

# **A SCOTTISH COMMUNION**

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A Scottish Communion by William Milroy

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**WILLIAM MILROY**

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# SCOTTISH COMMUNION.

BY

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## PREFACE.

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THE old style of Scottish Communion Services is fast fading out of the land. For some generations past the established practice has been to have two communions in the year, with accompanying services on the Thursday, Saturday, and Monday. To a large extent, this is the practice still. Change, however, has not only begun, but made such progress that further change seems inevitable. Whether it will be any improvement remains to be seen. The present volume is an example of these services as they have long existed, and may help, among other things, to give Presbyterians "furth" of Scotland some definite idea of what is said and done at an old-fashioned Scottish Communion.

The long-established practice, now gradually being departed from, is not the direct creation of Church law or constitution. Rather it has been a growth resulting from the Church's circumstances and varied experiences, together with the fact that no rule as to frequency is laid down in the New Testament. Even if the disciples at first observed the Lord's Supper daily or weekly, there is no evidence that that usage continued long, even at Jerusalem. The Apostle, when formally instructing the Corinthians on the subject, says—"as oft as ye eat



this bread and drink this cup," without saying how often. The question of frequency is left to the judgment of the Church according to circumstances.

The position of Scottish Presbyterianism in the matter is briefly this. The old Scots Confession (1560) says nothing of how often the Lord's Supper should be celebrated, nor of any additional services. The "Book of Common Order, or Order of Geneva," was partly taken as a guide in the First Reformation, and it says—"The day when the Lord's Supper is ministered, which is commonly used once a month, or so oft as the Congregation shall think expedient, the minister useth to say as followeth." The "First Book of Discipline" (1561) states that "the 'Order of Geneva,' which now is used in some of our churches, is sufficient to instruct the diligent reader, how that both these sacraments may be rightly ministered." Further, it declares, under the head of Policy, that "foure times in the yeare we think sufficient to the administration of the Lord's Table, which we desire to be distincted that the superstitions of times may be avoided." . . . "We do not deny but any severall kirk for reasonable causes may change the time, and may minister oftener, but we study to repress superstition."

The "Second Book of Discipline" (1581) says nothing on this particular matter. The "Westminster Confession" (1647) is similarly silent. The "Larger Catechism" says it "is to be frequently celebrated." But the formal judgment of the Westminster divines had

previously been embodied in the "Directory for Worship" (1645). It is there stated—"The Communion, or Supper of the Lord, is frequently to be celebrated, but how often, may be considered and determined by the ministers and other church governors of each congregation, as they shall find most convenient for the comfort and edification of the people committed to their charge."

From all which it appears that, in the authoritative documents of Presbyterianism, no hard and fast line has ever been laid down. The "First Book of Discipline" and the "Westminster Directory" are in complete harmony. The mind of the Church as to frequent communicating is quite manifest, and it is just as manifest that a congregation's power to vary its practice according to circumstances has always been recognised.

There were some Acts of Assembly, however, bearing on the matter. The Assembly of 1562 lays down that "a uniform order is to be kept in administrating the Sacraments,—and that the Communion is to be four times in the year within the burrows, and twice in the year in country parishes." During the struggle that followed in the early part of the Seventeenth Century to introduce Prelacy this was not carried out, in numbers of instances. For we find the Assembly of 1638 approved of "order being taken by Presbyteries, that the Lord's Supper be more frequently administered both in burgh and landward than it hath been in these years bygone." The leaders of the Second Reformation thus took measures to remedy the remissness of a time of declension.

And the idea that the change from quarterly to semi-annual, or less frequent Communion, was the doing of the Protestors cannot be maintained. It is not only without evidence, but even against evidence.

The division of the Presbyterians into Resolutioners and Protestors took place in 1650, and was every way sad and deplorable. But the Protestors were wiser than the Resolutioners, though not so worldly-wise. Their opponents had admirable and excellent men among them, some of whom confessed afterward the mistake they made. The Protestors were confessedly more sagacious than their opponents, and as a whole more earnest and devoted. Whatever special neglect there was of the Lord's Supper is thus presumptively to be laid at the door of the Resolutioners rather than of the Protestors. It is on record that, from mere policy of the former, the Lord's Supper was not observed for years in some of the largest towns and cities in the kingdom, *e.g.*, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Dundee. While in 1654 from a meeting of Protestors in Edinburgh the instruction went forth, "to have monthly fasts and communions as they could have them."

After the Restoration of 1660, when the more zealous ministers were ejected and hunted for their lives, the Communion was with difficulty in numbers of places dispensed once a year. And the same need of pressure to keep up even an annual observance of the ordinance appears after the Revolution Settlement all through the