

LECTURE VII.

THE character, influence, and career of John Knox have been so often and so ably discussed and expounded by historians and critics, from many and different points of view, that I do not propose entering on a field already fully occupied.¹ I wish merely to indicate the nature of his work as the leader of the Scottish Reformation.

To become the leader of any national movement in Scotland was no easy undertaking. For generations the country had been divided, politically and ecclesiastically, between three factions: the faction of the king and the nobles who stood by him; the faction of the nobles who were in revolt or opposition; and the faction of the Church, which not unsuccessfully

¹ And most recently, and in a very thorough and exhaustive manner, by Mr Hume Brown in his biography of the Reformer; and by Mrs MacCunn in her brilliant contribution to the series of "Leaders of Religion."

held its own between the other two, and which was upon the whole, although spiritually tyrannical, not unkindly in its relations to the people. The difficulty of initiating and carrying out any general scheme of policy or reform, in a nation so disrupted, was seriously aggravated by the presence, in its northern regions, of a race differing in language and in its degree of civilisation from its neighbours, and full of warlike and predatory instincts. Knox's achievement was that he, a man sprung from the middle class, and a simple member of the common priesthood, taking his own independent way, became the national leader. In spite of the anger of the Crown, the false friendship and the selfish duplicity of the majority of the nobles, the indifference of some and the unenlightened zeal of others of the commonalty, he was able to inspire the national mind with higher moral ideals than it had hitherto been conscious of, with a self-respecting desire for liberty of life and thought, and a consequent detestation of the unspiritual oppression of the Roman Church; and so to combine and direct towards the great end of national enfranchisement all those feelings, desires, and forces, which were in sympathy with the world-movement of the Reformation.

That his ways were often rude and his manners harsh and churlish, we do not deny; nor, re-

membering that he had spent eighteen months of his manhood among the galley-slaves in a French galley, do we greatly wonder at it. That he was bigoted and intolerant is scarcely to be imputed to him for unrighteousness. Bigotry and intolerance were inextricably woven into the ideas of a time in which tolerance was an almost impossible virtue. Elijah on Mount Carmel could not tolerate the priests of Baal, if he was to overthrow the idolatry of Israel; Knox in Edinburgh could not tolerate the mass, if he was to win civil and religious freedom for Scotland. So at least it appeared to him. The more liberal and tolerant spirit of Maitland of Lethington (as has been recently urged with singular ability in Mr Skelton's admirable book)¹ desired a policy of comprehension, if not of compromise, theoretically more humane and just than Knox's policy of "Thorough"; but such a policy, at such a time, was thrown away on the Irreconcilables whom it would fain have reconciled. Knox took a rougher but directer road. He fought intolerance with its own weapons. Any others would not have even dented the breastplates of the foe. He had been less touched than any other reformer with the humane charm of the New Learning. He

¹ Maitland of Lethington and the Scotland of Mary Stuart. By John Skelton, LL.D., C.B.

had none of the "sweet reasonableness" of Melanchthon, none of Zwingli's urbane sense of civic equity and social charity. He was not troubled with humanitarian scruples about using the sword of the Lord and of Gideon, when he saw an enemy or evil-doer, however stalwart or pretentious, before him. His life's battle was against the enemies of Christ's Church, and in that battle he feared God and knew no other fear. "If Knox," says Dr Schaff—that historian and scholar, Swiss by birth, American by adoption, whose removal the whole Reformed Church deplores—"if Knox lacked the sweet and lovely traits of Christian character, it should be remembered that God wisely distributes His gifts. Neither the polished culture of Erasmus, nor the gentle spirit of Melanchthon, nor the cautious measures of Cranmer, could have accomplished the mighty change in Scotland. Knox was, beyond doubt, the providential man for his country. . . . Such fearless and faithful heroes are among the best gifts of God to the world."

And just as truly says Mr Froude, who alone among English writers has shown a hearty appreciation of the character of the man he calls "the grandest figure in the entire history of the British Reformation,"—"Toleration is a good thing in its place, but you cannot tolerate what will not tolerate you and is trying to cut your

throat. . . . Knox and the Covenanters fought the fight and won the victory; and not till then came the David Humes with their essays on miracles, and the Adam Smiths with their political economies, and steam-engines and railroads, and philosophical institutions, and all the other blessed or unblessed fruits of liberty." And this is all the truer because, though animated throughout by the highest religious principle, and originating in the effort to reform the doctrine and practice of religion as then established in his native land, the mission of Knox was much deeper in its meaning, and wider in its scope, than any purely religious or mere dogmatic or ecclesiastical enterprise could ever be. His merit and power lay in this, that he recognised, more clearly perhaps than any other reformer, the essential character of the Reformation as the revolt of humanity against dominant oppression—the assertion of the human right to liberty of life, intellectual, moral, political.

In Scotland, as in Switzerland especially, the Reformation was the assertion and vindication of what may be broadly called "popular rights."

