

LECTURE VI.

THE ambition of Rome was satisfied with the success of David's policy. The Scottish Church was Romanised. Its episcopate was conformed to the Roman pattern, under a primate whose consecration had been duly effected according to the Roman canons. The free and national Church of Scotland in both its main branches—the purely Columban, and the British or Cumbrian, in which the tradition of Kentigern lingered—was parcelled into dioceses, under bishops owing allegiance to the Pope—the vicar of Christ, the successor of Peter. What that allegiance meant then, as it means now, cannot be more clearly defined than in the words of the present Pontiff, in his Encyclical of last year (1896): “It must be clearly understood that bishops are deprived of the right and power of ruling, if they deliberately secede from Peter and his successors, because by this secession they separate from the

foundation on which the whole edifice itself rests, and for the very reason they are separated from the fold whose leader is the chief pastor. The episcopal order is rightly judged to be in communion with Peter as Christ commanded, if it be subject to and obeys Peter. Otherwise it necessarily becomes a lawless and disorderly crowd. It is not sufficient that the head should merely have been charged with the office of superintendent, but it is absolutely necessary that he should have received real and sovereign authority, which the whole community is bound to obey. The Roman Pontiffs, mindful of their duty, wish above all things that the divine constitution of the Church should be preserved. Therefore, as they have defended with all necessary care and vigilance their own authority, so they have always laboured, and will continue to labour, that the authority of the bishops may be upheld. Yet they look upon whatever honour or obedience is given to the bishops as paid to themselves."

The Scottish Church, however, was never, any more than the Gallican, a complaisant vassal of Rome. The sentiment of national independence was always strong, as was that spirit of freedom which breathes through the chivalrous "Aberbrothock Manifesto," in which the Scottish nobles, protesting against the papal coun-

tenance vouchsafed to the English aggressions, tell Pope John XXII. that "not for glory, riches, or honour we fight, but for liberty alone, which no good man loses but with his life."¹ Nor were the Scots blind to the frequent delinquencies and malpractices of the Roman Court—its greed of filthy lucre, its meddlesome interference with national rights, its pretensions to infallible and absolute autocracy. In the great reforming Council of Basel the Scottish Church was represented by two bishops, two abbats, two secular priests, and two friars; and we gather that these deputies supported the liberal principles of which John Gerson was the exponent, and on the critical question of the Pope's superiority to all councils took the side of independence and common-sense. On more than one occasion the intrusion of papal legates was resented, and the exactions of the Papacy were withstood.

The Scots' desire for ecclesiastical independence and autonomy was thwarted by their want of a metropolitan. Without that high functionary the clergy could not meet in council, except at the pleasure of the Pope and by his authority, either exercised by a legate in Scotland or transmitted by rescript from Rome. From the days of King David onwards a few unnoticeable

¹ The Aberbrothock Manifesto—see Appendix II.

legatine councils were held; but in the year 1225 the Pope yielded to the national sentiment, so far as to authorise provincial councils to be held in Scotland without the summons or presence of a legate. The Church at once took advantage of this concession, and the councils acquired a definite importance and national character. The bishops met and ordained that all bishops, abbats, and conventual priors, as the leading ecclesiastical dignitaries and authorities, should henceforth assemble annually, and sit in council, if need be, for three days, under the presidency of a "conservator," elected by the voice of his brother bishops. The conservator presided in the council—opened it by raising the chaut "Veni Creator Spiritus," and closed it with the benediction. The opening sermon was preached by the bishops in rotation, the Bishop of St Andrews taking precedence. The conservator summoned the council by a writ addressed to each bishop: he held office from one council to another, with special authority during the interval to deal with transgressions or neglect of the canons; and the record of the Acts of the Council was drawn in the name, and authenticated by the seal, of the "Conservator of the Privileges of the Scottish Church." The conservator was, in fact, for the year of his office, the representative of the Church, and the guardian of

her discipline and interests. In this position and prerogative; in his duties as president of the council; in the system of more or less natural selection which guided his appointment, we see distinctly the prototype of the Moderator of the General Assembly. The council, also, in its character, proceedings, and composition, was in several respects an anticipation of the Assembly itself. Although at first only bishops, abbats, and conventual priors were summoned, later the attendance was required of the representatives of the cathedral chapters, of the collegiate churches, and of the conventual clergy; so that it comprised, in point of fact, a very fair and full representation of the Church as a whole, while the State had also its place and voice in the deliberations. Two doctors of the civil law were commissioned to attend on behalf of the king, to communicate his wishes, and to watch over the interests of the Crown and people. Except, however, as thus represented by the head of the State, the laity's right to any share in the councils of the Church was not recognised, and indeed was never urged.

