

Why be a Free Presbyterian?

By Rev. William Maclean

Young People's Magazine

My Dear FRIENDS,

In a day when efforts are made, open and disguised, to besmirch and belittle the Testimony of our Church, it will refresh and fortify our minds to read over again what men and women eminent in their day and generation for godliness had to say regarding the Testimony entrusted to us.

There was a notable Christian called William Grant, who lived on a farm called Slock, in Inverness-shire. This farm was at the boundary of the parish of Moy. He was at a communion in the Moy Free Church, and was as usual called to speak to the question on Friday. After he spoke and sat down, he asked the presiding minister, would he be allowed to say a few words to the people. His request was heartily granted. He then rose and said: — “There was one thing I wished to say to the people of Moy should the Lord reveal to me that I would be speaking in their hearing for the last time. When I spoke already to-day I did not know then that I was speaking here for the last time, but I know it now. What I have to say is, that there were some of us who were never fully satisfied with the Free Church, for she seemed to us to be like a speckled bird. At the same time, we were convinced that the light which would continue in Scotland till the glory of the latter days was in her keeping. The day is coming, and some present here will see it, when of the many hundreds of ministers in the Free Church, only two or three, it is my opinion that it will be two, will adhere to the principles and doctrines of the Reformation. I will not see it, but some of you will. I wish to let you know that if I were living then, I would follow these men.” (F.P. Mag., Feb., 1927.)

When the stand was made in 1893 there were some who distinctly recalled William Grant's prophecy, and who followed Mr. Macfarlane, fully assured that “the light” which is to continue in Scotland until the latter day glory was now in the Free Presbyterian Church. That “light” is the “principles and doctrines of the Reformation” — the cherished Testimony of our Church.

Murdo Cameron, Kishorn, was well known in the West Highlands as a man of eminent standing among the Lord's people. The following covenants written and signed by him prove this. “Kishorn, June 4, 1869. I am here this day, O Lord, to go about a great work which I am not capable of. Therefore, I desire Thy assistance. That which I have to do is to enter into an engagement with Thee, and I desire, Lord, that Thou wouldst consent to the bargain. Say not to me, What hast thou to

do to take thy covenant into thy mouth; but though Thou shouldst say the same to me, Thou art righteous. Yet I will plead upon Thine own Word: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" O Lord, I am to subscribe this day with my hand that I am the Lord's, as I promised in Gairloch on the Communion Sabbath, in the wood of Shieldaig there, where I did beseech the Lord not to approach me in anger at His Table that day. I gave up myself to be wholly at His disposal soul and body and all my cares for time and eternity; but all is to be done in the strength of Thine own grace. I deny all strength of mine own to do anything that is good; daily experience has taught me the truthfulness of this." When the Rev. Duncan Matheson was facing the Lord's Table, he said — "Come and fulfil your vow, you vowed this morning in Gairloch, to the Lord at His Table."?

"Another year, going to Gairloch, I left Alligin early in the morning on the Communion Thursday, and held worship in the hills, and entered anew into covenant with the Lord to be His by assistance of His grace, and prayed that He would consent to the covenant engagement. The Rev. Mr. Matheson began the Communion services that day by reading Isaiah, 44th chapter, and preached from the first five verses, and spoke specially on making a covenant with the Lord. He said—" And you who did this to-day in the hills coming here, I call you to the Lord's Table on the coming Sabbath, and keep it in possession till the day of your death."

"At another time, at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at Dingwall, I promised that if the Lord would reveal Himself to my soul at that Sacrament there, I would be His by the assistance of His own grace, whatever He would call me to suffer for His name and cause. The Lord did reveal Himself to me there, to the praise of His grace be it recorded. To this I inscribe with my hand, the 21st day of April, 1877 — Murdo Cameron, Kishorn."

