

The Princeton Theological Review

APRIL, 1926

THE REFORMED FAITH IN MODERN SCOTLAND

In the summer of 1841 a distinguished American Divine paid a short visit to the West of Scotland. J. H. Thornwell was one of the leaders of the Old School in his own Church. That School had just come through its struggle with its opponents; the spirit of the conflict was still alive and the type of later New England theologising, associated with Dwight, Barnes and the Doctors of New Haven, was what Thornwell spoke of as New Schoolism. He found during his stay in Glasgow that the leaven of their teaching had begun to work among the Seceders, who until that generation had for a century been the pillars of orthodoxy in the old Covenanting country. It had only begun to work and it was vigorously antagonised. Yet in connection with the beginning of the spirit of speculation in religion Thornwell was apprehensive. After speaking highly of the Scots and balancing, rightly enough, his favourable estimate with the judgment that they were a little too much inclined to bigotry he went on to say, "If the spirit of speculation on Theological subjects should once become propagated among them there is no telling where the evil would stop." At that time it was not widely propagated amongst professed Evangelicals.

In the State Church a species of speculation had been widely prevalent long before those days. It was not so much however a Theology as a negation of Theology. Moderatism so far as it had a principle or could be spoken of as a system was the expression of a philosophy of life that was strongly impregnated with Rationalistic elements. It was a rebellion against the Reformed Faith. The cold breath of Deism had

blighted much of the Church of Scotland. Whatever was mysterious was at a discount. The shallow Illuminism that concerned itself with little more than familiar antecedents and consequents lost sight of the outgoings of everything into mystery. In this it did not submit itself to the authoritative guidance of revelation. Professing themselves to be so modest that they did not aspire to things that were high above them the exponents of this tendency deprecated what they nicknamed "High-flying." The Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption by the blood of the Lamb, the New Birth, the Covenant of Works, the Covenant of Grace—all these were themes conspicuous by their absence from the preaching of this School. Their range of teaching did not go much beyond the common decencies and moralities of life. Anything like Theology was far from their thoughts. If the more cultured representatives of this party set themselves the task of freeing the pulpit of their country from rusticity and provincialism, if literary form was like the breath of their nostrils, the rank and file were very ordinary specimens of what an academic education can produce. They had taken their college course, and the words of one of their own bards held good of them, "They gang in stirks and come oot asses." Witherspoon has left in his *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* a living picture of what organised Moderatism was. As to what it was as a moral force he is credited with the cutting saying that the Moderates preached good works and left others to practise them.

In the hey-day of its power the Moderate party inclined to become militant against the exaction of the avowal of a Faith that it did not hold. When the Feathers' Tavern movement led by men like Blackburne and Lindsey against subscription to the Articles of the Church of England aimed at loosening the bond that bound the Clergy of that Church to its doctrinal constitution, there was a movement in the same direction in the Church of Scotland. This development did not commend itself to Principal Robertson, the historian, who had for many years been the recognised leader of the

prevailing party, and his retirement from the position in the Assembly which he had long held was attributed to his disapproval of such a line of policy. Happily this endeavour to get rid of Subscription to doctrinal standards that were unloved came to an end. But the disloyalty to the Reformed Faith which it exhibited continued to work in a large section of the ministry of the Church.

By the time of Thornwell's visit to Scotland the Moderate party was far from being as strong as it had been. Those were the years that led up to the Disruption of 1843, and before that event a decided majority of the ministry of the Church professed Evangelical principles. There were undoubtedly—and in some parts of the country they were not few—men whose personal faith and public teaching were monuments of what Moderatism had been three quarters of a century before. But from the time of the French Revolution onwards some of the leading men of that party were personally orthodox though they were latitudinarian in ecclesiastical management. Such for example were Dr. John Inglis and Dr. William Muir who might be more properly classified as Evangelical Erastians than as Moderates. The very leader of the party was of the orthodox in his system of thought; for Dr. George Hill was the author of a very able work which set forth the Reformed Theology. His Theological Lectures were used as an orthodox hand-book to the Calvinistic system. The position that these men took up was held by a considerable section of the party that they led. Thus it came about that apart from the survivals of old Moderatism *pur sang*, the ministry of the Established Church both in their private sentiments and in their public profession adhered to the system of truth enshrined in the Westminster Standards. The controversy that was then raging and was soon to disrupt the Church of Scotland showed how firmly the Evangelical party held to the Confession. It was only by a strict adherence to that document in its ecclesiastical statements that they could make out that their contendings were called for by the very pledge that they

had given at their ordination. The situation in regard to the maintenance and profession of the Calvinistic Faith seemed to be as secure as anything in this world. The beginnings of Arminian Evangelism were but as the cloud like a man's hand.

Within half a dozen years of Thornwell's visit the larger bodies of Presbyterianism found a new grouping which remained a prominent feature of Scottish Church life until a quarter of a century ago. In 1843 the Free Church of Scotland severed her connection with the State or the Establishment. There was no doubt as to the attitude which she adopted and maintained toward her doctrinal standards. While she was still an Established Church she held her privileged position in virtue of her professed adherence to the Confession which the Revolution Settlement in 1690 recognized to be the avowed Confession of the Church of Scotland, security for whose maintenance without change was in 1707 embodied in the Treaty of Union with England. It was on a strict reading of her standards that she had fought her Ten Years' Conflict; and when disestablished by her refusal to accept an unwarranted restriction of her blood-bought freedom she adopted a Formula of Subscription which pledged her officebearers to an unabated avowal of the old Confession as the Confession of their personal faith. By signing this Formula they bound themselves firmly and constantly to adhere to the doctrine that they thus professed.

