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# LETTER

TO

THOMAS CHALMERS, D.D., LL.D,

ON THE

PRESENT POSITION

*21.*

OF THE

FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

BY

A FREE CHURCH PRESBYTERIAN.



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## LETTER, &c.

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REVEREND SIR,

That our country is on the brink of a crisis—that we cannot move on at this rate much longer—and that something definite, decisive, and comprehensive, must speedily be done, is now most firmly believed and freely expressed by all parties in the political, and especially in the religious world. As the popular trumpet is giving a distinct sound in its loudly-expressed apprehensions, I am delivered from the painful task of enumerating the symptoms, and attempting to specify the causes, of our national organic disease. But it cannot have escaped your observation, that, at such critical junctures, Providence has directed the eye of society to some fit and influential instrument, in whom they may repose confidence. Far be it from me, Sir, in addressing you on such an occasion, and on so momentous a subject, to descend to the vice of flattery, by ascribing to mortal man, how highly gifted soever, that which belongs to God; yet your acknowledged talents and eloquence, your commanding influence and tried integrity of purpose, seem to point to you as the individual in whose hands, in a great measure, are laid the destinies of this great country. As much as this may be inferred from the prominent position you occupied while in the Established Church, prior to the late Disruption, which gave a shock to Christendom. That this pregnant event was mainly attributable to your character and influence, is what envy itself will not refuse to acknowledge. This admitted, it is a grave and solemn question, what, in consideration of your responsibility, is your present duty?

It is much to be regretted that, notwithstanding your exceedingly active and laborious efforts for the benefit of the literary world, the working classes, and especially the Church, you should, as yet, have left on record no well-weighed and intelligible measure of moral reform to meet our national emergency, and constitute a banner around which might rally the moral worth of our country. This is the great desideratum which we require and seek, and which Providence appears to call for at your hands. Former leaders, in similar times, so licked their great measures into shape, as to render it impossible to misunderstand them. Who that is slenderly acquainted with the history of Europe, can fail, on the mention of their names, to recognise the regnant policy of Pitt, Fox, and even O'Connell, in the political world; or of Luther, Calvin, and Knox, in the ecclesiastical? I say it not on purpose to abridge your well-

earned reputation in the commonwealth of letters, or to depreciate your late strenuous efforts and sacrifices in fighting the battle of Non-Erastianism, that it is no secret to your best friends and warmest admirers, that you have not, as yet, furnished us with such a clearly-defined and comprehensive measure as the present crisis demands, and which shall distinguish you, in after times, as a useful and practical Reformer. It is rather painful, in proof of this, to advert to your repeated, but abortive, attempts to render intelligible your opening speech at the first Assembly of the Free Church, or reconcile it with your speech delivered at the Bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly; and that, up to this hour, great dubiety hangs over the vague deliverances of the Free Church on that great question which materially affects the constitution of the Church of Christ. But the vagueness to which I allude, bears not only on one point, but upon the whole character and standing of the Free Church.

There are, however, some few considerations which, I would fondly hope, will induce you to apply your highly cultivated mind to this great national question; and bring before us, what is essential to our welfare,—a well-weighed and tangible deliverance.

The dust raised by the late controversy has greatly settled, and the combatants can more clearly discern each other,—the confusion, as the more immediate consequence of the Disruption, is giving way, thereby furnishing a fit opportunity for calmly measuring, and definitively staking off, the ground which the friends of Christ and their country should now occupy. It is not insinuated that your late ecclesiastical antagonists are yet reconciled; but it is meant, that in this half-hour's silence in heaven—this comparative calm—a most favourable opportunity is granted for maturing and recommending to the judicial adoption of the Free Church, such a standard as will define her exact position, and exhibit her precise and comprehensive object. This would form a rallying and confirming banner to Christ's scattered friends, who, because of rending diversities, hear no distinct sound of a trumpet, and cannot advance "to the help of the Lord against the mighty." This, Sir, the country needs; this the religious world needs; but this they have not. And although it might be profitable, yet it is not agreeable to contemplate the inevitably serious consequences that must result to our common Christianity, when the confederated adversaries shall advance upon the divided and ill-trained troops of Christ. *Verbum est sat sapienti.* Another consideration—solemn and impressive—is your advanced stage of life. For, Sir, you do not, I am sure, conceal from yourself what is obvious to your friends,—that "the shadows of the evening are stretching out" upon you,—that your period of public service in the Church below

cannot be much longer protracted,—and that, when in Providence removed, your friends and the country will have no easy task in giving you an intelligible niche in the temple of public and practical reformers. If, Sir, even now different and conflicting views are entertained regarding the exact character of your policy, how difficult, if indeed possible, to extract it from your varied writings, when the event alluded to shall have arrived? The nature of the measure which I recommend in the following pages would deliver your character from this unenviable stain; and although rejected by the country and the Church, would leave you a large cup of consolation, and ensure an honourable award to your memory;—that Dr. Chalmers rendered his patriotism undoubted in his distinctive and intelligible measure of Reform for the salvation of his divided and distracted country. Allow me, Sir, to address you in the pointed and emphatic language of Mordecai to Esther,—“Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” The acknowledged difficulty, in such a case, is the nature and character of the measure designed and fitted to reach the object,—a difficulty which only a few master spirits in our world have hitherto fairly met; but it is a difficulty which must now be attempted to be met, not upon the vague ground of forming a heterogeneous coalition, such as frost effects when it arrests the rapid current, and firmly holds together stones and straws and sticks, *et hoc genus omne*, and which must yield to the strength of the solar rays, but upon Scriptural principle, which is never at variance with the soundest policy, and secures, by a true union, permanency, and comfort, and utility. The construction of such a platform, especially at the present time, is worthy the genius and character of Dr. Chalmers; and, by it, as a mean warranting us to expect the divine blessing, the achievement of our political and ecclesiastical salvation would reflect light and worth upon your other multifarious and elaborate, but less important efforts. This were a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Without dogmatising on the leading and essential features of such a measure as I have now adverted to, allow me, with all due deference, to suggest, in the following remarks, what I humbly conceive is specially incumbent on you, as the confessedly able and distinguished leader of the Free Church, and what is specially requisite for us, in prospect of a heavier sea and a more serious storm than has yet assailed us.