And notwithstanding all the rudeness of the methods—the coarseness and violence, at this point or that, in the struggle to clear the way—the Scottish Reformation, as led by Knox, was a long and resolute step in the upward path of

light and liberty. It involved much destruction of that which might have been reasonably held sacred from assault; the desecration of much which old association and reverence had consecrated; the waste of much that might have been saved for the highest ends of national welfare. The reckless overturn of many things that should have been the objects of popular respect, engendered a hardness of sentiment and a roughness of manner which have survived long enough to become a kind of national reproach; but, rough and ugly as the process of transition from the old to the new and the means of emancipation from the ancient *régime* were, the work in itself was substantially righteous and salutary. It probably could not have been wrought out more delicately, nor accomplished except at the cost of all the pain and travail, which must accompany moral, social, and political, new birth.

“It was not a smooth business,” as Carlyle says,¹ “but it was welcome surely, and cheap at that price—had it been far rougher on the whole, cheap at any price, as life is.” The tradition of ecclesiastical dignity and influence was broken; the prerogative of the Crown was boldly questioned; the rights and privileges of the nobles were freely invaded; the old bonds and usages of society were loosed, and knocked about; but

¹ *Essays on Heroes ; The Hero as Priest.*

the people began to live a higher life, and a coherent Scottish realm became a possibility.

Knox had imbibed at Geneva a large share of the spirit of austere discipline and relentless severity which characterised the administration and the theology of Calvin. "The Lord thy God is a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children," was an aspect of the Almighty's character much more to his mind than "the Lord retaineth not anger for ever, because He delighteth in mercy." Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who drove her inhospitable spike through the temples of her sleeping guest, was in his eyes a nobler type of womanhood than Mary with her box of ointment, which was not sold for 300 pence and given to the poor. An intense conviction of the rectitude of his own course, and the truth of his own doctrine—a gloomy certainty of the hopeless perdition destined for his gainsayers and opponents—a prevailing sense of the justice and inevitability of God's ways and judgments,—these, coupled with an inexorable standard of morality, gave Knox a strong and stern hold upon the general mind and conscience; but they also imparted to his influence that character of hard-heartedness and uncharitableness, of Puritanic austerity and self-righteousness, which has too long infected the religion of Scotland. The same influence was

unfavourable to the growth of a pure *morale*. Ethical purity and integrity will never result from laws of unmerciful stringency and discipline of unrelenting vigour; and from the many lamentations which we find in the post-Reformation literature over the prevalence of crimes and vices of a flagrant sort, it is evident that the old corruptions had been by no means wholly rooted out of the general community. How little the upper and governing classes, the men of rank and estate, were swayed by religious principle in the part they played during the reforming period—how wholly selfish and partisan their motives were—how devoid they, on the whole, were of honesty and honour, is proved, as I have already indicated, by their frequent treacheries, by their lives, in many cases of gross licentiousness, and by their unscrupulous robbery of the patrimony of the Kirk. It is not among the mere peasantry on the one hand, nor the nobility and great landowners on the other, that we find the fruits of righteousness during the lifetime of Knox and his successors in the sixteenth century; but rather among the lesser landowners, and the members of the middle class, whose growth in general influence and rise in political and social power the Reformation did much to promote.

Those who maintain the necessity of a three-

fold order in the Christian ministry, and deny the right of any Church not owning that order to be regarded as a true branch of the Church catholic, represent the reformation in Scotland as the close of the Scottish Church's ecclesiastical existence, the collapse of its apostolic ministry, and the institution of a new form of schism in that country.¹ Such a representation has no warrant in the facts of the case.

I showed you, in my first lecture, that the threefold order of bishop, priest, and deacon is no part of the constitution of the apostolic Church; that the only two orders recognised in the New Testament are those of the elder or overseer and the deacon; that the episcopate emerged from the presbyterate, in post-apostolic times, by a natural evolution; and that the congregational episcopacy of the early Church was essentially different from the diocesan episcopacy of the medieval. Further, I pointed out that the catholicity and apostolicity of a Church could not depend on its owning a certain mode of government; but on its spirit and character, its holding the true faith, and possessing an

¹ "Churchmen," to avoid the wrong done to their principles by calling the Church of Scotland by its proper name, use the term "Kirk" (which comes exactly to the same thing); but sometimes their "object is attained by the more splenetic periphrasis of 'that form of schism which is established in Scotland.'"—Duke of Argyll, *Presbytery Examined*, Preface.

orderly and properly authenticated ministry. Moreover, we saw that, in the original idea of the Church, prominence was given to the great principle of the priesthood of the Christian people—the principle which strikes at the root of all sacerdotalist pretension and superstition. The history of the primitive Church had been long forgotten in Scotland, its principles had been ignored. That embodiment of them in the Columban Church, to which the country was indebted for its peculiar type of religious worship, life, church government, and organisation, had been overlaid by the cumbrous paraphernalia imported from Rome; and the results had been what I described in my last lecture. The task that Knox and his coadjutors had to face was not the invention of any novelties: it was simply the removal of the accumulated abuses of ages, and the reassertion of the truths and rights which these had hidden out of sight—the clearing away of lumber and litter, that the ancient foundations and venerable walls of the house of God might be restored to view. In the whole process there was no schism. To renounce “the usurped authority of the Roman antichrist”¹ was not schismatic.