The Statutes which secured the Establishment of the Reformed Church in 1690 were still on the Statute-Book and the Formula of Subscription that bound the ministry to the ancient Standards was still in the Established Church what it had been for more than a hundred years. It was not until 1889 that the formula of 1711 was given up in favour of one that closely resembled the older formula of 1694. And for more than a quarter of a century later the Statutes of 1690-1707 which established the Church and defined the doctrine, worship, discipline and government of the Church which they established were not tampered with.

The third large body of Presbyterians was made up in 1847 of the United Secession Synod, which included the vast majority of the Secession, and the Synod of Relief. These two bodies both represented a tendency which made for the relaxation of that strict adherence to the Standards which was characteristic of old Scottish Evangelicals especially of the Secession in its early days. Though they represented somewhat different theological outlooks it was really on ecclesiastical as distinct from purely doctrinal grounds that the three great bodies of Presbyterian Scotland were separated.

The modified Calvinism of the later Edwardeans affected the English Congregational and Baptist Churches in the earlier part of last century. This influence also told on prominent men in the United Secession; and the action of that body in refusing to apply discipline along the lines of a stricter Calvinism in the case of Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, whatever it may have done by way of helping on the Union with the Synod of Relief, certainly did not hinder it. This showed on the part of both the uniting bodies a looser hold on the Calvinism of their fathers. The tendency of New Light, as it was called, which brought the two bodies together was fitted to go further than it had so far gone. It held in its bosom the seed not only of ecclesiastical but of doctrinal revolution. It meant that the Church was to be open to New Light and free to follow its leading. It was in contrast with this New Light that the champions of the Original principles of the Secession came to be called "Auld Lights." They adhered to a strict reading of the bond that held them to those venerated Standards whose conservative defenders the first Seceders had been. The representatives of this tendency were not to be left out of account in the life of Scotland seventy-five years ago. About them still was a halo as the Church of Dr. Thomas McCrie one of the most revered names in the history of the Reformed Church in Scotland. Over the question of Union with the Free Church the Synod of Original Seceders split in two in the year 1852. The Synod which stood out against such a Union still

exists but with depleted ranks, yet the body which numbers in its ministry such an Evangelical preacher as Thomas Matthew of Kilwinning and has such elders as Dr. Hay Fleming and Mr. Forbes Moncrieff still counts for something in the life of the country. There was then also in being a Reformed Presbyterian Synod with a substantial number of congregations chiefly in the South and West of Scotland. This Synod claimed to be the most conservative of all the Churches that made up the Presbyterian family. In those days it could boast of two men whose names carried weight beyond the limits of the denomination, the two brothers Andrew and William Symington. In 1876 the majority of this Synod made an ambiguous union with the Free Church. The remnant minority still hold the old position but they do not number more than ten charges altogether.

Beyond the pale of Presbyterianism there were a number of Congregational and Baptist Churches which without written adherence to the Calvinistic system were in general understood to hold it. They were in the main the offspring of the Evangelical movement associated with the names of the two brothers Robert and James Alexander Haldane. The Congregational Churches were affected by the looser Calvinism which by that time had come to prevail in the English Congregational Churches. While adhering to the doctrine of Election and of Efficacious Grace they gave place to that of an Indefinite Atonement. Some of them sympathised with the New School whose beginnings Dr. Thornwell had noted in 1841. This movement originated in the United Secession but it drew much of its following from the Congregational Churches and the Evangelical Union, as it called itself, was made up of the two streams that thus flowed together. This body is now united with the Congregational Union. Such a Union tells how the Congregational Union has moved from its old moorings. Among the Baptists definite Calvinism has no great hold.

There were thus three large bodies of Presbyterians all of

which professed adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith.

One of these was representative of the purest strain of Calvinistic orthodoxy. Its theologians such as Cunningham, Maclagan and Smeaton were men who struck no uncertain note; and throughout Evangelical Christendom the Free Church of Scotland was looked upon as being a very home of historical Reformed orthodoxy. The first beginning of a departure from undiluted purity of doctrine was sternly checked. Scott of Glasgow was deposed for New School error and it was made perfectly plain that the Church's profession of adherence to her Standards was meant to be unambiguous.

The United Presbyterian Synod was less militant in its orthodoxy. While it included among its ministers and people a number of Old School Evangelicals it was hospitable to men of a less pronounced Calvinism and its prevailing ecclesiastical tendency wrought for the overthrow of the old Church Settlement in Scotland.

In the Church Established there were two marked Schools of thought, the Orthodox and the Latitudinarian. The Orthodox was represented by men like Robertson of Ellon, Hill of Dailly, Haldane of St. Andrews, and Dewar of Aberdeen. At a later stage Crawford of Edinburgh and Mitchell of St. Andrews were its outstanding men. Indeed such a Church Historian as Dr. James Cooper would describe the twenty years that followed the Disruption as years that showed a recrudescence of Calvinism and bigotry. One of the results of the Ten Years' Conflict was that for so long a time the thinking of the Evangelical School left its mark on many of its old opponents. At no stage in its history was the Latitudinarian School in love with the Faith enshrined in the Church's Standards. The leading representative of this School in those days was Robert Lee. He came more prominently before the world as an innovator in the department of the Church's Worship. But he was at the same time decidedly

Broad Church in regard to doctrine. At first his changes in public worship were hotly resented. He adhered to them for they were part of a considered policy. Lee saw that his Church, representing as it then did a decided minority of the people of Scotland, might be exposed to the dangers of Disestablishment and Disendowment. His aim was to conciliate for the Presbyterian Establishment in Scotland the favor of her sister Establishment in England. This he sought to do by bringing the Public Worship of the Church of Scotland into as great a likeness to that of the Church of England as he could secure. He was not alone in his disintegrating work. Men like John Caird, Norman Macleod and John Tulloch worked for much the same ends. Some of them who were not prominent as Ecclesiastics threw in other ways all their weight in these scales. In his early ministry Norman Macleod would be looked upon as an Evangelical Erastian. But he came into touch with the English Broad Church School. In this connection it may be that Court influence was not too helpful. His revolt against the old Scottish Traditions of Sabbath-keeping made clear that he had travelled far before his ministry came to an end. It might be a safe thing to say that the upheaval produced by his attack on the Confessional doctrine of the Sabbath did more than any other single thing to vitiate the Church life of his country. His genial personality and his great popularity gave an impetus to the movement which he headed that carried the rising generation of sixty years ago far away from the old anchorage.

