

# DISRUPTION WORTHIES

*A Memorial of 1843.*

With an Historical Sketch of the Free Church of Scotland  
from 1843 down to the Present Time

BY THE REV. JAMES A. WYLIE, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF THE "HISTORY OF PROTESTANTISM"



LEAVING THE MANSE: A MEMORIAL OF THE DISRUPTION

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JAMES MCCOSH, D.D.

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### Rev. James M'Cosh, D.D., LL.D.

**J**AMES M'COSH was born on the banks of the Doon, Ayrshire, 1st April 1811, and received his early education at a parochial school. He studied five years at the University of Glasgow, and then went to Edinburgh, where he studied other five years under Dr Chalmers; while in the University of Edinburgh, he paid considerable attention to Natural Science, and received from the Senatus the Honorary Degree of A.M., for an essay on the "Stoic Philosophy," which showed his proclivities towards philosophic reading and investigation.

In 1835 he was called to the Abbey Church in Arbroath, and continued there for three years, visiting from house to house in the parish allotted to him. When in the Divinity Hall of Edinburgh, he had defended the cause of Non-Intrusion, or rather of Direct Election by the people, in the Theological Society; and now in the Presbytery of Arbroath, and all along the east coast of Forfarshire, he and several other young men lately settled there, joined the Rev. Thomas Guthrie, who was their leader, in resolutely maintaining and promulgating the grand principles of the rights of the members of the Church. In 1838 he was appointed by the Crown, on the recommendation of his former teacher, Dr Welsh, to the first charge of the church in Brechin, one of the most enviable livings of the Church of Scotland. There he worked

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laboriously in preaching not only in the large cathedral church, but in barns and kitchens, in visiting from house to house, and in teaching in a large class, often numbering 150, the young men and women of the parish. The Gospel had been preached in Brechin by a succession of faithful ministers from the days of Willison at the beginning of last century; there was a large amount of Bible knowledge among the people; with scarcely an exception, the whole population went to some place of worship. He and his colleague, the Rev. A. L. R. Foote, had a communion-roll of upwards of 1400.

During the four years of his ministry in the Established Church, he kept steadily before his people and throughout the district the great principles for which the Church was contending. In "Recollections of the Disruption in Brechin," printed for private circulation, we have extracts from addresses delivered in the years 1842 and 1843, which show how fully he perceived the character and measured the difficulties of the situation. He believed that by the decision of the House of Lords, spiritual jurisdiction was taken away from the Church. In an address, dated 13th November, 1842, he says:—"The principles which I have endeavoured to state have long been entertained by me; I had lately, when on a bed of distress, an opportunity of reviewing them. My regret, with eternity in view, was, not that I had done too much, but that I had done so little. Deliberation has only tended to show me that the principles I hold are connected with all that is noble in the Church of Christ, of which I am honoured to be a minister." This was his language to his people immediately before going up to the Convocation in Edinburgh. As the Disruption, now evidently coming, drew on, he was actively employed in helping to organise his own congregation and several other congregations in neighbouring parishes where the ministers adhered to the Established Church. At the Disruption, 825 of his congregation adhered to the Free Church.

On the first Sabbath after the Disruption he preached on Haggai ii. 9,

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"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former," and referred to the sorrow they felt in leaving the Established Church, and the confidence they felt that God would bless the Free Church. At the opening of their new church in November following, he gave his reflections on the crisis through which he and others had passed. He said that if they had given up their principles, the wicked would have triumphed on seeing the cause of God betrayed by the so-called Church of God. "In this contest," continued he, "we have lost much. Some of us have lost that means of support of which at one time we never expected to be deprived but by death; we have lost, it may be, some of our status in the society of this world; we have been exposed, as our Master was, to reproaches and scorn; we have all of us lost those churches in which we worshipped, and the very stones of which were dear unto us; some of you may have lost friends and favours." Yet he added that they had not been defeated, nor had they cause to be ashamed; they would bless God that they had been permitted and enabled to give a testimony for Christ's kingdom and crown.

