

**HISTORICAL NOTICES OF THE
ECCLESIASTICAL DIVISIONS
IN SCOTLAND: WITH
SUGGESTIONS FOR RE-UNION**

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Historical Notices of the Ecclesiastical Divisions in Scotland: With Suggestions for Re-Union by Benjamin Laing

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BENJAMIN LAING

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BY
BENJAMIN LAING, D.D.,
COLMONELL.

"Without all controversy, the main cause of all the distractions, confusions, and divisions of the Christian world, hath been by adding other conditions of communion than Christ hath done."
MILLINGTON.



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PREFACE.

THE mutual relations of the several sections of the church of Christ, and more especially of the four Presbyterian bodies in Scotland, out of the Establishment, are of a most unsatisfactory character. This is felt to be the case, and the feeling is, I believe, daily widening and deepening among both the members and ministers of all these bodies.

These sections of the church are all free from state control, they have all the same form of government, they hold in common a broad basis of gospel truth, and yet they are all separate from one another ; and some of them hold no more ecclesiastical fellowship with their Protestant Presbyterian brethren, than they do with the Church of Rome. This is surely not as it ought to be.

All who intelligently and seriously examine the present state of the church, and consider the great changes that have recently taken place, and those that are evidently in progress, must, I think, feel persuaded, that

the whole subject of terms of ecclesiastical fellowship, and of union and intercourse among the churches, must undergo a thorough revision. This is the age of revolutions, not of kingdoms merely, but of churches and of opinions on all subjects. God is shaking, not the earth only, but also the heavens. All creeds and confessions, canons and constitutions, must be sifted; that those things that can be shaken may be removed, and that those that cannot be shaken may remain.

In our investigations, we must go deeper down than those have generally done who have written on union. We must go down to the constitution of the Christian church, ascertain what that constitution is, and what are warrantable grounds of separation, and what are not; and then examine to which of these classes our points of difference belong.

In the following essay, there is a feeble attempt to approach the philosophy of the subject, to discover and exhibit the first principles on which ecclesiastical fellowship is to be maintained.

I have been engaged in the formation of two unions—that between the Constitutional Presbytery and the Associate Synod, in 1827, forming the Synod of Original Seceders; and that between the Synod of Original Seceders and the Synod of Original Burghers, in 1842, forming the Synod of United Original Seceders. I have been also, for some years, a member of the joint committees for union between the Reformed Presbyterian and the Original Secession churches. For some

time past, I have been led to suspect that in forming the unions we have effected, and in the negotiations in which we have been recently engaged, we have not been proceeding on sound and scientific principles. The parties uniting seem to me to be *driving a bargain*—each labouring to have apparent in the basis as much as possible of their peculiar sentiments. Now, it occurred to me, that the duty of uniting does not depend entirely or exclusively on the number of points on which the parties may happen to be of one mind; but that it might have been our duty to have united though the common ground had been much narrower than it actually was.

When two parties unite on a very extended and complicated basis, this, unless afterwards altered and modified, may prove an insurmountable obstacle to farther unions. The principles on which the churches are to be united must be simple, comprehensive, universal, and permanent.

In particular, I felt persuaded, that the Reformed Presbyterians and the Original Seceders had put the *Testimony* in a wrong place, in the machinery of ecclesiastical politics; and hence, instead of gaining the great end which the church's testimony is designed to accomplish, it had, moving in this false position, contributed eminently to rend and fracture the church. Accordingly, I have endeavoured to point out the place which, according to the constitution of the church, the *Testimony* ought, in my opinion, to occupy, and the