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SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH

DELIVERED AT A MEETING CALLED BY

A DEPUTATION

FROM

THE CONVOCATION,

HELD AT

LAURENCEKIRK, FEB. 15, 1843.

BY THE

REV. JOHN COOK; A.M.,
MINISTER OF LAURENCEKIRK.

SECOND THOUSAND.

EDINBURGH:

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NOTE.

The Rev. WILLIAM WILSON, Carmylie, and the Rev. JAMES LUMSDEN, Barry, having called a meeting of the Parishioners of Laurencekirk, by a hand-bill, of which the following is a copy:—

“FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND.

“A deputation, appointed by the Convocation, lately held in Edinburgh, to co-operate with those who are friendly to the great principles for which the Church is now contending, will deliver addresses in the Independent Chapel, Laurencekirk, on Wednesday, the 15th of February, at Seven o'clock. The deputation, consisting of Messrs Wilson and Lumsden, will explain the present position of the Church, the imminent danger in which she is placed, and the steps which it will now be the duty, both of ministers and people, to take, so that, if not the *Established*, yet the *true and living* Church of Scotland may be *preserved* and *upheld* in this kingdom,”—

A requisition, numerously signed, was presented to me, expressing the desire of many parishioners that I would come to the meeting and state my views. The meeting was very numerously attended. Mr Lumsden, having commenced the proceedings with praise and prayer, addressed those assembled at considerable length, and, in conclusion, stated that the names would then be taken down of all those who were willing to adhere to the Convocation. It was at this stage that I rose and delivered the Address, of which the following pages contain the substance. I am very sensible that the interest felt in it arose in a great measure from the circumstances in which it was delivered, and that what is appropriate in a speech often appears less so in the pages of a pamphlet; but, having been urged to allow its publication, I have not thought proper to decline; and I gladly avail myself of this opportunity of expressing, in the strongest manner, my gratification at the reception which I met with from my people on that occasion, and at the cordiality and unanimity, (for I was told it was all but unanimous,) with which a vote was immediately carried, expressive of their thanks and confidence.

J. C.

SUBSTANCE OF A SPEECH, &c.

BEFORE that proceeding is gone about, I have some remarks, my friends, to offer to you :—

I assure you that it is not with pleasure that I come forward on such an occasion as this, even in my own parish ; and I do not understand the feeling which leads a minister to go into the parish of another, call a meeting of his people, and endeavour to alienate them from their own minister. It cannot be disguised that this is the purpose of the present meeting ; for it was sufficiently marked that the proceedings were commenced with prayer, and though, in all congregational meetings, more or less public, and I do believe on most occasions of family worship, the minister is not forgotten in intercessions at a throne of grace, yet in the prayer offered here by a brother minister, there was no allusion whatever to one who is over you in the Lord.

Called on as I have been by a requisition from a number of respectable individuals among you, as well as by my own sense of duty, I am here to defend myself and you against mistatements that might be made, and from the disunion that is attempted to be created by the ministers who have come unasked into this parish. They think that other parishes, and this among the number, are neglected, and they are come to teach us “the duty both of ministers and people ;” but, whatever good or evil they may do in other parishes, they make sure of this, that their own are neglected in their absence.

What is the occasion on which they tell you they are come ? It is on account, they say, of “the imminent danger in which the Church is placed.” There is no danger, no crisis affecting the Church, except such as they are themselves attempting to create ; they are trying to pull down that venerated edifice, under whose roof they are still living as ministers ; but, I trust, there is still sufficient attachment in the people of Scotland to the Church of their fathers, from which so many generations have derived the blessings of the gospel, and that there is still a sufficient measure of the Spirit of God with her ministers and her people to make all their devices of none effect.

But there is a crisis in their own state. They have signed a declaration that they would immediately go out of the Church, unless they got their own way in the management of it ; and now, because they have got a refusal to their demands, and are likely to find it necessary to act on their declaration, they wish you to pledge yourselves that you will go with them ; to pledge yourselves that you will share their fortunes, and join with them in forming a new Church ; to pledge your-

selves to contribute as much money as may be necessary for building their churches and paying their stipends. This is their purpose ; else why are they still remaining where they are ? They might have gone at once, after receiving so decided an answer and so firm a refusal as they have met with ; but they are sensible that it is a great leap which they must take, and they stand, as you see, hesitating on the brink of the precipice, calling on you to promise that you will hold out your hands to save them in their fall ; and if you do not, perhaps, after all, they will just remain where they are.

