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THE PRESBYTERIAN INTERPRETATION OF SCOTTISH HISTORY, 1800-1914

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ABSTRACT

The nineteenth century saw the revival and widespread propagation in Scotland of a view of Scottish history that put Presbyterianism at the heart of the nation's identity, and told the story of Scotland's history largely in terms of the church's struggle for religious and constitutional liberty. Key to this development was the Anti-Burgher minister Thomas M'Crie, who, spurred by attacks on Presbyterianism found in eighteenth-century and contemporary historical literature, between the years 1811 and 1819 wrote biographies of John Knox and Andrew Melville and a vindication of the Covenanters. M'Crie generally followed the very hard line found in the Whig-Presbyterian polemical literature that emerged from the struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth century; he was particularly emphatic in support of the independence of the church from the state within its own sphere. His defence of his subjects embodied a Scottish Whig interpretation of British history, in which British constitutional liberties were prefigured in Scotland and in a considerable part won for the British people by the struggles of Presbyterian Scots during the seventeenth century. M'Crie's work won a huge following among the Scottish reading public, and spawned a revival in Presbyterian historiography which lasted through the century. His influence was considerably enhanced through the affinity felt for his work by the Anti-Intrusionists in the Church of Scotland and their successors in the Free Church (1843-1900), who were particularly attracted by his uncompromising defence of the spiritual independence of the church. The steady stream of historical works from Free Church ministers and laymen during the lifetime of the church corresponded with a very weak output of academic history, and in consequence the Free Church interpretation was

probably the strongest single influence in forming the Scots' picture of their history in the late nineteenth century. Much of this interpretation, particularly the belief in the particularly Presbyterian nature of the Scottish character and of the British constitution, was accepted by historians of the other main branches of the Presbyterian community, while the most determined opposition to the thesis was found in the work of historians of the Episcopal Church. Although the hold of the Presbyterian interpretation was weakened at the end of the century by factors including the merger of most of the Free Church in 1900 and the increasing appearance from 1900 of secular and sometimes anti-Presbyterian Scottish history, elements of it continued to influence the Scottish national self-image well into the twentieth century.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work which it embodies has been done by myself. I confirm that the work has not been included in another thesis.

Signed: G. Neil Forsyth

Preface

Some years ago in Winnipeg, Manitoba, my Aunt Anne showed me a school text that had been used by her Aunt Margaret when she was growing up in Scotland, and asked me what I could make of it. It was a copy of *Our Country: A History of Scotland for the Young*, by the Free Church minister James Mackenzie, inscribed 'Maggie Forsyth, Logie Almond, 1871'. A cursory examination showed that it contained a version of Scottish history that was quite unfamiliar to me. Later, when, as a recent retiree, I was looking for a topic for a thesis on Scottish history, it occurred to me that my Great Aunt Maggie's school text might provide a key to an understanding of the manner in which the Scots of the nineteenth century – some of them, at any rate – saw the world. This thesis is the result.

Dedication

To my father, John Ewing Forsyth, who, though born on the Canadian prairies, embodied many of the virtues, and not a few of the opinions, of his Free Church ancestors in Scotland.

List of abbreviations

AFCS	*Annals of the Free Church of Scotland*
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
ECI	*Edinburgh Christian Instructor*
FES	*Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae*
RP	Reformed Presbyterian Church
SHR	*Scottish Historical Review*
UP	United Presbyterian Church

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Presbyterianism has almost ceased to be a perceived component in the Scottish identity, but it once loomed large. Visible reminders of past glories, and not just churches, are common: visitors can find statues of Knox, memorials to Covenanters, and graves of Presbyterian martyrs in many parts of the country without too much effort. In Scotland's libraries as well are monuments: works of academic and popular history in which the greatest event in Scotland's past was the Reformation, and the struggle of Presbyterian churchmen with their rulers was the struggle of the Scottish people. For most of the nineteenth century and a good portion of the twentieth much of Scottish history was written this way, or at least written in such a manner that a Presbyterian readership would find little to offend it. All this has changed, irrevocably and quite abruptly. Within the last half century such books have ceased to be written, and the great inventory of Presbyterian history has almost ceased to be read.

More than this, the extinction of this school of historiography, and for that matter its previous existence, have gone almost unremarked. There are no works available on the Presbyterian school of historiography, and in other historiographical works the Presbyterians emerge, if at all, as bit players, standing in the path of historiographical trends of more relevance to later centuries. The common indifference to religious factors in history unquestionably reflects the fact that present-day writers live in a highly secular society. Nineteenth-century Scots, however, did not. The rise of Evangelicalism in the first half of the century was associated with an increase in

Christian observance throughout the country. After the cataclysm of the Disruption in 1843, three Presbyterian denominations competed vigorously for the allegiance of the urban masses, their volunteers knocking on doors, teaching Sunday schools, establishing penny banks and running literacy classes and many other services. Until 1872, Presbyterian bodies ran two school systems. Rates of church attendance at mid-century were already high by historical standards, and seem to have risen steadily over the next fifty years; peak attendance was reached in 1905, with 50.5 % of the population in church each Sunday, with urban attendance rates not greatly different from those in rural areas.[1] Levels of nominal adherence were of course much higher, and the great majority of adherents were still Presbyterians.

For that reason alone it would be an error to doubt the importance of the manner in which the Presbyterians understood their history. Their viewpoint informed much of what was written about Scotland's past until the middle of the twentieth century and was for a time during the nineteenth century probably the dominant interpretation, particularly at a popular level. It was called upon repeatedly during the great disputes that racked the Church of Scotland during the third and fourth decades of the century, and probably played a part in determining their outcome. It created and maintained a legend, amounting almost to a cult, of the later Scottish Covenanters as martyrs and heroes of the faith and of Scottish liberty. Even in its decline, it played a great part in defining the Scots' image of themselves. It is worth examining.

Presbyterian or otherwise, the historiography of nineteenth-century Scotland has not been dealt with in much detail in any published work. The one frontal attack on the subject was Marinell Ash's *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (1980), an

[1] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 47

examination of the decline, after a promising start, of Scottish historical writing during the century. Dr Ash particularly lamented the failure of Scottish historiography to develop the kind of consensus to which Walter Scott aspired, in which all aspects of the Scottish polity might find themselves represented. She concluded that the problem lay in the main with creeping anglicisation of the university system, as a consequence of which Scottish history had by the end of the seventh decade of the century ceased to be interest or practical use to the student population.[2] But she was also scathing against the Presbyterians, whose intolerance, backwardness and fissiparous tendencies she believed bore a considerable responsible for the reduction of Scottish historical writing to 'a succession of historical kailyards'.[3] Her account of the historiography of the first part of the century included a discussion of Thomas M'Crie, the most famous Presbyterian historian of the century, but thereafter there was no explicit acknowledgement that the Presbyterians wrote any history of their own.

The other writer whose work most directly concerns the subject of this thesis is Colin Kidd, whose *Subverting Scotland's Past* (1993) detailed the path of whig historiography during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dr Kidd's central narrative was that of the destruction of the old Buchananite mythology of the origin of the Scottish state, leaving nothing which might have been useful for the elaboration of a nationalist ethos in defence of Scottish independence. While most of the work concerned eighteenth century historiography, it concluded with a brief discussion of the nineteenth century, in which he noted that there were still practitioners of old-style whig history among the Secessionists, particularly

[2] Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), 149-50
[3] *Ibid.*, 152

represented by Thomas M'Crie and his mentor, Archibald Bruce.[4] Dr Kidd did not believe, however, that the influence of these men had been effective in keeping whig history alive outside their own denomination. In the long run, Dr Kidd's picture of Scottish historiography in the nineteenth century, though more complex than that of Marinell Ash, is no more optimistic. By the end of it Scottish history was dead, killed by the very efficiency of its eighteenth-century practitioners in destroying the mythological framework upon which a nationalist historiography might have been based.

It is in this area that the present study has attempted to extend Dr Kidd's analysis beyond its original frame. If one judges by the criteria of publication and readership, there was, in fact, quite a vigorous practice of history in nineteenth-century Scotland. It was based not on academic institutions but on churches; its practitioners were Presbyterian ministers and laymen, drawn particularly from the Secessionists and the Free Church of Scotland, but involving most other Presbyterian denominations as well. They made copious and enthusiastic use of the Scottish past, although not to construct a rationale for political independence, for they felt no need of one. They used it rather to defend their faith against the Enlightenment tradition and its heirs, and to carry on a hostile dialogue with other competing historiographical traditions of nineteenth-century Scotland, particularly that of the Scottish Episcopal Church. They produced few works of enduring merit, but they were certainly influential in shaping the image of the Scottish people as church-going, hard-working, law-abiding, school-attending and fundamentally Presbyterian. More than this, they succeeded where eighteenth-century writers, in Colin Kidd's analysis, failed[5]: they elaborated a British whiggism, in which the Scots were not passive recipients of English freedoms

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[4] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993), 210

[5] *Ibid.*, 272

but full participants in the creation of the British constitution and in their own liberation from Stuart bondage.

A historiography embodying a Scottish form of British whiggism has obvious implications for the broad question of Scottish identity and nationalism. That field, unlike nineteenth-century historiography, has been well ploughed, particularly in recent years, with opinion on the matter evolving rapidly. Early works on the subject, particularly that of H.J. Hanham,[6] tended to focus on early precursors to twentieth-century nationalist movements, notably the National Association for the Vindication of Scottish Rights, while acknowledging that nationalism of this type was not particularly widespread. Subsequent works by a new generation of nationalist writers, most notably Tom Nairn's *The Break-up of Britain*,[7] were attempts to solve the conundrum of Scotland's failure to develop a nationalism on the same model as that of the Czechs and other mid-European cultures, one which would have sought a match of nation with independent state. More recently, something of a consensus seems to have emerged that nineteenth-century Scotland did, indeed, have a nationalism of its own, and one which even nationalist writers acknowledge was perfectly compatible with loyalty to the union.[8] Christopher Harvie used the term 'non-nationalist nationalism'[9]; Graeme Morton, writing from a different perspective, called it 'Unionist-nationalism'.[10]

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[6] H.J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1969), and 'Mid-Century Scottish Nationalism: Romantic and Radical', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), 143-179
[7] Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (London, 1981)
[8] Richard Finlay, 'The Rise and Fall of Popular Imperialism in Scotland, 1850-1950', in *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol 113, no. 1 (1997), 15
[9] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism*. Second Edition (London and New York, 1997), 34
[10] Graeme Morton, *Unionist Nationalism* (East Linton, 1999)

The nature and quality of the national identity remain a matter of debate. For R.J. Finlay, it was an essentially artificial construct, drawing heavily on the works of Scott and on tartanry, a 'whole range of symbolic representations of Scotland most of which belonged to the Highlands'.[11] Even for writers with a more conventional perspective on nineteenth-century nationalism, discussion of the subject usually partakes of the vocabulary of failure, as if the Scots had settled for something less than the best. Harvie's comment on national movements is quite typical: 'The entente between emotive nationalism and effective unionism gelded any political movement'.[12] The impression most often given, even when not made explicit, is of a national identity or nationalism markedly lacking in vital force. That feebleness was reflected in the society's historical observances: Rosalind Mitchison observed of Scottish history that it remained linked to a childish fictitious picture of the country's history; [13] David McCrone spoke of monuments raised to 'meaningless or selective images of Scotland's past'.[14]

The question of the nature of Scotland's British identity has also been the subject of debate. It has been most saliently addressed by Linda Colley, who argued for a powerful British nationalism, albeit a recently-created one sitting atop three much older nationalisms.[15] That view has been criticised by several recent writers on the topic: Brockliss and Eastwood, for example, have argued that there was no formal attempt to make Britishness a primary cultural identity.[16] Richard Finlay has gone

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[11] Richard Finlay, 'Caledonia or North Britain? Scottish Identity in the Eighteenth Century', in Davit Broun et al, eds., *Image and Identity: the Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 150
[12] Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism*, 22
[13] Rosalind Mitchison, 'Nineteenth Century Scottish Nationalism: the Cultural Background', in Rosalind Mitchison, ed., *The Roots of Nationalism* (Edinburgh, 1980), 138
[14] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London, 1992), 200
[15] Linda Colley, *Britons* (London, 1991)
[16] Laurence Brockliss , David Eastwood, and Michael John, 'From Dynastic Union to Unitary State: The European Experience', in L. Brockliss and D. Eastwood, eds., *A Union of Multiple Identities* (Manchester and New York, 1997), 195

considerably farther in arguing that the roots of British identity in Scotland were 'very shallow indeed'.[17]

The churches come into this literature at various points. The importance of Protestantism to the union has been noted by a number of writers; it was particularly stressed by Linda Colley, who regarded it as the unifying factor that underlay all the others: 'Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Britain possible'.[18] Of Presbyterianism itself, however, little is said, and that usually unflattering. The Presbyterians were of course unionist, and very few of them were part of the canon of nineteenth-century nationalist precursors. Where mentioned at all, they are likely to appear as backward-looking influences, standing in the way of progress in whatever direction the writer felt that Scotland ought to have been going. 'By the 1880s' Christopher Harvie noted in regard to the decline in the Scottish education system, 'as the reformed English universities were gaining momentum in scholarship and research, the Free Kirk was persecuting Robertson Smith, its greatest theologian and a pioneer of social anthropology, for heresy'.[19] The Kailyard School, the principal literary movement to have grown out of the Free Church, is regularly savaged as a device for avoiding consideration of urban problems, or whatever other issues the author believes ought not to have been avoided.[20] R.J. Finlay, once again a nay-sayer, went so far as to deny that the Protestantism was even a unifying force within Great Britain: 'Evangelicalism within the church of Scotland, the growth of dissent and the persistence of patronage disputes all show that, far from a common sense of Protestantism developing in Britain, it was a major source of division'.[21]

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[17] Finlay, 'Caledonia', 153
[18] Colley, *Britons*, 54
[19] Christopher Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism*, 93
[20] See, for example, David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London, 1992), 177-180, and Harvie, *Scotland and Nationalism*, 99; both regarded the Kailyard as a means of avoiding confrontation with urban realities.
[21] Finlay, *Caledonia*, 151

Even those authors who acknowledge the churches to have been an important part of civil society have shown little interest in their picture of the nation. Proto-nationalists such as Steill and William Burns receive more space, in many accounts, than all the churches put together. But in nineteenth-century terms, these figures were odd men out; while the churches were part of the mainstream; indeed, as community leaders, school teachers and prolific writers of Scottish history, churchmen did a great deal to *define* the mainstream. They were unionists and nationalists, in a century when that combination of identities was the norm in Scotland. That in itself is a reason for looking at the history that they wrote; for the church's national vision and its historical vision were inseparable, and most of what they had to say about the Scottish nation appears in their voluminous historical writing. But apart from Colin Kidd, who has noted the influence of Thomas M'Crie and the collector of Covenanter lore Robert Simpson,[22] few writers on nineteenth-century nationalism give evidence of having had any exposure to this literature at all.[23]

The histories that the Presbyterians wrote also throw light on the churches themselves. Many of the major contentions within and among the various branches of the churches, in a particularly contentious century, are reflected in their historical interpretations in one way or another. The leading Presbyterian historian of the period, Thomas M'Crie, began his historical career partly in reaction to disturbing trends within his own branch of the church, the Anti-Burgher Secession. Later works were produced in response to tensions within the Church of Scotland between the

[22] Colin Kidd, 'Sentiment, Race and Revival: Scottish Identities in the Aftermath of Enlightenment', in Laurence Brockliss and David Eastwood, eds., *A Union of Multiple Identities*, 114

[23] Christopher Harvie's 'The Covenanting Tradition', in Graham Walker and Tom Gallagher, eds., *Sermons and Battle Hymns* (Edinburgh, 1990), shows a familiarity with the Free Church writer James Dodds and a few lesser lights.

Popular party and the Moderates, a struggle which eventually led to the Disruption of 1843, an event that was preceded by a bitter polemic literature. Support was found in history for the strengthening of the parish system at the time of Thomas Chalmers's experiments in that field during the 1840s; for the liturgical reforms in the Established Church in the 1880s; for opposition to the court ruling of 1903 which gave the assets of the merged Free Church to the Highland-based remnant that refused to accept union with the United Presbyterians in 1900; for the maintenance of the Establishment principle in the early part of the century and for its abolition in the later part. Much of the literature on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was bitter against the principle of episcopacy, a position which, espoused by nineteenth-century Presbyterian writers, put them at odds with the Scottish Episcopal Church of their own day. The Episcopalians replied in kind; indeed with better books, if with little impact on the Presbyterian majority. Catholicism came in for even greater abuse; the Catholics generally did not reply, although one interesting history of Scotland from a Catholic point of view did emerged from the Tractarian wing of the Scottish Episcopalians.[24] Through the century one can also witness a gradual softening of attitudes and the rise of a more ecumenical spirit in among the Presbyterians, although that evolution was, in the Free Church histories, so grudging as to be almost imperceptible.

The Free Church will loom very large in this study. It was from its origins in the Evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland the most historically conscious of the Presbyterian bodies; it used Scottish history to justify its own separation from the Established Church and its continued existence outside it; its ministers and laymen were responsible for about half of the history written by Presbyterians during the

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[24] M.G.J. Kinloch, *A History of Scotland Chiefly in its Ecclesiastical Aspect* (London, 1888)

century. Dynamic, intolerant, creative, the Free Church is one of the most interesting phenomena of nineteenth-century Scotland, and it is a matter of some puzzlement that no one has ever written a history of it.[25] Much useful information on the Church, as on the other pieces of the ecclesiastical mosaic in the nineteenth century, can be found in John Burleigh's standard *A Church History of Scotland*, A.C. Cheyne's *The Transforming of the Kirk* (1983), in various works by Callum Brown, notably *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (1997), and in the two volumes on the nineteenth-century church by Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch;[26] but the overall cultural influence of this body has never been examined in any detail. The Scottish history that came from the Free Church milieu was not among its finer products; but it did give some idea of the vitality of the body, and of its understanding of its own place in the history of Scotland.

The Free Church is only part of a very large canvas. The topic covers a huge area, and could fill many theses. This one will consider the period from the turn of the nineteenth century until the onset of the Great War, during which Presbyterian historiography witnessed a revival, achieved the peak of its later influence, and began a decline that turned out to be terminal. Because the Presbyterians' view of their history concentrated so heavily on the struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, most of the thesis will focus on their depiction of this period, specifically from 1557 to 1707. The sources considered are primarily published general and ecclesiastical histories of Scotland, including academic and popular works, school text books, a small number of children's histories and Sunday School prize works; use has also been made of biographies and books on specialised topics such as the

[25] Such a book has been written about the Free Church of Canada: R.W. Vaudry, *The Free Church in Victorian Canada, 1829-1861* (Waterloo, Ontario, 1989)

[26] Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874* (Edinburgh, 1975)

later Covenanters. Concentration is of course on Presbyterian sources, but works by members of other denominations and writers of a secular cast have also been considered, in order to establish the historiographical background. Works of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century fiction that touch on the religious struggles of the earlier period are legion, and for just that reason have been excluded from consideration; but poetry, which almost every literate person in the nineteenth century seemed to write, has on occasion been used as evidence, as have grave markers, statues and inscriptions on monuments.

Of the literary works, almost all were found in one or more of five Scottish repositories: the National Library of Scotland, the New College Library in Edinburgh, the Edinburgh Central Library, the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the library of the University of Glasgow. The order of listing reflects the usefulness of the repositories from the point of view of this study, and in fact the lion's share of the books considered here were found in the first two. An attempt, first, was made to look at all the general histories of Scotland and general ecclesiastical histories of Scotland that were written during the period 1800-1914 from whatever point of view. Secondly, historical works written from the Presbyterian point of view covering any significant part of the 1557-1707 period were examined; this category of work included works on the Reformation and, more particularly, on the Covenanting period. Thirdly, specialised books by Presbyterians, as for example biographies of Covenanting martyrs or works on the gravestones of Covenanters, were sampled, usually by looking at one book by each author of such works. Fourthly, school text books on Scottish history, of whatever provenance, were examined.

The particular problem with all these categories except the first concerned availability. There was often surprisingly little overlap between repositories; that is, only one copy of a book might be found among the five libraries. That in itself suggests that many other books in these categories may not have survived, a surmise supported by fly-leaf references to books that cannot be found anywhere. The category of school text was a particular disappointment, with only twenty-four examples found in all the repositories. That being the case all twenty-four texts were used, rather than subjecting them to some kind of sampling technique.

Presbyterian history was not invented in the nineteenth century. It may be said[27] to have begun at the Reformation, specifically with John Knox's *History of the Reformation of the Church of Scotland* (1587), and it continued in the form of a huge body of polemical literature written by participants in the subsequent struggles and their supporters well into the eighteenth century. These works, which often lay in manuscript form until the publishing frenzy inspired by Scott and his colleagues, were to form source materials for the more scholarly treatments by historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some of the works that emerged from both sides of the controversy will be mentioned frequently in later chapters of the thesis, and may conveniently be described here.

The first of these, and certainly among the most influential, was George Buchanan's monumental *History of Scotland* (1582). Buchanan lived through the Reformation, and the last portion of his book is a record of the political events of that period, from the point of view of a partisan of the Reformed Church and a bitter enemy of Queen

[27] The term 'Presbyterian' can properly be applied to the Church of Scotland only from the inauguration in 1578 of the Second Book of Discipline, which introduced presbyteries as a fourth level of church courts. Subsequent Presbyterian writers, however, never had any doubt that they stood in direct line from the church of Knox, and the term has often been loosely applied to the Scottish church from the Reformation.

Mary. It was much quoted in later centuries. More than that, Buchanan had some title to be regarded as the founder of Scottish whiggism. His enormously influential pamphlet *De jure regni* laid down the core whig principle that the ruler is subject to law, and that the subjects have a right to depose an unfit sovereign;[28] and his *History* provided many examples (often spurious) of the process at work. John Knox's *History of the Reformation* (1587) was a history of the great events through his own eyes; more accessible than Buchanan's work – having been written in English rather than Latin – it was extensively cited by anyone whose work covered the period.

The first major source to appear after the Reformation was the diary, or more properly memoirs, of Andrew Melville's nephew James Melville. It served as a record of the controversies in which his redoubtable uncle was involved during the last three decades of the sixteenth century, from the point of view of an uncritical acolyte. Consulted in manuscript for over two centuries, it was first published by Scott's Bannatyne Club in 1829.[29] Melville's younger contemporary, David Calderwood (1575-1650), was probably the most quoted of any of the historians discussed here. A Church of Scotland minister, he was expelled from his pulpit in 1617 by James VI as a result of his opposition to the Articles of Perth.[30] Over the remainder of his life he compiled a huge work consisting of text and original documents, of which a greatly condensed version was published in 1675 under the title *The True History of the Church of Scotland; from the Beginning of the Reformation, unto the End of the Reigne of King James.* The full text, minus the documents, was published by the Wodrow Society, 1842-49. As might be expected, Calderwood was unsparing of his enemy James, and his work was much favoured by

[28] George Buchanan, *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stuart,* ed. W.A. Gatherer (Edinburgh 1958), 5
[29] *The Diary of Mr James Melville 1556-1601* (Edinburgh, 1829)
[30] *Dictionary of National Biography* (London, 1908), vol. iii, 696-8 (G.W. Burnett)

Presbyterian writers; but its detail made it a necessary source for anyone writing about the period. Calderwood's colleague John Row (1568-1646) was another minister who fell foul of the authorities over the Perth articles.[31] Late in life he wrote a memorial on the government of the church since the Reformation, titled *Historie of the Kirk of Scotland, from the Year 1558 to August 1637.* It existed in manuscript until 1842, when it was published for the Wodrow Society, one of several bodies established in the nineteenth century to make historical manuscripts available to the public. Unsurprisingly, it was also grist for the Presbyterian mill.

For the latter half of the seventeenth century the Presbyterians had many sources at hand. One useful author was James Kirkton (1620?-1699), a minister deprived in 1662 and subsequently driven into exile in Holland. At his death he left a manuscript titled *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Year 1678* which was published in 1817 by the Edinburgh firm Ballantyne. It became a favourite of Presbyterian writers, in part because of its highly idealised picture of the church during the Cromwellian period. The travails of the later Covenanters produced a series of classic accounts, familiar to Presbyterian readers. The favourites included *Naphtali* (1667) by Sir James Steuart, a history covering the struggle to 1667, and included the much-quoted dying speech of the martyr Hew McKail, as well as those of those of Argyle, Wariston, Guthrie and other favourites; *A Cloud of Witnesses* (1714), a compilation of last speeches of Covenanting martyrs from 1680 onwards which was reprinted more than twenty times during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and *A Hind Let Loose* (1687) by the Cameronian minister Alexander Shields, an extended polemic which took all of church-state relations in Scotland as its subject, and found the Cameronian position

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[31] *DNB* (1909) vol. xvii, 329 (Miss C. Fell Smith)

on the question to be the right one. Early in the eighteenth century the Church of Scotland minister Robert Wodrow (1679-1734) compiled what he intended to be a definitive account of the Covenanting period, the *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland, from the Restauration to the Revolution* (1721), in two volumes. Conservative in outlook, Wodrow was writing at a time when the church was under attack by its Episcopalian enemies as an innately rebellious body unsuited to the demands of civil society. He accordingly was at pains to present the great mass of the later Covenanters, from whom he carefully distinguished the Cameronians, as innocent victims of persecution.[32] Impressively researched, his work was of considerable use to subsequent historians.

Sources sympathetic to the Episcopalian viewpoint were less common. Much the most famous was *The History of the Church of Scotland* (1655) by John Spottiswoode (1565-1639), Charles I's last archbishop. Undertaken at the request of James VI, the work made a hero of James and justified episcopacy, but it contained so much useful information about the Reformation period that its selective use by Presbyterian historians was inescapable. The same was true of *The History of the Affairs of the Church and State of Scotland* (1734) by Robert Keith (1681-1757), who was primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church for the last fourteen years of his life. His work covered the period from the beginning of the Reformation until 1568.

All these works were in large measure party political tracts, written by men who had been personally involved in the events and controversies with which they dealt. Scholarly history of the post-Reformation period, with at least some degree of detachment, may be said to have made its appearance with the publication of William

[32] Colin Kidd, 'Constructing a Civil Religion: Scots Presbyterians and the Eighteenth-Century British State', in *The Scottish Churches and the Union Parliament, 1707-1999* (Edinburgh, 2001), 12-13

Robertson's *History of Scotland* in 1759. For the remainder of the century, while Presbyterian narratives of the church-state struggles of the previous centuries continued to exist at the level of popular literature, scholarly historical works most often reflected the concerns of the Scottish Enlightenment. David Hume's *History of England* (1754-62), portions of which concerned Scotland, and Malcolm Laing's *History of Scotland* (1800), discussed in chapter two, were the most prominent examples of this tendency. In the first decade of the new century, however, the secularisation of historical discourse stung into existence a reaction within the conservative wing of the Presbyterian community. The polemics of Knox, Calderwood and their epigones were revisited, clothed in academic finery and sent forth to do battle. That reaction, and the subsequent progress of the revived Presbyterian interpretation of Scottish history, will form the subject of this thesis.

Chapter two will examine the state of historical writing in Scotland in the early decades of the century, a period when most academic history was not written from a Presbyterian perspective, and certainly not from that of the conservative and Evangelical wings. Chapter three concerns the career of Thomas M'Crie, a Secessionist minister whose works on Knox and Melville and the Covenanters evoked a powerful response from the Scottish reading public, while essentially re-imposing an interpretation drawn from the polemicists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Chapter four traces the development of the Non-Intrusionist school of history, which drew Dr M'Crie's view of history into the Presbyterian mainstream and made it the part of the ideology of the new Free Church. Chapter five discusses the Presbyterian interpretation in the writing of general and ecclesiastical histories of Scotland from the last half of the nineteenth century, notes the differences between the different Presbyterian denominations and compares them with

Episcopalian and secular writers. Chapter Six concerns popular historical works from mid-century until the onset of the Great War, with particular attention to the abundant literature concerning the Covenanters. Chapter Seven examines school texts produced throughout the period 1800-1914. The concluding chapter will summarise the arguments made in the body of the text and discuss the influence the Presbyterian school of history for Scottish culture during the nineteenth century, and in particular for Scottish national identity. In the interim it should become apparent that this influence was far-reaching and enduring.

Chapter 2

The Scottish Historical Landscape in the First Part of the Nineteenth Century: General and Ecclesiastical Histories of Scotland, 1754-1832

The middle of the eighteenth century marked the appearance of the first recognisably modern narrative works on the history of Scotland. After the publication of the first and best known of these, Dr Robertson's ground-breaking *The History of Scotland* (1759), works of general Scottish history, aimed at a broad readership, began to appear with some regularity; and indeed the flow never ceased. Between these new works and those of the era of James Melville, David Calderwood and their contemporaries, a huge gulf lay fixed, for the two stood on opposite sides of the Scottish Enlightenment, which left ideas about the nature and content of history irrevocably changed. In place of partisan tracts, written by active participants in the controversies they described, one now had studied works of literature, written by academics and other professionals, which derived their content in large part from archival sources. At the same time, the straightforward division between whig and Presbyterian accounts on one hand and tory and Episcopalian on the other had disappeared; in its place was a historiographical environment of much greater subtlety, which contained many writers who were contemptuous of both sides of the old debate. For those within the Presbyterian community who had been weaned on the traditional, and formerly dominant, whig-Presbyterian narrative – and there were many such, even at the end of the century – the new historiography was often deeply unsettling. Decades would pass, however, before their views were once again represented within the mainstream of scholarly history.

The first, and critical, blow to the inherited whig consensus was the dissolution of the powerful legacy of George Buchanan, whose history of Scotland had stood from the end of the sixteenth century as the standard interpretation of Scotland's history, character and politics. Buchanan's great work turned out to be vulnerable to the corrosive forces of the eighteenth century on several fronts. It embodied, in the first place, substantial elements of the historical mythologies that had been inherited from the controversies associated with the Wars of Independence. After doing some pruning, Buchanan had elected to retain the fables relating to the foundation of the kingdom in the fourth century BC and its subsequent rule by forty kings, with imaginative names like Eugenius and Gillis, before the appearance of Fergus Mac Erc. The forty kings were shown to be apocryphal in 1729 with the publication of Thomas Innes's *Critical Essay on the Ancient Inhabitants of the Northern Parts of Britain, or Scotland*, and the entire mythological edifice deriving from Hector Boece and John of Fordun was subsequently swept away by the diligent researches of Lord Hailes and other figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Secondly, the central role assigned by Buchanan to the Scottish nobility as guardians of the nation's liberties was highly offensive to the sensibilities of Colin Kidd's 'sociological whigs', who had ceased to regard the nobility as guardians of anything but their own interests.[1] Finally, as will be seen, in the latter part of the century Buchanan was found vulnerable on a third front: the defenders of the honour of Mary Queen of Scots subjected his narrative to close analysis, and found him to be a party propagandist whose history could not be trusted even when it dealt with his own times.[2]

Buchanan's overthrow presaged the eclipse of the inherited Presbyterian narrative of the Reformation and its aftermath. The works produced during this period

[1] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993), 269
[2] See below, 45-6

represented a number of different viewpoints, only a minority of which were even nominally Presbyterian. The anti-religious element of the Scottish Enlightenment should not of course be exaggerated; many of the leading figures of the time would, as academics, have been required to subscribe to the Westminster Confession; and some, including William Robertson and members of his circle, were ordained ministers. At the same time, the writings of the sociological whigs were for the most part unremittingly secular in tone; further, though they were whigs, their whiggism was for the most part of a very conservative kind. For these reasons alone, the historians of the Enlightenment could not reasonably be expected to be sympathetic to an interpretation of Scottish history that was pervasively providentialist and often quite revolutionary in its implications. Few of them were.

The authors who produced major works of Scottish history during the second half of the eighteenth century differed in considerable respects from each other and defy easy classification. For purposes of their attitudes towards Presbyterianism, however, it is possible to establish three broad categories. The first may be described as the secular face of the Scottish Enlightenment, men who were most likely to be unsympathetic to providentialist explanations of historical processes. Of these historians, the first and much the most influential was also the most openly hostile to Presbyterianism. David Hume (1711-1776) never wrote a history of Scotland; indeed, he set out, famously, to write a history of Britain, but desisted, finding little of substance in the history of his own country. His *History of England*, however, contained sufficient asides relating to Scotland to make clear where his sympathies lay. The *History* was an evolving document; it began to appear in 1753, and its completion and revision occupied Hume's leisure hours until his death in 1776. It changed substantially in

outlook throughout.[3] Initially based on a whig narrative of England's political development, it displayed, through successive revisions, progressively increasing scepticism towards such whig shibboleths as the ancient constitution and the social contract, and a rising sympathy towards some of the tory protagonists. Never a tory properly speaking – he declared himself generally in favour of whig principles,[4] and thought a republican constitution probably the best one[5] – he nonetheless managed to throw some banana skins in the path of the whig parade, and to provide some comfort to its tory opponents.

For Presbyterians, Hume's religious views were more troubling than his politics. His reservations on the subject went beyond those of the ordinary non-juror; he believed that Puritanism was a live issue, and a continuing threat to liberty and civil order.[6] For this reason he was not disposed to show any sympathy in his depiction of their Scottish counterparts, who were almost always treated with ridicule when they appeared in his narrative. Thus Knox was termed a 'rustic apostle'[7] and portrayed as a conceited fanatic, meditating with glee on the murder of Cardinal Beaton, and preening himself on his achievement in reducing Queen Mary to tears. Though not an apologist for Mary, Hume affected to believe that her treatment by Knox and his brethren made her a much worse queen than she might have been: 'to the harsh and preposterous usage which this princess met with, may, in part, be ascribed, those errors of her subsequent conduct, which seemed so little of a piece with the general

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[3] David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution of 1688.* Reprint of the edition of 1786 (1894), vol. i, viii (introduction)

[4] 'My views of things are more conformable to Whig principles; my representation of persons to Tory prejudices.' Cited in Colin Kidd, 'The Rehabilitation of Scottish Jacobitism' in *SHR* lxxxvii (1998), 64. From a letter from Hume to John Clephane, [1756?] in J.Y.T. Greig, ed. *The Letters of David Hume* (Oxford, 1932), i. 237

[5] David Hume, *History of Great Britain,* ed. Duncan Forbes, 27 (from Forbes's introduction)

[6] *Ibid.*, 46

[7] David Hume, *History of England*, vol. ii, 353.

tenor of her character'.[8] Hume delighted in showing the clergy at their most absurd: prophesying the vengeance of God on Scotland for the ornaments some ladies wore on their petticoats, abolishing every rite or ceremony that might have made worship palatable. Moreover, he held them responsible for much of what was wrong about the country:

> by the prevalence of fanaticism, a gloomy and sullen disposition had established itself among the people; a spirit obstinate and dangerous, independent and disorderly, animated equally with a contempt of authority, and a hatred to any other mode of religion, particularly to the catholic.[9]

Apart from gloom, their most salient characteristic was their craving for political power. Under James VI, the church's presumption of control over the civil power reached levels scarcely found 'even during the darkest night of papal superstition'.[10] All their ventures into the political sphere were informed by an intolerant fanaticism; the National Covenant was in the first instance designed to inflame hatred against Catholics, and in its effects was absurdly disproportionate to its ostensible cause:

> The treacherous, the cruel, the unrelenting Philip...was scarcely, during the previous century, opposed in the Low Countries with more determined fury, than was now, by the Scots, the mild, the humane Charles, attended with his inoffensive liturgy.[11]

While Presbyterian heroes were turned into villains, the traditional villains, if not made heroes, were at least given the benefit of understanding. Hume referred to 'the pacific, and not unskilful government of James',[12] commending him among other things for his role in allaying feuds among the great families, while acknowledging

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[8] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 353
[9] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 48
[10] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 50
[11] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 187
[12] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 182

his personal weaknesses. He was rather harder on Charles I, but gave him credit at least for meaning well. Further, the connection between Presbyterians and liberty was completely lacking from Hume's work; the barbarous clergy displayed on his pages tend if anything to be working against liberty rather than for it. All this was extremely galling to Presbyterian sensibilities, the more so because of Hume's great popularity among the reading public; his work went through dozens of editions, and was still being read at the end of the nineteenth century.

Malcolm Laing, who published *The History of Scotland, from the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI. to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms, in the Reign of Queen Anne* (2 vols, 1800), may be placed in Hume's tradition in the limited sense that they shared a common background in the Enlightenment and thoroughly secularist understanding of history. Laing (1762-1818), who was called to the bar in 1785, was one of a number of historians in this period with a legal background,[13] and his work is characterised by extensive research and a careful examination of evidence. His history seems to have been well received; he published a second edition in 1804, with an extra two volumes detailing the case against Queen Mary, and a third edition appeared in 1819.

Unlike Hume, Laing was an uncompromising whig. He expressed no sympathy whatever for the Stuarts; in their constitutional struggles, in Scotland as in England, they were quite simply always wrong. Queen Mary's guilt was incontestable, her degradation from the throne an act of simple justice. Her son James was 'corrupted by an early passion for power'[14], his reign in Scotland largely without achievement,

[13] *DNB*, (1909), vol. xi, 404-6 (J.M. Rigg)
[14] Malcolm Laing, *The History of Scotland, from the Union of the Crowns on the Accession of James VI. to the Throne of England, to the Union of the Kingdoms, in the Reign of Queen Anne.* Second edition (4 vols., 1804) vol. iii, 21

his reign after his accession to the English throne 'inglorious and useless'.[15] Charles I perverted the laws of Scotland and was responsible for the civil war; Charles II's administration was tyrannical and unjust, his brother's worse. Much of his account came from standard Presbyterian sources such as Calderwood and Wodrow, and he supported the Presbyterians whenever they came into conflict with the monarchy.

Laing was not, however, writing a Presbyterian version of Scottish history. In the first place, he did not like Presbyterians; his comments on them, indeed, often echo the vocabulary of Hume and Guthrie. 'A fanatical melancholy began to predominate', he wrote on the Reformation church, 'and, as a contagion descended from the preacher to his audience, and habitual gloom overspread the nation.' He was scathing on the intolerance and wrong-headedness that led them to try to impose their religious system on the English, and freely used terms like 'barbarous', 'violent', and 'indiscreet and intolerant bigotry'[16] in his descriptions of other examples of Presbyterian endeavour. Even the praise that he assigned to the church for its positive influence on social morality smacks of Gibbon's criterion of usefulness to the magistrate: 'Profane swearing', he noted approvingly, 'which diminishes our reverence for judicial oaths, was universally discontinued'.[17] At a later point he referred to 'a placid and calm indifference, which constitutes the happiest state of enlightened society'.[18] Calmly indifferent himself, he was prepared to support the church's political position only when it corresponded with his own.

Further, Laing did not regard the church's participation as an essential element in the achievement of British liberty; far from it: 'It was a misfortune peculiar to the age',

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[15] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 52
[16] *Ibid.*, vol. iv, 233
[17] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 482
[18] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 288-9

he remarked in condemning the Solemn League and Covenant, 'and the cause of miseries to each nation, that liberty was not a pure and unmixed flame, but was fed, and at length gradually contaminated by the spirit of religion.'[19] In fact, he saw only occasional evidences of Scottish contributions to liberty at all, and did not believe that the country, sunk in feudalism and intensely loyal to its monarchy, had any natural genius for democracy.

> Whatever principles of liberty had been originally inserted in its constitution, the democratical forms and schemes of government agitated in England, had made no impression upon a nation to whose genius they were adverse; as they were irreconcilable with the feudal aristocracy to which the people were inured.[20]

Had the Stuarts continued to rule in Scotland alone, the attachment of the nation to their house might still have preserved their descendants on the throne. The union of the crowns, however, made Scots the beneficiaries of an English revolution that swept away both arbitrary monarchy and the feudal privileges of their aristocracy. More than that, it enabled them to sink their national identity in one that was larger and better, an outcome which Laing viewed with nothing but equanimity.

> The recent benefits of the union are truly inestimable...National animosities are at length obliterated; and though regarded as scarcely naturalized, the Scots assimilate so fast to the language, the manners, and the taste of the English, that the two nations cease to be distinguished in the subsequent history of the British Empire.[21]

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[19] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 245
[20] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 409-10
[21] *Ibid.*, vol. iv, 395

Laing's near contemporary George Chalmers (1742-1825) was another lawyer turned historian, and another secularist.[22] His monumental *Caledonia* (3 vols, 1807) was a work as much of antiquarianism as of history, the last two of its three huge volumes consisting of a shire-by-shire description of Scotland's regional history, commerce and geography. Most of the general history in the first volume concerned the period before the reign of Bruce, and was devoted in the first instance to overthrowing whatever still lingered of the myths about Scotland's origins. Drawing on the work of Thomas Innes and other historians and his own considerable researches, he efficiently dismissed the Scythians, Fordun's ancient kings, the Gothic origin of the Picts, the antiquity of the Culdees, and other inherited canards, with many a kick at Buchanan on the way.

None of this would have troubled Laing, and the two had other attitudes in common. Both were legalists, believing in an inherited Scottish constitution – pre-Bruce, in Chalmers's case -- against which the actions of governments and other bodies in the country might be measured. Neither had any respect for the Scottish parliament, which in Chalmers's opinion 'never well performed the useful ends of wise legislation;' further, 'the freeing of the people of Scotland from their parliament was one of the important objects which were obtained by the union'.[23] Both enthusiastically supported the union, which Chalmers deemed 'one of the most fortunate events in their annals, whether we regard the happiness of the people or the power of the state'.[24] Both detested Presbyterians, whose worth they evaluated in terms of social utility and found wanting.

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[22] *DNB* (1908), vol. iii, 1354-5 (Aeneas Mackay)
[23] George Chalmers, *Caledonia: or, a Historical and Topographical Account of North Britain from the Most Ancient to the Present Times, with a Dictionary of Places Chorographical and Philological,* New Edition (1887), vol. I, 866
[24] *Ibid.*, vol. I, 866

The historical narratives of the two men of the Reformation and revolutionary periods were quite different, however, for Chalmers was a tory As a young man in the colonies he had the misfortune to argue and lose a case against Patrick Henry; and on the outbreak of revolution in 1775 he was forced to return to England. It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that his historical work was marked by a profound conviction that defiance of the law and of established authority is wrong. Thus his history of the period proceeded as a mirror image of Laing's, with the Reformers and other malefactors committing illegal acts and the state responding by whatever means it could, sometimes necessarily involving illegality as well. The Reformation itself, in Chalmers's account, was illegal, and Mary was once again an innocent victim placed in an impossible situation by the intrigues of Elizabeth, Knox, Moray and her other enemies. He regarded the Presbyterians with evident loathing; domineering, unenlightened and tumultuous, they did nothing to raise the moral and intellectual tone of society. He was possibly the only historian of the century who refused to express any sympathy for the Covenanting martyrs under Charles II.

> amidst this unanimous loyalty there still existed several bodies of men who, as they were actuated by their old fanaticism, refused obedience to the King, to the legislature, to the laws, or to any power under heaven; hence proceeded plots, privy conspiracy, and rebellion. As the people were irascible and disobedient, the government was severe, perhaps tyrannous.[25]

James VII's reign was quite another matter; he acted illegally in trying to impose the Catholic religion on his people, and was justly overthrown. The revolution indeed strengthened the constitution of Scotland, and secured property and private rights.

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[25] *Ibid.*, vol. I, 863

Chalmers's work was held in high enough regard to justify a second edition over eighty years after the first, presumably because of the continuing value of his antiquarian researches. The hard-line Toryism in the narrative portion of his work must be regarded as somewhat eccentric for his time, and rarely, if ever, recurred in subsequent historical writing in Scotland. His contempt for Presbyterians, however, as for the parliament and other Scottish institutions, was only a little more extreme than that of many of his contemporaries.

The second major tendency in Scottish historiography during the later eighteenth century, Episcopalianism, had reasons of its own for disliking Presbyterians. William Guthrie (1708-1770), its first significant representative and author of the ten-volume *A General History of Scotland, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time* (1767-68) was an Episcopalian, the son of a Forfarshire Episcopalian clergyman, and concomitantly a mild tory.[26] Apart from its first volume, however, which seems to have been cribbed from Buchanan, his Scottish history was undertaken diligently and was factually reasonably accurate. It was not, of course, at all sympathetic to Presbyterianism; Guthrie's treatment of the Reformed clergy paralleled that of Hume, although without the latter's wit. Thus for Knox there was only the faintest of faint praise: 'Though violent and indecent towards authority, and though intractable to all who opposed him, yet he always acted on principles, which, however mistaken, were agreeable to his own conscience.'[27] For the clergy who were attempting to defend their role in late sixteenth century there was outright condemnation: 'the answer was, as usual, that they were resolved to obey God rather than man...thereby assuming to themselves dictatorial power in the state, and

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[26] *DNB* (1908), vol. viii, 826-7 (William Bayne)
[27] William Guthrie, *A General History of Scotland, from the Earliest Accounts to the Present Time*, London (1767-8) vol. vii, 397

reviving the worst and most dangerous principles of popery'.[28] He was similarly unsympathetic to the Presbyterians of the Covenanting period, 'ignorant, bold, and enthusiastic opposers of episcopacy in every shape', whom he felt had been effectively manipulated by the landholding class. He followed Hume in denouncing them for their treachery in selling their king in 1646, which 'rendered them contemptible in the eyes even of the traitors who bought him'.[29] The leading clerical martyr of the Restoration, James Guthrie, he described as 'the most obnoxious public delinquent in Scotland, imprest with the very worst ideas of popery, under the mask of an enthusiastic antipathy to it'.[30] The Stuarts fared much better. Guthrie was convinced of Queen Mary's innocence on all charges, and Moray's consequent guilt. He was generally admiring of James VI's management of the church, and he remarked that, before his conversion to the ideals of arbitrary rule occasioned by his accession to the throne of England, James had revealed great talents for government in Scotland. Charles I, however, was harder to defend, and Charles II harder still; and in the case of James VII, papist and oppressor, Guthrie threw up his hands.

Guthrie was apparently the only Episcopalian to write a major history of Scotland during the eighteenth century, but he was by no means the only one of his denomination writing history; William Tytler, an admirer of Mary Queen of Scots discussed below, was another prominent example. Episcopalian history was in fact to prove very durable; despite the small size of its flock in Scotland, Episcopalians would continue to write history from their own perspective through the following century, providing a continuous critique of Presbyterian pretensions as they did so.

[28] *Ibid.*, vol. viii, 337-8
[29] *Ibid.*, vol. ix, 421
[30] *Ibid*, vol. x, 89

There was of course, one historical school in Enlightenment Scotland that was not hostile to Presbyterians at all. William Robertson (1721-1793) was head of the Moderate party within the Church of Scotland, and his *History of Scotland* (1759) was, as one might have expected, generally respectful of his Presbyterian forebears. Most significantly, he tried to restore the connection between the Protestants of the Reformation and liberty:

> The most ardent love of liberty accompanied the Protestant religion throughout all its progress; and wherever it was embraced, it roused an independent spirit, which rendered men attentive to their privileges as subjects, and jealous of the encroachments of their sovereigns.[31]

His treatment of Knox implicitly acknowledged that the Reformer was something of a barbarian, but argued that he could not otherwise have been as useful as he was; and here Robertson went so far as to make a reference to 'Providence', a term without much currency in Enlightenment historiography.

> Rigid and uncomplying himself, he showed no indulgence to the infirmities of others. Regardless of the distinctions of rank and character, he uttered his admonitions with an acrimony and vehemence more apt to irritate than to reclaim. This often betrayed him into indecent and undutiful expressions with respect to the Queen's person and conduct. These very qualities, however, fitted him to be the instrument of Providence in advancing the Reformation among a fierce people.[32]

As the tone of this quotation suggests, Robertson, while generally accepting the rightness of the Presbyterian cause, was far from writing a party tract. His description of Moray, the other great Reformation hero of the Church, was even more

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[31] William Robertson, *The History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary, and of King James VI. Till his Accession to the Crown of England*, Eleventh Edition (1787), 103-4
[32] *Ibid.* 273

equivocal than that of Knox: 'His moral qualities are more dubious, and ought neither to be praised nor censured without great reserve, and many distinctions.'[33] Further, when the Presbyterians so far forgot themselves as to present a challenge to public order, as they did in the riots of 17 December 1596, they forfeited Robertson's sympathy altogether. The same was true of their earlier espousal of the pretensions to immunity of the seditious preacher Black of St Andrews, whom the clergy, 'instead of abandoning to the punishment which such a petulant and criminal attack upon his superiors deserved, were so imprudent as to espouse his cause, as if it have been a common one of the whole order'.[34] Himself a pillar of establishment, Robertson did not care for revolutionaries.

Nor were the Stuart monarchs who appeared in Robertson's history quite the hobgoblins that earlier and later Presbyterian accounts made of them. Mary in particular was sympathetically treated; Robertson carefully divided her person into an agreeable and pitiable woman and an unsuccessful and very wrong-headed queen. He had no doubt that the casket letters, evidence adduced by Moray after Queen Mary's deposition to prove her collusion with Bothwell, were genuine, and that Mary was privy to the murder of her husband and a willing partner in her marriage his murderer; and further, that she was an unrepentant Catholic who would certainly have returned Scotland to Catholicism had it been possible. If the essential elements of the indictment against Mary were valid, however, she was nonetheless much sinned against; among others, by her ambitious half-brother, and more particularly by the Queen of England: 'no apology can be offered for her behaviour to Queen Mary; a scene of dissimulation without necessity, and of severity beyond example.'[35]

[33] *Ibid.*, 253
[34] *Ibid.*, 359
[35] *Ibid.*, 384

James VI fared less well; he was shown as weak and hostile to liberty. But he was occasionally allowed to have decent impulses, as when he attempted a work 'worthy of a king'[36] in attempting to reconcile feuding factions among the barons, and he was also shown to be justified in taking action against the clergy after the commotions of 1596.

The real villain of Robertson's work was the nobility. Their continuing ascendancy in the sixteenth century condemned the country to poverty and backwardness. Their power under the Stuarts was not effectively checked by any other institution; parliament was a nullity, dominated by the great barons, and the king was unwilling or unable to exert control over them. Thus Scotland after the union of the crowns was in the worst possible case, subject to the miseries incident upon both absolute monarchy and aristocratic oppression. Relief was to come in two stages: at the Revolution, the Claim of Right ensured the basic liberties of the people, and gave them more representatives in parliament; but the sprit of aristocracy, which still predominated, 'retarded the improvement and happiness of the nation'.[37] Only with the union of parliaments was the heavy hand of the feudatories finally removed, and the people admitted to real liberty.

> Exempted from burdens to which they were formerly subject...and adopted into a constitution whose genius and law were more liberal than their own, they have extended their commerce, refined their manners, made improvements in the elegancies of life, and cultivated the arts and sciences.[38]

[36] *Ibid.*, 338
[37] *Ibid.*, 388
[38] *Ibid.*, 388

Thus, leaping ahead a century from the close of his narrative, Robertson provided a happy ending in which the Scottish people gained their liberties largely as a gift from the English, and found their destiny in the bosom of a British state.

Robertson's great history was followed at a distance of some four decades by a rather ramshackle effort that may loosely be described as part of the Moderate school, Robert Heron's five-volume *A New General History of Scotland, from the Earliest Times, to the Aera of the Abolition of the Hereditary Jurisdictions of Subjects in Scotland in the Year 1748* (1794-1799). Heron (1764-1807) was a Presbyterian; indeed, he studied divinity at Edinburgh, and served for a time as assistant to the Moderate Dr Blair.[39] He was not, however, cut out for the clergy, and became a writer instead. Thrown into prison for debt, he undertook the writing of a history of Scotland on the suggestion of his creditors, and wrote the first volume while still in prison. The work was written in a hurried and slipshod style, was full of errors and added nothing to popular knowledge of Scotland. It did, however, keep Heron out of prison for a time, enabling him to become a ruling elder for New Galloway, and for several years a member of the General Assembly, before returning to debtor's prison to die in 1807. His history, for what it was worth, followed a broadly whig line; he thought Mary guilty of Darnley's murder, for example; but he spoke rather more generously of the pre-Reformation clergy than most historians, and he followed his eighteenth-century predecessors in condemning the Protestant clergy for their attacks on public order, where he deemed it merited. His opinions in any case probably did not matter much, for his history sank without a trace.

[39] *DNB* (1908), vol. ix, 702-3 (T.F. Henderson)

A far more respectable successor to Robertson was George Cook, author of *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (1811) and *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation to the Revolution* (3 vols, 1815). Cook, like Robertson, was head of the church's Moderate Party. As with Robertson, he came in the end to appropriate whig and Presbyterian conclusions on major political questions. But he deviated from the inherited Presbyterian tradition in a number of ways, and in no way more than in that most characteristic weakness of the age's historians, sympathy for Queen Mary.

> It is impossible to dwell upon the singular combination of misfortunes which darkened the brightest prospects of happiness, upon the dignity with which she bore her sufferings, and upon the tranquillity and resignation with which she submitted to the iniquitous sentence which had been pronounced against her, without the strongest emotions.[40]

This kind of attitude necessarily entailed a certain unsoundness on Knox and Regent Moray, who were duly chided respectively for callous disrespect and ambition. Cook was also ambivalent about Presbyterianism; he suggested that the moderate Episcopacy established at the Convention of Leith in 1572 might have served the church just as well, and that of James in 1597 perhaps even better, had James only been willing to leave his reforms at that point: 'Perhaps it was impossible to devise any better mode of giving to the clergy that influence in parliament which…it was, in various respects, desirable that they should possess.'[41] He clearly detested Andrew Melville, and was particularly scathing about that clergyman's insistence that Presbytery was mandated by scripture. At the same time, he periodically assured his

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[40] George Cook, *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation to the Revolution* (1815), vol. i., 421
[41] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 118

readers that Presbyterianism had, in fact, worked out extremely well, and was to a considerable extent the foundation of their liberties.