Murdo Cameron was among the first to rally round the standard raised on the site of Christ's Cause in Scotland in 1893. "He was present at the first Communion Service held by the Free Presbyterian Church at Inverness. A godly woman, Mrs. Mackenzie, Douglas Road, in that town, asked him — 'What is your opinion concerning the stand that has been made in vindication of God's Truth?' He answered that he believed the witness raised in vindication of God's Truth would not die out in Scotland till the glory of the latter days would come. 'When Mrs. Mackenzie told the above to the minister (Rev. Neil Cameron), she quoted a text of truth which he mentioned as the ground he had for what he said; but the writer regrets that he cannot remember the passage. He told her also that great trials would meet the small Church, and that these trials would begin at

Inverness. This part of what he said has so far become a fact. The other part of it, if men will be faithful to God's Truth will also be accomplished. The which may the Lord grant." (F.P. Mag., Jan., 1928.)

The Rev. D. MacFarlane, in one of the sermons printed in his "Memoirs," tells of "a great and godly man" who before the stand in 1893 was made, "was looking with a sorrowful heart on the state of God's Cause in Scotland. He was seeing almost all the Churches departing from the principles and doctrines of the Church of God, and he was seeing that the judgment of God was coming just after this declension. Then his heart was cast down. But when he heard that there was a stand made he took courage, and said, "The judgment will not yet come, but mark this," he said, "and some of you may see it, this is the last call to Scotland, the last call to Scotland, and if Scotland will not hearken to the call of God, then the judgment will not be delayed any longer, and some of you may see the judgment."

Many "calls" have been addressed to us as a Church and still are. What is our duty respecting such "calls?" The first "call" is the call for union which has been addressed to us on more than one occasion by the present Free Church. The first communication from the Free Church anent union was submitted to the Synod in 1902. In connection with the same the Synod declared its firm adherence to the position taken up in 1893. Three persons eminent for godliness in the Church made known the truth they got relative to the question of union with the Free Church. They each received the same portion of truth. Mr. Archibald Crawford told the late Rev. Neil Cameron that the truth he got as to our duty towards the present Free Church was, "Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them." (Jer. xv., 9.) Mr. Crawford passed to his eternal rest in December, 1903. Mrs. Mackay, Strathy, the excellent and saintly mother of the late Professor J. R. Mackay, also informed Mr. Cameron that she had received the same portion. The third was Angus Gray, of Lairg. "These," writes Mr. Cameron, were three most sincere and honest Christians. The one did not know that the other had that portion of God's Word when each one made known that he or she got it from the Lord. No one could charge them as being enthusiasts. Each one of them was sober-minded above most of their contemporary followers of the Lord."

Since then three or four calls for union have been addressed to us by the Free Church. On account of the barriers to union and in light of the truth "Let them return unto 'thee, but return not thou unto them," the Synod on each occasion has adhered to its original motion, "not to consider any motion for union with any Church which does not hold the absolute infallibility of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and the whole doctrine contained in the Confession of

Faith, both in her profession and practice.” Events since then have proved to the hilt that the Synod’s decision was of the Lord.

It is our duty surely, to regard and treasure what these godly persons had to say concerning the Testimony entrusted to us as a Church. They had the mind of the Lord as few in their day. Let us follow their witness, for they, being dead yet speak. Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them” is the mind of the Lord. What saith the Lord shall stand. Let us, therefore, stand by it, faithful unto death, unmoved and steadfast in our allegiance.

There have been other calls from within the Church, four or five since 1893.

These “calls” proved but false alarms, alluring those bewitched by them into the bogs and swamps of schism. They were not of God, and consequently the so-called “stands” in connection with them came to naught —their decline and fall confirming what the “great and godly man,” Mr. MacFarlane referred to said, that the stand of 1893 was God’s last call to Scotland until the latter day glory dawn.

I shall now conclude with an extract from the diary of the late Rev. Donald MacFarlane. “Some call us “Seceders,” but we are not Seceders. The word seceder, according to the literal meaning, is to step aside from a position. We have not stepped aside from the position of the Church of Scotland for centuries. It is those who have left that position who are Seceders from God’s Word and worship. But what is the reproach of the obloquy of the creature in comparison to having God’s approval in our stand on behalf of His Word and worship.”
(Memoir, p. 55.)

I remain,

Your sincere friend,

WILLIAM MacLEAN.