All this spoke of unsettlement. But as far as adherence to Confessional Truth is concerned the very fact that the Established Church was but one party to an alliance with the State seemed to guarantee a permanence in regard to the profession of the Faith of the Reformation. There were however more tendencies than one at work that made for change. If the Broad Church Movement was away from the old doctrine and worship a High Church Movement took shape which aimed at the exaltation of the Sacraments and at

approximating the worship of the Church not to what Dr. Lee sought but to the standard set by the Oxford Movement. Dr. Cooper whom we have already named was the representative exponent of this churchly tendency. If he was very shaky as a Presbyterian he was a devout High Churchman untouched by sympathy with rationalistic questionings. A Sacramentarian tendency is never in hearty accord with the teaching of our Confession. So the work of this priestly School though professedly conservative was really so only to a very small degree. The tendencies thus at work in the State Church did not make for the maintenance of the old unabated profession that had come down from the Seventeenth Century. Given only an opportunity and the yoke of strict Subscription would be thrown off. Such an opportunity came and the hostile tendencies asserted themselves.

Well over fifty years ago the fear was expressed by Rev. Sir Henry Wellwood Moncreiff, D.D., who for years was Principal Clerk of the Free Church General Assembly that an attempt might be made to relax the Formula of adherence without making any change upon the Act of the Scottish Parliament which in 1690 ratified the Confession. He called on the friends of sound doctrine to be watchful lest their opponents should find a favourable opportunity for lowering the national standard on the subject of religious truth. What he apprehended in 1868 is what has now taken place. How it has come about is a curious chapter in Church History.

At the time when Sir Henry gave utterance to his fears he was one of the leaders of his Church in promoting Union negotiations with the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church. These negotiations along one line or another lasted for ten years and in the end they proved abortive. The opposition of the Free Church Minority could not be overcome. It was clear to them that the Union in contemplation could be brought about only at the expense of the integrity of the Testimony of the Free Church and adhering as they did to that Testimony in its fulness they made it plain that they

would not agree to make principles that they deemed vital to the witness of their Church mere open questions in a larger organization. In the course of these negotiations one of the younger men of the Church came to the front as the right-hand man and prospective successor of R. S. Candlish and Robert Buchanan the leaders of the Union party. This new Church leader pursued throughout a long life a line of policy which as a thread of consistency ran through his chequered public career. He held from the outset and he held to the end the position that the Church was entitled to claim a reserve power of going back on its pledged engagements and of taking the course that its varying circumstances called for irrespective of the Subscription by which each constituent member of its Courts was bound to its Standards. This leading principle was destined directly and indirectly to bring about the result that his colleague in leadership Sir Henry Moncreiff feared. It was a revolutionary interpretation of Spiritual Independence. Dr. Robert Rainy, the rising leader, was the man of destiny.

The Union Project which had to be set aside in 1873 fostered in the Free Church of Scotland a restless spirit that was radically out of sympathy with the strict orthodoxy of its earlier years. It is a singular instance of the irony of history that a Church which prided itself on its devotion to the Reformed Faith should become the home of that tendency in Theology that has transformed the whole aspect of the religious life of Scotland. There was a spirit of the age at work and the other Churches also felt it; but it was reserved for the younger men in the ministry of the Free Church to lead the van in the movement to forsake the ancestral Faith of their Fatherland. An absurd conceit of superior Theological attainments became with them an obsession. Some of them dared to claim the hegemony of the Reformed Churches. The adoption, unconscious though it may have been at first, of principles, borrowed from the Liberal Evangelicals, and even from the Rationalistic Schools, of Germany, which at bottom were at variance with

the necessary subsumptions of Calvinistic Orthodoxy led by degrees to the abandonment of the Old Theology that had hitherto from the Reformation downwards given tone to Scottish Evangelical life. The freedom of thought and of utterance that was tolerated in Protestant Germany became an object of envy, a pattern to be copied, an ideal to be aimed at. The feeble grip with which the Confession was held justified the judgment that William Cunningham had passed on the real incompetence that prevailed even in his own generation to estimate aright the true character of Theological Constructions. There had been earlier skittish manifestations of sympathy with Broad-Churchism. But the really significant proof that showed how far the spirit of concession to radical change was prepared to go came to light in the long-drawn-out Robertson Smith case.

In the end Robertson Smith was removed from his Chair. Rainy called into requisition his doctrine of the reserve power to reach this end. But there was no clear stand taken against the type of criticism for which Smith stood. In keeping with the early Evangelical traditions of his Church, he and his supporters claimed to be true representatives of the School of Calvin who were ready to give effect in their critical work to such a critical spirit as they detected in the great Reformer. In his later years Robertson Smith came to see, what a man of his intelligence should have seen from the first, that his attitude to Holy Scripture was thoroughly out of harmony with the Confession of Faith. This it was both in regard to the definite statements of the First Chapter and the place which the Confession throughout accords to the God-given principium of its Theological system. The leaven however of unbelieving Criticism had now begun to work strongly. It went hand in hand with the spirit of speculation in religion and to a large extent the ministry not only of the Free Church but of other Presbyterian Churches too came to stand in a false relation to the Confession by the avowal of which as the Confession of their personal Faith they had come to hold office in the various Churches.