I am wrong in saying that they have all engaged to go *immediately* on getting a refusal. Some of them signed the resolution, with an explanation—that explanation being to the effect that they would wait “a reasonable time” before they left the Establishment ; and among their number you will find the name of Mr William Wilson, Carmylie, the gentleman who appears here as a deputy from the Convocation. Now, I don’t say that it is at all unreasonable in Mr Wilson and his brethren to claim “a reasonable time” for making up their minds to go ; but I say it is very unreasonable in these gentlemen not to allow you what they claim for themselves—not to allow you “a reasonable time,” after their new Church is formed, to look on this picture and on that, and see which Church will suit you best.

What then are the circumstances which they allege as requiring these extraordinary proceedings ? They say that encroachments have been made, by the Civil Courts, on the spiritual privileges of the Church :—on the other hand, we say that the circumstances are no other than these, that they have not been allowed to use their powers and advantages as ministers of an Established Church in any way they please, without regard to law and to the rights and liberties of their fellow-citizens and their fellow-Christians. I will endeavour to explain how the case is so, as clearly and simply as I can.

The peculiar privileges of the Established Church rest on Acts of Parliament. Like all other churches, established or not, she has other privileges which she has received from her great Head : but all her emoluments, stipends, civil honours, and advantages, belong to her only by statute. By the Act 1592, which is usually called the great and original charter of Presbytery, certain privileges and a certain jurisdiction were admitted and allowed to belong to the Church, and the Church agreed to exercise these privileges only. The articles of agreement are expressly said, in the words of the Act, to have been “agreed upon by His Majesty, in conference with certain of the ministry convened to that effect.” The ministers wished to have more power allowed to the Church, but it was refused ; nevertheless the terms were agreed to. It is declared that these articles comprehend “the whole jurisdiction and discipline of the same kirk ;” and the Act goes on, “of which articles the tenor follows,” &c. ; and among the clauses and provisions, there is this one, relating to the settlement of the ministers who should enjoy the stipends provided by law—“Providing the said Presbyteries be bound and astricted to receive and admit whatsoever qualified minister presented by His Majesty or other lay patrons.”

Now here is a regular compact : it may be right or it may be wrong ; that is not the question. The question is—Have you, gentlemen,

accepted the stipends, the emoluments, the privileges, conferred by the statute? Then you must abide by the conditions, on which they were conferred, or else quit them. So irresistible is this conclusion that you would perceive that Mr Lumsden could not help arriving at it: but the wonder is how, while this conclusion is admitted, and while Mr Lumsden and his friends are evidently not abiding by the conditions, we still find them not quitting the emoluments.

To explain this inconsistency, a good deal was said about the authority which is to interpret the statutes. The Convocation says the Church must interpret all Acts of Parliament relating to herself. That would, indeed, be giving her all power, and without any control. The Church, that is, the Church Courts, (for the Church, properly speaking, includes all individual believers,) is only one of the parties concerned, you and the rest of the community being the other party; and one of two parties cannot be allowed to interpret the statutes in their own case, which they will naturally be inclined to do always in their own favour. In a cause between two private parties, would you think it common justice if one of the two was allowed to decide which was in the right? Courts have been established, judges have been appointed, for the very purpose of deciding all questions relating to social right between man and man. And these judges are not parties themselves, mere servants of the State, bound to speak only its pleasure, and liable to be turned off, if they did not, as Mr Lumsden said, "like a butler or a chambermaid." It will give you an idea of the strange views of liberty which Mr Lumsden entertains, and of the way in which he and his friends would sacrifice the liberty of the subject, when you hear him thus setting aside the independence of the judges, one of the bulwarks of the liberties which, as Britons, we enjoy. The Supreme Judges of the land, the Court of Session and the House of Lords, are removable only on cause shewn, and are entrusted with the power of determining what are the rights of the Throne, as well as those of the meanest subject. If they were not independent, as Mr Lumsden would lead you to believe they are not; if their authority in interpreting the laws were subverted, as it would be if the proceedings of these ministers were tolerated; then, indeed, you would have no security for the preservation of your liberty, of your property, or of your rights of any kind.

It is said, indeed, that the questions now discussed are not proper subjects for these Courts to entertain, and that they exceed their jurisdiction in entertaining them. How is it, then, that they have become the subject of Acts of Parliament? If the Church had been satisfied without any civil advantages—which, however, it is greatly for the interest of religion that she should possess; if she had been content, without coming into contact with an Act of Parliament at all, the case would have been different; but, having consented to accept privileges, which she could receive only from the law, these privileges must, like all other matters contained in Acts of Parliament, be subjects for the ordinary courts of law to determine.

