

in our present earthly state. But I have little fear about the inquiry bearing blessed and glorious results ere long, if it be conducted by men who hold so strongly and reverently as Professor Smith to the one central truth, that Scripture, whatever be the history or the origin on the human side of the books that make it up, is the inspired revelation of the will of God. And I should have no fear at all about the issue, if men like him were on the one hand guided and restrained by kindly admonition when they are in danger of running on too fast, and on the other upheld, as they ought to be, by the prayers and the sympathy of the Church, for whose good they labour. But I should fear for the future of the Church in the face of intelligent heathenism and cultured infidelity, if anything induce it to quit the path of patient diligent inquiry into what God has actually done, the only path for a calm and humble faith—if anything induce it to take up rationalistic ground and to condemn by implication the conduct of St. Luke.

In the whole of the difficulty with which it is confronted now, the Church has need to lay to heart the message with which the prophet was charged to Israel when the chosen nation was in danger of rushing in excitement to premature conclusions—"THUS SAITH THE LORD GOD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, IN RETURNING AND REST SHALL YE BE SAVED; IN QUIETNESS AND CONFIDENCE SHALL BE YOUR STRENGTH."

THURSO, *July*, 1877.

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PRESIDENT McCOSH

ON

BROAD CHURCHISM

IN

SCOTLAND.

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## BROAD CHURCHISM IN SCOTLAND.

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PRINCETON COLLEGE, U. S., *Sept.* 22, 1877.

In my recent visit to my native land, I was led to ponder the state of the Scottish Churches. It is evident that there is in that country, at the present time, a considerable amount of what Dr Conybeare first called Broad Churchism. For the past age that system, or rather spirit—for it is opposed to system—has had considerable influence in the Anglican Church. It has now appeared unmistakably in the Presbyterian Churches of Scotland. It was visible first in the Established Church, which tried to ape the Church of England, and thus bear itself up in the troubled waters with which it is encompassed in North Britain. It has come forth in the United Presbyterian and the Free Church, and is proclaimed more or less definitely by young ministers who have studied in Germany, some of whom, being theological professors, but not having been brought into contact with the people in the exercise of the pastoral office, are as utterly ignorant of human nature and what it craves and needs as their German instructors, who construct, in their libraries, theories of history,

philosophy, and religion, which set at defiance all the motives by which men and women are swayed in this actual world of ours.

I thought at one time of speaking briefly on the subject in the Presbyterian Council. But, on further reflection, I thought it best not to disturb the holy unity which reigned in that body, by the introduction of a question which belongs rather to the separate churches than to a General Alliance. But when, on the occasion of a visit to Brechin, a city in which I had been a minister for twelve years, and with which I have been so closely associated ever since, I was invited by the Young Men's Christian Association to preach to young men, I felt myself called on to speak out, first on the prevalent error, so eagerly propagated in the present day, that we cannot know God; and secondly, on Broad Churchism. An abridged report of what I said on the latter subject appeared in an influential paper, the *Dundee Advertiser*, and was copied into other papers. That report, though correct so far as it went, scarcely gave a full view of what I said. I was preparing to sail for America, but I resolved immediately on my arrival here to transmit a correct account of what I said and what I hold—to be read only by those who are sufficiently shrewd to discover that Broad Churchism is a subject which will soon engage intensely the attention of all Scotland.