Even men who in their own thinking and teaching held to the old Faith were to a great degree at a loss. The age with its questionings launched them on a great sea of critical difficulties. They saw the little details that were pressed upon their notice. But they could not see the wood for the trees. They had not the grasp of the principle of Apostolic authority which would have taught them to relegate objections and difficulties to the subordinate place that belonged to them. Some of them even tried to restate the doctrine of Inspiration by starting at the wrong end. They began with the difficulties and ended with the attempt to adjust the statements of Scripture to the idea that their preoccupation with what were really subordinate details had given them of the general subject. This involved them in confusion. Like any other great doctrine of the Word of God it was to be derived directly from the statements of that Word. Thus it is that we come at the doctrine of the Person of our Lord or of Justification by faith. It is when the various statements of the Apostles are duly considered that on these subjects we arrive at conclusions as to what on a conjunct view of the evidence should be held to be the Christian Faith. Converging rays of light from different texts and contexts come to a common focus. This gives us the truth that is regulative for Christian thinking. The doctrine of Inspiration is in no different category. Like all the other doctrines of the Faith it can be profitably formulated only when we are sure of our ground in authority. For as a doctrine it is a thing to be discussed only among the believers in the witness of the Word. What that Word teaches controls the faith of the Church. But its inspired character is not the first thing on which Christians lay stress in controversy with avowed unbelievers. The campaign of opposition to this doctrine within the Churches proceeded logically on a refusal to accept the truth of the claims that the Apostles made on their own behalf. Thus it struck not only at the common Faith of Catholic Christendom in regard to the inspired and consequently divinely authoritative character of Holy Writ. It

struck also at the substantial truth of the Christian Archives.

The Churches of Scotland were unprepared for the day that had overtaken them. In their halting uncertainty they suffered a tendency that was inimical to their historical faith to effect a lodgment in their bosom. They lost sight of the essential simplicity of the Christian position—"Heaven's easy artless unencumbered plan." When John tells us that he wrote his Gospel that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing we might have life through His Name he thought the witness borne by his fellows and himself to be ground enough for the faith of Christians to build upon. Christian faith through the ages has responded to this claim. It was the claim not only of the Apostle but of the Holy Ghost who spoke in him. It is undoubtedly the mind of the Spirit that the evidence which He thus bore to the truth as it is in Jesus should suffice for the Church of God to the end of time and to the ends of the earth. What was thus in the Gospels claimed by the Apostles for the witness that they bore they claimed for their teaching in the Epistles. They spoke not in the words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Ghost teaches. They could say, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us." Such claims were in full keeping with the promises given to them in the Upper Chamber. There has been from the beginning a Holy Catholic Church—define it how we may—to whose care and keeping the New Testament books were committed and from whose hands in successive generations her children have received them as being alike in their witness and in their teaching the crystallised and perpetuated ministry of the Apostles. As many as are willing to sit at their feet, as they thus continue to bear witness and to teach, will learn to treat the Old Testament Scriptures as the Lord and His Apostles did. Here we have the common view of Holy Writ held throughout historical Christendom. On this view the whole structure of Christian Theology is built. To maintain the superstructure we must defend the substructure.

With the changed attitude of so many of the rising ministry the puzzled Christian public could not make out exactly what had gone wrong. The old pillars of orthodoxy had come to be regarded as superfluous laggards on the stage. A strong and definite lead in the acceptance and defence of the Christian Fundamentals was sorely needed among the younger men. While this process of change was on foot communication with other countries had become easier. Scotland was no longer as isolated and self-contained as she had been and the purely Scottish Tradition came to be looked upon as a parochial peculiarity. The young bloods in the ministry let go the faith of their fathers. They begged to be excused from bearing its reproach, and, oblivious of the fact that their fathers as the legitimate successors of the Reformers were fitted to teach those that had gone astray from the Christian Confession, they learned to look upon those fathers as narrow and benighted. When, to begin with, the Robertson Smith party raised their head and loudly claimed to be out and out Evangelicals, Dr. Begg of Edinburgh on a visit to London called on Thomas Carlyle. The sage though long expatriated took an interest to the last in what was happening in his native country. However little his attachment to the faith of his home training was he knew what it taught. He knew also at least more than a little about the unbelief of the German Rationalistic Schools. The conversation turned to the claim made by the Robertson Smith faction to be Evangelicals when Carlyle thundered out: "Have my countrymen's heads become turnips when they think they can hold the premises of German unbelief and draw the conclusions of Scottish Evangelical orthodoxy?"

It may be surely said that the existence of this state of things was not consistent with a high level of Christian life. It was not. Thomas McCrie in 1820 ventured on a forecast of the development of things religious in his country which was now finding striking confirmation:

A vague and indefinite evangelism, mixed with seriousness into which it is the prevailing disposition of the present age to resolve all Chris-

tianity, will, in the natural progress of human sentiment, degenerate into an unsubstantial and incoherent pietism, which after effervescing in enthusiasm will finally settle into indifference; in which case, the spirit of infidelity and irreligion, which is at present working and spreading to a more alarming extent than many seem to imagine, will achieve an easy conquest over a feeble and exhausted and nerveless adversary.

→ The old sturdy Evangelical life that was rooted in that knowledge of the Word of God which is sealed by the illumination of the Holy Ghost was replaced by fitful and sensational revivalism which produced excitement and aimed at giving speedy peace and securing immediate results in the profession of conversion. Its method of short cuts and the warfare that it waged on the serious and weighty introspective type of godliness that has always characterised the Puritan tradition did not encourage the large and generous attention that the earlier generations of Evangelicals had paid to the exhibition in systematic form and in ordered proportion of Christian truth. Those who were the upholders and the product of this new order could scarcely be reckoned upon in the day of battle to prove defenders of the Reformed tradition. There was thus a weakening of the hold which Confessional teaching had on the older generations. It had become unfashionable.