There are only two points which the Free Church has given out, as professedly exhibitivè of her exact and distinctive position, and which her adherents conclude, are sufficiently definite and intelligible. I allude to the ostensible cause, in defence of which the Non-Intrusion banner was unfurled,—the Headship

of Christ over his spiritual kingdom, the Church ; and, the identification of the Free Church with the Reformed Church of Scotland. That the breath of the Reformed Church was invariably in favour of Non-Erastianism, in the common acceptation of that term, as a trenching upon the Church's inherent and independent jurisdiction by the civil power, is obvious beyond dispute ; and it is freely admitted, that he who questions this regnant element of her constitution, is not to be reasoned with. Neither is it denied, that the late interference of the Court of Session, affirmed by the House of Lords, and practically homologated by Her Majesty's Government, which issued in the Disruption, was Erastianism ; but, Sir, this is not sufficient to shew the exact and distinctive position of the Free Church, or to substantiate her claim of identification with the Reformed Church,—the Church of our fathers. It cannot be denied, that with regard to the Headship of Christ, as diametrically opposed to Erastianism, the independents of every kind, Baptists, Reliefs, Seceders of every grade, and Cameronians, occupy the same ground, and have an equally valid claim to be designated the Church of our Fathers, and the Free Church of Scotland, as that association of which you are the acknowledged leader. This not-to-be-disputed fact I mention, not in the way of ridicule or under the influence of a captious spirit, but simply to show, what you will admit, that in point of Erastianism, their claim to your ostensibly specific designation, is equally valid with your own. If, on the other hand, you object to the claim of those associations, because, although agreeing with the Free Church in testifying against Erastianism, yet they, from their respective peculiarities, cannot be held as identified with the Reformed Church of Scotland, then opportunity is given for attempting to ascertain your specific position, and the nature of your claim to be reputed the representatives and successors of the "Scots Worthies." Before entering upon a calm and candid consideration of this paramount question, it must be granted, that stirring appeals to the protracted and well-sustained struggles of our murdered fathers, constituted the charm that won over the great body of the people to declare adherence to the Free Church. It is not necessary to cite, in proof of this, the General Assembly and platform speeches of the leading Non-Intrusionists ; but it is clear, that these appeals, especially those addressed from the platform, were adroitly reserved for a high finished and impressive peroration, which never failed to elicit an enthusiastic response. To this policy, in the main, I do not object ; and from its very successful application, one cheering and practical lesson may be learned,—that Scotland's heart was feelingly alive to the general cause and names of her martyrs. But, Sir, it is due to Scotland that the Free

Church explicitly and formally declare what is her specific and distinguishing position, so as to put beyond all doubt the validity of her claim to be identified with the Martyr-Church. Unless, upon this subject, vague and ambiguous generalities be speedily dropped, to speak in mild and measured terms, your claim will be suspicious and hazardous in the extreme; while Scotland will be still deprived of her rallying standard, in as far as the Free Church is concerned. That the charm alluded to—identification with the Reformed Church—is still felt to be necessary, is obvious from its constant use among the distinguished members of the Free Assembly. To this effect we had the “Bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly of Divines,” held at Edinburgh, July 1843; the “Wodrow Society;” and the resolution to reprint the standard works of the English Puritans and Scottish Reformers; and in particular, not to mention “Dr. Hetherington’s History of the Church of Scotland,” we have a formal and most elaborate effort of Dr. Buchanan, Glasgow, in his “Historical Introduction” to a new edition of the “Scots Worthies.” It is worthy of remark, that Dr. Buchanan, in the introduction alluded to, is extremely shy of coming to close quarters upon the main question, as appears from his designedly employing the term *substantial*, instead of *formal*, and thus dexterously availing himself of indefinite latitude in not discussing, but blinking the point at issue.\* These facts, and many others of a similar kind which might be adduced, clearly show the fond, and I would be glad to believe, the honest wish of the Free Church to be the representatives and successors of the martyrs; but surely she cannot conceal from herself that hitherto she has not exhibited any judicial measure, in regard to this claim of identification, which specificates her from almost all the other religious associations of this country?

It cannot surely be safely argued, that a professed adherence to the Confession of Faith, and other Westminster Standards, specificates her claim to this designation, The Church of our Fathers; seeing these Standards are also subscribed by many other associations, besides the Free Church, and on that account, have an equally valid claim with herself. There is, we admit, a marked difference, on this head, betwixt these associations—the Synods of the Relief, United Secession, United Original Seceders, Cameronians, &c.—but assuredly that difference is not in favour of the Free Church. These Synods judicially declare their respective views of these subordinate

\* The last edition of the Scots Worthies is recommended by “An Historical Introduction, explanatory of the great principles for which the Worthies suffered, and showing their *substantial identity* with those at present contended for by the Church of Scotland.”



