

**THE HISTORIC
SIGNIFICANCE OF
EPISCOPACY IN
SCOTLAND 1560-1690**

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THE LEE LECTURE, 1899

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THE HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF
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1560-1690

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THE HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF EPISCOPACY IN SCOTLAND.

1560-1690.

I.

IN the Life of Dr Lee it is stated that he saw the proverbial three courses open in the future of the Scottish Establishment. They were—(1) Presbyterian Reunion; (2) Restoration of full communion with the Church of England; and (3) Ultimate Disestablishment.¹ This was more than thirty years ago, and the issue is not yet clear. In the interval, efforts have been put forth in each of these directions. Three years after Dr Lee's death, the General Assembly appointed a committee on Union. The labours of this Committee proving ineffectual, private conferences ensued in 1893, and were continued at intervals for two years. The result was to show that the non-established members of the conferences were convinced that "the one great hindrance is the ex-

¹ Dr Story's Life, ii, 125.

isting State connection,"¹ and accordingly in 1895 they joined in the most important assault which has yet been made on the Establishment. Presbyterian Reunion therefore depends at present upon Disestablishment, so far as one of the two contracting parties is concerned; and Dr Lee's three courses become practically two. The Church has to choose between Disestablishment followed by the union of Presbyterians, and the restoration of full communion with the sister Establishment. In the latter direction Dr Lee himself took some steps, but it is well-known that the Episcopal Church in Scotland barred the way. That Church is in reality a branch of the Anglican Church planted in Scotland,² and if any negotiations have taken place with it since the abortive attempt in 1864, they have not yet been made public, and do not enter into the practical possibilities of the hour. The object of this Lecture is to show that a union with the Church of England, even apart from the Scottish Episcopal communion, would be opposed to the history of our Church and to the rooted instincts of the people.

Throughout the long struggle which began in 1560 and ended in 1690, the Scottish people as a body associated Episcopacy with Romanism. There is reason to think that herein native Scottish shrewdness was in the right, and that sometimes unconsciously, but at other times with a certain degree of intention, the Episcopate was used as a pioneer to

¹ Report of Private Conferences, 1896, p. 57.

² This is the frankly expressed view of at least one Scottish dignitary—Dean Rorison. See 'Scottish Guardian,' March 31.

clear the way for the re-establishment of a Roman hierarchy.

It will be necessary, in the brief historical sketch now proposed, to deal with several erroneous views which are coming into favour regarding the Reformation in Scotland and the subsequent conflicts between Episcopacy and Presbytery.

It is often, for instance, commented on as a surprising circumstance that the Roman hierarchy should have fallen in 1560 without any perceptible struggle, without striking a blow. This is deemed to be all the more remarkable and puzzling, because the old Church is pictured as having been far from totally corrupt or drowned in ignorance. "On the eve of the Reformation," we are told, "the Church of Scotland could glory in prelates who were equally distinguished for their talents and their virtues. . . . The inferior clergy could also pride itself on many learned and virtuous priests."¹ There had been a distinct movement for reformation within the doomed Church, no less than three councils being held for the purpose between 1549 and 1559. The Church also was in possession of enormous wealth, and her charities, if faithfully used, might well have won popularity and love. Yet, when the crisis came, no voice was lifted up in her defence. In the Parliament of 1560, the bishops allowed the Scots Confession to be ratified without protest. Dr Grub thinks that they did not understand the important issues which were then at stake.² But such a view implies the flattest con-

¹ Rev. W. Forbes-Leith in 'Narratives of Scottish Catholics,' p. 6.

² Grub's Hist., ii. 85.

tradition of the talents of the prelates, whatever scope it may leave for their virtues. Bishop Leslie¹ alleged that the reforming statutes had driven many of the younger priests into the opposition; but this also conveys a dark slur upon the intellectual abilities of the younger clergy, who sought to escape reform by fleeing into the ranks of the strictest Reformers. In the apparent difficulty, we must seek an explanation of a different kind. The view which I venture to submit is, that the prelates had for some years seen that their cause was indefensible, and they concurred in bowing before the storm. They did not, however, simply disappear and leave "not a rack behind." The entire subsequent history of the Church is affected by the presence of Roman or Romanising forces in Scotland. Its troubles, its sudden and violent changes, its final accession to the Revolution, cannot be fully accounted for but by recognising that, from 1560 onward, Romanism, driven under the surface, remained as a disturbing element in the ecclesiastical sphere.

It is unlikely that a Church whose priests were planted all over Scotland, whose abbeys and religious houses and hospitals formed a national system for relief of the poor, and whose holy days and festivals were part and parcel of the life of the peasantry, should have disappeared in so sudden and silent a mode. The seeming completeness of the Reforma-

¹ Hill Burton, iii. 336, note. Bishop Leslie says of the "Statutes" of 1559—"whilk was the principal cause that a great number of the young abbots, priors, deans, and beneficed men assisted to the enterprise and practice devised for the overthrow of the Catholic religion, . . . fearing themselves to be put at according to the laws and statutes."

tion arouses suspicion, since we are not used to see ancient growths uprooted in a moment. What we may naturally expect is a change of form and tactics, by which the defeated party shall try to bring about their reascendancy. Let us therefore look around for the evidence of such a policy, and we may find it in the vicissitudes of the Reformed Church, begun so soon after 1560, and continuing for over a hundred years. The disturbing force may not be called by the name of Rome,—it may even assume the appearance of a violent opposition to Rome; but, whether unconsciously or not, it will perform the functions which belonged of right to the discredited Romish Church.

Another error in regard to this subject is associated with the fortunes of the House of Stuart, which is generally represented as labouring and finally perishing in the cause of a Reformed Episcopacy.¹ Here, also, surprise has often been expressed that such sacrifices should be made for a system of Church government. Why, it has been asked, should the Stuarts have risked their throne in the effort to supplant presbyteries by bishops, and one prayer-book by another? The motive seems inadequate, and the conduct of this royal House takes almost an insane character, as long as it is assumed that they fought a mere battle of mitres and liturgies. The popular history of Scotland becomes perplexing and unsatisfactory upon such a view. Episcopacy

¹ Charles I. "fell a true martyr to the cause of Episcopacy and the Church."—*Rise and Progress of Presbyterianism*, by Rev. G. B. Howard, 1898, p. 87.

may be worth contending for, but surely not to the death :

Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis Tempus eget.

A more adequate view seems to be that the stake was nothing less than the reconciliation of Scotland to Rome, the reconquest of stubborn heretics, the accomplishment of that conversion which the Pope recently hailed as awaiting the Scottish people in the immediate future. It will be my aim to show that the Stuart family were the agents, sometimes unwittingly, but towards the end with open eyes, in a great and admirably persevering scheme to win back Scotland to the Roman obedience. The cause for which they fought was no mere question of ecclesiastical dignities. The banner under which the fight was carried on bore indeed no "strange device" of ultramontane faith; but had the crowning efforts made by James VII. prevailed, Scotland to-day would be all that the Pope's recent letter seems to hope for the twentieth century.

In resisting Episcopacy, the Scottish people were, by a strong native instinct, resisting Popery, which lay behind it. And hence their battle-cry latterly became one against "Popery, Prelacy, and Arbitrary Power." These three forces were bound together, and fell together at the Revolution. Upon this theory, and upon this alone, we are enabled to account for the inbred and undying dislike of the Episcopal system, which has seemed to some observers so irrational and ungrounded. It has been suggested that what the nation rebelled against was