Confluent streams of unfriendly tendency were beating on the walls of the old citadel. And it felt their impact. The liberty of indefinite change which would reduce the stability of the Church's Confession to the steadfastness of the weathercock was held by Dr. Rainy and his followers to belong to the essence of Spiritual Independence. The issues of the old Subscription Controversy were raised afresh. Martineau may tell how this freedom of indefinite change had brought himself and his fellow Socinians to be the representatives of orthodox Puritans whose legitimate succession was not guarded by Subscription. He believed in freedom of speculation and profession of personal convictions, but he would not pledge others or bind posterity. He says in his second letter to Rev. S. F. Macdonald (1859):
My protest is against a *Church* fixing its creed, i.e. against a prior

Jefferson!
Scary.

generation of life-tenants prejudging the convictions of a posterior and using their own rights to the restriction of their posterity's. I know well that to believe a thing true is to believe it immutable; that earnest conviction naturally excludes all suspicion of possible change, and carries in it a confidence of spreading to other minds, and attaining universal recognition. Within the limits of his proper rights I would have every man surrender himself freely to these impressions, utter them, and act upon them. But limits there certainly are to his proper rights in this respect; arising partly from the presence around him of his fellows with precisely similar feeling attached to different beliefs; partly from the certainty of successors whose faculties and opportunities are not his to mortgage.

That is to say, men may think for themselves that they have found the truth but the Church must be ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of it. In Martineau's words we have the marrow of what came in Scotland to be known as New Light. Those who have learned the truth of the Evangel have no fear that any new light that will break forth from the Word will quench or dim the light whose shining has gladdened their hearts. The truth they have learned they can individually and collectively acknowledge and their rightful successors and representatives are those that share their faith. They do not lay on those that do not hold it the obligation to avow as their Faith what is not their Faith. Those only who hold it for themselves are their legitimate heirs in the Church of God.

The principle in regard to a Church's Confession which would always keep the window open to the East for new light was one held in common by two such different men as James Martineau and Robert Rainy. Those who espoused this view of things as regulative of the Church's duty felt the strict terms of Subscription to the Confession which the Free Church exacted to be a galling yoke. They took steps accordingly to relieve themselves from such a yoke. The way that they adopted to do this was the passing of a Declaratory Act which set forth the sense in which Subscription to the Confession was required. The character of this Ecclesiastical legislation was more than doubtful. Contemporaneously with these movements in the Free Church there were move-

ments of a similar kind in the other large Presbyterian Churches. Indeed the United Presbyterian Synod were beforehand with the action that they took. The pseudo-liberalising tendency among them, which a man like John Cairns took to be more far-reaching than fifty years ago it proved to be, resulted in the adoption of a Declaratory Act in regard to Confessional Subscription in 1879. A few of the more extreme men such as David Macrae kicked over the traces; but the course taken by the Synod secured internal peace. The real character of the statements of this Declaratory Act we are not at present concerned to set forth. They may have been a warrantable declaration of the truth taught in the Confession or an addition to its statements or even conceivably a substitute for them; for the last doctrinal deliverance is presumably of regulative authority. Dr. George Smeaton, of whom his able but eccentric colleague James Macgregor said that he had the best-constituted theological intellect in Christendom, held a very definite view of their character. "There are," said he, "good Calvinists in the United Presbyterian Synod but I should not find it difficult to prove that in its Declaratory Statement the Synod has taken up Arminian ground."

In the Established Church the Broad-Churchism of Robert Lee and Norman Macleod became more outspoken. The volume of *Scotch Sermons* published in 1880 was virtually a manifesto of this School. The right place for men of such opinions as were here ventilated was outside of any Reformed Church. Their avowal of the Church's Confession as the Confession of their Faith was belied in their teaching and policy. Honest men would have given up a position that they could not honestly hold and would never have used it to further a policy which aimed at the subversion of the Constitution that they had pledged themselves to defend. The agitation of the Broad Churchmen bore fruit. From 1711 a formula of Subscription to the Confession had been in steady use which bound the subscriber in unmistakable terms to that document as the Confession of his own Faith.

He pledged himself to assert, maintain and defend its whole doctrine, for he owned the whole doctrine of the Confession to be the truths of God to which he promised through grace firmly to adhere. There could be no mistake as to the pledge thus given. It was obviously meant to conserve for all time the profession of the truth that the early Reformed Church was assured she had learned from the Word of God. In regard to this Formula the question was raised as to the competence of the Church's action in first adopting it and then for over a hundred and seventy years employing it as the bond which bound her ministers to the Confession. The ground was taken that the Formula of 1711 went farther and was stricter than the requirements of the Civil Statute of 1693. Accordingly in 1889 a Formula was adopted which echoed the terms of that Act of Parliament and was almost identical with the Formula in use from 1694 to 1711. The slight differences of these two similar Formulas were not without significance. But it could scarcely be claimed by those who had clamoured for relaxation of terms of Subscription that they had secured anything material by this virtual return to the Formula of 1694. There was however a question put to ordinands which was dropped in 1889, the retention of which would have pledged to the acceptance of the Reformed System of Doctrine; and this omission is now important.