But you were told, as if with indignation, that it was quite an error, though it was uttered from high places, to say that the Church was claiming that she alone should have the power of interpreting Acts of

Parliament relative to herself, for that all that she is claiming is, that that power should belong to her jointly with the Civil Courts. Now, examine this statement, and you will see that it is nothing else—I say it with respect—than absurd. It is not possible that an Act of Parliament can have two different meanings and that both can be effectual. A man cannot both have and not have the civil rights which he claims under an Act of Parliament. Nobody will hinder him from forming any opinion he likes of what the Act means, for his own guidance; but his opinion is of no practical value, unless it agree with the judgment of the courts of law. Nobody hinders the Church from interpreting, as she claims a right to do, the Acts of Parliament as she thinks proper for her own guidance; but her interpretation can carry no civil effect along with it, unless it agree with that of the Civil Courts; and, if she find that it does not agree, she must either acknowledge her error and accept the Court's interpretation, or quit the advantages which that Act conveyed.

Now it has been solemnly decided, in the highest courts of law, and on the fullest investigation, that there is a duty devolving on ministers of the Church, in regard especially to the settlement of ministers—a duty expressly declared in the Act 1592, to the terms of which the Church herself had agreed—a duty which, nevertheless, these ministers have resolutely declared that they will not perform. I don't need to examine particularly the grounds on which this decision was given; it is enough to know that it was fairly given by the competent court. I might easily shew, and in another place I would shew, that the decision is perfectly consistent with the law and the constitution of the Church and of the State, ever since the Church was established. I will just mention one fact of some importance. You are aware that some of the Judges of the Court of Session gave their opinions in favour of the Church; and it was often made the subject of boast that the judges who did so, though the minority, contained the ablest lawyers, as was said, on the bench. But one of this minority, Lord Jeffrey, lately declared, on the bench, that he had come round to think that his opinion was wrong, and that the Court of Session and House of Lords had been right in the decision they had given in the great Case of Auchterarder. (A friend of the deputies called, "That's denied.") I am not aware that the statement which I have made, and which was given in the usual and recognised channels of information, has been in any way, or on any occasion, publicly denied, except by an interruption similar to that now given; and, if it be a correct statement, it must go far to satisfy those who were not convinced before, that the judgment in the Case of Auchterarder was fairly given, and is unquestionably sound.

But, without reference to Lord Jeffrey's opinion, and without reference, as I said, to the particular grounds on which that judgment was pronounced, what we have to notice is, the alarming plea which the Church brought forward, as her reason for refusing to obey it, viz., that she was not bound to obey any judgment of the Civil Court, in regard to any matter which she might call spiritual: and she has renewed this plea for disobedience in the Stewarton Case as to *quoad sacra* ministers, of which you have just heard so much. The

discussion, then, is transferred from all questions about the Veto, about Non-Intrusion, about *Quoad Sacra* parishes, and the like, to this plain but serious question, whether the ministers of the Church are, or are not, to be bound by Acts of Parliament in the same way as other people are. The Convocation says they are not. In their memorial to Sir Robert Peel, they say, "In both Acts" (1592) "the provision" (to which I referred as to the settlement of ministers) "is expressed in terms which, if directed against any private party or civil incorporation, would unquestionably have imported a complete civil obligation to the performance of the specified act. But, when applied to the Church, in relation to the appointment or ordination of her ministers, it seemed impossible to construe this provision of the Act as importing a civil obligation." What is this but a revival of the old and dangerous doctrine that Churchmen, ministers, are not bound by any obligation, however explicit, farther or longer than they think it binding? Acts of Parliament may be passed, with their own consent, and in terms which "unquestionably import" an obligation, yet, after all, they may turn round and say—The obligation relates to something which we call spiritual, and we are not bound to fulfil it; for, in all these matters, we must be allowed to do as we please. Give the Church liberty to call anything she pleases spiritual, and continue her in the possession of all the great powers of an Establishment, and everything, temporal and spiritual, would soon be found to be within her grasp. It was so formerly, when one matter after another was pronounced to be within her province, till, at last, she became absolute mistress of men's liberties and lives. And so it would be again. We have already had some foretaste of that tyranny which would be exercised if the Church were not controlled in the exercise of her power by her lawful engagements. We have seen ministers deposed for obeying the law of the land: we have seen members of the Church deprived of their privileges on what we cannot but call unreasonable pretences. We have seen a system of inquisition begun over every individual, in and out of the Church, and a disposition to deny the liberty of thinking for himself to every one who thinks differently from these rulers—these kings of the Church. We have seen these things only in the commencement, and, by and by, as one oppression followed another, if we ventured to complain, we should be told, as the people were by King Rehoboam, when they complained to him that he was making his yoke heavier on them than his father's, "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