> It did certainly carry with it the elements of freedom; and we shall find that to it we are in a great measure indebted for those limitations of the executive power which have placed the throne on the affection of the people, and have led to the most admirable form of government, which has ever been hitherto introduced amongst mankind.[42]

This inconsistency of tone, if not perhaps of argument, marks the entire narrative. Deeply conservative and writing during a war, Cook, like Robertson, had a natural horror of civil unrest. If he accepted the necessity of opposition to the civil power during the reign of the Stuarts, he was never able to bring much enthusiasm to the tale of Presbyterian struggle. Added to this tepidness was a tendency to try to understand the enemies of the church, such as Mary and James VI, rather than merely condemning them; and in an occasional passage he showed himself a clergyman of the Moderate party, uneasy with more emotional currents in the church. Thus of Wodrow's *Life of Welsh*: 'It is difficult from the whole narration...not to draw the conclusion, that in this good man, enthusiasm had reached the point of insanity, to which it so naturally tends'.[43] In all, Cook's work was a considerable achievement as history and was welcomed in some measure by Presbyterian reviewers. It was not, however, quite the revival of Presbyterian and whig synthesis that some in the Presbyterian community had wished for.

Two pieces of hack work that appeared during Cook's career perhaps throw some light on what at least a portion of the Presbyterian reading public was looking for.

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[42] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 290

[43] George Cook, *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation to the Revolution: Illustrating a Most Interesting Period of the Political History of Britain* (Edinburgh, 1815), vol. ii, 80

Both were immediately identifiable as very dubious productions by their heavy reliance on the work of Buchanan, who by this time been so thoroughly savaged by the intellectual elite as to have lost almost all his credibility among serious historians. Alexander Cullen, an otherwise unknown author who wrote *The History of Scotland from the earliest Period of Authentic Record to the Present Time* (1815), nonetheless paid a particular tribute to Buchanan in his preface:

> The early part of Scotch History has been investigated with such profound discrimination by George Buchanan, the venerable father of Scotch History, that the author has in many places epitomised him.[44]

He was as good as his word; in addition to the potted biographies of Eugenius V and that ilk, the book contains numerous direct quotations from Buchanan up to the Reformation period. As a follower of Buchanan he was convinced of Mary's guilt in the death of Darnley, and generally followed a strongly pro-Presbyterian line. An undated work by the Englishman Thomas Wright (1810-1877), *The History of Scotland from the Earliest period to the Present Time*, followed a similar line, was perhaps even worse than Cullen's effort, and like it, sank immediately from sight. Worthless as history, the two works do provide an idea of what opportunists of the period thought that the Scottish reading public wanted: a narrative in which Presbyterians were unequivocally in the right. It was some years since the more respectable portion of the historical profession had provided one.

In fact, a historical school predicated on just such an assumption was by this time already in existence, in the person of the Anti-Burgher minister and biographer Thomas M'Crie, who will be the subject of the following chapter. The production of general histories, however, continued for some years to be dominated by works

[44] Alexander Cullen, *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period of Authentic Record to the Present Time...Embellished with Elegant Engravings* (London, 1815), Preface

reflecting an Anti-Presbyterian bias, and in some measure continuing trends established in the previous century. By far the most important of these was Patrick Fraser Tytler's *History of Scotland*, which appeared in stages between 1828 and 1841. It ran to nine volumes, covering the period from Alexander III to the union of the Crowns. The work represented years of toil in the Public Papers Office in London as well as use of the usual published material, and it put an end to the idea that a serious work of Scottish history could be produced from the latter sources alone. Tytler (1791-1849), Scotland's Historiographer Royal, was an Episcopalian.[45] In his discussion of the Reformation he chose his words carefully, and in many respects his account followed in the familiar channels of the Presbyterian model. But there were undeniable differences: among others things, he attacked the characters of the Presbyterian heroes Moray, Buchanan and, most damagingly, Knox. He went to greater lengths than usual to detail the treachery of Elizabeth and her destructive manipulation of Scottish politics during post-Reformation period. And at the centre of his account was Mary, once again greatly sinned against and rarely sinning. The hero of the last volume was James VI, a particular bugbear of the Presbyterians. Among his achievements, Tytler included his triumph 'over extreme licence and democratic movements of the Kirk',[46] and gave pride of place to the regulation and strengthening of the church through the establishment of episcopacy.

Except for the documentation, there was little new about any of this. But Tytler's work seem to have caused a good deal more disquiet among Presbyterians than that of Chambers or any of the other mariolaters who had preceded him, perhaps because of the enormous prestige associated with the writer's position and achievement. His book was re-printed thirteen times between 1841 and 1887. Presbyterian

[45] *DNB* (1909), vol. xix, 1380-2 (Aeneas Mackay)
[46] Patrick Fraser Tytler, *History of Scotland*, Second edition (9 vols., 1841) vol. ix, 242

unhappiness with his approach to the subject was forcefully expressed by the prominent jurist and writer Patrick Fraser (1819-1889):

> if, instead of demonstrating the four last volumes as history, they were described as a partial biography of Mary Stuart, of Regent Murray, and of Morton, interspersed with sketches of other grandees, and solemn denunciation of the coarse vulgarity and intolerance of Presbyterian ministers, a better idea would be entertained of its character and its object.'[47]

In the long run, reaction against Tytler's work was to play a part in the upsurge in Presbyterian historiography that was under way even as Tytler published.

Books by two other authors published about the same time presented a variety of problems for the Presbyterian reviewer. Sir Walter Scott's two-volume *History of Scotland* appeared in 1828, the same year that his friend Tytler began the publication of his great opus. One of the many books written in the wake of Scott's financial disaster, the history was written at great speed and doubtless following Scott's normal practice in historical matters of relying on his previous researches and his prodigious memory rather than on consultation of sources.[48] For all that, it was really quite a good history within its limits; it was well written and often made clear where others obfuscated. As might be expected, Scott had some sympathy for almost everybody, although his sympathy was nowhere more tempered than when writing about Presbyterian heroes:

> Moray, for example, is still remembered by the commons as the good regent, and not undeserving of the epithet; for making allowance for

[47] Patrick Fraser, *Tytler's History of Scotland Examined* (Edinburgh, 1848), 245

[48] James Anderson, *Sir Walter Scott and History, with Other Papers* (Edinburgh, 1981), 15

the stormy time in which he lived, his character will bear comparison with most statesmen of the period.[49]

Scott wrote from an unabashedly Episcopalian perspective, and spent some time explaining how the Presbyterians overshot the mark in their reaction against the Church of Rome -- neglecting ritual, eschewing notes for preaching of sermons, destroying buildings[50] -- and how they misbehaved themselves in various ways afterwards. But there were many things that interested him more than the Reformation: John Knox was mentioned on just five different pages, while Kenneth McAlpine had ten to himself, and Mary was allotted forty pages for her execution alone. Scott's history ended in 1603. While engaged in writing his *History*, Scott was also at work on *The Tales of a Grandfather* (1827-9), an anecdotal history of Scotland from its origins to 1746. The work was initially targeted at children, but it proved enormously more popular than its more scholarly companion, and was re-printed over thirty times over the course of the century.

A more straightforwardly secular history was that of Robert Chambers (1802-1871), who produced his two-volume *The History of Scotland, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* in 1832. A member of the famous publishing family, Chambers early devolved his business responsibilities on to his brother William, and spent the rest of his life writing on the history of Scotland and the British Empire and a variety of other topics. His most famous work, published anonymously, was *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, often considered a forerunner of Darwinism. A recent work on his identifies him as religiously indifferent and anticlerical,[51] although he did not see fit to parade himself as such during his lifetime. (His last two books,

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[49] Sir Walter Scott, *History of Scotland* (1830), vol. ii, 139
[50] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 78ff.
[51] James A. Secord, *Victorian Sensation, the Extraordinary Publication, Reception, and Secret Authorship of* Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (Chicago and London, 2000), 85

unpublished, were 'A Catechism for the Young' and 'The Life and Preaching of Jesus Christ from the Evangelists').[52] Certainly, in his *History* he showed little personal attachment to the various contending parties in the Reformation and Civil War, and, indeed, took some evident pleasure in holding all sides up to ridicule.

> There was much superstitious fanaticism on both sides; the King believed that God would never suffer rebellion to prosper, and the Parliament, also trusting that their cause was the cause of God, were equally sure that it would triumph through divine aid. It is amusing to observe how much they were respectively puzzled, when fortune happened to declare against them.[53]

He accepted the necessity for the Reformation, but was more sympathetic to the Catholics and the Irish than any other Scottish historian of the period. His attitude to Presbyterians was that of an outsider: at various points he was bitterly critical, particularly in his discussion of the pretensions of the clergy to power without responsibility. At the same time he acknowledged the usefulness of their contributions to the moral health of the country, and spoke particularly highly of their role in the creation of an educated population in Scotland, however selfish their motives may have been. In the end he stated that the establishment of the Church of Scotland in 1690, with its tacit acceptance of control by King William's government, 'was a most fortunate event for Scotland, and the cause, without a doubt, of much of its happiness and prosperity.'[54] Where Chambers's spirit of moderation utterly failed him was in his partisanship for Mary; he was the most rabidly pro-Mary historian of the century, in a crowded field.

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[52] *DNB* (1908), vol. iv, 23-5 (Francis Watt)
[53] Robert Chambers, *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, 2 vols (London, 1832), vol. ii, 42.
[54] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 143

Perhaps what is most striking about the histories considered in this chapter is that the most vexed historiographical issue of the period under discussion was not the Reformation or the Civil War but the career of Mary Queen of Scots, a woman who occupied the Scottish throne for barely six years. The amount of ingenuity, printer's ink and anger that went into dealing with the single question of whether Mary had foreknowledge of the murder of Darnley can only be perplexing to the modern mind. The debate had a long pedigree, stretching back at least to the competing narratives of Buchanan and Bishop Leslie. The recent phase, however, in which all the authors treated in this chapter were in some sense participants, began in 1754 with the publication of Walter Goodall's two-volume examination of the casket letters, *An Examination of the Letters said to be Written by Mary Queen of Scots, to James Earl of Bothwell, Shewing...that they are Forgeries.* That work provoked a response by Dr Robertson in the form of an extended appendix to his *History of Scotland,* demonstrating that the letters were authentic. A year later, in 1760, a riposte, *An Historical and Critical Enquiry into the Evidence Produced by the Earls of Murray and Morton, against Mary Queen of Scots, with an Examination of the Rev. Dr Robertson's Dissertation, and Mr. Hume's History, with Respect to that Evidence,* appeared from the pen of William Tytler (1711-1792), an Episcopalian who was grandfather to Patrick Fraser Tytler. The elder Tytler was able to make something of a career of the book, re-issuing it three times over the next thirty years, each time in substantially altered form. In the meantime appeared Gilbert Stuart's narrative account, *The History of Scotland, from the Establishment of the Reformation, till the Death of Queen Mary* (1782), vindicating the queen from all charges against her and bitterly excoriating her enemies. That position shortly received further support from an intensely detailed three-volume discussion of the casket letters under the title of *Mary Queen of Scots Vindicated* (1787) by John Whitaker (1735-1808), a Church of

England clergyman. His contribution exceeded 1500 pages of documentation and polemic.

Finally, the whig Malcolm Laing entered the fray with a supplement to the second edition of his *History of Scotland* (1804), one volume of text and one of documents, by which he intended to put an end to the controversy once and for all.

> if the conclusions which I have drawn, are consistent with those historical facts to which I have uniformly appealed, the participation of Mary in the murder of her husband, must rest hereafter as an established truth, which no prejudice can evade, nor the perverse ingenuity of disputants confute.[55]

It is needless to say that he failed in his object, but his contribution did mark the end of the war of documentary analysis that had begun with Goodall. In that time some 4000 pages of material had been committed to print, the bulk of it relating to the single question of Mary's guilt in the death of her husband, without, it may be hazarded, convincing anyone who did not wish to be convinced. Thereafter, the issue was debated in general histories with somewhat greater economy of effort, but with continuing rhetorical excess.

Why did it all matter so much? Certainly, allegiances in the question depended to a considerable extent on political and religious positions: many of Mary's defenders were Episcopalians, like the Tytlers and Whitaker, or Tories, like Chalmers. But the difference was not clear cut; Gilbert Stuart was a hard-line whig, Thomas Wright a Presbyterian and whig, and Chambers a Liberal. Even granting a rough division along sectarian lines does not go very far to explain the intensity of feeling on the part of Mary's partisans, to the extent that Walter Goodall, for example, was willing

[55] Laing, *History of Scotland,* vol. ii, 67

to devote the bulk of his adult life to her defence. Inescapably, one is left with an element of romance, specifically the appeal across the centuries of a beautiful and doomed queen to an entirely male historical establishment. Part of that appeal was delineated, half facetiously, by Robert Heron, not himself one of her defenders, in 1798:

> Nay, I shall own, that ever since I saw *Bartolozzi's* fine *engraving* of her, *from a coin*, which is prefixed to *Dr* G. Stuart's History, I have actually been as much in love with her, as it is possible for one to be in love with a BEAUTY who died more than two hundred years since.[56]

Sometimes, indeed, historians seemed to forget that their princess had been defunct for two centuries, and to speak as if she were still alive, and in need of their aid. Thus Whitaker, describing the appearance of Gilbert Stuart's work:

> He even challenged Dr Robertson...to come forward from his covert at last, and either justify or retract his slanders against her. This was fair, bold and manly. It was in the true spirit of historical gallantry, advancing to the rescue of an oppressed Queen.[57]

Whitaker here mistook Stuart's motives; Stuart hated Robertson, and would presumably have defended Ivan the Terrible had Robertson seen fit to attack him.[58] But the passage gives us a glimpse of the nature of Tytler's own feelings, which seem to have been shared in some measure by many of his contemporaries. The fascination was by this time international; Schiller's *Maria Stuart* was written in 1800, and followed by operas, plays and historical works from various western European countries. Nor did it ever end. From the point of Scottish historiography, however, the obsession with Mary seems to have peaked during the period under

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[56] Robert Heron, *A New General History of Scotland, form the Earliest Times, to the Aera of the Abolition of the Hereditary Jurisdictions of Subjects in Scotland in the Year 1748*, 5 vols (Perth, 1794-1799), vol. iv, Preface, vii

[57] John Whitaker, *Mary Queen of Scots Vindicated*, 3 vols (London, 1787), vol. i, Preface, vii.

[58] *DNB* (1909), vol. xix, 83-4 (W.P. Courtney)

consideration, and to have begun to yield place to more mundane issues some time before the middle of the nineteenth century.

From the point of view of the traditionalist Presbyterian, the consequences of this outpouring of mariolatry could only be baneful. The intense animosity generated by the question tended to influence the opinions of writers towards all the other historical actors of the period, and some of these figures were Presbyterian heroes. Thus for example Alexander Cullen, who thought Mary guilty, called the Regent Moray an 'eminently good and great man'[59]; his contemporary Thomas Wright, who did not, thought him 'a monstrous hypocrite and traitor'.[60] Moray, in fact, was more at risk than anyone else from Mary's sympathisers; even Robertson referred to some parts of his behaviour towards her as unjustifiable.[61] For Stuart he was evil incarnate: 'no language has any terms of reproach that are sufficiently powerful to characterize his perfidiousness and cruelty'[62]; and fifty years later, the more dispassionate Patrick Fraser Tytler found him not much improved.

> If we go higher still, and seek for that love which is the only test of religious truth, how difficult it is to think that it could have a place in his heart, whose last transaction went to aggravate the imprisonment, if not to recommend the death, of a miserable princess, his own sister and sovereign.[63]

Generally, the bill of indictment against Moray stated that he had been privy to the murder of Darnley, had commissioned the forgery of the casket letters, had conspired with Elizabeth to keep Mary in prison, and had betrayed Norfolk and

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[59] Alexander Cullen, *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period of Authentic Record to the Present Time...Embellished with Elegant Engravings* (London, 1815), 302

[60] Thomas Wright, *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* [n.p., 1832?] 289

[61] Robertson, *History*, 222

[62] Gilbert Stuart, *The History of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation, till the Death of Queen Mary*, 2 vols (London, 1782), vol. ii, 52-3

[63] Patrick Fraser Tytler, *History of Scotland*, vol. vii, 255

Northumberland to the English queen. If accepted, and it was accepted in part even by moderate Presbyterians such as Robertson, it left intact little of the mantle of The Good Regent.

Knox was another victim. For generations of mariolaters, Knox was the man who reduced the queen to tears, and bragged about it. 'Mary', declaimed Stuart, 'full of astonishment at the boundless audacity of the man, burst into tears. But the perturbation and the tears of a queen, so young and beautiful, did not soften the coarse rusticity of this zealous ecclesiastic.'[64] That scene, from the memorable interview between the two in 1563, made its appearance in almost every history that covered the period, most often with the sort of gloss that Stuart put on it. Knox was also portrayed inveighing against her most innocent pleasures, such as dancing, as unpardonable crimes; deliberately promoting suspicion between Elizabeth and Mary; and calling for Mary's execution after Darnley's murder. 'It must be admitted by every Moderate Protestant', urged William Guthrie after describing his denunciations of the queen, 'that the above behaviour of Knox was an insult not only upon majesty, but upon decency.'[65] Overall, the picture that emerged from these accounts of the central figure of the Scottish Reformation was of a fanatical and somewhat barbarous spirit, deaf to considerations of chivalry and even of common humanity. Some of his detractors were prepared to go a good deal farther.

No one, in fact, was quite safe. George Buchanan, already hammered from the whig side for his uncritical take on Scotland's origins, was assailed on a quite different flank for his unquestionably fanciful portrayal of Mary in his history of Scotland and in *Detectio Mariae Reginae Scotorum* (1571). In their defence of Mary in the

[64] Stuart, *History of Scotland*, vol. i, 68
[65] Guthrie, *General History of Scotland*, vol. vi, 219

eighteenth century, Goodall and William Tytler, among others, exposed his work as a tissue of error and built a picture of its author as an unscrupulous party propagandist, producing history to order.[66] 'Buchanan', Stuart remarked in one of his attacks on Moray, 'who had tasted his bounty, gives a varnish to his crimes.'[67] Probably the most abused of Mary's enemies, however, was Queen Elizabeth, who was damned in page after page of historical writing for her callous mistreatment of her sister monarch. Elizabeth, to be sure, was not very popular in Scottish historiography, even that of the Presbyterians, because of her long-running interference in Scottish affairs; but her image was nowhere blacker than in the text of one of Mary's partisans.

> The same malicious spirit of unrelenting jealousy, that had in the Seventh and Eighth Henries, inspired blood-thirstiness, insatiable till the last object of its fears should be destroyed, was inherited by the maiden queen; neither honour, nor pity nor justice could induce to hearken to the entreaties of her unfortunate relative.[68]

There was also venom available for the Reformed clergy in general, for the Protestant nobility, and indeed almost everyone who had figured favourably in the Presbyterian account of the Reformation. For the mariolaters, only one player stood above the corruption of the age. 'Strange to say', wrote Robert Chambers as he prepared to rehearse the sad tragedy of Queen Mary yet again, 'the only innocent individual was about to become the victim of all the rest'.[69]

Despite the intense emotional level of the debate over Mary, there can be no doubt that a greater long-term threat to the Presbyterian world-view came from the essentially secular face of the Scottish Enlightenment. Hume, with his mockery of

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[66] George Buchanan, *The Tyrannous Reign of Mary Stuart*, ed. W.A. Gatherer, Edinburgh (1958), Forward [by W.A. Gatherer], 9
[67] Stuart, *History of Scotland*, vol. ii, 53
[68] Wright, *History of Scotland*, 299
[69] Chambers, *History of Scotland*, vol. i, 220

the Presbyterian clergy as gloomy and ignorant fanatics, was continually reprinted through the nineteenth century and widely read. Malcolm Laing, well respected as an historian and much closer to the Presbyterians than Hume in his political outlook, had scarcely any more regard for the clergy, and no more for their religion, than Hume had. Chalmers, also an influential and re-printed author, respected neither the Presbyterians' religion nor their politics. None believed that the Presbyterian clergy had any useful contribution to make to the political sphere, or that they had played any part in gaining Scotland's freedom. In the much later work of Robert Chambers can be found a Voltairean superciliousness on religious matters not greatly different in its essentials from Hume's rather more blatant apostasy. As will be seen in the following chapters, the Presbyterian counterattack arose primarily out of a deep distress at the prevailing irreligion of the period, and was motivated in particular by the manner in which the Scottish past had been appropriated by David Hume and his cohorts.

By comparison, the challenge from the Presbyerians' fellow Protestants in the Episcopal Church was a fairly modest one, but it was a continuing irritant. Scottish Episcopalians were few in number, but they were often well placed in society and well read; and they wrote a lot of books. They had a strong historically-based sense of their own identity, and two major source books, the histories of Bishops Spottiswoode and Keith, from which to draw arguments. Of the authors under consideration, four – Guthrie, the two Tytlers, and Scott – were Episcopalians, while the Anglican Whitaker might be regarded as a well-wisher. Collectively, they were influential far beyond their numbers. Guthrie produced the first multi-volume history of Scotland, Patrick Fraser Tytler the first such work written with extensive use of unpublished sources. Tytler's book became a standard work on the subject, and

continued to be consulted through the century. Other Episcopalian works of history were to follow, all of them involving extensive grinding of anti-Presbyterian axes.

The criticisms made by the Episcopalians were quite different from those made by representatives of the Enlightenment. They did not, in the first place, approve of the nature of the Presbyterian church, finding its lack of ritual unsatisfying and its organisation defective. They deplored the destructiveness of the Reformation, particularly as it related to monastic structures and churches; they accused Andrew Melville of proposing that the Cathedral of Glasgow be unroofed. Three of the four were enthusiastic supporters of Mary. All supported James VI, for the most part, in his struggles with the Church, congratulated him on his restoration of Episcopacy, and commended him on other achievements. They were personally sympathetic to Charles, even if they deplored his unwisdom; and they excoriated the Covenanting Government for selling him to the English. If they often found little good to say of Charles II, and none of his brother, they again disagreed with the Presbyterians over their treatment of the Episcopal clergymen after the Revolution.

One of their number, Walter Scott, was of course far more important as an historical novelist than as an historian; he was the most influential writer of his day, and in that persona a powerful enemy of Presbyterianism when he chose to be. Earlier in his career, he triggered a bitter and pivotal controversy with his hostile portrait of the Covenanters in *Old Mortality* (1816).[70] He was perhaps more to be feared, however, for his wide-ranging sympathies than for his hostilities. Though Scott was a whig, many of the most colourful characters in his novels were Jacobites, and he did much to encourage the vogue for sentimental Jacobitism that already existed in Scotland

[70] See below, 89ff.

and has never subsequently been absent. Particular *bêtes noires* of Presbyterian historiography such as Montrose and Dundee, of whom Scott doubtless disapproved in theory, cut much flashier figures in his novels than did his worthy whig protagonists. Similarly, he believed Mary guilty of her husband's murder, but painted a very sympathetic picture of her in *The Abbot* (1820). Endlessly re-printed and read all over the western world, appealing to the imagination as much as the intellect, Scott's novels were a recurring problem for Presbyterian historiography.

The works by Presbyterian authors published during this period did not, for one reason or another, provide the framework for a strong Presbyterian historical vision. Of the five such works under discussion, three may be dismissed out of hand. The histories of Heron, Cullen and Wright were straws in the wind, entirely derivative from secondary sources, published and forgotten. The remaining two Presbyterian histories included one great work, William Robertson's *History of Scotland*, and George Cook's competent multi-volume history of the Church of Scotland. Both men were leaders of the Moderate wing of the Church; that identification in itself distinguished them in outlook from the Church's Evangelical wing, which by Cook's day represented the majority of church-goers. Both were products of the Enlightenment, and their approach to history very different from the inherited certainties of Knox, Buchanan and Calderwood, which presented a picture of Scotland reformed by the hand of Providence. Both made efforts to understand the positions of some of the Church's enemies, and on occasion to question some of its heroes, such as Moray in Robertson's case and Melville in Cook's. Robertson was particularly concerned to deal with the problem that Mary's tragedy posed to the history of the Church.[71] His resultant portrait of a sympathetic individual but a

[71] Stewart J. Brown, 'William Robertson (1721-1793) and the Scottish Enlightenment', in Stewart J. Brown, ed., *William Brown and the Expansion of Empire* (Cambridge, 1997), 19

hopeless queen served to infuriate many Presbyterians almost as much as it did the packs of mariolaters snapping at Robertson's heels.

Finally, neither historian did much to re-establish the connection between Presbyterianism and freedom embodied in the works of Buchanan and Calderwood. For Robertson, the central problem of the period he was discussing (1542-1603), was an over-mighty and irresponsible nobility. The solution lay in union with England, a country that had dealt with the problem; he spoke explicitly of the Scottish commons 'being admitted to a participation of all the privileges which the English had purchased with so much blood'.[72] There was no room in this formulation for Scottish participation in their own liberation. Cook took a somewhat different tack; he did at times express the importance of Presbyterianism to the achievement of Scottish freedom; but there was little in his text to illustrate his assurances. Both Cook and Robertson were essentially conservative in their social outlook, and both reacted with censure when they described the clergy taking an active role in stirring up popular disorder.

All this fits comfortably with Colin Kidd's thesis that eighteenth-century whig historiography had broken down the link between liberty and nationhood in Scotland.[73] In general, that analysis would seem to stand up well enough for the historical literature, of whatever provenance, available in the first third of the nineteenth century. All the authors represented in this chapter regarded both the Revolution of 1688 and the union as positive developments; there were no lamentations for the Scottish parliament, and no attempts to resuscitate the nobility as guardians of the nation's liberties. The ancient mythology embodied in the forty

[72] Robertson, *History*, 389
[73] Kidd, *Subverting*, 267

mythical kings was effectively dead; where the kings appeared, it was as a result of the laziness or naivety of the historian, and not an attempt to make use of them as embodiments of Scottish nationhood. It is a little too much to say, however, as Kidd does, that Scottish history had been 're-written in terms which denigrated the native achievement of preserving freedoms against external enemies and of bridling tyrannical kings.'[74] Most of the authors represented regarded the Scots as historically a liberty-loving people, and those who treated the period of the middle ages paid the usual tributes to Wallace and Bruce. Patrick Fraser Tytler's attitude was fairly typical:

> perhaps, in the history of Liberty, there is no more memorable war than that which took its rise under Wallace in 1297, and terminated in the final establishment of Scottish independence by Robert Bruce in 1328.[75]

But the essential point, that liberty from the Stuart autocracy was in the last analysis the gift of an English revolution, was generally accepted. Neither Robertson nor Malcolm Laing believed that the Scots could have achieved their liberation on their own. Later accounts were not so unequivocal, but the passage from the tyranny of James VII to liberation at the Revolution was usually described without much in the way of commentary on Scottish responsibility for their own freedom. All this, as Kidd observed, left little basis for either a revived Scottish whiggism, or for a British whiggism that would have made the two countries partners in liberty.[76]

For the Presbyterians in the first decade of the nineteenth century, more was missing than a political synthesis. What is particularly striking about the historiography of the period is the scarcity of general histories that catered to the prejudices of the

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[74] *Ibid.*, 269
[75] Patrick Fraser Tytler, *History of Scotland*, vol. i, Preface, v.
[76] Kidd, *Subverting*, 207

country's predominant religious group. Enlightenment or not, Scotland was, overwhelmingly, still a Presbyterian country; and the strength of Scottish religious feeling during the first half of the century, as measured by church-going, construction of churches, missionary activity, Sunday School foundations and other indicators, was on the rise. Within the Presbyterian community the predominant moving force was now Evangelicalism, creating an increasing gap between the Moderatism of Robertson and Cook and the rank and file of their own church and of other Presbyterian churches. Yet the story of Scotland, as far as general histories of any virtue were concerned, was entirely in the hand of Moderates, or of writers who were unsympathetic to Presbyterianism in any form.

Chapter 3

Thomas M'Crie

> Truth, eternal truth, is the firm and immovable basis of the Church. She is built upon that system of doctrine which is laid down in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone[1]

The first published article of Thomas M'Crie (1772-1835), biographer of John Knox and Andrew Melville and prolific writer on related historical topics, bore the title 'On the Importance of Right Principles in Religion, and the Danger of those that are False'. That title, and the frame of mind which it implies, set the tone for his historical writing as well as his theological career. The two vocations were inseparable in M'Crie: minister and historian, he wrote history in which there were no shadows or equivocations, for the purpose of establishing truth and correcting error. A man of great ability and education, he was able to use some of the historical tools of the Enlightenment to counter the influence of Enlightenment historiography, along with a number of other enemies of his faith. In doing so he struck a chord -- Presbyterian and traditionalist -- with a significant portion of the Scottish reading public, and became perhaps the most influential Scottish historian of the nineteenth century.

The most important thing about Thomas M'Crie, both as a theologian and a historian, was his upbringing in a devout family of Anti-Burgher Seceders. In later life M'Crie had kind words to say about other Reformed churches, but there was never any doubt

[1] Thomas M'Crie, 'On the Importance of Right Principles in Religion, and the Danger of Those that are False', *The Christian Magazine*, Feb. 1797, 23

in his mind that the Church of Scotland as it emerged from the Reformation came closest to the perfection of scriptural norms, and this because of the special relation of God to the Scottish people. 'By the good hand of God on her', he wrote in 1821, 'Scotland attained to a greater purity of religion, and higher degrees of Reformation, than any other Protestant country'.[2] Nor was there any doubt that of the various fragments into which the Church of Scotland had been divided, the Anti-Burgher Secession Church was the right one. An incident late in M'Crie's life throws some light on the intensity of his identification with this body. M'Crie was a great believer in church unity, and in 1830 he was called upon to negotiate a union between his Old Light Anti-Burghers and the Old Light Burghers. The only issue between them, the burgher oath, had not been required by any municipal jurisdiction since the turn of the century, and another man might have let the matter slide. Not so M'Crie; he wanted a formal renunciation of the oath and legal security provided that none would ever be sworn again.[3] Eventually, most of the Old Light Burghers found their way into the more tolerant bosom of the Established Church. For M'Crie, unity, however important, could come only through the acceptance of everything that the Anti-Burgher Church had taught; for it was all true, and it was all eternally relevant.

Deeply religious from youth, M'Crie entered his denomination's divinity hall in 1791, was licensed to preach in 1795 and ordained the following year. On the latter occasion he drew himself to the notice of his church by refusing, along with a fellow ordinand, to subscribe to the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, which included acceptance of the power of the magistrate 'to suppress blasphemies and heresies; to prevent or reform all corruptions and abuses in worship and

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[2] Thomas M'Crie, *On the Covenants and the Reformation*. From the appendix to *Two Discourses on the Unity of the Church* (n.p., 1821), 8
[3] Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *Life of Thomas M'Crie, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1840), 321

discipline, to call to account persons publishing erroneous opinion, and to exercise a control over the deliberation of synods'.[4] This question had been under discussion in the church since 1791; accordingly, M'Crie and his colleague were allowed to take the oath with reservations, and in 1804 the offending articles, and much else, were abandoned by the church. By this time, however, M'Crie had changed his mind. In 1800 he announced that the church's founders had been right all along, and that the Westminster Confession should be accepted as it stood.

M'Crie's volte-face seems to have derived largely from the influence of Archibald Bruce (1746-1816), who was the church's professor of theology and at once its most revered and most intransigent member. M'Crie, who had studied theology under Bruce, held him in the highest possible regard: 'for no man on earth', according to M'Crie's son, 'did Dr M'Crie entertain a more profound veneration, to no man's opinion did he pay a greater respect'.[5] Minister to a small congregation at Whitburn, and only reluctantly a teacher of his denomination's theological students, Bruce devoted himself primarily to writing in defence of his church and of his own theological beliefs. For a time, indeed, he went so far as to employ a full-time printer in his basement to ensure that his rather turgid productions saw the light of day.[6] He was a man of considerable ability; his collected works, which fill nine volumes, are packed with references to literature from all over western Europe, including sources in Latin, French and Italian; along with pamphlets and theological disquisitions, he wrote satires and a volume of verse, some of it ponderously humorous. Prolix, repetitive and sometimes almost impenetrable, his writings had small circulation; but

[4] Cited in John M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (Edinburgh, 1841), 379
[5] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 52
[6] M'Kerrow, *History*, 896-9

they did outline a series of positions that later informed the work of M'Crie, a much better communicator.

The church to which Bruce and M'Crie belonged had reasonable title to being the most conservative of the four fragments into which the Church of Scotland had been divided by 1769 (this is to leave aside the Reformed Presbyterians, who were never part of the church established in 1690). The Secession of 1733 was associated primarily with the patronage question, but also reflected apprehension on the part of the Secessionists that the leading men of the church of the day 'had declined from the purity of the faith',[7] in the words of the church's historian. The split within the Secessionists over the taking of the burgess oaths in 1747 also concerned degrees of orthodoxy, for by swearing to profess 'the true religion presently professed within this realm',[8] the Anti-Burghers feared that they might be implicitly accepting someone's definition of the true religion other than their own; and in particular, a definition that involved the acknowledgement that an established church might have a monarch at its head. As well as the most conservative, the Anti-Burghers were the most historically-conscious denomination. One of their church's basic documents, the *Narrative and Testimony*, was in part an account of Scotland's religious history from the first Reformation, and that of the Secessionists from their origin. They laid particular emphasis on the two Reformations and the covenanting periods of the Scottish history, the latter of which they considered the brightest chapter in the annals of the church. They were a covenanted church; they continued to regard the two covenants as binding on the Scottish people, and until 1798 they required candidates

[7] *Ibid.*, 10
[8] Andrew Thomson, *Historical Sketch of the Origin of the Secession Church* (Edinburgh, London, 1848), 139

for the ministry to swear the covenants before they became licentiates. Finally, they accepted the Westminster Confession in its entirety.

For Archibald Bruce, all this was as it should be. Quite apart from his decisive influence on Thomas M'Crie, Bruce holds an interest as a spokesman for a political and theological vision that was almost wholly antithetical to the mainstream of the Scottish Enlightenment, and yet still retained a considerable vitality at the turn of the nineteenth century. His basic beliefs were entirely in keeping with the original traditions of his church; they derived from those of the Scottish Reformation and its sequels in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as mediated by the Secession Church of the eighteenth, and with as little concession as possible to more recent ages. He was a Calvinist and apparently unaffected by the Evangelical currents that were already coursing through his own church. He was providentialist; he believed that God intervened in human affairs, and that His interventions could be detected by careful study of history. One of his most curious works was his last, an account of all the great volcanic eruptions and earthquakes he had encountered in his researches, which he set down 'for the aid of those disposed to make religious improvements on such events', that is, to determine which proceeded from the immediate hand of God and which were merely accidents.[9] On the deliverance of the Scottish church at the Reformation, he was in no doubt: it was unequivocally the work of God.[10] Nor had God erred in the matter. The Reformation as it had unfolded in Scotland had taken the right form, and its principles were universally applicable.[11] In common with his

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[9] Archibald Bruce, *An Historical Account of the Most Remarkable Earthquakes and Volcanic Eruptions from the Beginning of the World to the Present Time* (Whitburn, 1820)
[10] Archibald Bruce ('Calvinianus Presbyter'), *Annus Secularis: or the British Jubilee* (Edinburgh, 1788), 227
[11] Archibald Bruce, *A Brief Statement of the Genuine Principles of Seceders, Respecting Civil Government; the Duty of Subjects; and National Reformation: and a Vindication of their Conduct in Reference to Some Late Plans and Societies for Social Reform; and the Public Dissents of the Time.* (Whitburn, 1799), 55

church, Bruce adhered to the covenants, condemning the 'narrow and absurd plan of a local and national religion'[12] accepted by the Revolution settlement of 1690. For the Covenanters themselves he had the most profound reverence. Politically, he was a whig, but of a specifically Presbyterian and Scottish variety. He accepted the revolution of 1689 to the limited extent that it re-established a lawful government and vindicated the right of subjects to overthrow tyrants; but he condemned it for failing to re-enact the covenants, failing to re-establish the constitutional framework of the late 1640s, and imposing a purely political settlement on the Church of Scotland.[13]

While Bruce continued to hope for the eventual re-union of the various Presbyterian fragments in Scotland, he had little but scorn for the Church of Scotland of his own day. His early works included a mock-epic in the style of Pope called *The Kirkiad*, in which he attacked Moderatism, patronage, and everything else in the church that he found annoying ('As for the Organ's solemn peal / and chanting choirs, we like them well')[14] and a burlesque catechism which focused on patronage ('Question. What is the chief end of a *modern clergyman*? A. A *modern clergyman's* chief end is, to serve his *Patron*, and his friends, that he may in due time enjoy a *benefice*, or be advanced to a better *place* through his favour').[15] What was fundamentally wrong was erastianism, the great enemy of the Christian church through its history and the author of the system of patronage that had subverted the Church of Scotland; the solution was the acknowledgement of the freedom of the church from all forms of

[12] Bruce, *Annus*, 228
[13] *Ibid.*, 227-9
[14] Bruce, *The Kirkiad; or the Golden Age of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1774), 27
[15] Bruce, *The Patron's A, B,C: Or, the Shorter Catechism* (Glasgow, 1771), 5

civil control over specifically religious matters. 'Government of [the] Church is divine, and totally independent of civil power'.[16]

The question was, as Bruce was repeatedly at pains to point out, more than merely a problem for the church. 'Civil and religious liberty', he wrote in 1794, 'are but two great branches of the same expanded tree. They have been found most intimately allied'.[17] The more complete the independence of the church, the greater the freedom of the citizen. In a later extended attack on the control of the civil power over religion, he illustrated the point with a comparison between the English and Scottish Reformations, greatly to the advantage of the latter. The one, he noted, had been imposed from above, for political ends; the other began with the people and communicated itself upwards.

> Accordingly, as might be expected, the change in the former kingdom, was not accompanied with any sensible accession or advantages to civil liberty, nor productive of a limitation but augmentation of regal prerogative: in the latter, it produced a very remarkable struggle for civil rights, and popular liberty, which at the time did great honour to the principles and spirit of the Scotch Reformers, and eventually procured a system of national rights and legal privileges, civil and religious, which many of their neighbours have eagerly sought, but have not yet attained. The English who boast of patriotism, as their manner is, are disposed to arrogate to themselves the glory of asserting the principles of freedom against the tyranny of the Stewarts; and of overthrowing it at last in the Revolution; nor are they always so just as to

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[16] Bruce, *A Historico-Politico-Ecclesiastical Dissertation on the Supremacy of Civil Powers in Matters of Religion; Particularly the Ecclesiastical Supremacy Annexed to the English Crown* (Edinburgh, 1802), x. [mis-numbered; should be xiv]

[17] Bruce, *Reflections on Freedom of Writing and the Impropriety of Attempting to Suppress it by Penal Laws. Occasioned by a Late Proclamation against Seditious Publications, and the Measures Consequent on it...* (n.p., 1794), iii

> abstain from insinuations against the inhabitants of one part of the isles as fond of hereditary slavery. But the English have every reason not to provoke a comparison on this head, as it would turn out very little to their honour. – In all the great principles, and in almost every point of public liberty, the Presbyterian Reformers went before their celebrated patriots...[18]

In this quotation are expressed the elements of a Scottish whig theory of British history, in which, as a result of the greater purity of their Reformation, the Scots were able to give the lead to the English in the creation of the principles of liberty. Bruce was not primarily a historian, and he did not elaborate on the idea; but as will be seen, it did not end with him.

Independence of the church from the state did not mean that the state had no responsibilities for religion. Quite the contrary; Bruce believed that rulers still had the duties ascribed to the magistrate in the Second Book of Discipline: to protect the church by making laws in its favour, defending it from violence, and providing material support. 'There is no power ordained of GOD', he declared in a pamphlet in 1785, 'but is to be applied for the glory of GOD'.[19] This kind of assistance could, however, only be extended to true religion; toleration of all religions was as good as no protection at all.[20] In particular, no toleration could be extended to Roman Catholicism, which was not a Christian church at all, but antichristian. Bruce's identification of the Catholic Church with the Antichrist was not unusual in British Protestant circles at the time, nor was the close and necessary connection which he believed to exist between Catholicism and civil tyranny; but his animus against Catholicism was intense even by the standards of the day. In 1781 he published *Free*

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[18] Bruce, *Historico* (Edinburgh, 1802), 87
[19] Archibald Bruce, *True Patriotism; or, a Public Spirit for God and Religion Recommended, and the Want of it Reprehended* (Edinburgh, 1785), 36
[20] *Ibid.*, 42

Thoughts on the Toleration of Popery, in which he drew on a host of sources in four languages to detail the outrages committed by the elder church through the ages. He concluded that toleration of Catholicism was not only inexpedient but forbidden by scripture:

> The fatal catastrophe and fatal extermination of Antichristian Rome is an event no less expressly declared, and more fully and circumstantially described in the New-Testament prophecy, that the overthrow and defoliation of the temple of Jerusalem. Is it work, then worthy of any but apostates from Protestantism, and Christianity itself, to labour to counteract the designs of Providence, and to falsify the divine oracles, in regard to the most glorious event, which the last times are to bring forth for the general happiness of the world...?[21]

Bruce made the same argument – that Providence had decreed the destruction of the Catholic Church, and that it ill behoved Protestant nations to interpose themselves in its defence – after the outbreak of the French Revolution made it appear that the prophecy was on the point of coming true. Again, it has been pointed out that his position in the matter was by no means unique; many Britons, even those of a conservative disposition, welcomed the Revolution at first and rejoiced at evidence that the Catholic Church might be at last tottering to a conclusion.[22] But while other British supporters of the Revolution fell away during the decade of its progress, Bruce, in the four or five pamphlets he wrote on the subject during the Revolution, never wavered, nor altered the basis of his argument.

> Was there no danger to be apprehended, in a Protestant nation again joining in affinity with the people of these abominations – of their becoming

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[21] Archibald Bruce ('Calvinus Minor, Scoto-Brittanus'), *Free Thoughts on the Toleration of Popery* (Edinburgh, 1781), 351

[22] John D. Brims, 'The Scottish Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution' Ph.D. thesis (University of Edinburgh, 1983), 58-59

> partakers of Babylon's sins, and responsible for the blood of saints and murdered souls that is in her skirts, and so receiving of her plagues?[23]

That rhetorical question was asked in a pamphlet published in 1799, and by that time Bruce and his supporters, in defending the Revolution, were certainly in a small minority among the British people.

For Bruce, that position was neither unusual nor unsought. His identification with the theology and the witnesses of Scotland of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries necessarily put him at odds with the intellectual and social currents of his own day. He lived in the great age of the Scottish Enlightenment, but did not like it; his writings are replete with lamentations on the irreligion of his time, and its contrast with the great age of faith of the Scottish people. Once in Scotland thousands of Covenanters had offered themselves to martyrdom, torture and exile in the cause of Jesus; but no more:

> Instead of inheriting their spirit, and maintaining the testimony of such inviolable, doth not this age stigmatize them for fools, and traduce their cause as folly?... Are not many tongues and pens daily proclaiming the triumph of reason and good sense over what they are pleased to call Bigotry and Fanaticism; and celebrating the irreligious spirit of the times, accursed of GOD, as superior wisdom, moderation, free inquiry, liberal thinking and what not?[24]

It must have been equally upsetting to Bruce to find that he was losing touch even with his own church. When a proposal was initially made in 1793 to revise the church's testimony to eliminate reference to the coercive role of the magistrate,

[23] Archibald Bruce, *A Brief Statement of the Genuine Principles of Seceders, Respecting Civil Government: the Duty of Subjects; and National Reformation: and a Vindication of their Conduct in Reference to Some Late Plans and Societies for Social Reform; and the Public Dissents of the Time* (Whitburn, 1799), 62

[24] Bruce, *True Patriotism*, 111

Bruce was the first to argue, correctly as it turned out, that the change expressed a much more fundamental shift in the church's beliefs.[25] Reducing the magistrate to a nullity, he believed, would make the church's adherence to the covenants meaningless; it would put the church on the road to Voluntaryism, in flat contradiction to the principles of the Original Seceders. He must also have discerned a yet more profound change; the majority of his church was falling under the influence of Evangelicalism, which Bruce, with his essentially seventeenth-century theological viewpoint, could not be expected to assimilate. In the event the issue was fought out largely over the issue of the magistrate's role. For some time, Bruce stood out against the changes alone; later a small band of ministers, one by one, moved over to join him. One of them was Thomas M'Crie.

Exactly what had happened in M'Crie's life to bring him around to Bruce's views is not clear from his biography. He seems to have come under Evangelical influence early in his career; his refusal to accept the whole doctrine of the Confession of Faith at his ordination has been noted, and he later did a tour of preaching in Orkney, in keeping with the Evangelical emphasis on missionary activity. Shortly afterwards, however, he began to re-think his position, probably as a result of renewed contact with his divinity professor. Late in life he also spoke of reading Bishop Butler's *Analogy between Natural and Revealed Religion* at this period, from which he imbibed principles of biblical interpretation whereby 'I learned that I could be friendly to...establishments, and to the Protestant constitution of my country'.[26] Whatever the cause, by the turn of the century he had come to believe that the Old Testimony of his church had been right all along.

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[25] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 52
[26] *Ibid.*, 84

He never changed his mind again. With Bruce and four other ministers M'Crie stood against the bulk of the church in opposing the changes proposed in 1804, and when their opposition failed he joined them in 1806 in constituting a separate body, the Old Light Anti-Burghers. That church believed what the old one had believed, that is, in the continuing validity of the subordinate standards of the church, especially the Westminster Confession, as well as the scriptures, and in the continuing validity of the two covenants. On the question that M'Crie had raised in 1796, that of the role of the civil magistrate in the support and maintenance of the reformed religion, he now took the hardest possible line. 'We consider' he told his congregation shortly before his deposition from the church,

> that it is eminently the duty of those who are invested with civil authority to exercise a care about religion, and to make laws for countenancing its institutions. We are persuaded that if the principles now adopted by Seceders had been acted upon in former times in this country, the Reformation could never have taken place; *and that Satan, after having found his scheme for persecuting religion can no longer succeed, is now endeavouring to persuade men, that civil government and rulers have nothing to do with religion and the Kingdom of Christ.*[27] [Biographer's italics]

M'Crie wrote a good deal on establishments of religion in subsequent years, usually in more measured terms, but with equal conviction. The concept of establishment that he put forth was one of voluntary co-operation between bodies that were independent of each other, the established church being no sense an organ of state. The arrangement implied the payment of the ministers' stipends, the creation of new churches, and the suppression of Catholicism; in return, the church provided a more

[27] Cited in M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 128

moral society. Without the establishment principle, he believed, Scotland could not have long survived the Reformation as a Protestant country:

> the consequences would have been, that many parts of the country would have been thrown destitute of religious instruction and worship; ignorance, and crime, and atheism, would have spread through the land; and, within a short time, popish superstition and tyranny would have regained that power which had been wrested from them with such difficulty, and at the expense of so much toil and blood.[28]

Of at least as great importance to M'Crie as the establishment principle was the retention of the historical framework and the subordinate standards of the church. The New Testimony introduced in 1804 was informed by the biblicism that formed part of the Evangelical world view; while by no means consistent, it generally embodied a belief that the doctrine of the church should derive entirely from scripture. That position was as unacceptable to M'Crie as it was to Bruce; central to their vision of the church was a belief that the Reformers had been instruments of Providence, and that the confession, bonds and covenants that they left behind them embodied divine truths. In his later incarnation as a historian, M'Crie scattered references to Providence through his work, from accounts of the earliest martyrs to the Covenanters.

> At length, Providence raised up a man [Patrick Hamilton], singularly qualified as an instrument for arousing the minds of his countrymen, and opening their eyes upon that system of error and superstition by which they were enslaved and deluded.[29]

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[28] M'Crie, *Melville*, vol. i, 322-3

[29] Thomas M'Crie, 'Life of Patrick Hamilton', *The Christian Magazine*, Jan. 1806; in Thomas M'Crie the Younger, ed., *Miscellaneous Writings, Chiefly Historical, of the Late Thomas M'Crie, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1841), 89

> At length the time for delivering the Church of Scotland arrived. The Lord regarded the prayers and fasting of his servants, made their light to rise out of obscurity, and restored their captivity in an unexpected and surprising way. [Describing the introduction of the canons and prayer book in 1637][30]

With that kind of visible evidence of divine favour, the Church of Scotland could never be regarded as just another church, nor could its history ever be set aside in response to new fashions in theology.

With his deep intellectual and emotional commitment to a belief system which derived in large part from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, M'Crie was condemned to spend a lifetime in fundamental disagreement with much that had arisen during the eighteenth and nineteenth. His writings contain frequent references to the irreligion of the present, and at times we find him close to despair, as in a letter written to a fellow minister about 1818:

> The truth is, I am sick of the public—I am disgusted at it...It is long since I perceived that the favour which it testified for Knox was superficial, hollow and treacherous. How, indeed, could such an age really or sincerely venerate his character, or sympathize with his principles or his feelings, which are at such a variance with all its own?[31]

But he never gave up. M'Crie's nature and education had given him an instrument, in the form of historical research and writing, with which to defend his beliefs; and defend them he did, all his life.

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[30]Thomas M'Crie, 'Life of Alexander Henderson', in *Lives of Alexander Henderson and James Guthrie* (Edinburgh, 1846), 11

[31] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 191

Theologically a bedrock conservative, M'Crie was in most respects a liberal in political matters. As with Bruce, he conceived Presbyterianism and liberty to be inseparably bound to each other, and a belief in liberty runs through his writings. He was more of an activist than his study-bound tutor; he campaigned against the slave trade, which he described as 'Britain's disgrace', supported the Reform Act, and in the 1820s spoke at public meetings in support of Greek independence. But inseparable from his liberalism was a deep hostility to the repeal of laws against Catholicism, which he identified with tyranny. He took a concerned interest in the question of emancipation all his life; according to his son, no other question would excite his feelings so much.[32] An early expression of his opinions appeared in a pamphlet 'by a Scots Presbyterian' which he issued in 1807.

> In Britain, the legal maintenance of the Protestant religion, with security to its professors against the tyranny and perfidy of Roman Catholics, has, from the aera of the Reformation, been a principal object of policy. The laws enacted for this purpose have been viewed as an important part of our constitution.[33]

M'Crie always claimed to be a friend of freedom of conscience; he petitioned for the removal of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, and had no use for 'No Popery' mobs. But he believed that Catholics could never be trusted with positions of power. More than this, believing, as he did, that the covenants were still binding on Great Britain, he was convinced that the country was pledged to work towards the extirpation of Catholicism, and that to admit Catholics under the umbrella of the British constitution would expose the country to the judgements of heaven threatened against those nations which 'give their power and strength unto the beast'.[34] In 1829

[32] *Ibid.*, 316

[33] Thomas M'Crie, ('A Scots Presbyterian'), *Letters on the Late Catholic Bill, and the Discussions to which it has Given Rise, Addressed to British Protestants* (n.p., 1807), 4

[34] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 314

he drew up a petition to the House of Commons against emancipation, expressing some of his concerns, signed by 13,150 people.[35]

M'Crie's formation as a historian was somewhat more complex than his theological development. In 1783 he entered the University of Edinburgh, where he studied under, among others, Dugald Stewart, whom he greatly admired, subject to certain theological reservations. He was a good student, and his historical craft clearly owed a great deal to the education he received there; certainly, his histories were a world away from the unadorned screeds of his Presbyterian predecessors such as Calderwood and Row. M'Crie's works bore the same sort of scholarly apparatus that one finds in William Robertson: extensive footnoting, and end notes where he discussed historiographical questions, re-printed source documents, or retailed historical information peripheral to the text. His books were carefully and exhaustively researched, their footnotes containing references to a huge array of sources; one admirer counted 161 of the latter in his biography of Knox.[36] An accomplished linguist, he was able to make use of many Latin and French works – Beza's *Icones,* Calvin's correspondence, Verhudius's *Effigies* -- which appear in the bibliographies of few, if any, other Scottish historians; late in life he was able to add Italian and Spanish to the list. Further, one often encounters concepts in his work that suggest a university origin. Here, for instance, he supplies a contractual basis for the swearing of covenants, possibly the result of exposure to Locke or Pufendorf:

> A mutual agreement, compact, or covenant, is virtually implied in the constitution of every society, civil or religious; and the dictates of natural law

[35] *Ibid.*, 318
[36] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 188

> conspire with the declarations of revelation in sanctioning the warrantableness and propriety of explicit engagements.[37]

Thus in format, research techniques, and in some interpretative ideas, M'Crie the historian may legitimately be called a child of the Scottish Enlightenment. What one does not find in his writing is any consistent attempt to understand a past age on its own terms, in the manner of the German historicists or in that of his countryman Robertson. His historical writings were works of advocacy; he explained as much, and the reason for it, in the introduction to his *Life of Knox*:

> The attacks which have been made on [Knox's] character from so many quarters, and the attempts to wound the Reformation through him, must be my excuse for having so often adopted the language of apology.[38]

In practice this approach meant that M'Crie sometimes explained questionable acts or characteristics of his protagonists, as for example the harshness of Knox's rhetoric, by referring to the practices of the time. But this effort of understanding stopped with the Reformers; at no point in his histories did M'Crie ever apply the same consideration to any of the other players in Scottish history. The enemies of the church, in particular the Stuarts, were relentlessly judged by the political and ethical norms of the early nineteenth century, and as relentlessly found wanting. Little inquiry was made into their motives; they were shown for the most part behaving as they did because, for some reason or other, they had chosen to do evil.

M'Crie was equally uneven in the deployment of his very considerable critical abilities. At one point in his Knox biography, he noted of David Calderwood that he had mistakenly claimed that Knox had spent nine months in the galleys, when the

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[37] Thomas M'Crie, *The Life of John Knox*, fourth edition (Edinburgh, 1818), vol. i, 181
[38] *Ibid.*, vol. i, xi

correct figure was nineteen. He added of Calderwood's work 'Though it has been useful, is not always accurate in what it contains'.[39] Just so; and it could also be said that Calderwood's history was written by a man who had been expelled from the pulpit by James VI, and had all the historiographical drawbacks associated with party political tracts. But for M'Crie, Calderwood's narrative was one of the major sources of the Reformation story that he had learned as a youth, and he accordingly accepted most of what he found in it without too close an inquisition. Opposition narratives such as Hume's, on the other hand, were regularly savaged, not without skill.