¹ The King’s Covenant of 1580—known afterwards as “The National Covenant,” and as such subscribed in 1590, 1638, 1639, and by King Charles II. in 1650 and 1651.

It was a necessary vindication of national independence. No national Church can be schismatic so long as it holds the Catholic faith.

Rome is not the centre and crown of Christian unity; nor is the Pope the vicar of Christ, in any sense in which any faithful minister of His Word and bishop of a flock is not His vicar. It was not the spirit of schism, but the spirit of purity, freedom, and truth, that compelled the Church of Scotland to sever its communion with that of Rome, and to abjure its unworthy allegiance to the Roman bishop. In doing so, and in re-adjusting the conditions of the National Church, the reformers reverted to primitive and apostolic principles and models. They restored to the "brethren" (the general body of the faithful) their long-withheld rights as members of the Church, and their share in its self-government. They abolished the bloated and unapostolic prelacy, which had too long lorded it over God's heritage. They cleansed the worship of the congregations from the superstitious and unscriptural accretions which had disfigured the once purer ritual of our fathers, and they gave its former place in that ritual to the reading and preaching of the Word. While retaining unaltered the Œcumenical creeds of the Apostles and of Nicæa, they drew up and obtained legislative sanction for a confession of the faith as held, in its in-

tegrity, by themselves and the rest of the reformed Churches.

All this was not accomplished without some concomitant outbursts of popular fanaticism and excitement, and selfish obstruction from professed friends of reform, much to be deplored; but the work was attended with less disturbance in the external circumstances of the Church, and less change in the *personnel* of its clergy, than might have been expected. Though the Church lands and other endowments were freely plundered, her territorial position remained unassailed. The churches, manses, and glebes were let alone. Her parishes were not meddled with. The ruling power of the Church was transferred from the bishops to the General Assembly, which was only a modification of an institution already familiar in Scotland. Ever since the year 1225, when the clergy obtained the Pope's sanction to their holding provincial councils, these, as we have seen, had sat from time to time, and regulated the affairs of the Church. The General Assembly was the counterpart of those old councils, which had helped to preserve the Church's independence; but the introduction of the laity to a share of their deliberations made the reformed conventions at once more truly national, and liker to the primitive model of the Ecclesiastical Synod.

The change in the actual composition of the clerical body, effected by the Reformation, was slighter than is commonly supposed. The first General Assembly, or National Reformed Church Council, was held in 1560, and numbered but forty-two members, of whom only six were ministers, and of these six four were reformed priests. To them the national voice, speaking through the Parliament, intrusted the task of framing anew the constitution of the Church. It was done so ably and thoroughly, that in seven years the staff of the Church included five superintendents, 289 ministers, and 715 "readers"—over 1000 in all. These must have been found for the most part among the Romanist clergy. They were not foreigners; and among the natives of Scotland the clergy were almost the only possessors, though by no means generally the possessors, of the qualifications necessary for the duties of minister, preacher, and reader.

Five of the Romish bishops—those of Orkney, Caithness, Argyll, the Isles, and Galloway—adopted the principles of the Reformation: but Roman Catholic writers question whether some of these had been validly consecrated under papal sanction; and our information as to their position and functions in the communion of the Reformed is very vague. There is no doubt,

however, that a considerable number of the secular clergy, and not a few of the regulars also, conformed. Some of the former remained in their old parishes, as ministers: others were appointed at the discretion of the General Assembly, as readers, and were promoted from that office to the full ministry, when pronounced "most qualified for ministering the Word and sacraments." In the 115 parishes in the Synod of Perth and Stirling, Dr Hew Scott's¹ researches in their records discovered at least thirteen appointments of those who had certainly been in Roman orders, and many more of those who presumably had been so. The proportion was probably not less in other districts. The fact is interesting, as illustrating the spontaneity of the process by which the Church reformed herself from within, and without any violent rupture of the continuity of her ministry. Those who take a natural interest in tracing the regular sequence of office and order in the Church, and who attribute a proper value to the element of a true apostolical succession, find with satisfaction that the great transformation, which passed upon the Kirk in the sixteenth century, thus involved no break in that sequence and succession. The old order changed, giving place to the new; but between the two there was no

¹ Author of the '*Fasti Ecclesie Scoticanæ*.'

absolute disruption. Out of the Romanist emerged the Reformed ministry. As, four hundred years before, the Celtic Church had been amalgamated with the Church of Rome, so now, though the passage was more rapid and stormy, the Romanist was in part absorbed into, in part superseded by, the Reformed.