The question, then, is simply this, whether a body of men in the State shall be allowed to act as they please, and to use all the powers which they have received from the State, without regard to the laws of the State. And all that is required of Ministers of the Church, in order to keep them within lawful bounds, is, that they will abide by their lawful engagements. I am sure that you will think it only reasonable that they should. A minister of a dissenting congregation receives his support on the condition or the expectation that he will preach certain doctrines and act in a certain way. If he changes his doctrine and mode of acting—if, for instance, though chosen to preach the doctrines

of the Trinity, he were to become a Unitarian, what would be the consequence? I do believe there are few cases in which he would ask or expect continued support; but, though he did, what would happen? Why, the congregation who adhered to their original principles would leave him, and the supplies would be stopped. It is not so easy to stop the supplies of a minister of the Established Church, but is it fair that he should take advantage of the better hold which he has of them, to endeavour to do what a Dissenting minister could not even if he would—retain his pay, and not perform the duties for which it was promised?

But these ministers say that there is something sinful in the duties which are required of them, as now interpreted by the Civil Courts. If they really think there is anything sinful in being ministers of the Established Church, why do they not immediately go? There is no obligation on them to remain in a state of sin. If it is because they are afraid of the difficulties of getting churches built and stipends paid, that is not a manly course; it destroys all the merit of martyrdom to which they lay claim; it might well make them blush to be standing beside Dissenters, and making use of the buildings which they have erected. They have boldly done what they thought right, trusting to God for support, but these ministers are lingering in what they call a sinful church, till they get arrangements made for their own security when they leave it. Little do they think what handle they are giving to the infidel who scoffs at religion as well as at its ministers; little do they think what cause they are giving to men of serious mind to speak lightly of them. I will tell them what men say—Remember Lot's wife. She was commanded to flee to the mountains from the polluted cities of the plain, but she cast a lingering look behind, and became a pillar of salt. These ministers say they are commanded by Christ to flee out of this sinful Church—they put it on no lower ground than this—and to preach the gospel on the hill sides; but they, too, are seen looking back on the advantages which they are about to leave, and men say that, if they were dealt with as Lot's wife was, there would be among them many pillars of salt.

But is the Established Church really such a guilty and polluted thing as they say it is? It is not so merely because they say so; and many good men have never been able to see any sin in keeping the engagements which they have made as ministers of the Church. Mr Lumsden presented to you a great array of the numbers of those in different parishes whose names have been put down as adhering to the principles of the Resolutions of the Convocation; but he did not tell you how many ministers of the Church have signed the Resolutions. There are 1200 ordained ministers of the Church, including *quoad sacra* ministers, whom we all admit to be our brethren in the work of the ministry, though we may not admit their right to sit in Church Courts; but of these there are only 447 who have signed; and of 947 parish ministers, there are only 289 who have signed. All the rest are prepared to keep their engagements as ministers of this Church, interpreted as they have been by the Civil Courts.

Are the ministers of the Church, then, subject to any restraint which hinders them from acting with the liberty which is necessary

in the exercise of their spiritual functions? They are just as free as those ministers who now complain were when they entered the Church. Mr Lumsden gave you a long catalogue of encroachments which the Civil Courts are alleged to have made on our spiritual province; but examine the cases, and you will find that they are all explained by reference to the statutory duties of ministers, and are no encroachments at all.

There are two statements made on this subject which it is worth while to notice, and which are both erroneous. The one is, that the Civil Courts, of their own accord, wilfully interfered with the proceedings of the Church; and the other is, that their interference was not lawful, and was an encroachment on her spiritual functions. The Civil Courts never interfered in any of the cases of their own accord; you know well they cannot do so. You know that the judges are solemnly bound by their oaths of office to judge in every case that is brought before them according to their conscience and their views of law, and they have no choice whatever, either as to what cases shall be brought before them, or as to whether or not they will give judgment in them when they are brought. And their interference was not contrary to law; they did not exceed their jurisdiction; their judgments were in all cases founded on the laws which they are bound to interpret.

