

## The Presbyterian Review.

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Toronto, August 3, 1893.

### An Object Lesson.

A CRISIS has arisen within the Free Church of Scotland which affords an object lesson to the Churches. At the last General Assembly a strenuous effort was made by a minority of the members to throw back the Declaratory Act with the view of its ultimate repeal. The minority made out a very fair case, if their statements were meant to be taken, not as so much rhetoric, but as the moderate expression of their deliberate opinion, of their mature conviction. They contended that the Act would oppress their consciences in that it opened wide the door for heterodoxy, giving office-bearers and ministers the right to subscribe to the Confession of Faith and Standards with certain reservations; and furthermore, that it was a blow at the constitution of the Free Church as formulated in 1843, the year when the Church was organized. The fact that a considerable body of the ministers and people held these opinions as vital, ought to have great influence on the General Assembly, and the supreme court of the Church might at least have hastened slowly. Warnings were uttered that, should the Act be pressed into law, dissension would be followed by disruption in many congregations. But the warnings fell unheeded and the Act was duly confirmed. The Highlanders of the North were the first to take action. After a few meetings, which showed that their leaders would not leave the Church, two ministers and a number of divinity students placed themselves at the head of the non-contents and a few congregations have been formed, while an agitation, bitter and personal, is springing up all over the country. The ministers who have hitherto had great influence with the people have practically lost control because of their refusal to sever their connection with the Church, and instead of the esteem of former friends they are experiencing hostility, misrepresentation and open opposition. A breach has been made which, it is to be feared, only the death of many of the opposing parties will heal. The work of the Church is being frustrated at a time otherwise critical in the history of the country, and it is questionable whether any person now living will again see a revival of the old confidence in and deference to the Church, which was such a notable feature in the character of the people.

The Declaratory Act is not responsible for all this; the old order was passing away subject to the general law of change, but the transition has been precipitated, and old moorings wrenched by the haste with which the Act was passed in the face of intelligent and conscientious opposition, and the General Assembly must thus share the responsibility of the present sad state of affairs. The As-

sembly was strong and could have afforded to be patient. Patience and moderation ought to be the ever-present handmaidens of strength. When the weak is ruthlessly crushed the victory often lies with the vanquished.

The leaders of the minority also share the responsibility. They led the people too far. In their zeal they lacked wisdom, and the whirlwind which they raised they were not able to rule. They are now in a very unenviable, indeed, in a pitiable condition. In their opposition to the Act, and to the views of certain professors, they went beyond their depth; the pity of it is, the people followed, and now when the leaders call them back the people will not listen to their counsel. Now, a number of the ministers are obliged to apologize for the Declaratory Act. Even so uncompromising a combatant as Mr. Macaskill finds it necessary to explain that the principles of the Church are not fundamentally subverted by the hated Act, against which for two years he has railed in season and out of season. The great danger to truth arising from prejudice has had seldom a more striking illustration. Here were men in whom the Highlanders had the most perfect confidence; they were in very deed the spiritual guides of the people. They undertook to defend the Church against the inroads of undesirable innovations and against the unsound doctrine of "advanced" critics. On these subjects they were implicitly trusted. When the Declaratory Act came up, they opened an agitation against it, offering an uncompromising opposition. They told the people that its passage would mean the overthrow of the essentials, the destruction of the safeguards of pure doctrine, that the Church would become a totally different one from the one they had joined and, moreover, that they, the ministers, would never conform to the new order of things. The people supported them and began to prepare for the worst. When the Assembly refused to listen to the minority and passed the Act, these leaders were asked by the people to sever their connection with the Church. Meetings of elders were held at which this course was decided upon, but the ministers did not respond. The ministers became alarmed at the turn things had taken and counselled delay, parley and moderation. Their advice went unheeded. Then they lectured the dissentients on the sin of schism. The latter responded by promulgating a bond of secession which is being extensively signed in some congregations. The ministers have now found it necessary, in order to defend themselves, to explain away the Declaratory Act as an objectionable, but not a vital measure. The weakness of their position is so manifest that their power is gone. Had they considered well before taking up their first position, and treated the question strictly and scrupulously on its merits without prejudice, as they are seeking to do now, they would have best served the cause of Christ, and the bitter feelings which have been excited would not have been aroused. The moral is obvious, and ought to be pondered by the representatives of the various phases of thought in every Church.

### There Should Be No Compromise.

DURING the past week the opponents of Sunday cars were active and good work was done. On the side of those in favour of the Sunday cars Prof. Goldwin Smith has contributed a remarkably weak letter to the press in which he advocates a compromise between those on both sides who hold, what he thinks, are extreme views on the proposal to have Sunday cars. Without entering into the theological questions which Prof. Smith brings to the front