Broad Churchism has a unity and certain marked features which enable us to recognise it. It does not propose to institute any new creed, but would undermine all existing creeds. It professes to admire excessively the character of Christ; but it takes away the atonement by suffering and righteousness; and earnest youths have to ask their anxious fathers, "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" It freely admits the divinity of Christ, but is not very sure how much is implied in this; and in some cases is

satisfied with making Christ merely a manifestation of God. Miracles are spoken of doubtfully, apologetically, and disparagingly, it being uncertain whether our Lord wrought miracles, or merely believed that he did. It shrinks from speaking of sin as deserving and implying an eternal separation from God. The Sabbath is commended as a good institution; but this, not because written on the granite blocks of Sinai, but because it is for the good of man,—the fact being lost sight of, that, in countries such as France and Germany, where there is no belief in the Sabbath as a Scriptural institution, it is not observed, and does not convey the good. They approve of prayer, but simply as an outlet to the feelings—as boy-poets speak to the moon; but affirm that the inflexibility of the laws of nature prevents God from giving an answer,—as if God, who has made the laws of nature unite to form the eye, might not also make them combine to furnish an answer to prayer. They are lowering, in a variety of ways, the inspiration of Scripture, making it the product of human nature in its higher moods, having no special divine authority, and quite compatible with error. It is now casting doubts on the Books of Scripture, and introducing principles of criticism, which, followed logically or illogically, will, in half an age, mutilate our Gospels in the very manner of Strauss and Renan, and cause common Christians to say, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him."

It is clear that the Scottish Churches cannot allow those who are called by them to be preachers to utter what they please on such vital subjects. The question arises, and is now put,—What are the churches to do with those who are publicly denying what the church universal has held? Everybody sees that there are statements openly made which are inconsistent with the old truths and the standards of the churches. Those who make them will readily avow this, and rather glory in

it, as they are to introduce a new spirit and a new era. What, then, are the churches to do? The question is the most solemn and searching which can be put to them at this time; and they must answer it. Faithfulness to Christ demands it. The church universal expects it. The very world is waiting for it.

Already, investigations have been undertaken, and prosecutions started by two of the churches, the Free Church and the United Presbyterian. It is acknowledged that there are far more clamant cases in the Established Church. The defence lodged in these is, that an endowed church should give full room for all opinions. But surely this is not the ground on which the Church of Scotland has been maintained in time past—its defenders commonly claiming for it that it is a public acknowledgment of the truth. Many will declare it to be a sin in a church, to consign, for an age, a whole parish, say a country parish, to the ministry of a man who deliberately teaches that the Bible is fallible, that Jesus did not work miracles, and did not suffer for us, the just for the unjust. Whether the Established Church takes up the subject or not, the public which provides the endowment will, and pronounce a judgment. So we are already in the heat of ecclesiastical discussions on the most vital points, and of painful prosecutions in church courts. I am not to offer an opinion on the cases of any individual minister or professor. I am not possessed of sufficient information to enable me to do so; and the cases should be closed in the church courts before we pronounce a judgment. But it is already clear that utterances have been made in public, which, if parties are not to shuffle, must end in ecclesiastical censure. People feel that if this is not done, the standards should be abandoned as a mockery, a sin, and a snare. But suppose that this is done. We may suppose that a professor or two, and several ministers of eminence, who are not so cowardly as to

conceal or deny their opinions, are cut off from the communion of their churches: what then? Are these men,—differing from a number of others who hold the same views only in being more outspoken,—to be left isolated and unsupported, while those who have disguised their sentiments are cherished by the churches? I should certainly deplore to find the Church of Scotland turned into a refuge for such. Surely the universities of Scotland are not to commit the blunder into which they fell last century and the beginning of this, or which the London University perpetrated at a later date, under the leadership of Mr Grote, giving the preference to those reputed heterodox. Surely they are not thus to separate themselves from the old churches and the best evangelical life of the country. What, then, are those censured to do? What are those who favour them to do?

It is clear that the prosecutions which have begun must run their course. We may presume that the answers to the inquiries will be open and honest, and that there will be no attempt to conceal or equivocate. Surely those who so praise boldness and frankness will speak out candidly. They owe that to their God, to the world, and the cause they represent. Indeed, I hold that those who do not believe the standards which they signed, should not wait to be prosecuted, but are bound spontaneously to avow their convictions to their church. Every honest man will declare that those put on trial should, instead of withholding, openly confess what they believe. On the other hand, there will, I doubt not, be all charity, forbearance, and patience on the part of those who are conducting the investigations. As the issue, there will be ministers resolutely adhering to Broad Church negotiations. The crisis is come as soon as any of the brotherhood is suspended, or even censured.