But you are told the Civil Courts have unwarrantably interdicted ministers of the Church from preaching the gospel, from deposing drunkards, thieves, and the like, from the office of the ministry, and from suspending church members from church privileges. They have done no such thing. The parties who have, in all these cases, interrupted the usual and ordinary progress of church duty and of church discipline, are the very parties who complain that it was done by the Civil Court.

In the case of their being interdicted from preaching the gospel in Strathbogie, the Ministers of Strathbogie were unlawfully deposed for obeying the law of the land, and applied to the Civil Courts for protection from those ministers who rushed to their parishes to hurt their peace and to divide their people; and the Courts gave them protection, which it was their duty to do. The Confession of Faith declares that "it is the duty of the civil magistrate to take order that unity and peace be preserved in the Church." It was these ministers, then, who interdicted themselves from preaching in Strathbogie. Let them acknowledge the Strathbogie Ministers as brethren, which they are, and they may, perhaps, even yet be allowed to enter their pulpits, unless, indeed, they go as deputies from the Convocation.

In the cases, again, of deposing ministers and suspending church members, on grounds which unquestionably deserve the highest censure, who was it that interrupted the regular course of proceeding? It was, again, these ministers themselves. They admitted into their courts persons who had no legal right to sit there,—the *quoad sacra* ministers and elders; and the parties deposed or deprived naturally applied to the Civil Court, on the ground that they had been tried and condemned by persons who had no right to do so; and, upon that ground, and on that ground alone, they granted the interdicts. They had no alternative but to grant them; and it is surely of consequence, for the preser-

vation of your rights and liberties, that you should be enabled, by the intervention of the Civil Courts, to make sure that these shall always be tried only by the parties entitled by law to do so. Let these ministers, then, purge their courts of persons not entitled to be there, and there will be no interference with their exercise of discipline.

You had a long account, indeed, of the case of Mr Anderson, in the Presbytery of Arbroath ; and it was represented as a great aggravation of his offence, that he should not have appealed, in the first instance, to the Synod. But strange cases arise in the Presbytery of Arbroath ; and really, after the experience which George Key of Barry had of the judgments of that Presbytery, and of the Synod of Angus and Mearns, we cannot wonder very much that he should at once have availed himself of a ground of complaint which he believed was open to him before another court—viz., that *quoad sacra* ministers had sat in the Presbytery in his cause ; and this was the ground on which the Lord Ordinary granted the interdict, prohibiting them from hindering him in the use of his privileges as a member of the Established Church.

I cannot pass from this part of the subject without noticing the charge which Mr Lumsden brought against the Moderate party—of habitually sheltering persons of immoral character, and of gladly availing themselves, for this purpose, of interdicts which the Court of Session willingly granted. He was not restrained by those feelings which usually lead us to speak with reserve, at least, of the dead, and stated to you, in very strong terms, the case of a minister in this Synod, now no more. He told you that he was acquitted by the Church Courts of an offence which the Civil Courts afterwards found proven against him ; and he laid the blame of this entirely on the regardless Moderates of the day. Now, if my memory serves me rightly, the great defenders of that individual were ministers not of the Moderate party ; and, as I am driven to it, I will state other cases, that have happened within the bounds of this Synod, which look very much as if the views which Non-Intrusionists have taken of individual character and morality were not altogether independent of the party which the individual espoused in Church politics. (Three cases were here stated without, of course, names being mentioned, and Mr Lumsden denied the accuracy of the statements.) I am not sorry that Mr Lumsden has denied what I have stated. I am quite aware that these matters are capable always of being represented in different lights, in such a way, that they appear to be true in both the one light and the other, and it shews how dangerous, as well as unbecoming, a mode of argument it is on which Mr Lumsden thus chose to enter.

I must notice what Mr Lumsden said of the case of Stewarton. He told you what a monstrous thing it was that the Court of Session should compel the Church to commit the care of 6000* souls in that parish all to one man ; but he did not tell you how many Dissenting chapels there are in that parish ; and, I presume, that, however strongly he represented right views of Church government to be essential to right views of the gospel, he will not, in this house at least, deny that some Dissenters may promote the cause of Christ. Neither did he tell you

* According to the Census of 1841, there are only 4,654.

that it is perfectly competent for the Church to ordain, in Stewarton, and throughout Scotland, as many ministers of the gospel as she deems necessary for the work of the ministry. In terms of her agreement with the State, she cannot admit them to the privileges of ministers of the Establishment without the consent of the State, which there is a recognised way of obtaining; but she has it in her power to make them in every other way efficient ministers for the preaching of the gospel and the administration of Christian ordinances.