Standards, — the sense in which they receive them; whereas the Free Church has no such clear-toned and authoritative document. And, Sir, there must be some special reason inducing the Free Church to decline this essential duty to other associations, to the country, and to herself. Undoubted it is, that this ill-judged policy places her in a position not in accordance with that of the Reformed Church, has a tendency to create and foster suspicions, which a straightforward and judicial explanation might show were unfounded, and leaves the bulk, and best, although illiterate, of her people, exposed to constant annoyance which exhausts patience, and to serious objections which they are ill able to meet and to obviate.

It was expected, Sir, that, in consequence of the Disruption, — certainly an imposing sight and pregnant event — the Non-Intrusionists, having made an escapement from a position of much temptation, and having emancipated themselves from the fetters of Erastianism, would now at least unfurl a sufficiently intelligible and concentrating standard. Under the influence of this expectation, not a few of the Dissenting bodies sent deputations to the first Free Assembly, warmly congratulating them on the stand made against, and the signal victory achieved over, the encroachments of Erastianism, and in defence of religious liberty. That these deputations were most sincere, as well as ardent, is obvious from their reported representations; and that the Free Assembly were equally sincere, is obvious from her reported responses. In order to attract and concentrate, by ecclesiastical incorporation, these various Dissenting bodies, the Assembly, it would appear, showed much wisdom in appointing a very able committee to produce a draught of a measure of a definite and specific character, — a Testimony, specifying their position, and delineating their constitution, in accordance with their designation, Free Church, and its identification with the Church of our fathers. This was a piece of sound legislation, of wise tactics, and promised to be the salient and luminous point of the Free Church. The result of the labour of this Committee was looked for with feverish anxiety; and, notwithstanding the liberal allowance made, in consideration of the numerous, but, in point of magnitude, vastly inferior matters that pressed themselves on the attention of the Assembly, the deliverance when announced fell like a thunder-clap on the astonished ears of not a few of Scotland's best friends. The deliverance, as reported in the newspapers, was the following: — “Dr. Candlish, in the absence of Dr. James Buchanan, Convener, gave the report of the Committee, to the effect, that after several meetings, they had come to the conclusion that it was not expedient for the Church to issue a

Testimony at all,—especially as the Protest, and Deed of Demission, sufficiently shew her distinctive principles. Approved of".—This deliverance being approved of by the Assembly, became its judicial deed; and here, without reappointing the Committee, the matter rests. Without severely animadverting upon this rather strange deliverance, or attempting to make the most of small matters, the following remarks suggest themselves:—*1st*, The Assembly on appointing this Committee, of course judged that it was both expedient and necessary for the Free Church to have some such specific and judicial measure as a Testimony is supposed to be. *2d*, The appointment of this Committee as obviously shows, that the Assembly had judged the Protest and Deed of Demission, which every member must in charity be supposed to have deliberately considered and distinctly understood, was not equivalent to, and could not serve the purpose of, a Testimony. And, *3d*, After several meetings of this able Committee, it is now declared and approved of, that it is not expedient for the Church to issue a Testimony at all. Why? Because the Protest and Deed of Demission sufficiently show her distinctive principles. Now, Sir, there must be some reason of no ordinary influence over the Assembly, not yet declared, for this abrupt termination, and abortive effort, of its Committee—for this extinguisher upon the fondest wishes and warmest hopes of a very respectable number within, and of thousands without, the pale of the Free Church.

That reason, whatever it be, is not one of principle, but, as the deliverance declares, of expediency,—the same in kind with that which characterized your most fruitless negotiations within the Establishment. It is not consistent with my design in addressing you, to hazard a conjecture on the true reason which dictated this perilous policy; but I attach no culpability to any individual when I say, that the deliverance must be accounted for on one or other, or both, of the two following suppositions:—*1st*, Either that all the members of that Committee were not at one as to what was essential to the testimony of the Free Church,—that they could not frame a testimony to meet their views of their own exact position; or, *2d*, The Committee had discovered that a testimony could not be so framed as to accord with the views of the different religious bodies, whose sympathy and aid had been felt to be both gratifying and substantial, and with some of whom they had ulterior views of incorporating. Whichever of these two suppositions is the correct one, or whether the truth is to be found in both conjoined, clear it is, that the step taken is indefensible on the high ground of principle, abridges the claim of the Assembly to her designation

“Free,” and is repudiated by the straightforward and undisguised conduct of the Reformed Church of Scotland. Surely, Sir, this is not to make the trumpet give a distinct sound,—is not a game that has conferred honour or profit on those who have played at it,—and the baneful effects of which might, ere now, have read a serious and very intelligible lesson to the members of the Free Assembly?

But, Sir, after all, what is the amount, — what is the real worth of this deliverance of the Committee? By it we are referred to the Protest and Deed of Demission, two documents which, in point of principle, are but one. Now, not to insist upon the fact that these documents, together with the Claim of Rights, upon which they reduplicate, were once judged by the Assembly as not a sufficient explanation of the distinctive principles of the Church, it must be acknowledged by every man who has carefully read and considered these papers, that they contain only one principle — a noble and comprehensive principle it is admitted — the Headship of Christ, as opposed to Erastianism. But I have already shown that this principle does not distinguish the Free Church from other religious bodies in this country, unless we except the Established Churches. How then, I would calmly ask, can the Protest and Deed of Demission sufficiently explain the distinctive principles of the Free Church? Are there no religious bodies in the land free of Erastianism, except the Free Church?