The Church, from the days of David to those of Mary, had been under that government of bishops, in which the members of the Church in general had no share. The bishops were subservient to a foreign authority at Rome. This government was now set aside, and with it was discarded the sacerdotal conception of the Church on which it rested. The Reformers reverted to the apostolic conception of the Church, as the Christian community in the completeness of its whole membership. The government was vested in an assembly which, like the first Christian councils, contained both clergy and laity—"elders" and "brethren." Under this General Assembly other courts were instituted, not immediately, but as the process of the Church's development and consolidation permitted. The lowest of these was the kirk-session, the next was the presbytery, the third the synod. The session consisted of the minister, elders, and deacons of one parish; the presbytery of a minister and elder from each of a group of

parishes; the synod of a minister and elder from each parish of the several presbyteries within the synodical bounds. Admission to the ministry had, under the Roman *régime*, been at the pleasure of the bishops. The old scrupulous preparation and conscientious training of the Celtic Church had been utterly relinquished; and ordination had been profaned and bartered, while the people's right to a voice in the appointment of their spiritual teachers and guides had been habitually flouted. All this was now amended. The "call" of the Christian congregation was recognised as the primary basis of admission to the cure of souls. Before the person so called could be admitted he must be strictly examined by the presbytery, or—before the definite erection of presbyteries—by the ministers of a district acting together in a presbyterial capacity, who must satisfy themselves as to his adequate learning, good character, and general capacity for the work of the ministry. If he stood the examination, he might then be ordained—not otherwise. At first, and for a few years after 1560, the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, which was the visible sign of the commission granted to the candidate, was disused. This abrupt departure from apostolic usage was justified in the 'First Book of Discipline' by the curious plea, "Albeit the apostles

used imposition of hands, yet seeing the miracle is ceased, the using of the ceremony we judge not necessary." Knox and the other authors of that book were evidently under the impression that the apostles, by the imposition of hands, imparted some miraculous gift—a superstition they ought to have rid themselves of when they bade farewell to "the works of men's invention," such as—to use Knox's own words—"pilgrimages, pardons, and other sic baggage."¹ They might have remembered that of the earliest of all ordinations it is recorded that Moses was commanded to lay his hand on Joshua—not that he might receive the Spirit, but—because the Spirit was already in him.²

It is in connection with the reformed use in ordination, and the transference of the act from the bishop to the presbytery, that the charge is brought against the Church of having thereby separated itself from the Church Catholic. We cannot admit the charge as valid. The "laying on of the hands of the Presbytery," to which S. Paul refers as the warrant of Timothy's ministry,³ had gradually given way, as we have seen, to the laying on of the hands of the president of the presbyters, as the essential element in ordination. The old rite now recovered its original form. The diocesan bishop no

¹ History, book i.² Num. xxvii. 18.³ 1 Tim. iv. 14.

longer was allowed to usurp the privilege of admitting whomsoever he would to the ministry. The congregational bishops, acting together in a recognised and orderly court, resumed their control of the function which guarded the sacred portal of the sanctuary, but which had been grievously abused. The episcopate, being a mere post-apostolic development from the presbyterate, could have no exclusive claim to appropriate a right of which the presbyterate was the original depositary, and to exercise a power which presbyters had exercised before bishops, as distinct from presbyters, had been heard of. The theory of episcopal apologists that, while the apostles "ordained" in all the churches presbyters, who had no authority to confer ordination in their turn, they "consecrated" a few chosen men to a rank higher than the presbyters and equal to their own, "qualifying them to ordain deacons and presbyters, and, when necessary, to impart their full commission to others,"¹ is a theory merely, without historical support.

In the Roman Church ordination of a priest is a sacrament; consecration of a bishop is not. Whatever peculiar and efficacious grace resides in the sacrament, must therefore be held, by that Church, to belong to the priest, not to the bishop. The bishop, at least, receives no fresh or

¹ Dean Hook, *Church Dictionary*, p. 727.

greater share of the sacramental grace, through his (non-sacramental) consecration. This fact marks the priesthood as the order in which the sacred deposit of grace and authority, originally committed by the apostles to their successors (whatever that may amount to), is actually to be found.¹ The Scottish presbyters who arranged the organisation of the Reformed Church had no scruple in acting upon this principle. At the call of the people they examined a man's fitness for the ministry,—if fit, they ordained him. Having no more faith in episcopal government than in episcopal ordination, they vested the Church's administration in duly formed courts,

¹ "To test the matter practically—the credentials of the apostles were the ability to cure diseases, to take up serpents, and to drink of deadly poison without harm; power was also given them to pardon sins. It is recorded in holy Scripture that they did actually cure diseases, and of one of them it is recorded that the bite of a venomous reptile did him no harm; but they seem to have seldom or never pardoned sins. Now, any who claim to be successors of the apostles by apostolical succession, and who claim by that succession to be possessed of similar graces and powers, should surely therefore show the credentials of apostles. Will they, then, cure diseases? No! Will they, then, handle the deadly rattlesnake? No! Will they drink of poison? No! Will they pardon sins? Yes!—they, and those of the inferior grade of presbyters, will pardon sins. That is to say, that they cannot do what the apostles did, but profess to be able to do what the apostles seem not to have done—and that an easy matter, which any one can say he can do. According, then, to this Scriptural test, any who claim to be as the apostles of Jesus Christ, by apostolical succession, are but false apostles, and the doctrine a blasphemous figment."—*Tod's Protestant Episcopacy in relation to Apostolical Succession*, p. 22.