What then do you find to be the privileges of ministers of the Established Church, under and after all the alleged encroachments of the Civil Courts? They are under no restraint which hinders them from performing all the duties of ministers of the gospel: they are free to preach the gospel: they are *bound* to preach it, if the Confession of Faith, the doctrines of which they are bound to preach, be according to the gospel. They are free to examine every person who is presented to a Church, and to reject him if they think him not qualified. Mr Lumsden challenges us to produce proof from Scripture that we are required to intrude unworthy presentees: we seek to produce no such passages, for we follow no such practices. (A voice from behind the deputies' friend called out, "Marnoch.") The people of Marnoch were allowed an opportunity of stating any objections they might have to Mr Edwards as their minister: they chose, under the advice of Non-Intrusionists, not to avail themselves of this opportunity, and the Presbytery, being aware of no unfitness on the part of Mr Edwards, were obliged to ordain him. No court on earth can force, or has tried to force ministers to ordain any man whom they judge, or you to receive as a minister any man whom you judge, unfit to be a minister of the gospel: you might turn away from him; or if you state sufficient objections to the Presbytery, or they, on their own trial, find him not qualified, they are bound to reject him. The Presbyteries of the Church are free also to judge of the qualifications of every one who is licensed to preach the gospel; and kirk-sessions are free to judge who are fit to be admitted to Christian communion; and you need have no fear of their being interfered with in the lawful exercise of this privilege, so necessary for the preservation of the purity and the character of a Christian society.

What more privileges than these does a Church of Christ require? They comprehend everything connected with the preaching of the gospel, the administration of ordinances, and the power of the keys, or admission to Christian communion. What more privileges, then, do these ministers want? They want, as I said at the first, the privilege of doing as they please in other things besides these; but that is the very privilege which it would not be safe to entrust to them or to any other body of men.

They refer, indeed, to the Confession of Faith, as if it warranted the claims which they are making, because it is said there, "There is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ." Mr Lumsden expended a great deal of unnecessary labour, in the opening part of his speech, in proving this great truth, which none of us deny, that Jesus Christ is "our King," the alone King and Head of his Church. But

there is a wide leap from that position to this other, that there is no other head of the Church but the Convocation, or secret conclave of ministers at Edinburgh; yet that is the only position which will avail them anything in proving the justice of their claims. These words were put into the Confession of Faith for the very purpose of condemning such claims as theirs—of condemning all ecclesiastical persons who should presume to act as if they were the vicegerents of Christ on earth, and had exclusive authority to interpret and declare his laws. The words stand thus—“There is no other Head of the Church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof.” These ministers are really making themselves Popes: they justify all that they do by saying, “The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head and King in his Church;” as if they were possessed of all his prerogatives, and could not err; and as if no one dare resist them, or call their infallibility in question. On the principles on which they proceed, carried out especially as you have heard them explained, in reference even to matters of Church government and policy, all the constitutional ministers of the Church—that they seem readily to admit—all Episcopalians, all Dissenters, Independents, Congregationalists, Methodists, all who differ from them, are actually living in a state of open rebellion against Christ as their King. Truly they are taking the crown from the head of Jesus Christ and putting it, not, as was profanely said of others, on the President of the Court of Session, but on some of themselves—servants, ministers, in his Church.

You see, then, that the object of the present agitation is really to extend the powers of the ministers of the Established Church, and, therefore, to abridge yours; for, whenever the power of Church Courts is enlarged, the liberties of those who are subject to these courts are necessarily abridged.

It is not for the abolition of patronage that the present movement is making; that is a separate matter; and the Convocation are very anxious that it should be kept separate from this discussion. Sir James Graham, in his excellent letter, which I commend to your attentive perusal, gave a joint answer to both their claims; and they blame him severely for doing so. In the minute of the Special Commission, afterwards approved and adopted by the last meeting of the General Commission, they say, “The object of the Claim of Right was to seek protection from the encroachments of the Civil Courts on the spiritual jurisdiction of the Church; and it was clearly indicated that a refusal to give the protection and redress desired, would compel the Church to an abandonment of the benefits and privileges of the Establishment.—The Anti-Patronage address, again, in no respect represented its abolition as essential to the continuing to carry on the government of the Church in connection with the State. Though the one were refused, she might nevertheless continue to carry on the government of the Church in connection with the State.—The refusal of the other would render this impossible.” They tell Sir James Graham that they wish the claims of the people and their own claims considered separately; that they are willing to remain in the Church though patronage is not abolished,—though they do not get what they ask for the people, if he

will only grant them the unlimited powers which they ask for themselves. It is not, then, for the people that they are now struggling and threatening to leave the Church.