Trusting that the above remarks, which are in strict accordance with palpable facts, and which are not thrown out in a captious or factious spirit, will be received in good part—in the spirit in which they are made,—I cannot, Sir, bring myself to believe, that you will feel inclined to deny the painful conclusion to which they lead, that the country is without anything like a well-defined Constitution of the Free Church,—any explicit, authoritative statement of her exact and distinctive position. Now, Sir, this is what the Church at large, and the country, desiderate, what is a plain scriptural duty to attempt to provide, and what, if scripturally executed, we are warranted to believe, would go far to sweeten the breath of society, to avert merited and threatened judgments, and give security for a successful and triumphant struggle with the confederated political and ecclesiastical infidelity of the age.

Having found that Non-Erastianism—that professed, but indefinite adherence to the Westminster Standards—that the Claim of Rights, and Protest, and Deed of Demission, are extremely defective for clearly defining and satisfactorily explaining your exact position and distinctive principles, I shall now, as briefly and as candidly as I can, examine your claim to be held as the

representatives and successors of the "Scots Worthies,"—your claim of identification with the Reformed Church. The character of the Reformed Church is, at any time, but especially at the present, a subject of deep interest and national importance; and, persuaded that your fondest wish, and most earnest prayer, is for the prosperity of the Church and of your country, I shall studiously avoid dropping a single expression, which, when charitably construed, will bear upon any questionable step of policy the Non-Intrusionists may have taken, prior to the late secession.

That the Reformed Church of Scotland was decidedly Non-Erastian, appears not only from her general history and well-sustained struggles with the Civil Courts, but also from her ecclesiastical constitution, as delineated in her judicially sanctioned standards; but, on the other hand, it must be candidly admitted, that she never, as an Established Church, except on one memorable and short-lived occasion, was completely delivered from that grinding and blasting element. This arose from her fruitless, although patriotic, struggles to obtain a full and uncrippled civil ratification of her ecclesiastical creed; and hence the painful and continued confounding of respective rights, and confusing of respective jurisdictions. The plain matter of fact is, that the Reformed Church was, with the exception of the brief period alluded to above, Non-Erastian in her *ecclesiastical creed*, but was liable to a measure of Erastian interference, in consequence of the Civil Acts never fully recognising that creed. It is foreign to my present design to discuss this as a matter of speculation, or to attempt a consideration of the conflicting opinions of eminent lawyers, or decisions of the Civil Courts,—opinions and decisions of a painful character, and which, I am confident, have not been of any practical value to the great body of the country, or the majority of the members of the Free Church; but it may be necessary briefly to state the ground of the above distinction betwixt the ecclesiastical creed of the Reformed Church, and the Civil Acts partially ratifying it, so as to ascertain the true character of the Protest of the Free Church, and the measure of reform I would humbly, but most earnestly, recommend for your consideration and adoption.

The above distinction and fact appears from what is called the "Church's Great Charter"—the Act of 1592, upon which the present National Church is based, by an act of the Revolution Parliament of 1690. From this indisputable and freely admitted fact it follows, that the Revolution or present National Church is, in regard to Christ's Headship, and her consequent independent jurisdiction, substantially and formally one with that of 1592. This brings me to consider the constitution of the Reformed

Church, according to her charter of 1592, on the subject of Christ's Headship and her jurisdiction; and, although it may appear a bold and startling statement before the proof is adduced, yet it is nevertheless true, that her charter cut away Christ's Headship, and deprived her, in express terms, of her inherent right. This has been the deep and solemnly expressed convictions of the warmest and most enlightened defenders of the Reformed Church. No less an authority than the late Dr. M'Crie—an authority claimed by the Free Church—says, "This settlement was not without its defects. Not to mention some important pieces of reformation, craved in the Second Book of Discipline, which were entirely left out, the Supreme Court was deprived of the right which it had hitherto possessed of appointing its own meetings. At a posterior period, when the Reformation of the Church was carried to a higher degree of perfection, and a settlement made upon more liberal principles, these restrictions were abolished. But, at present, this could not be obtained; and the Church waived her demand in consideration of the advantages which the act conferred on her."\* That this act of deprivation of an acknowledged and hitherto possessed right of the Supreme Court of the Church was unmasked Erastianism, no man, we presume, will attempt to deny. The Reformed Church then, by waiving her demand, and thus conceding her hitherto possessed right, felt, and felt severely, that the measures to which the Court resorted for imposing Episcopacy upon Scotland, by calling and dissolving General Assemblies at pleasure, were not at variance with statutory law—the very act which the Church pled as her charter. But this was the view of the Reformed Church herself, which proves the accuracy of Dr. M'Crie's remarks, and explains the serious and protracted collision between the Church and State, during the eventful period from 1610 to 1638. Hence, in all her dealings with the Court against the exercise of Erastianism, during that time, her voice was one, and it was unfaltering—"Give us a Free General Assembly." And unless the Church had been convinced that she had conceded this her inherent right to call her own Assemblies, it is not easy to interpret this her uniform petition. When, at last, the prayer of this petition was granted by his Majesty, calling an Assembly to be held at Glasgow, 1638, this comprehensive Erastian "restriction," as Dr. M'Crie calls it, "was abolished" by the Assembly's own authority. The constitution of the Re-

\* Mel. vol. I., p. 320. It is painful to observe the special pleading of Dr. Buchanan in his "Historical Introduction to the Scots Worthies." He frequently quotes Dr. M'Crie's remarks on the benefits of the act 1592, about which there never was a dispute, and slips an extinguisher on the plainly and pointedly declared Erastianism of that settlement. Such a mode of proceeding eventually defeats the object it was designed to serve.