Whether these councils held the required yearly meetings or not cannot be determined. The earliest record of their action which we possess is a code of canons, probably drawn up between 1240 and 1280, and which remained in

force, and received little alteration or addition, till near the time of the Reformation. They were read at the beginning of each council after the opening sermon, and after an avowal of adherence to the first four Œcumenical councils—Nice, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon—and, laying down certain rules as to the order and constitution of the council itself, they enact that “all the prelates are to hold firmly the catholic and apostolic faith, to instruct those under their jurisdiction in the same, and to urge parents to bring up their children in the knowledge and observance of the Christian religion. The sacraments to be administered according to the form prescribed by the Church. The churches to be built of stone—the nave by the parishioners, and the chancel by the rector; they are to be duly consecrated, and furnished with the proper ornaments, books, and sacred vessels. No church or oratory is to be built, nor the divine office celebrated therein, without consent of the diocesan. Masses not to be said in private places without the bishop’s permission. Every parish church to have its proper rector or vicar, who is to exercise the cure of souls either personally or by deputy; and all ecclesiastics are to lead pure and godly lives, or suffer canonical punishment. A sufficient sustentation to be provided for vicars from the churches which they serve,

amounting, all burdens deducted, to at least ten marks annually. The clergy to take care that both their mental acquirements and outward habit are such as become their state. No rector or vicar to enter upon any benefice without the consent of his diocesan, or other lawful superior. A proper parsonage-house to be built near every church, within a year's time."

These canons are most wise and wholesome. Of the same tone and tendency are some others, adopted at a diocesan synod held at Musselburgh in 1242, by the good David of Bernham, Bishop of St Andrews—a man of vast zeal, energy, and piety, who in ten years consecrated no less than 140 churches within his diocese. Among the canons of his synod were these, which show how much care was expended, under a good bishop, in the endeavour to have all things in the church done decently and in order. "The churchyards to be properly enclosed and protected against wild animals. The chancel of the church to be kept in repair by the rector, the rest of the building by the parishioners. The clergy to wear a large and conspicuous tonsure, not to eat or drink in taverns except on a journey, not to play dice, and to lead chaste and devout lives. The duty of residence to be strictly observed by the clergy. Marriage not to be contracted save before lawful witnesses. Clerics not to exercise any secular

trade or calling; nor to dictate or write a sentence of death. To avoid the inconveniences of frequent clerical changes, no substitute to be appointed for less than a year. Vicars strictly bound to residence. Every rector either to provide a suitable and well-educated priest for his church, or to be himself in orders, on pain of suspension and deprivation of his benefice."

The regular convention of councils was hindered rather than helped by the erection of St Andrews into a metropolitan see in 1471. The theory of ministerial parity, which is known in its full bloom in Presbyterian Churches, was not without its prototype in the medieval Church, in Scotland. Not one of the bishops wished to see a brother elevated to a higher rank than his own. The Bishop of Glasgow especially, as the successor of Kentigern, and representative of the traditions of the British Christianity of Strathclyde, repudiated the primacy of the prelate who could not now be said to have any peculiar right to pose as the "co-arb" of Columba. Each of the bishops had hitherto enjoyed in his turn the rank and prerogative of conservator, and saw with jealousy these submerged in the permanent office of metropolitan. Possibly, also, the growing worldliness and indifference of the bishops and clergy made all alike careless of holding assemblies, which reflected little credit on the

Church, and whose records gave a painful publicity to their own professional shortcomings and neglect of the very canons of their own councils. We hear of no council, summoned or held, for sixty-six years after the creation of the primacy.

The council of 1536 sat under the presidency of Archbishop James Beaton, the uncle of the notorious Cardinal, and was ostensibly called at the instance of the king, James V., who desired that it should ratify and enforce a tax he sought to impose upon ecclesiastical benefices, for the support of his newly instituted Court of Session. This was carried out, to the extent of levying a yearly assessment on the prelates for this object. Another proposal of the king's, the adoption of which would have done much to sweeten the relations of the clergy to the people, was set aside. This was that they should renounce "the corse presents"—the Church cow and the upmost cloth—as the hateful mortuary dues were called, the exaction of which was as unpopular as that of a Welsh tithe in our own days; and further, that they should grant every husbandman a lease of his teinds for a certain fixed payment. Long ere this the teind had lost much of its character of a voluntary benefaction granted by the pious landowner, and had come to be regarded, not, as it really was, a property of the Church, but

rather as an impost wrung by the parson from the tiller of the soil. This was partly owing to the fact that its payment had commonly been transferred from the owner to the occupier of the land, and that it was collected by the incumbent personally, who was thus brought into an unpleasant relation with his parishioners, as one who seemed to be not so much drawing the fruits of his own share in the soil as taxing their industry.