I confess I see only one upright course open to

those who cannot concur with the standards in the letter and the spirit of them, who are not prepared to stand by the Reformation, that is, the Pauline theology. Let them withdraw, and form a separate church as other honest men have done before them, as the Covenanters, the Wesleyans, the Socinians, the Irvingites. It is only thus, as it appears to me, that Scotland can avoid an interminable continuance of those prosecutions which have been begun, and which are so distracting the faith of the people, and causing the enemy to blaspheme; only thus that old churches can retain the old—what they believe to be the Scriptural—faith in its integrity, and the New Light ministers and those who adhere to them follow an honest and consistent career, and enjoy full freedom in a land of freedom.

I know that not a few who have adopted these new views will be unwilling to adopt this course, and can be led to do so only by a sense of duty. They will be averse to be separated from churches in which they have been brought up and which they love—but to which, I may add, they will become less attached as these contests and prosecutions proceed. But meanwhile, their course will be a candid and upright one, and they will have a clean and a clear conscience, and no one will be able to charge them with inconsistency. Of all things, what is chiefly required in the present day is intelligence and honesty in signing creeds. I do stand up for orthodoxy—that is, adherence to Scripture—in a church; but honesty is a more essential virtue, and those who laud honesty will find comfort in practising it. Some of those who are propagating these new views are not in their right places as ministers of the old churches. Thus, I never thought Mr Gilfillan, who has been criticizing me in the *Scotsman* and the *Dundee Advertiser*, as in his proper position as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church; he never was a good Seceder, and can lay no claim to hold the views of the Erskines. In a free

country like Scotland, no one is under any temptation to join or continue in a given church, in order to exercise his gifts. Some of these bright writers and preachers will have much more of the freedom which they love when delivered from the trammels of the Confession of Faith, and left to walk and run without such a burden upon their shoulders. They could then, without any risk of a troublesome prosecution, or any qualms of conscience, or the possibility of being charged with inconsistency or dishonesty, lecture to the *Philosophical Institution* of Edinburgh, or write for the *Contemporary Review*, or *Nineteenth Century*, or for the *Scotsman* and *Dundee Advertiser*.

I verily believe that good might arise from the formation of a separate Broad Church. Those thus withdrawing would constitute a body of considerable influence. Many of them are men of refined taste (none of profound thought); they write gracefully, and throw out noble sentiments taken from the New Testament and from our later poets, who wrote before Swinburne had shown us in what a sink of licentiousness all this is to end. In their sermons and articles they shed a dim religious light, like that of the stained glass in their church windows, and they create feelings like those produced by music; thus they interest and draw young men who are not prepared to listen to deeper spiritual truth. They will have no difficulty in getting fit young professors, learned in German speculation and magazine literature. They would erect a half-way house for a considerable body of young men who, having imbibed the spirit of the age, are indisposed to enter the old churches or listen to the old preaching, and might detain them there, when otherwise they would be tempted to run into wild scepticism. If they did not promote the spiritual religion of the people, they would at least promote their refinement. They might even have an influence for good upon the old

churches, by restraining them from uttering harsh expressions sanctioned neither by Paul nor Calvin. In a few years there would be a few congregations of such in our large cities. The smaller towns and rural parishes would have to do without them, and would not regret or feel the loss. As a good issue, we should know where to find our young ministers, and our students would have a free choice as to the church to which to attach themselves. As a still happier issue, the whole movement, both among our young ministers and students, would be very much arrested, when they discovered the pass to which things had been brought, and realised that they had been separated from the church catholic or universal.