formed Church, sketched in that "Famous Assembly," more fully developed in the Westminster Standards, and ratified by the highest civil authority of this country, raised her upon a broad and intelligible Non-Erastian platform, upon which the three nations of England, Scotland, and Ireland, took their stand. Then it was, that "a settlement was made upon more liberal principles," and, that "the restrictions of the Church's great charter were abolished;" then it was, that Erastianism, Episcopacy, and Despotism, generally found in company, were overthrown; and, without advertent to isolated measures and modes of procedure that were adopted by the Reformed Non-Erastian Church of Scotland, from 1638 to 1650, this, it must be held, was her constitution in point both of civil and ecclesiastical law. Upon the restoration of Charles II., this platform was demolished; and, during his reign, and that of his infatuated brother, James II., the adherents of this Reformed settlement were proscribed, hunted down, and not a few of them compelled to embrace a blazing stake in the metropolis and chief cities of the kingdom. When the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 was effected, the Scottish Parliament of 1690 settled religion in this country, not upon the Non-Erastian constitution of 1638-1650, but upon that of 1592, thereby leaving the former under the recessory laws of Charles I. Now, Sir, it is beyond all dispute, that there must have been a reason,—and a reason not favourable to the independent jurisdiction of the Church of Scotland—for the Revolution Parliament overlooking, and setting adrift the Non-Erastianism of the Second Reformation, and fixing her down upon the maimed and Erastian Church of 1592. And it is no less clear and undoubted, that this special element and prominent fact in the constitution of the present National Church, was seen, and lamented, and remonstrated against by the flower of her clergy. This capital flaw in her constitution was the *origo mali*—the original cause of all the ecclesiastical feuds and dissensions that raged within her Courts,—of all the secessions from 1732, down to 1843. These were the views of her Dicksons, her Hepburns, her Hogs, her Bostons, and many of a similar calibre, who still adhered to her in the fond but vain hope, that a firm, well disciplined band might, by their prayers and concentrated energies, scotch this serpent of constitutional Erastianism. Without holding Dr. M'Crie as oracular authority, yet as the highest of an ecclesiastical kind claimed by the Free Church, we shall here quote his views upon this subject, which he has expressed in pointed terms and exact accordance with the above brief sketch. "They (the Scottish Parliament of 1690) ratified the Presbyterian Government according to its establishment in 1592, in the way of

*sinfully overlooking and passing by all the legal securities* given to it between 1638 and 1650, which together with the reformation attained to in that period, was left buried under the infamous Rescissory Act, which stands in the body of *our Scotch law* to this day. In like manner, they ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith, as the public and avowed Confession of this Church, without any reference to the Act of the General Assembly 1647, by which it was received as a part of the uniformity in the Churches of the three kingdoms, and with an explicit assertion of the inherent right of the Church to call her own Assemblies,—*an omission which paved the way for dangerous encroachments by the state.*”\* This is plain speaking; and, if correct, shows that Erastianism belongs essentially to the constitution of the National Church. The quantum of Erastianism, or the latitude allowed for its efficient application, is quite immaterial and foreign to the point at issue; yet clear it is, that the settlement of religion made at the Revolution struck a decisive blow at the heart of the second Reformation, and displaced the doctrine of Christ’s Headship and the spiritual independence of the Church. In proof of this formal, and to some it may be, startling statement, I shall again cite the matured remarks of the same author, who devoted a long life to the consideration of this subject. “The judicial testimony (the Doctor’s own) finds fault with the *national profession and settlement of religion* made at the Revolution, both materially and formally considered, and condemns the State for excluding, *in its laws authorizing religion*, the divine right of Presbytery, and the *intrinsic power of the Church*,—*two special branches of the glorious Headship of the Redeemer over his spiritual kingdom.*”†

These are the views of not only Dr. M’Crie, but of almost all, if not all, the Dissenting bodies in this country; and they are views not hastily adopted, or stated in a cursory, transient, or speculative manner, by individual authors, but explicitly and solemnly declared as articles of testimony-bearing in their judicial standards. Taking this view to be at least more likely the correct one, than that which the recent legal discussion has thrown up, we are led to the conclusion, that Erastianism, as directly affecting the Headship of Christ and the inherent right of the Church, is essential to the national profession of religion, is at variance with the Non-Erastian Reformed Church; and, that the Protest and Claim of Rights of the present Free Church rest upon not only equivocal, but unconstitutional ground; consequently her claim to identification with the Reformed Church fails.

But, Sir, should the Free Church still insist that her claim

\* Test Orig. Seced. p. 42; the italics are not the Doctor’s. † Ditto, p. 67.

to be the continuation of the Reformed Church between 1638 and 1650 is valid, notwithstanding the above remarks, as of a debateable character, then I am laid under the necessity of specifying a few of the integral parts and luminous prominencies of her constitution, which, if not formally disclaimed, are certainly refused a judicial acknowledgment by the Free Church.