In sum, what distinguished M'Crie definitively from such writers as Robertson or Hume was that he was not primarily interested in gaining an understanding of the past and making a readable narrative out of it. Rather, he was a theologian whose beliefs were under attack, and who wished to re-establish a correct historical narrative in order to defend them. For this reason his writings, to the modern reader at any rate, have a propagandistic quality that is absent from that of his two predecessors, despite their own strongly held positions. M'Crie certainly had virtues as a historian: he was a tireless researcher; he seems to have read everything extant on his subjects, and he brought to light a good deal of material in manuscript that had not featured in previous historical writing. But his purpose was always evident: throughout his career, he strove ceaselessly to make his readers understand why his side was right, and why their opponents were wrong. It often makes him a difficult historian to read.

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[39] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 76n.

M'Crie's career as a historian began in 1803, when he wrote to a friend describing a meditated series of sketches on the Reformers for the *Christian Magazine*, which he edited:

> The order for instance might be (I write merely from the recollection of the moment), Patrick Hamilton, George Wishart, John Knox, John Craig, Andrew Melvine, [sic] Patrick Simpson, Robert Bruce, &c.[40]

He fulfilled only part of his programme: the 'Life of Patrick Hamilton' appeared in 1806, and 'The Life of Alexander Henderson', in five numbers, the same year. By that time, the apostasy of New Light, which he felt 'went to condemn the whole plan of Reformation pursued by our ancestors',[41] convinced him that something more was needed to revivify the image of the Reformers than articles in an obscure magazine. He began writing *The Life of John Knox* shortly afterwards, and in 1811 it was published to great acclaim. He followed this success in 1819 with a life of Andrew Melville, who had entered the Church of Scotland's councils two years after the death of Knox in 1572, and whose biography effectively carried the story of the church through another generation. M'Crie later said that the effort of researching and writing the two biographies had been so exhausting that it had ruined his health; in any event, he did not continue with his series on the Reformers, and his last two books, *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (1827), and *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the Sixteenth Century* (1829), pursued specialised interests of his own. As well as his books, he produced a stream of reviews, articles and pamphlets, all in some way related to the history of the Protestant religion. It is scarcely an overstatement to say that everything he wrote may be described as an answer to the critics of the Reformers and their works.

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[40] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 152

[41] *Ibid.*, 162

The works of some of these critics have been discussed in the previous chapter. Certainly the most influential and most obnoxious figure was David Hume, whose *History of England* encompassed almost everything in the existing historiographical climate that M'Crie found most insupportable: Hume was a freethinker, savagely contemptuous of the Scottish Reforrmers, and though neither a tory nor a Jacobite was far more sympathetic to those twin sophistries than M'Crie was prepared to tolerate. Withal, his writings were tremendously popular. It is not surprising that M'Crie did not care for Hume.

> Regarding the various systems of religious belief and worship as distinguished from one another merely by different shades of falsehood and superstition, he has been led, by a strange but not inexplicable bias, uniformly to shew the most marked partiality to the grosser and more corrupt forms of religion; has spoken with greater contempt of the Protestants than of the Roman Catholics, and treated the Scottish with greater severity than the English Reformers. Forgetting what was due to the character of a philosopher...he has acted as the partizan and advocate of a particular family; and, in vindicating some of the worst measures of the Stuarts, has done signal injustice to the memory of the most illustrious patriots of both kingdoms.[42]

M'Crie's attitude to Hume's friend William Robertson was quite different. M'Crie was enough of a scholar and a Scot to recognise the *History of Scotland* for the achievement that it was; his son said that he used to refer to it as 'the most beautiful piece of history he ever read'.[43] In footnotes he referred to him as 'the careful Robertson' or 'the most moderate and impartial of our historians'. Still, Robertson's

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[42] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. ii, 247
[43] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 180

attitude to the Reformation was not M'Crie's; he found Robertson lukewarm on the virtues of the Reformers and unduly sympathetic to their enemies. One problem was his hostility to Andrew Melville, whom he criticised for claiming clerical exemption from civil jurisdiction parallel to that obtained by the Catholic clergy[44], and generally spreading turbulence. Even worse was his absurdly sympathetic portrait of Mary:

> the warmest admirers of his History of Scotland cannot deny, that he has been misled by the temptation of making Mary the heroine of his story, and of thus interesting his readers deeply in his narrative, by blending the tender and romantic with the more dry and uninteresting detail of public transactions... the History of Scotland has done more to prepossess the public mind in favour of that princess than all the defences of her most zealous and ingenious advocates, and consequently to excite prejudices against her opponents.[45]

Prone to this kind of perceptual lapse, Robertson, for all his merits, had to be regarded as a dubious ally on critical points of Presbyterian history.

Robertson's fellow Moderate, George Cook, published his *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (1811) just as M'Crie was completing his biography of Knox. Cook came to appropriate Presbyterian conclusions on political questions, and M'Crie accorded him a favourable, though qualified, mention in the preface to his own book. But in fact the differences between the two authors were profound. There was, to begin with, a difference on the workings of Providence, specifically, in the words of his son, 'the omnipotent influence he [Cook] ascribes to secondary causes'.[46] Further, he was too impartial, and far too tepid:

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[44] William Robertson, *History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and James VI* (Edinburgh, 1759), 307
[45] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. ii, 248-9
[46] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 185

> In the pages of Dr Cook we discover the same neutrality of feeling, and looseness of sentiment, with respect to many important branches of the Reformation, which we have already noticed as characterising those of Dr Robertson....There is hardly one point that good men have suffered or struggled for, which appears to him of sufficient importance to justify a struggle or a suffering on account of it.[47]

Like Robertson, he was unsound on the Regent Moray and even more so on Mary, and in a successor work published a few years later it would become apparent that he loathed Andrew Melville. Cook did, however, provide M'Crie with one idea that struck a chord, that of the Presbyterian ministry as a predecessor of the free press:

> At this period the liberty of the press was much shackled, and sufficient intellectual progress had not yet been made, to render the extensive circulation of political publications an instrument for the preservation of liberty. The minister alone, whose interests were identified with those of the great mass of the community, who were held in the utmost veneration, and who had vast influence in guiding popular feelings and opinion, could render to the country the essential service, which, in a different state of society, would, from other quarters, have been given.[48]

Translated into M'Crie's prose in his biography of Melville, this oddly ahistorical argument for the verbal excesses of the clergy during James VI's reign was to go rattling through Presbyterian historical works for the rest of the century, often almost verbatim.[49]

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[47] *Ibid.*, 184

[48] George Cook, *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 1815), vol. ii, 19

[49] See below, p. 86

Most of the other historians with whom M'Crie had to contend were lesser lights. The most dangerous of them, in M'Crie's eyes, were the single-minded adherents of Mary Queen of Scots:

> the greatest torrent of abuse, poured upon his [Knox's] character, has proceeded from those literary champions who have come forward to avenge the wrongs, and vindicate the innocence of the peerless, and immaculate Mary, Queen of Scots.... In the raving style of these writers, Knox was "a fanatical incendiary—a holy savage—the son of violence and barbarism—the religious Sachem of religious Mohawks."[50]

M'Crie is here quoting John Whitaker's *Vindication of Queen Mary*, but that work was but one of many, and there were more to come. A final category of enemies perhaps reflected more on M'Crie's perceptions than on the historiography of the period. M'Crie applied the term 'Jacobites' to persons who might otherwise be called tories, that is to people who thought too highly of the royal prerogative, and too little of civil liberties.

> The spirit by which the Jacobite faction was actuated, did not become extinct with the family which was so long the object of their devotion; and though they transferred their allegiance to the House of Hanover, they retained those principles which had incited them repeatedly to attempt its expulsion from the throne....From persons of such principles, nothing favourable to our Reformer can be expected.[51]

M'Crie mentioned no names. In later years, however, charges of Jacobitism, based on this accommodating definition, were routinely flung by his successors at enemies of Presbyterian history of whatever stripe.

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[50] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. ii, 247
[51] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 246

The strongest single motive for M'Crie's biographies seems to have been his desire to counter the picture presented in Hume and others of the Reformers as gloomy fanatics. He implied as much in the preface to the first edition, in commenting on the absence of a full-dress portrait of Knox from the existing historical literature.

> Nor can it escape observation, that a number of writers have been guilty of great injustice to the memory of our Reformer, and from prejudice, from ignorance, or from inattention, have exhibited a distorted caricature, instead of a genuine portrait.[52]

Doubtless for this reason, in his presentation of his subjects he laid considerable emphasis on their learning, erudition being in any case for M'Crie the greatest secular virtue; with Melville, for instance, he detailed his academic achievement, his reforms at the Universities of Glasgow and St Andrews, and his services to Scottish literature,[53] and gave some examples of his Latin poetry. With Knox, he supplemented accounts of his subject's academic brilliance with accounts of his sense of humour and of his family life, the better to counter his legendary gloominess. He also was at pains to address specifically some of the charges that had been adduced against the Reformers, particularly by the abhorred Hume. Here, for example, are Hume on the subject of the murder of Cardinal Beaton in 1546 and M'Crie's counter:

> It is very horrid, but at the same time somewhat amusing, to consider the joy and alacrity and pleasure, which that historian [Knox] discovers in his narrative of this assassination.[54]

To which M'Crie replied:

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[52] *Ibid.*, vol. i, v
[53] M'Crie, *Melville*, vol. ii, 273-336
[54] Hume, *History*, vol. ii, 242n.

> The truth is, he held the opinion, that persons who according to the law of God, and the just laws of society, have forfeited their lives, by the commission of flagrant crimes, such as notorious murderers and tyrants, may warrantably be put to death by private individuals; provided all redress, in the ordinary course of justice, is rendered impossible.[55]

As for Knox's apparent delight in the deed, he was, in M'Crie's opinion, obviously borne away by his sense of humour.[56] M'Crie also rebutted, one by one, Hume's attacks on the Reformer's behaviour towards Mary. He never called her Jezebel while she was queen, and he never spoke to her with disrespect, merely with a plainness with which she was unfamiliar. Hume's suggestion that her conduct was in some sense caused by the Reformers was simply absurd:

> It is well known that the court at which she received her education was most dissolute; and the supposition that she carried away the innocent polish and refinement of their manners, without contracting their criminal contagion, is not only incredible but contradicted by the confessions of her friends.[57]

Clearly, the twig had already been bent.

It will have become evident that popular sympathy for Queen Mary was a source of considerable unhappiness for Dr M'Crie. He accordingly made repeated efforts to correct the picture of her that was current in popular literature. To begin with, Mary was nowhere near as nice as she seemed:

> Of a temper naturally violent, the devotion which she had been accustomed to see paid to her personal charms rendered her extremely impatient of

[55] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. i, 48
[56] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 373
[57] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 318

> contradiction...Full of high notions of royal prerogative, she regarded the late proceedings in Scotland as a course of rebellion against her authority.[58]

Moreover, she was a Catholic, and a quite unrepentant one.

> She was taught that it would be the great glory of her reign to reduce her kingdom to the obedience of the Romish See....With these fixed prepossessions Mary came into Scotland, and she adhered to them with singular pertinacity to the end of her life.[59]

She treacherously refused to ratify the Treaty of Peace of 1560, tried to have Knox condemned for treason, and in 1566 signed the Catholic League for extirpating Protestants. Her guilt in the death of her husband had been demonstrated by Hume, Robertson and Laing. Her removal as queen saved the country from the activation of her plots against the Protestant religion, and the cry of Knox and his colleagues for her execution as a murderer and adulteress was no more than just. Still, there was a note of frustration in M'Crie's words: one senses in his repeated outpourings on the subject a fear that no amount of rational argument could ever weaken the cult of that difficult and inconvenient woman. If that is indeed what M'Crie believed, he was right.

Mary's half-brother Moray was in the opposite case, that of an admirable man who had been unfairly traduced. Here, the most plausible offender was the estimable William Robertson, and M'Crie's rebuttal was couched more in terms of sorrow than of anger:

> I confess that it pains me to think of the way in which Dr Robertson has drawn his character. The faint praise which he has bestowed on him, the doubt which he has thrown over his moral qualities, and the unqualified

[58] *Ibid.*, vol. ii., 22
[59] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 22-23

censures which he has pronounced upon some parts of his conduct, have, I am afraid, done more injury to the Regent's memory, than the exaggerated accounts of his adversaries.[60]

M'Crie's supported his demurral with an end-note of several pages in which he carefully controverted about a dozen of Robertson's charges, and concluded with the seventeenth-century French historian Thuanus's description of the Regent, entirely in capitals for greater certainty:

> HE WAS A MAN WITHOUT AMBITION, WITHOUT AVARICE, INCAPABLE OF DOING AN INJURY TO ANY ONE, DISTINGUISHED BY HIS VIRTUE, AFFABILITY, BENEFICENCE AND INNOCENCE OF LIFE.[61]

Another sore spot with which M'Crie had to deal was the violence and demolition that accompanied Knox's progress following his return to Scotland in 1559. For M'Crie, who had little interest in art and architecture even of the non-Popish kind, the subject was obviously a source of some considerable exasperation.

> Scarcely any thing in the progress of the Scottish Reformation, has been more frequently or more loudly condemned, than the demolition of those edifices upon which superstition had lavished all the ornaments of the chisel and pencil.[62]

To the chisel and pencil crowd, M'Crie made several answers: first, that the demolished buildings were no longer of any use, as there was no longer a monastic or episcopal presence in the country; second, that the violence never would have happened if the queen had been willing to negotiate with the Protestant nobles; third,

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[60] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 332-333
[61] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 340
[62] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 271

from Knox's own words, that it served to prevent a return of Papists to their former haunts; and finally, that it struck at the real source of strength of Catholicism, its genius for display:

> I will go farther, and say, that I look upon the destruction of these monuments as a piece of good policy, which contributed materially to the overthrow of the Roman Catholic religion, and the prevention of its re-establishment. It was chiefly by the magnificence of its temples, and the splendid apparatus of its worship, that the popish church fascinated the senses and imaginations of the people.[63]

Several other issues of concern to M'Crie recur at various parts of his narratives. One lay at the heart of Presbyterianism, the question of bishops in the church and their replacement by the presbytery. Reading back from subsequent history, there was no issue more important to the Scottish church of the post-Reformation period. M'Crie was therefore at great pains in his Knox biography to show that the Reformer had never approved of bishops, despite his having co-existed with them in the church.

> As early as the year 1547, he taught, in his first sermons at St Andrew's, that no mortal man could be head of the Church; that there were no true bishops, but such as preached personally without a substitute...[64]

There are similar intimations throughout the book, including an assertion that the church of Geneva 'on the whole, corresponded with his ideas'.[65] Knox was shown scorning the idea of consecration of ministers by laying on of hands, and declining to inaugurate Bishop Douglas in 1572. There are, however, no direct quotations on the

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[63] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 277
[64] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 103
[65] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 103

matter from Knox, who seems in fact never to have taken a stand on principle against bishops, and whose last word of advice to the church was that the bishoprics created by the 1572 Leith convention should be filled as soon as possible with capable men.[66]

Whether or not Knox was firmly on side, M'Crie believed on the basis of subsequent history that bishoprics, however constituted, were necessarily a danger to the freedom of the church.

> It was by setting up bishops, and by the share which they consequently had in the admission of ministers, that the court expected chiefly to succeed in their designs on the patrimony of the church. And whatever they may have found it prudent to give out...the great reason which has induced rulers to prefer episcopacy, is the superior facility with which it enables them to exert an unlimited sway over the clergy, and, through them, over the sentiments and feelings of the people.[67]

Thus is was that when Andrew Melville proposed the establishment of presbytery in 1575, so far from unnecessarily attacking a viable system, as was described in the works of Robertson and Cook, among others, he was in fact rescuing the church from an institution that was in its nature scripturally unlawful, corrupt and dangerous. As for presbytery itself, M'Crie stopped just short of describing it as directly prescribed by the word of God.

> Such is the outline of the Presbyterian plan of church government, as delineated in the Second Book of Discipline. Its leading principles rest upon the express authority of the word of God. Its subordinate arrangements are supported by the general rules of Scripture.[68]

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[66] Gordon Donaldson, *The Scottish Reformation* (Cambridge, 1960), 170
[67] M'Crie, *Melville*, vol. i, 108-9
[68] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 123

Unsurprisingly, the system worked.

> Accordingly, it has secured the cordial and lasting attachment of the people of Scotland; whenever it has been wrested from them by arbitrary violence, they have uniformly embraced the first favourable opportunity of demanding its restoration.[69]

Another recurrent issue, the relations between church and state, was closely related to that of bishops. Here, M'Crie adhered closely to Melville's position that the civil and ecclesiastical spheres were separate from each other, despite the fact that Knox obviously never considered them so. M'Crie believed that the church-state separation was firmly established when the Presbyterian system was instituted, and that in this separation lay the greatest strength of the new system.

> It [presbytery] encourages a friendly co-operation between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities; but it, at the same time, avoids the confounding of their limits—prohibits church-courts from "meddling with any thing pertaining to the civil jurisdiction,"—establishes their independence in all matters which belong to their cognizance—and guards against, what is the great bane of religion and curse of the church, a priesthood which is merely the organized puppet of the state, and moves and acts only as it is directed by a political administration.[70]

Much of the drama in the remainder of the Melville biography derived from its subject's efforts to maintain the separation in the face of opposition from the utterly worthless and erastian James VI. The narrative high point was reached with Melville's 'God's sillie vassal' speech at Falkland, in which he delineated the theory

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[69] *Ibid.* vol. i, 123
[70] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 124-5

of the two kingdoms to a dumbstruck James. M'Crie gave the speech, taken from James Melville's diary, in great detail:

> Therefore, Sir, as diverse times before I have told you, so now again I must tell you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland: there is King James the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus the King of the church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. Sir, those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over his church, have power and authority from him to govern his spiritual kingdom both jointly and severally; the which no Christian king or prince should control and discharge, but fortify and assist; otherwise they are not faithful subjects of Christ and members of his church.[71]

The tirade went on for two more pages. Shortened versions of this scene, with the critical passages intact, were to appear in histories and texts for the remainder of the century, and provided a philosophical basis for arguments for the church's spiritual independence. At the time, however, M'Crie noted, the church gained nothing: the design of restoring the popish noblemen was persevered in, and more Catholics were admitted to the King's inner circle.

Parenthetically, it is hard for a modern reader not to note that of all the harangues which M'Crie's heroes directed at royalty – Knox at Mary, Knox at Darnley, Melville at James VI, and, one might add, the Protesters' six-hour sermons to the young Charles II – not one achieved anything; indeed, the royal figures in question invariably ended doing the opposite of what they were told. Absent from M'Crie's narrative is any concept that Melville might have been part of the church's problem:

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[71] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 391

that his repeated public reprobation of his sovereign, his excommunication of James's allies, his hectoring lecture at Falkland and a host of other indignities might have played a part in converting an insecure and wavering young king into an enemy of the presbytery. For M'Crie, Melville and the other Reformers were speaking truth to power; if they failed, the fault lay with the royal auditors. That there might be methods for dealing with royal personages different from those that worked so well with congregations never seems to have entered M'Crie's head, any more than it did that of his fellow minister Andrew Melville.

M'Crie's depiction of Melville's role in these struggles certainly assigned him a greater role in the history of his period than had previously been the case, and probably a greater one than his contributions merited. Alan MacDonald, in an article published in 2000, noted that 'Melvillians' as such probably never existed.

> There is...no firm evidence that Andrew Melville was the leader of an ecclesiastical faction nor that he was any more prominent in the Kirk than many others. His fame may derive largely from Thomas M'Crie's view of him as the successor to John Knox who had been given a peculiarly pre-eminent role by general assemblies of the 1560's.[72]

To do M'Crie justice, he never used the term 'Melvillians', and specifically denied that Melville was the leader of a party.[73] By choosing him as Knox's successor in his truncated series of biographies, however, M'Crie certainly gave Melville a higher profile in subsequent historiography than he otherwise would have had. In this respect it is interesting to note the picture of James's relations with the Kirk in George Cook's history, the last major work of Scottish history to appear before the

[72] Alan R. MacDonald, 'James VI and the General Assembly, 1586-1618', in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch, ed., *The Reign of James VI* (East Linton, 2000), 171
[73] M'Crie, *Melville*, vol. .i, 135

publication of M'Crie's *Melville* in 1819. Melville appeared in Cook's text as the original proponent of the Presbyterian system of church government and the originator of the idea, highly regrettable in Cook's eyes, that the system was prescribed by scripture. Apart from that, however, Melville played no larger part in Cook's account of the struggles with James VI than did such figures as Bruce and Balcanquhal. His 'God's sillie vassal' speech to James at Falkland in 1596, a staple of all later ecclesiastical histories, did not appear, nor was there any reference at all to the 'Melvillians'. For that matter, it will be recalled that when, in 1803, M'Crie drew up a list of Reformers for possible biographical treatment, Melville was the one whose name he could not quite remember. For most of the century after the publication of the biography, however, Melville was depicted in historical works as the second founder of the church, the leader of his own clerical party, the scourge of James VI. He was a hero to the Free Church school of historical interpretation, a large but somewhat embarrassing presence in that of the Established Church, a black villain to Episcopalians. All of this suggests is that MacDonald was correct in believing that M'Crie's biography permanently enhanced Melville's historical role, and if that is so it is a pointer to the influence that M'Crie was to wield.

It has been noted above that M'Crie, unlike Robertson, who had rejected the idea of separate kingdoms because it seemed to undercut the establishment principle, thought the two principles perfectly compatible. M'Crie went on to insist, in the face of considerable contrary evidence, that Melville and his confreres really did keep out of civil affairs, and that only the king overstepped the line between the two. He played down, for instance, clerical responsibility and the seriousness of the religious riot of 17 December 1596, which so horrified Robertson and Cook.

> Such are the facts connected with the tumult *the seventeenth of December*, which has been related in so many histories , and magnified into a daring and horrid rebellion. Had it not been laid hold of by designing politicians as a handle for accomplishing their measures, it would not now have been known that such an event had ever occurred...[74]

Similarly, he tripped very lightly over the anomaly of the civil penalties attached to the church's power of excommunication, a power which was used freely during this period against Huntly, Hume, Errol, and various other perceived enemies of the church, often at Melville's insistence. M'Crie did acknowledge that the ministers conducted a vigorous programme of political commentary from the pulpit; but that activity was well within their remit, and moreover was essential to the health of the nation:

> A law which would have had the effect of restraining the ministers of Edinburgh alone from expressing any opinion on matters of state, was more to be dreaded at that time than the presence of ten thousand armed Spaniards in the heart of Scotland...Persons may declaim at their pleasure on the insufferable licence in which the preachers indulged; but it will be found, on examination, that the discouragement of vice and impiety, the checking of the most crying abuses in the administration of justice, and the preserving of common peace and order in the country, depended upon the freedom of the pulpit, to a degree which no one who is not intimately acquainted with the state of things at that period can conceive.[75]

This line of thought, as suggested above, evidently owed something to George Cook; M'Crie was nothing if not omnivorous in finding arguments for the defence of his church.

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[74] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 410
[75] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 401

He went farther than Cook, however. For M'Crie, the churchmen were doing a great deal more than giving sound advice: they were protecting everyone's freedom. The phrase 'civil and religious liberty' recurs frequently in M'Crie's works, and like his mentor, Bruce, he believed that over the long run the two forms of liberty were inseparable.

> Civil and ecclesiastical tyranny were so closely combined, that it was impossible for men to emancipate themselves from the latter without throwing off the former; and from arguments which established their religious rights, the transition was easy, and almost unavoidable, to disquisitions about their civil privileges.[76]

Thus it was that the struggle against the imposition of Episcopacy during the reign of James VI was far more than an argument over ecclesiastical forms. It was in fact an attempt by the king to make himself dictator in matters of religion, and therefore in everything else:

> his ultimate object was, by means of the bishops, to overturn the civil liberties of the nation, and to become absolute master of the consciences, properties, and lives of all his subjects in the three kingdoms. It was a contest, therefore, that involved all that is dear to men and Christians – all that is valuable in liberty and sacred in religion. Melville was the first to discover and to denounce the scheme which was planned of the overthrow of these; and he persisted in opposing its execution at the expense of deprivation of office, imprisonment, and perpetual banishment from his native country.[77]

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[76] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. i, 303
[77] M'Crie, Melville, vol. ii, 335

It is here, then, that M'Crie locates Melville's most important contribution to his age, not just as founder of the Presbyterian polity, but as martyr to the liberties of the British people.

The connection between Presbyterianism and freedom was a commonplace among Presbyterian writers, appearing in Robertson and Cook among others; Robertson said that the Reformers introduced a new spirit of liberty into Scotland and thereby 'overturned the firmest foundations of civil tyranny'.[78] But Robertson, as indicated in the previous chapter, believed that real constitutional liberty had been delivered to the Scottish people by the union. Bruce and M'Crie saw things in quite a different light, and in the latter's work may be seen a revival and elaboration of the whig interpretation of Scottish history, which shifted the primary responsibility for Scottish, and to a large extent British, freedom to the Scots themselves. The motive force was the Protestant Reformation. M'Crie, no more than Robertson, believed in an ancient Scottish constitution of liberty[79] (though he did believe in an English equivalent); the powers of the Scottish kings had indeed been limited, but only by the random selfishness of the nobility. The idea of liberty came into Scotland with the Reformation; it was nurtured by the clergy, and embodied in the constitution of the presbytery, and it owed nothing, in its origin, to the English. In outlining Knox's political views, he noted that they were 'essentially the principles upon which the free constitution of Britain rests'.[80] In discussing the struggles between the clergy and James VI in the first decade of the seventeenth century, he went somewhat farther, in attributing to the former the origins within Great Britain of the principle of the rule of law.

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[78] Robertson, *History of Scotland*, vol. i, 156
[79] M'Crie, *Knox*, vol. i, 307
[80] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 308

> The question at issue between the court and them amounted to this, whether they were to be ruled by law, or by the arbitrary will of the prince—whether royal proclamations were to be obeyed when they suspended statutes enacted by the joint authority of King and Parliament. This question came afterwards to be debated in England, and was ultimately decided by the establishment of the constitutional doctrine which confines the exercise of royal authority within the boundaries of law. But it cannot be denied, and it ought not to be forgotten, that the ministers of Scotland were the first to avow this rational doctrine, at the expense of being denounced and punished as traitors; and that their pleadings and sufferings in behalf of ecclesiastical liberty set an example to the friends of civil liberty in England.[81]

This passage is somewhat more subtle (and defensible) than Bruce's rodomontade on the same subject, but it contains a clear implication that there was in fact a constitution of liberty in Scotland; that it resided in her church; and that to some degree the English received their liberties from the Scots rather than the other way around. Like many of the leading ideas expressed in M'Crie's work, this one was to have a long and vigorous life.

Despite the great success of M'Crie's biographies and the subsequent development of a Presbyterian school of historiography, erroneous views of the past continued to abound in Scotland. One particularly hard case was the author of *Waverley*, whose novels, full of sympathetically drawn Jacobites, began to appear while M'Crie was writing his biography of Melville. In 1816 M'Crie's friend Andrew Thomson, then the leading figure in the Popular Party in the Church of Scotland, drew his attention to *Old Mortality*, with its hostile caricatures of the Covenanters of Drumclog and

[81] M'Crie, *Melville*, vol. ii, 117

Bothwell Bridge. M'Crie's outraged response, at over 190 pages surely one of the longest book reviews in literary history, appeared in the first three monthly issues for 1817 of Thomson's *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, and was later (1824) issued as a book. As was always the case when M'Crie was discussing the history of the church, a great deal more was at stake than merely getting the facts straight.

> We would advise those who write for public amusement, to be cautious in the choice of their subjects. Surely, if the blood of God's dear saints be precious in the sight of their Almighty Redeemer, it is unsafe to make their general character, or even their weaknesses, in the hour of trial, the subject of sport, or of frivolous entertainment; lest when His hand taketh hold on judgment, and He ariseth to render vengeance to His adversaries, and to make inquisition for blood, He then remember them.[82]

It may be recalled that M'Crie was a Covenanter himself; he belonged to one of the last ecclesiastical bodies in Scotland that still regarded the covenants as binding on the Scottish people. M'Crie accordingly found it particularly offensive to find Scott making fictional figures out of real Covenanters, without making any effort to give a true picture of them. Even worse, Scott had portrayed the fanaticism and rancour of the Covenanters without describing the persecution that gave rise to them.

> What person of judgement and candour will condemn the Covenanters, or say that they acted otherwise than it became men of conscience, integrity and spirit to act? Men who had been betrayed, insulted, harassed, pillaged, and treated like beasts...; and by whom? By a perfidious, profane, profligate junto of atheists and debauchees...aided by a set of wretches, the most despicable and worthless who ever disgraced the habit they wore...[83]

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[82]Thomas M'Crie, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters: Consisting of a Review of the First Series of the "Tales of My Landlord"*, extracted from the *Christian Instructor* for 1817. (Edinburgh, 1824), 4

[83] M'Crie, *Vindication*, 33-4

Scott's favourable treatment of Claverhouse brought forth a similar outburst. Usually in somewhat more temperate language, M'Crie spent most of the rest of the review establishing the narrative of the Covenanters on the basis of the standard Presbyterian sources – Wodrow, *Naphtali*, Burnet, Kirkton, and a few others – and going over Scott's narrative, error by error, with a meticulousness born of long study.

One of the ideas that he introduced along the way was to have a long run. The Covenanters, he argued, were not defending merely themselves, but the principles of civil and religious liberty.[84] This idea was not altogether new; Samuel Charters (1742-1825), one of whose sermons M'Crie quoted at length in his article, made a similar point in praise of the Cameronians;[85] and something the same was certainly implicit in the much earlier dedication of Robert Wodrow's *History*, in which he noted that Scots Presbyterians 'humbly claim the character of contending and suffering for Revolution principles, even before the Revolution was brought about'[86]. What M'Crie contributed was one of Archibald Bruce's favourite expressions, 'civil and religious liberty', and the weight of his own formidable scholarship and reputation. By way of supporting the proposition, he ran through a list of works by Covenanting authors, all of which spoke in favour of civil liberties; they included Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, the *Apologetical Relation* of Brown of Wamphrey (1665), and *Jus Populi Vindicatum* by James Stuart of Goodtrees (1669). 'These were the books', M'Crie concluded, 'which were in the hands of the Covenanters, and from which they derived that knowledge which astonished Bishop Burnet; and none but a person who is ignorant of their contents, could ingenuously oppose "whiggery" to the

[84] Thomas M'Crie, 'A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters' in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 348
[85] 'While Lord Russell, and Sidney, and other enlightened patriots in England, were plotting against Charles, from a conviction that his right was forfeited, -- Cameronians in Scotland, under the same conviction, had the courage to declare war against him. Both the plotters and the warriors fell; but their blood watered the plant of renown, and succeeding ages have eaten their pleasant fruit'. From Dr. Samuel Charters, *Sermons*, edition 1816, pp 273-277; cited in M'Crie, *Vindication*, 166
[86] Robert Wodrow, *History*, Dedication

"chartered rights of freemen" as the author of the Tales has done'.[87] Whether or not anyone but M'Crie seriously believed that the Ayrshire peasantry of the 1680s commonly ingested works like *Jus Populi Vindicatum* with their morning oatmeal, the idea in its outline struck a chord, and, as will be seen in Chapter Six, eventually became inseparably linked with the Covenanters' popular image.

In formulating this kind of argument, M'Crie felt that he was defending more than the Covenanters. To ridicule Presbyterians was to traduce the Scottish people, for in M'Crie's mind the two categories were largely identical. That point emerged very forcibly in another attack on Scott, written a year afterwards but never published, in which he argued that Scott's works as a whole systematically misrepresented the Scottish people.

> We have among us many who are as great strangers to the real history of their country, and to patriotic feelings, as those who never were north of London. We have writers of poetry and of romance, called National, who...have not uttered one sentiment truly Scottish, who have not yet been able to form a conception of the real Scottish character, who never were in the heart of Scotland, and are at home only when they are among marauding borderers, or demi-savage, pilfering, poignarding mountaineers.[88]

For M'Crie, the real Scots were the honest, pious and sacrificing Presbyterians whom he described in his writings; and most certainly, they were the only ones who needed to be displayed before the eyes of their southern brethren.

It is safe to say that M'Crie, who regarded novels as a waste of time, could never have understood Scott or his appeal to the reading public. Scott said as much himself

[87] *Ibid.*, 422
[88] Cited in Thomas M'Crie the Younger, ed., *Miscellaneous Writings*, 252

in a letter to a friend: 'I own I have my suspicions of that very susceptible devotion which so readily takes offense: such men should not read books of amusement'.[89] It is improbable that Scott lost anything in popularity as a result of M'Crie's attack; he did, however, feel sufficiently wounded by the review to write an answer to the first third of it in *The Quarterly Review.* Without much evidence, M'Crie's son believed that the general approbation attracted by his father's article had led Scott to avoid any further attacks on the Covenanters, and that his very sympathetic portrait of Jeanie Deans in *Heart of Midlothian* (1818), with her Covenanting father, was intended as a compensation, however inadequate, for his earlier errors.[90]

In the decade after his confrontation with the Great Unknown, M'Crie found another, more serious, enemy looming on the horizon. M'Crie regarded Catholic emancipation with something like horror; as mentioned above, he believed that it was a breach of Britain's covenant with God, and he wrote and later petitioned against it. In the late twenties M'Crie began writing his *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Italy in the Sixteenth Century* (1827), to be followed by a similar volume on Spain two years later. M'Crie had a long-term interest in the Reformation on the continent, but it is safe to suppose that his publication of the two books was partly motivated by a desire to show what happens to a country when it is dominated by Catholicism. In both countries the story mostly concerns the growth of scattered groups of Reformed Christians, followed by their elimination through expulsion, massacre, imprisonment or execution. The consequence of the Catholic triumph was a pinching off of the country's intellect, the creation of a frivolous and empty culture, and the destruction of its economy by a burgeoning and rapacious clergy.

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[89] Edgar Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott the Great Unknown* (London, 1970), 561
[90] M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 224

> Holland, with no soil but what she recovered from the ocean, waxed rich and independent, while Spain, with a third part of the world in her possession, has become poor.... Every street in Salamanca swarms with sturdy beggars and vagabonds able to work; and this is the case wherever the clergy, convents, and hospices are numerous. With a soil which, by its extent and fertility, is capable of supporting an equal number of inhabitants, the population of Spain is not half that of France.[91]

M'Crie's opposition to Catholic emancipation was not in itself eccentric; there were many anti-Catholic petitions presented in 1829, and their sentiments seem to have reflected a majority viewpoint.[92] But while the opposition in England, at least, centred around the political question of loyalty,[93] M'Crie's far wider considerations were a product of something far more intractable, the conviction that Catholicism was an anti-Christian system which the Kingdom of Great Britain had sworn to oppose.

For a man who was both a Protestant and a providentialist, the survival of so evil a system over the larger part of Europe was necessarily a perplexing matter, and we find in his text a rare admission that the ways of Providence were not always clear to him.

> The fate of the Reformation in Spain, as well as in Italy, teaches us not to form hasty and rash conclusions respecting a course of proceedings on which Providence, for inscrutable reasons, may sometimes be pleased to frown....persecution may be carried to such a pitch as will, without a miracle, crush the best of causes...[94]

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[91] Thomas M'Crie, *History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the Sixteenth Century* (Edinburgh, London, 1829), 389
[92] G.I.T Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics, 1820 to 1830* (Oxford, 1964), 87
[93] *Ibid.*, 15
[94] *Ibid.*, 343-4

He was certain, however, that resistance, by military means if necessary, was both justified and imperative when it was a question of saving the faith. The Protestants of Italy and Spain failed to resist, and disappeared; the Waldenses and others resisted and failed, to be sure, but it was an honourable failure, while the Protestants of Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries and Scotland resisted and survived. The time might come again when pacific means would not avail.

> It is to be hoped that the public mind in Britain, much as has been done to mislead it, is not yet prepared for adopting principles which lead to a condemnation of the famous Waldenses and Bohemians, for standing in defence of their lives, when proscribed and violently attacked because of their religion.[95]

It is perhaps of some relevance that an in an earlier article M'Crie had urged that Britain seek to ally itself with other Protestant powers.[96] For Scottish history, the implications were quite clear: the Covenanters were quite right to take up arms to defend their church, as the alternative was destruction.

By the time M'Crie published his book on Spain he was unquestionably the most influential living historian in Scotland, and he remained so until his death in 1835, though he wrote no more books. His biography of Knox received favourable reviews from many sides, religious and secular; the *Edinburgh Review*, for example, called it 'by far the best work of history which has appeared since the commencement of our critical career', and article in the *Quarterly Review* was almost as favourable.[97] The work had gone into its fourth edition by 1818 and was ultimately re-printed at least ten times, the last time in 1905. *Melville* was not as successful, but it also received

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[95] *Ibid.*, 343-4 n.

[96] Thomas M'Crie, 'Considerations on Geneva', from the *Christian Instructor*, Oct. 1814; reprinted in Thomas M'Crie the Younger, ed., *Miscellaneous Writing*, 228

[97] Cited in M'Crie the Younger, *Life*, 170-175

very good reviews and was reprinted in a revised version in 1823 and twice afterwards. The *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* called the two biographies 'the Iliad and Odyssey of the Scottish Church'.[98]

For a reader two centuries after their publication, the great success of these contentious, rather long-winded and utterly one-sided books necessarily prompts the question, why? The short answer is that there was a market for them. M'Crie was almost the only historian writing Scottish history in a manner in keeping with traditional Presbyterian accounts, and certainly the only one who commanded widespread respect in the historical community. Not everyone in the Scottish reading public was a freethinker, mariolater or armchair Jacobite. The majority, in fact, were adherents of the Church of Scotland and broadly whig in politics. Some of them would have been brought up on such classics as *Cloud of Witnesses* and John Howie's *Scots Worthies* (1774) and understand Scottish history pretty much the way M'Crie did. For these readers, even the more balanced accounts of the Presbyterians Robertson and Cook must have had less resonance than Dr M'Crie's straightforward simplicities.

There was also another factor at work which certainly strengthened M'Crie's influence. Some of the tensions in the Church of Scotland which would lead to rupture in 1843 were already in evidence when M'Crie's biographies were published. As will be discussed in the next chapter, both M'Crie's impulses and his friendship with the leader of the Popular Party, Andrew Thomson, made him a natural ally of the opponents of patronage within the Established Church. Subsequently the Non-Intrusionists, the successors of the Popular Party and the dominant group in the

[98] *ECI*, Nov. 1824, 773

General Assembly during the ten years before the Disruption of 1843, drew heavily on M'Crie's work in support of their position. The influence of this alliance carried forward into the Free Church. The new church from the beginning had a strong historical orientation, which may be traced partly to a need for an historical narrative to justify the very radical step of rending the Church of Scotland in two; and M'Crie's work provided this justification with its very hard line on the independence of the church from state intervention.

More than this, it is not too much to say that there was among many of the body of the ministers who walked out of the Church of Scotland in 1843 a different vision of the Scottish past from that of those who stayed in their seats. Their vision embodied a rejection of what the Enlightenment, in the form of such figures as Hume and Robertson, had done to challenge or attenuate the traditional Presbyterian view of the Reformation and the subsequent struggles of the church. Every one of the ministers of the Free Church who wrote historical works before and after the Disruption couched his account in the very uncompromising terms derived from Calderwood, Row and the other standard Presbyterian sources, and exemplified in the work of M'Crie.

The degree of the actual influence exerted by M'Crie's work is of course subject to the usual problems associated with intellectual history. The enthusiastic reception accorded by the Free Church to M'Crie's writings suggests that in his absence, the adherents of that church might have developed their own historiographical school unaided. And so they might; but it certainly would have been a poorer, and perhaps much thinner, school without his contribution. As it was, the Free Church produced many historians, but none remotely as good as M'Crie. Most borrowed from him in

one way or another; many went back to the same sources, selected the same quotations and came to the same conclusions as he had; and some of his arguments echo through the entire tradition.

It must also be recalled that when M'Crie began writing, the historiographical tide did not appear to be moving inexorably in his direction. He was, in fact, almost alone among contemporary historians in his outlook. Even among the public at large, the fact that one of the most conservative of Scottish churches, the Anti-Burgher Secession, had recently slipped its historical moorings suggests that the traditional Reformation story might have been starting to lose its some of its currency among Presbyterians. There was, after all, an alternative. William Robertson's great, and very readable, *History of Scotland* was written by a Presbyterian divine. Colin Kidd has argued that Robertson's intention was to defend the church in the atmosphere of the mid-eighteenth century essentially by drawing a circle around the core values of the Reformation while distancing it from the more embarrassing aspects of its heritage.[99] That approach, or the more pliable on-the-one-hand method of his successor George Cook, might well have set the pattern for future writing of Scottish history. But Cook had few successors, and M'Crie had many. M'Crie drew a circle of his own, much wider than Robertson's, wide enough indeed to include every aspect of the Reformation story that he had learned at his mother's knee. It has to be regarded as a measure of his achievement that generations of historians were to spring up to defend the line where he had drawn it.

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[99] Colin Kidd, 'The Ideological Significance of Robertson's *History of Scotland*, in Stewart J. Brown, ed., *William Robertson and the Expansion of Empire* (1997), 144

Chapter 4

Evangelicals, Non-Intrusionists and the Origin of the Free Church Historical School

The issue of patronage was for over two centuries a bone of contention within the Church of Scotland, and during the period of the Ten Years' struggle, 1833-43, it came to constitute a critical threat to the unity of the church. During this latter period Non-Intrusionism, opposition to the imposition of ministers chosen by patrons on unwilling congregations, hardened from a philosophical position into the status of a party, led by men who later became leaders in the Free Church. It did so largely because patronage was perceived increasingly as an obstacle to the extension of the church and, and for some of its members, to the revitalisation of the parish system on lines propounded by the leader of the Non-Intrusionists, Thomas Chalmers. The war of sermons, pamphlets and articles that accompanied the legal struggles of the period included appeals to the history of the Scottish church. Such appeals inevitably involved Dr M'Crie, by far the most prominent and accessible source of historical information of the kind that the Non-Intrusionists could use. So pervasive, indeed, was the picture of Reformation Scotland painted by M'Crie that it may have helped to shape the objectives pursued by the Non-Intrusionists as they sought to make a new Scotland out of the old. His work also helped to shape the beginning of a revived Presbyterian historiographical tradition which shared the world-view of the Evangelicals and Non-Intrusionists in the church, and eventually provided the basis for a Free Church school of history.

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Not long thereafter, however, Dr Thomson found the man he was looking for. When M'Crie's *Knox* was published in 1811, it was greeted with a review by the Evangelical minister David Dickson in the *Instructor* that bordered on the ecstatic. At the core of the review was an evidently heartfelt sense of relief at M'Crie's rescue of the traditional Presbyterian account of the Reformation from the clutches of the Enlightenment revisionists. Of Knox himself, Dickson declared jubilantly that M'Crie had 'triumphantly vindicated his memory from many aspersions and misrepresentations with which it has been loaded'.[4] Dickson quoted two full pages of M'Crie's rehabilitation of the Earl of Moray, the Reformation's other greatly maligned hero, 'so anxious do we feel, that the real character of Regent Murray, so long and undeservedly concealed or misrepresented by former historians, should be as universally known as possible'.[5] Of their principal traducer, Hume, Dickson could wish nothing more on him than another publication by M'Crie: 'we should think it a most essential service to the interests of truth and religion, were he to draw up a kind of *index expurgatoricus* to this infidel historian's cavils at the Reformation, and his unfounded or distorted views of this interesting part of our nation's annals'.[6] Finally, Dickson noted the 'scripturalness of M'Crie's doctrinal opinions, and the purity of his moral feelings – the Christian spirit, in short...which leads him to mark, so constantly and interestingly, the superintending direction and influence of divine Providence, in the commencement, progress and success of the Reformation'.[7] With God back in his heaven, Hume cast down, and Knox and his fellow reformers once again exalted, all was right with the Reformation.

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[4] *ECI*, Aug. 1812, 114
[5] *Ibid.*, 110
[6] *Ibid.*, Sept. 1812, 184
[7] *Ibid.*, 195

Thomson seems to have felt the same way. Shortly after the review appeared, he personally sought out M'Crie, and began a close friendship that was to last for the rest of Thomson's life. All of M'Crie's publications thereafter received favourable reviews. The second edition of *Melville* was treated to a three-part article in 1823, which was frankly a summary of the text, on the grounds that a proper review would have required 'in the Reviewer, a degree of learning and research nearly equal to that of its author'.[8] From 1812, M'Crie periodically contributed to the *Instructor*, often as a result of persistent urging on Dr Thomson's part; M'Crie's famous review of *Tales of My Landlord* was the product of just such an importunity. Sometimes Dr Thomson's suggestions to his friend appeared in print:

> In Dr M'Crie, we see all we could wish for in the historian of the Presbyterian church, and if he would add to his former labour, a history of the church from the beginning of Charles the First's reign to the Revolution, we are sure that the public would receive it with feelings of highest satisfaction.[9]

M'Crie was never able to write such a book, but his occasional writings, such as his life of Henderson and his review of *Tales of My Landlord*, put on record his interpretation of much of the period in question, just as his two biographies had covered most of the two reigns prior to Charles I.

What gave M'Crie his particular importance was that people *read* him; for as Thomson had found in his publishing venture with the Reverend James Scott, there was no point in publishing an author, however correct his opinions, if he could not find an audience:

> a well written compilation is the only kind of book that will attract many readers. We believe, that though Wodrow's ten faithful folio volumes could

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[8] *Ibid.*, Oct. 1823

[9] *Ibid.*, Oct. 1825, 694

> be purchased for five shillings, they would find far fewer readers than Hume's less faithful compilation[10]

M'Crie, spectacularly, had found an audience; and not just among academics. Dugald Stewart reported reading *Knox* at a single sitting; more significantly, he found his servant, a member of M'Crie's congregation, so rapt in the same book as to be oblivious to any outward sensation.[11] When the copyright to the first edition of Knox expired early in 1840, it was immediately reissued by an editor named Andrew Crichton – an action, as a hostile column in *Witness* implied, that could only have been taken because Crichton recognised an infallible money-spinner when he saw one.[12] Reprints of the later, revised, editions continued to appear until the first decade of the twentieth century. For the period of the 1840s, it can be assumed that the Non-Intrusionist clergy and many of their communicants were familiar with *Knox*, and often with *Melville* and others of M'Crie's writings as well.

So it was that in the countless articles, reviews and speeches by which the Non-Intrusionists forwarded their cause in the years leading to the Disruption, their historical references, as often as not, were mediated by M'Crie. In one critical respect they all owed M'Crie a debt, frequently acknowledged: in the rehabilitation of the Reformers, and particularly of Knox, which had been the primary object of M'Crie's historical career. The following quotation, from the *Instructor* in 1835, is typical of many:

> The Scottish nation felt a pride in the defence and hence when they read in the pages of Dr M'Crie such a different version of the character of Knox, from that which Hume and other writers had given, there was a sort of self-

[10] *Ibid.*, 693
[11] Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *Life of Thomas M'Crie, D.D.* (Edinburgh, 1840), 416-7
[12] *Witness*, 5 Dec. 1840

gratulation, as if the fame of the nation had been vindicated from a foul stain.[13]

Hugh Miller made a similar point in an article written some five years later.

> The labours of the late Dr M'Crie have done much to disabuse the public mind regarding the true character of Knox, moral and intellectual. Never before did an honest and able man turn the stream of truth through such an Augean stable of calumny and falsehood as this admirable writer... He accomplished such a revolution in public opinion regarding the character and events of the [Reformation] period, as the well chosen hero of his first biography accomplished in its religion.[14]

The recurring thread in many of these quotations, and probably the key to M'Crie's enormous popularity among the Presbyterian faithful, was a sigh of relief, a sense among Presbyterians of the redemption of their historical and religious heritage from the slurs of the demonic Hume and his allies. A letter in the *Instructor* suggested what that might mean in personal terms among the church's communicants:

> Dr M'Crie has raised a monument to Knox. He has produced a great change in the public sentiment on that Subject. I know a family who never could hear John Knox named without indignation, who have received him – that is, his life and picture – into their library...[15]

With Knox thus cleansed of the mud flung at him by Enlightenment mobs, he could once again be appealed to without trepidation to as a standard and exemplar. In the coming struggles of the Non-Intrusionists such appeals were often made.

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[13] *ECI*, Mar. 1835, 140
[14] *Witness*, 4 Mar. 1840
[15] *ECI*, Vol. 9, Nov. 1814

Parallel to his rehabilitation of Knox was M'Crie's powerful sense that Knox was an agent of Providence, and that the Reformation in Scotland reflected the unfolding of a divine plan for Scotland. That idea, too, finds frequent echo among the Non-Intrusionists. 'His age', said Robert Candlish in a speech on Knox in 1846, 'was pre-eminently the time of Scotland's visitation; and he pre-eminently was the man: both prepared by God, and mutually prepared for one another'.[16] Many years afterwards, James Begg, the last survivor of the leading Disruptionists, said much the same thing in a sermon, in the course of which he acknowledged his debt to M'Crie.

> Knox was raised up by God as a mighty instrument in *overthrowing* the gigantic system of superstition and idolatry which at that time stood entrenched in Scotland, shutting out the light of Gospel truth, and subverting the foundations of human hope.[17]

The Non-Intrusionists were sufficiently modest that they did not claim to be agents of Providence; but parallels between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth were inescapable. Thomas M'Crie the Younger, who followed the development of the Free Church as closely as any man, believed that its creation was unquestionably providential[18], and he was probably not alone.

Recovery of the church's past, in and for itself, was thus the first and greatest service of Dr M'Crie to the Evangelical wing of the church. The practical use that they made of his writings during the coming decades was associated with the struggle over patronage, an issue which only gradually came to define an intractable division in the Church of Scotland. During the period before Non-Intrusionism, three or four articles of a historical cast on the subject appeared in the *Instructor*. The most

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[16] Robert S. Candlish, *John Knox, His Time, and His Work* (1846), 9
[17] James Begg, *God's Gift to Scotland in John Knox and the Reformation* (Perth, 1872), 5
[18] Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *Thoughts on Union with the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1852), 1

comprehensive account of the legal aspect of patronage appeared in an article by one W.S. [Writer to the Signet?] which appeared in November 1820, and gave a chronology of the issue, from 1565 to 1711, in a fairly dispassionate manner. This low-key approach was sustained by Andrew Thomson in a review the following year of Thomas Chalmers's *On the Christian and Civic Economy of Large Towns*, Nos. V and VI, 'On Church Patronage'. The reasons Thomson adduced in opposition to patronage lay in the decay of eloquence in the clergy, the attack on the church's dignity, and a resulting temporising spirit within the church. But he added:

> We certainly do not mean to insinuate that our establishment has been disgraced to such an extent by the servility of its clergy, or the vices of its patrons...On the contrary, we do not know where we could find any religious establishment so simple and effective, and so completely calculated...both to provide the people with useful instruction, and to secure its clergy in comfortable independence.[19]

Chalmers himself, it may be noted, was not at this point an opponent of the patronage as an institution; never a democrat, he doubted whether popular election would produce any improvement in the quality of ministers.[20]

Thereafter, the patronage issue largely disappeared from the *Instructor* for the remainder of Thomson's tenure, despite his continued opposition to the institution. When it reappeared during the Ten Years' Conflict, the rhetoric on the subject had changed beyond recognition. Thus one J.S. in 1840, after explaining that the Scottish parliament had ratified the Confession of Faith in 1567, declared:

[19] *ECI*, vol. 20, April 1821, 267
[20] Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford, 1982), 226

> This legalizing of the Christian profession, however, did not bestow upon the members of the commonwealth a right to obtrude themselves upon the church..., as has been with extreme folly, we had almost said wickedness, maintained by half-wits, not to mention law lords and doctors of divinity.[21]

By this time, from being an irritant and occasional source of friction, the institution of patronage had come to be perceived as the major obstacle in the path of church expansion and, for some, of the restructuring of the church along lines suggested by Chalmers. The result was the development of an Non-Intrusionist theology that was amplified relentlessly in the pamphlets, speeches and sermons of the period. At the centre of the theology is the identification of Christ's kingdom with the church. There were, they declared, two kingdoms in Scotland, one of which was headed by Christ, the other by the monarch; and neither had the right to interfere in the affairs properly belonging to the other. Thus the Rev. Archibald Bennie in 1840:

> Let it be distinctly understood, then, that the magistrate has no spiritual jurisdiction in the Church. He has no authority to promulgate laws, or to appoint office bearers, or to determine causes, within that sacred enclosure. The Church is a province guarded by the Headship of Christ, into which he may not intrude.[22]

This fundamental separation was in no way altered by the civil power's legislation establishing the Church of Scotland as the country's national church. The legislation of 1567, 1592, and 1690 in fact guaranteed the independence of the church within the spiritual sphere. The two bodies might, and indeed ought to, co-operate with each other.

> That there is an obvious propriety and duty in their treating such an alliance, since they have the same origin, and ultimately the same end, -- both being

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[21] *Ibid.*, Jan. 1840, 5

[22] Archibald Bennie, *The Headship of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Edinburgh, 1840), 17

equally ordinances of God, appointed for his own glory and the good of man.[23]

Co-operation, however, could be only on the basis of a voluntary arrangement between two sovereign entities. Finally, since the spiritual independence of the church was based on the explicit requirements of scripture, it was not subject to any form of compromise.

> The Church of Scotland, cannot, dare not, abandon her position. The law against intrusion is not *her* law, -- she did not make it, -- she but declared it, -- it is the law of Christ, written in the Church's true statute-book, this blessed volume. The state can change its law, as the state made it. The Church cannot change the laws of her King.[24]

There the Non-Intrusionists stood; they could do no other.