in which the representatives of the people, called the elders, as well as the deacons, acted along with the ministers in all matters affecting the interests of the Church and congregation, except in the ministry of the Word and sacraments. The only orders recognised were two, those of the presbyter or minister and the deacon. The deacon now resumed his proper place in the Church, not as a subordinate assistant in the services and aspirant to the priesthood, but as the Church's almoner, or "distributor," intrusted with the care of the poor, and of the properties and goods of the Church. He sat in the kirk-session, but had not the governing voice and vote there allowed to the elders; who, in the Reformed Church, held a place peculiar to themselves, the true significance of which has been obscured by the attempt, repeatedly made, to invest their office with a spiritual character, which it does not properly possess or historically claim.¹

The name of these officials is Scriptural, but the office itself was an outcome of the reforming policy which had originated in Switzerland. There, and especially in Zurich, under Zwingli, the relation of Church and State was pre-emi-

¹ For an example of this attempt, which has no doubt some sanction in the 'Second Book of Discipline,' see 'The Eldership of the Church of Scotland,' by the Rev. J. G. Lorimer. For an able and learned exposition of the opposite view, see 'The Ruling Eldership,' by the late Principal P. C. Campbell, D.D.

nently intimate, and the representatives of the people had a place and power in the administration of the Church, unknown either in the East or West since the apostolic and earliest patristic times. Scotland was in so much the disciple of Switzerland, that it need not surprise us to find this special mode of according full recognition to the lay element in Church government reproduced in our ecclesiastical constitution. The elders of the Kirk were the embodiment of the apostolic principle that the Church was the whole body of the faithful, and of the Swiss practice of associating certain men with the pastors in the government of the Church, as the representatives of that whole body. The elders were not "presbyters" in the sense in which that word is identical with *bishops* or *ministers*: they were the "elders of the people," in the sense in which the term was used in Old Testament times to designate those who, by reason of age, station, or character, were regarded as worthy representatives of the rest of the community. The elder is defined in the 'First Book of Discipline' as a man of good life and godly conversation; without blame and all suspicion; careful for the flock; wise, and above all things fearing God. His office is defined as consisting in governing along with the ministers, in consulting, admonishing, correcting, and ordering all things apper-

taining to the state of the congregation; and as differing from the office of the ministers, in that it includes neither preaching the Word nor ministering the sacraments. The elder's co-operation with the clergy included all administrative business. The elder at first, as also the deacon, held office only for a year at a time, but later this restriction was removed.

Another functionary who obtained a vocation in the remodelled system was the Reader. For this also there was primitive warrant. His office was one well known in the early Church. In Cyprian's days the reader was appointed to read to the congregation from the Scriptures or other permitted writings, such as the Pastor of Hermas and the Epistles of Clement of Rome. The office was then regarded, and coveted, as forming a stepping-stone to the priesthood. The Scottish reader was deputed to places where there was no settled ministry, that he might read the common prayers and Scriptures before the congregation, and sometimes even add a word of exhortation. The office might be held by a deacon if he were qualified; but it was intended to be, as a general rule, only a temporary one, and a substitute for that of the settled minister. The readers were commonly chosen, as I have said, from the ranks of the conforming priests; and from the carefulness with which evidence of their ability to discharge the

duty is required, it is plain that the office of the priest in the unreformed Kirk was often held by a man who could not read the English language intelligibly, and whose literary acquirements presumably extended no further than to such an acquaintance with the missal as enabled him to stumble through the celebration of the mass. The readers (with what appears to be the ineradicable desire of unlicensed persons to usurp the office of the licentiate—a desire commonly strongest in those whose incapacity renders its indulgence least desirable) proved a somewhat intractable set of functionaries, and again and again we find the General Assembly discharging them from the assumption of ministerial duties beyond their own sphere.

It would be a mistake to suppose that the government of the Reformed Church of Scotland was settled on a *dogmatic* basis, or in accordance with a preconceived theory of the *jus divinum* of Presbytery. There is, on the contrary, clear evidence that the first Reformers had no dogmatic hatred of Episcopacy, or attachment to Presbytery. Among the reforms which the Lords of the Congregation craved in their first petition, abolition of Episcopacy was not included, or even named. The episcopal function was continued in the appointment of the reformed Superintendents; and the Episcopal order, as an order,

was regarded with tolerance, if not with respect, by those who rebelled against the domination and the doctrines of Rome. What brought Episcopacy into discredit was the character of the prelates, who represented it in Scotland before and at the date of the Reformation, and the tenacity with which they clung to the Roman connection, when the nation had made up its mind to renounce what the reforming Act of Parliament called "the Pope of Rome and his usurped authority." The bishops' fidelity to Rome destroyed their influence in Scotland, where popular sympathy and reverence had already been alienated by their worldly lives, their neglect of duty, their preference of the interests of the Roman Church to those of the Scottish nation, and the many ecclesiastical abuses which they had connived at and encouraged. Thus, when the destructive stage of the Reforming movement was passed, and men began to reconstruct a somewhat shattered system, there was no effort made to adapt the old episcopate to reformed conditions. At the same time, the expediency of the episcopal function was too apparent to allow that function to be discarded. One of the first reconstructive acts of the Reformers was, therefore, to perpetuate it, through the appointment of those who were called "Superintendents"—a name exactly equivalent to that of bishop or

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overseer; and designating an official who, under reformed conditions, would supply to the Church all that was best in the function of the Celtic abbat or the "Catholic" bishop.