I confess that I do not regard the prospect of the church or churches thus formed as very bright, and students had better pause and reflect before they cast in their lot with them. Their glow is like that of the evening sky, soon to sink into darkness as the luminary which gives the light departs from behind. As having no fixed creed to keep them together, they would be driven about with every wind of doctrine, and ever be flying off from each other. The young men, as they advanced in life, would be apt either to go on to religious unbelief, or, as they became heads of families, and had to bring up their children, to return to the old faith. The career will be like that run by the Arians and Socinians of Belfast and Boston (with whom I have been brought in contact), who are fast vanishing away; only, the course of Broad Churchism, as having no common belief, would be a vastly swifter one. Meanwhile, the old truths which have been held in the church universal since the time of the Apostles, and against which the gates of hell have never prevailed, and which have been able to cast off the new opinions of age after age, will endure, while the new fancies and speculations spring up and wither like the grass.

Scotland cannot afford, in this century, to pass through an experience like that of Moderatism in the last century, with its declension, first of orthodoxy, then of piety, and ultimately of morality. The fathers of moderatism did not mean to injure religion, they expected to improve morality. My study of Scottish history has led me to believe that Francis Hutcheson and Principal Leishman imparted to Moderatism the form which it took. They were undoubtedly sincere and earnest men; their aim was to make religion more attractive by rubbing off some of its offensive points, in fact, to remove the "offence of the cross," and thereby make Christianity more acceptable to young men and the genteel classes—in all which they signally failed. Hutcheson's object was, as he avowed, "to put a new face upon theology in Scotland." He sent out a body of young preachers, such as Jupiter Carlyle, who unfortunately lost the common people, and the pious of all ranks, without gaining the worldly and unbelieving of any rank. I freely allow that some of the leaders of the new movement are sincere men, really anxious to promote religion by making it more reasonable, more amiable, and acceptable to the natural heart—as they think. But the issue will be the same, *mutatis mutandis*, if our young preachers take away from the words of the Book. My illustrious predecessor in this College, when he was minister of Beith and Paisley, did try to stop the tide, but was unsuccessful, as the law of Patronage was dead against him and was too powerful. But there is no such State opposition now as to damp the effort of devoted men. I believe that good and brave men may even now arrest the progress of the movement within the old churches.

We know what has taken place in Germany. The professors, even the theological, began to cut and carve the Bible; and the young preachers sent forth, with all sorts of Erastian restraints laid upon them, uttered a very uncertain sound; and the people were shrewd

enough to discover that their pastors had no faith, and they gave up the reading of the Scriptures; and the children did not know what to believe, and either abandoned religion altogether, or constructed a sort of composite, each one for himself. The churches in Scotland certainly do not mean to allow their college principals, their professors, or their new-fledged ministers, to bring Scotland to this plight. And here I wish it to be understood that I do not propose to keep our young men from studying in Germany. I endeavour myself to keep up with the latest phases of German speculation, and we have commonly a dozen Princeton graduates studying—most of them under our superintendence—at Berlin, Leipsic, or some other German university. But I also labour not to allow German thought to come in among us till it has been subjected to a sifting process of common sense. If criticism is allowed to proceed, as it has done in Germany, it will not be in the power of our refined professors and preachers to prevent it from bringing about the same results as it has done in Germany, and is now doing in Holland.

It appears to me that now is the time to arrest the evil by allowing it a legitimate outlet, ere a large body of young men are sent forth to undermine the scriptural faith among the people. It was a happy day for Ulster, and the Irish Presbyterian Church began to live from the very day, when Dr Cooke and Dr Stewart took measures which led the Arians to retire. It was greatly for the benefit of the old faith in New England when Dr Channing was acknowledged as separated from the Congregational churches. Rationalism and infidelity have prevailed to such an extent in Germany because there was no power in the Erastian Churches to turn them out. Broad Churchism is so strong in Great Britain at the present time, that the process of cutting off branch after branch must be a tedious, a humiliating, and a painful one. I see no other means

of casting off the evil, than by the churches pronouncing such decisions and delivering such utterances, that all who do not hold by the old truths must in common honesty and consistency retire to an independent and honourable position.