In every one of its elements, this set of beliefs was abundantly supported by M'Crie's writings. Ultimately, of course, it derived from the Westminster Confession: spiritual independence, for instance, is clearly implied in a paragraph of the Confession of Faith concerning the rights of the civil power, which begins 'The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the administration of the Word and the Sacraments, or the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven'.[25] At the same time, however, the shift from the pragmatic arguments of Thomson's articles to the uncompromising two-kingdoms argument of a decade later does suggest significant conceptual influence on M'Crie's part. The strongest evidence for this is the frequent recurrence of Andrew Melville's 'two kingdoms' speech at Falkland in 1596, brought

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[23] Robert S. Candlish, 'Lecture on the Advantages which the Church Derives from an Alliance with the State...', Lecture V in *Lectures on the Nature, Lawfulness, Duty and Advantages of Civil Establishments of Religion* (Edinburgh, 1835), 3

[24] Charles J. Brown, *Rights of Christian Peoples in the Appointment of Their Ministers* (Edinburgh, 1835), 25

[25] Cited in Bennie, *Headship*, 17. Third article, 23rd chapter of the Confession of Faith.

to public attention in M'Crie's biography and now regularly used as the capstone of arguments against patronage.[26] Thus William Cunningham, addressing a Non-Intrusionism rally in 1840:

> The statement of Andrew Melville to King James was, that there were two Kings and two kingdoms in Scotland; and this principle, which is also in full accordance with the Confession of Faith, contains the sum and substance of all that we now contend for; whereas our opponents seem to think, though they will scarcely venture to maintain it, that there is but one King and one kingdom.[27]

And Robert Elder, in one of a series of Lectures on Non-Intrusion published in 1840:

> Whether the power which interferes with the Church, her proceedings, be really *lawful*, as to the matter before us? We are not speaking evil of dignities...we do not think that Andrew Melville, in former days, derogated from lawful authority, spake evil of dignities, or deserved to be branded a rebel, when he firmly but respectfully declared, to the monarch of his day, -- "There are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland..."[28]

And Hugh Miller the same year, writing an approving review of an anti-erastian article in *The Scotsman*:

> This exploration by the editor of *The Scotsman* is tolerably distinct, but if further illustration is required, it may be given in the language of one who was spoken of in terms of high admiration by the same

[26] A portion of the speech is found in Howie's sketch of Melville in *Scots Worthies* (1774), but it was absent from the histories of Robertson and Cook, neither of whom fully embraced Melville's position on the matter. On hostile use of the 'Two Kingdoms' phrase by Episcopalian pamphleteers of the early part of the seventeenth century, see Colin Kidd, 'The Ideological Significance of Jacobite Latinity', in Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory, eds., *Culture, Politics and Society in Britain, 1660-1800* (Manchester, 1991), 118.
[27] *Witness*, 8 Jan. 1840
[28] Robert Elder, *Vindication of the Church from the Charge of Rebellion in her Present Position* (Edinburgh, 1840), 13

> gentleman. 'As diverse times I have told you, there are two kings...'[29]

Melville's speech had by this time evidently become so familiar among Non-Intrusionists that if one hummed the opening bars, the audience could be expected to join in the chorus. That familiarity was certainly due to a great extent to Dr M'Crie.

Paralleling the struggle of the Non-Intrusionists against patronage, and engaging at least as much ink and rhetoric, was their struggle against Voluntaryism. The motives in both cases were the same; the Non-Intrusionists believed that the parish system could not be expanded and new-modelled without the co-operation of the state any more than it could without church control of its own ministry. It was thus necessary that the Church of Scotland retain its status as an established church. With the United Secession Church campaigning for an end to establishment, the Non-Intrusionists found themselves fighting a battle on two fronts. William Cunningham, in a speech on the Auchterarder intrusion in 1839, gave vent to the prevailing frustration in his camp:

> There is scarcely an organ of public opinion that supports our principles; and if you attend to the public press, you will find, perhaps, the attack of a High Church journal on Friday, followed up on Saturday by a Voluntary print. The High Church organ may return to the attack on Tuesday, and you are sure to find it followed up on Wednesday by an outpouring of Voluntary abuse.[30]

The arguments in favour of establishment were for the most part based on practical considerations. William Cunningham argued in 1834 that the chief concern at that time was the provision of ministers and churches for the poor, and that this provision

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[29] *Witness*, 30 Dec. 1840

[30] William Cunningham, *Speech of the Reverend William Cunningham on the Independence of the Church, in Reference Particularly to the Present State of the Auchterarder Case* (Edinburgh, 1839), 5

could only be made by an established church, with the aid of the civil power.[31] Robert Candlish argued for a somewhat broader remit: the state could render assistance in the way of securing the respect and reverence of its subjects for 'the name of God, the Worship of God, the day of God';[32] that is, by suppressing blasphemy, building churches, and legislating against Sabbath-breaking. James Begg, defending the same principle long after he had ceased to be a member of an established church, went farther:

> the most thorough manifestation of National religion consists not only in the recognition of Christianity in all our legislation and public acts, but in the maintenance of a Church Establishment, by which the knowledge of Divine truth, by means of a living ministry and the territorial principle, may be diffused through every corner of the land. We are not aware of any other arrangement by which the same all-important object has ever been effectually accomplished.[33]

Although the arguments in favour of maintaining civil establishments were not primarily historical, Dr M'Crie was on occasion called in to add his voice in their support. He had, after all, broken with his church in 1806 largely on this particular point. In 1837 a pamphlet was issued containing his writings on civil establishments, culled from a statement that he and fellow protesters had produced in 1806, and from a pamphlet on the unity of the church he had published in 1821; the "Statement", out of print, had according to the publishers been the object of frequent applications for copies. In 1843 an ad hoc committee of the Free Church reprinted the "Statement" as one of the first publications of the new church. As one might expect, the arguments

[31] William Cunningham, 'Lecture on the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State', Lecture I in *Lectures on the Nature, Lawfulness...*, 52
[32] Robert S. Candlish, 'Lecture on the Advantages', 5
[33] James Begg, *Voluntarism Indefensible: or a Nation's Right and Duty to Profess and Practise Christianity* (n.p., 1870)

in M'Crie's writings on the subject are fairly consistent with those later used by the Non-Intrusionists. The two kingdoms were separate and independent from each other; but independent bodies might surely make friendly alliances for their mutual benefit. From such an alliance the church might expect to gain essentially the same things that the Non-Intrusionists wanted:

> It [civil authority] may be lawfully employed in defending and maintaining externally the kingdom of Christ; in securing the rights and privileges of particular churches; in removing external hindrances or molestation, and in providing those things which are necessary to the use of the spiritual means.[34]

What the civil power received in return was a better-ordered state.

> The prevention of crimes and disorders is a more important object than their punishment...And of all the means which are calculated to preserve order, to repress crimes, and to promote the public and general good of society, the most powerful beyond all reasonable doubt is religion.[35]

For these purposes, the purer the religion the better; and for M'Crie, Scotland's religion was the purest available.

As has been suggested, the concerns both for civil establishment and non-intrusion seemed to have derived much of their intensity from Thomas Chalmers's vision of the future of the church, which would have seen both the expansion of the church and the extension of its functions in the field of social welfare, based on a revitalised parish system. This vision was historically based, and although Chalmers himself wrote nothing on Scottish history, his colleagues drew extensively on history in support of the plan. Two historical periods came into play. The first was that of

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[34] Thomas M'Crie. *Sentiments of the Late Dr. M'Crie...on Civil Establishments of Religion. Extracted from his Historical Work entitled the "Statement" and from the "Appendix" to his Book on the Unity of the Church* (Edinburgh, 1837), 12

[35] M'Crie, *Sentiments*, 4

Knox, and specifically the Knox of the First Book of Discipline in 1560. A review in the *Witness* in 1841, for example, bore the title 'John Knox bringing round the kingdom to right principles, a pattern to us':

> nothing has struck us so forcefully as the striking analogy between the position of the Church of Scotland, in regard to church extension at that period and at the present moment, with this mighty difference, that Knox had a whole kingdom to enlighten, we, scarcely half of one.[36]

Robert Candlish carried the analogy a good deal farther in a pamphlet published five years later, (which he began by acknowledging that his historical information was drawn entirely from M'Crie's *Knox*, 'that noble work'). He was emphatic that the unfulfilled plan of Knox was as valid in the present as it had been in Knox's time.

> What would Knox have made of Scotland? He would have made it as the garden of the Lord. His own ideal model, as it stands recorded in his Book of Discipline, will bear the test of scrutiny, even at this day – scarce demanding any allowance to be made for the progress of opinion, or the new lights of modern civilization... [37]

To be sure, Knox's country would have been very different from the Scotland of Candlish's own day; and not, one imagines, to everyone's taste.

> a dull enough country, some may think – gloomy, morose and ascetic; no open profligacy, or profane swearing, or Sabbath-breaking, tolerated; all sorts of incentives to intemperance, or ungodliness, discountenanced; decency of manner enforced. Then, what universal schooling, and catechising, and lecturing, and preaching!...And if avenues to sinful pleasure would have been

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[36] *Witness*, 19 May 1841,

[37] Robert S. Candlish, *John Knox, His Time, and His Work* (Edinburgh, 1846), 19

stopped, what doors of usefulness and eminence would have been opened to all![38]

Candlish believed that the Knoxian vision had been three times within sight: during Knox's own time, during the second reformation (i.e. 1638-1660), and during his own time under a leader 'on whom the mantle of Knox had fallen'. Each time it had been blighted by malevolent external forces; but he still believed it to be possible of achievement.

The second period which Non-Intrusionists cited was the Cromwellian period, when the parochial system was deemed to have reached its fullest development. An account in Andrew Crichton's *Memoirs of the Reverend John Blackader* (1823), quoted approvingly in an 1825 review in the *Instructor*, described a parish regime in which the minister stood at the centre of a network of elders, who had power by various means to rectify the behaviour of parishioners, even to the extent of entering their homes.

> Their office required them to exercise the strictest inspection over the morals of the parish; to punish open transgressions with unsparing severity...Their duty extended to what we could call the levities and amusements of life; dancing, dicing; gaiety of attire, &c., were rebukable offences. They were authorised, on some occasions, to carry their offices into the bosoms of families and individuals.[39]

But it worked.

> It was under this stern and illiberal economy, that the blessings of religion and the benefits of learning were more extensively diffused...It was then that Scotland became eminent for superior intelligence,--that she earned the

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[38] Candlish, *ibid.*, 22

[39] *ECI*, Sept. 1825, 617 (review of *Memoirs of Rev. John Blackader*, ed. Andrew Crichton)

> character, by which she is still proud to be distinguished as a country of religious peasantry, a nation without a mob.[40]

Benefits of that order were clearly worth the sacrifice of a few levities.

A much more influential account of the parochial system during the Commonwealth period was that of James Kirkton (1620-1699), whose manuscript history of the Church of Scotland from 1660-1679 was first committed to print in 1817. As was so often the case, knowledge of Kirkton's work entered public consciousness through the medium of Dr M'Crie: passages from it were quoted by him in his review of *Tales of My Landlord* in March 1817 (when Kirkton's work was still in manuscript),[41] and he quoted it at greater length in the appendix to his *Life of Melville.* Thereafter, two or three quotations, selected by M'Crie, concerning the excellence of the parish system as of 1660 and the consequent sobriety and happiness of the Scottish people, were to appear in countless Non-Intrusionist and Free Church historical works and articles. They were cited in 1835 in a lecture by the Non-Intrusionist James Lorimer, who used Kirkton's work to illustrate the virtues of the parish system, which, like Crichton, he believed accounted for the peculiar superiority of the Scottish people.

> I am chargeable with no national pride...when I say that Scotland has been distinguished among modern nations for the industry, the intelligence, and enterprise, and high moral and religious character of her people....What then can explain the high national character of Scotland? Nothing can explain it but her parochial system, -- her literary, and moral, and religious

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[40] *Ibid.,* 621

[41] For example: 'Nobody', says Kirkton, 'complained more of our Church government than our taverners, whose ordinary lamentation was "their trade was broke, people were become so sober"'. Thomas M'Crie, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters* (Edinburgh, 1824), 136; see James Kirkton, *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Year 1678* (Edinburgh, 1817), 65

> institutions...Is it no evidence of original excellence and scriptural adaptation as an instrument, when it can boast of such glorious achievements?[42]

Lorimer concluded his article by referring to Dr M'Crie's testimony before the Church Patronage Committee 'for a vindication of Kirkton's authority'. Subsequent authorities have tended to dismiss Kirkton's picture of the Cromwellian parish as wishful fantasy;[43] but it was real for Dr M'Crie, and thus became so for a generation of Non-Intrusionist and Free Church writers.

It is in no way surprising that all the writers involved in the construction of a picture of orderly and productive parishioners, living harmonious and virtuous lives under the benevolent eye of a Church of Scotland minister, were themselves clergymen, M'Crie and Kirkton included. It may also be noted that there is little in Non-Intrusionist literature to support any degree of lay control over the clergy. Popular election of ministers was expressly rejected by Andrew Thomson in his article on church patronage in 1821, and a later (1840) writer in the same journal did not believe that a congregation had any rights in the process at all.

> The scriptures, it appears to us, warrant...that over the process of forming the pastoral tie, in all cases, the constituted ecclesiastical authorities possess an entire and absolute control.[44]

There was, in effect, a deep strain of theocracy in the Non-Intrusionist vision of a reformed Presbyterian polity, highly unlikely to be workable in nineteenth-century Scotland. That Thomas Chalmers should have failed to create a sustainable parish system on the basis of this deeply flawed historical model is scarcely remarkable.

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[42] John G. Lorimer, 'Lecture X, on the Excellence of the Parochial Economy, and its Fitness to Promote the Ends of a Scriptural Union between the Church and the State', in *Lectures on the Nature, Lawfulness...*, 17-18

[43] One of Kirkton's early detractors was his fellow Presbyterian John Cunningham, who went to some lengths to detail examples of vice among congregations during Kirkton's golden age. See John Cunningham, *The Church History of Scotland.* Second edition (Edinburgh, 1882), vol. ii, 76

[44] 'J.S.', *ECI*, Feb. 1840, 44.

The degree to which M'Crie bore responsibility for sending Chalmers and other Non-Intrusionists on their great atavistic detour is an unanswerable question. It seems apparent, however, that the pictures of the Scottish past held by most of the Non-Intrusionists were far more likely to come from M'Crie, or to be mediated by him, than any other historian. This is most significantly true of the unfulfilled project of Knox for a godly Commonwealth, and Kirkton's theocratic never-never-land of the pre-Reformation period. Insofar as his influence supported the Evangelical churchmen of the period in their effort to emulate these eras, he did them little good.

To be sure, by the end of his life M'Crie was no longer alone as an author of Scottish history with a slant acceptable to the Evangelical Party. Over the decade and a half before the disruption, a small group of writers, all more or less influenced by M'Crie, began to produce historical works from the traditional Presbyterian point of view. The first was something of a curiosity. James Aikman (1779?-1860) was a Scottish writer whose publications include three volumes of poetry and two on natural history, as well as several works of British history written between 1827 and 1848. His entry into the latter field was an English translation of George Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, with a continuation in his own hand until 1792; it began to appear in 1827 and ran to six volumes, of which only the first two, taking the story to 1572, were by Buchanan. Aikman was an intelligent historian, and his acquiescence in Buchanan's fabulism is a bit puzzling, and was so even to Aikman:

> I had...considered the greater part of these names that stood at the head of the long list of our ancient monarchs as confessedly fabulous, and came to the work under the impression that they would be very easily discussed; nor was it till I found that Buchanan had received

> them as part of the record of whose authenticity he was convinced, that I determined seriously to examine the subject.[45]

Aikman's highly detailed account was largely from the usual published sources, most notably Spottiswoode, Calderwood, and other contemporary writers, along with more recent works by Robertson and Lord Hailes. He had read both of Thomas M'Crie's biographies, and acknowledged their influence in footnotes.[46] Apart from an expressed admiration for the Independents and some harsh words on the intolerance of the Presbyterian clergy, his work was strongly Presbyterian. He was bitter in his hostility to episcopacy, and had nothing favourable to say about the reigns of any of the Stuarts. He followed M'Crie in associating the covenants with freedom, and went a step beyond him in being the first writer explicitly to identify the National Covenant of 1638 as the saviour of British liberties:

> To this much vilified bond every Scottishman ought to look with as great reverence as Englishmen do to the Magna Charta. It is what saved the country from absolute despotism, and to it we may trace back the origin of all the successful efforts made by the inhabitants of Britain in defence of their freedom, during the succeeding reign of the Stuarts.[47]

His sympathy with the later Covenanters was deep and unqualified; his account of their sufferings ran to 200 pages, and he later expanded it into a full-length book, *Annals of the Persecution in Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution* (1842).

For all this, Aikman's work was not even reviewed by the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*. One discouraging factor may have been the incorporation of the work of Buchanan, the early portion of which was no longer taken seriously by most educated

[45] James Aikman, *The History of Scotland, Translated from the Latin of George Buchanan, with Notes and a Continuation to the Union in the Reign of Queen Anne* (Glasgow, 1827-1832) vol. i, iv.
[46] E.g. vol. iii, 166, 173, 183, 189, 218, 242, 268, etc. Aikman quotes no other near-contemporary except Malcolm Laing.
[47] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 445

people. As well, Aikman failed to make some of the points of particular importance to the Non-Intrusionists: most significantly, he omitted to quote from Melville's 'two kingdoms' speech, despite having obviously made considerable use of M'Crie's biography of Melville. Another problem was his preference for the Independents over the seventeenth-century Presbyterians on the matter of toleration, always a difficult question for apologists for the church in that period. 'The presbyterians' he wrote in connection with the Solemn League and Covenant, 'were anxiously labouring to secure to themselves religious liberty, but no less anxious to prevent its being enjoyed by any other, or in any other way than their own'.[48] He also scanted somewhat on ecclesiastical matters in his narrative, as he intended to write a companion volume entirely devoted to the history of the church, but never did so. All the same, Aikman was an ally in most areas where it mattered, and he provided the first detailed narrative of Scottish history written from a traditional Presbyterian and anti-Moderate point of view. His work was certainly not ignored by fellow historians; several passages from his work, including his paean to the National Covenant quoted above, were cited in the work of his successors.

A second author, like Aikman unknown to biography, made his appearance at about the same time. William Sime was a writer on European religious history, whose works included *History of Reformation in the Principal Countries in Europe* (1826) and the *History of the Christian Church from the First to the Nineteenth Centuries* (1828). His contribution to a specifically Scottish ecclesiastical history was a *History of the Covenanters in Scotland* (1830). It was a much more systematic account than that of M'Crie, drawn mainly from the vast storehouse of Wodrow and a score of other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources, along with James Aikman's

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[48] *Ibid.*, vol. iv, 124

history. But its inspiration and some of its leading ideas clearly derived from the elder historian; Sime's dedication to him is worth quoting in full:

> To the Reverend Thomas M'Crie, D.D. the distinguished biographer of the reformers, and historian of the Reformation from Popery, in Scotland, Italy, and Spain, the following attempt to record the heroic resistance of the Scottish Covenanters to the ecclesiastical and civil tyranny, in the seventeenth century, is, with high regard for his principles and talents, no less than for his personal character, respectfully dedicated by the author.[49]

Sime's Covenanters, like those of M'Crie, 'possessed the only religion and solid worth which existed in Scotland at the time'[50]; and like M'Crie's, were fighting for political as well as religious rights:

> whatever minor faults may be laid to their charge, ...it cannot but be acknowledged that they were the men who "singly and alone" stood forward in defence of Scotland's dearest rights, and to whom we at the present day owe every thing that is valuable to us either as men or as Christians.[51]

As for the aforesaid minor faults, he followed 'that judicious historian Aikman' in quoting the biblical phrase 'oppression maketh a wise man mad'[52] as an all-purpose justification for any excesses that might have been committed by the Covenanters in the course of their struggles. Aikman, as it happens, had been quoting M'Crie, who had used the line from Solomon in his *Vindication*;[53] the world of Non-Intrusionist historiography was still a small one. Although Sime's book was not re-printed, it is important in being the first nineteenth-century treatment of the Covenanters. Many

[49] William Sime, *History of the Covenanters in Scotland*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1830), Dedication, vol. i [unpaged]
[50] *Ibid.*, vol. i, vi
[51] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 364
[52] *Ibid.*, vol. i, 364
[53] M'Crie, *Vindication*, 166

more were to follow, Aikman's larger and rather better book of 1842 being the next in line.

The next historian in the Non-Intrusionist camp was the bearer of both Thomas M'Crie's intellectual and genetic legacy. Thomas M'Crie the Younger (1797-1875) had studied theology under Archibald Bruce and his father, was ordained at Crieff as an Old Light Anti-Burgher in 1822, and became his church's professor of theology in 1836.[54] Subsequently he became was an important figure and sometime moderator in the United Original Secession Church, a body formed from three splinters of the Secession Church in 1842. His career as an author began with his life of his father in 1840, and included a translation of the *Provincial Letters* of Blaise Pascal (1848) and a history of the Waldensian Church (1872).

No external observer can have regarded the Non-Intrusionist struggle with more sympathy than did the younger M'Crie. M'Crie's church, the heir to the tradition of Bruce and the elder M'Crie, was regarded as the closest to the Non-Intrusionists and later the Free Church of all the other Presbyterian bodies. The elder M'Crie's close personal friendship with Andrew Thomson and affinity for his party in most areas have been noted. The younger M'Crie formed a parallel relationship with Hugh Miller, who often called upon him to provide articles for *The Witness*; so close, indeed, were the writing styles of the two men that one publication, *Macaulay on Scotland: a Critique* (1853) has been variously attributed to both of them.

Thus it was that when M'Crie published *Sketches of Scottish Church History: embracing the Period from the Reformation to the Revolution* in 1841, he found a

[54] William Ewing, ed., *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), vol. i, 219

ready audience, much of it among the Non-Intrusionists. *The Witness* wrote a glowing review, declaring that it bore the stamp of 'sound and masterly judgment'.[55] Buoyed by this kind of support, the work went through three more printings in the following five years, the fourth printing being undertaken by the Free Church's Committee of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland for the Publication of the Works of Scottish Reformers and Divines. A sixth printing appeared in 1850; and in 1875, the last year of his life, M'Crie published a new edition, carrying the narrative up to the Disruption. In addition to being the first ecclesiastical history of Scotland written from the Non-Intrusionist perspective, it was the first work of general history from the anti-Moderate and Non-Intrusionist camp that was unquestionably a popular success.

Aside from the magic inherent in the M'Crie name, the success of the book undoubtedly owed something to the deep distress and division in which the Church of Scotland found itself at the time of the publication. The Non-Intrusionist cause had been struck by a series of hammer blows, beginning with the decision of the Court of Session in 1838 against the Veto Act, the measure by which the church had hoped to render the patronage question tractable. When the church appealed to the House of Lords, that body upheld the Court of Session, and went a step farther in declaring the rights of patrons absolute. A year later the General Assembly's Chapels Act, under which the *quoad sacra* churches had been created as part of the church's extension scheme, was called into question, beginning a process which would eventually see the Court of Sessions declare it illegal. All of this flew in the face of basic principles about the independent spiritual jurisdiction of the church, which churchmen believed to have been recognised by the Revolution settlement of 1690

[55] *The Witness*, 25 Sept. 1841

and guaranteed at the Union; certainly, they had not been challenged by the courts until their intervention in 1838.[56] Appeals to former sympathisers in the political sphere such as Peel availed nothing. Angry and divided, the church was in 1841 debating a response, a process which would issue in its Claim of Right of the following year and the Disruption in 1843.

What the younger M'Crie offered to the discussion was a well-written narrative embodying his father's ideas on Scottish church history, but covering, as the elder M'Crie had never done, the whole of the critical period from Reformation to Revolution. With the necessary additions and the benefit of all his father's erudition, he recited the familiar story of Knox, Melville, the Covenanters and the other heroes leading the church's struggle, their principles of church independence and the sole headship of Christ, their enemies the Stuarts and Prelacy, their cause always just and ultimately victorious. The appeal of this narrative to the Non-Intrusionist constituency at the time of its appearance was succinctly described in its review in *The Witness*:

> Turned back as we are by the present circumstance of that Church, upon the history of her past contendings for the same great principle which is now at stake, we are disposed to ascribe no small importance to a work fitted like this to enable our people to trace out that principle as the object of her struggles of old.[57]

In the face of hostile legal and political establishments and widespread indifference, the Non-Intrusionists found in M'Crie a historical narrative that showed clearly and unequivocally that they were right.

[56] J.H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1983), 361
[57] *Ibid.*

The same message, with the volume considerably turned up, was delivered the following year with the publication of the Rev. W.M. Hetherington's *History of the Church of Scotland* (1842). Hetherington (1803-1865) was a minister from 1836, Professor of Exegetical Theology at the Free College, Glasgow, from 1857, and founder and editor of the *Free Church Magazine*. His long list of publications include *The Antichristian System, or Popery Predicted in Scripture* (1851), along with more conventional theological works and a history of the Westminster Confession.[58]

Hetherington's *History* was the first such work by an author who was also a participant in the Non-Intrusionist struggle. Further, it was written during the ninth year of the Ten Years' Conflict, a time when ecclesiastical animosities in Scotland probably stood at a more intense level than at any other time in the century. Even more than the younger M'Crie's work, it is a clear-cut story of truth versus error, with dark forces from the political sphere eternally trying to subordinate the church, and the church bravely struggling to defend itself. Something of the tone of his narrative can be gleaned from a passage early in the book:

> there can be little difficulty in making specific mention of that great Christian principle that the Church of Scotland has always striven to realize and defend: THAT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST IS THE ONLY HEAD AND KING OF THE CHURCH; whence it follows, by necessary consequence THAT ITS GOVERNMENT IS DERIVED FROM HIM ALONE, AND IS DISTINCT FROM, AND NOT SUBORDINATE IN ITS PROVINCE TO, THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE.[59]

[58] *AFCS*, vol. 1, 55-6

[59] W.M. Hetherington, *History of the Church of Scotland, from the Introduction of Christianity to the Meetings of the Commission of the General Assembly in August 1841* (Edinburgh, 1842), 4

Not only did Hetherington feel the need to shout, he found it necessary to repeat his message at frequent intervals throughout his history; for there is a great deal more at stake than matters of political control.

> It can be proved, and often has been proved, that the Prelatic form of Church government, is one of merely human invention, whilst the Presbyterian is of divine origin and authority, and consequently is that which would of necessity be adopted and retained by any Church which held as its leading principle the sole headship and kingly domination of the Lord Jesus Christ.[60]

If that is true, then there can be no room at all for compromise with an erastian state:

> A man may lose his civil liberties, or submit to civil wrongs, and be a Christian still; but a Christian cannot yield up his religious liberty without committing grievous sin, sinking into the condition of a slave, and forfeiting his hopes of heaven.[61]

In both these positions, Hetherington was going beyond anything in the M'Crie legacy. Although Melville purported to believe that presbytery was mandated by scripture, Dr M'Crie limited himself to declaring the Presbyterian system to be compatible with the word of God, while Episcopacy was not; nor did he ever suggest that persons forced to live under an erastian system necessarily lost their hope of salvation.

But Dr Hetherington was very angry. His heroes were men who ever refused to truckle to authority: Melville, Knox, the Covenanters, the Protesters, the Cameronians, the sixty-some ministers who refused to accept the indulgences in Lauderdale's period. His work encompassed the history of the church until his own day, and he was thus able to detail in a single narrative, and with a running gloss of

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[60] Ibid., 5
[61] Ibid., 310

invective, the parallel stories of the struggles of the church against the two great representatives of erastianism: Prelacy and Moderatism. One had been defeated; the other, still in the field, was waging a similar war against the Truth and demanded similar resolution to oppose it. Whatever may be said of his qualities as an historian, Hetherington seems to have spoken for a large body of opinion within the church, for within a year of its publication in 1842, his turgid, captious and tiresome book had attained its third printing. It was ultimately re-printed at least seven times.

Hetherington was the last of the Non-Intrusionist historians, and may be said to have been the first of the Free Church school. By the time that school came into existence after the Disruption, there was already, as has been indicated above, a reasonable body of published work on which it might draw. Leaving aside a few authors of school texts or biographies of individual Covenanting heroes, five writers had contributed, from the venerable Dr M'Crie to Hetherington. Three were still alive and would write more books; one was a Free Church minister and another, the younger M'Crie, would become so in 1852 when he led the greater part of the United Original Secession Church into union with the larger body. Between them, they embodied many positions and attitudes that influenced the dozens of works that would be produced by the new school, and it is worth considering what some of the more salient of them were. Most obviously, the authors stressed the independence of the church in spiritual and organisational matters, and concomitantly the sole headship of Christ. If there was a dominant theme in the work of the five writers, this was surely it.

The story of the church's struggles was usually told as a clear-cut narrative of good versus evil. This approach was fully present in Dr M'Crie's work; but if anything one

can detect a hardening of rhetoric in the light of the church's contemporary conflict. For Hetherington, the most tightly-wound of the lot, the Church of Scotland was simply too perfect to survive unmolested in the world:

> It is a melancholy thought...that the opposition, and even bitter hatred, which the Church of Scotland has had to endure in every age, has arisen from the fact, that her standards of faith and government are too pure and spiritual to be readily apprehended by the darkened mind, or relished by the corrupt heart, of fallen and sinful man.[62]

This attitude served to reinforce the tendency to identify with the hard-liners in the church's history that was already evident in work of the elder M'Crie. Both Hetherington and the younger M'Crie sided with the Protesters against the Resolutioners; all the writers joined in the rehabilitation of the Cameronians, from whom Wodrow had been at pains to distance both himself and the great body of law-abiding Covenanters.[63] The other side of the coin was the depreciation of anyone in the church with what might be regarded as Moderate tendencies. Two former heroes of the church, William III and his principal advisor for Scotland, William Carstares, were deemed in the Non-Intrusionist period to have been too erastian and too tolerant of episcopacy. Both Aikman and Hetherington thought that Carstares's great error lay in advising the King to allow the episcopalian clergy to retain their livings. This was to introduce unnecessary weakness into the church; and in Hetherington's analysis, it made the church too weak to resist the imposition of patronage after the Union;

> It would have required the united energy and determined of the entire Presbyterian Church to have promptly met, and triumphantly resisted, every

[62] *Ibid.*, 146
[63] Robert Wodrow, *The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution, Edited by the Rev. Robert Burns* (Glasgow, 1839), vol. iii, 213

> attempted encroachment of the British parliament upon her secured rights and privileges. But this, with such a numerous band of cold friends and treacherous mercenaries within her camp, was impossible.[64]

About the same time an article in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* spoke of 'the wily Carstares' as one of those responsible for the failure to include the covenants in the Revolution settlement.[65] Carstares and William would become heroes again in Free Church histories – they had, after all, been jointly responsible for the establishment of Presbyterianism in place of Prelacy -- but not until the passions associated with the Non-Intrusionist campaign had somewhat abated.

A development also closely related to the church's struggles was a heightened interest in the post-1661 Covenanters. They were a group for whom the Presbyterian rank and file had always felt a strong affinity, and that affinity seems to have increased as the conflict over patronage intensified. 'Every thing relating to the Covenanters is now invested with a double interest', declared *The Witness* in the month preceding the Disruption, 'The times in which we live are becoming rapidly similar to theirs, and the principles for which we are struggling are essentially the same'.[66] A review the following year made the principles explicit:

> Whether they witnessed against Popish error, or combined against Prelatic tyranny, their doctrine was the same – God's word is the supreme and only rule of duty – Christ is the supreme and only king of Zion. Liberty to serve Christ, in the way of Christ's appointment, was all they sought and struggled for. And for what have we been struggling, but for that very liberty – liberty

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[64] Hetherington, *History*, 585
[65] J.S. , 'The Life and Times of Principal Robertson', *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, Jan. 1840, 6
[66] *The Witness*, 12 April 1843

of administering Christ's affairs as he himself hath told us they ought to be administered.[67]

Dr M'Crie's work on the Covenanters, published as a book in 1824, attained its fourth printing in 1845. In the interim, as mentioned above,[68] the first modern narrative history of the Covenanters, that of William Sime, appeared in 1830, followed by Aikman's somewhat more comprehensive work in 1842. Thereafter, works on Covenanters appeared with increasing frequency: Robert Simpson's *Traditions of the Covenanters*, his biography of James Renwick, and a life of Richard Cameron by G.M. Bell all appeared in 1843; *Tracts on the Martyrs and Covenanters* by John C. Johnson in 1844, new editions of *Naphtali* in 1844, and of Defoe's *Memoirs of the Church of Scotland* in 1845. More were to follow; at this point, almost all the works of popular history available seemed to concern the Covenanters. Within more scholarly works, a disproportionate emphasis also prevailed: the younger M'Crie took over a third of his 600-page work to cover the last 28 years of a the period from the Reformation to the Revolution, while Hetherington took over 150 pages of a book that covered a much longer time period. Fighting and dying for the Crown Rights of Christ, the Covenanters had a relevance to the world of the Non-Intrusionists that exceeded that of any other part of the church's story. Their importance would scarcely diminish during the lifetime of the Free Church.

Another element of unanimity among the writers was the belief, repeatedly insisted upon by Dr M'Crie, that the struggle for religious liberty was also a struggle for civil liberty, as the two were inseparable. 'Her love of liberty', wrote the younger M'Crie of Scotland, 'has hitherto been entwined with her love of religion; and if these twin-sisters should ever be dissevered, we fear that the blow which divides them will

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[67] *Ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1844

[68] p. 67

prove fatal to both'.[69] Commonly associated with this point was a conviction that the church's struggle for freedom through Scottish history had materially aided development of the British constitution. Aikman's quotation on the importance of the National Covenant has already been cited;[70] it was subsequently quoted or paraphrased by both Sime and Hetherington, and thereafter by Free Church writers such as James Mackenzie.[71] Of the Cameronians, all four of the writers agreed with Dr M'Crie in seeing the Sanquhar declaration as prefiguring the principles of the coming Revolution. Thus Sime:

> are not the principles which it avows, in substance the same with those which in 1688 were acted upon by both parliaments, when the race of Stuart was for ever banished from the throne? To the comparatively few, but intrepid patriots who thus boldly set at defiance the doctrine of passive obedience to despots, the British Isles are at this day under no trifling debt of gratitude.[72]

The unbroken transmission of this leading idea from Dr M'Crie through the younger writers of the period ensured that it would play an important part in subsequent Free Church historiography, and indeed that of the Presbyterian churches in general.

Another idea that travelled well was Anti-Catholicism. Aikman summed up his Confession's reservations about the older religion from the point of view of the Covenanters in 1643.

> As a religious system, it was in direct opposition to the essential doctrines of Christianity, held by all protestants as fundamental, and, as a political system, it stood opposed to the enjoyment of civil liberty, and the progress of knowledge...It was not a matter of choice, but a matter of self-preservation, to

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[69] Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *Sketches of Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh, 1846), 175
[70] p. 66
[71] James Mackenzie, *The History of Scotland* (London, 1902), 544
[72] Sime, *History*, vol. ii, 57

> eradicate a religion that justified the terrific butcheries of France, the gunpowder treason of England and the Irish massacre, then neither distant events, nor considered as doubtful effects of a decried religion , but as the obviously necessary consequences of a sanguinary creed.[73]

Sime, for his part, put the casualties in the Irish massacre of 1641 at 200,000, a common figure at the time. The younger M'Crie took a more global point of view: 'Popery...with all its sanctified pretensions, was only a vast conspiracy against the civil and religious liberties of mankind, the ramifications of which extended over nearly the whole earth'.[74]

Although Dr M'Crie would have agreed with these analyses, it would be fatuous to charge him with responsibility for attitudes which were extremely common in Great Britain[75], and not without foundation in the earlier history of Europe. Not everyone in the country, however, shared these views in respect to contemporary Catholics; the kind of virulence that had sparked the Gordon riots in 1780 had, in fact, been markedly in decline from the 1780s.[76] In Scotland, Catholic emancipation had been enacted by Parliament in 1829 with the support of both Andrew Thomson and Thomas Chalmers, successive leaders of the church's Evangelical wing. Chalmers, in fact, had Catholic friends and actually liked the Irish, not the least of his many eccentricities.[77] But in this he did not carry the rank and file of the Free Church with him; the new body was, in fact more anti-Catholic than the old, and much more so than the post-Disruption Established Church. In 1850 the Free Church's Committee on Popery produced an interim report which declared that 'the Pope of Rome 'is not, in any sense, the Head of the Church, but is "that Antichrist, that man of sin, and son

[73] Aikman, *History*, vol. iv, 123
[74] M'Crie the Younger, *Sketches*, 12
[75] John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain, 1829-1860* (Oxford 1991), 2
[76] *Ibid.*, 14
[77] Stewart J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth* (Oxford, 1982), 112

of perdition, who exalteth himself in the Church against Christ, and all that is called God.'"[78] The report was unanimously approved by the Commission of the Free Church. The effect of this kind of scriptural identification was to reinforce the conviction that the Catholic Church could not change its stripes, whatever outward appearances might suggest. The Scottish Reformation Society, an inter-denominational anti-Catholic body established in 1851, was founded by the Free Churchmen James Begg and James A. Wylie, included such powerful Free Church figures as William Cunningham and Robert Candlish on its board, and was always dominated by the Free Church.[79] The attitude was widespread in contemporary Free Church literature; Hugh Miller, who had supported Catholic emancipation, nonetheless wrote several harshly anti-Catholic articles in *The Witness.*[80] In this kind of atmosphere, a highly negative attitude towards the Catholic church was frozen into Free Church historiography at an early stage, and would be modified only slightly throughout the course of the church's history.

The new church, a fragment wrested from the old, was not quite the body that had been envisaged by the Non-Intrusionists, who had thought in terms of a renewed Church of Scotland. The historical vision of its leaders, in consequence, though similar, would not be identical. The idea of the godly commonwealth as Chalmers understood it was effectively at an end with the Disruption; administration of the Poor Law passed into the hands of the state in 1845, and Chalmers's leadership of the new church quickly faded. A huge new building programme, financed entirely by private funds, created some 730 new church buildings in four years, and in so doing put an end to the shortage of pews in urban areas, one of the great concerns of the

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[78] Free Church of Scotland, *Proceedings of the Commission of the Free Church of Scotland*, 20 Nov. 1850. The reference to the Man of Sin is found in Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, 2.
[79] John Wolffe, *The Protestant Crusade in Great Britain 1829-1860* (Oxford, 1991), 249-250
[80] George Rosie, *Outrage and Order* (Edinburgh, 1981), 60

Non-Intrusionist leaders over the previous decades. At the same time, while abandoning the provision of basic social services, the Free Church was able to create a vigorous and evangelising parish life in many urban areas. The success of these efforts tended to weaken the support within the church for the establishment principle, which at the Disruption had been regarded as one of the two great principles of the new church, along with spiritual independence. William Candlish, who had emerged as the effective leader of the Free Church after the Disruption, was never very sound on the principle,[81] and in the sixties led the church in a failed attempt at a merger with the Voluntaryist United Presbyterians. His successor, Robert Rainy, eventually led the church to an advocacy of the disestablishment of the Church of Scotland, though stopping short of an outright embrace of Voluntaryism. In historiographical terms, the result of these changes was that the defence of the establishment principle, which had loomed very large in the work of Dr M'Crie, generally faded away.

Most of the remaining historiographical legacy of the Non-Intrusionists, however, remained in play. The church that emerged from the Disruption was certainly the most historically-based of the three major Presbyterian denominations, and its continuing use of the Scottish past was on balance a continuing source of strength. In the second year of its existence the church established a Publications Committee of some one hundred members, headed by Robert Candlish and James Begg. They published two or three books a year for the next five years, including selected writings of Knox, M'Crie's life of Henderson, and M'Crie the Younger's *Sketches of Scottish Church History*, which appeared in two volumes in 1847. In 1850 the original committee was wound up, but it was replaced by a smaller Committee on

[81] Donald Macleod, 'Hugh Miller, the Disruption and the Free Church of Scotland', in Michael Shortland, ed., *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (Oxford, 1996), 199

Missionary Publications of the Church, which continued to produce publications, some of them historical, for the duration of its existence. As will be discussed in a later chapter, the Free Church school system taught Scottish history to its pupils from its inception, and produced textbooks for them, along with historical tracts and prize books for Sunday schools. Many ministers wrote full-dress historical works. There were other schools of historiography in Scotland during the latter nineteenth century, but the Free Church's was certainly the most productive, and probably the most influential.

It was also the most insidious. The missionary zeal with which the Free Church propagated its own view of Scottish history extended beyond the covers of formal works of history, for members of the church seemed to have a grasp of the importance of different communication modes parallel to that of a twentieth-century Trotskyite. A telling example was the appearance in 1875 of *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsman. Originally Edited by Robert Chambers. Revised Throughout and Continued by the Rev. Thomas Thomson.* Robert Chambers, who had died in 1871, was something of a *bête noire* of the Free Church party; his *History of Scotland* (1832), discussed in the second chapter above, lionised Mary Queen of Scots, the Viscount Dundee, and several other characters whom the Free Church viewed with distaste. The Rev. Thomas Thomson had been the editor of the Free Church's Publications Committee, and later wrote a history of Scotland on strict Free Church principles.[82] As might be expected, his revision of Chambers's text was very thorough indeed. Queen Mary was given a reasonably balanced biography, but a lengthy passage from M'Crie was inserted near the beginning explaining why the Reformers were right to fear the accession of a Catholic monarch.[83] No balance at all

[82] Thomas Thomson, *A History of the Scottish People from the Earliest Times* (London, 1894)
[83] *Ibid.*, vol. iii, 425

was evident in the account of Chambers's other great hero, Dundee, of which the following passage is a representative example.

> Claverhouse requested that he might be allowed to sack and burn Glasgow, Hamilton, Strathearn and the adjacent country, for the countenance they had given the rebels, as he termed them, but in reality for the sake of spoil, and to gratify a spirit of revenge for the affront he sustained at Drumclog. This, however, he [Monmouth] had too much humanity to permit. But he had abundant room for satiating revenge afterwards, being sent into the west with the most absolute powers; which he exercised in such a manner as has made his very name an execration to this day.[84]

Gaining control of the enemy's citadel and turning its guns against him must have afforded Dr Thomson no small satisfaction.

That there was a market for the volume and type of history that the Free Church school of historians would produce, is a measure both of the success of church itself and of the growing influence of a revived Presbyterianism in Scotland. As mentioned in Chapter 1, churchgoing in Scotland was by mid-century at a high level by historical standards on the wings of the Evangelical revival, and continued to rise over the next fifty years.[85] With half the population in church every Sunday, it would be quite surprising if religion did not play an important role in cultural life. 'In no country', remarked one reviewer,

> is there so much attention bestowed on Church affairs as in Scotland. One cannot spend an evening in social converse, how mixed so ever may be the

[84] *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen. Originally Edited by Robert Chambers. Revised Throughout and Continued by the Rev. Thomas Thomson* (London, 1875), vol. ii, 160
[85] Callum Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland Since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997), 47

> company, without ecclesiastical matters engrossing more or less of the conversation; and this is not confined to any one class of the Scottish people.

The same writer traced the preoccupation in part to a spirit of nationality, which in Scotland could only find vent through the church:

> Since the Reformation, too, the history of the nation has been almost identical with that of the Church...It has been said, that where there is no heroic history there can be no nationality. The heroic in Scottish history is almost all connected with the church.[86]

Obviously many Scots, particularly the legions of fans of Walter Scott, would not have accepted the writer's delineation of the heroic. But many seemed to have accepted the contention that the history of Scotland since the Reformation was essentially that of the church; for that is how most history was written in the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century in Scotland, and it found a market. All of this may go some way to explaining the decline in the writing of history from a secular point of view which so puzzled Marinell Ash in *The Strange Death of Scottish History*: people did read Scottish history, but they read history that flattered their prejudices. And they were church-goers.

As the most historically-minded of the Presbyterian churches, the Free Church was the greatest single purveyor of historical works for this very substantial market. Unlike the other two large denominations, Free Church historians had a coherent tradition behind them in the work of Dr M'Crie and the historians of the Non-Intrusionist period. They had a well established narrative line; they knew what they wanted to say and where to find supporting quotations and examples. For the Established Church, the most recent work of history in the Moderate tradition was

[86] *Witness*, 12 Jan. 1850

George Cook's *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Establishment of the Reformation to the Revolution* (1815), and in any case the church in the 1850s and 60s was busily, and very successfully, putting its Moderate past behind it. The United Presbyterian Church's historical tradition consisted largely of biographies of individual Covenanters produced by a handful of Secessionists. All of this left the Free Church, in the field of popular history at any rate, in a position to set the tone of historical discourse.

For this, they undoubtedly had Dr M'Crie to thank. The powerful affinity between the Old Light Anti-Burgher minister and the makers of the Free Church would appear to some extent anomalous, as M'Crie was never on all fours with the Evangelical wing of the Church of Scotland on doctrinal matters. But he backed them where it mattered: on patronage, on the independence of the church, on the establishment principle. The leading spokesmen for the church were able to find in his work historical chapter and verse for the points that they found most pressing; and they did so, repeatedly. He was far and away the best researcher in the field of Scottish history of his day, and he had the ability, not common in his period, to attract a mass audience to historical works on matters of Scottish ecclesiastical history. Both elements gave him a cachet among ecclesiastical spokesman that no one else had; an appeal to Dr M'Crie was an appeal to a final authority.

M'Crie was also an inspiration to the writers of general and ecclesiastical histories who appeared in the decade and a half leading up to the Disruption, all of whom, it may be noted, were found on the Evangelical and Non-Intrusionist side of the ledger. For James Aikman, the M'Crie influence was partial, most of Aikman's view of history having been derived directly from Buchanan and other early sources. For

Sime and Hetherington it was much more evident, and for M'Crie the Younger it was virtually all-embracing. All of these writers, even Aikman, played a part in transmitting M'Crie's influence to later generations of Free Church writers. That influence was of course a very single-minded one; but the very quality that makes M'Crie's historical work so unsatisfactory to later readers, his insistence that his side was always right, was a powerful element of its appeal among Non-Intrusionists. Locked in a long struggle for the soul of the church, they were not looking for academic waffle; and in the work of Dr M'Crie, Covenanter and lifelong witness to the Truth, they did not find any.

Chapter 5

The Presbyterian Epic in Major National and Ecclesiastical Histories, 1850-1901

> We live in an age of big, if not great histories. Various modern Histories of Scotland lie in the table of the present writer. They are weighty works on the scales weighing from eleven to sixteen pounds avoirdupois.[1]

In this description, as in a great many other things, the historian and Free Church minister James Mackenzie was exceeding the evidence. His estimate was closer to the mark, however, than Marinell Ash's curious description of Patrick Fraser Tytler's great work, *History of Scotland*, as 'the only history of Scotland'.[2] The latter part of the nineteenth century was, in fact, fairly prolific in histories of Scotland, particularly if we include ecclesiastical histories; there were one or two serious histories published in every decade, and the majority of them ran to two or more volumes. At least one, that of John Hill Burton, rivalled or exceeded Tytler's in its scope and in the depth of its research.

Where Ash did, certainly, strike a chord was in her description of one the of polemics against Tytler as 'an attempt to turn the clock back; to re-establish philosophy or religion as the primary reason for writing history. Scottish history ought to be an a posteriori argument for the divine inevitability of presbyterianism'.[3] As has been seen in the last chapter, there were indeed historians in Scotland, including the major

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[1] James Mackenzie, *The History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1867), Preface, iii
[2] Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), 87
[3] *Ibid.*, 120

Secessionist and Free Church writers, who saw their mission in something like those terms. During the remainder of the nineteenth century their historical vision played a very significant, perhaps dominant, role in the interpretation of Scotland's history. Even writers who did not share the Free Church's ethos, and were often very critical of aspects of the Presbyterian legend, nonetheless tended to concur in many of the church's historical positions. Only one group, the Episcopalians, remained almost uniformly hostile; and that because they had an inherited historical narrative of their own which cast the Presbyterians in an exceedingly unflattering light.

When the Free Church emerged from the Church of Scotland in 1843, its leaders believed that the new church would shortly supplant the old one. In the event, the Free Church never even became the largest denomination in the country. However, it had, as has been seen, a head start in the production of historical works, which it retained throughout its existence. Both the works of William Hetherington and Thomas M'Crie the Younger continued to circulate, and the latter produced an extended version of his *Sketches*, re-titled *The Story of the Scottish Church*, in 1874, the year before his death. In the interim, several other Free Church clergymen and sympathisers had begun writing on historical matters, and in 1861 one of them saw fit to publish a full-dress history of Scotland.

James Mackenzie (1817-1869) was ordained shortly before the Disruption, and spent most of his career as a Free Church minister in Dunfermline. Initially an editor of the Free Church Assembly *Blue Book* and *Missionary Record*,[4] he began publishing works on church history in 1859, and in 1861 produced *The History of Scotland*. Mackenzie was no academic; indeed, his account soared so far above the trammels of

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[4] William Ewing, ed., *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900*, vol. i, 239

documentary evidence as frequently to snap the connection entirely. His history of Scotland incorporated in a pure form every Presbyterian debating point and historiographical position; where evidence was lacking to support them he made it up; where events appeared to controvert them, he ignored the events. Readers were never left in doubt as to the identity of the villains of the piece: the later Stuarts, for example, were never referred to in his text by any other title than 'the Bloody House'. The deaths of enemies of the Presbyterian cause, which sometimes occasioned a crocodile tear or two from other Free Church writers, were dismissed by Mackenzie with the nineteenth-century equivalent of 'good riddance'. 'Blood had followed blood at last', he wrote of Mary, 'and Darnley's treacherous murderess had gone to her dread account'[5]; 'It was a terrible deed; but the wretched Italian [Rizzio] had provoked his fate'.[6] Charles I and others fared no better. Mackenzie's first book had been called *Our Banner and its Battles* (1859), and the level of tolerance for contrary opinions implied by that title carried through all his subsequent writings.

The result, oddly enough, was a history that remains entertaining to read. Part of the appeal, certainly, is the style; obviously influenced by Carlyle, Mackenzie made much use of the historic present, descriptive scene-setting, and declamatory sentences capped with exclamation marks.

> About noon the mist lifted, and the sun shone out on the tall spears of the army of the Congregation. These heavy and formidable masses of spearmen are right dangerous to meddle with, and the Regent's officers evidently think so -- for see! white wands of truce are coming this way. Messages pass and

[5] James Mackenzie, *History*, 407
[6] *Ibid.*, 372

> repass between the armies. Finally, the Regent agrees to a truce for eight days, within which time she is to send fit persons to treat of a lasting peace.[7]

The book was an expanded version of a successful school text that Mackenzie wrote in 1860[8]; in its adult form it retained much of the original prose and remains a masterpiece of historical exposition, saving only that its content is almost entirely fraudulent, polemical or both. Certainly the weakest of the works considered here from an academic standpoint, it may well have been the most influential in consequence of its popularity: it was re-printed in 1867 and 1902, and is still frequently found in Scottish public libraries.

A History of the Scottish People from the Earliest Times (1894) by the Rev. Thomas Napier Thomson is a rather different production, originally issued in three heavy volumes and bearing the evidences of some scholarship. Thomson (1798-1869) was a Church of Scotland minister who served in Australia, 1831-35, but returned to Scotland after 1835 to devote himself to historical studies, and subsequently adhered to the Free Church.[9] Earlier works included *A History of Scotland for the Use of Schools* (1849)[10] and an eight-volume edition of Calderwood's *History of the Kirk of Scotland* (1842-49)[11]. He was an valuable adherent to the church, acting as chief editor for the its Publications Committee and performing other editorial work, including the preparation of a series of selected works by Knox, Rutherford and many other Presbyterian heroes. His history was apparently left in manuscript at the time of his death in 1869, and was not published for another twenty-five years, when it appeared with an introduction by one Charles Annandale. Lacking both the flights

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[7] *Ibid.*, 324
[8] James Mackenzie, *Our Country, a History of Scotland for the Young* (Edinburgh, 1860)
[9] *Dictionary of National Biography* (1909), vol. xix, 753-4 (George Stronach)
[10] Thomas Thomson, *A History of Scotland for the Use of Schools* (Edinburgh, 1849)
[11] David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson (Edinburgh, 1842-49)

of fancy and the expository skills of Mackenzie's work, Thomson's history was the most complete, if pedestrian, expression of the Presbyterian view of Scottish history to appear during the nineteenth century. It was re-issued the following year (1895), beautifully re-bound in six volumes and illustrated with a series of fine engravings.

The Rev. James A. Wylie (1808-1890), was another full-time literary figure within the Free Church, and one who played an even more important part in the church's cultural and organisational life than did Thomson. Like the younger Thomas M'Crie, Wylie came to the Free Church from the Original Secession, where he had been an ordained minister; that provenance was significant, as Secessionist writers, whether they joined the Free Church or not, invariably took a hard line on historical matters, and were particularly unforgiving of papism. Resigning his ministry in 1846, he served as co-editor of *The Witness* with Hugh Miller, and in 1852 was accepted by the Free Church as a minister without charge, in which post he deployed his talents as editor, lecturer and writer on religious issues for the rest of his life.[12] Deeply ingrained in Wylie's theological vision was an intense hostility to Catholicism and a corresponding concern for the preservation of Great Britain's Protestant constitution and character. He and James Begg, as mentioned in chapter four, were the leading figures in the Scottish Reformation Society, founded in 1850 to express just those concerns. Of his very substantial published output, a good part concerned the Papacy, such titles as *Which Sovereign: Queen Victoria or the Pope?* (1860) and *The Papacy in the Antichrist: a Demonstration* (1888) testifying to his continuing interest in the subject.