The king's sound advice, however, was not accepted; and in the wild days that were coming on, the clergy had bitter reason to regret that they had not taken the opportunity he offered them, of removing the grievances of their taxes on death, and the personal exaction of their teinds. They, possibly, were not altogether inclined to be ruled by the royal counsels, for King James V. made no secret of his impatience of the misdemeanours of their order and his disrespect for its members. The Court of Rome, alarmed lest he should follow the evil example of his powerful kinsman and neighbour the King of England, plied him with every flattery and attention: sent special nuncios to confer with him; sanctioned large subsidies being paid him out of the ecclesiastical revenues, in furtherance of his English war; bestowed on him the mystic cap and sword blessed by the Pope on Christmas night; offered

him the title of "Defender of the Christian faith,"—but in spite of these blandishments the king did not even affect a friendliness he did not feel. He encouraged Buchanan to satirise the Mendicant Friars in his play "The Franciscan"; and he sat and listened when Sir David Lyndsay's "Satire of the Three Estates" exposed the clergy and their misdoings, on the public stage, to the frankest popular ridicule; while in an interview with the prelates, in his Court at Linlithgow, he hotly charged them with neglect of duty and the attempt to foment discord between himself and his nobility, and as he warmed with his subject, striking his hand upon the short sword at his belt, he exclaimed—"Wherefore gave my predecessors so many lands and rents to the Kirk? Was it to maintain hawks, dogs, and harlots to a number of idle priests? The King of England burns you, the King of Denmark beheads you; but I shall stick you with this same whinger."

At the time he uttered this fierce invective the clergy of Scotland had fallen low in the moral scale. The enjoyment of near four centuries' "Catholic" apostolic succession had failed to sustain and invigorate their apostolic character. Never was their lineal descent from the source of Catholic unity and authority, in S. Peter, technically more unimpeachable; never was the boasted

threefold ministry more hopelessly unlike that of the apostles. At no period in the history of the Scottish Church do its records reveal a baser type of character and conduct in the clergy—a more scandalous neglect of duty—a more sacrilegious worldliness and profane immorality on the part of almost all who held high office in the Church, or concerned themselves in its affairs.

There were no doubt some good men both among the bishops and the priests; but they were lights shining in dark places. That Kennedy, Archbishop of St Andrews, wise, learned, and devout, was, when he died in 1466, “lamented as a public parent,”¹ is the testimony of so keen a Protestant and partisan as George Buchanan. Reid of Orkney and Douglas of Dunkeld were both men who had imbibed the spirit of the New Learning, to which their Church at large was stupidly indifferent. The one beautified the massive Cathedral of Kirkwall, and provided the first endowment for the University of Edinburgh; the other “gave to rude Scotland Virgil’s page,” and—“noble, valiant, learned, and an excellent poet”—left behind him, as the historian of his illustrious family records, “great approbation of his virtues and love of his person, in the hearts of all good men.”² Gavin Dunbar, Bishop of

¹ Buchanan’s History, book xii. 23.

² Hume of Godscroft, Hist. of the Douglasses.

Aberdeen from 1518 to 1532, pious, generous, and enlightened — the friend of Hector Boece the historian of Scotland—is said to have spent the whole revenues of his see in works of charity and public utility. His predecessor, Elphinstone, the founder of King's College, was at once a man of letters, a statesman, and a true overseer of the Church—whether as an ambassador abroad, or in the Parliament and in his cathedral at home, doing his devoir as a public-spirited and patriotic servant of the Church and State.

Among the humbler churchmen, too, there were men of God who mourned the evils of the times, and held closely to the truth as they understood it,—such as Ninian Winzet, school-master at Linlithgow, and ultimately Abbot of S. James's, Regensburg, erudite and honest, a lover of the ancient ways, but grieving over “the decline of the true faith” and the ignorance and vice of his brethren in the priesthood,—“Alas!” he says, “we are right sorry that it is true for the most part or more, that they are unworthy of the name of pastors”:¹ such as Thomas Forret, vicar of Dollar—kind and tender to the poor of his flock—a diligent pastor and faithful preacher—faithful to the death, for because of

¹ Winzet's Tractates: with introduction, notes, &c., by J. K. Hewison, M.A., F.S.A.Scot., Minister of Rothesay. Scottish Text Society.

his fidelity his end was to be burned. These, however, were the rare exceptions. When we look beyond them we behold a turbid sea of harlotry, simony, ignorance, superstition, mere worldliness and carnality, into whose foul waters the stately fabric of the Church is sinking lower and lower, as into an abyss of shame and ruin.