1. All admit that the Reformed Church was eminently a covenanting and covenanted Church. For nothing was she distinguished more than this; and it is equally obvious, as readily granted by Dr. Hetherington and Dr. Buchanan, that her patriarchal leaders attributed her most signal victories over confederated opposition to this exercise, as embodied in her National Covenant, and especially the Solemn League and Covenant. Under this distinctive and intelligible banner were all her victories gained—under it were her sons cherished and rallied—and under it her martyrs of the second Reformation bled and died. This it was that nerved them to express and predict Scotland's future glory, before kings, on the scaffold, and at the stake. Whether this exercise, and the embodiment of it in the national documents to which I have referred, be right or wrong—whether these solemn vows of confederation were scriptural or unscriptural—whether they merit the warm commendations of Hetherington, Buchanan, and some others, or are liable to the aspersions of sciolists, and witlings, and some grave divines, is not at present the question. All I ask is a candid and unfaltering admission of the notorious fact, that the Reformed Church was a covenanted Church—that all her adherents were, without a single exception, Covenanters—and that these public and solemn documents formed an integral and eminent part of her profession. This, Sir, the country expects, and this the country has a right to demand, from the Free Assembly. Although some of her far-seeing and deep-calculating members see the risk that has been run by assuming and giving forth this claim of identification—and speak with much respect of these public oaths—cautiously, however, guarding themselves against dropping a single phrase or term that might appear to implicate them as to their adoption, either materially or formally—yet the Free Church has not yet given forth any distinct sound on this vital question; and while it requires not great insight into the mysteries of ecclesiastical tactics, to account for this equivocal and tremulous policy, yet undoubted it is, that from her refusal to acknowledge and judicially adopt this integral part of her constitution, all semblance of a claim vanishes to be held as the veritable continuation of the Martyr-Church of our covenanted fathers.

2. It is equally obvious that the Reformed Church was Anti-Voluntary, as that term is commonly received. The much-agi-



tated question—emphatically called the question of the day—which had no small influence in issuing the Disruption, elicited this fact. This was specially true of the pleadings of some who now hold chief seats in the Free Assembly. Unwilling, however, to bring up the strong and mutually crinating epithets that passed as stamped and current coin among the belligerents, as not suiting my present object, it will not, and cannot be denied, that Anti-Voluntaryism was an integral and conspicuous part of the constitution of the Reformed Church, both when established and disestablished. Now, where is the clear and intelligible declaration of the Free Church on this head, which materially and essentially affects the doctrine of Christ's Headship? You have confessed, Sir, your sorrow that, notwithstanding your repeated attempts to explain away an untoward impression, occasioned by your first speech in the first Free Assembly, it is somehow or other, yet embraced, and your speech at the Bicentenary Meeting has not been viewed or felt as a corrective. The last, and perhaps *dernier resort* of the Free Church is, that this is not a practical question, and may therefore be conveniently enough shelved and boxed up, till the light of the millennial sun dawn upon our world. Admitting for a moment this highly paradoxical and more than questionable mode of dispensing with eminently scriptural truths and principles—principles, too, that must of necessity be practical while the Established Churches exist—that must be practical until the Rider on the white horse shall lend his disorganising blow to the compact systems of the beast and false prophet, which are introductory to the millennial glory—principles, because of the practicability of which, as occupying a place in the testimony of the two witnesses, subject them to a persecution of 1260 years,—still, Sir, it is an unquestionable fact, that this principle was an integral part of the constitution of the Reformed Church of Scotland, was embodied in her authorized standards, got a prominent place in her covenants, and was rendered transparent by her fiery struggles. I am not called upon to argue the reasonableness or unreasonableness, the scriptural or unscriptural character, of this principle. I am not called upon to show that this last, but unhappy, thought of the Free Church is at cross purposes with, and overthrows, her Protest and Claim of Rights. But I am entitled to ask, how in common honesty and fair dealing, the Free Church can claim to be identified with the Martyr-Church, when positively refusing judicially to acknowledge and testify to her most prominent and leading features?

3. The Reformed Church was eminently distinguished for inserting in her constitution, not only scriptural principles, but her laudable attainments in their defence, and pointed condemna-

tion of defection therefrom. This was absolutely necessary to furnish material for writing her history, securing her advances, and showing her continued identity. This principle is known by the designation, Historic truth, which she considered herself bound to maintain as part of her testimony, and exhibitivè of her victories over the multifarious forms and appearances of heresy, defection, and persecution, as also constituting an arsenal, from which her sons, in after conflicts, might take a tried and successful weapon. This appears in all her judicial documents,—her first Confession of Faith, her Books of Discipline, her Westminster Standards, and her various Testimonies, to which marked allusion is made in the preamble to the Solemn League and Covenant. This she conceived to be essential to her constitution, a plain duty to God for the deliverances wrought, and a great practical benefit to society, “that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children.” To these archives of the Reformed Church, the defenders of Establishments were lately much indebted, and more lately the advocates of Christ’s Headship. This, Sir, is without all controversy a scriptural principle, on which the Word of God itself is constructed; for what were the Scriptures, if stript of their historic truth, but a mere skeletonised system of doctrine, that might be comprised within a few leaves? Now, the Free Church has not given, or attempted to give, such a judicial history, or narrative, as to define her exact position, and prove her identity with this Reformed Church. The policy that leads to decline this duty and service, is of a vague and equivocal character, and compels me to hazard the conjecture, that, identification with the Reformers, in this respect, would force the Free Church to speak too plainly of the Revolution Settlement, of the Incorporating Union, of the Claim of Rights and her Protest; and would thus impose a clear necessity of condemning many, if not all, of those bodies of Dissenters, with which she is in terms of negociation, with a view to Union. On this subject all parties, as parties, could not agree, which would speedily explode the contemplated incorporation. Be this as it may, it is obvious that the Free Church, by the deliverance of the Committee appointed to draw up a Testimony, and which was approved of by the Assembly, invalidates her claim of identification with the “Scots Worthies.”