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[12] *AFCS*, vol. i, 361

Wylie's great work, *The History of Protestantism* (3 volumes, 1874-77), was an account of the progress of Reformed thought in all parts of Europe, and a work of some scholarship. But it was almost entirely derived from published works by other Protestant authors, and was of course totally uncritical. In his chapter on Scotland, this approach involved following well-travelled pathways beaten by Knox, Calderwood, the M'Cries and a handful of other approved authors. What did distinguish his work from a standard Free Church account was his constant awareness of the great issue involved, the world-wide struggle against the Papacy. There was thus a greater sympathy than usual with the English Church, which was, for all its failings, an ally. More than this, it was in the union of the two great Protestant nations of the north that Wylie saw the great hope for the future, and the great example to the world.

> It was not given to England alone, nor to Scotland alone, to achieve so great a work as that of consolidating and crowning the Reformation, and of presenting a Protestantism complete on both its political and religious sides to the nations of the earth for their adoption; this work was shared between the two countries. England brought a full political development, Scotland an equally full religious development; and these two form one entire and perfect Protestantism, which throws its shield alike over the conscience and the person, over the spiritual and the temporal rights of man.[13]

Perfection of this kind left nothing more to discuss; and with his chapter on Scotland Wylie closed his book.

Late in life, Wylie set out to produce his own summation of Scottish history, part of which appeared as *History of the Scottish Nation* (1886-1890). It is at once a sad

[13] J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism* (London, Paris and New York, 1874-77), vol. iii, 464

monument to his memory and a mark of the influence that the antiquarian traditions of Buchanan, Pinkerton and the like might still wield on the unwary. Making use of the standard antiquarian arsenal of classical learning, philology and oral tradition, Wylie set out to address questions about the origins of the Scottish people that had been answered seven or eight decades earlier. He managed to get everything wrong, and the work is a dreadful farrago – his Welsh, for example, were Germans, the Germans were descendants of the Kimmerians, the Scots were Scythians, and the Belgae Scots.[14] He died after publishing three volumes, which took him only to the thirteenth century; no one could have wished for a fourth.

While numbers of more or less amateur efforts at ecclesiastical and national history continued to issue from the pens of Free Church ministers over the remainder of the century, it was not until 1901 – by which time the church was no more – that another Free Church minister published a history with serious academic pretentions. *A History of the Church in Scotland* (1901) was written by John Macpherson (1847-1902), minister at Kinloss from 1878 until his retirement in 1900.[15] Macpherson seems to have made a genuine effort at research; the footnotes in his text refer to an impressive range of sources, including recent works by recent historians such as Hume Brown and Samuel Gardiner. But the content of the book is the wearyingly familiar Free Church narrative of the Scottish church's struggle for religious liberty against Stuart and Moderate erastianism. In the course of the work he touched on the Culdee presbyters, Jenny Geddes and the 350-400 ministers outed in 1662, all fictions exploded decades earlier, and he repeated the Free Church conceit that the Cameronians were responsible for the achievement of civil liberties for the entire island of Great Britain. Macpherson had a few ideas of his own, but his overall

[14] J.A. Wylie, *History of the Scottish Nation* (London, Edinburgh, 1886-1890). vol. i, 16, 270
[15] *AFCS*, vol. i, 256

performance bore the marks of a historiographical tradition that was incapable both of learning and forgetting.

That kind of depressing consistency was not a problem that afflicted the writers of the Church of Scotland. Something of the Church's collective frame of mind during in the half-century after the Disruption may be gleaned from the iconography of St Giles in Edinburgh, the nearest equivalent in the Church of Scotland to an English-style cathedral. At one point during this period someone saw fit to erect a tablet in honour of Dean Hannay, the clergyman who was officiating at the introduction of the prayer book in 1637 when a stool was thrown at his head. That action prompted a different faction within the church to insist on a plaque in honour of Jenny Geddes, supposed to have thrown the stool.[16] Near the latter is a plaque of nineteenth-century vintage in honour of the Covenanter Alexander Henderson, but at the end of the nave another to Dean Ramsay, a prominent Anglican clergyman of the Victorian period who was a critic of covenant-centred Presbyterian history.

It was probably this conceptual confusion, as much as anything, that inhibited the Established Church from making the same kind of use of history as did their rivals in the Free Church. Presbyterian the Established Church certainly was, but there was within it a strain of sympathy for the Church's Episcopalian past, and sometimes a palpable distaste for the excesses of its Presbyterian ancestors. Further, with the departure of the Anti-Intrusionists in 1843, there was not the same need to portray the ecclesiastical history of Scotland as a sleepless struggle to defend the Sole Headship of Christ against the forces of erastianism. Lacking both motive and apocalyptic

[16] William Stephen, *History of the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh, 1894, 1896), vol. ii, 255n.

certainty, the Established Church produced a good deal less history than the Frees, but what they did produce was invariably better.

In 1859 one of their number, John Cunningham, produced quite a respectable ecclesiastical history, *The Church History of Scotland.* Cunningham (1819-1893) was an academic who became principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews, in 1886. Something of an ecumenicist, he also wrote *Popery and Scotch Episcopacy Compared* (1849)[17] and a history of the Quakers (1868),[18] and was active in carrying through legislation opening appointments to members of non-established Presbyterian bodies. He also promoted the use of instrumental music in church.[19]

His work was well-researched and measured in its judgements. He devoted the first 180 pages to a consideration, reasonably sympathetic, of the pre-Reformation church, including a gentle dismantling of the old Presbyterian picture of Columba and the Culdees as proto-Presbyterians.[20] He was very sympathetic to Mary of Guise, and set aside some of the Protestant myths affecting her memory. He was aware that spiritual independence, the great cause of the Free Church, had not always been a central concern of the church.

> The idea of spiritual independence had been gradually growing, till at this period it had attained to a morbid size. Unknown by Knox, it was fully developed by Melville. Unmentioned in the "First Book of Discipline," it is carefully defined in the Second. Men's sentiments had changed with the change of times. When the Church was Roman, it was the duty of the

[17] John Cunningham, *Popery and Scotch Episcopacy Compared, or an Enquiry into the Anti Protestant Doctrine and Tendencies of the Episcopal Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1849)
[18] John Cunningham, *The Quakers from their Origin till the Present Time: an International History* (Edinburgh, 1868)
[19] Hugh Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* (Edinburgh, 1915), vol. 7, 424
[20] The role occupied by the Culdees in Presbyterian historiography is discussed in Chapter Six below, 244-7.

magistrate to reform it. When the Church was Protestant, it was impiety in the magistrate to touch it.[21]

He was also conscious that Melville and his associates over-reached themselves and damaged the church's cause; he commended Charles I for some of his actions; he condemned the church for its intolerance and for the crimes that it committed during its moment of power in the 1640s. But for all that, Cunningham was still a Presbyterian. His pictures of the reformers were mixed, but basically positive; those of the Stuarts mixed, but basically negative. His picture of James VI was the standard one of a man foolishly convinced of his divine right to rule, achieving nothing of value and dying unlamented. Cunningham's political values were those of the Revolution, and insofar as he had a secular hero, it was William.

Cunningham's work was re-issued, only slightly revised, in 1882. A year earlier he had taken part with group of writers from his church as a contributor to the St Giles' Lectures, subsequently published as *The Scottish Church from the Earliest Times to 1881* (1881). His fellow authors were not full-time historians, but they represented the intellectual cream of the Established Church. A.K.H Boyd (1825-1899), minister at St Andrews, was the author of about thirty books of sermons and essays, and probably better known outside Scotland than any contemporary Presbyterian divine.[22] Robert Flint (1834-1910), Professor of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, a polymath and a man of prodigious learning, was the outstanding intellectual figure of his Church during much of his career, and the author, among many other publications, of three works on the philosophy of history.[23] Robert Herbert Story (1835-1907) held the Chair of Church History at the University of Glasgow, 1886-98,

[21] John Cunningham, *The Church History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1882), vol. i 437
[22] *FES*, vol. v, 236-7
[23] *Ibid.*, vol. vii, 284-5; Alan P.F. Sell, *Defending and Declaring the Faith* (Exeter, 1987), 39, 62

and was Principal of that university for the remainder of his life. Donald Macleod (1831-1916), minister of Park Church, Glasgow, was the author of four books.

For the most part, the members of this distinguished panel followed the pattern established by Cunningham: they were prepared to see flaws in the heroes of presbytery and virtues in their opponents, but ultimately they took their stand with the former. Thus Boyd treated the Scottish church in the monastic period kindly, while his picture of the church on the eve of Reformation was one of unremitting decay. Donald Macleod's essay on the Reformation period depicted Knox as a very great man, while acknowledging that he was given to intolerance and rhetorical excesses. Cunningham, who wrote the section on the period 1572-1660, had criticisms to make of Melville's reforms, of the behaviour of presbytery in the 1590s, of the Solemn League and Covenant, of Protesters and other extremists of the civil war era, and of other evidences of overzealousness among the faithful; but he concluded that it was all worthwhile in the long run. Robert Flint, who wrote on the 1660-1690 period, began with the kind of qualification that could never have appeared in a Free Church source:

> it only tends to discredit Presbyterianism in the eyes of persons who care for truth and accuracy, to indulge in those indiscriminate and unqualified panegyrics on the Covenanters which conceal the fact that some of their principles and many of their proceedings were unjustifiable.[24]

As with his two predecessors, Flint regarded Stuart intransigence as the fundamental cause of the conflict, but he made no attempt to blind himself to excesses on the Presbyterian side. The chapter on the period 1690-1707 by the prolific Robert Herbert Story was rather more conventionally Presbyterian, employing rhetoric that

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[24] *The Scottish Church from the Earliest Times to 1881* (St Giles Lectures) (Edinburgh, 1881), 194 (Flint)

would not be out of place in a Free Church history to describe the overthrow of the prelatic system and to defend the ousting of the curates by the Cameronians:

> That was that 'rabbling of the curates', over which their representatives and apologists may, to this day, be heard to bleat and whimper. Never were enormous wrongs so leniently retaliated. Never, in the day when power had passed from the oppressors to the oppressed, was the oppression so lightly revenged.[25]

But even Story saw fit to condemn the behaviour of the post-Revolution Church Commission in northern Scotland for its expulsions of ministers in that area, 'shutting up churches, stirring evil and sectarian passions, under the cloak of enforcing ministerial purity and efficiency'.[26] Why rabbling should have been right on one side of the Tay and wrong on the other was not made clear; consistency on such matters, as has been suggested, was not one of the virtues of Established Church historiography.

Nine years after the St Giles' Lectures were published, Story edited a general handbook of the Church called *The Church of Scotland, Past and Present* (1890). Two volumes of the work were given over to an account of the Church's history by James Rankin. Rankin's picture fell within the general framework of Church of Scotland interpretations: the Presbyterians often hurt their cause by intolerance and violence, but the tyranny of the Stuarts – some of whom, to be sure, were not without virtues – was the fundamental cause of the church-state problem. In the end, all was well; Presbyterianism triumphed to the great benefit of the Scottish people, and their political principles came to be embodied in the Revolution settlement of 1688.

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[25] *Ibid.*, 234 (Story)
[26] *Ibid.*, 243 (Story)

In discussing Melville's reforms, Rankin went a step farther in his criticism than his colleagues of the St Giles' lectures a decade earlier. He was personally sick and tired of the endless committee work that, in the nineteenth century, had become inseparable from the inherited structure of the Church, and wished there were bishops or some equivalent about the place to tell everybody what to do:

> the Reformed Church did not start with any theory of parity, but deliberately in duty, authority, and stipend, although not in distinct ordination or consecration, recognized certain churchmen above others....Had the original inequality been maintained, it would have proved extremely useful, especially in recent days, as a great improvement on the slow and cumbrous government and administration of departments of church work by committees.[27]

He went on to pronounce a eulogy on Melville, and an anathema on his old enemy James VI; but at no point did he have anything good to say about the reformer beyond the usual meaningless homilies. That, indeed, seems to have been the standard Established Church attitude to Melville; both Robertson and the Moderate Dr Cook had performed the same somersault, condemning Melville's behaviour throughout his career but abruptly breaking into a eulogy before bidding him adieu.

Rankin was also unhappy with the Protesters, in whom he clearly saw precursors of the zealots in the Free Church:

> But the saddest and most lasting result that came to Scotland when religion ran to seed in the whims and fanaticism of the Cromwellian and Puritan period, is that these oddities and excesses got to be perpetuated among us in the spirit and form of dissent, vexing the Church...with internal strife, and the

[27] James Rankin, 'The Church from the Reign of Malcolm Canmore to the Reformation; and from the Reformation to the Revolution of 1688', Books II-III of Robert Herbert Story, ed., *The Church of Scotland Past and Present* (London, 1890), 442

> presence of an unreasonable and irreconcilable element from these days till now; whereas it has been the effort of the national Church for two centuries to rid itself of crotchets, and get back to the good sense and tolerance which marked the Reformed Church from 1560 to 1596.[28]

Finally, there was the recurring problem, which appears in the St Giles' lectures as well, that many of the innovations of the Stuarts, besides episcopacy itself, now seemed like good ideas. In both cases the authors shifted their focus to the methods of the Stuarts in forcing innovations on the church, and away from the substance of their efforts (such as the celebration of Christmas and the use of a liturgy). Free Church writers, for whom all innovations of whatever kind were interpreted as steps towards Popery, would never have admitted such a distinction.

One other Presbyterian source deserves mention, a curious volume produced by the intellectual elite of the United Presbyterian Church. *The Pictorial History of Scotland, from the Roman Invasion to the Close of the Jacobite Rebellion*, in two huge and unwieldy volumes, was published in 1859. Its primary author was James Taylor (1813-1892), a United Presbyterian minister from 1848 until 1873, when he became secretary of the new Board of Education. His colleagues included the Reverends John Eadie, John Anderson and William Lindsay, teachers at the UP theological college, and a scientist named George MacDonald. The latter contributed an introductory chapter on the geology of Scotland illustrated with pictures of fossils and other natural phenomena, a mark of the general interest in the subject in the pivotal year 1859. The erudition in the rest of the work is impressive; hundreds of published sources were used, and extensive work seems to have been done in archival repositories as well.

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[28] Rankin, 'The Church', 529

One of the peculiarities of the book is the influence of the Episcopalian Tytler. Taylor had produced an enlarged and continued version of Tyler's history which he published in its final version in 1863, and in the *Pictorial History* he often cites the elder historian as a source. On frequent occasions Taylor took issue with his predecessor, particularly concerning the latter's portrait of Knox, but he agreed with him almost point-by-point in his picture of the sufferings of Mary and the machinations of Elizabeth. He even had some charitable things to say about the young James VI. After he passed 1603, however, the loss of Tytler's influence is quickly felt; James became a villain, and the account of the church fell into a more conventional Presbyterian mode. Apart from a sympathetic portrait of Montrose, there is little in the work's account of the seventeenth century that would be out of place in a Free Church history of the same period. This is particularly true of its account of the post-Restoration Covenanters, which was the usual theme and variation on the persecution of the innocent, performed with the stops pulled out.

A peculiarity of the work is the periodic appearance of chapters titled 'Ecclesiastical History', written by one of the other authors. The unnamed author did not agree with Taylor about Mary; he regarded her, as a Catholic, as an unsuitable sovereign for a Protestant country. But it is this writer who first raised the point that derived specifically from the UP context: that if it were not for the pernicious concept of an established church, the welter of conflicts surrounding the post-Reformation church settlement would never have occurred.

> But the ideas of that age in regard to religious liberty were radically and totally wrong. It was the universal conviction that only one church ought to be allowed by government to exist, that that church

> should be supported by the authority of parliament, and that all deviation from its principles should be suppressed by civil pains and penalties. This was the belief of the Romish Church...but it was also the belief of the Reformed Church, though she had been restrained by the influence of her purer faith from carrying it out to the same extent of cruelty...[29]

That argument recurred from time to time, within a text that was in other respects largely a traditional Presbyterian narrative. The work itself was a one-off, perhaps because of its heaviness and awkward shape, or the fact that it was written by a committee, and one that evidently did not agree within itself; in any event it was never reprinted. Nor did any other UP minister attempt a serious history of Scotland.

Episcopalians, heirs to the losers in the seventeenth-century ecclesiastical struggles, were a good deal more persistent. At mid-century the standard history of Scotland, to 1603, was that of the Episcopalian Tytler, and his work was reprinted several times over the next five decades. Tytler was himself the successor to a series of Episcopalian historians of Scotland that included William Guthrie, Walter Scott and his grandfather William Tytler; and he was succeeded by the authors of two excellent ecclesiastical histories, George Grub and William Stephen. It is in this tradition, particularly in the works of the two latter writers, that one finds the most incisive and consistent critique of the Presbyterian interpretation that appeared during the nineteenth century.

Some mention might first be made of a curious work by one Thomas Stephen, an Anglican who was a medical librarian at King's College, London. Stephen seems to

[29] James Taylor et al., *The Pictorial History of Scotland, from the Roman Invasion to the Close of the Jacobite Rebellion* (London, 1859), vol. ii, 443

have had Scottish roots, for he cared enough about the Church of Scotland to write a 2800-page tirade against it, *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Reformation to the Present Time* (4 vols, 1843-1845), along with two other works of a similar colour. The political viewpoint of his work underlines one element that all the Scottish writers treated here had in common: they all accepted the Revolution settlement of 1689 and the manner in which it was achieved. Stephen did not. He was a bitter anti-democrat, believing that the authority of the monarch is from God, and further, that episcopacy was justifiable as the only form of church organisation compatible with monarchy. That viewpoint left him with little sympathy for John Knox; the Reformer 'constantly advocated the cause of rebellion, and encouraged resistance to lawful authority...in consequence, he has left such a sting behind him as has deluged these kingdoms with blood, and plunged them into anarchy and rebellion...'[30] But the real villain of Stephen's piece was Melville, who arrived from Geneva two years after Knox died, and in due course managed to persuade the church to abolish the existing prelatical system and substitute one of his own. The unworkable presbyterian organisation that he imposed on the church collapsed in discord and violence within four years of its parliamentary establishment, to be replaced by a proper episcopal system of James VI's construction. When the genie again escaped from the bottle in 1637, the result was civil war, followed by the entirely justified suppression of presbytery; and when that suppression was reversed in 1690, Scotland was saddled with an ungovernable national church doomed to endless in-fighting and schism. Stephen's story did not have a happy ending.

Nor, one imagines, did it have much of an audience. Stephen's prose, studded with italics and exclamation marks, bore the marks of the most perfervid apologetic. Even

[30] Thomas Stephen, *The History of the Church of Scotland from the Reformation to the Present Time* (London, 1843), vol. i, 233

more obviously than his Free Church opponents, he was writing not a considered work of history but an argument, and an argument which, in his case, there were few ears to hear. It is probably a measure of the influence of his great work that the copy in the library of New College lay in that busy repository for a century and a half with most of its pages uncut.

A decade and a half later, the Episcopalian historian George Grub (1812-1892) wrote a very different book, with a different fate. Grub was a Professor of Law at the University of Aberdeen; his *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* (1861) had an appropriately detached and magisterial tone, distributing praise and blame to members of all parties. It also managed to include interesting details unrelated to denominational conflict; it was, in fact, a solid work of history. Its narrative line, however, was in broad outline the same as Stephen's. Grub was very critical of the destructiveness of Knox's Reformation; regarded favourably the mixed prelatical system established by the Convention of Leith in 1572; inveighed against Melville for intruding himself and his alien and destructive structure on the church. He sympathised with Queen Mary to a degree, and with James VI to a greater extent, while allowing that both exceeded their lawful prerogatives. He did as well as he could by Charles I, but for the most part threw up his hands at the reigns of his sons. Unlike Stephen, Grub did not believe the royal prerogative to have been unlimited; his political outlook, indeed, did not appear to be far removed from that of his whig counterparts in the Church of Scotland. But like his Anglican predecessor, although not nearly so stridently or so often, he made clear his affection for the episcopate, the apostolic succession, and the ceremonies of the Episcopal Church. Grub's work sits on the open shelves at the National Library of Scotland, still a standard work on the ecclesiastical history of Scotland.

Grub's work was seconded by William Stephen (1834-1901), Rector of St Augustine's, Dumbarton, who published his two-volume *History of the Scottish Church* in 1894 and 1896. Stephen paid fulsome tribute to Grub in the preface to his second volume and had in fact received some assistance from him, and it is unremarkable that his account of the struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was generally conformable with that of the elder historian. Stephen, however, was of a rather less conciliatory temper; he had few good things to say about the Presbyterians and many that were harshly negative. He was particularly adept at hammering at their weakest point, religious intolerance, and took evident satisfaction in bringing up examples of that unfashionable trait which were normally omitted from Presbyterian accounts. Thus of the General Assembly at Dundee in 1593:

> The fanaticism broke out in the following Assembly at Dundee where they presented four petitions to the king, demanding the extermination of the papists. Had James complied with the petitions the result must have been a general massacre of the Roman Catholics, -- a St Bartholomew's day in Scotland.[31]

He was similarly at pains to point out that the Covenanters, taken as a group, were more often persecutors than persecuted; that the supposed attachment of the Presbyterians to democracy was belied by their behaviour when in power; that the post-1661 Covenanters were despised by most Scots; and that Scotland, far from being an innately Presbyterian country, was in fact predominantly Episcopalian at the time of the establishment of the Church of Scotland in 1690. Writing late in the century, Stephen was able to make use of criticisms found in the work of earlier

[31] William Stephen, *History*, vol. ii, 158-9

writers such as the Established Church writers Cunningham and Rankin, and the secular historian John Hill Burton, as well as Grub. In so doing he fashioned a critique of early Presbyterianism, and the historiography that defended it, which went beyond anything produced by his predecessors.

John Hill Burton (1809-1881) was one of only two secular historians who wrote scholarly histories of Scotland during the last half of the century. Published in 1870, his eight-volume *The History of Scotland from Agricola's Invasion to the last Jacobite Insurrection*, succeeded Tytler's history as the definitive work in the field, and held that distinction for more than thirty years. Burton was Tytler's successor as Historiographer Royal, but his work has a very different tone from that of Tytler or his other more recent predecessors. A Benthamite and a biographer of Hume,[32] he had no particular brief for Mary, Episcopalians, or for Presbyterians either. Something of his outlook may be gleaned from his comment on Cromwell:

> Three infallibilities had successively held rule – the infallibility of Laud, on the apostolic past; the infallibility of the Covenanters; now it was the turn of the infallibility of Cromwell and his army of saints. It exemplified a renowned saying, that Providence was to be found with that side which had brought the heaviest artillery into the field...[33]

Burton perceived the Reformation as the product of a social upheaval, not of preaching. Knox, who believed otherwise, often appeared in his pages as grossly self-deluded, no less than fanatical and intolerant. The leadership of the Presbyterian party in the church over the following century generally fared worse, being commonly held up to ridicule under the collective title of 'the zealots'. Describing

[32] *DNB* (1908), vol. iii, 462-4

[33] John Hill Burton, *The History of Scotland from Agricola's Invasion to the Last Jacobite Insurrection* (Edinburgh and London, 1897), vol. vii, 45

the clergy-led riots of 17 December 1596, he remarked that 'Of that British institution called, towards the close of the last century, the "no Popery mob", Edinburgh thus enjoyed the distinction of possessing the oldest specimen'.[34] He wrote in some detail, and with great disdain, of the persecution of the bishops at the Glasgow Assembly of 1638, and drew attention to many other examples of high-handedness, cruelty and foolishness on the part of the Presbyterian clerics and laymen. On the way he pointed out that there were no documentary references in the 1637 period to anyone named Jenny Geddes, a revelation that initiated the slow disappearance of that character from the Scottish historical stage.[35]

But on the critical matters, Burton as often as not sided with the Presbyterians. He concluded his consideration of Knox with a full-page quotation of the eulogy on the Reformer written by his secretary, Richard Bannatyne. Moray also was given a favourable valedictory, while Mary was held to have signed the League of Bayonne and otherwise to have been pretty much guilty as charged. Burton attacked Montrose for using Celts in warfare against civilised people, defended the Scots against the charge of selling their king, and presented a picture of the persecutions after the Restoration that was as hostile to the government as that of Wodrow, from whose work it was largely drawn. He eulogised Carstares, spoke with respect of William and despised the Jacobites. In the controversies that followed, Burton was to be quoted as often by defenders of the Presbyterians as he was by their opponents.

John Mackintosh (1833-1907) published his four-volume study *The History of Civilisation in Scotland* over a ten-year period ending in 1888. Mackintosh's title suggests Henry's Buckle's *History of Civilisation in England* of two decades earlier,

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[34] *Ibid.*, vol. v., 311
[35] *Ibid.*, vol. vi., 150

and the work in fact may have been an answer to it;[36] Buckle's study had included an extensive and gloomy picture of a Scotland historically hobbled by an intolerant and reactionary clergy. Mackintosh used a methodology similar to his predecessor's, but reached quite different conclusions. He organised his study by topic within given eras, including material on social organisation, agriculture, literature, and so on, his primary purpose being to show the successful progress of enlightenment in Scottish society. Like Buckle, he found himself far short of producing a convincing positivist framework of interpretation; he admitted in the introduction that there was no possibility of developing an adequate philosophy of history in the present imperfect state of knowledge of the past; and such generalisations as he did essay were so tentative as to be risible:

> It is palpable that there must be a connection between the natural features of a country and its inhabitants, though at this day the influences of physical agencies on man's development is only imperfectly known.[37]

Mackintosh did believe very firmly, however, that for progress in civilisation to be sustainable, intellectual enlightenment must be accompanied by equivalent advances in morality. Thus the Reformation in Scotland was far from being a retrograde development; it was in fact critical to the progress of the country because it represented a great advance in moral sentiments and ideals, which in turn permitted developments in education and other fields to proceed apace. He was thus naturally very commendatory of the Presbyterians for their educational innovations. More surprisingly, in his political narrative of the post-Reformation period he followed the Presbyterian line very closely. Thus, in discussing the Restoration period:

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[36] Michael Fry, 'The Whig Interpretation of Scottish History', in Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley, eds., *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1992), 84

[37] John Mackintosh, *The History of Civilisation in Scotland,* (London, 1878-1888), vol. i, 26

> the task which Charles II undertook was by force to turn aside the current of religious thought, of feeling, and of sentiment, sprung from the Reformation of 1560, and continued through a century of hard struggles; the attempt was bound to fail, although it was made with deliberation and persistence, and everything done to crush the spirit of the Scots and extinguish the last vestige of their liberties.[38]

The hyperbole in this passage and its implicit identification of Scots, Presbyterianism and liberty are infallible marks of the Free Church interpretation of Scottish history. It is a testimony to the continuing prevalence of this kind of history late in the century that Mackintosh, an aspiring positivist, seems not to only to have been exposed to it but to have swallowed it whole.

It must be acknowledged that all the historians considered here accepted some elements of the Free Church position, if only because they all depended on many of the same sources. But in the treatment of the important elements in the narrative, significant differences among the schools described above invariably surfaced. John Knox's career is perhaps the earliest obvious example. The reformer presented a problem to both subdivisions of the Presbyterian school. He was in a critical sense the founder of their church; at the same time, he was responsible for words and actions that had made him the object of criticism and ridicule at least from the time of Hume and Robertson. The Free Church solution, as was so often the case, was to brazen it out. In the first place, as James A. Wylie made clear, his historical role in creating and defending the Scottish Reformation put him beyond the range of criticism:

[38] *Ibid.*, vol. iv, 542

> It is hardly possible to over-estimate the importance of the service which Knox rendered. It not only led to the establishment of Protestantism in Scotland, and the perpetuation of it in England; but, in view of the critical condition in which Europe then was, it may indeed with justice be said that it saved the Reformation of Christendom.[39]

Far from being ridiculous, their Knox was virtually infallible; when he made a decision, it was the right one; when he made a prediction, it came true. Mackenzie's picture of Knox in his last days, denouncing the St Bartholomew's Day massacre, shows both men in full flight:

> Summoning up the remainder of his strength, the old fire kindling as he went on, and the feeble voice swelling to the trumpet-tone that had so often thrilled his countrymen, he thundered forth the judgement of Heaven against the King of France, and desired his ambassador to tell him that the vengeance of God would pursue him and his house. Whether Knox mistook let history declare.[40]

And if he sounded intolerant at times, it was only because he was speaking the truth. For the older generation of Free Churchmen, which included Thomson and Wylie as well as Mackenzie, Knox was still the man chosen by God to bring the light of Reformation to Scotland; and he could do no ill.

For the Establishment historians the question was a little thornier; their Knox was not a paragon. 'It was too bad' complained John Cunningham,

> that a queen who had as yet been convicted of no crime but a conscientious attachment to the religion in which she had been educated, should be publicly compared to every harlot, murderer, and

[39] J.A. Wylie, *Protestantism*, vol. iii, 495
[40] Mackenzie, *History*, 435

> idolater mentioned in the Old Testament, and that even prayer should have been prostituted to the purposes of abuse.[41]

But in the long run, both Cunningham and his St Giles colleague Alexander Mitchell thought that Knox's great qualities and achievements outstripped the harm he did. Even his acknowledged intolerance, Mitchell thought, was inseparable from the times, and probably was necessary for the task he had to perform.

> He was certainly intolerant in the modern sense; but it was precisely such intolerance as could alone have produced the reformation. The colourless 'Liberal Thought' of the present day, with its hesitation as to all religious beliefs, would never have emancipated Scotland.[42]

A very similar point had been made by their distant predecessor, William Robertson, over a century earlier.[43]

Burton's mixed portrait has already been mentioned; his Knox was a somewhat comical character, honest in his vanity and on balance on the side of progress. But he was far less important than he thought: the Reformation was made by social and economic forces, not by Knox. The Episcopalians agreed on the latter point; 'the Reformation was virtually accomplished', noted William Stephen, 'before Knox returned from Geneva'.[44] Further, whatever accomplishments Knox might actually have had, they had to be set against the terrible intolerance for which he was responsible:

> he was in principle as intolerant as the papists, and in his own belief as infallible as any pope...but for the restraining hand of the nobility he would have been as relentless a persecutor as any Romanist in the land. "Death to

[41] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. i, 326
[42] *Scottish Church from the Earliest Times*, 148 (Macleod)
[43] William Robertson, *History,* 273: 'These very qualities, however, fitted him to be the instrument of Providence in advancing the Reformation among a fierce people.'
[44] William Stephen, *History*, vol. ii, 97

> the idolaters" was a common cry of himself and his party, not spoken hastily...but in cold blood.[45]

Grub's portrait was more judicious but at bottom just as negative: 'the evil of which he was guilty lived after him. Some of the worst deeds which stained the history of our country in the following age were justified by an appeal to the principles and example of Knox'.[46]

The obverse of the Free Church veneration of Knox was a detestation of Mary, or more exactly of her nineteenth-century supporters. The intractability of the problem and its apparent cause were bewailed by Thomas Thomson in much the same terms that the elder M'Crie had used six decades earlier:

> The chivalrous enthusiasm of Mary's advocates, which has kindled into absolute quixotism, and which two centuries of inquiry and common sense have scarcely abated, has made her partisans see proofs where none existed, and expand commonplace trifles into important facts....Had the report of Mary's charm been less transcendent, or the history of her misfortunes less poetical, would the characters of Knox and Moray have descended to the present day with such an amount of misrepresentation and abuse?[47]

Nonetheless, the ground was a little easier for the Frees in the second part of the century than it had been in the first. Only one of the other writers considered here was an unqualified partisan of Mary, and that one, James Taylor of the United Presbyterians, was undercut by one of the other writers, unidentified, of the book he edited. The latter was somewhat more temperate in his language than the Free

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[45] *Ibid.*
[46] George Grub, *An Ecclesiastical History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1861), vol. ii, 187
[47] Thomson, *A History of the Scottish People from the Earliest Times*, Second edition (London, Glasgow, Edinburgh and Dublin, 1895), vol. ii, 280

Church writers, who believed that Mary had been a conscious part of a conspiracy among Catholic powers, the more or less fictitious League of Bayonne, to re-Catholicise Scotland and England. But like them, he questioned whether a Catholic could successfully rule a Protestant country in the era of the Counter-Reformation.

For the Established Church historians, the problem was a little more complicated. Cunningham saw no evidence of a plot on Mary's part to foist Catholicism on an unwilling Scotland, and showed some sympathy for her; but he was troubled by her evident guilt in the death of Darnley, as all but proved by the casket letters. In the end he referred to her 'more than questionable name'.[48] Rankin, more sympathetic, was not quite so certain that the casket letters proved anything.

> The mystery of the "Casket Letters, "...is still uncleared , but the presumption is considerably in the queen's favour. There can be no doubt that the nobles as a body were unjust and grossly disloyal to the queen, and had a direct interest in blackening her character so as to excuse their own plots.[49]

Burton and both of the Episcopalians, Grub and William Stephen, had some sympathy for Mary in the opening years of her career but had serious reservations about her conduct in the later stages. Withal, among serious historians the rhetoric associated with Mary had considerably cooled as the century progressed; qualified verdicts were the norm, and the days when Mary's story could occupy ten percent or more of a general history of Scotland were gone.

That is not to say, however, that there was no longer much public interest in the subject. During the last half of the century biographies sympathetic to Mary

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[48] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. i, 384
[49] Rankin, 'The Church', 449

appeared by Alexander M'Neel Caird (1866)[50], John Hosack (1869)[51], Agnes Strickland (1873)[52], Alexander Walker (woundingly described as 'an elder of the Church of Scotland', 1889)[53], A.H. Millar, (1890)[54], John Skelton (1893)[55], and others, with only one by the Free Churchman David Hay Fleming (1897)[56] to serve as a corrective. J.A. Wylie tried to put the best face on the situation:

> whenever the world is on the point of forgetting a life from the odiousness of which there is no escape but in oblivion, there comes forward, with a certainty almost fated...an apologist to rehearse the sad story over again, and to fix the memory of her crimes more indelibly than ever in the minds of men.[57]

But he was whistling in the dark. Sympathy for Mary would not go away, and, at one level or another, it continued to gnaw at the Presbyterian consensus.

The second of the Scottish church's great reformers, Melville, loomed rather larger in the Free Church tradition than the first; indeed, Melville and his struggle with James VI in many ways lay at the core of their perception of the church and its role in history. Their version of the story, derived largely from the elder M'Crie, began with Melville's return to Scotland from Geneva in 1574; there he found the church in a deeply unsatisfactory state, bearing within it the tulchan bishops allowed by the Convention of Leith in 1572. Working with other members of the church, he was able by 1578 to achieve agreement on a Second Book of Discipline to replace the First, creating the present structure of church government. Problems began in 1581

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[50] Alexander M'Neel Caird, *Mary Stuart: Her Guilt or Innocence* (Edinburgh, 1866)
[51] John Hosack, *Mary, Queen of Scots and her Accusers* (Edinburgh, 1869)
[52] Agnes Strickland, *Life of Mary Queen of Scots* (London, 1873)
[53] Alexander Walker, *Mary Queen of Scots* (Aberdeen, 1889)
[54] A.H. Millar, *The Story of Queen Mary* (Glasgow, [1890])
[55] John Skelton, *Mary Stuart* (London, 1893)
[56] David Hay Fleming, *Mary Queen of Scots: from her Birth to her Flight into England* (London, 1897)
[57] Wylie, *Protestantism*, vol. iii, 498

when the King's favourites, Lennox and Arran, began interfering in the ecclesiastical sphere through the appointment of new bishops. They had, in fact persuaded the king to make himself absolute, and to that end to replace the presbyterian system with episcopacy. In 1592 the king, under political pressure, agreed to enact the presbyterian system into law; despite some flaws, the act stood as 'the Magna Carta of the church'. James, however, was only biding his time.

> So far as James was concerned, he hated the democratic principles that constituted the foundation of the Presbyterian polity, and was determined that so soon as opportunity was afforded him, he would repudiate all his fair promises, and re-establish the hierarchy in Scotland.[58]

In 1596 the famous confrontation occurred at Falkland in which Melville explained to James the theory of the Two Kingdoms. James might have learned from the encounter; but instead, he took the next opportunity to impose his own solution on the church. In December a summons to answer for some of his sermons was served on David Black, minister of St Andrews; when he refused the jurisdiction of civil courts, Melville organised a defence, but the innocent Black was nevertheless exiled. The affair led to a reaction on the streets of Edinburgh on 17 December. The tumult was quickly quelled with the help of the ministers; but James now had all he needed. In the following year he began, with the help of ministers from north of the Tay, to impose prelates on the church, and by 1610, this process culminated in the creation of a fully-fledged episcopacy under the control of the crown. Melville, the champion of both religious and political freedom, died in exile. The worthless James died unlamented, having stored up a nest of troubles for his dynasty that would necessarily lead to its downfall.

[58] John Macpherson, *A History of the Church in Scotland* (Paisley, 1901), 152

The Established Church historians' version of the same story ultimately reached the same conclusion, but by a very different path. They began with a somewhat different picture of the church's state in the aftermath of the Leith Convention. Cunningham regarded the prelatic system imposed by the Convention as generally unsatisfactory, but not bitterly opposed by the membership of the church; the system had, after all, been approved by Knox. Rankin, who did not think much of the structure of his own church, was much more positive.

> Had the principles agreed on at Leith in 1572 been more generally accepted or more fairly carried out, so as to have properly taken root, they might have averted the long and bitter strife between Presbytery and Episcopacy, as well as the degradation of Presbytery, in later times, into narrow sects based on paltry internal feuds.[59]

Cunningham was a good deal more sanguine about the presbyterian structure that emerged from the Second Book of Discipline than Rankin, but believed no more than his colleague that it was mandated by the word of God. Both agreed that the bitter animus against bishops which Melville introduced into the church destroyed the good relationship that existed between the Scottish and English churches. Further, the church, particularly after its legislative triumph in 1592, abused its power, through senseless badgering of the monarch and language from the pulpit which 'would hardly be used now by the most violent republican demagogue'.[60] Unlike the Frees, the two Established Churchmen were aware that the King's attitude towards the church might in fact have taken some of its colour from this kind of behaviour.

> The Assembly [of 1596] had the impertinence and senselessness formally to depute three ministers to confer with the king concerning his own sins and those of his household in six articles of complaint, the last of which dealt with

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[59] Rankin, 'The Church', 458

[60] *Scottish Church from the Earliest Times*, 170 (Cunningham)

the queen's late hours and balls! No wonder the king was galled and alienated.[61]

Far from being a royal plot, the riotous events of 17 December 1596 in Edinburgh put the king in fear for his life, and served to confirm him in his conviction that he could not co-exist with presbytery. Summing up Melville's career, Cunningham was prepared to acknowledge that the eventual triumph of his principles long after his death was by no means without cost:

> the clergy have lost their places in parliament and on the bench; the country has come through agonies of which the traces still remain; and England and Scotland, long united politically are still divided ecclesiastically. All this has come of Melville's victory.[62]

In the end, however, Cunningham and Rankin both delivered eulogies to the departed Melville, and painted the familiar Presbyterian picture of James dying unlamented after a reign barren of achievement. Why?

The answer seems to have been essentially political. Whatever criticism may be made of the manner in which Presbyterianism was introduced, or of the system itself, it was the one that led to the British constitution, which, to Cunningham, almost certainly owed its existence to Scotland and her intransigent church. Cunningham, indeed, penned one of the most eloquent summaries of the Scottish whig position that appeared in the literature of the nineteenth century:

> The Presbyterian Church was the home of freedom and independent thought all through the seventeenth century--on two different occasions it was their last asylum when they had been driven out everywhere else. From it there issued the forces which established the Commonwealth and afterwards led to

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[61] Rankin, 'The Church', 476

[62] *Scottish Church from the Earliest Times*, 165 (Cunningham)

> the Revolution; and it is questionable if there had been Commonwealth or Revolution without it. Without it the Stuarts might have been still upon the throne, doing as the Stuarts always liked to do.... I am inclined, then, to think that after all we did not pay too high a price for our Presbytery, though it cost the clergy their dignities and lands, and the country some bloody agonies.[63]

Similarly, Rankin stressed the belief of the Melvillians in freedom; what was important about James's innovations was not that episcopacy was necessarily bad in itself, but that it 'was forced on the church, and became the basis for despotism'.[64] Thus for the Established Church the struggles of the Melville and his contemporaries were ultimately about freedom; and that was the principal thread that bound them to the otherwise very dubious theological practices of the latter sixteenth century.

The Episcopalians, of course, reached different conclusions. For the Anglican Stephen, Melville was an unmitigated disaster for the church, and the central villain of his history. Grub believed that the Leith system was quite workable, and the basis of a rapprochement with the English church; it might have endured without Melville. The system prescribed by the Second Book of Discipline and enacted into law in 1592 did not work; it was full of lacunae, and it collapsed in violence in 1596. Ironically, it was only reforms introduced by James that made presbytery viable at all. Finally, Grub, in his summaries of the lives of the two great antagonists of the period, while he did have a few positive things to say about Melville and some serious criticisms of James, mounted a tribute to him which echoed that of his Episcopalian predecessor Tytler:

> the great improvement which his government effected in the condition of Scotland has seldom been sufficiently acknowledged. When he grew up to

[63] *Ibid.*
[64] Rankin, 'The Church', 486

> manhood, he found his kingdom torn by civil dissensions, his people discontented and miserable, and the authority of the law utterly set at nought. At his death he left his subjects quiet and prosperous, and the country accustomed to the steady administration of justice.[65]

In this encomium he was not echoed by William Stephen, who regarded the King's erastianism, and that of subsequent Stuarts, as an insuperable barrier to the establishment of a moderate and popular episcopacy in the country. But Stephen was not prepared to deny that the king was responsible for some progressive developments in law and internal peace-keeping. Nor was the sceptical Burton, who otherwise narrated the church-state struggle of the period with his normal amused detachment.

The same pattern recurs in the descriptions of the reign of Charles I: a simplistic right versus wrong tale among the Frees; a more nuanced account from the Established Church largely tending to the same conclusions; more fundamental disagreements from the Episcopalians; and criticisms and wry humour directed at both sides by Burton. The story of the riot in St Giles on 23 July 1637 will serve as one example. In all the Free Church accounts, the riot was a spontaneous outburst of popular feeling that began when Jenny Geddes threw a stool at Dean Hannay; indeed, a woodcut of Jenny Geddes in the act appeared in Wylie's book, while Mackenzie's showed a picture of the very stool, then reposing in the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries. For Cunningham of the Established Church, the stool was thrown by an old woman, one of the rabble 'who cannot understand the propriety of petitioning, and instinctively resort to violence'.[66] For Grub, the unnamed stool-thrower was almost certainly part of an organised conspiracy organised by the leaders of the

[65] Grub, *Ecclesiastical History*, vol. ii, 333
[66] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. i, 517

Presbyterian party. Finally, as mentioned above, the industrious Burton found no reference to Jenny Geddes in contemporary records; the name had apparently been associated with a Restoration mob, and later been mistakenly associated with the St Giles affair. Typically, neither of the Free Church histories written after Burton's showed any awareness of the insubstantiality of their heroine; Free Church writers did scan histories by Burton, Gardiner, Froude and many others, but only in search of support for their main narrative, not of reasons for changing it.

In regard to the covenants, the Frees regarded both as monuments to human freedom, the Established Church writers accepted the first but regarded the Solemn League and Covenant as a grave mistake, committing the church to force its system on two kingdoms that did not want it; the Episcopalians had nothing good to say about either. In his account of the National Covenant of 1638, William Stephen put his finger on the inconsistency that lay at the heart it:

> Its subscribers were loud in their professions of loyalty to the throne, but their professions have to be read in the light of their subsequent action, which was perfectly consistent with the spirit of the Covenant but hardly so with any recognised standard of loyalty; and if they meant open war it would have been more honest to have said so.[67]

Of the Glasgow Assembly of 1638, the Frees generally concurred with the younger M'Crie that it was 'one of noblest efforts ever made by the church to assert her intrinsic independence, and the sole headship of Christ'[68]; Cunningham was disturbed by the packing of the Assembly by nobles and the crude railroading of the bishops, but saw much to admire in its revolutionary sweep; the Episcopalians saw in it an act of tyranny.

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[67] William Stephen, *History*, vol. ii, 262

[68] Thomas M'Crie the Younger, *The Story of the Scottish Church* (Glasgow, 1988), 165

In the Cromwellian period, the Frees identified with the Protesters; the Established Church writers excoriated them as intolerant fanatics and a source of bitter division within the church; the Episcopalians deplored the behaviour of the entire church. The post-Restoration settlement brought the two Presbyterian groups closer together, for they both derived their information mostly from Wodrow; but Robert Flint, who wrote the chapter on the period for the St Giles volume, was very censorious of the Covenanters for their intolerance, while the Free Church identification with them was complete. Both the Episcopalians disapproved of the Government's policy during the period, but they had many criticisms of the traditional narrative. They threw doubt on the veracity of Wodrow, and regarded Kirkton's narrative as worthless and Burnet's as little better. They argued that the curates, the replacements for the outed ministers so universally abused in Presbyterian annals, were in fact educated men who for the most part seemed to have done their best under trying circumstances. They ridiculed Wodrow's version of the story of John Brown of Priesthill, while Grub, following the Jacobite writer Mark Napier,[69] doubted that the Solway martyrs had ever been drowned. More convincingly, they pointed out that the story of the Covenanters, far from constituting the whole of the history of Scotland during the Restoration period, was in fact confined to five counties numbering no more than a fifth of the Scottish population.

Finally, the Revolution was for the Frees the climax of the story: inspired by the example of the Cameronians, William liberated the people of Great Britain, and the Scottish people joyfully returned to their native church. Only one error was to mar their triumph; because they were too tolerant, the church failed to purge itself

[69] Mark Napier, *The Case for the Crown in re the Wigtown Martyrs Proved to be a Myth versus Wodrow and Lord Macaulay, Patrick the Pedler and Principal Tulloch* (Edinburgh, 1863)

completely of Episcopalian elements, who were to become the basis of the Moderate Party in the following century.

> But many of them readily conformed to the Presbyterian establishment for the sake of manse and stipend. The most vital injury, perhaps, which the Church of Scotland ever sustained, was the too easy admission into her bosom of this unprincipled swarm.[70]

The Established Church writers shared in the satisfaction at the return of presbytery, but once again split with the Frees over the question of tolerance; for Cunningham, the ousting of the Episcopalian clergy in 1690 brought parallel evils to that of the Presbyterian clergy in 1662.[71] William Stephen, for the Episcopalians, rejected the Presbyterian assertion that the mass of Scots craved the return of their form of church organisation, arguing that the great majority of the Scottish population, by the time of the Revolution, were contented enough to remain Episcopalians and would have done so had it not been for the intransigence of the Scottish bishops in rejecting William. The king himself was the subject of a rare element of harmony: all three groups respected him.

What is perhaps most noticeable about this litany of differences is the absolute inability of the Free Church writers to depart in any important point from the inherited narrative of the Presbyterian Church. Their church owed its origin to a rejection of state control, and they derived their legitimacy from the legacy of the Presbyterian history, rather than from state recognition. Thus they portrayed the church as uniformly hostile to state control at all points in its history; and the phrases 'the divine headship of Christ' and 'spiritual independence' run through their history texts like mantras. Their unwillingness to accept any criticism of the church and its

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[70] Mackenzie, *History*, 644

[71] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. ii, 182

heroes seems to have stemmed from a feeling that to criticise would be to undercut their own position.

Something of this difference in approach between themselves and their brethren in the Established Church is apparent in their attitude to the theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Although they seldom discussed the matter directly, the Established Church writers evidently understood that the Post-Reformation church was a different place, theologically, from that of the nineteenth. Dr Donald Macleod's comments on Knox's Old Testament-based polemics showed an awareness of the question.

> There are indeed things which Knox has written that we wish he had never penned. The models he put before him were unfortunately borrowed more from the Old than the New Testament; and Samuel slaying Agag, Elijah executing the priests of Baal, the Israelites exterminating the Canaanites, and such-like events, were recognised not only as teaching general principles, but as affording to himself title to apply the principles, and to act towards Mary and her co-religionists with the rigour of ancient Judaism.[72]

Rankin, discussing the imposition of the death penalty for the third saying of mass, was a good deal harsher:

> The cry of idolatry was raised mainly to enable the Reformed to fall back on the Old Testament, for the help of severe measures which in different circumstance once had Divine sanction, but which no Christian body is now entitled to plead under any circumstances... This is a piece with the worst that can be said of the Spanish Inquisition.[73]

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[72] *Scottish Church from the Earliest Times*, 146 (Macleod)
[73] Rankin, 'The Church', 435

Cunningham remarked several times on the early Reformed Church's affinity for the Old Testament.

> It is very remarkable that all the lessons prescribed for the Church-service on these occasions [fasts] are taken from the Old Testament, and not one from the New. It is characteristic of the age, and of the temper of the men who lived in it. Their religion, in some of its aspects, was more Jewish than Christian.[74]

In effect, the early Reformers regarded both testaments as equally infallible, and felt much more strongly drawn to the Old than the New, something that certainly could not have been said of most of Cunningham's readers. Parallel considerations from the Free Church writers are far to find. They were certainly aware of the problem, but they dealt with it by never quoting anything from their heroes that would be jarring to nineteenth-century sensibilities. Their histories were about continuities, not about differences.

The intolerance that the Established Churchmen attacked in Knox was evident in the behaviour of the Church of Scotland through much of its history, and constituted a continuing problem for its historians. Vulnerable on almost every front, the Free Church version was nowhere weaker than on this one, and its weakness became increasingly apparent towards the end of the century as Catholics were progressively added to the list of groups who ought, in the eyes of enlightened public opinion, to have been tolerated. That was not an idea that could ever have been assimilated to Free Church historiography, for the Free Church continued to hold Catholicism to be anti-Christian until the end of its existence. Thomson, the most respectable of their historians, rejected Catholic emancipation throughout his career,[75] and his colleague

[74] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. i., 397
[75] Thomas Thomson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (Edinburgh, 1875), vol. iii, 9

J.A. Wylie turned out volumes of prose that were little more than extended hymns of hate against the elder church.

In the works of the historians of the other churches, however, sympathy for Catholics can be seen can be seen developing as the century waned, and with it a tendency to distance themselves from attitudes in the post-Reformation church. Cunningham, writing in 1859, included consideration of Catholics in his attack on the religion of Covenanting Scotland circa 1643:

> it was not that broad, loving religion which we see reflected in the gospel of Jesus. It was narrow in its notions, and somewhat bitter in its spirit. It hated Popery and Prelacy with an equal hatred, and was not always able to separate between Popery and the Papist, between Prelacy and the Prelatist, so as charitably to love the one, while it piously detested the other.[76]

Both the Episcopalians went farther than this. William Stephen, writing in 1894, was particularly vehement on the subject: 'there was no abatement in the odious persecution of Roman Catholics',[77] he remarked on the policies of the church during the reign of James VI; 'the eyes of Scottish ecclesiastics were still blinded to the abominable cruelty and injustice of these persecutions'.[78] Remarks of a like tenor recur through his text.

Generally, the Free Churchmen assumed one of two lines of defence on the matter. The first was to point out, correctly enough, that tolerance was not much in vogue during the period under discussion. Thus John Macpherson, defending the

[76] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. ii, 45
[77] William Stephen, *History*, vol. ii, 195
[78] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 201

Covenanters against the charge of unreasonably forcing subscription to the Covenants in the 1640s:

> It should be remembered too that toleration as now understood and practised had not then been conceived of by any party. The time was not ripe for it. The principles of liberty could not be asserted and acted upon until certain constitutional safeguards had been erected against despotic arbitrariness on the one side, and whimsical individualism running out into licentiousness on the other.[79]

That kind of understanding did not, however, work two ways; no Free Church historian ever suggested that the government might have been reasonable in demanding conformity to the post-Restoration settlement. A second approach was much more common: the more outrageous examples of Presbyterian misbehaviour were simply not mentioned in their texts. That saved a good deal of defending, and for readers who obtained all their information from Free Church sources was doubtless quite effective. Thus incidents mentioned in the some of the other histories of the period – the execution of civilian camp followers after Philiphaugh, Johnstone of Wariston's insistence on the death penalty for civilian captives in the same year, the rise in witchcraft persecutions as a result of resolutions by the General Assembly in the 1640s, the crusade against the remnants of Catholicism such as artistic works and the celebration of Christmas, and many other examples of narrow-mindedness – simply went unreported. Persecutions of Covenanters and other Presbyterian victims, at the same time, were described in loving detail, with suitable execration of the perpetrators.

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[79] John Macpherson, *History*, 201

One other group, along with Catholics, attracted considerable hostility. All of the histories of the century were written by Lowlanders, and Highlanders do not figure very favourably in them. Sometimes referred to simply as 'savage mountaineers' or 'the barbarians', the Highlanders normally appeared in the form of armed raiders, as with the Highland Host in 1678 or the armies of Montrose and Dundee. The Presbyterians' frequent strictures on Highlanders, however, were considerably less thorough-going than those of the lawyer J.H. Burton; he believed that the Highlanders and Irish were fundamentally different from the rest of the British, in that they were outside the tradition of western law:

> Employing the Celtic race in civilised warfare was employing a force not expected to concede the courtesies of war to the enemy against whom they were let loose. Their hostility was not that of pugnacious enemies met in battle--it was the hatred of one race to another; and the object was not victory but extirpation. To them the infant and the aged mother were objects of hate and hostility as much as the armed soldier.[80]

Thomson made an unusual attempt in a chapter on the history of society during the seventeenth century to give a description of the domestic life of the Highlanders, but even this account is something less than indulgent:

> Of the style of their peaceful life little need be said, as it was a state of penance, from which they were always glad to escape. The Highland towns were generally villages of rude huts, built in utter disregard both of the rules of architecture and those of domestic comfort.... Their martial music of the bagpipe, while with some it unpleasantly "sings i' the nose," and with others is but a Babel of confused sounds

[80] Burton, *History of Scotland*, vol. vi, 243

> and uproar, is a far different matter with the Highlanders, whom it transports into warlike fury more effectively than a whole orchestra of drums and wind-instruments.[81]

As might be expected, a greater level of sympathy was evident in Episcopalian accounts than in Presbyterian; George Grub, for example, noted that the Highland Host never actually killed anyone.[82] Generally, however, there is no evidence in any of these histories of the tartan-and-bagpipe sentimentalisation of the Highlander that was already common some circles in Scotland, and which, indeed, is sometimes depicted by present-day authors as the dominant vision of the Scottish past in the nineteenth century.[83] Also absent, even from the work of Burton, was the kind of genetic determinism that was propagated by the eighteenth-century writer John Pinkerton, who drew a line between the Teutonic Lowlands and the Celtic Highlands which corresponded to a division between civilisation and savagery.[84] For the Presbyterians, the problem was a culture based on tribalism and rapine, and the solution, as always, was the gospel.