To take a few examples. Of the last two primates of St Andrews one was the persecuting Beaton, notorious for his amours. So debauched was the moral feeling of the time that this most reverend father in God thought it no shame to attend publicly the nuptials of one of his daughters and the Earl of Crawford, which were performed, says Archbishop Spottiswoode, "with an exceeding pomp and magnificence." The other, himself a bastard son of the Earl of Arran, was the father of three bastards. The last Bishop of Aberdeen is described by Spottiswoode as "a very epicure, spending all his time in drinking and whoring," and wasting great part of the revenues of the Church on his lemans and their children. The last Bishop of Moray made away fraudulently with the revenues of his see, and did not deny the charge of having thirteen concubines. Chisholm, the penultimate Bishop of Dunblane, robbed the revenues of the Church to enrich his three illegitimate sons. Of the four

bishops of Argyll, from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the year 1558, two were illegitimate members of noble families; and one had himself illegitimate offspring. But one need not multiply instances of the clerical degeneracy. The preamble of the canons of the Provincial Council, held in Edinburgh in 1549, frankly declared that the two chief causes of the existing troubles and heresies in the Church were the "crassa ignorantia" and "profana obscenitas vitæ" of the general body of the churchmen. They stood condemned by their own tribunal.

Yet with all this clerical criminality, it is not just to pass such a severe sentence on the religious condition of Scotland as is pronounced by Dr M'Crie, the biographer of Knox, who is but one of a class of zealous Protestant writers who can see no good thing in the pre-Reformation Nazareth. "The corruptions," says Dr M'Crie, "by which the Christian religion was universally distinguished before the Reformation, had grown to a greater height in Scotland than in any other nation within the pale of the Western Church."¹ This is not accurate. Beaton was cruel and profligate, but he was also a genuine patriot and able statesman. Scotland might breed a Beaton and a Chisholm, but she produced no parallel to Pope Alexander VI. and

¹ Life of Knox, Period 1st.

his son, "the monster steeped in every crime." The Scottish feuds and factions were embittered and unrelenting; but the country never exhibited such scenes of savage fanaticism and brutal inhumanity as rendered the religious wars of Bohemia and Hungary a horror and scandal to Christendom; nor had the holy office of the Inquisition ever established itself and practised its diabolical arts within the Scottish border. Moreover, education in Scotland had gained a high level. The Papacy discouraged popular education; but the Scottish Government and the medieval Scottish Church, always independent in its spirit, fostered learning in spite of the Papacy. We find the proof of this in the scholastic system established in this country as early as the thirteenth century, and maintained in efficiency until broken up by the storms which burst upon the Church in the sixteenth.

From early times we distinguish in Scotland three classes of schools—"Sang schools," which were connected with the cathedrals or the more important churches, and whose primary intention was to train singers for their musical services; "Grammar schools," which were founded in most of the burghs; and "Monastic schools," which were attached to the monasteries. All these had this in common, that the education they afforded was under the charge of the Church,

and of the monastic orders specially; and the method of management adopted was generally to appoint a single monk as director or inspector of the schools of a burgh or of a district, under whose superintendence other monks taught. The interest in education, which had distinguished the Columban Church, was not seriously impaired by its amalgamation with the Church of Rome. It survived in active force; and before the foundation of any of the existing public schools of England (the oldest of which is Winchester, founded in 1387), we find the charge of the schools of Roxburgh intrusted in 1241 to the monks of Kelso, over whom was an official called "the Rector of the Schools." In 1256 the statutes of the church of Aberdeen imposed on the chancellor of the cathedral chapter the duty of supervising the discipline, and teaching of the schools, of that city.

Of the three classes of schools the sang schools were the most rudimentary—teaching music, reading, and grammar. They, indeed supplied the place of a system of primary schools, so far as they went. Their close connection with the Church tended to insure their extinction when the Reformation came; and in 1579, when the mischief had been done, an Act was passed ordaining that sang schools should be provided in burghs for the

instruction of the youths in music and singing, which, says the Act, "is like to fall in great decay without timeous remeid be provided." But an Act of the Scots Parliament could not restore the school in the cathedral cloister, and the tuneful monks who had taught it; and Scottish sacred song has only now begun to regain its voice. In the grammar schools the course embraced Latin, thoroughly taught, and whatever was included under the terms "grammar and logic," with instruction in some of the modern languages, and in the principles and practice of arithmetic. The monastic schools were of a still higher grade, and appear to have been intended chiefly for the education of candidates for the priesthood, and for the sons of the nobility and greater landowners. These schools virtually supplied the place of the universities ere these arose. Those only were received into them who had already passed through the grammar or secondary schools, or had acquired instruction equivalent to theirs. One of the requirements was "perfect Latin," which we suspect would nowadays rather thin the list of entrants to our colleges, and even to our Divinity Halls; and the curriculum included philosophy and law.