4. The Reformed Church was no less characterised for her adherence to a part, than to the whole of her Subordinate Standards. It is true that some of these parts had a superior relative importance, as lying nearer the main pillars of her constitution; it is also true, that she was oft found, while waging war with the State, bringing all her strength to the support of one dis-

puted principle or attainment ; but, Sir, it is no less true, that she never consented, while thus engaged, to disrespect, or express an unwillingness to contend earnestly for other relatively minor parts of her profession. It is not my present object to discuss the question of " essentials and non-essentials ;"—to specify the *capita fidei*—the weightier matters of the law ; these have been already discussed and settled by the Reformed Church, are inserted in her standards, and are not now to be questioned by those who claim identification with her. All inserted in these standards she held to be essential,—not to salvation,—for she never descended to so low, and narrow, and unscriptural ground, but essential to the glory of God, the stamp of whose authority on the *least* of which she received and acknowledged, as constituting the rule and reason of her duty. This, Sir, was her high scriptural ground, from which she has not yet been displaced ;—a position which, we are confident, is impregnable. That the Reformed Church was characterised for defending at every hazard, not a part, but the whole of the Reformation cause, formally considered, is placed beyond the reach of doubt, by her standards, the history of her varied struggles, the administration of discipline upon her refractory sons, although the highest in the land, and by her conduct in the Glasgow Assembly of 1638 ; by her debates in the Westminster Assembly, and by the uniform declarations of her martyrs on the scaffold and at the stake, from Patrick Hamilton down to James Renwick. It would not be easy, Sir, if indeed possible, to mention a single martyr who did not bear witness—not only to the Headship of Christ and the independent jurisdiction of the Church, but—to the whole of the covenanted Reformation. This, I assume, no man, who has even cursorily read these precious and patriotic *memorabilia* of our murdered fathers, can deny, or refuse to acknowledge.

Assuming then, that the Reformed Church exercised a laudable jealousy over the Reformation cause, I and thousands with me desiderate, on the part of the Free Church, any distinct resemblance to her, in this regnant feature of her honourable face. As already remarked, the avowed, but far from distinctive ground of the Free Church, is simply Non-Erastianism ; and without specifying the numerous other doctrines included in his Headship besides Non-Erastianism, I am heartily sorry that there are so many and so painful evidences of a refrigeratory influence at work, against other parts of the Reformed profession. This is discovering itself more and more, by such cant phrases and terms as, essentials, vitals, non-essentials, circumstantial, speculative and not practical questions, together with the negotiating attitude assumed towards religious bodies, characterised in the laxest sense as Evangelical, but whose prin-

ciples rest upon ill and vaguely defined constitutions, directly in the teeth of the Reformed Church. Again, I say, whether or not the Reformed Church was scriptural in occupying the position of regarding all in her standards as essential to be received, I am not now called upon to discuss; but I am safe and not uncharitable in affirming, that while the Free Church repudiates this position, she cannot, in candour and honesty, claim to be the representatives and successors of the Scottish Martyrs.

Other and regnant elements of the Reformed Church, not regarded, at least not judicially declared for by the Free Church, might have been condescended upon; but unwilling to draw what some might interpret a strong representation, and as making the most of minor parts, I forbear; convinced, however, that were the Free Church to exhibit a profession, embracing the above elements, which, according to her claim of identification, she is bound to do, then the claim might be reputed valid, and would, as the old and venerable Standard of the Reformed Church, that has "borne the battle and the breeze," form a rallying point for the *stamen* of this country, and augur well for its salvation, notwithstanding the present revolutionary currents and bewildering mists.

Judging that the above remarks, which I conceive to be borne out by well-authenticated facts, will be acceded to by you, permit me to express my unfeigned sorrow because of the many objections stated by distinguished members of the Free Church, to their cordial adoption. While some readily admit that the above elements were essential to the constitution of the Reformed Church, and harmonize with scripture, yet the public documents in which they are exhibited, and the manner in which they were worked, have been objected to, as now highly impolitic, and especially impracticable. To argue this question, is not so much my object, as to show that if this objection be good, then it is fatal to the claim of identification urged by the Free Church. But it may be affirmed, without much fear of contradiction, that should the Free Church refuse to take up and judicially adopt the Reformation cause, not only materially or substantially, but formally, she will expose herself to great suspicion of having used such phrases as the Martyrs, and Martyr-Church, Christ's Crown and Covenant, as a pious fraud, a hollow and dishonest imposition on the credulity of the Christian people of Scotland. What I here then humbly but earnestly and solemnly recommend and plead for, in the name of the Reformed Church of Scotland, is, the judicial adoption of the Covenanted Reformation—a cause that needs not my recommendations, and which, as signally honoured by God in a former period of our country's history, will