You see, too, how the present struggle is so different from that in which your forefathers were engaged in times of Reformation. They struggled for liberty to read the word of God, which was withheld from them—for liberty to worship God in any place, according to their conscience, which they could not do without fear of imprisonment or of death—for liberty to be free from all the exactions and impositions of an intolerant Church, the then Established Church: and the Convocation is now wishing to revive the same uncontrolled power in the hands of an Established Church; they are wishing you to join them in undoing all the work which your fathers gave their lives to make good.

You see, too, how it is that the claims of the Convocation are hostile, not merely to the liberties of members of the Church, but to the liberties of citizens in general, both civil and religious. To allow the ministers of an Established Church to exercise all the great powers of an Establishment, and be subject to no laws, bound by no compact into which they may enter, would indeed be the way to bring back the dark times of bigotry and despotism. The time was when all men were bound to attend the Established Church under pain of imprisonment or fine; and the time when the most unjust law which imposed these penalties was repealed, and the Act of Toleration was passed, is the very time at which these ministers complain that fetters were put upon the Established Church. Loosen these fetters—grant the Church all the power that is asked for her—and such enactments might soon be revived; a cry would be raised that the liberties of the Church were invaded because other sects were tolerated, and the liberties of the Christian people, instead of being extended, would be abridged or annihilated.

No wonder, then, that the claims of the Church have been resisted on all hands, condemned by the Court of Session, unanimously condemned by the House of Lords, and resisted by men of every political party, Whigs, Tories, and Radicals, all alive to the danger which threatens the liberties of all. Lord Melbourne's government resisted them, and Sir R. Peel's Government, the members of which attempted to bring in bills that would satisfy them, were at last obliged to abandon the attempt, and leave these ministers to be dealt with, as other subjects are, according to law.

You see, farther, my friends, how the subjects involved in this discussion, are really not essentially connected with your salvation. It is right that every one should endeavour to acquaint himself with what Christ has said on all the matters which are revealed in his Word; but, notwithstanding what Mr Lumsden has said to you, I am sure you will not find that his laws, as to the government of his church, are made known in such a way as to lead you to believe that there is only one form acceptable to him, and that all who observe any other are disobedient to his will. Passages are quoted, but they are not applicable to the subjects in dispute. In a question of abiding by our engagements, and performing our social duties, the passages that seem most applicable are such as these: "Pay that which thou hast vowed."

(Eccl. v. 4.) "Render to all their dues." (Rom. xiii. 7.) "Submit yourselves,—whether to the King as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him." (1 Pet. ii. 13, 14.) "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." (Rom. xiii. 5.) Principles such as these, laid down by the Apostles of Christ, the ministers of Christ ought not to set an example of disregarding.

There is, indeed, one passage which is often quoted and alleged to be conclusive ; and though it has not, I think, been referred to to-night, I will take this opportunity of directing your attention to it. I will do so now, for I have few opportunities of addressing you on these subjects. You know that I have always avoided introducing them in my public ministrations. In these, I will set before you all that seems essential to your spiritual peace now and your eternal peace hereafter ; but I will not seek opportunities of forcing on your attention what does not necessarily tend to your edification. The passage to which I refer, is, "Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Mark xii. 17.) If the spirit of these words were acted on by the ministers of the Established Church, they would not seek to retain Cesar's emoluments, if they did not perform the duties for which Cesar gave them. Look at the manse, which a minister of the Established Church has provided for his dwelling—at the stipend, for his maintenance—at the Church in which he and his people assemble, without expense—at all the honours and advantages which, in many ways, he possesses—and say, whose image and superscription is this, stamped on them all ? Is it not Cesar's—his, whom they call Cesar ? If, then, they apply again to this subject the one part of this precept, Render to God the things that are God's, we must meet them with the other, Render to Cesar the things that are Cesar's.