It is evident that such was the education given in the monastic schools that men were able to

go direct from them, and take that place among Continental scholars and thinkers taken in the fourteenth century by John of Duns, in the fifteenth by John Mair and Hector Boece, and in the sixteenth by George Buchanan.

The general culture which prevailed, at least in every class above the rank of the rural peasantry, may be inferred from many indications in the Scottish life of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Thus a commission was issued in Buchanan's day, of which he was president, to rectify the inconveniencies arising from the use of different grammars in the schools. The existence of such a multiplicity of grammars, as to call for a commission of the kind, is a proof of no little educational activity. It is obvious that French was familiarly known and spoken in Scotland from the thirteenth century. In many of the grammar schools no language was allowed to be used but Latin. When the Reformation dawned there was an eager demand for the Reformation literature; and though by that time the corruption of the clergy had become notorious, and the Church had lost much of its native spirit of independence, education was still very generally diffused; and the Reformers' charge against the priests and monks was not that they left the people ignorant of their letters, but that they never instructed them in the veriest elements of religious truth.

Had religious instruction been offered them, the people were ready to receive and benefit by it. They were sufficiently educated to read books, and to understand intelligent teaching. Sir David Lyndsay says he wrote not for scholars, but "for colliers, carters, and for cooks"; and his works, with those of Dunbar, passed through several editions in the sixteenth century. Luther's writings, smuggled across from Holland, were eagerly sought. In 1542 the Scots Parliament authorised the use of the Scriptures in the vernacular tongue, and John Knox testifies "there might have been seen the Bible lying upon almost every gentleman's table. The New Testament was borne about in many men's hands."

But those who should have been the religious instructors of the people had no instruction to give them. They were illiterate, and ignorant of theology. The bishop never preached; the parish priest seldom. Such preaching as was to be heard was from the mouths of the monks and mendicant friars, and it was, as a rule, but little to edification. There was no private or catechetical tuition. The ministry had utterly broken down, and failed as a means of grace—as an instrument of religious teaching—as a guardian of morals—as the custodian of the apostles' doctrine and fellowship. "Even among the higher clergy," a Roman Catholic historian testifies,

“too many were more than suspected of leading lives the reverse of edifying; while the inferior ecclesiastics were lamentably deficient in that trained theological learning which alone could meet and overcome the dominant errors of the time. Above all, it is impossible to doubt that the knowledge which the people at large possessed of the doctrines of their religion was insufficient to enable them to cope successfully with the coming storm. ‘There,’ said Bishop Leslie, speaking of the causes which led to the overthrow of the faith in Scotland—‘there is the source and origin of the evil, that the people, neglected by the clergy, and uninstructed in the Catechism in their tender years, had no sure and certain belief.’”¹

The hideous excesses of outrage and sacrilege, which followed in the track of the “Lords of the Congregation,” proved too plainly how wholly the populace had become demoralised under a worthless priesthood, and how thoroughly all respect for religion, its ordinances, its holy things and places, had been rooted out of the popular mind. Like priest, like people. The general *morale* was pitiably low. The “horrible crimes” which abounded in the realm, and which ecclesiastical discipline had left unchecked, formed one of the earliest subjects on which the Reformers

¹ Bellesheim, vol. ii. p. 322. Hunter Blair’s translation.

appealed to the Government. The reader of the 'Book of the Universal Kirk' will see how constantly the Church, when awakened from her torpor, strove to arrest the prevalent crimes and vices.