The year following the Disruption was one of hard and trying work to Mr M'Cosh, in which he displayed the energy, tact, and courage which are characteristic of him. He was appointed by the General Assembly "Convener of Supply" for the district of the county of Mearns, and the North-East of Forfarshire; and he now set himself to organise congregations, to provide them with ordinances, to advise and aid in getting sites, in raising funds, and having churches erected. The ministers who remained in the Established Church did their utmost to obstruct the members of their churches who desired to join the Free Church. Lords, lairds, and their factors scowled on the movement, and threatened their tenants and dependants. Mr M'Cosh had many adventures in confronting their hostility and in gathering the people into churches. In a number of places no sites could be obtained for churches from the proprietors of the soil. In Fettercairn the people could get no place to worship in till

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a widow offered a field which she rented, and there on the green grass Mr M'Cosh dispensed the ordinance of the Lord's Supper a few Sabbaths after the Disruption, to 213 communicants, and this under the immediate view of Sir John Gladstone who in the first instance did all he could to crush the movement. In Menmuir Mr M'Cosh after officiating twice to his own congregation preached on the Sabbath evening on the roadside, and gathered a congregation who after keen persecution got a site for a church. In Lochlee the Free Church members met with determined opposition from a very powerful man, Lord Panmure, who possessed the whole district; and for a long time they had to worship in a shepherd's house provided for them by a courageous farmer, David Inglis. Mr M'Cosh also aided in forming congregations and building churches in Fordoun, Laurencekirk, Stonehaven, and Bervie. In carrying on this work he rode around the country on horse-back, preaching in barns and ballrooms, sometimes riding thirty miles, and preaching thrice on a Sabbath. It is believed that now for the first time was the Gospel of the grace of God preached in parishes from which it had in all previous ages been excluded by Moderatism and Prelacy.

In the winter of 1843-44 he went as a member of a deputation to the parts of England in and around the city of York, in Northamptonshire, and about Olney, addressing meetings on the cause of the Free Church, and soliciting the sympathy and help of the English Nonconformists. In the year 1844 he removed from the West to the East Free Church of Brechin, where he ministered until the end of 1851.

Disruption struggles began to subside in 1846, and Mr M'Cosh was thus able to apply himself to the preparation of his first great work, "The Method of the Divine Government." The appearance of this work in 1850 at once placed its author amongst the foremost thinkers and apologists of the age, and led soon afterwards to his being offered the Chair of Logic and Metaphysics in Queen's College, Belfast. He entered on the duties of this chair in 1852, where he soon proved himself as able a

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teacher as he had been a successful writer. During the sixteen years of his Belfast Professorship, he created a taste for the study of Philosophy in the North of Ireland, and sent out a number of students who have already made their mark in this department. At this time he was usually an Examiner in the Queen's University, he was one of the distinguished Board of Examiners who organised the first Competitive Examination for the Civil Service of India, and he was twice Examiner for the Ferguson Scholarships open to graduates of the Scottish Universities. He also published whilst in Belfast "An Examination of John Stuart Mill's Philosophy," and "The Intuitions of the Mind Inductively Investigated," and several other philosophical works. He advocated the cause of Intermediate Education in Ireland, and did much to promote the circulation of Sound Literature through the Bible and Colportage Society, of which he was one of the secretaries. He took a leading part in organising the Ministerial Support Fund of the Presbyterian Church, and was for some years Joint Convener of that scheme. His last publication before leaving Ireland was a vigorous protest against a project for endowing Popery, which was then seriously proposed by the leaders of both political parties.

In 1868 Dr M'Cosh was called to the Presidency of the College of New Jersey, at Princeton in the United States, a post formerly occupied by Aaron Burr, and Jonathan Edwards, and (another Scotchman) John Witherspoon. Under his supervision the College has had remarkable success, having doubled the numbers of its buildings, professors, and students, within the eleven years of his administration, and having been enriched by large benefactions, and having greatly improved its methods of teaching.

Notwithstanding the multifarious work incident to the office of President of a large American College, and the duties of the Chair of Psychology which he ably fills, Dr M'Cosh has found leisure for a good deal of outside work. He favoured from the first the Union of the Old

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and New School Branches of the American Presbyterians, and he is entitled to the credit of having planned and in some measure carried out the Catholic Alliance of all Presbyterian Churches in the Pan-Presbyterian Council. He has also issued in America, his books on "The Discursive Laws of Thought," on "Christianity and Positivism," and on "The Scottish Philosophy from Hutcheson to Hamilton ;" besides a large number of smaller works, public addresses, sermons, and contributions on Philosophical and Apologetic subjects to *The Princeton Review*, *The North American Review*, and other *Reviews*, and to *The Popular Science Monthly*.

All his writings are characterised by penetration and boldness of thought, by giving full force to every newly discovered truth, and by uniform allegiance to the supreme authority of the Word of God.

G. M.L.