> The gentle power of the gospel of peace will turn the wild clansmen into quiet and loyal subjects by and by. But many a day must pass before that change can be wrought.[85]

James Mackenzie was speaking in the historic present; he felt that the process described had already happened. In his own day, the population of the Highlands had overwhelmingly opted to join the Free Church at the Disruption, and representatives

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[81] Thomson, *History of the Scottish People,* vol. iii, 279

[82] Grub, *Ecclesiastical History*, iii, 253

[83] See, for example, Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in H.J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge,1983), 15-42

[84] Colin Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition, 1780-1880', *SHR*, lxxiv (1995)

[85] Mackenzie, *History*, 649

of well over a hundred Highland congregations sat in the church's General Assembly.[86]

While the different denominations of the Presbyterian Church differed widely on questions such as tolerance, there were also important areas of agreement. Universally, they shared the assumption that Presbyterianism lay at the heart of the Scottish character, and thus of her subsequent prosperity. Alexander Mitchell of the Established Church declared that at the Reformation, the Scots 'from being one of the rudest, poorest, most turbulent races in Europe, became one of the most educated, prosperous, orderly, and upright'.[87] His colleague Donald Macleod and the Free Church minister James Mackenzie both described the transformation in very similar terms:

> The middle class which John Knox was inspiring with his own convictions, was the beginning of that Scotch people to whom we belong. The Scotch people have grown with the Scotch Church. The Church has been the palladium of popular liberty, the mother of education, the trainer of the people in truthfulness and in an independence regulated by a supreme loyalty to the Word of God.[88]

> the change which the Reformation had already produced was wonderful. The sturdy preaching of the ministers was teaching the people to think sturdily and independently. The parish schools were spreading education and intelligence. The people knew their rights and felt their strength. The middle classes were rising in importance. Public opinion had been born...[89]

[86] Douglas Ansdell, *The People of the Great Faith: The Highland Church, 1690-1900* (Stornoway, 1998), 62-5
[87] *Scottish Church from the Earliest Times*, 128 (Mitchell)
[88] *Ibid.*, 151 (Macleod)
[89] Mackenzie, *History*, 447

Waxing even more eloquent, the Free Churchman J.A. Wylie was able to identify to the day when the transformation had occurred: 'On the 17th of August, 1560, the Scotland of the Middle Ages passed away, and a New Scotland had birth – a Scotland destined to be a sanctuary of religion, a temple of liberty, and a fountain of justice, letters and art'.[90]

The 'temple of liberty' in Wylie's phrase points to another area of agreement. All branches of the Presbyterians concurred in the interpretation of the political history of the period that the elder M'Crie introduced to public view, the Scottish version of the whig interpretation of history. Cunningham's view that without the Presbyterians the Stuarts might still be on the throne of Great Britain has already been quoted. It was not unique; indeed, the accounts of the Presbyterian writers are studded with references to the link between the struggle of the Presbyterians in Scotland and the evolution and defence of the British constitution and British liberties. To begin with, Scots first enunciated the right of resistance to tyranny, and they applied it in their struggle against the Regent in 1560:

> No friend of the British constitution, as at present existing, can maintain that resistance to the supreme power is at all times wrong; there are times when resistance is the duty of every patriot.[91]

Secondly, it was Knox, in his conversations with Queen Mary and subsequent struggles, who first enunciated the rule of law:

> not the will of the ruler, but law was the supreme authority with him. The prince, in his view, was as much bound to submit to the law of the land as the meanest subject, and was to be held responsible in the event of violating it; and, without a question, the lovers of liberty and

[90] Wylie, *Protestantism*, vol. iii, 495
[91] Taylor, *Pictorial History*, vol. i, 697

> of the British constitution, owe to his memory a debt of gratitude which no time can repay, for the consistency and the courage with which he ever maintained this grand principle.[92]

Thirdly, in the vigorous commentary maintained from the pulpits all over Scotland during the reign of James VI may be found the origins of a constitutional opposition to the Crown, and the principles of freedom of expression.

> These brave old preachers did not flinch. They incurred bitter hatred, and suffered outrageous persecution, for their bold censure of iniquities in high places. But it was they who first taught the Scottish people the right of free men to express an opinion on the conduct of their rulers; and it was the courts of the church which set the earliest example of a regular British and constitutional opposition to the measures of arbitrary power.[93]

Fourth, in swearing the covenant in 1638, they struck the first critical blow in the constitutional struggle against tyranny in Great Britain.

> If Englishmen look back with reverence to their Magna Charta, with reverence as great does every Scotchman look back to the National Covenant. It saved our country from absolute despotism. It was the impressive commencement of a struggle which, enduring through blood and tears for half a century, had its triumphant issue in securing the liberties of Britain.[94]

Finally, it was Scottish Presbyterians who took the lead in the forfeiture of the Stuarts. The declaration of forfeiture made by the little band of Cameronians at

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[92] *Ibid.*, vol. ii, 266

[93] Mackenzie, *History*, 463

[94] *Ibid.*, 544

Sanquhar in 1680 may have seemed an absurd gesture, but it would be ratified eight years later by both of the island's parliaments. In the meanwhile, the lonely struggle of the Cameronians kept the light of freedom alight in both kingdoms.

> For England was now disgusted with the inglorious reign of Charles II...And now they learned that in these feelings they did not stand alone, and that there was a community in Scotland, represented as the bulk of the people, who not only sympathized in, but who were ready to act upon these sentiments, and who gave substantial religious arguments for their proceedings. Upon the English mind these considerations were not lost, and a few years after, the accord of the nation in expelling the unworthy dynasty was as wonderful and unwonted as it was complete.[95]

The idea that the Cameronians were in some way responsible for the Revolution of 1688, originally propagated in Dr M'Crie's review of *Old Mortality*, was certainly the most bizarre of the five propositions. It proved remarkably persistent, however, showing up in most of the Presbyterian accounts of the period of whatever stripe. John Macpherson gave voice to the most uncompromising variant of this interpretation in declaring that it is to the Cameronians, 'narrow and bigoted as in some things they undoubtedly were, we owe the liberty, civil and religious, which we enjoy today'.[96] It is a testimony to the power of the myth, however, that the usually-sagacious Cunningham, four decades earlier, had said very much the same thing:

> Did not the parliaments of England and Scotland, nine years afterwards, do exactly what these twenty-one desperate men now did?...These men were

[95] Thomson, *History of the Scottish People*, vol. iii, 180
[96] John Macpherson, *History*, 272

> bigoted, but they were self-devoted. Like the old Roman, they leaped into the gulf, and saved the country.[97]

No writer in the Presbyterian camp was more dubious about elements of the orthodox Presbyterian narrative than Cunningham; but he was powerfully drawn to the idea that the excesses of whatever nature of the early Presbyterians were justified, in the long view, by the political freedoms that resulted from them. So it was that in his text, as in many others, twenty-one zealots rode into Sanquhar in 1680 and saved British liberty.

With the acceptance of major elements of the Free Church view of Scottish history even by sceptical historians in the Establishment, as well as by secular writers such as John Mackintosh, Free Church historiography lasted out the century in what appeared to be a reasonably healthy condition. Even the one important secular history of the period, that of Burton, was not a frontal attack on the Free Church version; it was certainly a different perspective, but its criticisms were often muted and its tone mocking rather than indignant. The Episcopalians, to be sure, took a much harder line; and they were good historians. What prevented them from posing a greater threat to the Free Church version than they did was the size of their reader base. The Episcopal Church of Scotland counted some 69,000 members in 1881.[98] The number rose for the remainder of the century, reaching 116,000 by 1900, and it must be acknowledged that their membership was disproportionately drawn from among the better-off elements of Scottish society, more likely to be book-buyers. But it was not a patch on the potential Presbyterian readership; and it is significant that, unlike most of the Presbyterian works considered here, none of those by either Episcopalian was

[97] Cunningham, *Church History*, vol. ii, 123
[98] Rowan Strong, *Episcopalianism in Nineteenth-Century Scotland* (Oxford, 2002), 29

ever reprinted. Further, as will be seen in the next chapter, Episcopalian works were almost unrepresented among popular and specialised books on Scottish religious history, a market which remained dominated by Free Church writers and their Secessionist allies.

At the same time, the Free Church historical school was, by the last decades of the century, clearly on very shaky ground as far as scholarly opinion was concerned. It had, in the first place, never produced a first-rate historian; for that matter, a first-rate historians would have been out of place in a tradition whose primary duty was to retell the same story, over and over again, to new generations of believers. Secondly, their narrative itself followed an extremely hard line. A historiography in which one side is always right, the other always wrong, naturally invites scepticism; but the Free Church writers went farther than this, in invariably identifying with the most intransigent figures in the church in each historical era. Thus Melville and his cohorts in the 1590s, the Covenanting leaders in the 1640s, the Protesters in the Cromwellian period, and, most remarkably, the Cameronians in the 1680s, successively became the standards of Presbyterian truth. This was largely Dr M'Crie's legacy, and it committed the church to the defence of a world-view that derived from two centuries before its own time.

The Free Church writers did defend it, however. They did so, as has been seen, most commonly by avoiding discussion of anything that might weaken their case, and by pointing to the contributions of the Presbyterians to the Scottish character and the British constitution. The latter device worked well with members of the United Presbyterian and Established Churches, who were only too delighted to be associated with the creation of two products that excited so much international admiration. But

it was less effective with the secularist Burton, and did not work at all with the Episcopalians. The problem was compounded by a rising belief during the period in religious toleration, which influenced historians of all the churches except the Frees. Thus, beginning with the work of John Cunningham, a body of criticism of the Free Church account began to emerge among the historical community, focusing on its intolerance, factual errors, lacunae and internal inconsistencies. As the historians read each others' work, the effect was cumulative, so that the last historian, William Stephen, was able to cite criticisms in the works of Cunningham, Grub, Burton and Rankin in prosecuting his own case. There was still, to the last year of the century, no work of general Scottish history on the market that constituted an outright attack on the Free Church's view of Scottish history; but the time would come.

Chapter 6

The Covenants, the Constitution and the Scottish Character: Ecclesiastical History for Popular Consumption

In 1935 Mrs M.E.M. Donaldson, a Scottish Episcopalian who had converted from the Church of Scotland early in life, wrote an angry book about the Presbyterian appropriation of the Scottish past called *Scotland's Suppressed History*. Among other things, she was incensed that almost everyone she knew seemed to accept the identity of Scot and Presbyterian; that they referred to her church as 'the English Church'; that the history they learned ignored all the crimes committed by the Presbyterians while expanding or inventing trespasses against them; and that in particular they venerated the Covenanters with an almost superstitious zeal, without really knowing anything about them. A few years before writing she had made up a little quiz to test this last point, some of the questions being the following:

(1) Give some idea of the matter of (a) the National Covenant (b) the Solemn League and Covenant.

(2) Give one instance of the exercise by the Covenanters of "the spirit of liberty" for which they fought.

(3) Name some bishops and curates who went about armed and incited Royalists to slaughter Covenanters.

(7) How many of the Covenanters did "Bluidy Clavers" himself shoot in Paisley; and how many elsewhere did he (a) burn and (b) drown?

(8) How many men and women did he order to be slaughtered in cold blood?[1]

[1] M.E.M. Donaldson, *Scotland's Suppressed History* (London, 1935), 126-127

The young school teacher to whom she first administered the test performed pretty much as expected; he had to admit ignorance on most questions, and when he guessed was hopelessly wrong. 'About fifty' was his estimate for question eight. (As Mrs Donaldson phrased them, the answers to questions three and seven would certainly have been zero, while that for eight might have been either three or zero, depending on one's interpretation of the phrase 'in cold blood'[2]). Vindicated but not pleased, Mrs Donaldson spent most of the rest of the book metaphorically tearing her hair out at the persistence of attitudes to her own church and to Scotland's history which, even at that late day, seemed impervious to correction.

It is safe to say that the entrenchment of the attitudes that Mrs Donaldson deplored, along with many that she would have found equally objectionable, owed a good deal to the popular literature on the church history that emanated from Presbyterian writers in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The works to be considered in this chapter are a diverse group of such literature, including histories, historical biographies and related works dealing with Scottish church history in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, written by Scots between 1844 and 1908 and representing the popular end of the historical spectrum. Most are not footnoted; they include published lectures, works for the young, historical essays written in response to some controversy or other, and a sub-group of works of various types dealing with the post-1661 Covenanters. Most date from the last thirty years of the period indicated. They are an unscientific sample, chosen because of their survival in major Edinburgh and Glasgow repositories;[3] but there is no reason to believe that they are not representative of the books on church history available to the historically-conscious Scottish reader during the period. And

[2] Magnus Linklater and Christian Hesketh, *John Graham of Claverhouse: Bonnie Dundee: For King and Conscience* (Edinburgh, 1992), 137

[3] University of Edinburgh Library, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh Central Library, University of Glasgow Library, Mitchell Library (Glasgow).

church history, it must be stressed, constituted a large part of what was written on Scottish history during the second half of the nineteenth century; it was not until 1900 that the appearance of the first volume of Andrew Lang's *A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation* marked the beginning of a renewed interest in the history of the country from a secular point of view.

Of the twenty-five histories discovered, about twelve can be classified as general histories of the Church in Scotland; four cover the Covenanting period from 1638, or in one case from 1661, to the Revolution; and the rest deal with specialised topics such as the Reformation or the Revolution of 1688. The authors represent most of the Presbyterian groups of the period, including such arcane splinters as the Original Secession Continuing and the Reformed Presbyterians Continuing (represented by the second date in each of their respective categories). Unsurprisingly, however, the Free Church supplied the largest single group. The distribution of authors among the various denominations can most easily be outlined as follows:

Works of Popular Ecclesiastical History, 1849-1908

Denomination	No.	Dates of publications
Free Church	10	1849-1892
United Presbyterian	3	1852, 1881, 1887
Church of Scotland	3	1892, 1896, 1897, 1908
United Free Church	4	1903, 1904, 1905, 1908
Reformed Presbyterian	2	1865, 1895
Original Secession	2	1851, 1903
Episcopalian	2	1888, 1907

Unidentified	1	1905
Total	27	

It will be noted that ten of the authors were members of the Free Church; if we add the three United Frees who were former members of the church, the figure rises to almost half of the total. That ratio seems roughly to reflect the balance among writers of ecclesiastical history generally. The importance that the Free Church attached to controlling the picture of Scotland's past has been discussed in previous chapters. From 1844 to 1850 the church had a Publications Committee, charged with re-printing significant works of ecclesiastical history; thereafter, it relied for their presence in the historical field on the independent activities of remarkably energetic and historically-conscious clergy, along with a few like-minded laymen. They seem to have done their job. In all groups, clergymen accounted for a majority of the works described; among the Free Church the ratio was highest, accounting for eight of the ten histories.

The works by Free Church authors were written for various purposes. John Anderson's *Chronicles of the Kirk* (1849) was issued as a work for children, although originally intended for an adult audience; Norman Walker's *Scottish Church History* (1882) was a handbook for Bible classes, while D.A. Mackinnon's *Some Chapters in Scottish History* (1893) was a series of lectures in honour of the jubilee of the church 'with a special view to the young of the congregation'. There were other lecture series: James Dodds's *The Fifty Years Struggle of the Scottish Covenanters* (1860) originated as a tour of lectures in England and Scotland, and Thomas Brown's *Church and State in Scotland* (1891) was a transcript of the third series of Chalmers Lectures in Edinburgh that year. Allan Cameron (1847-1928), a minister at Inverness, re-printed a series of

his lectures to his congregation under the title *The Church of Our Fathers: Being Lectures on the History and Principles of the Scottish Church* (1886).

Two, and possibly more, of the works, testify to the church's tendency to delve into history when some challenge to the church needed a response. Principal Robert Rainy's *Three Lectures on the Church of Scotland* (1872) was a reply to a course of lectures delivered during a visit to Edinburgh by A.P. Stanley, Dean of Westminster, in support of the established status of the Church of Scotland. Rainy made use of a fairly conventional Free Church version of the history of the church in order to provide a reply 'more strongly grounded in the facts'. He also included a panegyric on Presbyterianism -- 'Presbyterianism meant organised life, regulated distribution of forces, graduated recognition of gifts, freedom to discuss, authority to control, agency to administer';[4] meant, indeed, an enormous list of abstractions, the enumeration of which went on for another two pages. It was much quoted by later Free Church writers. The anonymous writer of *Our Church Heritage or, The Scottish Churches Viewed in the Light of Their History* (1875) was responding to a different, though related, challenge, the abolition of patronage within the Church of Scotland in 1874. That event might have suggested reunion of the two churches, but the anonymous writer wanted none of it. He accordingly conducted the usual tour through Scottish ecclesiastical history, and found that the true heir to the Reformation Church was the Free Church, while the Established Church was '*simply the Moderate party in power*'.[5] Along the way he took time to cite Dr Rainy to the effect that Presbyterianism 'meant organised life', and so on.

[4] Robert Rainy, *Three Lectures on the Church of Scotland.* New edition, revised (Edinburgh, 1883), 35
[5] Anonymous. *Our Church Heritage or, The Scottish Churches Viewed in the Light of Their History* (London, Edinburgh, New York, 1875), 118

The lectures given in 1891 by Thomas Brown (1811-1893), Free Church minister of the Dean Church, Edinburgh, 1849-93, seemed designed to support a similar position, at a time when projects for reunion of the churches were being floated. His *Church and State in Scotland. A Narrative of the Struggle for Independence From 1560 to 1843* (1891) was an extended essay on the principle of spiritual independence in its workings in Scottish history. Brown was himself a Disruptionist and editor of *Annals of the Disruption*;[6] and like other ministers who participated in the event, he was disposed to take a very hard line on state interference in religion, and consequently on the Established Church. Spiritual independence, he believed, was the central principle in Scottish church history, and was the point at issue in the church's various struggles with the state, culminating in the Ten Years' Conflict. If a union within the churches was to be contemplated, it could only be one in which the principle was fully respected; and that stipulation limited the choice of partners:

> whatever shape the movement for Union may take, the principle of Spiritual Independence – come what may – will not be allowed to be put into the background. We know how completely our brethren of the United Presbyterian Church hold this principle in common with the Free Church. The difficulty will lie with our brethren of the Established Church.[7]

Throughout, Brown's text is marked by doctrinal absolutism and residual bitterness redolent of the Ten Years' Conflict. Five decades after the Disruption, Brown had forgotten nothing, except for his church's original commitment to the establishment principle.

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[6] William Ewing, ed., *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland, 1843-1900* (Edinburgh, 1914), vol. i, 105

[7] Thomas Brown, *Church and State in Scotland. A Narrative of the Struggle for Independence from 1560 to 1843* (Edinburgh, 1891), 242

In this latter respect he was by this time certainly in harmony with the great majority of his fellow Free Church clergymen. The Non-Intrusionist vision of an independent but established church faded rapidly after the death of Chalmers, its most effective proponent, in 1847. In Free Church historical literature, the term 'spiritual independence' was increasingly used after 1860 as a shorthand symbol of what Presbyterianism, as embodied in the Free Church, stood for. At the same time, there were few, if any, attacks in the later literature of the church on Voluntaryism, which church leaders at the time of the Disruption had considered at least as serious an enemy as erastianism. This tilting of the literary balance towards the anti-erastianism seems to have been part of the process by which the Free Church cut its links with its past espousal of the establishment principle and nudged itself towards union with the United Presbyterians. After that union was accomplished, the principle was once again pressed into service by the former Free Churchman Hector Macpherson, who produced *Scotland's Battle for Spiritual Independence* (1905) to protest against the House of Lords decision in favour of the Free Church Continuing in the battle over disposal of the property of the former church.

It may be noted that not all the Free Church writers were born and bred to the church. The Free Church had a life of only fifty-seven years, and absorbed two other churches during this period, making for a diverse set of backgrounds. Thus, for example, John Anderson was on his third church when he wrote *Chronicles of the Kirk* in 1849, having been ordained as an Old Light Burgher, entered the Church of Scotland at the union of those two churches in 1839, and gone out at the Disruption. James Anderson of the Original Secession entered the church at the union of 1852, as did Thomas M'Crie the Younger, a much larger catch in historical terms. William Carslaw was a minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church before its union with the Free Church in

1876; two other RP ministers, Robert Naismith and John Henderson Thompson, entered the church at the same time, in both cases after they had written the books considered here. The Free Church never adopted the covenants, and its absorption of the bulk of the last two covenanted churches in Scotland may be said to have put an effective end to the Covenanting movement. At the same time, the works of the members of the Covenanting churches, with one exception, seem to have differed little in their historical vision from that of Free Church, whether writing before or after their adherence to that body. The exception was James Kerr, one of the small number of RP ministers who disdained to join the Free Church in 1876. He still believed that the covenants might yet be revived.

> A national movement, in penitence and faith, for the repeal of the Act Recissory and the recognition of the National Covenants would be as life from the dead throughout the British Empire. The people and rulers of these dominions shall yet behold the brilliancy of the Redeemer's crown; and shall, by universal consent, exalt Him who rules in imperial majesty over the entire universe of God.[8]

Kerr's outpourings divide him sharply from the other writers, but give some idea of the fascination that the covenants must at one time have held for many Scots. His little group soldiered on into the twentieth century, but with steadily fainter voices.

There are only four works by members of the Church of Scotland in this sample, and all date from the 1890s. (Although it will be noted that two works by Church of Scotland clergymen, the St Giles lectures of 1881 and James Rankin's contribution to *The Church of Scotland Past and Present* (1890), which were dealt with in the previous chapter, cover the same ground as many of the works discussed here.) They

[8] James Kerr, ed., *The Covenants and the Covenanters* (Edinburgh, [1895), 7

consist of a brief general history of the Church by Pearson M'Adam Muir, 1890; a course of lectures by eight ministers edited by J.A. McClymont, entitled *The Church of Scotland: What She Has Done for the People of Scotland, and What She Expects in Return* (1892), and a transcript of the Baird Lecture for 1895, by Henry Cowan, Professor of Church History at Aberdeen, *The Influence of the Scottish Church in Christendom.* In the following decade the Dumfriesshire-born minister John King Hewison (1853-1941) published *The Covenanters* (1908), a general history of the church from the Reformation to the Revolution in two volumes. While members of the Church of Scotland wrote comparatively little history, what they wrote usually gives the impression of greater intelligence than that of their Free Church counterparts. In a broad sense, the two groups followed the same narrative path, but the Established Churchmen were far less predictable, varied considerably from each other, and lacked the bitter anger that so often ran through Free Church works. They were also sometimes capable of generosity towards an enemy, as in the following statement by M.P. Johnstone, one of the eight lecturers in McClymont's work:

> The steadfast loyalty of the Episcopalians to the exiled Stuarts hindered and hampered their influence in the south. In a sense, this was a sore misfortune to the body; in another sense, their unshaken loyalty to a lost cause crowns them with imperishable renown.[9]

Statements like that are simply unthinkable in Free Church works. Another characteristic which differentiated Church of Scotland writers from all the other groups was a concern for the establishment principle in general, and for the Church of Scotland in particular. The latter, indeed, was identified by M.P. Johnstone as the greatest single benefaction of the Covenanters:

[9] M.P. Johnstone, 'Its Preservation; or the Church of the Covenanters', in J.A. McClymont, ed., *The Church of Scotland. What She Has Done for the People of Scotland, and What She Expects in Return* (1892), 98

> And we are thankful for the times of the Covenant, as churchmen; thankful for the preservation of the Scottish expression of Christianity; thankful for the great place the Church, strong by her victory over foreign intrusion, has taken ever since among the national Churches of Christendom.[10]

Gratitude for the establishment principle was quite absent from the later works of the Free Church, as it had always been absent from that of the United Presbyterians.

There are two general histories by members of the United Presbyterians, both brief. *The Heroes, Martyrs, and Bards of the Scottish Covenant* (1852) was written by George Gilfillan (1813-1878), United Secessionist and later UP minister in Dundee, a writer on a numerous topics, a Liberal and a Voluntaryist.[11] He was also something of a positivist; his work terminated with at series of propositions which he deemed to have been proved by his narrative. Curiously, they all corresponded with his previously-held theological positions.

> Fourth, the irresistible attraction leading a dominant church downwards to tyranny and bloodshed...Ninth, the impossibility of properly adjusting by any conceivable alliance the conflicting claims of church and state. Tenth, the consequent necessity of complete severance of the two. Eleventh, the power of the voluntary principle...[12]

None of this would have upset his fellow communicants among the United Presbyterians. Gilfillan was a voluminous writer but not a very original one, and his text in this case seems to have been borrowed pretty much from the younger M'Crie. The other history was *The Scottish Covenanters* (1881) by the Rev. James Taylor (1847-1905), a teacher and historian, a well-written re-telling of the story of the church

[10] Johnstone, 'Preservation', 102

[11] *Dictionary of National Biography* (1908), vol. vii, 1229-30 (J.W. Ebsworth)

[12] George Gilfillan, *The Heroes, Martyrs and Bards of the Scottish Covenant* (London, 1852), 212-3

to 1690. Taylor was clearly influenced by the Free Church writer James Dodds, and his narrative was generally compatible with that of his Free Church contemporaries. There was also a compilation by George Johnston, a UP minister from Dunoon, *Treasury of the Scottish Covenant* (1887), containing portions of historical works from a variety of sources.

Only two works by Scottish Episcopalians appear on the list, and only one of these was written in the nineteenth century, and that was something of an oddity. The first volume of Marjory G.H. Kinloch's *A History of Scotland Chiefly in its Ecclesiastical Aspect* appeared in 1874 with an introduction by Bishop Forbes, the Tractarian (and almost Roman Catholic) Bishop of Brechin. Kinloch was herself an Anglo-Catholic, and her account of Scottish history hewed so closely to the Roman Catholic point of view as to constitute a quite separate vision from that of her Episcopalian predecessor, George Grub. Protestant heroes were regularly savaged; Catholics such as Ninian Winzet, the Jesuit Father Gordon and the Jesuit martyr John Ogilvy received extensive space – there was a full chapter on Winzet – while conflicts between Protestant and Catholic, such as the Battle of Glenlivet in 1594, were described entirely from the Catholic point of view. When she used the term 'the Church' she referred to the Roman Catholic Church. Kinloch never completed her history; the second published volume (1888), of three projected, only took the story to 1625. What she produced, however, stands as the nearest thing to a Catholic history of Scotland to be written in that country during the nineteenth century.[13] It cannot, however, have reflected mainstream Episcopalian views, despite a significant rise in the numbers of Anglo-Catholics in Scotland during the last three decades of the century.[14]

[13] Dr Bernard Aspinwall has kindly provided a list of Scottish Catholic authors of works on historical topics. None managed anything approaching a general history of Scotland or of the Scottish church.
[14] Rowan Strong, *Andrew Forbes of Brechin* (Oxford, 1995), 257

The more conventional viewpoint of Scottish Episcopalians during the nineteenth century is represented by only one surviving pamphlet, W.H. Biggar's *A Sketch of Scottish Ecclesiastical History* (1881). Biggar, who was an honorary lay-reader at Springburn Mission, Glasgow, was largely concerned with affirming the legitimacy of the Episcopal Church as an entirely Scottish body, quite separate from the Church of England; a similar concern was to trouble Mrs Donaldson half a century later. In the new century a book appeared by one William Mutch, *A Manual of Scottish Ecclesiastical History from the Introduction of Christianity to the Present Date* (1907) which was mostly a precis of George Grub's work. In the meantime, however, the market had been served by Anglican clerics, living in England; four such authors wrote short histories of Scotland or the Scottish church between 1853 and 1893.[15] Generally, their work bore the same overall burden as that of the authentically Scottish George Grub and William Stephen: they defended the institutions and ceremonies of their church, were contemptuous of many aspects of the Presbyterian interpretation, but were also hostile to erastianism and did not defend the royal prerogative. Popular accounts of Scottish history sympathetic to the Episcopalian point of view were thus available, but there is some question about who might have read them; certainly, none of the four books in question was re-printed, nor was that of Mutch.

Presbyterian works thus clearly dominated the field in the latter half of the century, and it is in these works that is to be sought the narrative most likely to be communicated to the Scottish reader in that era. Several points may be made about them. The first, and least remarkable, is that most of these productions are not of much value as history;

[15] Henry Caswall, *Scotland and the Scottish Church* (Oxford, 1853), W.B. Flowers, *A History of Scotland* (London, 1854), Julius Lloyd, *Sketches of Church History in Scotland* (London, 1876), Herbert Mortimer Luckock, *History of the Church in Scotland* (London, 1893)

this is particularly so of the histories produced by the bulk of the Free Church writers and their allies. For the most part, they derived entirely from secondary sources, and from secondary sources that were deeply flawed to begin with. Since the writers did no research of their own, their texts could become no more accurate than the models they followed, and could easily become less so. One example of the practice of Free Church historiography will give an idea of the general pattern. In his *Vindication* Dr M'Crie cited a quotation from Gilbert Burnet's memoirs concerning the 'curates', the pejorative term applied to the ministers appointed in place of the clergy outed from the church after the re-establishment of Episcopacy in 1662: 'they were the worst preachers that ever were heard, ignorant to a reproach, and many of them openly vicious – a disgrace indeed to their function, and the very dregs and refuse of the North'.[16] Burnet was an extremely dubious source himself; he was a whig, despite being an Episcopal cleric; he hated Archbishops Sharp and Burnet, and eventually went into exile in Holland, whence he returned in the train of William of Orange.[17] But M'Crie cited him on the curates as a disinterested fount of truth, and added several flourishes of his own to drive home the absolute depravity of these men.[18] A generation later, Robert Naismith, misunderstanding Burnet's term 'north', lowered the curates a further notch on the evolutionary scale by making them Highlanders.

> The empty pulpits were speedily filled by men from the Highlands, untrained to the holy office, and lamentably unfit to be spiritual guides of an intelligent, earnest, pious peasantry. Highland lairds complained of the scarcity of herdsmen, since so many had been hurried off to make lowland curates. These

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[16] Gilbert Burnet. *History of His Own Time. Abridged by Thomas Stackhouse* (London and Rutland VT, 1991), 75
[17] *Ibid.*, Introduction, vii ff.
[18] Thomas M'Crie, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters: Consisting of a Review of the First Series of the "Tales of My Landlord", Extracted from the Christian Instructor for 1817* (Edinburgh, 1824), 38

men were nothing short of cruel, cold-blooded oppressors of the religious community, and often immoral in no small degree.[19]

That misconception seems to have persisted; four decades later the Original Secession minister Alexander Smellie observed, before the ritual excoriation of the curates for their viciousness, that 'most of them were Highlanders, who had no comprehension of Lowland notions and ways'.[20] For the record, the curates were all university educated, consisting mostly of men from north of the Tay who had been unable to find parishes ('stickit ministers') and had accepted positions as teachers, tutors and the like. While the quality of these men as ministers may have been low, there is no evidence of acts of oppression or viciousness on their parts.[21] The Free Church portrait of the curates thus never bore more than the most distant relation to the surviving historical documentation; nor is there any practical evidence of concern that it ought to. The same historiographical philosophy may be said to have underpinned every part of their enterprise.

The second, and much more striking, point that emerges from these histories is the overwhelming importance to all branches of the Presbyterian Church of the Covenanters. Six of the historical works by Presbyterian authors limit themselves to the Covenanting period, and for most of the rest the Covenanters play a climactic and pivotal role in the narrative. There was in fact a ready-made market in Scotland for books about the Covenanters, particularly when the term was defined narrowly to describe the persecuted victims of the 1662-1688 period. John Howie's *Scots Worthies* (1774), which seems to have played a role in Scottish homes equivalent to that of *Pilgrim's Progress* in England, ensured that most Presbyterians grew up knowing the

[19] Robert Naismith. *The Story of the Kirk* (Edinburgh, 1865), 122

[20] Alexander Smellie, *Men of the Covenant. The Story of the Scottish Church in the Years of the Persecution*, Fourth edition (London,1904), 93

[21] Ian B. Cowan, *The Scottish Covenanters* (London, 1976), 56; Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V to James VII* (Edinburgh and London, 1965), 367-8

basic elements of the story. That work was re-issued regularly through the nineteenth century; along with the slightly less popular *Cloud of Witnesses.* The story that these works told stood at the emotional centre of the Scottish Presbyterian national myth, just as the longer, post-1637 struggle was at its intellectual centre. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, and certainly by its end, the covenants themselves had lost all meaning for most of the Scottish people. In the interim, as has been shown in previous chapters, the Covenanters had been successfully re-branded as martyrs for civil and religious liberty, as well as exemplars of all that was admirable in the Scottish character, and in that guise they soldiered on into the twentieth century.

Something of the hold of the Covenanters over the popular imagination can be judged from the extensive specialised literature to which they gave rise. Along with histories, the period produced a welter of biography, martyrology, or general lore relating to the post-1661 Covenanters, usually with short historical introductions. They include works such as *Martyr Graves of Scotland* (1875-77) by the Reformed Presbyterian (later Free Churchman) John Henderson Thompson, and *Ladies of the Covenant* (1851) by James Anderson of the Original Secession (also later Free Church). Some of the more dedicated authors wrote several books. Robert Simpson of the United Secession and United Presbyterian Church wrote six books on various aspects of the Covenanting experience, 1843-1861, including two novels. From 1820 a minister at Sanquhar of immortal Covenanting memory, he spent a great deal of effort tracking down folk memories of residents in the area and committing them to paper; his *Traditions of the Covenanters* (1843) contained the record of his research in the form of hundreds of remembered anecdotes.[22] William Carslaw, like Thompson a Reformed Presbyterian who entered the Free Church in 1876,[23] wrote six biographical works on Covenanters,

[22] *DNB* (1909), vol. xviii, 276-7 (T.B. Johnstone)
[23] *AFCS*, vol. i, 118

1893-1908, including individual lives of James Renwick, William Guthrie and Donald Cargill, and edited an edition of the *Scots Worthies.* For the more ardent devotees, there were books such as the Reformed Presbyterian A.B. Todd's *The Homes, Haunts and Battlefields of the Covenanters* (1886), and James Gibson's *Inscriptions on the Tombstones and Monuments Erected in memory of the Covenanters* (1881).

What sold best, however, were the old stories of good versus evil, of persecution stoically endured and death bravely met. There was no sign that this kind of story was losing anything of its potency as the nineteenth century drew to an end; if anything, the demand for books about them seems to have been strengthening around the turn of the century. In 1903, Alexander Smellie produced a history of the period, *Men of the Covenant: the Story of the Scottish Church in the Years of the Persecution* (1903), which went through four editions within three years of its first publication, and eleven in all; it was followed shortly by T.M. Dryerre's *Heroes and Heroines of the Scottish Covenant* (1907), which recycled the stories of Hugh M'Kail, Donald Cargill, Richard Cameron, the Wigtown martyrs and all the other favourites, and also went into extra printings. That was followed in 1908 by the Church of Scotland minister Hewison's *The Covenanters*, a general history, which, as the title suggests, focused heavily on the Covenanting period.

The stories were not always told in prose. In mid-century, the Free Church intellectual establishment was troubled by the appearance of William Aytoun's *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers* (1849). Aytoun (1813-1865) was an avowed Jacobite, and his work included poems on both Montrose and Dundee, together with short prose notices vindicating the two men. Aytoun's poetry is not particularly memorable, but it gallops along cheerfully enough, and it was found sufficiently engaging to achieve a

remarkable twenty-four printings, 1849-1900. Thereafter, Presbyterian efforts to extend the same kind of poetic treatment to the Covenanters invariably met with extremely generous treatment from *The Witness* or *The Free Church Magazine*. One such publication, *Lays of the Kirk and Covenant* by Mrs. A. Stuart Menteath, was favourably compared to Macaulay's original in the latter journal when it appeared in 1850.[24] In fact, Mrs. Menteath's efforts could never have been to everyone's taste; among other problems, her muse dictated a remarkable profusion of exclamation marks:

> My country, O my country! yea for thee the light is sown,
> Only be steadfast in thy trust – let no man take thy crown!
> Thine be the standard-bearer's place! the post of suffering high –
> God's blessing on the Covenant – I'll sign it ere I die![25]

Such, however, was the market for this type of verse in subsequent decades that *Lays of the Kirk and Covenant* managed a respectable four printings, the last in 1892. Other endeavours in the same field included *Lays of the Covenanters* (1880), a collection of the poems published early in his career by the previously mentioned lawyer and historian James Dodds; they included eulogies on such martyrs as the Marquess of Argyll, John Brown of Priesthill, Richard Cameron and James Cargill, more or less in the style of Scott. If it must be acknowledged that the Devil still had the best tunes, he had not, at least, had the last word.

It may be added that the story was not always told entirely in written form, either. Memorials of one kind or another to the Covenanters began to appear in significant numbers early in the century, and continued to do so through much of the period under

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[24] *Free Church Magazine*, vol. vii (Sept. 1850), 273
[25] Mrs. A. Stuart Menteath, 'The Signing of the Covenant in the Greyfriars' Churchyard, Edinburgh', in *Lays of the Kirk and Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1850), 78

discussion. In Stirling, between 1857 and the opening of the Wallace memorial in 1869, statues were erected to the martyr James Guthrie, Alexander Henderson, James Renwick and Margaret Wilson, part of a frenzy of Presbyterian iconography that also included statues of Knox, Melville and Ebenezer Erskine.[26] Dumfries erected a monument to its martyrs in 1834 and Wigtown in 1858; eventually, most of the towns in the former Covenanting areas of southern Scotland had one. As noted in Chapter Three, the language of inscriptions on the memorials commonly made a connection between their sacrifices and the general principles of civil and religious liberty; thus for example, on the Wigtown memorial:

> This Monument has been erected in memory of the noble army of Martyrs in Galloway and other parts of Scotland by whom during the age of persecution our Religion and Liberties as now established were secured, and a lesson to posterity never to lose or abuse those glorious privileges, planted by their labours, rooted in their suffering, and watered in their blood.[27]

That kind of language points to the third salient aspect of the literature on the Covenanters: the flourishing, not to say the apotheosis, in these works of the Scottish whig hypothesis. That mode of explanation, which had originated in Thomas M'Crie's attempt to protect the founding fathers of Presbyterianism from the Enlightenment and the Covenanters from Walter Scott, had by this time become universal, and in one way or another it is part of all the Presbyterian interpretations considered here. Three of the historians among those discussed, however, went a good deal farther in their constitutional musings than their fellows, or for that matter of the professional historians who had preceded them. Of these the first and much the most influential

[26] H.J. Hanham, 'Mid-Century Scottish Nationalism: Romantic and Radical', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), 172

[27] The main inscription refers to the two Wigtown martyrs and is couched in more traditional terms of personal sacrifice.

was James Dodds (1813-1874), who published *The Fifty Years' Struggle of the Scottish Covenanters* in 1860. The book is a series of lectures delivered in several Scottish and English cities and is not footnoted; but Dodds was an energetic historian, and was certainly one of the few members of the Free Church school to spend time in the State Papers Office and in the perusal of other unpublished material. Dodds was also one of the minority of writers treated in this chapter who was not a clergyman: he was a Writer to the Signet, and from 1846 was Scottish Parliamentary Agent in London. More important, he was a great admirer of Thomas Carlyle, and for some time a frequenter of the Carlyle household.[28] That connection bore evident fruit in his writing style, which, in contrast to the lugubrious carping of much Free Church history, is vigorous and upbeat, sometimes almost to the point of histrionics.

Dodds's work treated the period from 1638-1688 as a single story, with a triumphant outcome. It was, even more than was normally the case, a predominantly political outcome; for no one did more than Dodds to elaborate Thomas M'Crie's picture of the Covenanters as harbingers and moulders of the British constitution. He referred to 'the constant and unwearied struggle, which at last brought about the constitutional settlement of 1688';[29] and in summing up the Covenanters' achievements:

> The Covenanters...were the pioneers, and led the van in the battle which was won at the Revolution of 1688. Their principles, in the main, just constituted the Revolution Settlement, -- are just the principles of the existing British Government.[30]

These phrases are very much like those used by Dr M'Crie. For M'Crie, however, the covenants were solemn contracts between God and Great Britain, permanently binding

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[28] James Dodds, *Lays of the Covenanters* (Edinburgh, 1880), Introduction by James S. Dodds, 44-50, 76-7. James S. Dodds, a Free Church minister, was James Dodds's cousin.
[29] James Dodds, *The Fifty Years' Struggle of the Scottish Covenant* (Edinburgh, 1860), 7
[30] *Ibid.*, 21

on both. Dodds's vision was a much more political one: he saw the covenants as interim documents, playing a part in a larger drama involving the destiny of the British people. He outlined the nature of that destiny in his introduction:

> The design of Providence, in founding and carrying to such a height this mighty empire, has been to evolve, for the benefit and instruction of mankind, a model of the best system of government which seems practicable in the present state of human development; a government, that is to say, by representative institutions and equal laws; in short...*Constitutional Government*.[31]

This formulation represents a fundamental shift from the version of Scottish whiggism of M'Crie and his followers. M'Crie used the British constitution as a means to deflect criticism from the Covenanters, whose objectives he shared. For Dodds, the constitution itself was the objective, the covenants a means. The National Covenant had done its work by the Revolution, 'when it ceased, therefore, as a paper document, to have any further active operation'.[32] Here we can perhaps perceive an echo of Carlyle's philosophical idealism, as the idea of constitutional government can be seen sloughing off its original trappings and emerging on its own into an altered world.

During the fifty years' struggle itself, the specific function of the covenants lay in serving as a national rallying point against the most troublesome obstacles on the way of the achievement of constitutional government, the Stuarts, who had mounted an attack on all the legitimate political and religious interests of the state in pursuit of absolute sovereignty. In response, the Scottish Parliament and Kirk united, and, 'seeing that no national movement can be brought into coherence, or rendered permanent, without some unific symbol, the leaders both of Kirk and Parliament caught up the whole voices of the people, and compressed into the covenants all that

[31] *Ibid.*, 2
[32] *Ibid.*, 392

they were vaguely and inarticulately longing to express'.[33] Thereafter, the faithful part of the Scottish nation stood fast in their opposition to tyranny for fifty years; and when William finally struggled on to the island with his 'little army of heavy and stubborn Dutchmen', it was Scottish Covenanters who were able to protect him from a potentially fatal counterattack from Scottish and Irish Royalists.

> Was the country then to be plunged back, before it had well breathed, into the horrors from which there had seemed a prospect of escape?....Clear and loud as the clarion's sound...there issued a voice, when all others were mute. It was the voice of the *Cameronian Host*!....Listen to the well-known accents! The same voice in 1688 that was heard in 1638; the lapse of fifty years has neither cracked nor weakened its freedom-loving, tyranny-defying tones.[34]

In the last sentence we have Dodds's take on the history of the Covenanting struggle in summary: it was a unity, and it was about freedom.

If the Revolution marked the end for the covenants, it was a new beginning for the British constitution. The principles for which the Covenanters had fought – 'that the people should be governed by fixed laws passed in assemblies representing the national will; and that religious belief...should be secured in perfect spiritual independence'[35] – were universal, and it was the role of the British Empire to spread them to the ends of the earth.

> The good old manly custom in Britain – may it be perpetual! -- has been to contend earnestly for all human right. ....Our empire has not half accomplished her mission. Heaven's light points the way, as a Voice from the cloud proclaims, "O Britain! continue to be the nurse of freedom! THE MIGHTY

[33] *Ibid.*, 392
[34] *Ibid.*, 387
[35] *Ibid.*, 392

MOTHER OF FREE COLONIES, AND OF THE FUTURE FREE EMPIRES OF THE WORLD!"[36]

No writer on the Covenanters, save Dr M'Crie, had more influence on subsequent Free Church historiography than Dodds. That influence for the most part did not lie in the imperial vision expressed in his fervid peroration; apart from text book writers, most Free Church historians of this period made no attempt to link it to the British Empire. What was most attractive seems to have been the conception implied in the title, that of a single struggle for freedom lasting fifty years, with Scottish Presbyterians as heroes and a triumphant conclusion. Moreover, his sleight of hand in putting beyond consideration the theological trappings of the Covenanters, and making them simply fighters for freedom, was an approach that was to be much emulated by mainstream Presbyterian writers for the remainder of the century. Doubtless without meaning to, Dodds here stood at the head of a long succession of writers and spokesmen for various interest groups, from Scottish Nationalists[37] to the Communist Party of Great Britain[38], who, while not actually believing anything that the Covenanters believed, were to appropriate their memory in support of wildly divergent causes.

A very different and much more muted approach to the Scottish contribution to British freedom appeared almost three decades later, in Charles M'Crie's *Scotland's Part and Place in the Revolution of 1688* (1888). M'Crie (1836-1910), a grandson of the original Thomas,[39] was interested in constitutional history, and saw Scotland's part in

[36] *Ibid.*, 397, 399
[37] For example, the Scottish Covenant, drafted 1949, was part of an attempt to organise a non-party political movement for a Scottish parliament. See Jonathon Hearn, *Claiming Scotland: National Identity and Liberal Culture* (Edinburgh, 2000), 48-9
[38] Communist Party of Great Britain, *Programme of the Pageant of Scottish History. The Story of Scotland's Struggle for Freedom from the Invasion by the Romans till Today. Initiated by the Communist Party, the True Heirs of Scotland's Progressive Tradition* [n.p., c. 1938], 6
[39] *AFCS*, vol. i, 218; John Alexander Lamb, ed., *The Fasti of the United Free Church of Scotland, 1900-1929* (Edinburgh, 1956), 126

the Revolution of 1688 largely in terms of Scottish political thought. 'The Scots are a nation of thinkers', he noted in connection with Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, 'and have never shown any aversion to digest larger quantities of truth than morsels, even should there be dryness and toughness therewith'.[40]

The thinkers in question were Buchanan, with his predecessors Mair and Boece, and Rutherford. M'Crie noted at the opening of his discussion that Locke was the greatest thinker of the late Stuart period, a man who came to the conclusion that a king who violated the trust of his people could be replaced by them. But 'The thinking men of Scotland were in this department of thought not behind but ahead of those in England, ahead in more ways than one'. Buchanan and Rutherford had made the same point long before, respectively in *The Rights of the Crown in Scotland* (1579) and *Lex Rex* (1644). (It should perhaps be noted that M'Crie gave no hint of the preponderant role assigned to the Scottish nobility in Buchanan's system). Thus by the time of the Restoration, 'it was a first principle of political economy with the men who had the moulding of the Scotch character and the making of Scotch history; that, when the people make a person their king, they do so not absolutely, but conditionally, there being a covenant tying the king no less than his subjects'.[41]

So it was that when we find, in 1680, the Cameronians deposing Charles Stuart, what they were doing was entirely in keeping with the principles of civil government that had become second nature with the Scots:

> from the days of Mair and Boyce and Buchanan, it has been the first principle of civil government with Scotsmen that the royal power is derived from the

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[40] Charles M'Crie, *Scotland's Part in the Revolution of 1688* (1888), 28

[41] *Ibid.*, 29

> people, with whom it rests to dethrone as well as to appoint a king and his heirs.[42]

Moreover, it was not in any way different from what the slow-learning English would find themselves doing eight years later:

> Beyond all question, the opinion of Cargill and Hall was the verdict of the majority of Englishmen and Scotsmen eight years after the *Queensferry Paper* ... – for that verdict was just this: -- "King James VII....hath forfeited the right to the crown, and the throne is become vacant."[43]

This is to stop somewhat short of suggesting, as so many Free Church writers did, that the Cameronians actually brought about the overthrow of James by their efforts and example. M'Crie's concern seems more to have been in line with his those of his grandfather, to defend Scots in general and the Covenanters in particular from accusations of backwardness and fanaticism. His association of the Scottish Covenanters with the constitutionalist writers of the sixteenth century and with the British constitutional developments of the late seventeenth was exactly the tactic that Thomas M'Crie the Elder had used two generations earlier.

While the Established Church generally accepted the Free Church's views on the constitutional contributions of Scottish Presbyterians, it rarely provided any intellectual leadership on the subject. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to find what is probably the most sweeping expression of the Scottish whig position to have come from a member of that church, a professor of Church History at the University of Aberdeen named Henry Cowan (1844-1932).[44] Cowan's *The Influence of the Scottish Church in Christendom* (1896) is the transcript of the Baird Lectures for 1895. The work is

[42] *Ibid.*, 88
[43] *Ibid.*, 89
[44] *FES*, vol. 7, 375

unfootnoted, and it is difficult to tell whether he read either of the two Free Churchmen discussed above; but he echoed Charles M'Crie in stressing the importance of such figures as John Major and George Buchanan, and agreed with Dodds in asserting that the Presbyterian struggle was really about freedom: 'Deeper, however, than any antipathy to particular forms of worship or modes of Church government – deeper, also than any resentment against Anglican intrusion, was the spirit of resistance to despotism'.[45] But he was also able to add perspectives of his own. Lecturing late in the century when attitudes in his Church were softening, Cowan made a leap that most Free Church historians could not have made: to accept a continuity between the Church of Scotland of the late Middle Ages and that of present-day Scotland, and to declare the mediaeval Scottish Church a friend to liberty.

> Throughout the history of Scotland the Scottish Church has been generally on the side of national independence as well as constitutional liberty, and has borne against despotism, both external and internal, a notable testimony which has patently influenced the history of Britain, and, more or less directly, that of other lands.[46]

Thus he found the church's assistance invaluable in the struggle for independence as well as the struggle against the Stuarts. Further, he argued that the Scottish victory in the earlier struggle had a constitutional significance that was critically important to the progress of freedom in England, as it forced the king to relax the royal prerogative in search of money:

> the prolonged resistance of Scotland to English aggression forced Edward I. to complete the programme of the Magna Charta. In order to obtain fresh equipments, he consented to invest the Commons with that parliamentary

[45] Henry Cowan, *The Influence of the Scottish Church in Christendom. Being the Baird Lecture for 1895* (London, 1896), 184
[46] *Ibid.*, 168

privilege of granting or withholding supplies which became a vital part of the British constitution, and a main safeguard at once against useless wars and against baneful despotism.[47]

Thus we find the first major building blocks of the British constitution – the Magna Carta and Parliament's control over money – respectively functioning and in existence because of Scottish intransigence.

The Scottish Church's part in the second struggle was even more important. Following Charles M'Crie, Cowan identified John Major and his pupils Buchanan and Knox as the progenitors of the central principle of whig political philosophy, the right of resistance to tyranny. This was the philosophy that underlay Scottish resistance to outside ecclesiastical innovations from Melville to the Civil War, and in turn inspired the same sentiments among the English. When the Scots seized their country's strong points after the signing of the covenant and put an army on Duns Law , 'an example of resistance to tyranny was set which fanned the flame of English opposition to unconstitutional taxes, and of indignation against the abuse of royal prerogative, until resentment and remonstrance turned into revolt'.[48]

As the conflict in England was partly inaugurated, so it was sustained and shaped by Scottish influence.

> The Scottish Church helped them to forward what the English Church for two generations hindered, the growth of a constitutional monarchy. Amid prevalent English subservience during the reign of Charles II., Scotland, under cruel

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[47] *Ibid.*, 177-8
[48] *Ibid.*, 186

> persecution, held aloft the banner of the Covenant; and that banner notwithstanding the intolerance of the Covenanters, led to liberty.[49]

With the revolution accomplished in England, the Scots played what may have been a crucial role in Ireland: 'but for the courageous support of the Revolution by Scoto-Irish Presbyterians...James would have retained the Irish, and might have eventually regained his English and Scottish kingdoms'.[50]

Thus, having secured for England her most important early constitutional principles, created a philosophical basis for constitutional liberty, shown by her example of resistance to despotism, and provided the military muscle to defend the revolution on its flanks when it came, the Scottish Church left little for the English to do in the formation of the British constitution but fill in the blanks. This, Professor Cowan was pleased to note, they had managed to do. But there was more to come:

> The Revolution of 1688 is the acknowledged turning point of modern political history...It was the first stage in the realisation of George Buchanan's maxim that the fountain of political authority is the popular will, and that the end of political government is the popular welfare.[51]

The second stage was the American Revolution, which again owed much to Scottish ideas and to the military contributions of Scottish and Scots-Irish settlers. Even the French Revolution, though a more distant affair, was largely the consequence of British ideas. Though Cowan made rather less of the British Empire as an institution than did Dodds, he clearly shared with the earlier writer a belief in a destiny for the British people as disseminators of ideas of constitutional freedom, ideas which were in origin preponderantly Scottish.

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[49] *Ibid.*, 187
[50] *Ibid.*, 187
[51] *Ibid.*, 189

For the most part, the other historians, in and out of the Free Church, made few additional theoretical contributions to Scottish whiggism. The reason lies partly in the limited intellectual horizons of most of these writers; but probably owed more to the fact that the case had already been proved, to the satisfaction of most of them, by Thomas M'Crie, Dodds, and other earlier writers. The dedication to a book by A.B. Todd, a Reformed Presbyterian poet and writer in 1894, provides a neat example of popular internalisation of the conclusions of the school: 'In memory of the Heroes and Martyrs of the Scottish Covenants whose Struggles won for Great Britain and America the Precious Heritage of Civil and Religious Liberty'.[52] A key phrase here is 'civil and religious liberty'. That expression appears in almost every work touching the Covenanters written in the last half of the nineteenth century; even Reformed Presbyterians, who made a particular study of the theology and history of the Covenanters, used it routinely to encapsulate the object of their struggles. Nor does it just appear in books. On the site of the Battlefield of Drumclog, a plaque affixed in 1829 to the side of a schoolhouse identified civil and religious liberty as the matter at issue in the battle, and the phrase also appeared on Covenanter monuments in Loudon and Crossgellioch in Nithsdale, dated 1829 and 1827.[53] It appears on a plaque of much more recent vintage on the floor of St Giles, where 'civil and religious liberty' is adduced as the objective which motivated the mythical Janet Geddes to throw her apocryphal stool.