The great religious revolution, in which Luther's trumpet blew the first note of war, had changed the whole constitution of the Church in many kingdoms of the Continent, and had worn itself out in England, ere yet Scotland felt its force. The remoteness of our country from the central scenes of conflict; the weakness of the Government; the turbulence of the nobles; and the emigration of the flower of the Scottish scholars, acted as a barrier between Scotland and the revolutionary influences. It grew plain, however, as the reign of James V. passed on, that Scotland must sooner or later be involved in the general crisis. Had any prelate or ruler of the Church been able by skill, diplomacy, strength of will, and firmness of administration, to postpone the evil day, it would have been Cardinal Beaton, who in 1539 became Primate, and in Church and State the foremost man in Scotland. But even under his sway the spirit of freedom and reform grew stronger; and he and the clergy began to think of putting their house in order. The swell of the far-off Continental storm was reverberating on the Scottish

shore: they could scarcely hope that the tempest would pass away and leave untouched the churches and cathedrals, the monasteries and manses, of Scotland. Beaton was too sagacious not to see that there must be two measures for the safety of the Church—the one the repression of heresy, the other the reform of morals. But, in a convention of the clergy and bishops held at Edinburgh in 1546, the discussion of these subjects was postponed to the exigencies of the war with England. The English had crossed the Border, and already Melrose, Kelso, Dryburgh, and Jedburgh had been burnt. The convention voted a liberal subsidy—to be levied on benefices of more than £40 in annual value. The repulse of Henry and the maintenance of the French alliance were to the clergy of such vital moment, that many of them are said to have fought in person at Pinkie, under a banner bearing the legend “*Afflictæ sponsæ ne obliviscaris.*” Indeed the political combinations, necessary to thwart the English and reforming party, appear to have engrossed Beaton’s attention more than any attempts at Church reform. If indeed that matter was debated at all, there was no result as regarded the all-important point of restraint of the abounding clerical immorality.

Beaton was murdered; but under his successor, Hamilton, council after council was sum-

moned to devise schemes of reform, and plans for the repression of "heresy." If highly moral canons could have extinguished immorality, the Scottish priesthood would have been a pattern to Christendom. Could ecclesiastical thunderbolts have demolished heresy, Scottish orthodoxy would have rivalled that of Athanasius. But it was too late. There is an eagerness, half ludicrous half pathetic, in the solicitude with which the moribund ecclesiastical system looks round for causes of scandal, and proclaims its correctives and antidotes, persuading itself that the time for their application is not really over and gone. And yet no one appears to have really understood the fatal depth of the Church's fall from its early purity, its wholesome discipline and government, its high standard of duty and self-denial on the part of its clergy. Demoralised by long familiarity with wrong, and blinded by devotion to the Vicar of Christ, the clergy—ignorant and worldly—did not apprehend, like the angel of the Church of Ephesus, "from whence they had fallen." They evidently did not see the fatal contrast between themselves and their predecessors in the Celtic era of the Church, which even in its decadence had never shown the gracelessness, the impurity, the sluggish decrepitude, the collapse of decency, of discipline, of self-

respect, which marked the close of the Roman era.

The old Celtic delight in the Word of God, and constant study of the Scriptures, had given place to their complete disuse and prohibition. The once hearty services had dwindled down to perfunctory masses scantily attended. The careful preparation of candidates for the ministry had succumbed to a glaring system of nepotism, favouritism, and simony, which scattered office in the priesthood and the Episcopate among the baseborn, the greedy, the licentious, the incompetent and illiterate. The rigid discipline and careful order of the monastic Church had lapsed into the self-indulgence which made the so-called fast-days mere objects of popular ridicule, and the irreverence which turned the sacred ritual into general contempt. The Celtic combination of devoted loyalty to the ecclesiastical chief, and free play of individual zeal and genius, had long since died down into apathetic and sluggish formalism and routine. The people had no longer any share in the choice of their spiritual overseers; nor was there any conscientious oversight. The authority of the revered abbat had been superseded by the nominal rule of the bishop, whom—in nine cases out of ten—nobody revered or could revere. The Church had fallen, and no

ingenious canons of alarmed councils, no archbishop's Catechisms or "Godly Exhortations," no professions or promises, could lift her out of her Slough of Despond.

The Provincial Council of 1559 received from "the Lords of the Congregation," as those who had assumed the lead in the reforming movement were called, certain articles of reformation, indispensable, they maintained, to the welfare of the Church. These were, amendment of the lives and habits of the clergy; satisfactory examination and proof of the requisite qualifications before admission to orders; that there should be a sermon delivered in every parish church on every Sunday, and if not also on every holiday, at least on Christmas, Easter, and Whitsunday; that after mass the common prayer and litanies should be read in the vernacular; and that no one should be allowed to dishonour, or speak irreverently of, or connive at the irregular celebration of, the sacraments, or to despoil or injure church, chapel, or religious house. These and other equally reasonable demands were not altogether satisfactorily answered. The request that the common prayers should be read in the vulgar tongue was refused; but strict rules were laid down for the frequent preaching of the parish priest and the due instruction of the people, for the abolition of certain irritating exactions on the part of the