The Reformers were not hampered in this by any theory either for or against the episcopal order. They did not believe it was of divine institution; they did not believe it was of satanic origin. What was useful and apostolic in the discredited office they would preserve. They would have wise and good men acting as overseers of the churches, the advisers of their brethren—the superintendents of their work—not in virtue of an authority vested in a traditional hierarchy, and exercised at the dictation of a foreign potentate, but an authority conferred by the Church itself in order to meet its own necessities, and for the proper exercise of which those clothed with it were to be responsible to the Church, as represented by its General Assembly. Those who have imbibed Andrew Melville's ideas as to the inherent mischief of Episcopacy, and the inherent virtue of Presbytery—ideas unknown to Knox and his coadjutors—have made a practice of representing the office of superintendent as a mere temporary expedient, and an excrescence on the Presbyterian system. In point of fact, it was one of the earliest and most carefully devised institutions of the Reformed Church—adapted to be permanent,

and held, as it was, at the will of the great governing council, regarded as perfectly in accordance with Presbyterian theory and practice.

For Presbytery, we must remember, does not mean the simple assertion of that questionable entity called "Presbyterian parity." It means the government of the Church by presbyters—by the whole body of the ministry and those associated with them for purposes of government, and not by bishops or the members of a special class, claiming to govern not as the representatives of the whole body of the Church, but in virtue of an alleged divine commission. That parity, which insists on holding that every presbyter shall be considered the equal of every other, and that there shall be no ascending scale of office or function in the ecclesiastical body, and which has therefore rejected the order of superintendents, is practically untenable. It is not exhibited even in the Church of which it is supposed to be a distinctive principle. Apart from the imparities created by individual character and genius, there are the imparities unavoidable under any active and intelligent organisation. He who is *primus inter pares* is for the time being as much *cæteris impar* as if they were not his peers. The Moderator of a presbytery or Assembly is the temporary president, with powers belonging as specially to his office as if

he were a superintendent. The difference between the prerogatives of the minister of a parish and those of the minister of an unendowed chapel is as distinct as if the one and the other belonged to a separate order of ecclesiastics. If Presbyterian parity exist at all in more than in name, it is as much infringed by a commission of the General Assembly being empowered to exercise, occasionally, and inconveniently, those duties of supervision which were discharged regularly and without friction or offence by the duly constituted superintendents of the Church of the Reformation. There is no reason to believe that those who instituted the office contemplated its early abolition. That abolition was owing to the development of extreme theories, and the illegitimate revival of that pretended Episcopacy which the nobility set up to serve their own rapacious purposes. But two of the most prominent features of the reformed system of Church government, as organised by Knox and those who acted with him, were the governing General Assembly of the Church; and under it and responsible to it the superintendent.

The system of superintendency was never carried out in the fulness of its design. The only districts or dioceses which were actually planted were those of Glasgow; Angus and Mearns; Argyll and the Isles; Lothian; and Fife.

But the intention was to provide superintendents also for Orkney; Ross; Aberdeen; St Andrews; Jedburgh; and Dumfries; and thus to occupy the whole area of the Church.

In the appointment of a superintendent, the ministers, elders, and deacons of the chief town in the province or diocese, along with the magistrates and council, nominated two or three of "the most learned and godly ministers within the whole realm"; and every church in the province was at liberty to do the same. Public intimation of the names was duly made, and after thirty days, all the nominees were subjected to a searching examination, at the hands of the clergy of the province and certain of the already appointed superintendents. After this a vote was taken—proxies from absent ministers being allowed—and he for whom the majority voted was set apart, in a solemn service, to the office of superintendent. He was not required to resign his parochial charge, but obtained assistance in it, that he might not be hindered in his episcopal work. The appointment of ministers began with the "call" of the people, on which followed strict examination by the other presbyters of the bounds: after which, if found duly qualified, the candidate was by them solemnly ordained.

In the appointment of elders the minister and kirk-session drew up a "leet" for the people

to choose from. So also in the case of the deacons.