But the phrase does not appear in or on anything remotely contemporary with the Covenanters themselves. The gravestones of the Covenanters inscribed in the

[52] Adam Brown Todd, *The Homes, Haunts, and Battlefields of the Covenanters* (n.p., [1894]), Dedication
[53] *Ibid.*, 21, and John Henderson Thompson, *The Martyr Graves of Scotland*, (Edinburgh, 1875), 233

seventeenth century tended to bear dreadful doggerel; later, particularly c. 1730, the standard phrase used was 'for his adherence to the Word of God and the Covenanted Work of Reformation', to which was often added 'against tyranny, perjury and prelacy. Rev. 12.11'.[54] A surviving banner borne at Drumclog reads 'For Christ and His Truths. No Quarters for ye Active Enemies of ye Covenant',[55] and another at Duns Law read 'For the Crown Rights of Christ'. None includes anything about 'civil and religious liberty'. In fact, the use of the phrase in connection with the Covenanters originated, as discussed in Chapter Three,[56] with Dr. M'Crie's famous article on the Covenanters in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* in 1817.[57] M'Crie, of course, understood the essentially seventeenth-century motivations of the Covenanters; he was, after all, a Covenanter himself. But his work, and that of his Free Church successors, was not aimed at other Covenanters, but at the post-Enlightenment reading population of Scotland, and for such people phrases such as 'the Covenanted work of Reformation' were likely to appear archaic or meaningless. 'Civil and religious liberty', on the other hand, produced an immediate sympathetic response. So it was that Enlightenment values were called upon, throughout much of the nineteenth century, to defend a movement from a very different era.

There were, of course, problems in writing the history of the Covenanters from this point of view. The most obvious of these lay in the fact that the Covenanters were not friends of religious liberty but bitter enemies, and said so, repeatedly and vehemently, even when their opinions were not being polled on the subject. By the Solemn League and Covenant, they promised to undertake 'the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, and

[54] James Gibson, *Inscriptions on the Tombstones and Monuments in Memory of the Covenanters* (Glasgow, 1881), *passim.* The Biblical citation is 'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.'
[55] Andrew Lang, *A History of Scotland from the Roman Occupation*, 4 vols (Edinburgh, and London, 1900-1907), vol. ii1, 353. The banner is possibly not authentic.
[56] See above, 91
[57] Thomas M'Crie, 'A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters' in *Miscellaneous Writings*, 348

whatsoever should be found contrary to sound doctrine, and the power of godliness',[58] and to enforce Presbyterian uniformity on the three kingdoms. They protested against Cromwell's imposition of toleration for sectaries;[59] and during their period in the wilderness after the Restoration they continued to insist on the validity of both covenants, which would have involved forcing Presbyterianism on two kingdoms that palpably did not want it. At the Revolution they fought William's plan to include the Episcopal ministers in the Established Church, and over the following decades managed by various means to remove most of the Episcopalian survivors. When toleration of Episcopacy was finally imposed on the kingdom in 1712, many of the Presbyterian clergy regarded it as a disaster parallel to the re-introduction of patronage.[60] In terms of civil liberties, the Covenanters had a somewhat more defensible record, as they were able to exercise power only for a short period in the middle of the seventeenth century, and expressed themselves enemies of tyranny at all other times. When the Covenanting party did hold power, however, it did so on a steadily narrowing base, culminating in the Act of Classes in 1649 which effectively stripped the civil rights from anyone who did not think as it did.

Free Church writers dealt with the problem in various ways. The first and most nearly universal was avoidance: the bitter language of the Covenanters was almost never quoted, and only those of their more unsavoury actions – such as the murder of Sharp – were cited which were too well known to be ignored. There were periodic references to 'excesses' of the Covenanters, but they were never spelled out; and general absolution was always provided, normally in terms of the oppression that they suffered or the beliefs of the age. M'Crie, as always, set the pattern for this type of exculpation:

[58] Dodds, *Fifty*, 40
[59] Frances Dow, *Cromwellian Scotland 1651-1660* (Edinburgh, 1979), 39
[60] J.H.S. Burleigh, *A Church History of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1936), 275-6

'If, in some cases, they run to extremes, Solomon's saying will be remembered, "Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad"'.[61] Solomon's dictum, as noted in Chapter Four,[62] made frequent appearances in subsequent Non-Intrusionist literature, and it was also popular in Free Church histories.

Some authors felt the need to confront the question of Covenanter intolerance more directly. The most elaborate defence was mounted by James Dodds, who also made the most frank admission of the shortcomings, from the modern point of view, of the covenants . Those documents, he explained, had in them something universal, but also something exclusive, sharing the imperfections of their age.

> That which was exclusive, was the avowed intention to extirpate...certain other churches and creeds, and the desire and tendency to impose upon the three kingdoms, if possible upon the world, a Presbyterian uniformity. That which was *universal* was the principle, that the people should be governed by fixed laws passed in assemblies representing the national will; and that religious belief, and the Church as the embodied organ of the individual beliefs, should be secured in perfect spiritual independence.[63]

Implicitly or explicitly, most of the apologists for the Covenanters in the nineteenth century found it necessary to make a similar division.

The problem could still cause palpable distress. A remark by D.A. Mackinnon, Free Church minister at Marykirk and author of *Some Chapters in Scottish History* (1893), suggests the conundrum that might face a sincere writer who failed to make the universal-particular separation. Commenting on the offending clause in the Solemn

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[61] M'Crie, *Vindication*, 447
[62] See above, 120
[63] Dodds, *Fifty*, 392

League and Covenant, he declared that 'the Covenanters were untrue to the principles of liberty, for which they themselves contended, in introducing such a clause'.[64] Enforcement of religious exclusivism, however, was at the heart of both covenants, and it can hardly be suggested that the Covenanters betrayed their principles by composing the covenants. Mackinnon's plaintive remark suggests the effects of years of propaganda; so deeply embedded was the idea that the Covenanters were really fighting for freedom that the contents of the covenants themselves appeared to him to be a mistake, which the Covenanters would have repented of, had they had time to think of it.

If we return to the dedication to A.B. Todd's book quoted above, 'In memory of the Heroes and Martyrs of the Scottish Covenants whose Struggles won for Great Britain and America the Precious Heritage of Civil and Religious Liberty', there is evident a second obvious question. Was it really the Covenanters who did all that by themselves? Whether one is referring to the post-1638 Covenanters, or the persecuted sect from the post-Restoration period (as Todd probably was), the bald assertion would appear to ignore the contributions of King William, among others. Yet the idea continued to appear, in different forms, in many places. Thus John C. Johnston of the United Presbyterians, in 1887:

> A most precious heritage, secured at great cost, they have bequeathed to the people of Scotland. The liberties and religion of the land compose their bequest, and constitute at the same time the martyrs' enduring monument.[65]

Likewise the United Free author Alexander Smellie wrote in 1903:

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[64] D.A. Mackinnon. *Some Chapters in Scottish History. A Souvenir of the Jubilee of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1893), 84

[65] Johnston, *Treasury*, 652

> The disciples of Richard Cameron and Donald Cargill and James Renwick...were to a great degree the human architects of those liberties which the country welcomed with overflowing gratitude, and in which she read the promise of a stable and prosperous future....tens of thousands reaped the bountiful harvest of the seed they sowed in a wild and stormy spring, and praised God for the valleys covered with corn.[66]

Most of the writers of full-dress history, even within the Free Church, would not go as far as that; and certainly, whatever claims for the importance of the Covenanters to the development of constitutional liberty could much more easily be made if one extended the period of the Covenanters back to 1638, as did Dodds and his followers. But, as we have seen, even Dodds felt the need to assign a role of critical importance to the persecuted hillmen, with the Cameronian host emerging to protect William from the vengeance of the ousted Scottish Jacobites. For the mass of Presbyterian writers on the subject, and perhaps especially those who believed that the covenants were themselves without meaning beyond their time, the Covenanters *had* to be heroes, and if so they had to be heroes of constitutional liberty.

The generally rosy view of the motives of the Covenanters was greatly aided by the historiographical climate of the latter half of the nineteenth century. As was shown in the last chapter, all but one of the full-scale histories of Scotland written during the period were written by Presbyterian ministers; and the one exception, Hill Burton, often reached Presbyterian conclusions on major issues. Hume Brown, whose *History of Scotland* began appearing at the turn of the century, was perhaps not exactly a Presbyterian himself, but clearly wrote with a Presbyterian audience in mind.[67] The

[66] Alexander Smellie. *Men of the Covenant. The Story of the Scottish Church in the Years of the Persecution.* Fourth edition (London 1904), 421
[67] *DNB*, 1912-1921 (London, 1927), 70-71 (H.W.C. Davis).

appearance, then, of Andrew Lang's *A History of Scotland From the Roman Occupation* (1902) was something of a shock. Lang, a writer of no disclosed religion and Jacobite sympathies, had no protective impulses whatever towards the Covenanters; he delighted, indeed, in showing them at their worst. Thus, for example, we are told about the massacres of women and unarmed prisoners after Philiphaugh; Warriston's demand for the blood of the enemies of the covenant in order to avert God's judgement on Scotland; the violence committed by Covenanters against the curates in the aftermath of the expulsions of 1662; and dozens of other details deemed unsuitable for inclusion in most Presbyterian histories. And if indeed it be acknowledged that the modern heritage of freedom of speech and religion were the inestimable heritage of the Reformation, 'it was a heritage', in Lang's analysis, 'that neither Reformer nor Covenanter intended to bequeath'.[68]

The book drew one direct response from the Presbyterian community, *Scotland and Presbyterianism Vindicated: Being a Critical Review of the Third Volume of Mr. Andrew Lang's History of Scotland* (1905), by T.D. Wanliss, an Australian who published a nationalist journal, *The Thistle*, in Edinburgh, 1909-18, and was a passionate champion of Presbyterianism as the essence of the Scottish national way of life.[69] Simply in the act of confronting Lang, Wanliss admitted more than most of his co-religionists. He acknowledged, for example, the excesses of fanaticism, which were handed down in innumerable Covenanter pamphlets, but argued that the verbal excesses did not lead to an excess of cruelty; and that the admitted extremism of the actions of the Covenanters could hardly have been avoided.

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[68] Lang, *History of Scotland*, vol.i, xi
[69] H.J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London, 1969), 122. Wanliss, of Scottish birth, was a publisher in Ballarat, Victoria; see *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Melbourne, 1990), vol. 12, 378

> Further, the Presbyterians were themselves persecutors, and thus must be regarded as enemies of liberty. But the important and vital point of the question, that Presbyterianism, being based not on an ecclesiastical caste, but on popular government, contained...within itself the principle of regeneration and the true seed of religious liberty, is quite beyond the purview of Mr. Lang.[70]

Here Wanliss was making the standard point that, whatever their shortcomings, the Covenanters procured for us our rights and liberties, but he has shifted the usual ground of the argument away from the actions of the Covenanters to the nature of the religion that they professed, which he regarded as innately democratic.

Lang's criticism went beyond an attack on fanaticism. He argued that the Kirk's ethos was essentially theocratic, and that its repeated interventions in politics from Morton's day made normal civil government in Scotland impossible until the ministers' teeth were drawn at the settlement of 1690, 'without the Covenants and with a saner conception of the powers and duties of the preachers'.[71] This was certainly not a new idea; unsympathetic souls had on several previous occasions remarked that the church, by supporting the Covenanting government in overthrowing the king's power, raising an army, making war, negotiating a military alliance with a foreign power, and by eventually seizing sole political control of the country, might very well have transgressed the thin line that divides the spiritual from the civil kingdom. J.L. Watson, a Free Churchman writing in 1890, fearlessly exposed that idea for the absurdity that he understood it to be:

> the ministers have been often blamed for stepping out of their sphere, and meddling with secular affairs in the kingdom. For their vindication it may be

[70] T.D. Wanliss, *Scotland and Presbyterianism Vindicated Being a Critical Review of the Third Volume of Mr. Andrew Lang's History of Scotland* (1905), 31
[71] Lang, *History of Scotland*, vol. iii, 423

remarked that, in an ignorant and unlettered age, and the people gave them a position of supremacy...The national resistance under the mad tyranny of the two Charleses and of their successor James, was headed by ministers who also took the largest share in all deliberation, accompanied their armies to battle...and conducted negotiations with foreign courts. At the same time, from the very first, they declared that their province was *exclusively spiritual*.[72]

Without repeating Watson's final argument, Wanliss echoed his earlier point that clerical exercise of power was acceptable because it derived from the people; and as such it was the opposite of theocracy.

> Presbyterianism is not based on theocratic but on democratic principles; and great, as for a time, may be the power of its ministers, especially in critical and excited times, such as those of Charles the First, they cannot do much, or go far, unless they have the people with them.[73]

In effect, if Presbyterianism was not theocratic in principle, it could not, in Wanliss's analysis, have been so in practice.

However sincere Wanliss's belief in the democratic mandate of the ministers, quibbling over the definition of 'theocracy' did not go to the heart of Lang's argument. Lang and his kind were in fact much better ignored than answered. Thus T. Meldrum Dryerre's book 1907 book, *Heroes and Heroines of the Scottish Covenant*, opened by promising to defend the Covenanters from the 'false ideas put there by the illustrious Sir Walter Scott'[74], a straw man that had been beaten to death by twenty writers since the days of Dr M'Crie. Little more, if anything, was heard of Lang in subsequent histories.

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[72] J.L Watson, *Scotland's Banner and its Story* (Edinburgh, 1890), 68
[73] Wanliss, *Scotland and Presbyterianism*, 42-43
[74] T. Meldrum Dryerre, *Heroes and Heroines of the Scottish Covenant* (Kilmarnock, 1926), 9

Presbyterian writers also managed to find support for their view of the Covenanters from the English historians of the last half of the century. At various times, the writers in this study quoted or cited Macaulay, Green, Froude, Hallam and Gardiner in support of their positions. As might be expected, they were nothing if not selective; Gardiner, for example, had very serious reservations about the Covenanters,[75] but was quoted frequently in their support, particularly by Wanliss.[76] The favourite was Froude; he could be relied on to say the kind of things that Presbyterian writers liked to hear.

> For more than half the seventeenth century the battle had to be fought out in Scotland, which in reality was the battle between liberty and despotism; and where, except in an intense, burning conviction that they were maintaining God's cause against the devil, could the poor Scotch people have found the strength for the unequal struggle which was forced upon them.[77]

The weight of this kind of support is suggested by another quotation form Froude in the work of the Established Churchman Henry Cowan, and Cowan's comment.

> "If we except the Athenians and the Jews," said the late Mr. Froude, when addressing a Scottish academic audience, "no people so few in number have scored so deep a mark in the world's history as you have done."
>
> This testimony may be accepted as not only impartial but indisputable.[78]

Remarks like this were made particularly gratifying by the unspoken implication that if an Englishman says something good about the Scots, it *must* be true.

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[75] For example, he referred to the Assembly's demand in 1639 that everyone be required to accede to the National Covenant as an 'unwarrantable interference with the conscience of individual Scots'. Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I., to the Outbreak of the Civil War 1603-1642* (London, 1884), vol. ix, 50

[76] E.g. from Gardiner's *The Puritan Revolution*, pp. 105-106, in defence of the Glasgow Assembly of 1638: 'For all that, the Scottish movement was a necessary preparation for liberty. Not till the majority of a nation is left undisturbed in its religious or political principles can it venture to accord freedom to a minority.' Wanliss, *Scotland*, 15

[77] Cited in Johnston, *Treasury*, 652

[78] Cowan, *Influence*, 1

Froude's quotation points to a noticeable characteristic of the writers of all these works: their Presbyterianism was to a great extent bound up with their national feeling. A recurring theme in all Presbyterian historiography of the century is the idea that the Scots were essentially Presbyterians, and that the virtues of the Scots were essentially Presbyterian virtues. 'The Kirk of Scotland', wrote James Dodds, 'was always but the people of Scotland, in a different embodied form'.[79] The Kirk lay at the core both of the Scot's history and of his Scottishness. 'To it', wrote another Free Church writer in a litany endlessly repeated throughout this literature, 'we owe not only the preservation of our religion, but also our liberties, our education, our national character'.[80] It fostered the growth of a middle class, and the values of education and enterprise for which the Scots were famed. And most strongly emphasised in the works studied here, it was innately democratic, shaped by the needs of a freedom-loving people:

> we cannot but agree with Melville that Presbyterianism was and is the right thing for Scotland....It suits a liberty-loving people. It suits a people who believe in free institutions.[81]

It is in this context that that the literature associated with the Covenanters must be understood, for they had become the focus of both religious and national feelings, inextricably intertwined. They were seen as representatives of the Scottish Church and people, struggling against the forces of tyranny and a form of religion that were both alien to their national identity. And they won. 'Is it to be wondered at', wrote the Free Church minister D.A. Mackinnon, after a twenty-page description of the sufferings of the Covenanters, if in liberty-loving Scotland we cherish this old Presbyterian Church, for which our godly fathers fought, and suffered, and died? God bless it evermore!'[82]

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[79] Dodds, *Fifty*, 11
[80] Anon, *Heritage*, iv.
[81] W. Beveridge, *Makers of the Scottish Church* (Edinburgh, 1889), 102
[82] Mackinnon, *Some Chapters*, 103

It must be stressed that this kind of nationalism had almost nothing to do with opposition to the union. There was, certainly, a strain of political nationalism in the Free Church, a product in part of the struggle with the British Parliament during the Non-Intrusionist period.[83] Both Hugh Miller and James Begg, veterans of the struggle and powers in the post-Disruption church, were early advocates of Scottish home rule.[84] One of the Free Church writers, Norman Walker, was himself a former Disruptionist, and still bitter enough about the experience four decades afterwards that he felt moved to point out that there were minuses as well as pluses to the union:

> We can now see still more clearly the good of the union and the evil of it ....it deprived the Scottish nation of much of its legitimate influence in the regulation of its internal affairs, and it not only drew to London our upper classes, but (by the operation of the sacramental test and otherwise) led to that abandonment by them of their own national Church, which is to this hour one of the most perilous and unsatisfactory of our social characteristics.[85]

That outburst, however, was as far as any of the writers was prepared to go, and even that level of criticism was absent from the younger generation of historians. The journalist T.D. Wanliss is the one figure who might be termed a nationalist by the definition of a later era; but he lived out his life in Australia. Far more characteristic was the kind of nationalism expressed in an essay by the UP minister John Ker, which combined an intense Scottish national feeling with unquestioning loyalty to the union. For Ker, what had made Great Britain the greatest civilisation in the world was the diversity of its two principal races; Scots made the enormous contribution that they did specifically because they differed from the English, and in critical ways. Thus, he

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[83] D.W. Bebbington, 'Religion and National Feeling in Nineteenth-Century Wales and Scotland', in Stuart Mews, ed., *Religion and National Identity* (Oxford, 1982), 500

[84] H.J. Hanham, 'Mid-Century Scottish Nationalism: Romantic and Radical', in Robert Robson, ed., *Ideas and Institutions of Victorian Britain* (London, 1967), 155, 163

[85] Norman L. Walker, *Scottish Church History* (Edinburgh 1882), 101-102

declared, 'we shall do more for the British Empire as Scotsmen than as mongrel Englishmen'.[86] Not surprisingly, the most important Scottish contribution to the mix was religious:

> When one remembers how the religion of Scotland has aided the noble English Nonconformists, and even the Evangelical party in the Church of England, how it has given to the British Government in Ireland its one loyal foothold, how it has told upon the United States and our Colonies, with their many thousands of Presbyterian Churches, we begin to feel the importance of the separate citadel that was maintained in Scotland, first for national, and then for spiritual independence.[87]

There were of course, many secular virtues associated with Scottish distinctiveness as well; but those too were products of Scotland's Presbyterian heritage.

Ker's analysis left a critical role for William Wallace, whom he greatly revered. For in preserving the independence of the rough-hewn Scottish people, Wallace had made it possible for John Knox to come along several centuries later and make them into something earth-shaking:

> Wallace made a nation and Knox a people. The one secured the soil on which the other built up the church polity, and in which he implanted the religious principles that have since been associated with the name of Scotland wherever it is known, and that have given it a place in the world out of all proportion to its extent, or population, or material resources.[88]

[86] John Ker, *Scottish Nationality and Other Papers* (Edinburgh, 1887), 18
[87] *Ibid.*, 8
[88] *Ibid.*, 6

There could, in brief, have been no Presbyterianism without Wallace. For a contribution of this magnitude to the British polity, Ker believed that even liberal-minded Englishmen might reasonably be grateful.

And indeed, if any of the other Presbyterian authors considered here saw a contradiction between loyalty to the union and a powerful and very specific sense of Scottish identity, none, with the equivocal exception of Norman Walker, saw fit to say so. Overwhelmingly, the key to the Scottish identity that emerges from these texts is religious, not political. The story of the Covenanters is the story of a struggle for recognition of the Divine Headship of Christ, not for an independent state. The civil and religious liberty which resulted from the struggle was achieved, in the usual narrative, in co-operation with the English. The Scots were partners with the English in the creation of the British constitution; senior partners, indeed, in the view of some writers; and the constitution derived ultimately from philosophical principles which were at the heart of the Presbyterian ethos. For some, the participation of Scotland in the British Empire was a step toward spreading these principles to the far corners of the world. With the principle of spiritual independence effectively established and Presbyterianism the dominant form of religion in Scotland, there was nothing to be gained and much to be lost by destroying the union. Thus while the authors of the books often expressed exasperation with the English, the impulse never seemed to develop into a yearning for political independence.

One final, and recurring, element in the narratives, far removed from the Covenanters, throws some further light on the Presbyterian attitude to the Scottish nation. The Culdees, an order of monks supposedly established by St Columba for the purpose of spreading the gospel in Scotland, made its appearance in every history written by Free

Churchmen that touched the early period of Scottish history, and in many of the other histories as well. In all cases, the monks were presented as in essential respects very different from those of the later church; they married, owned no ecclesiastical superior, ignored the mass and other Popish rites, and derived their doctrine and organisation from the Holy Scriptures; they were, in fact, Protestants in all but name. The picture was largely fanciful; the Culdees in fact made their first documented appearance in Scotland in the tenth century, and most subsequent references suggest a monastic order in decay.[89] But the legend was given currency by the appearance in 1811 of the scholarly *An Historical Account of the Ancient Culdees of Iona, and of Their Settlements in Scotland, England, and Ireland* by John Jamieson, and was repeated often enough in Presbyterian histories to assume the status of holy writ. Culdees, or at any rate the idea of a pure pre-Roman Scottish Church, found their way into the historiography of all three of the major Presbyterian denominations of the latter half of the century.

Free Church writers, predictably, took the lead. In every volume of general history produced by that school the Culdees make their appearance in their pristine incorruptibility, the model of everything that the Scottish Church had been and would be again. In the manner of Free Church historiography, any subtleties or reservations in the accounts of Jamieson or earlier writers were ignored, and the Culdees presented simply as Proto-Presbyterians. Thus the Rev. John Anderson, in 1849:

> Such were the early ministers of the Church of Scotland, to whom, if not by an apostle himself, yet by his disciples, were committed, and by them transmitted, a form of doctrines, worship, government and discipline, in all respects

[89] Burleigh, *Church History*, 36. The Culdees were founded in Ireland in the early part of the ninth century; their subsequent role in Scotland is very poorly documented. See Ian B. Cowan, 'The Post-Columban Church', *Scottish Church History Society Record*, xviii (1974), 253-5. The history of the lively Protestant myth of the Culdees has apparently not been written.

substantially the same with that acknowledged and exercised by the Free Church of Scotland at the present day. Its ministers then as now were presbyters.[90]

And the Rev. D.A. MacKinnon, in the last decade of the century:

> At the mission institute in Iona ... the jurisdiction was in the hands of the presbyters, with the presbyter abbot at their head, just as to-day the missionaries in our colleges at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, under their respective principals, manage their own offices while preaching the gospel in a semi-pagan land.[91]

The key to the powerful attraction of the myth of the Culdees lay in the identification of Presbyterianism as the real religion of the Scottish people, and in the element of continuity that it provided between the dark ages and the Reformation. Thus Roman Catholicism in Scotland could be perceived as an interlude, with flexible boundaries, between two periods of religious history that were fundamentally Protestant. And like every other revolution that occurred in the British Isles, the Reformation could be seen to have been no revolution at all, but a return to an earlier age of freedom that had been temporarily overwhelmed by an encroaching tyranny. Robert Naismith, a Reformed Presbyterian and later Free Churchman, put it in suitably uncompromising fashion in a history written in 1865:

> That glorious doctrine which the Scottish Christians held tenaciously with their *dour*, unflinching characteristic temperament – the supremacy and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures – shone brightly in the Kirk of Scotland during the sixth and seventh centuries, repelling the insidious advances of the Papal supremacy.... but the on-sweeping deluge of Popish error, priestly tyranny, and

[90] John Anderson, *Chronicles of the Kirk, or, Scenes and Stories from the History of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1849), 7
[91] Mackinnon. *Some Chapters*, 16

> debasing immorality swept the truth into hidden nooks and desert wilds, where, amid surrounding darkness, it faintly glimmered for dreary centuries, till it caught the flame of kindred light and heat from Germany, and burst forth in uncontrollable grandeur at the Reformation.[92]

Later in history, other attempts would be made to separate the dour Scots from their natural religion; but, as Naismith's analysis made clear, they were all doomed.

As shown above, other writers drew the same conclusion from the story of the Covenanters; indeed, the idea of the essential inseparability of Scotland and Presbyterianism ran through every element of the Presbyterian story, and was one on which all historians of different branches of the church could agree. Even in the face of the various threatening developments in the century – Irish immigration, Episcopalian revival, Dissenting inroads – there was a widespread consensus that the link between Presbyterianism and Scottishness remained as secure as ever. 'Scotland has never been more truly Presbyterian than it is at the present moment', wrote Hugh Miller in 1848.[93] 'The people are still by an overwhelming majority Presbyterian', wrote the Church of Scotland minister John Alison three decades later, 'and if a considerable number of them are dissenters, this is merely incidental, and may be remedied early if the people will'.[94] For his UP contemporary John Ker, the Presbyterian identity of Scotland was so because history had made it so, and it would not change:

> before it can be otherwise, the nature of the Scottish people must be made over again, their most hallowed associations destroyed, the most heroic pages of

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[92] Robert Naismith, *The Story of the Kirk*, 38-39

[93] *The Witness*, 16 Dec. 1848

[94] John Alison, *Tracts for the People on the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, c.1880), 4

their history blotted out, and the last old stone dug up that lifts its head from the grey hillside to tell where martyred dust is sleeping.[95]

Figuratively and literally, Presbyterianism was in Scotland's bones.

This pervasive linkage of religion and nation in a single Scottish identity must be regarded as a major source of the enduring influence of the Presbyterian historical narrative. The Presbyterian epic was a defence of the Church, certainly, but it was also a national parable, explaining where the Scots came from and how they came to be what they were. The interpretation was not universal in late nineteenth-century Scotland; but it had the advantage of enthusiastic propagation, not just as history book but as Sunday School text, poetry and monument; and it a huge natural readership among Presbyterian church-goers. To this generally approving audience it showed how their native Presbyterianism embodied their love of freedom and engendered a host of other virtues; how the Presbyterian Scots taught liberty to the other peoples of the British Isles; and how their influence for good might yet be spread over the face of the globe through the agency of the British Empire. In sum, the Presbyterian historians were telling their fellow-religionists, over and over again and in many different forms, that the Scottish religion and the Scottish identity were inseparably intertwined, and both were the best that was to be had. That is why, when the exasperated Mrs Donaldson administered her little Scottish history test, thirty years later and in a very different Scotland, she got the answers that she did.

[95] Ker, *Scottish Nationalism*, 18

Chapter 7

'These Were Men Who Knew How to Die!' Presbyterianism and Scottish History in School Text Books, 1805-1909

Authors of works of academic history are aware that only a small portion of the human race actually reads them. The great majority of mankind absorbs its historical vision as part of its schooling; thereafter its exposure to history tends to be limited to easily digestible surrogates such as historical novels. For this reason writers of school textbooks are in a powerful position to influence what people feel and think about their country's history and identity.

Presbyterianism played a part in the interpretation of Scottish history presented to school children throughout the long nineteenth century, partly because it was part of the culture, and partly because the control by the Free Church of its own schools in the middle part of the century made possible the exposure of its students to a version of the Free Church's peculiar views on the subject. As will be seen, however, the Free Church's short-lived experiment was the only systematic attempt to impose a controlled Presbyterian view of Scottish history on the school system, and the degree to which the outlook of subsequent texts can be described as 'Presbyterian' depended on the vagaries of government educational policies and the personal views of individual writers of text books. Later texts contain elements of secularism, non-sectarianism and the inherited Presbyterian narrative, the proportion varying with the demands of the educational authorities and the views of the writers.

Given Scotland's control over her educational system, the market audience for school texts on Scottish history in the nineteenth century was rather smaller than might have been expected. It is difficult to know exactly what was studied in the country's schools prior to the imposition of a national curriculum in 1873, but it would appear that Scottish history generally was poorly represented. History was a 'higher subject' in parish schools during that period;[1] that classification meant that it would not be studied at all by the legions of children who spent only enough years in school to acquire basic literacy. Nor was it the most popular higher subject; in a study of pupils in a hundred and forty-eight schools conducted in 1868-69, it was found that 5,530 of 12,745 were studying grammar, 4,727 geography, and only 1,724 history.[2] In 1853, some 13.3% of students in Established Church schools were studying history, against 39.4% geography, with 14.6% versus 43.4% in Free Church schools.[3]

Further, 'history' did not specifically mean Scottish history, and British history seems in fact to have been more common. One school inspector writing in 1872 characterised the teaching of history in his time as consisting of some of the chief events of importance in the history of England: 'its main use was as a treasure-house of moral anecdotes'.[4] When a code of standards was set up in 1873 for the national system of education established the previous year, it mandated the study of Scottish history in Standard IV and V, and British history in VI. Shortly afterwards, however, the code was modified to put British history into Standard V, and in 1886 into Standard IV, pushing Scottish history back to Standard III. Even this limited

[1] James Scotland, *The History of Scottish Education* (London, 1969), vol. 1, 200
[2] *Ibid.*, 238
[3] *Ibid.*, 254
[4] *Ibid.*, 200

protection was abandoned in 1890, when the Scotch Education Department withdrew from prescribing a history curriculum, and advised teachers to devise their own.[5] There was, in fact, an evident doubt among some educational authorities as to whether the study of Scotland's history was of any value at all. One of the school inspectors quoted by James Scotland seems to have summed up attitudes that were common by the time he wrote (1879):

> one year of school life is quite enough to devote to such an uninteresting subject as Scottish history, which consists merely of three grand events: the reign of Bruce, culminating in the battle of Bannockburn, the Reformation of which Knox was the central figure, and the Union. All else is a mere chronicle of murders, personal squabbles among the nobles, occasional battles in the country and frequent battles on the border – all barren events in which we trace little development or progress among the people.[6]

Emphasis in the teaching of history was thus overwhelmingly placed on Great Britain and the British Empire, with Scotland not even viewed as a repository of moral examples.

The last two decades of the century seem to have been a low point in the teaching of Scottish history; an article in the *Glasgow Herald* in 1907 remarked that 'the unsatisfactory condition of the teaching of history is vouched for from too many quarters not to be a reality'.[7] Something of a renaissance in the subject, however, began in 1907 when the SED issued a memorandum insisting that Scottish history

[5] R.D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People 1750-1918* (Oxford, 1995), 213-5
[6] James Scotland, *The History of Scottish Education*, vol. 2, *From 1872 to the Present Day* (London, 1969), 78
[7] John S. Samuel, *Scottish History: Its Importance as a Scientific Study and Its Place in the Curriculum of Scottish Schools* (Edinburgh, 1907), 2

should be fundamental to the curriculum at all levels[8], and the end of our period was marked by the production of texts aimed at both junior and senior standards, in which P. Hume Brown and other prominent academics participated. Overall, the study of Scottish history during the nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries thus appears as something of a patchwork, with many students receiving no exposure to the subject at all, some participating only at elementary levels, and some doubtless coming away from the experience with a fairly solid grounding. The last category, however, must be regarded as the smallest of the three.

The upshot of all of this is that the content of the textbooks in the nineteenth century is not a completely reliable guide to what, if anything, ordinary Scottish students carried away with them on the subject of their country's history. The texts do, however, provide a good guide to what text writers saw fit to tell them; and enough survive to provide an idea of what was being said in every decade but one (the 1830s) and to represent the views of several portions of the Scottish ideological spectrum. A total of twenty-four texts were found in major Scottish repositories, along with three histories of Scotland for children which lacked the usual apparatus of chapter-end quizzes but may have formed part of school libraries.

The authors of the texts were for the most part lay and professional. Only three of them – four if we include William Robertson, whose history was epitomised for use as a text -- were clergymen, and none of their works dated from later than 1860. Two were employees of the National Library of Scotland, writing a century apart. One, P. Hume Brown, was a professional historian, most of whose works were aimed

[8] R.D. Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 218-19

at an adult audience. The remainder were involved in the business of education, sometimes partly as teachers, sometimes as full-time writers of texts. Few of the latter limited themselves to writing history, and none to Scottish history. The texts for the most part usually began with the Romans and terminated in 1707 or 1746; some of those purporting to bring the story to the present day in fact provided only a brisk summary of the events of the previous century. The emphasis in the texts was mostly political and military, with occasionally forays into social or literary matters, while economic history was present only in the most rudimentary form. The perspective was entirely Lowland; Highlanders came into the narrative as brigands or supporters of Jacobitism, but rarely in any other capacity.

The making of textbooks was an infant industry in Scotland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and some efforts in the period 1803-1850 were quite inept. One particularly unproductive technique, used in eighteenth-century England by Oliver Goldsmith and frequently imitated in Scotland, was to take a work written for adults and abridge it for the classroom. Thus William Robertson's history, clumsily titled *The History of Scotland Abridged after the Manner of Goldsmith's England &c &c &c for the Use of Schools*, appeared in 1805, abridged to 287 pages but otherwise unchanged. Robertson's was at least a respectable work of history; the same cannot be said of a work by Alexander Bower, which appeared in abridged form as *The History of Scotland, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time, Abridged for the Use of Children* in about 1810. Bower, who was Assistant Librarian at the University of Edinburgh, devoted the first third of his text to detailing the careers of Fordun's spurious kings, and the rest of his account, if marginally more accurate, was so slender as to be of little use. A quite different type of bad textbook was *A*

Catechism of the History of Scotland, which appeared on the market about 1820. Authored by a writer identified only as 'A Friend of Youth', the text was written entirely in question-and-answer format, in the manner of a previous production of the author on the history of England. Obviously an Englishman himself, the author progressively lost interest in his subject after the Wars of Independence, and by the time he had reached the later Stuarts contented himself by declaring that nothing of interest had happened in Scotland in the reign of Charles II, and nothing in that of James VII either.[9] The whole production was over in seventy pages.

With this kind of competition, it is not altogether surprising that the first respectable effort in the field made a huge success. Robert Simpson's *The History of Scotland from the Earliest Period*, originally published in 1808, had reached a remarkable thirtieth edition by 1853, and can be found in multiple versions in Scottish repositories. Simpson is unknown to biography, but he may have been a professional writer of texts; his other recorded works were an *Introduction to Collections for Schools* (1828) and editions of some of Goldsmith's abridgements. His text was generally thoughtful and well written, although, like most of the texts from the first half of the century, it made no concessions in style or vocabulary to its youthful audience. It was Protestant in tone and generally sympathetic to Presbyterianism: Knox was praised, James VI condemned for his interference with the church, the National Covenant celebrated, the later Covenanters justified, Lauderdale, Claverhouse and the other villains hissed, Popery deplored. Occasionally Providence

[9] 'A Friend of Youth', *A Catechism of the History of Scotland, Containing Every Important Event Relating to that Country, from its Invasion by Agricola, to the Present Time* (London, c. 1820), 67-8

was invoked as an explanatory tool, notably on the defeat of the Spanish Armada.[10] Simpson was not, however, absolutely rigid in his Presbyterianism. He was prepared to extend the benefit of the doubt to Mary while denying it to her half-brother, Moray; he gave a balanced and partially favourable verdict on James VI, and extended sympathy to his son on the occasion of his execution; more remarkably, he did as much for Montrose. He was often critical of the reformed clergy in their more outrageous moments, as when they were raising riots in Edinburgh in 1596 or persuading Leslie to take his forces down the hill at Dunbar in 1650. On most major points, however, his narrative was a Presbyterian account, and this was particularly so in his chapters on the Covenanting period.

One other text which appeared during Simpson's life was equally serious, although much less successful. Alexander Stewart's *The History of Scotland from the Roman Invasion, till the Suppression of the Rebellion in 1745* (Edinburgh, 1826), is of interest in part because of its authorship. Stewart (1781-1862) was the very type of a Moderate clergyman. Licensed by the Presbytery of St Andrews in 1805, he spent fifteen years in the wilderness before being presented to the parish of Douglas by Archibald, Lord Douglas, and his gratitude to his patron was acknowledged in a dedication at the opening of this text. Once ensconced in his parish he was able to devote his copious leisure time to authorship of academic works, of which the first was a biography of the founder of Moderatism, William Robertson; later publications included two successful geography texts.[11] In composing his history text he followed the path laid out by Robertson and Cook. Queen Mary was treated with kindness but

[10] Robert Simpson, *The History of Scotland form the Earliest Period, With a Continuation to the Close of the Year 1849*...30th Edition (Edinburgh, 1853), 120

gently reproved for her errors. The Reformation was welcomed, but the reformed clergy were frequently chided for their intemperate zeal and intolerance, particularly when their behaviour seemed to constitute a threat to public order. He sided with the Presbyterians in their later struggles with the Stuarts, but not without cavils here and there, and some sympathy for history's losers, such as Charles I. The history probably suffered from being too adult in its presentation; Stewart made no concession to younger audiences at all, save for the insertion of review questions at the end of each chapter. For whatever reason the text seems not to have been reprinted.

A final text from the first half of the century was that of Henry White (1812-1880), a professional writer of texts of some ability. His *History of Scotland for Junior Classes* (1850) generally followed the pattern set by Simpson and Stewart, if with a somewhat more secular tone. The Reformation and Presbyterianism were generally approved, and the actions of the Stuarts in respect to religious matters condemned; but some sympathy was accorded Mary and her two successors, and from time to time attention was drawn to matters that traditional Presbyterian writers preferred to ignore.

> The Covenanting party was now supreme in Scotland; and it is to be regretted that its victory was not attended by toleration and humanity. These were virtues, however, at that day little known among people of any class of opinions...and much sacrifice of life, both among the great and the obscure, followed the victory of Philiphaugh.[12]

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[11] Hugh Scott, ed., *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* (Edinburgh, 1920), vol. iii, 303-4

[12] Henry White, *History of Scotland for Junior Classes.* Sixth edition (Edinburgh, 1850), 100

As with his predecessors, however, White reverted to the established account of the later Covenanters when they appeared; boot and thumbkin were duly displayed, and the murder of Archbishop Sharp described as 'a startling example of the effect of arbitrary and tyrannical government in undermining all morality and true religion'.[13] For the most part, however, his text was reasonably even-handed in tone, while presenting a picture sufficiently Presbyterian to win the approval of the *United Presbyterian Magazine*.[14] Like Simpson's text earlier in the century, White's seems to have become something of a staple in the educational system, achieving a thirteenth edition by 1870.

By this time another, and quite different, school of text writers had established itself. The first text from the Non-Intrusionist / Free Church corner of the Scottish intellectual firmament, one N. Leitch's *A History of Scotland, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Earliest Period to the Present Day*, appeared in 1841. Leitch was a teacher in a parish school at Greenock, the author of several other textbooks, and clearly, from the positions he took in his text, the sort of teacher who would be staffing the Free Church school system when it was established three years later.

> The Assembly of 1638 may be regarded as one of the noblest efforts ever made by the Church to assert her intrinsic independence, and the sole Headship of our Lord Jesus Christ.[15]

[13] *Ibid.*, 121
[14] *Ibid.*, inside cover.
[15] N. Leitch, *A History of Scotland, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Earliest Period to the Present Day...for the Use of Schools* (Glasgow, 1841), 211

While not a complete exemplar of the Free Church school, Leitch's narrative did convey its essential thrust: that the central struggle in Scottish history was that of church versus state, and that in this struggle the Presbyterians were always right, and the erastians always wrong. It was the first surviving history text to do so.

Notwithstanding Leitch's contribution, there was by the following decade evident concern in some Free Church circles at the lack of a text that would tell the story of Scotland the way that it needed to be told. In the view of Hugh Miller, most existing texts were nothing but 'overgrown partizan pamphlets, written apparently with the design of vilifying everything peculiarly Scottish, and holding up to ridicule and contempt all that Scotland most reveres and cherishes in her history'.[16] Great was Miller's satisfaction, then, at the appearance in 1849 of Thomas Thomson's *The History of Scotland for the Use of Schools.*

> A great desideratum has been supplied by the publication of this truly admirable history of Scotland. Mr. Thomson identified himself fearlessly with what is good and great in the nation's history....We unhesitatingly affirm that Mr. Thomson's history ...is the only school history of Scotland that deserves the name, or that ought to be tolerated in our national schools.[17]

Whether the students who were exposed to Thomson's text experienced the same level of satisfaction is more than doubtful. Written totally without regard to the youth of its readers or of any incipient interest they might have had in balance or readability, the text was a grindingly tiresome vindication of the Free Church's position on Scottish history. Almost half of it was dedicated to the critical period

[16] *The Witness*, 1 June 1849
[17] *Ibid.*

between the Reformation and the Revolution; of the former, Thomson declared at the outset that a 'war of religion had commenced, a war between truth and error, in which no compromise could be admitted, for error would be all or nothing',[18] and provided a correspondingly one-sided narrative of the period. A similar spirit pervaded his account of the following century, which was almost entirely given over to church-state relations, truth residing exclusively with the former. Thomson's text disappeared after its second printing in 1856. Later in life he made use of his researches to produce *A History of the Scottish People from the Earliest Times*, described in Chapter Five above,[19] published long after his death with some measure of success. Thomson was of great use to his church as an editor and historian, but the writing of text books does not appear to have been his forte.

The final Free Church text managed to convey most of the messages that were found in Thomson's effort, but without the stylistic baggage that made them so unpalatable. The Free Church minister George Mackenzie's *History of Scotland* (1861) has been described in Chapter Five.[20] The text book on which it was based appeared a year earlier under the title *Our Country*. It was unabashedly aimed at children, or to be precise, at boys: 'A book to teach boys history must be a book pleasant for boys to read. Wanting the quality of readableness, it wants everything'.[21] Mackenzie's guide in the pursuit of this laudable objective was Carlyle; his book was full of descriptive set pieces, often written with great brio, with a particular fondness for battle scenes. No one reading Mackenzie's text could ever be in doubt about where his sympathies

[18] Thomas Thomson, *The History of Scotland for the Use of Schools*. Second edition (Edinburgh, 1856), 242
[19] Chapter 5, 79-80
[20] *Ibid.*, 78-9
[21] James Mackenzie, *Our Country: A History of Scotland for the Young* (London, 1870), iii

lay, for his work was every bit as one-sided as that of Thomson, and with fewer claims to accuracy. But he knew enough not to try to involve his young readers too deeply in theological argumentation. His picture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was marked by stark divisions between Protestants and Catholics, Presbyterians and erastian Stuart rulers; having clearly established, however, who was right and who wrong, he preferred to cut to the battle scene.

> The Highlanders, with wild yells, charged up to the walls, which were so low that the fight was hand to hand over them. Some neighbouring houses, whose windows looked down upon the enclosure, were occupied by Highland marksmen. The Cameronians stood their ground immovably. These were men that knew how to die![22]

Mackenzie's text was reprinted in 1870 and 1872, by which time the Free Church school system, where his text doubtless found a natural home, was coming to an end.

Andrew Drummond and James Bulloch, in their standard work on the church in Victorian Scotland, have made clear that the 1872 act marked neither the beginning nor the end of the decline in the influence of the church on education; that process had in fact been under way since the Act of 1803 and was not completed until 1905, when the churches ceased to run the normal schools.[23] Having said that, it is apparent from the content of the raft of texts that appeared in the aftermath of the 1872 act that an important perceptual boundary had been crossed. None of these works can be described as strongly Presbyterian in its tone; one writer, William

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[22] *Ibid.*, 260

[23] Andrew L. Drummond and James Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland 1843-1874* (Edinburgh, 1975), 100-101

Stewart Ross, writing in 1872 about the origin of the Reformation, refused even to endorse Protestantism:

> The Church is alleged at this point to have been at this period dissolute and wicked. The allegation likely contains much truth, and not unlikely is at the same time much exaggerated. And since becoming Protestant to acquire acres is not the most sublime thing in religious history, it is difficult for any unbiassed writer to extol the one party and declaim against the other.[24]

None of the other authors went that far; their books were, in fact, not unsympathetic to Presbyterianism, particularly when it was under attack, as during the later Covenanting period. But there was no attempt to construct a case for Presbyterianism; and discussion of things religious tended to be non-committal in tone, as befitted texts for a school system which now formally encompassed a number of religious denominations.

The most striking exhibition of this altered attitude was the issue in 1873 of *The Royal School History of Scotland* by Nelson and Company, the firm which previously had been the publisher of George Mackenzie's *Our Country*. In the preface to their new text, they explained that a new day had dawned in the in the educational world:

> In preparing this work, the Editor has had in view the National System of Education now existing in Scotland. The book will be found free from anything that would render it unsuited for general use in mixed schools.[25]

The greater part of the book was in fact taken from Mackenzie's text, of which Nelson evidently still held copyright. But the editors were as good as their word;

[24] William Stewart Ross, *History of Scotland, from the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Edinburgh and London, 1872), 152

they had eliminated almost everything from Mackenzie of a sectarian nature, leaving his crowd-pleasing descriptive set pieces, intercut with deadpan summaries of major events by another hand. It was not, of course, possible to sanitise this most partisan of historians completely; phrases such as 'The Marquis of Argyle, great as a Highland prince, but greater far as a Christian patriot'[26] remained in the text, and made the author's allegiance plain. But there was nothing about strictly theological issues, no Culdees, and no Cameronians, no books of discipline. One imagines that Mackenzie, never at a loss for words, might have had some very harsh comments on the manner in which his work had been used; but he had died in 1869.

The nature of the texts written during this period was also clearly affected by the imposition of the SED's code in 1873, which as mentioned above limited Scottish history instruction to Standards IV and V, and in 1886 to Standard III. The students for Scottish history in most of this period would have been in the ten to fourteen age range, and the eight surviving texts from the 1872-1885 period all seem to have been written with this in mind. Most were a fairly straightforward summary of political and military events, with familiar stories and incidents, which the authors clearly believed would be of greater interest to students than discussions of issues raised at the Reformation. Some went to the opposite extreme; Francis Watt, who wrote *History of Scotland from Robert the Bruce to the Union of the Crowns* (1885) for W&R Chambers, filled his short text with accounts of major battles on Scottish soil, including some lesser names like Homildon Hill and Harlaw. John Knox was favourably treated, but in a few paragraphs; Kinmont Willie received three pages.

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[25] James Mackenzie *et al.*, *The Royal History of Scotland* (London, 1873), iii
[26] *Ibid.*, 243

Some sectarian biases certainly remained. Presbyterianism was part of the culture, and was a constituent of many of the reference books which the authors of texts would have been using. Thus men like Knox, Moray and Melville loom rather larger in some texts than they might otherwise have done; Jenny Geddes (who continued to make appearances in these texts into the twentieth century) was always thought to have done something commendable; the Covenanters of 1638 were unequivocally in the right, and had the support of the nation; and the later Covenanters were never spoken of as anything but victims.[27] In the 1880s Episcopalians in Edinburgh lodged protests against the treatment of the seventeenth century in textbooks used by the Edinburgh School Board. In fact, the surviving texts of the period did far less violence to the Episcopalian world view than those of an earlier era; but the logic of the changes introduced in 1872 gave them a moral right to complain. R.D. Anderson suggests that the question of sectarian bias was one of the factors involved in the decision of the Scottish Educational Board in 1890 to withdraw from prescribing a history curriculum, and leave teachers to devise their own.[28]

That decision seems to have had a telling influence on the Scottish text book industry. From the next seventeen years only two texts survive, the first, Lionel Lyde's *A History of Scotland for Junior Classes* (London, 1892), isolated from the second by a dozen years. Lyde was an established educationalist and the author of over twenty texts, most of them on geography, 1892-1935. His text is rather better than most of its post-1872 predecessors; it was also, interestingly, more openly

[27] Thus for example, from Margaret Macarthur, *History of Scotland* (London, 1873), 151: 'A time of cruel slaughter followed, in which Claverhouse was the chief persecutor.'

Presbyterian, despite carefully-worded concessions to Episcopalians and tolerance. The importance of the Reformation was again stressed, Knox was lionised, James VI vilified, and Roman Catholics once again termed 'papists'. Anecdotes that showed up in earlier Presbyterian works, such as that of James VII watching the torture of Covenanters, were revived. Finally, the contributions of Presbyterianism to Scotland's culture were remembered: 'There cannot be much amiss in a system of education and religion which has given to the world, as the gift of Scotland, the name of David Livingstone, the factory boy'.[29] Lyde's work was reprinted in 1896 and 1901, a period when reprints of the other texts had ceased.

The second text, David Watson Rannie's *A Student's History of Scotland* (1904), also stressed the relationship between Scottish culture and religion, but with a more ecumenical twist. Rannie was an Oxford scholar and author of works on English literature and the English constitution, and in his account of Scotland's history he was determined to attack the barriers of prejudice between Episcopalian and Presbyterian: 'I have tried to treat Scottish Protestantism as one of the most remarkable and powerful manifestations that multifarious force, the Christian spirit, and as one of the chief builders of a great nationality'.[30] What followed was an intelligent text in which the effects of religious intolerance were decried, but the importance of Protestantism, and in particular its Presbyterian form, to the culture of Scotland was never scanted.

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[28] Anderson, *Education and the Scottish People*, 214-5
[29] Lionel Lyde, *A History of Scotland for Junior Classes* (London, 1892), 183
[30] David Watson Rannie, *A Student's History of Scotland* (London, 1904), vi

As indicated above, Scottish history was established as a core curriculum subject by a memorandum of the SED in 1907. Two pairs of texts appeared shortly afterwards. The Edinburgh firm of Oliver and Boyd brought out a senior history by P. Hume Brown, *A History of Scotland for Schools*, and a junior history by H.W. Meikle, *The Story of Scotland for Junior Classes*, both in 1907. Two years later, Blackie & Sons of Glasgow responded with *An Intermediate History of Scotland* by T. Douglas Dunn, and *Our Country's Story*, for younger children, by David Campbell and David Frew. All these texts may be said to follow broadly in the paths of their two immediate predecessors, in that they all acknowledged the significance of the Reformation and Presbyterianism, even if they declined to defend the Kirk at every point in its history. Hume Brown, whose earlier works included a biography of John Knox, found reasons to praise figures such as Melville and Henderson and activities such as the signing of the covenant and the Glasgow Assembly of 1638, as well as the more commonly lauded behaviour of the later Covenanters. Of the Glasgow writers, T. Douglas Dunn, who was Inspector of Schools for the Indian Educational Service, wrote a consistently Presbyterian account, while Campbell and Frew, if more critical of the Presbyterians and much more respectful of James VI than most writers, nonetheless hewed to the Presbyterian line on critical points, such as the Reformation and the later Covenanters.

Some note may be made here of three non-texts written for children during the period, which may conceivably have found their way into school libraries. They differed widely from each other. Anne Rodwell's *The Child's First Step to Scottish History* (1846) was written for very young children, with material derived from Scott, Tytler and a few other sources. Unlike any of the textbook authors, she was an

outright mariolater, and much of her story was taken up with commiseration with the innocent queen. Frederica Rowan, author of *History of Scotland* (1851), was another who thought Mary innocent, and her history was less friendly to the Presbyterians than any of the texts. Margaret Oliphant's *A History of Scotland for the Young* (London, 1896), was a well-written and intelligent narrative by one of Scotland's most prolific authors, full of the personal opinions of its author. She quoted Scott often and, like him, had some sympathy for most parties in Scotland's conflicts.

The observable pattern among the serious texts considered here (leaving aside the abridgements of adult works and texts by English writers) is thus of strongly Presbyterian, though not uncritical, texts during the first fifty years of the century; the emergence of the uncompromising Free Church school at mid-century; the appearance of a rash of brief and largely secular texts for junior classes in the wake of the Education Act of 1872, and a return to a somewhat more Presbyterian, if sometimes critical, outlook in the period 1892 to 1909. While some of the latter texts showed awareness of the views of such hostile contemporaries as Andrew Lang and William Stephen, and occasionally shared them, there was no text in this period which constituted an outright attack on the Presbyterian view of history. The first such surviving text, that of the University of Aberdeen Professor of History and Episcopalian sympathiser C. Sanford Terry, did not appear until 1921.[31]

From the point of view of the Presbyterian interpretation of Scottish history, the texts of the three Non-Intrusionist and Free Church writers are obviously of particular

interest, and it is worth looking at their most salient characteristics in some detail. They were, to begin with, providential, the very quality that M'Crie had found lacking in the historical works of his day. For Leitch, the interpretation of the ways of Providence was indeed his object as an historian.

