system. The Presbyterian Church was not a college of ecclesiastics, but was composed of the whole body of the faithful, and it was impossible to exaggerate the importance of the lay element. The only remark he should make with reference to spiritual independence was that it appeared to him impossible to have spiritual independence in a Church connected with the State, unless the lay element was introduced. Spiritual independence could only properly exist, in its full force, in a Church where the governing body was not purely ecclesiastical, but where the people were truly and fairly represented. There was ecclesiastical parity in the Presbyterian Church; for there