clergy, and for the speedy reform of their loose ways of living—as well as for the regulation of pluralities, the examination of presentees to benefices, and the visitation of monasteries and nunneries. The scheme of improvement, by which the exigency of the crisis and the claims of the new ideas were to be met with safety, was, on the whole, respectable as a scheme, except in that particular of denying the use of the vernacular; but it was a scheme on paper merely. The council could write it out, but could not translate it into action. And so far from reforming the Church, it has been affirmed, and probably with a measure of truth, that this set of reforming canons, instead of being a strength to the Church, accelerated the very catastrophe it was designed to avert. For the rigorous statutes of this council, and the obligations and restraints they imposed, were so distasteful to the younger clergy, that the dread of the novel discipline with which they were threatened inclined them to take their chance of greater liberty among the ranks of the Reformed, and to desert the old communion in its last extremity. Certainly among the many members of the clerical order who adopted the principles of the Reformation, all were not actuated by religious motives.

The last act of the Provincial Council of 1559 was to appoint another, to be held at Edinburgh

in the following year, to make inquiry as to the due execution of the canons, and take counsel as to any further questions of ecclesiastical discipline that might arise in the meantime. That council never met. It was summoned for the 11th February 1560. By that date John Knox had arrived from Geneva, and had inflamed the popular passions to the pitch of zeal, at which the godly congregation and the "rascal multitude" dealt indiscriminate devastation to the most venerable and historical edifices in their country. The noble churches and monasteries of Perth, the stately Palace and Abbey of Scone, the glorious Cathedral of St Andrews, the High Kirk and the royal Abbey of Edinburgh, with many more, had been sacked and ruined. The Government of the queen regent had been openly defied, and a rival power—that of the so-called "Lords of the Congregation"—had entered into negotiations with Elizabeth, a foreign sovereign, in which she engaged to assist them in an alliance, offensive and defensive, against France. In pursuance of these negotiations, the Treaty of Berwick was concluded about the very time the council should have been sitting; in virtue of which an English army of 8000 men entered Scotland, and, attacking the Scots and French forces of the Crown, proceeded to promote the cause of religious reform with the sword. Then followed the death of the

regent, the proclamation of peace between the Government and the Congregation, and the virtual triumph of the Reforming party, resulting in the proscription of the mass, the downfall of the Roman hierarchy, and the adoption of the Reformed Confession by the Parliament of 1560.

The catastrophe was startling in its suddenness, its completeness, and its revelation of the prevailing ill-will towards the Church, and the undisciplined violence of party and sectarian passion, which marked the progress of a movement that was, in its earlier stages at least, more a political revolution than a religious reformation. Other causes were at work, in making the way of the movement plain, than that dissoluteness of the clergy and those ecclesiastical abuses to which I have directed your attention. One of these, and the most essentially religious of them, was the presence of that leaven of Wycliffite doctrine in the Lowlands, which no rigour of persecution had been able to eradicate. In their days of peril, some of Wycliffe's "poor priests" had found shelter there; and witnesses for the simple Gospel they preached had never been wanting. Many had sealed their testimony with their blood; but the persecution of the "heretics" begat that which it sought to destroy. In Scotland, as elsewhere, the blood of the martyrs was the seed of

the Church, but not of the Church that did homage to Rome. The spectacle of the martyrdoms of Patrick Hamilton, of George Wishart, of Thomas Forret, and of Walter Mylne, hardened the people's hearts against the bigoted hierarchy, and embittered the silent rage with which those who loved liberty and truth marked its inhuman tyranny. The goodwill of the middle class—mainly the burghers and traders—which included most of the intelligence, the sagacity, and the religious principle of the community, was hopelessly alienated from the secular clergy, bishops and priests alike. They saw in them no toleration of free thought—no belief in those truths of the Gospel which Wycliffe and Luther had taught them to value, and which bore to them the promise of liberty, reform, progress, in every department of life, thought, and action.

To all this the regular clergy were as hostile as the secular. The popular favour had fallen away from the monasteries. These for several generations had enjoyed a just popularity. But luxury and laxity had made their way into the cloisters. The wealth and power of the great abbeys and monastic houses by-and-by rivalled, if they did not exceed, those of the principal nobles. The mitred abbat sat in Parliament, and was an important social and political personage, the equal of the bishop and the peer. Much as the monks