The terms of the Formula of 1889 in respect to adherence to the Confession as the Confession of the Subscriber's personal faith were identical with those of the 1694 Formula, "I declare the Confession of Faith . . . to be the Confession of my faith and I own the doctrine therein contained to be the true doctrine which I will constantly adhere to." To turn the corner of this engagement the course of resorting to declaratory legislation which the larger unestablished Churches had taken was considered. Its competence was found to be restricted to narrow limits. On matters in regard to which the Confession is ambiguous or silent it might be employed. But as long as the Act of 1690 remained in force

the Church had no power by Declaratory Acts or otherwise to modify, abridge or extend any Article of the Confession. Its possible use in regard to topics outside the scope of the Confession could not relieve Subscribers from any share of the full obligation to own the doctrine of the Confession to be the true doctrine. It was felt that it was only by upsetting the legislation of the Revolution Settlement 1690-1693 that any change could be secured. That legislation had been guaranteed to be permanent by the Act of Security in 1706 and by the Treaty of Union with England in 1707. This being so it did not look likely that relaxed Subscription would be brought about. Or were Treaties mere scraps of paper?

But Sir Henry Moncreiff's fear in 1868 was on the way to be accomplished. The Union negotiations between the Free Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterian Church which had broken down in 1873 were resumed. For this the ecclesiastical leaders had been paving the way. The Declaratory Statement of the United Presbyterian Synod of 1879 was followed by the Free Church Declaratory Act of 1892. By these instruments the endeavour had been made to relax subscription to the Standards. In each case we believe that such legislation was incompetent. To make it so a minority had but to interpose a veto. If it was declaratory it must, to be competent, declare the true meaning of the Confession and not something else in its stead. If it was extra-Confessional it could not modify the full pledge given at ordination to hold to the full Confession, for no competent addition to the Confession could modify its considered statements while the terms of Subscription were left unchanged. Legislation of such a character as could secure modification was *ultra vires* for the Courts of the Church at least of the Free Church and as such was null and void. The pledge given by ordinands is fundamental to their whole ecclesiastical life and activity. It is in virtue of it that they hold the office to which they were ordained when they gave this pledge.

The United Presbyterian Synod when it passed its Subscription legislation in 1879 altered the Question put to ordinands to make room for the statements of their Declaratory Act. This change was not called in question in any serious way. In the Free Church however there was no such change in the terms of contract and until their Union with the United Presbyterian Church in October, 1900, even the majority continued to exact the pledge of full adherence to the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith. It was this fact that rendered possible the continuance with them of the minority who were opposed to any tampering with the Constitution of their Church. For over thirty years they had fought their fight as the Constitutional party whose position as they defended their Church's Constitution was in turn by that Constitution defended. Throughout these long years Principal Rainy was the protagonist on behalf of a reserve power of making indefinite change. Over against his voting phalanx were the resolute defenders of the old order. For a series of years at the early stage of this conflict an ecclesiastical duel in the field of journalism was fought. On the one side was *The Presbyterian* whose presiding genius was Robert Rainy. On the other was *The Watchword* edited by James Begg with Hugh Martin as his right-hand man. The question at issue in regard to Subscription was the same throughout. This question Hugh Martin handled in his trenchant style in an article, "Are we to have no constitution?"

I am ordained into this Church, resigning, we shall say, all other life prospects which I might be warranted to cherish and devoting to her service all my energies and interests, embarking on her prospects also all the temporal interests of my family. I am then ordained in terms of an Ordination Vow. This vow is not an instrument special in my case, not peculiar to me. It is the vow taken also by all my brothers who in this Church are exactly my peers. It has been already taken by all the brothers who in this transaction of exacting and accepting my vow represent to me and act the part towards me of the Church. Not to mention that they are thus bound by the self-same vow already, taking into account merely that they exact and I render this vow in my ordination, is it conceivable that speaking of this one ordination merely I alone

became bound by it? Is this merely a pact on my side without being a compact between me and the Church? . . . Do I then come under obligation to the Church without the Church coming under obligation to me? Who would make an assertion so outrageous? The idea of a vow between creatures of God binding only one party in the transaction is a sheer paralogism. This vow entails very weighty obligations on my side and on the side of the Church the weight of obligation is as great. The obligation is manifestly reciprocal. That inheres in the idea of it. Laying out of view the contingency of my convictions as to the subject-matter of my vow coming to be changed and my leaving the Church accordingly, I am bound by it, aye, and until the Church shall release me. Is it conceivable that all this time the Church should have been silently reserving a right to release herself what time she may be able to outvote me? Is it possible that on what are actually called "general impressions" and considerations of "good sense" it is proposed to regulate anew our Church Communion and I am to be—by a dispensing power, we presume—set free from my ordination vow and the Church from her reciprocal and another is to be substituted in its stead? Has a majority power to do this? Yes, if I have power to change my vow and still continue in the Church. And yes, if the Church was not bound to me by prescribing and accepting my vow. . . . A majority may prove treacherous to a vow, just as an individual may: nor is it in the power of the multiplication table to settle a question of morals. Our ordination vow taking us bound to our Confession settles that we have a Constitution, clearly enough defines it, renders us answerable to it and pledges the Church reciprocally as amenable to it also?

The men who adhered to the full Confession unabated and unmodified could go no farther with their brethren when they entered into a new alliance whose constitutive terms were obviously such as called for an abatement of the full and unambiguous profession of the Reformed Faith as that found exhibition and statement in the Confession. Their stand for the old Constitution brought them into the law courts to defend their civil rights and the decision of the highest Judicial Tribunal in the British Empire recognized them as the rightful representatives of the Free Church of Scotland of 1843. The result was an almost world-wide outcry against the decision; and to adjust things Parliament intervened. Now was the time for the Ecclesiastics of the Established Church to seek release from what they felt to be unwelcome bonds. And along the lines of Sir Henry Moncreiff's apprehension in 1868 they secured the Fifth Clause

of the Churches' (Scotland) Act of 1905. Pilate and Herod had joined hands. Their intervention in this business is one of the meanest things in the history of their Church or Country.