honour those that befriend it. That there are difficulties in the way, which can be met and obviated only by men of great moral courage, and liberally endowed with the martyr's spirit, is not denied; but, Sir, there are counterbalancing encouragements, which guarantee a successful issue to those who, trusting in the martyr's God, make the honest attempt. As to the difficulties—the obstacles to be met and overcome, which to many will doubtless bulk in their eye, the most prominent, and indeed what comprehends all the others, are the two following:—Many otherwise excellent and influential adherents of the Free Church will scruple to put their hands to the work, and may retire;—Many of the influential Dissenting bodies, now making advances to incorporation, will pause, and may issue hostile manifestoes.—Your ranks thus thinned, might leave you, according to human calculation, in too feeble and uninfluential a condition to make efficient head against advancing infidelity, and expose you to hard names. This, I honestly think, is the strongest and darkest view that can be taken of what is, after all, a mere problem; it is a view, however, I confess, that has few attractions for mere ecclesiastical politicians and speculators. But, Sir, these, and more serious obstacles than these, encompassed the path of our reforming fathers; and not only were these met and obviated, but improved as calls in Providence to assert and vindicate the whole Reformation cause, and that too by solemn vows, which bound man to his fellow, nation to nation, and all the people as one man to God. How great soever, then, the perils that threaten the disorganization of our country, politically and ecclesiastically, yet they are not greater than those which our fathers encountered before, and during, the eventful period of the Second Reformation; which, instead of deterring from adopting bold and well-defined measures, led to the renewal of the National Covenant, and “shut up to the faith of reposing implicit and unreserved confidence in Him who has the hearts of all men in his hand,” who signally countenanced their efforts, and secured them friends and aid from “many a quarter not expected.” But, Sir, what, after all, is the character of these two specified difficulties? Is it not all human—all of man? Is it not the same as that with which all Reformers and Patriots must lay their account? Are not these the difficulties which the receding tide of public apostacy leaves on the sand, and must of necessity be encountered by the in-coming tide of public Reformation? The Reformer that scruples to face them, exposes himself to the heavy charge of yielding to “the fear of man which bringeth a snare;” of calculating upon the fallacious ground, that number is equivalent to truth and principle; and that

a great and influential body is absolutely requisite for successfully fighting the battles of the Lord. If number alone be sought, the policy is most perilous; for, unless well instructed and trained, great numbers become unwieldy, impede the movements, and damp the spirits, of the regular and fighting troops; who, although a handful, are, when the Lord of hosts is at their head, INVINCIBLE. Numbers, when discordant in judgment, especially in regard to the public banner under which it is expected they shall fight, are not to be relied on when a united onset is necessary. The liberty of free discussion, especially on constitutional questions, is dreaded as apt to issue in spontaneous combustion. Such policy, with respect to number, the history of the Church of Christ has clearly shown, although partially successful, has never been crowned with honour or comfort, when a blow was to be struck for constitutional reform. True it is, that such policy was never practised, but honestly resisted, by the Reformed Church of Scotland.

Apart, however, from the expediency and sound policy of adopting the measure which I humbly recommend, there are numerous sweet and sustaining encouragements, designed and well fitted to induce the honest Reformer to keep his eye on duty, and leave all consequences in those hands that were nailed to the accursed tree, never doubting that in time of need He will deliver His people, for His "hand is not now shortened that it cannot save."

The Divine authority, which is the RULE AND REASON of duty, sets far in the back ground all such difficulties and carnal objections as I have adverted to. No fear of man, or any combination of men—no difficulties of whatever amount or character, can possibly warrant the Church of Christ to decline acknowledging her former scriptural standards and laudable attainments. By denying or obscuring this position, we exclude ourselves from the character of "his witnesses," who are distinguished as continuously "finishing their testimony." A practical respect to the divine authority must of necessity take precedence of all other considerations; and, without all controversy, this it was that kept afloat the Church of our fathers, when tossed to and fro on the heavy and fiery surges of a protracted and a cruel persecution. It is also, Sir, no ordinary encouragement so to adopt judicially the entire cause of the Reformation, that a claim to identification with it then becomes palpable and valid. If the Free Church glories in the *name*, and if, by its assumption and exhibition, she has won over the multitude, would it not confer more real honour if she had the *reality*? Is it no encouragement, Sir, to adopt a cause which has been already tried,

and which has, in the stormiest period of our country's history, proved its practicability beyond the most sanguine hopes of its friends; a cause which the Most High has remarkably countenanced in the conversion of immense multitudes; a cause that gave visibility and body to "that righteousness which exalteth a nation," and frowned into its proper and dark den "that sin which is a reproach to any people;" a cause that struck terror into the flinty hearts of Zion's adversaries, compelling them "to feign submission" to her;—and, in fine, Sir, a cause, apostacy from which has entailed upon us national divisions, feebleness, infidelity, and crime? In point of morality and external national prosperity, no period since that of the Second Reformation can be compared with it, in our history;—a period when a cup of true patriotism was quaffed, which sustained a bleeding Church for the long period of twenty-eight years, and concentrated a few kindred spirits, in its darkest hour, for overthrowing the last king of a long and popular although tyrannical dynasty. Think you, Sir, that such a cause was the mere device of man, or that it was worked by men, who would consent to box up any of its luminous and essential elements until the millennial sun had visited our world? Verily no. And does Dr. Chalmers conclude that it would tarnish his European reputation for learning and eloquence, were he to consecrate his mental endowments to the illustration and vindication of what has honoured God and our country in her golden era? What I thus plead for and recommend, is no Utopian, no untried measure; but a measure which has amply proved its wholesome practicability among all ranks in Britain and Ireland; and a measure which, as it entails benefits, so it entails obligations of no ordinary character, upon these isles of the sea, which certainly may not expect to get scathless through this thick storm, until brought to say in honesty to God and one another—"We will go to our first husband, for it was better with us then than it is now." This I need scarcely tell you, Sir, was the cheering and solemn conviction of Scotland's best and most enlightened, although murdered friends. Hence the last declaration of the celebrated James Guthrie:—"When on the scaffold, James Guthrie lifted the napkin off his face, just before he was turned over, and cried, 'The Covenants, the Covenants, shall yet be Scotland's reviving!'"

Trusting that the Free Church will proceed to substantiate her claim to identification with the Reformed Church, and calculate less upon number, wealth, and popular preachers, all which are mere circumstances, and give no security of being continued, when the flash of novelty shall have subsided, I shall