I have no wish to speak harshly of any of my brethren ; I have no wish to see a separation of any of them from the Established Church ; I have never sought exclusive intercourse with one party only ; many of those who have differed from me I have seen reason to respect ; and I do believe that many who have signed the resolutions do not see the consequences to which they lead, and would shrink from them if they did. But, if they *will* leave the Church, they have themselves created the necessity for it ; they have, indeed, already virtually separated themselves from us, and no longer act toward us as brethren. They force us to speak out as I am now doing, and as you know I have not done to you before ; they force us to tell them that, though they do leave, we have no fears for the stability of the Church of Scotland or her efficiency as a Church of Christ. She has stood severer trials before, and, by the help of God, she will stand now.

Having said thus much as to the general principles of this unhappy controversy, I must say a few words as to the manner in which it is promoted by those ministers who are going about the country, under the name of Deputies from the Convocation. Though their cause was as just as I believe it to be entirely the reverse, it would not justify the means which they are using.

They seem to think that our Lord intended that his servants should

have for their motto—"I came not to send peace on earth, but a sword ; to set a man at variance against his father, the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." In these words, our Lord foretold what would be the conduct, not of his friends, but of the enemies of his friends.

They cannot have forgotten the vows which they took at their ordination, "to follow no divisive courses from the present established doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of this Church ;" and "never to endeavour, directly or indirectly, the prejudice or subversion thereof." These are their vows—the very words of their vows—vows still upon them ; and you see how they are fulfilling them—still ministers of this Church, yet seeking you to join them in overthrowing it.

They cannot be ignorant how necessary it is that a minister should possess, in some degree, the respect and regard of his people, in order that his ministry may be useful among them ; but they are seeking to destroy the usefulness of all ministers who differ from them, by representing them as themselves being, and as favouring those who are, men of immoral character, hypocrites, hirelings, thieves, and robbers, who care only for the fleece, and not for the flock. Instead of coming to help and strengthen the hands of those who are labouring in the same vineyard with themselves, they come to hinder or destroy our work—as accusers of the brethren. It is not thus that they can serve the cause of Christ—it is not on such an errand that we can bid them God speed.

They are wishing you to leave the Established Church and join theirs, which, they say, will be still "the Church of Scotland." We shall dispute that title with them ; and, having nearly seven hundred of the parish ministers of the Church, and a goodly portion of their congregations, we shall have the larger, and as good, if not the better part, with us ; and on this ground alone, independent of any other, I think you will admit we shall have the better claim to be called still "the Church of Scotland."

But have they told you of what kind their new Church is to be—its principles, its doctrines, its form of government ? I see, from the placard calling this meeting, that it is called a "Free Church"—free enough, I dare say, as to the way in which they will act in it. But what kind of freedom are you to have ? They have not promised you the free choice of your ministers. They could not, even if they would ; for, in providing ministers for all the new congregations, they must first provide for themselves. You would then have *one of them*, but you don't know which ; it might be Mr Wilson of Carmylie, if the "reasonable time" has then elapsed, after which he says he is to go ; it might be Mr Lumsden of Barry—you don't know who it might be. A free church ! You would not be free to act or to think in it, but must act and think precisely as they require you. A free church, indeed ! You call that free for which you have nothing to pay ; *there* you would have everything to pay for—stipends, manses, churches, schools.

My friends, I do not advise you to move any resolutions at this meeting, in which I perceive many persons who do not belong to this

parish, so that the resolutions that might be carried—though I believe they would not be different—would not represent, by the numbers supporting them, the feelings of the parishioners of Laurencekirk. Let the effect of this meeting be judged of by the number of those who give their names as adherents, and I think it will be found they are wondrous few.—(Loud applause.)

At the same time, I have no wish to put any obstacle in the way of any one of you who has a mind giving his name to join this free church; I only wish to set before you the real facts of the case. The position which I hold, as a minister of the Established Church, I take to be this—I am set here to offer, as I best can, religious instruction or comfort to any in the parish who will receive it at my hands; if any prefer other hands to mine, I have no fault to find with them; but whenever my services, as a minister, can be of use and acceptable to any one of the Church, or not of the Church, I freely render them. I have endeavoured to act thus hitherto, and, by God's grace, I will endeavour to do so still.

I have now done, and shall leave this meeting. I may have expressed myself in other terms than I could have wished. I feel this is no place for a minister of Christ—a minister of peace; but I have this consolation, that, though appearing here, I am on my own ground, and among my own flock, to give them warning when danger is near. It is my duty to do so. I have now done that duty; the rest I leave to your own consciences and to God.