> it is certainly the duty of him who brings the facts of history before the youthful mind, to represent them as dispositions of unerring Providence and deduce from them such instructions as may serve to exhibit the perfection of the Deity, and to enforce those duties which man is under obligation to perform.[32]

He carried out his programme with a series of little homilies at the end of each chapter, as for example on the failure of Edward Bruce in Ireland:

> The truth is...that it was not the will of Providence that the conquests of Bruce should extend to Ireland. Whatever is attempted contrary to the designs of Heaven, whether in the affairs of kingdoms or of individuals, can never be attended with success.[33]

The other two writers were not as presumptuous, but Providence was regularly evoked at critical turning points of Scottish history, and there was never a doubt that the story they are telling had, in its main outline at any rate, a divine author.

A more salient aspect of their writing, however, was a virulent and pervasive anti-Catholicism. Indeed, 'Catholics' as such rarely appear in any of the three texts; they were Papists, their religion was Papistry, Popery or Romanism, and it was wrong.

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[31] C. Sanford Terry, *A Short History of Scotland* (Cambridge, 1921)
[32] Leitch, *History*, Preface
[33] *Ibid.*, 88

> Gross and childish fables for the pure word of life; saints and idols for the one Mediator; the bread-god for the Redeemer; the spider's web of man's works for the glorious robe of Christ's righteousness; the mummeries of superstition for the worship which Jehovah requires; -- what a hideous imposture it was with which our rugged forefathers were abused during the long ages of their bondage to the mystical Babylon![34]

Wrong though it may have been, it was powerful. Catholic plots abounded, striving to sabotage the stirrings of reform wherever they appeared, and papal agents were everywhere. Here is Mackenzie explaining the geopolitics of the murder of the Regent Moray in 1570:

> The triumph of the popish cause in Scotland was deemed certain, now that the regent, the bulwark of Protestantism, was out of the way. And then, with Protestantism down, and Popery victorious in Scotland, Scotch sea-ports could be used to introduce French and Spanish troops for the attack of England. By sea and land the forces of the united papal power could at once assail England, and destroy Protestantism in its island stronghold. This was the calculation.[35]

James VII was engaged in a similar manoeuvre at the time of his overthrow. Indeed, there was no term on the threat from the Roman Catholics; it would last as long as Rome, and the only defence lay in eternal vigilance. Leitch cautioned as much in his account of the introduction of the clerical innovations of 1637:

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[34] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 177
[35] *Ibid.*, 204

> as...they indicated a return to Popery, it is no wonder that the people beheld them with alarm, and took the first opportunity of testifying against them. It were well that the present generation were animated with a similar zeal, and that the growing prevalence of Popery were regarded with less complacency. Popery is all that it used to be, and though now compelled to disguise its noxious principles it is as much to be dreaded and opposed as in the day of John Knox.[36]

Leitch urged his students to pray for Catholics; James Mackenzie, the author of *Our Banner and its Battles*, made no such suggestion.

But Papistry was not the original or essential religion of the Scottish people. That religion was that of the Culdees, always identified with the order established by St Columba on Iona. These men were not ordinary monks; their monasteries were seminaries for teaching and not places of seclusion, and they taught a simple form of Christianity derived from the Bible:

> The form of worship was equally primitive and scriptural, and therefore in striking contrast to that formal ritual, and those gorgeous ceremonies which had begun everywhere to disfigure the Christian Church. With regard to their ecclesiastical polity they seem to have been very nearly assimilated to, if not wholly identified with, presbyterianism. All the brethren were equal, without a prelate to rule over them.[37]

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[36] Leitch, *History*, 208
[37] Thomson, *History of Scotland*, 6

So it was that when the reformers drafted the First Book of Discipline in 1560, they were restoring 'the simple Presbyterianism of the Culdees'[38] rather than creating something previously unknown.

That restoration was the greatest event in Scottish history, 'Scotland's morning' in Mackenzie's phrase;[39] its progress was immediate and almost universal among the Scottish people. And if the Reformation was Scotland's greatest event, John Knox was the greatest Scotsman. He was without fear; his predictions always came true, and he never made an error. Beside him were other lesser Protestant heroes, like Moray and Andrew Melville, and a catalogue of Protestant martyrs, each given an elaborate farewell. Patrick Hamilton, the first of them, will serve as a model:

> having arrived at the place where the fire was prepared, he put off his gown, coat and bonnet, and gave them to a favourite servant, saying 'these will not profit me in the fire, yet they will do thee some good'...in a little after the fire was kindled, and the noble martyr died, exclaiming, 'how long, O Lord, shall darkness overwhelm this realm?...' And ended by praying, with Stephen, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.'[40]

Six other martyrs are given similar closing scenes in the three books, while the death of Knox himself is allotted three pages in Thomson's text.

More than just the greatest event in Scottish history, the Reformation was the *defining* event. Presbyterianism made Scotland what it is. From God's own word,

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[38] *Ibid.*, 250
[39] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 176

the reformers drew 'the form and pattern of the Church to be set up in Scotland -- the Church which was to teach unborn generations the way of life, and to prove the main instrument in moulding the entire national character'.[41] Within only thirteen years of the first General Assembly, marvels had been achieved:

> The sturdy preaching of the ministers was training the people to the habit of independent thinking. The parish schools were spreading education and intelligence. The people knew their rights and felt their strength. The middle classes were rising in importance. Public opinion had been called into existence as a mighty power.[42]

Although a great Scottish event, the Reformation was made with the help of the English, and the historians were conscious of the importance of co-operation between the two Protestant nations in defence of their faith, however much it went against the grain of their previous relationship:

> The protestants of Scotland must join with protestant England, to gain a victory compared with which Bannockburn was of little account...This principle must be kept in mind, when we read of alliances that seem unnatural between Scots and English in the advancement of a common cause.[43]

All three of the historians were even willing to spare some good words for Queen Elizabeth, so often an object of hostility in contemporary Scottish history because of her treatment of Mary Stuart and subsequent meddling in Scottish affairs.

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[40] Leitch, *History,* 150
[41] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 193
[42] *Ibid.*, 207
[43] Thomson, *History of Scotland,* 219

No such charity was extended to the later Stuarts, all deemed enemies of the faith. Comments on the characters of the monarchs perhaps will give some flavour of their interpretation:

> The behaviour of James [VI] on receiving tidings of his mother's death was in accordance with that selfishness and coldness of heart which formed the chief elements of his character.[44]

> What wonder that an exasperated people begin to demand the punishment of delinquents, and of the CHIEF DELINQUENT? [Charles I][45]

> [Charles II] was, however, destitute of every good principle. Incapable of friendship or of gratitude, he was mean and treacherous, revengeful and cruel...he was a bad man and a bad king. Two papers, written in his hand, in defence of popery, were found in his closet.[46]

> when living in Edinburgh, he [James VII] often went to see the torture of the boot and the thumb-screw applied, as an amusement of his leisure hours. He was a bigoted papist, and a drivelling slave of Rome.[47]

The long struggle against these men was a constitutional as well as a religious one, and one in which the Scottish Presbyterians once again made common cause with

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[44] *Ibid.*, 307
[45] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 231
[46] Leitch, *History*, 240
[47] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 254

their English counterparts. Mackenzie, who derived some of his opinions as well as his writing style from Carlyle, was unable to perceive any important difference between Independency and Presbyterianism, and for this reason could not understand why the Presbyterians failed to welcome Oliver Cromwell to Scotland. Further, the struggling Scottish Presbyterians were consistently portrayed as representing the great majority of the Scottish people against their oppressors; the fractures and in-fighting that afflicted Presbyterian ranks from 1648 onwards were almost totally neglected, as were the significant numbers who preferred a mild episcopacy to continued warfare. Even in speaking of the persecution of the Covenanters of the era of James VII, who by this time were a minority within a minority, Thomson declared that 'the bulk of a nation is not to be destroyed so easily'.[48]

In describing the persecutions inflicted on the Covenanters, the authors, as one might expect, pulled out the stops. One quotation will suffice:

> what they drove at now [1684-5] really seemed to be to get rid of the Covenanters by killing them off. The soldiers had orders to go through the country and kill at their own absolute discretion. Every common soldier was judge of life or death over every person he met...Daily murder -- murder in the house and in the field, murder of men and women, of old and young, murder for very sport, -- this was the work of this horrid time.[49]

Claverhouse loomed very large in these accounts, as did the boot, the thumbscrew, the dungeons, the gallows, the dying speeches of martyrs, the story of John Brown,

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[48] Thomson, *History of Scotland*, 383
[49] Mackenzie, *Our Country* 251

the random executions on the road. Finally, however, there was one last glorious martyr's speech from James Renwick, and all was over.

Providential, constitutionalist, Protestant and anti-Stuart, the Presbyterians clearly occupied the heartland of the whig interpretation of history. Thomson and Mackenzie, of course, were prepared to go beyond the standard English account; both later expounded the Scottish whig variant in their adult histories, and they offered a potted version of it in their texts. The whole process of constitutional development, Mackenzie pointed out, started in Scotland.

> The tumult which began with the throwing of the cabbage-woman's stool was not laid till the king's head rolled on the scaffold. It was the beginning of a struggle which lasted fifty years, and by which the glorious heritage of British freedom was secured.[50]

Thomson said much the same thing: the National Covenant was Scotland's Magna Charta, and 'the death knell of the despotism of the Stuarts'.[51] Both authors went on to interpret the parliamentary alliance of 1643 as an affirmation that the liberties of England were bound up with those of the Scots, and to describe in somewhat inflated terms the role of the Scottish army in preserving those liberties. With the Restoration 'the whole labour of achieving civil and religious liberty was to be undergone anew'.[52] It was that labour which the 350 Covenanting ministers took up when they walked out of their manses in 1662, and those freedoms for which the Covenanting thousands suffered until the liberation of 1688. When the Scottish parliament chose William to reign in Scotland in 1689, it meant the expulsion of the Stuarts from the

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[50] *Ibid.*, 222
[51] Thomson, *History of Scotland,* 337

island of Great Britain; and the island's last battle for freedom was fought in Scotland, at Dunkeld, by Scottish Covenanters.

Thus when the constitutional and religious settlement achieved in 1690 was the product of a British struggle in which the Scottish contribution was of at least comparable importance to the English. Now all that remained was to safeguard that settlement through the union of the two peoples. That union was of course achieved by disgraceful means, but the very squalor surrounding the event was proof of its providential character.

> What the valour and policy of centuries had failed to effect, was finally achieved by the bribery and intrigues of a few third-rate politicians. Can we fail in such a result to see the interference of a more than human power directing these worthless agencies, to make the nations become one?[53]

Thus the story ended, with Great Britain, by the Grace of God, united, Protestant, and free.

Parts of this narrative were accepted, in some measure or other, by most of the other texts discussed here. But there is invariably a marked difference in tone, with all the other authors implicitly accepting the possibility that good and evil might be distributed among parties to historical disputes, where the Free Churchmen insisted on an exclusive allocation of the former quality to the Presbyterians and the latter to their opponents. James VI was one of the great beneficiaries of this different

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[52] *Ibid.*, 363
[53] *Ibid.*, 408

outlook; always depicted as utterly worthless in Free Church accounts, he usually emerged from the other accounts with at least a few achievements to his credit. Hume Brown's tempered encomium was typical: 'He had many faults as a king, but at least he never neglected his duties as some kings have done'.[54] Charles I usually was allowed to have been a good husband and father, and occasionally given credit for holding constructive ideas; and if little good could be found to say of Charles II, some writers at least pointed out that his mistreatment by the Covenanting ministers might have had something to do with his subsequent conduct. His brother James, to be sure, was pretty much beyond the pale.

At the same time a good deal of criticism was directed at the Presbyterian ministers, even by strongly sympathetic writers such as Simpson and Lyde. Most of it was directed at their intolerance and, more particularly, their will to power. David Watson Rannie, writing in 1904, made a point about Melville and his contemporaries that had been stressed in recent years in the works of Andrew Lang and William Stephen:

> Melville and his ministers were really aiming at more than the mere independence of the Church. They were aiming at its *supremacy* on the grounds that the Church represented God and that man must obey God.[55]

Whether or not they phrased it in this manner, many of Rannie's predecessors had frequently expressed concerns about the ministers overreaching themselves at points in Scottish history. 'The reformed ministers', wrote Margaret Macarthur in 1873,

[54] P. Hume Brown, *A History of Scotland for Schools* (Edinburgh, 1907), vol.ii, 103
[55] David Watson Rannie, *A Student's History*, 176

> fancied they had succeeded, not only to the Pope's right of dictation in all matter, public and private, but to the lands of the Church as well. To neither of these claims could the Lords agree. They were as little inclined to submit to the tyranny of presbyters as to the tyranny of the Pope.[56]

Stewart, the Moderate Presbyterian writing in 1825, was particularly pained at the behaviour of the radicals in the Kirk in 1596, establishing a Standing Council of the Church, supporting Black's declination, raising a riot in Edinburgh:

> They entreated the nobles to remain in the city; they inflamed the people by violent invectives against their sovereign; and they laboured to unite the leaders of their party in an association for their mutual defence....The effect of this, as of all unsuccessful insurrections, was to confirm and increase the king's authority.[57]

The ministers of the Covenanting period were similarly targeted. Many writers mentioned their part in the loss of the battle of Dunbar in 1650. 'Ministers had the upper hand in everything', wrote the novelist Margaret Oliphant in her discussion of that incident, 'I am not one who is disposed to say a single word against the Church...But national affairs want large experience and much judgement'.[58] Some writers were more blunt than that; Dunbar seems to have been a sore spot. Generally, some criticisms of clerical behaviour could be found in almost every text discussed, save those of the Free Church school.

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[56] Margaret Macarthur, *History of Scotland* (London, 1873), 101

[57] Alexander Stewart, *The History of Scotland from the Roman Invasion, till the Suppression of the Rebellion in 1745, With Exercises for the Use of Schools, or of Private Students* (Edinburgh, 1826), 303

[58] Margaret Oliphant, *A History of Scotland for the Young* (London, 1896), 258

Other deviations from the Free Church line appeared only in some texts, becoming more evident as time passed. Providence, as an explanatory factor in history, appeared in the works of Simpson and Stewart, and in the three Free Church works, but not thereafter. The Culdees were introduced by the Free Churchmen; they made later, and rather more perfunctory, appearances in the texts of White (1850), Anderson (1874), and an anonymous book of historical readings published in 1884, and then were heard of no more. With them went a powerful piece of evidence for the essentially Presbyterian nature of the country.

That idea was further challenged by a rise in the value ascribed to tolerance. This change of tone was most strikingly evident, as indicated above, after the introduction of national education in 1872, which was followed by a generation of junior texts which dealt with religion by ignoring it as much as possible. With the appearance of more substantial texts from 1892, however, the question was again addressed, within the context of an ethos that required a more inclusive attitude to the two other groups, or to the Episcopalians at any rate. Lyde, writing in 1892, was happy to incorporate the Episcopalians in his vision of Scotland.

> Scotsmen are still proud to own in their presbyterian church the simplest, and in their Episcopal Church the oldest, form of worship in the island; and they are still prouder of the fact that, while standing fast to their own form, they tolerate every form of worship.[59]

Rannie (1904) also thought of the Episcopalians as brethren; and in his discussion of the indignities imposed on the Covenanters he included a little lecture on toleration: 'all such things are hateful to us because we have at last learned not to injure those

who think and believe differently from ourselves'.[60] That kind of message was found in several of the later texts.

Incorporating Catholics in the national history was rather a more difficult matter, and cannot be said to have been seriously attempted; Catholics were pretty much absent from the textbook history of Scotland after the reign of Mary. So too, however, was the great international Catholic-Protestant struggle that played so large a part in Free Church accounts, and the implicit stigmatisation of Scottish Catholics that came with it. In 1907 Hume Brown went as far as to note that 'there were cruel laws in Scotland against Roman Catholics as well as against Covenanters'[61], a point that had been made repeatedly by the Episcopalian writer William Stephen[62] and others, but thus far had made no appearance in the nation's texts. Brief sympathetic comments on Catholics also appeared in the works of Margaret Oliphant and Douglas Dunn, the former actually referring to the reigning Pope as 'a good and remarkable man'[63]. Probably more significant was a growing tendency on the part of the later text writers to call Catholics by their preferred name. The term 'Roman Catholics' began to be used in the 1870s, and Lyde's book, in 1892, saw the last use of the terms 'Papist' and 'Romish'.

A final, and striking, difference in world-view was the disappearance from later texts of the Scottish whig interpretation of the British constitution, a key part of Dr M'Crie's legacy to the Free Church and central to their picture of Scottish history.

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[59] Lyde, *History of Scotland*, 186
[60] Rannie, *A Student's History*, 248
[61] Brown, *A History of Scotland for Schools*, 184
[62] William Stephen, *History of the Scottish Church*. Vol. ii (Edinburgh, 1896), 195
[63] Oliphant, *A History of Scotland for the Young*, 176

What one finds in the non-Free Church texts is almost invariably some form of the English whig interpretation. William of Orange was a hero and the Revolution a boon; but it was an English revolution, from which the Scots benefited. 'England would not submit to the misgovernment of James', wrote Robert Anderson by way of explaining why it happened; 'So strongly did England object to these [James VII's] measures', wrote William Collier on the same subject, 'that William Prince of Orange was invited to take the throne'. Scottish opinion had simply been dropped from the equation. Elements of the theory could still be found in a few sources: Douglas Dunn in 1909 stressed the significance of the Scottish contribution at the beginning of the struggle:

> It is worth remembering that in the great struggle between the King and the English Parliament, a struggle which makes the history of the seventeenth century so important, the Scots set the example of resistance to royal power. All through this struggle the Scots assisted those Englishmen who were on the side of 'constitutional freedom'.[64]

But even Dunn, in his account of the English parliament at the union, made clear who had been the major partner in the constitutional struggle:

> Scottish members of parliament who went up to London to take their part in the united assembly of Great Britain were sharing in the privileges of a much greater institution than Scotland had ever known. The Parliament of England had fought for its rights against many a tyrant; it was the true friend of the people...[65]

[64] Dunn, *An Intermediate History of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1909), 112
[65] *Ibid.*, 152

Statements of this kind are very reminiscent of the views of William Robertson and Malcolm Laing over a century earlier.[66] The central narrative of the Free Church school on the subject, that of a fifty-year struggle for constitutional liberty in which the Scottish people played at least as important part as did the English, had disappeared.

With these very salient differences between the Free Church account of Scottish history and that of it successors, there can be no doubt that Hugh Miller and the other stalwarts of the Free Church would have denied that the post-1872 texts could be described as Presbyterian at all. This is not to say, however, that they would have been right, for a good deal that was Presbyterian remained. In the first place, most of the texts, and all those from 1892 onwards, accepted that the Reformation represented a vital turning point for Scotland. 'The most important period in Scottish history', wrote Douglas Dunn in 1909, 'is that which lies between the Battle of Solway Moss in 1542 and the return of Mary Stewart in 1561'; in Rannie's words, it was 'the most important period of Scottish history, because it is the period during which the Scottish nation as we now think of it was *made*'.[67] While the theology of the Reformation was very often scanted, the tone in which the story was told almost invariably suggested a development that was favourable to the Scottish nation.

The writers also endorsed Presbyterian heroes. Knox, despite criticisms and outright denigration in the works of Hill Burton, William Stephen, Andrew Lang and others, was without exception very favourably treated in these texts. 'Great men lived hard

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[66] See, for example, William Robertson, *History of Scotland during the Reigns of Queen Mary and James VI* (Edinburgh, 1759), 389

lives of self-sacrifice and of danger in order to bring about the establishment of Protestantism', wrote Douglas Dunn, 'Of these great men John Knox was undoubtedly the greatest'.[68] Knox's plans for education were particularly admired, as was his personal bravery; the phrase from Calderwood, 'he never feared the face of man', made repeated appearances. There were references to his intolerance, but never without palliation: 'He, in accordance with the spirit of the age', wrote Robert Anderson in a typical formulation, 'had no idea of toleration; nor did he think that he was bound to grant it to those who never allowed it to others'.[69] Moray's reputation suffered in some accounts, as always, because of his treatment of his half-sister. But mariolatry was not as intense an impulse in the second half of the century as the first, and every account managed to find something good to say about him, usually including the stock phrase 'the good regent'. There were other beneficiaries. 'During this [James VI's] reign lived and wrought three of the greatest men Scotland has produced' wrote William F. Collier in his generally secular history in 1880, meaning Knox, Buchanan and Melville. The presence on the list of the name of Melville must be regarded as evidence of the lingering influence of Dr M'Crie; for it was M'Crie who had plucked this extremely disagreeable man from near-obscurity and declared him a hero; and a hero he remained, to Collier and some of his contemporaries.

Further, there is an implicit assumption in almost all the texts that the Presbyterian Church was, from its origin, the national church. A smooth and automatic transition to the Reformed faith at the Reformation was generally assumed; there was no

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[67] Rannie, *A Student's History*, 135

[68] Dunn, *An Intermediate History of Scotland*, 67

suggestion of a lingering portion of the population that was still Catholic at heart.[70] Nowhere was this attitude more evident than in the treatment of the National Covenant of 1638; here, the texts are as certain as the Free Church school that the covenant spoke with the voice of the Scottish people. Thus Lyde:

> One of their first acts was to summon a crowded meeting in Greyfriars Church, where all good Scotsmen signed a national covenant. This bound all who signed it to uphold the old religion with its pure and free gospel.[71]

'It is a doctrine of very great importance;' wrote Rannie in 1904, 'and to understand it, to enter into its spirit, and to realise form the list of people who signed it that its is the spirit and voice of the whole nation, is to understand the essence of Scottish history'.[72] That voice, he went on to explain, was Protestant, loyal, religious and Presbyterian.

The greatest unanimity, however, was on the subject of the later Covenanters. In every text, they were treated in pretty much the traditional way, as unoffending victims, heroes and martyrs. In text after text, the same elements reappeared: the outing of the minister, the use of the boot and the thumbkin after Rullion Green, the dying speeches, the killing time, the Solway Martyrs, John Brown of Priesthill, Bluidy Clavers.

> Claverhouse was the chief agent in carrying out the will of the government. How he did it has often been told. How men were chased over the moors; offered the Oath of Abjuration and then shot with bullets which they had

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[69] Robert Anderson, *History of Scotland* (London and Edinburgh, 1874), 132

[70] A later text, that of Sanford Terry, made that very point, suggesting that this proportion may have been as high as three-quarters of the population in 1560. See Terry, *A Short History of Scotland* (Cambridge, 1921), 111

[71] Lyde, *History of Scotland,* 161

> provided for their defence; how some were made to swear by having their means of livelihood seized, and their wives and children starved; how others who would not swear were hung or drowned.[73]

Almost a century earlier, Alexander Bower had written of the same period:

> every sort of insult, reproach, and the most dreadful sufferings, were inflicted upon those who would not renounce the presbytery and forswear the covenant....Neither age nor sex were spared; for helpless, aged, as well as young women, were hanged and drowned by their merciless persecutors.[74]

Remarkably little had changed. There were still no criticisms of the motives or behaviour of the Covenanters, and none of the writers found it necessary to point out that the Covenanters formed a small portion of the population even of the southern counties where they were found. Nor did any text include information about the history of Scotland during the reigns of Charles II and James VII that did not relate to their story. Finally, some of the writers who were not prepared to accept the Free Church dogma that the Covenanters were fighting for civil and religious liberty were nevertheless willing to go part of the way. 'His [James Renwick's] was the last life that was lost in the long struggle for freedom of worship in Scotland',[75] wrote the relatively secular Campbell and Frew. From whatever point of view the authors wrote, all accepted that the Covenanters were an inescapable part of the Scottish epic, and depicted them largely as the Free Church writers and their predecessors had done.

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[72] Rannie, *A Student's History,* 211
[73] *Ibid.*, 248
[74] Alexander Bower, *The History of Scotland, from the Earliest Period to the Present Time. Abridged for the Use of Children* (Edinburgh, [1810]), 108
[75] David Campbell and David Frew, *Our Country's Story,* 194

In one important respect the Free Church writers were both alike and unlike their successors: that is in the knotty question of attitudes towards Scottish nationalism and attitudes towards the union. The Free Churchmen favoured both; so, indeed, did all the writers. Every text described Bannockburn as a good thing, and every text that covered the period up to 1707 included encomiums on the union; nor was there any perceived contradiction between these attitudes. What distinguished the Free Church authors from many of the later ones was that they had a clear idea *why* Bannockburn was a good thing, given that it delayed the union for four centuries. In James Mackenzie's words, 'Had Bannockburn gone foul for Scotland, our whole history, national character, Church, and all that is peculiar to us as Scotsmen, had been shapen far otherwise'.[76] For Mackenzie the key word is 'Church': without Bannockburn there would have been no Presbyterians, and consequently nothing of value to distinguish Scotland from any other country. As it was, the qualities of character and intellect that Presbyterianism engendered made the Scotland a remarkable nation; and the union, when it came, would provide a platform worthy of her talents. Thomson agreed:

> Not only was her precarious liberty established...but her energies called forth, and a wide field provided for their exercise. It was now that she commenced a new national existence to which all her past career had been but a preparatory training, and accomplished in a few years the work of ages.[77]

That theme is missing from many of the texts that followed in the 1870s and 1880s, which tended to stress the benefits that Scotland received from the union rather than the contributions she made to it; thus the rather tepid formulation in the anonymous

[76] Mackenzie, *Our Country*, 102
[77] Thomson, *History of Scotland*, 408

book of readings of 1884: 'there can be no doubt that both countries, Scotland especially, have reaped from it very great benefits. From that event Scotland must date the great prosperity which she now enjoys'. [78]

That tone changed, however, with the 1892 text of the Presbyterian Lyde, who discussed Scotland's particular successes within union and empire at length, and concluded that they were due to education, 'and education has not been, as so largely in England, divorced from religion'.[79] Most of the later texts took up his point to some degree or other, at any rate in making reference to the extent of Scottish contributions. Hume Brown was particularly eloquent on the subject, beginning with the rhetorical 'Has she contributed as much to its greatness and prosperity as could be expected of her?',[80] and following with a roll of the names and achievements of Watt, Nasmyth, Rennie, Telford, Smith, Burns, Scott, Carlyle, and others, to make it clear that indeed she had. In this somewhat secularised way the cultural effects of Presbyterianism, in which Brown certainly believed, were implicitly acknowledged, even if the connection was never made as clear as the Free Churchmen would have done.

In this manner a grab-bag of Presbyterian attitudes was carried on in the later texts, though sometimes in secularised form, and never forming the kind of coherent system that existed for a short time in the Free Church school. From that point of view, much had indeed been lost. One thing made strikingly evident by consideration of the texts is the symbiosis that existed between the Free Church and the Scottish

[78] Anon., *Scottish History: A Reading-Book for Junior Classes* (London and Edinburgh, 1874), 186
[79] Lyde, *History of Scotland,* 186

whig interpretation of British constitutional history. In the broader world of general and ecclesiastical history, the interpretation remained current until the end of the Free Church in 1900, but sensibly diminished thereafter. In school texts it appeared only in those of the Free Church, and held its own only until the withdrawal of the Free Church from the education system in 1872. Even the most defensible part of it, the observation that the constitutional struggles of the seventeenth century began in Scotland and were subsequently forwarded by Scottish participation, was spelled out only in one text, that of the Presbyterian Dunn in 1909. While the interpretation had been embraced by members of the other two Presbyterian denominations, it is inescapable that the driving force behind it was the Free Church.

Finally, it must be stressed how much the Act of 1872 cost the Presbyterians in terms of influence over the telling of Scottish history. The formation of a national school system had been supported by the Free Church, and was doubtless inevitable. But Free Churchmen could not possibly have understood the extent of the difference that the new system would create, not so much in the secularisation of Scottish history – though that did happen to a degree – as in putting educational policy in the hands of men who did not believe that Scottish history was worth studying. Such an idea was far more directly opposed to the Free Church philosophy of history than anything produced by the writers of the post-1872 period. Whatever the shortcomings of the Free Church writers as Scottish historians, they never doubted that the story was worth telling. Scotland was the country which had experienced the most complete Reformation in Europe and whose national church embraced the purest Christian doctrine. That religious transformation had given rise to a people who were pious,

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[80] Brown, *A History of Scotland for Schools*, 574

hard-working, creative, freedom-loving and better educated than any other race in Europe. When Scotland entered the union, she did so as an equal, not a subordinate; and the qualities that derived from her religious identity made possible her remarkable contributions to Great Britain, the Empire and the world. If any country's history was worth writing, Scotland's was. The trivialisation and virtual abandonment of the teaching of Scottish history in the first three decades of national education was thus a more thorough-going affront to Presbyterians, and particularly those of the Free Church tradition, than anything written by secularising authors.

As it was, the modest revival in the study of Scottish history which occurred in the first decade of the twentieth century was certainly on balance favourable to the perpetuation of a generally Presbyterian picture of Scotland's past. Important pieces of the Presbyterian epic were missing, and not all the authors were themselves Presbyterians or warm sympathisers. But the accounts all acknowledged the importance of the Presbyterian legacy and treated it with respect; and the resulting narrative was compatible with a picture of Scotland as an essentially Presbyterian country, and one that was the better for it. In that somewhat diluted form, the Presbyterian interpretation of Scottish history was passed on to a new generation of scholars in the colder atmosphere of post-war Scotland.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The Presbyterian interpretation of Scottish history had its origin in the polemical literature of the Reformation and of the lengthy struggle between church and state that followed. Through the eighteenth century much of this literature faded from popular consciousness, but the broad outlines of the story were kept alive by the churches and in popular works which mostly concerned the struggles of the late seventeenth-century Covenanters. From the middle decades of the eighteenth century, however, new schools of history began to present alternative pictures of the nation's recent past. Some of these were at least sympathetic to Presbyterianism, as was *History of Scotland* (1759) by William Robertson, the head of the Church of Scotland's Moderate wing. Others were not; secularist writers such as David Hume and Malcolm Laing were in particular a source of accounts critical of Presbyterians.
Another strain in the historical writing of the period lay in attempts by writers to vindicate the memory of Mary Queen of Scots, a project that necessarily involved undermining the reputations of the Presbyterian heroes John Knox and the Earl of Moray, and indeed to some extent aspersing the Reformation itself. Biographies of the tragic queen formed a continuing sub-genre within Scottish historiography, but the works produced during the latter part of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had a particular virulence about them. Romantic sympathy with Jacobitism of the type found in Walter Scott's novels similarly tended to undermine the Presbyterian historical narrative. Finally, Episcopalians, heirs to a tradition that had been consigned to oblivion by the same settlement that established the Presbyterians

as the Church of Scotland in 1690, had an alternative, and hostile, narrative, of their own, and were influential out of proportion to their numbers.

It was in this generally unsympathetic intellectual environment that the first works appeared of the most influential Presbyterian historian of the century, Thomas M'Crie (1771-1835). M'Crie came out of a much different theological tradition from that of Cook or Robertson; a minister of the Anti-Burgher Secession Church, and a participant in the split in the church that created the Old Light Anti-Burghers, M'Crie stood at the conservative edge of the Scottish Presbyterian theological spectrum. He regarded the written inheritance of the church from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including the Westminster Confession and the two covenants, as of undiminished validity, and the reformed Scottish church as the recipient, through the workings of Providence, of the purest form of Christianity to have emerged from the Protestant Reformation. M'Crie's historical vision was of a piece with his theology, deriving from Knox, Calderwood and the other controversialists of the two critical centuries, and no more compromising than any of his predecessors. M'Crie was also much influenced by Archibald Bruce, the leader of the schism that created the Old Lights. In Bruce's voluminous writings on theological and political topics can be seen some of the ideas that later figured histories: most significantly, an insistence on the mutual dependence of civil and religious liberty, and a conviction that the Scots, in virtue of the greater purity of their Reformation, were able to give the lead to the English in the seventeenth-century struggle for constitutional liberty. Jointly, these ideas contributed to a Scottish version of the whig interpretation of British history, which M'Crie was to develop at length. Whether or not a result of Bruce's influence, many other elements in his thought also appear in M'Crie's works; among others, a vitriolic anti-Catholicism and a belief in the necessity of the establishment principle

as a defence against a Catholic revival. More important, probably, was the conviction that the key to the history of the post-Reformation church in Scotland was the struggle against erastian domination of church by state, whether in the form of the seventeenth-century warfare with the Stuarts or in present-day controversies over patronage.

M'Crie's entry into the field of historical writing was motivated to his deep distress at the nature of the historical literature available in his time. He particularly detested Hume, whose disparaging comments on the Reformers and the Presbyterian clergy embodied the irreligion that M'Crie associated with the current age, and he was similarly impatient with sentimental Jacobites and apologists for Queen Mary whose writings ultimately led to conclusions similar to those drawn by Hume. Thus it was that in 1803 M'Crie set out to defend his faith by putting the historical record right; that is by resurrecting the interpretation of Reformation and seventeenth-century history that derived from Calderwood and the other Presbyterian apologists of the period, which M'Crie believed to be the correct one. Three of the books that M'Crie wrote in pursuit of this objective were to be enormously influential. His *Life of John Knox* (1811) was a great public success from its first appearance, and was re-published at frequent intervals throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. Its companion piece, *Life of Andrew Melville* (1819), altered common perceptions of the era following Knox's death, and gave Melville a prominence in the history of the period that he has never fully relinquished. The third book, *A Vindication of the Scottish Covenanters* (1824), was a response to Scott's *Old Mortality*; it succeeded in refurbishing the image of the later Covenanters and revising the vocabulary used in discussing them. M'Crie's audience seems to have consisted primarily of ordinary

Presbyterians who, like M'Crie, did not find their own views reflected in contemporary historical writing.

M'Crie's writing followed a very hard line; the reformers and their Presbyterian successors in his narratives were invariably right in their disputes with the civil power, and their Stuart enemies wrong. The central principle underlying M'Crie's historical vision was one laid down in scripture: that Christ's kingdom was not of this world, and that there could thus be no human head of the church. Any monarch who tried to interfere with church doctrine or organisation, as all the later Stuarts did, was virtually beyond redemption. Partly for this reason, M'Crie was attracted by figures on the extreme end of the Presbyterian spectrum, including Melville, whose 'two nations' speech he popularised, in the sixteenth century and the Cameronians in the seventeenth, men often criticised by previous Presbyterian writers.

Although M'Crie believed in the providential nature of the Scottish Reformation, he was aware that this approach would not always commend itself to a post-Enlightenment Scottish readership. He accordingly did everything that he could to justify the struggles of the Reformers and their successors in terms that would make sense in terms of the vocabulary of the early nineteenth century. What this most noticeably involved was an effort to re-define the church's contest with the Stuarts in the Post-Reformation period as a struggle for human freedom. In doing so, M'Crie developed the Scottish version of the whig interpretation of history that had been suggested in the work of his mentor Bruce. The interpretation rested on several points. The Scots John Mair and George Buchanan had first enunciated the right of resistance to tyranny, far in advance of the first English exposition of the principle, that of John Locke. It was Knox, in his conversations with Queen Mary, who first

enunciated the principle of the rule of law. In the vigorous commentary maintained from pulpits all over Scotland during the reign of James VI may be found the origins of a constitutional opposition to the Crown, and the principles of freedom of expression. In the constitutional struggles with the Stuarts, the Scots led, rather than followed, the English. Finally, while M'Crie wrote little about the Civil War period, his defence of the later Covenanters made it clear that the covenants were documents embodying basic human freedoms, and that the object of the Covenanters' struggle was, in Bruce's phrase 'civil and religious liberty'.

The influence of M'Crie's writings to the Presbyterian reading public was significantly enhanced by the contemporary division within the Church of Scotland between Moderate and Popular parties, the former associated with an acceptance of state involvement in the church, the latter with Evangelicalism and an anti-erastian stance. M'Crie initially became associated with the Popular party through his friendship with its leader, Andrew Thomson, editor of the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*. His influence on the Evangelical wing of the church reached its apogee, however, after the death of both Thomson in 1831 and M'Crie himself in 1835. The Anti-Intrusionists, Evangelicals who were struggling against patronage in the church during the ten-year period 1833-1843, frequently turned to M'Crie's work for historical evidence in confirmation of their positions. They found it in several areas. Through his rehabilitation of Knox's 'Godly Commonwealth' and his favourable picture of the influence of the parish ministry during the Cromwellian period, M'Crie offered support to the Anti-Intrusionist project for renewal of the parish system, a particular obsession of the movement's leading spirit Thomas Chalmers. M'Crie believed in the establishment principle: the state had an obligation to support the national church financially and politically. At the same time, he of course believed

that the state could exert no control over the internal affairs of the church, which constituted a separate and independent kingdom; and these views also corresponded exactly with those of Chalmers. M'Crie's biographies provided historical examples and cogent arguments, the most famous example in the former category being Andrew Melville's 'two kingdoms' speech, which was widely quoted in Anti-Intrusionist writing and oratory. A good part of the attraction of M'Crie's writing lay in its absolute judgements. In an increasingly bitter struggle over the control of the church, the Anti-Intrusionists wanted an historical narrative in which their side, the Anti-erastians, were unequivocally in the right and their opponents, with equal certainty, in the wrong. M'Crie's work provided it.

By this time, other historians, broadly in the same school and all more or less influenced by M'Crie, had made their appearance; they included three general histories of Scotland written between 1827 and 1842, one of them by M'Crie's son Thomas the Younger. All of this literature supported the idea of a single, necessary, and uncompleted Presbyterian struggle against erastianism, of which the Anti-Intrusionist campaign against Moderatism and patronage was but the latest chapter.

It was this uncompromising vision of Scotland's past that formed the basis of the historical literature produced by members of the Free Church, which came into existence in 1843. That literature was voluminous; church members, particularly clergymen, wrote a substantial number of works, particularly ecclesiastical and general histories of Scotland, for the remainder of the lifetime of the church, which came to an end in 1900. The number of such publications, and the frequency with which popular titles were re-issued, suggest a substantial market for history written from a Presbyterian point of view during a period when academic history of Scotland

was not flourishing. One reason for this apparent anomaly was undoubtedly the upsurge in the level of adherence to the church that occurred during the latter part of the nineteenth century, and saw church attendance at record levels by 1900. Mostly Presbyterians, the churchgoing part of the public was a natural audience for a narrative that confirmed their confessional identity.

All branches of the Presbyterian Church produced writers of history during the six decades after 1843, but the great majority of the surviving Presbyterian works emanated from the Free Church and their two ideological allies, the United Secessionists and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, which (mostly) joined the Free Church respectively in 1852 and 1876. Both the United Presbyterians and the Church of Scotland also produced historians, the latter generally of a more scholarly cast than those of the Free Church. It was, however, the Free Church version of the story that dominated Presbyterian historiography during the life of that church, if only because of the greater frequency of its dissemination. The narrative that appeared in Free Church sources, repeated with only small variations, was largely that of Dr M'Crie, with accretions drawn from writers such as James Aikman and James Dodds. Several fundamental elements recur. First, Scotland was in essence a Presbyterian country. Some histories began with the Culdees, treated as proto-Presbyterians who established Scotland's religious identity in the sixth century; all regarded the Reformation as the birth or re-birth of the real Scottish nation, and John Knox as the greatest Scottish hero. Roman Catholicism, which it replaced, was not a form of Christianity, and made no positive contributions to the Scottish identity. Second, the period of religious contendings that began with Knox and ended with the establishment of the Church of Scotland in 1690 was the most important in the country's history, and the key to her subsequent evolution. Third, the independence

of the church, the issue on which those struggles turned, was a condition mandated by the word of God and not subject to negotiation. The opponents of that independence – the Stuarts and their minions – were for this reason absolutely wrong, and its defenders right; and the most extreme Presbyterians – Melville and his allies, the Protesters in the 1650s, the Cameronians in the 1680s – tended to be the most right. Fourth, the principles for which the Presbyterians fought corresponded to those of the British constitution as it was understood in the nineteenth century; indeed, many of these principles had been enunciated in Scotland long before the English stumbled on them. The revolution against the Stuarts that eventually brought about the modern constitution began in Scotland, and was sustained by the intervention of the Scots, and could not possibly have happened without them. Finally, all these themes came together in the testimony of the post-1661 Covenanters, representatives of the true Scottish nation who in their struggles for political and religious liberty helped to bring about the liberation of the British people and the triumph of the British constitution. It may be added that this triumph enabled the Scots to deploy those peculiar qualities with which their Presbyterian heritage had endowed them – piety, industriousness, honesty, and a high level of education – to become worthy partners in the United Kingdom and its empire.

Not all Presbyterians accepted every element of this narrative, which was particularly adapted to the needs of the architects of the Free Church for an uncompromising argument against state intervention. Church of Scotland historians tended to deviate in various ways: they had some good things to say about the pre-Reformation church, often criticised the excesses of the Presbyterian clergy, extended a measure of charity to some of the Stuarts, found Melville distasteful, and tended to side with the Resolutioners in the 1650s. But on most issues relating to the church-state question

they were in general agreement with the Free Churchmen, and like them they believed that the English owed the Scots a heavy debt for the part they played in the establishment of the constitution. The United Presbyterians, with their Secessionist background, generally followed the Free Church line much more closely, subject to the often-expressed reservation that the whole church-state conflict might have been avoided had everyone been Voluntaryist. Writers from all branches of the church tended to accept the idea that the Scottish nation and people were inseparable from Presbyterianism; and that both church and people embodied an innate dedication to freedom.

More serious criticism could be expected from the academic sector, but the latter half of the century was not a vintage era for the scholarly secular history in Scotland. The one important historian of Scotland of the period, John Hill Burton, was frequently very critical of the fanaticism and intolerance of the Presbyterian clergy, but he was sufficiently even-handed with his strictures that he was sometimes quoted by Free Church writers in their own defence. A more comprehensive opposition was provided by Episcopalian writers, two of whom, George Grub and William Stephen, published excellent church histories respectively in 1861 and 1894-96, both very hostile to the Free Church's interpretation. The influence of this school, however, was limited by the size of its natural market, as the Episcopalians remained a small percentage of the Scottish population even by the end of the century.

Without effective opposition, and supported by a bodyguard of statues, Covenanter memorials and devotional poetry, the uncompromising Presbyterianism presented by the Free Church school remained the dominant mode of interpretation of Scottish history until the end of the century. Signs of decay, however, were evident long

before that. The school did not attract any serious historians after the death of Thomas Thomson in 1869. In the schools, the dissemination of the Presbyterian message was much hindered by the creation of a national educational system in 1872, which implied a considerable degree of secularisation of school texts; perhaps more serious was an accompanying downgrading of the study of Scottish history in favour of British history, as the educational system was caught up in the excitement of empire.

At the turn of the century two critical events occurred. The more important was the union of the Free Church with the United Presbyterians. It was the Free Church's effort to justify its existence that constituted the major emotive force behind the hard-line Presbyterian interpretation of Scottish history, and that prop largely disappeared when the church merged into the larger body. The other was a modest revival in the writing of scholarly history in Scotland, which included work by such authors as Andrew Lang and William Mathieson who were radically unsympathetic to the pretensions of the Presbyterian school. Attitudes were deeply ingrained, and books broadly sympathetic to Presbyterianism in its more moderate incarnation continued to appear long afterwards. But Free Church historiography, with its insistence that Presbyterian hard-liners had always and everywhere been right, had lost its institutional base and was clearly on the way out. With it, to a considerable extent, went the Scottish whig interpretation of British political history, although elements of it, including the belief that the later Covenanters were fighting for civil and religious liberty, continued to form part of the literature on the subject well into the new century.

Two recent historians have been useful touchstones for much of this study. Marinell Ash, author of *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (1980) was briefly critiqued in chapter five on the grounds that she overstated the degree to which Scottish history disappeared in the second half of the century. Some of her thesis is beyond dispute; it is unquestionably true, for example, that the teaching of Scottish history suffered a serious decline in the schools in the three decades after the Education Act of 1872, and much the same may be said of the study of Scottish history at university level. But Dr Ash ignored a great deal of historical writing, of which the publication of Hill Burton's general history in 1870 was only the most notable example.[1] In particular, she showed no interest in at all in the work of Presbyterian historians of that period or in that of their Episcopalian opponents. Like so many other writers in the present age, Dr Ash almost certainly underestimated the strength of the religious identity of the inhabitants of nineteenth-century Scotland. In fact, the avidity with which the Scots of that period purchased ecclesiastical histories and works on the Covenanters is a testimony to the role that the church and its historical icons continued to play in the Scottish psyche to the end of the century and into the next.

The work of Colin Kidd, although primarily concerned with the eighteenth century, touches several of the themes in this study. In particular, Dr Kidd in *Subverting Scotland's History* (1993) commented on the existence in the nineteenth century of a Scottish version of the whig theory of British history, as embodied in the writings of Archibald Bruce and Thomas M'Crie.[2] A considerable portion of this study has been devoted to an exploration of this point, the results differing from Dr Kidd's analysis chiefly in his estimate of the extent and influence of the phenomenon. For

[1] Some of the other lacunae in her work have been discussed in Colin Kidd, '*The Strange Death of Scottish History* Revisited: Constructions of the Past in Scotland, c.1790-1914', in *SHR*, lxxvi (1997)
[2] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993), 200-203; also '*The Strange Death of Scottish History* Revisited', 98-99

Dr Kidd, M'Crie's influence was circumscribed by two factors. First, M'Crie's biographies of Knox and Melville did not constitute a solid reconstruction of the old whig-Presbyterian ideology, as they failed to revive the Buchananite message in tracing back a tradition of Scottish liberty before the Reformation.[3] Rather, M'Crie argued that while the Renaissance had diffused the libertarian ideas of antiquity among the elite, it took the force of religious renewal to raise the consciousness of the whole Scottish people. All this is quite true, but not necessarily a source of weakness. M'Crie was himself a product of the late eighteenth-century education system, and had no interest in reviving myths that he knew to be discredited; he did not even make reference to the Culdees, and neither did his son, who usually reflected his viewpoint. The materials on which he drew were for the most part texts written by witnesses to the religious struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a much more solid base than Buchanan's inherited fables. M'Crie, in effect, set out to create a version of Scottish whiggism that would stand up to scrutiny in a post-Buchananite world; and to some considerable extent he succeeded.

Dr Kidd's other stricture lies in limiting the influence of Dr M'Crie's constitutional vision to his those of his own persuasion: 'Outside the ranks of a Secessionist presbyterianism radicalism based on hostility to Anglicanism, the national past was not generally associated with the liberties of Scots'.[4] But as has been argued in earlier chapters, no part of Dr M'Crie's thesis found so ready an acceptance among other Presbyterian denominations as did the connection he drew between liberty and Scottish Presbyterianism. It was adopted enthusiastically by the Free Church school, and found its way into the work of the historians of the United Presbyterians and

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[3] Kidd, *Subverting*, 202
[4] *Ibid.*, 250

even the Established Church, who were in other respects much more inclined to follow the flexible attitudes of their Moderate predecessors. Admittedly, the idea did not achieve much currency among scholarly historians, but it did gain wide acceptance among the public at large; in particular, the idea that the Covenanters were fighting for civil and religious liberty is literally graven in stone, and in bronze as well, on monuments in various parts of Scotland.

A final amendment to Dr Kidd's interpretation concerns his assertion that the historiography of the period failed to contribute to a genuinely British identity.[5] Certainly, it was no part of the intention of Dr M'Crie and his successors to create such an identity; but they already embodied such an identity themselves, and their work is full of unionist assumptions. As a Covenanter, M'Crie necessarily thought in British terms: the Solemn League and Covenant was, after all, a pact between God and the two kingdoms that were its signatories; it continued to be binding on Great Britain, and its terms could only be achieved within a British framework.[6] His successors were mostly not Covenanters, but they were whigs who accepted the settlements of 1688-89 without serious cavils. Further, they were Protestants, and many of them, particularly the leading lights of the Free Church, feared a revival of Catholicism and saw in England an ally in the struggle for the defence of their common faith. They were also conscious that they were living in a country that had been doing rather well for itself within union and empire, while at the same time making critical contributions to the prosperity of both. What is most striking in this connection about their writing, however, is the appeal to the British constitution as an

[5] *Ibid*, 272

[6] 'If Britain contracted a moral obligation, in virtue of a solemn national covenant for religion and reformation, that obligation must attach to her until it has been discharged.' Thomas M'Crie, *On the Covenants and the Reformation* (1844). From the appendix to *Two Discourses on the Unity of the Church* (n.p, 1821), 25

all-purpose vindicator of the beliefs and actions of the early reformers, as if the constitution possessed an authority more potent than scripture. That argument, and the related insistence that the Scots had been equal (or senior) partners in the creation of the British constitution, obviously derived from a powerful sentiment of shared Britishness. The use of these arguments continued throughout the century in historical works written by members of all sections of the Presbyterian community, and could only have served to foster the same sentiment among their readers.

At the same time, these writers were far from believing in a merger of the Scottish and English people into a single culture. They were in fact quite intensely nationalistic, even if their nationalism was not of the European romantic variety that required that nations, once identified, must be provided with states of their own. Their nationalism had a religious basis, the conviction that Scotland was fundamentally a Presbyterian country. They believed that the Scottish people had come into existence in their present form at the Reformation, when they were made the recipients of the purest form of Christianity found anywhere; and that through their religious profession they had become the unique and quite remarkable people that they were. The struggle to defend the Scottish church from the imposition of forms of church government and ritual that derived from England formed the core narrative of the country's post-Reformation history. The very strength of the union of 1707 stemmed from its combination of two quite different peoples, each with its own virtues. Thus it was that all the Presbyterian histories of the century that touched both the era of Bannockburn and that of the union regarded both with warm enthusiasm. The first event maintained Scotland's separation from England so that its Presbyterian character might be developed; the second created a commonwealth that was at once a bulwark against Catholicism and a vessel that enabled the Scots to

develop and express the qualities that centuries of Presbyterian guidance had nurtured. It could never have occurred to them that the Scottish people were not worth celebrating, or that their story, which was also the story of their church, was not worth telling. That was certainly one of the reasons why Presbyterian ministers and laymen went on writing Scottish history when so many of their academic contemporaries had lost interest in the subject.

As suggested in the opening chapter, Graeme Morton's unionist-nationalist model provides the most sympathetic interpretation of this kind of nationalism. This is not simply because the Presbyterians were unionists and nationalists, but because they were part of the mainstream of nineteenth-century Scottish culture, and major contributors to it. Certainly, the community that the Presbyterians imagined was not a very close approximation to the Scottish society of the day; among other things, there were no Catholics in it, while there were a lot of them in Scotland. But at the same time it clearly had far more resonance with the urban middle classes, who lie at the core of Morton's analysis, than available alternatives. This is most obvious when considered in relation to R.J. Finlay's contention that the dominant component of the Scottish national model was Highland, composed of the kind of materials described in Trevor-Roper's famous article on the subject.[7] The Presbyterians – who, it must be stressed, were the most prolific historical school of the century -- had no sympathy whatever for the invented panoply of the Highlanders nor for the traditional culture that underlay it, which they associated with brigandage, massacre and Jacobitism. Their own quite antithetical picture of the national character, which laid heavy stress on piety, education, hard work, democracy and obedience to the laws of God and

[7] Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in E.J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge,1983)

man, was certainly far closer to the way that the urban middle classes saw themselves. Presbyterian or otherwise, historians normally described the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries from a sober Lowland perspective, leaving celebration of the ancient Highland way of life to the realm of literature.

Morton was not alone in offering useful insights into nineteenth-century Scottish nationalism. But the other writers who have written on the subject, of whom H.J. Hanham is probably the best example, tend to focus on precursors of twentieth-century political nationalism; and all, to some extent, use the vocabulary of failure. It is on this point that Morton's central position -- that because of this focus on centralised political institutions, Scotland's nineteenth-century nationalism 'has been missed, and replaced by a discourse transfixed by defeat'[8] -- is particularly apposite. The nationalism of the Presbyterians was never a reaction to defeat, nor was it a failure to produce a more up-to-date ideology on the lines of the Czechs or some other foredoomed middle-European group. It was in fact a nationalism appropriate to the time and the people: a nation largely in control of its own affairs, aware of its achievements and rising prosperity, and conscious of its position in the world's most progressive empire; and one whose leading lights commonly showed up for services on Sunday morning. The Presbyterian interpretation of history offered that nation a pedigree and an admonition to carry on and do more of the same. It could be pointed out that the collapse of the Scottish economy at the end of World War I would sweep most of this confidence away and bring forth a quite different kind of nationalism; but that is hindsight.

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[8] Graham Morton, *Unionist-Nationalism: Governing Urban Britain* (East Linton, 1999), 9

Not much now remains of the Presbyterian school. Of the nineteenth-century historians themselves very little can be found beyond a few copies of some of their works in public repositories. Thomas M'Crie makes an appearance in historiographical literature from time to time; Dr Kidd's references to him have been mentioned, and he also is also referred to by Marinell Ash, who observed that his work was still of use in some respects.[9] Alan MacDonald's accurate assessment of his role in creating the Melvillean legend has been noted in chapter three.[10] Of the other Presbyterian historians, who include a few interesting characters such as James Dodds and James Mackenzie along with a larger number of the deservedly obscure, little or nothing is ever written.

For more than a century, however, these men mattered. They embodied, in the work of Thomas M'Crie in the early years of the century, a reaction to the Enlightenment in favour of Scotland's neglected Presbyterian heritage, a reaction that drew an enormous amount of support. They provided a rationale for the Non-Intrusionist movement within the Church of Scotland, and for the same group in its struggle against patronage; and the very radicalism of their historical interpretation probably helped to encourage the intransigence which led to the creation of the Free Church. For the remainder of the century, historians within the Free Church produced a volume of Scottish history which overshadowed that of their contemporaries in the Established Church and in academia. While simplistic, derivative and marked by a bitter hostility to Catholicism and Episcopalianism, the Presbyterian school did regard the Scottish past as of abiding interest. It maintained a version of Scottish whiggism which made the Scots equal or superior partners with English in the

[9] Marinell Ash, *The Strange Death of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1980), 125
[10] See above, 84

creation of a free constitution, and which was sufficiently solidly based to last out the century. Further, it drew a picture of the Scots themselves as freedom-loving, intelligent, pious and Presbyterian; indeed, the most favoured of races. If they failed as scholarly historians, they succeeded as architects of an enduring myth.

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