The Free Church which had made good its contentions and which was to be subjected to a process of legal spoliation which resulted in its being fleeced when it was not flayed had always aimed at an up-building again of a United Church of Scotland on the ground of the Ancient Statutes of the Revolution Settlement and the Treaty of Union. They had resisted the majority of their former brethren who had sought to compass the downfall of the Establishment. They had fought in its defence. And it is hardly too much to say that it was the stand taken by them as the Free Church Minority and as the solid Highlands of Scotland that saved the Establishment of the Presbyterian Church in the years 1880 to 1885. Yet those whose privileged position as a National Institution they had unselfishly defended ruthlessly threw them overboard when they could have given them help. They did more. They undermined the very foundation on which the Church of Scotland had rested for over two centuries and once for all made it impossible for those who adhered to the integrity of the ancient order to return to fellowship with them. For by their intervention in 1905 they secured the alteration of the statutory obligation that lay upon them as the Established Church to exact an acknowledgment from their ministers of their acceptance and avowal of the Confession of Faith as the Confession of their own faith. They went to fish in troubled waters and this was what they caught: "The Formula of Subscription to the Confession of Faith . . . shall be such as may be prescribed by Act of General Assembly of the . . . Church with the consent of the majority of the Presbyteries thereof." This piece of legislation is the pivot on which turns the ecclesiastical history of Scotland for the last score of years.

The Churches' (Scotland) Act was passed in 1905. It was not until 1909 that the New Formula was adopted which

should replace the old one. The Formula adopted is one that does homage to the fact that by the Act of 1690 the Confession of Faith is the avowed Confession of the Church while at the same time the Subscriber pledges himself to nothing definite as his personal faith. Its terms are: "I hereby subscribe the Confession of Faith declaring that I accept it as the Confession of this Church and that I believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith contained therein."

This new Formula is more remarkable for what it is not than for what it is. It does not pledge the Subscriber to the Confession as in any personal sense his own. Neither does it pledge him to the system of doctrine set forth in the Confession. It may be argued that subscription to the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith is itself a very serious engagement. No doubt it is, if men were starting with no historical background to write upon a clean slate. But it is a very different engagement from that which held the field for so long. Even if the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith be interpreted historically what presents itself to our notice in such a Formula is the fact that it has been substituted for one of a much stricter character. And the argument that the Formula is a very solemn document still, seeing that men pledge themselves to the Fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith is one that goes too far if subscription to the Confession is called for in any serious sense at all. For the acceptance of office in a Christian Church without any subscription may be said to pledge a man to the Fundamentals. Indeed it pledges him to even more. For if he only considered it aright he would see that it pledged him to the whole message of the Word of God. Why then have any subscription? But subscription has been rightly called for. And it is a fit means to secure where honor prevails that there shall be a definite understanding between the Church and the ministry as to where they each stand, while it gives a guarantee to the simple of the flock, who are often lost sight of in the discussion of these things, that the Church has shown care about the kind of message that they

The contractual
character of
confessional
subscription

are likely to hear. At the same time their minister has given his pledge as to what should give tone and seasoning to his public teaching, if indeed that teaching should not altogether be taken up in due proportion and application with the truth that has been confessed as matter of faith. The significance of the changed Formula comes out in two ways.

The first of these indirectly but none the less effectively throws light on the mutilation of the Reformed Confession that has taken place. It is a Syllabus of Religious Instruction for Schools which has been published jointly by the "Youth Committees of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church of Scotland." In the public Educational system that prevailed in Scotland down to 1872 the Bible and the Shorter Catechism were taught as part of the recognised curriculum in both the Parish and in the Free Church Schools. By the Educational settlement of 1872 such teaching was allowed to be continued but outside of the timetable hours. A Conscience Clause was made operative to exempt from attendance on Religious Instruction the children of parents who had conscientious objections to the teaching of Bible and Catechism to their children. "Use and wont" as it existed before 1872 continued throughout most of the country as the deliberate decision of the ratepayers when they elected the School Boards of the various parishes. This state of things lasted until the fresh Educational Settlement of 1918. But for the last few years several County Authorities have accepted the Syllabus of the Churches.

This Syllabus has been prepared with care. It shows however a decided bias towards Modernism in the type of literature which it recommends for use by the teachers while in connection with the Shorter Catechism, where its use has been continued at all, the recommendations of the Syllabus excise what is most definitely characteristic of Calvinism from the portion prescribed for use during the School Course. The questions about the Decrees of God are cut out and all the questions from 15 to 22. These deal with the fed-

eral relation of mankind to the first Adam, the sin and misery which the Fall entailed upon the race, the Covenant of Redemption and its Mediator with the constitution of His Person and His Incarnation. It is significant further that in the questions expository of the Ten Commandments on their negative side all are cut out with a single curious exception in favour of "What is forbidden in the Tenth Commandment?" Those questions too are omitted which give the reasons assigned in connection with various commandments. By the omission of question 51 the classical answer setting forth the Puritan and Reformed principle of worship will be no more the familiar thing it has been for centuries in Scotland. For so many of our children will be no longer taught to say that "The Second Commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images *or in any other way not appointed in his word.*" The omissions are eloquent. What is most distinctive of Augustinianism or Calvinism is left out. And the Puritan principle which gave shape to Puritanism in the English-speaking lands is cut away from the stump that is left of the great Puritan Catechism.