One of the wholly new features of ecclesiastical arrangement, to which prominence is given in the First Book of Discipline, was the institution of the "Exercise," as it was called. It was one of the healthiest of the marks of the Church's abandonment of sacerdotalist traditions. It was an emphatic assertion of her belief in the great truth of the priesthood of the whole Christian family. The exercise was a kind of general or congregational assemblage, which was to be held once a-week, with the express object of bringing the members of the Church together on a basis of social union, for mutual edification, and for the exercise of the individual "gift" which each might possess. The object in view was "that the Kirk have judgment and knowledge of the graces, gifts, and utterances of every man within their body; the simple and such as have somewhat profited shall be encouraged daily to study and to prove in knowledge, and the whole Kirk shall be edified. . . . Every man shall have liberty to utter and declare his mind." It was, though new in the Scottish Church, but a reversion to the apostolic usage, the proper rules for which S. Paul suggests to the Corinthians;¹ and was singularly well adapted for knitting the Church together in

¹ 1 Cor. xiv.

friendly intimacy, and in religious and intellectual intercourse. The conventionality, which took the place of sacerdotal tradition, and stiffened the development of the Reformed Church, gradually transformed this free and intelligent conference—wherein all took an equal part—into a more formal meeting, in which the minister gradually assumed the lead, if he did not indeed monopolise the whole functions; so that, to use the words of Edward Irving, "our church meetings" (and he does not exclude those of the Lord's Day), "from being for edification of the brethren by the Holy Ghost showing Himself in the variously gifted persons, have become merely places for preaching the Gospel, and not for edifying the Church." The revival of the earlier custom of a free meeting, for united worship and open conference and discussion, could not fail to be interesting and profitable to any congregation attempting it. Where the ordinary so-called "prayer-meeting"—which is not really a prayer-meeting so much as a preach-meeting—is found to be dull and unattractive, this attempt to freshen it and give it life might be worth a trial. The discontinuance of the "exercise"—which is not referred to even in the Second Book of Discipline—is only one out of many instances of the contraction, rather than expansion, in freedom and variety of development which early began to

narrow and impair the life of our Reformed Church.

In those details of order and organisation which I have put before you, we have the constituent elements in the government and administration of the Reformed Church: the minister of the Word and Sacraments standing at the centre of the whole organisation, whether in his more individual relation to one congregation as pastor and teacher, or in his larger relation to a group of congregations as superintendent; the deacon, in charge of the patrimony and the alms of the church; the elder, or representative of the brethren, acting along with the minister and deacon in counselling, ruling, and applying the discipline of the Church. Over all these was the General Assembly, or National Ecclesiastical Council—the supreme depository of authority and instrument of government. The Presbytery and the Synod were later developments of the Presbyterian polity. In its earliest stages it exhibits only the two extremes—the kirk-session, or council of the minister with his elders and deacons, on the one hand; and the General Assembly, or council of the whole Church, on the other. The constitution of the Assembly, at first and for a long time, was of a civil, quite as much as of an ecclesiastical, type—that is to say, we find its membership determined by civil

as well as by ecclesiastical qualifications. The nobles and great landowners sat in it in virtue of their rank and territorial influence; and of those members who were called "commissioners of kirks" we have no reason to believe that all were office-bearers. The Reformed Assembly was, in a sense and a degree in which the Roman councils had never been, fairly and fully representative of the nation in its religious convictions and polity. The whole system, of which the Assembly was the crown, was, in its theory and organisation, the very antithesis of the system which had grown up under the sombre shadow of Rome. It dealt a death-blow to the sacerdotalism which was the vital principle of the Roman Church. It released the Christian ministry and the government of Christ's Church from the thralldom of priestcraft, and set them upright on a rational, as opposed to a traditional and sacerdotal, basis.

It may be questioned whether so complete a change as the establishment of the reformed order implied was necessary; whether, for example, the supremacy of the General Assembly might not have been asserted and maintained quite as fully, though some of its members had borne the ancient name of bishop instead of the modern title of superintendent; whether the theory of Presbyterian parity might not have

flourished under a system which, while recognising the episcopate as an office, refused to recognise it as a distinct order? But, on the whole, it is doubtful if less thorough measures would have served the essential purpose. Every step taken could refer to Scriptural sanction or primitive example. The time was not one for half-measures and bland compromises. The necessities of the case left no leisure for Fabian tactics—for prolonged deliberation and warily cautious choice of means and methods. The Church had to be purified, reformed, and re-established promptly on a more stable foundation, and the system of reformation that Continental experience had tested and approved appeared the best and soundest to the Scots Reformers. Even “the judicious Hooker,” determined apologist of Episcopacy as he was, recognised that the argument of a present and pressing necessity might override a theory and a tradition of Church government. “This device,” says he, speaking of that scheme of ecclesiastical polity which Calvin established in Geneva, and whose principles Knox reproduced in Scotland, “I see not how the wisest at that time living could have bettered, if we duly consider what the present estate of Geneva did then require.”¹ If the best that could be

¹ *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Preface, ii. 4.

devised for the time at Geneva, and if it worked well and secured the orderly administration of the Church's worship and discipline there (as Hooker acknowledges it did), why should it be discarded, after experience had approved it, in order to revert to another polity which Geneva had found to be profitable neither for religion and morals, nor for the civil welfare of her citizens? Why should its efficacy not be tried in Scotland, and, as in Geneva, be justified by its results?