had done for the people, they were doing comparatively little when Henry VIII. began to dissolve the great English houses and to plunder their revenues. The news of what went on south of the Tweed no doubt was familiar in the north; and the popular envy and cupidity, engendered by the sight of the riches and splendour of the abbeys and monasteries, were not counterbalanced by any deep sense of gratitude for good works done and pious services rendered to the people by their owners. The pride which any intelligent and educated Scot must have felt at the mention of their famous names was probably little, if at all, shared by the multitude, and was not even a strong sentiment with the more cultivated class. We can mark few signs of the reverence which ought to have been inspired by the aspect and traditions of the abbatial and cathedral churches. The churches of either order were unusually grand in their architecture and wealthy in their possessions. And yet, so estranged was the common feeling from those who took charge of these historical temples, that no general effort was made to save them from the violence of the mob that roamed the country at the heels of the preachers and the "Lords of the Congregation." And not only so, but the angriest passions of these disorderly innovators expended themselves in working havoc among the very noblest of those

buildings. The devastation could not have been possible had not popular respect and affection become wholly detached from the monasteries—had there not been a deep-seated jealousy of the wealth and splendour of the great dignitaries, and a desire to level those who had hitherto held their heads so high.

Yet another, and a very potent, factor in the ecclesiastical revolution, was the character of the Scottish nobles. Nowhere was the title of noble less appropriate than to the great majority of the members of the Scottish peerage. They were poor, mean, greedy, and unprincipled. Again and again, in the reigns of the Jameses, they had showed themselves treacherous to their country and disloyal to the Crown. Some were in the pay of England; some in the pay of France. A disinterested and honest patriot was hard to find amongst the whole gang. They had long cherished a grudge against the Church, because it generally—if not always—took the side of the Crown in the monarch's frequent encounters with the factions of the nobility. They had long envied the Churchmen their large possessions, their well-cultivated farms, steady feudal tenants, and costly church furniture of silver and gold, more splendid and precious than any they could display in their own ancestral halls. They had long, also, regarded whatever material profit

they could make out of the Church as fair spoil. In this they had been fatally encouraged by the example of the Crown, and by the criminal laxity of the Church itself. When James IV. appointed his natural son, Alexander Stuart, Archbishop of St Andrews, at the age of eighteen, and took him with him to the field of Flodden, he was only giving a more than usually conspicuous illustration of a system which had treated royal and noble bastardy as a title to ecclesiastical promotion, and had looked on office in the Church as no bar to civil or even military employment. And this system was unblushingly connived at by the Church.

For three hundred years before the Reformation, we may say, the Scottish bishops had never made the previous admission to orders an indispensable preliminary to admission to a benefice. Those of them who had a proper respect for their profession, and for the character of the clergy, might try to make this qualification imperative; but they tried in vain. They could not cope with the insatiable desire of the beggarly nobles to provide for their kindred or dependents at the Kirk's expense. They could not withstand the monarch's thrifty purpose of endowing his illegitimate offspring out of the ecclesiastical revenues. The records of the diocesan and provincial councils bear frequent witness that rec-

tories and other offices were filled by men who were not clerics. And it is acknowledged, with shame, by the best champions of the Roman Church in her conflict with the Reformers, that rich livings, with the cure of thousands of souls, were held by persons utterly incompetent and unqualified. The root of this laxity may probably be traced to the loose practices of the Culdees in sanctioning the hereditary tenure of benefices, and in allowing their endowments to lapse into lay hands: but the laxity had never been properly repressed; and it grew with the growth of the Church, till, on the eve of the Reformation, it had gained a rampant and indecent notoriety.

All these abuses had whetted the nobles' appetite for the plunder of the Church. As long as she stood secure and unassailed, fortified by the august authority of Rome and the protection of the law, it was easy, by intrigue or evasion of canon or statute, to grasp at a benefice here and there; but it was impossible to appropriate, with the wholesale audacity of Henry VIII., the general possessions of abbey, cathedral, and well-dowered rectory. But, let the religious passions of the people only be stirred to the needful fervour, then the bishops might be driven off, the monks unfrocked, the parish priest frightened into submission, and the goodly heritage of the Church would be the prey of the strongest of the

depredators. There can be little doubt that the nobles argued thus;—that their reforming zeal was in most cases the mere stalking-horse of their wolfish avarice, and that their desire to rob the Church was one of the most efficient causes of the religious revolution called the Scottish Reformation. In no country were the various elements which combined to produce the religious revolution of the sixteenth century of a more complex kind; but certainly in none did the movement, as a whole, owe less to that class which should have set the example of disinterested patriotism, to say nothing of religious principle.

I have spoken of those causes which helped to accelerate this great reforming movement, when it at last reached Scotland, and to secure its rapid and irresistible progress. In every such movement, however, the crowning impetus and final direction, which determine not only its success but stamp it with its special character, is a personal force. It was so here: the personal force was John Knox, next to Columba the most striking figure and most creative influence in Scottish history.