

**THE SCOTTISH CHURCH
AND ITS SURROUNDINGS,
IN EARLY TIMES**

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The Scottish Church and Its Surroundings, in Early Times by Robert Paton

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BY
ROBERT PATON,
MINISTER OF KIRKINER.

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Ms. C. 7

PREFACE.

THE following sketches contain, in a more or less connected form, a bird's-eye view of the rise and development of Christianity in Britain, especially North Britain, during the first seven centuries of our era. They were first delivered to the congregation and parishioners of Kirkinner, and formed a course of monthly lectures in the winters of 1881-1882, 1882-1883. The aim the writer had in view in their construction was, to exhibit in a popular form the rise and progress of the Church in connection with the general history of our country in these early times. In carrying out this object, occasional sidelights have been borrowed from the "world's broad pavement," and contemporary events and movements in that wider sphere have been explained and illustrated, rather than simply alluded to, that those to whom such researches are unfamiliar may be the

better able to understand the subject, at least in a general way. As the authorities founded on are sufficiently indicated in the body of this work, it will not be necessary to particularise here on the matter further than to say that the author has adopted generally the view of Skene in regarding the Picts, as well as the Scots, as a Gaelic speaking people; while the use made in these pages of Fuller, characterised by Coleridge as one who, "next to Shakespeare," excited in him "the sense and emotion of the marvellous," has been simply to clothe in that writer's felicitous and quaint literary style facts otherwise abundantly verified. The feeling that, in our retrospect, we are too apt to stop short at the Reformation, and that an appearance of haste in slipping over pre-Reformation epochs has characterised some, if not all, of our more elaborate treatises on Scottish Church History, has in some measure determined the author to indulge in a quiet and leisurely stroll among these early and unfamiliar walks. The period embraced in these pages, from the earliest ages to the end of the 7th century, gives us the dawn of Christianity on the background of heathen darkness; the few drops ushering in the shower of blessing that came

to our land with the advent of Christianity,—the rise and progress of the Celtic Church, first in South Britain, then in the north under Columba and his monks,—the progress of Culdee missionary enterprise till the time of Bede, when it had reached its zenith. This, which forms a distinct epoch in the evolution of our Scottish Christianity, is interesting not merely as a portion of our past history, but as containing within it the embryo of those distinctive features which, when the Reformation wave passed over us, crystallized in the north into Presbytery, while in the South Christianity emerged in Episcopalian forms.

The qualifications necessary for the treatment of historical subjects are by no means universally distributed, and in no case can they be attained without a considerable expenditure of labour. To be able to “transcend the special limitations of his time;” to exhibit a fullness and thoroughness of knowledge, never failing at any point over the whole field; to lift the story up, and make it lucid by general points of view; to throw the whole into historical perspective with suggestive background, are conditions which require to be satisfied by the historian.

To recognise that it is possible so to manage correct

knowledge as to leave a strikingly incorrect impression;—so to group events together in crowded chapters that one “cannot see the wood for the trees;”—so to sink from a position of commanding survey as to drag the story along in the hollow of events, and treat all as on the same level, is a qualification no less necessary than the foregoing. But the ecclesiastical historian must, in addition, have a special eye to the operation of the greatest force at work in human affairs, and exhibit Christianity in the deep sky of social evolution—in the relation of “organism” and “environment.” How far the author of the following pages has failed to reach such an ideal he himself is deeply conscious; but if their perusal shall give the reader as much pleasure as he has experienced in their construction, and stimulate to fresh interest in that department of our national history in which lies our true glory, he will conceive himself amply rewarded.

R. P.

THE MANSE, KIRKINNER,
October, 1883.

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