Having been labouring of late years, in my own limited sphere, to promote union among the Presbyterian Churches, it is very painful to me to be obliged to contemplate a separation. But, if things go on as at present, a separation must come, if not of the adherents of the new faith, certainly of the adherents of the old, as they see the old truths undermined one by one. I observed that comparatively few of the New Light ministers attended the late Presbyterian Council, and Mr Gilfillan tells us that some of them went away disgusted with the proceedings. The cause of union will be best promoted all over the world by keeping the churches pure. How much better would it have been if the Church of Scotland, in the last century, had sent off such men as Home and Carlyle, instead of the Erskines, Moncrieff, and Gillespie. I cherish the hope that in an age—may it be in half an age from this date—and after “the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain,” there will be some union of the three large orthodox churches, in thorough consonance with the faith of Presbyterians all over the world.

I feel bound to add that, if the new movement had taken a different direction, so far from opposing it, I might have thrown myself into it with my whole heart. I do not wonder that there should be a reaction against the way in which Calvinism has sometimes been presented in Scotland, with a stern face, without love. In looking back upon my own ministry, I feel, and do now confess, that it was deficient in tenderness—in the tenderness which was one of the

characteristics of our Lord. If the leaders of the new movement had set themselves to impart a deeper tone of pity, and a higher tone of love, to the preaching of Scotland, I should have rejoiced in it. I have a very strong conviction that Scotland would be very greatly benefited if, along with the preaching after the model of Paul, we had also preaching after the model of him who leaned on our Lord's bosom and drank into His spirit. I am prepared to make a farther admission. Mr Moody has been welcomed in various countries, because he has been expounding so powerfully those simple elementary truths of Scripture with which a living religion must begin; and everywhere Sankey's hymns have been felt to be the expression of babes in Christ. But surely, among educated men, there may be a more expanded and elevated style of preaching, and the use of other hymns than these revival hymns, to express the full wants and aspirations of Christians. There is a boundless field here for the reformer, and for those ardent young spirits who wish to elevate the Scottish churches. In this work they would have a more profitable, and a vastly more comfortable work, than in denying or suppressing some of the old truths, clearly written in Scripture and upheld by universal consent.

I am prepared to admit farther that the time has come—not for a revision of the Confession of Faith, the expediency of which is very doubtful, but—for settling what should be the terms of subscription required. The American churches, which are at present remarkably orthodox, never required ministers to sign the Confession literally. It is simply absurd, not to say sinful, to require a student, educated at the present day at any of our universities, to declare his belief that God made the world in six days of twenty-four hours. I know, to use a comparison of Abraham Lincoln's, that it is not expedient to be swapping horses in the

midst of a running stream, but the step is a necessity—if we are to restrain our conscientious orthodox young men. I admit that the work is a very difficult and a very delicate one, but there are wise and good men in the churches able for the work. But, whatever modification may be made and relief secured, no one of the existing Scottish churches will dare so to lower the subscription that it will not include all and every one of the great truths which the Broad Church would set aside.

I have uttered but a very feeble voice, but it may be echoed from the everlasting hills of Scotland till the whole land hears it. How I did rejoice, in my late visit to my native country, to gaze on these old Grampian mountains, which the Romans never crossed, standing in their strength; and as I passed Bannockburn, to remember how she never submitted to England till England took a king from her; and, as I lived for days in the Covenanting region in which I was reared, to reflect how she repelled the Prelacy which foreigners sought to impose on her, and established for ever the rights of conscience and freedom of worship. But I was vastly more delighted to notice the unequivocal traces of the old spirit abiding among the people, who, under the leadership of Chalmers, crushed out the Moderatism of the last age, and will be able to blow away, like the chaff of the threshing floor, the lighter error which has appeared in this.

JAMES McCOSH.