The other way of coming at an understanding of what the new order of things means is to read with open eyes the Act of Parliament of 1921 which sanctions Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland in things spiritual. We have in the first of these Articles a list of the things which the Church is represented as holding in one way or other. The terms of that Article are worthy of attention. It reads :

The Church of Scotland is part of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church worshipping one God Almighty, all-wise, and all-loving in the Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory, adoring the Father infinite in Majesty of whom are all things; confessing one Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son, made very man for our salvation; glorying in His Cross and Resurrection, and owning obedience to Him as the Head over all things to His Church; trusting in the promised renewal and guidance of the Holy Spirit; proclaiming the forgiveness of sins and acceptance with God through faith in Christ, and the gift of eternal life; and labouring for the advancement of the Kingdom of God throughout the

world. The Church of Scotland adheres to the Scottish Reformation, receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as its supreme rule of faith and life, and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic Faith founded thereupon.

There is beauty and dignity in the wording of this Article yet who would dare to say that it is a worthy or an adequate representation of what is distinctively the Faith of the Reformed Churches? Yet it is all the indication one can detect as to what the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith are to which subscribers to the Confession pledge themselves. The undefined mention of these doctrines in the end of the Article does not however point in the direction of saying that the previous statements of the Article are designed to set forth the doctrines that are to be deemed fundamental.

The Articles Declaratory of the Constitution seem in Article VIII to give permanence to what Article I sets forth. Yet the claim, made in the context that calls for consistency with the provisions of Article I, is a claim to modify or add to these Articles. And the adherence to Article I itself is limited by the expression "as interpreted by the Church." The sentence reads: "The Church has the right to interpret these articles, and, subject to the safeguards for deliberate action and legislation provided by the Church itself, to modify, or add to them; but always consistently with the provisions of the first Article hereof, adherence to which, as interpreted by the Church, is essential to its continuity and corporate life." This seems to give no great guarantee in practice for steadfastness of adherence to even the early Creeds. Discipline for doctrine does not seem to be in view. Before these articles were adjusted an opinion was given as to the meaning of the Formula of 1909 by one whose word carries great weight. Dr. William Mair was long looked upon as the leading ecclesiastical lawyer of the Establishment. In *The Scottish Churches*, 1914, he writes of what was then a quite new Formula, "It requires us to belief no more than the fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith. if these are in the

Confession, and we need take no account of any amplification or explanation of these given by the Confession." This illustrates the flux of doctrine and it seems to be a fair account of how the matter stands. We may see from it what a serious revolution has taken place in the doctrinal profession of the largest Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Church which holds the ancient ecclesiastical Patrimony and which possesses all the social advantages that belong to a recognised national institution.

The campaign to compass its overthrow by Disestablishment has come to an inglorious end. But the Reformed Faith has been disestablished and its unfaithful custodians are left in the enjoyment of the Endowments of the Ancient Reformed Church. For the Act of 1925 has made over these as the corporate property of the Church Established which does not now hold its ministry even to the system of the Reformed Faith. If the old Questions put to ordinands had been left intact there was one to which we have already referred that might be held to bind them to the Calvinistic system. In answer to this Question they renounced "all Popish, Arian, Socinian, Arminian, Bourignian and other doctrines tenets and opinions whatsoever contrary to and inconsistent with the foresaid Confession of Faith." This Question however was dropped when the change of Formula took place in 1889. Its removal has taken away the possibility of urging the plea that the acknowledgment of the Confession, such as it is, holds the Subscriber to the present Formula bound to the system which in such temperate terms is embodied and exhibited in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Though in terms the Formula of 1694 and again that of 1711 were stricter than the bonds which bound the American Presbyterian Church to the System of the Confession yet in practical administration so long as the System was adhered to the discipline of the Church, apart from the stupid condemnation of the Marrow of Modern Divinity two centuries ago, was exercised with considerable latitude and great considerateness. But what seems now to be set aside

What exactly does this mean?

is the very system that is distinctive of the Reformed Churches. And the end is not yet. That System of truth is one that recognises the sovereignty of a holy God. He is King being all that He is. He is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His being and in all His glorious attributes. If a king to be a king indeed must be wise, He is wise; if powerful, He is powerful; if righteous, He is righteous; if good, He is good; if true, He is faithful and true. And He is all this heightened to infinity and possessed of eternity while immutability is stamped on all these perfections. We should surely rejoice in the supremacy of such a Being. Nor should we grudge Him the highest and the controlling voice in the government of His wide Universe. He is surely to be trusted even when He works in the dark and gives no account of His matters. His creatures as loyal subjects should not quarrel with His holy sovereignty nor should they be slow to confess it.

The profession of the truth of His Word that the Lord calls for from His Church is but the utterance of convictions which she cherishes because she has come to know that truth. It is a confession of faith. Its convictions belong to the very essence of a new and spiritual life. The truth in regard to the mystery of sin in the race and in the individual, the truth in regard to the redemption which the Gospel exhibits in the mystery of God and Godliness and in the mystery of redemption and regeneration, the truth in regard to a salvation that is all of Grace as it is all from God, this is the truth that must be known by the world that the world may be saved. The truth that enshrines the glory of God as it gives all glory to Him is the instrument which is destined to regenerate mankind. And this truth must not be muffled up or withheld or suppressed. It ill becomes the professing Church of God to halt or to hesitate in proclaiming truth like this. And it is ominous that the tendency to make as hazy as may be the avowal of such truth should furnish the atmosphere in which the two great Presbyterian Churches of Scotland speak of uniting. When over the grave of buried

truth they agree to sink their differences the value of the result will come out in negatives and not in positives. But the projected Union has not yet come off; and it will be time enough to comment upon it when it is an accomplished fact. Meanwhile though the end is not yet we can see before our eyes in this old country to what an extent Dr. Thornwell's contingent apprehensions have been already vindicated seeing that the "spirit of speculation on theological subjects" has taken hold of the Scottish race. They have gone far; there is reason to fear that they will go farther.

Inverness, Scotland.

JOHN MACLEOD.