The new polity, as I have pointed out, did not emerge whole and complete in all its parts from the mint of the First Book of Discipline. It received its fuller elaboration in the Second Book, and at the hands of Andrew Melville. He gave it the new impetus, under which it expanded and developed into its perfect organisation of kirk - sessions, presbyteries, synods, and assemblies, each of these being, like all healthy organisms, a natural growth. The principles at the root of the growth were the sufficiency of the order of presbyters for all purposes of discipline, order, and government; and the right of the people to a voice in the affairs of the Church.

The first foe that the Reformed Church had to fight was Prelacy, the earliest development of which was, as we shall see, the creation of the

“tulchan” bishops, who were mere channels through which the revenues flowed into the coffers of the nobles. The tulchans were knocked on the head by Andrew Melville in 1580. Again in 1598 the Episcopal title was revived, that under cover of it churchmen might be once more admitted to Parliament; and in 1610 Anglican consecration was bestowed on the parliamentary prelates, whose reign lasted till 1638, when their office and order were rudely overthrown. Renewed again at the Restoration, Prelacy was finally abolished at the Revolution. Through all these years of conflict it was the symbol of despotism and wrong. Under guise of Prelacy the Church was cozened out of its revenues; the liberties and consciences of the people were violated; the absolutism of the Stewarts was advanced. This, more than anything in the office of bishop itself, made “black Prelacy” so abhorrent to the commonalty of Scotland; and, identifying Presbytery with freedom of life and thought, deepened their attachment to the polity of the Reformation. And all through these years of conflict that polity remained substantially unchanged. Bishops were set up and were pulled down, but from the days of Knox to those of Carstares the doctrine, discipline, and government of the Church continued practically unaltered. The

Assembly and the Presbytery had the real power; the bishop had little, if any, except what the support of the arm of flesh gave him. The records of Synods and Presbyteries during the time when Prelacy was most vigorously enforced—from 1662 to 1688—record the inner life of the Church in much the same terms as those in which it might be recorded now, except that the Synod had a permanent moderator, who was present and took the lead at every ordination. The ecclesiastical name, and a part of the form, might be changed; but throughout, the life and character were essentially Presbyterian, as the regular succession of the ministry was Presbyterian. The presbyterate never had to seek renewal from foreign sources; but the parliamentary prelates of James I. and the nominees of Charles II. had alike to travel to Westminster, to knit up there the ravelled line of the disorganised Episcopate.

We may note, at this point, that not only did the Church never lose that essentially Presbyterian character which was stamped on it at its Reformation, but that the changes which more than once were temporarily made in its form of government were in the main so political and external, that they did not even affect the mass of the clergy sufficiently to break their connection with the Church. We have seen how the

great body of the Celtic clergy became Romanist; how numbers of the Romanist became Reformed. Similarly the great body of the parochial clergy at the Restoration accepted, without resistance, the imposition of Episcopacy; and a large majority of the parochial clergy at the Revolution accepted, in the same way, the re-establishment of Presbytery. Several of them lived quietly on in their parishes through both changes,—some, perhaps, because they were men of peace, like Leighton or Laurence Charteris; some, no doubt, because they were of the same mind as Andrew Gray, of Coull, whose epitaph bore that

“ He had a church without a roof,
A conscience that was cannon-proof:
He was Prelatick first; and then
Became a Presbyterian;
Episcopal once more he turned,
And yet for neither would be burned.”¹

Or of Gavin Young, who, being asked how he reconciled his conscience to remaining minister of Ruthwell, through all the changes of Church government from 1617 to 1671, ingenuously replied, “Wha wad quarrel wi’ their brose for a mote in them?”

At the Restoration, and at the Revolution, the clergy numbered about 1000. Of these,

¹ Fasti, p. 528.

less than 300 were put out, or removed themselves at the Restoration; about 400 at the Revolution. In each case the majority remained. That majority at the Revolution was composed chiefly of men who had been Episcopally ordained—as, at the Restoration, it was composed of men who had been Presbyterially ordained—and from whose ranks the bishops between 1662 and 1688 were chosen and consecrated, without previous re-ordination. The stream of orders flowed on in a current, at first somewhat mingled, but which gradually cleared itself, as the Episcopally ordained remnant died out, and the Presbyterate became once more—as in the primitive Church—the sole channel of ordination.

Since the end of the seventeenth century no convulsion of any kind has disturbed the peaceful progress of the Church. Changes have passed upon it, as they pass upon all bodies whose life is in themselves, but they have not been forced upon it by any external pressure,—they have been the natural developments of the Christian consciousness of the body of Christ. There have been certain modifications in methods of administration; in ritual; in the general cast of doctrine and interpretation of Scripture; but there has been no change in the system of presbyterial government, in the

common order of our reformed worship, and in the authorised standards of belief. Almost all the principles of the First Book of Discipline have remained throughout all her vicissitudes the distinctive principles of the Church. In the end of the nineteenth century she retains the essentially Presbyterian type of polity devised for her by Knox and the Reformers of the sixteenth.