

THOMAS MCCRIE
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to
Carol

INTRODUCTION

To have deserved the title, the "Discoverer of John Knox," would seem to be certain assurance of undying fame and regard, at least in Scotland, if not among all Protestants; and yet, the man who earned that title is little known in his native land and practically unknown in his native town of Duns. Not that his name has disappeared entirely, for "Thomas McCrie" may still be discovered in the footnotes of even recent historical works concerned with the Scottish Church, and his "Life of Knox," which was responsible for restoring the great Reformer to his rightful place among the greatly honoured and highly regarded of Scotia's sons, will, probably, always be recognized as a standard which later historians have only embellished. However, McCrie accomplished much more in life than the composition of his biography of Knox, and this thesis is an attempt to recover Dr. McCrie's works from the oblivion for which they seemed to be destined and to assess his importance and determine his place among the Scottish Historians. At the same time, an effort has been made to sketch enough of his life so that his character and background may be

understood, and also to make a study of his main contribution to Scottish Churchmanship, which was in the field of Church and State relations, an area which, more than any other, has been the field of conflict in the Scottish Church.

Although a detailed review of any single work has not been presented, a study of all McCrie's works has been made in the course of the preparation of this thesis. It should be mentioned, too, that not one of them proved to be dull or uninteresting and their style was found to be unexpectedly modern. In fact, his historical works are as easily read as a good novel which one scarcely wishes to lay aside until one has finished reading it all. His support of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, the Reformers, and the Covenanters, and his intense pride in and love of his native land, ^{are} ~~is~~ gratifying to anyone of Scottish descent and of Presbyterian conviction but his outspoken criticism of prelacy and his undisguised preference for Scotland and Scottish life above any other, may be aggravating to the Episcopalians, particularly to those "south of the Border," as it evidently was when his works were first penned.

Besides McCrie's own works and other general works on Scottish Church History and on the development of the science of Historiography, a study has been made of the

periodicals and reviews contemporary with McCrie, and the conclusion seems to be justified that, though McCrie was, in some respects, a late historian of the "Enlightenment," he was much more, for Scotland at least, a precursor of the age of scientific Historiography which has always been recognized to have commenced with Ranke.

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PART I.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THOMAS MCCRIE.

CHAPTER 1

THE SECESSION MINISTER

The town of Duns in Berwickshire, which had already produced two famous sons--Duns Scotus, the scholastic doctor of the fourteenth century, and Thomas Boston, the author of the Fourfold State--was the birthplace of yet another of Scotland's distinguished sons--Thomas McCrie. He was born in November, 1772, and was the eldest in a family of four sons and three daughters. His father, also Thomas McCrie, was a manufacturer and merchant noted for his high religious principles and much respected in the community. His mother, Mary Hood, who had a marked influence on her son, was a "woman of superior mind, of exemplary piety, and the most amiable dispositions."¹ Despite the discouragements of his father, who was not willing, as he said, to make one of his sons a gentleman at the expense of the others, McCrie was started along the paths of learning by the efforts of his mother and her father, and he early acquired habits of assiduous study and revealed his avidity for learning.

He was educated at the parish school in Duns under

1 Much of the material in this sketch is taken from the Memoir: Life of Thomas McCrie, by his son, Rev. Thomas McCrie, 1840. Hereafter it will be referred to simply as Memoir. The above quotation--Memoir, p. 2.

the tutorship of a Mr. Cruickshanks¹ and speedily obtained sufficient education to qualify him to take up teaching as a means of financing his own further studies. Before he was fifteen years old he had taught in two country schools near Duns.² His religious education during this early period was also given careful attention since his parents were members of the Anti-Burgher section of the Secession, under the ministry of Rev. Mr. Whyte of Duns. The truths of the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith would be constantly before him and the purity of the Reformation Church presented as the ideal towards which he, with the Secession, ought to strive. The following description of scenes prevalent in the private households of the Secession Church may give some idea of the sort of atmosphere in which McCrie passed his early formative years.

Pious parents on the evening of the Lord's Day gathered their families around them, and after careful examination, not only on the Shorter Catechism and the discourses heard in the church during the day, they brought the instructive proceedings to an appropriate close by engaging in family worship. On week-day evenings it was not unusual for Secession families to sit around the hearth, and after some telling biography

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- 1 Andrew Crichton in his Memoir of McCrie, prefixed to his edition of Life of Knox, (Belfast, 1874), says his schoolmasters were Mr. Dick and Mr. White. McCrie, the Younger, makes no mention of either of these as tutors.
 - 2 Crichton says he taught at E. Linton in East Lothian and at Musselburgh Grammar School.

from the Scot's Worthies had been read, such as that of Guthrie of Stirling, Alex. Peden, or Brown of Priesthill, to talk about the troublous times during which these Christian heroes had lived, and the importance of imitating their conduct by handing down unimpaired the principles of civil and religious liberty. In the week-day congregational class it was also sometimes the case that ministers, after expounding a portion of the Westminster Confession, asked the young people to read aloud in rotation such narratives as the Battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge, after which such historical explanations would be made as stirred deeply the spirit of religious patriotism, and gave the young an abhorrence of popery and prelacy which never afterwards forsook them.

Occasionally at these advanced classes the doctrinal part of the Secession Testimony was read and explained in lieu of the Confession, and so clearly stated and edifying were its statements, that frequently a goodly number of aged elders and members attended the classes, as spectators who desired to be sharers in the edification that was to be received.¹

If these scenes present a true picture of McCrie's home background it is not difficult to explain or understand the subsequent course of his life and work.

In December, 1788, not long after his sixteenth birthday, McCrie took his leave of Duns and set out for Edinburgh to enroll as a student at the University. His mother accompanied him for part of the way when he began his journey and bade him a fond farewell on Coldingham Moor after they had both knelt behind a rock by the side of the road while she solemnly devoted him to the service of God and commended him to His fatherly care. At the

1 Annals of the Original Secession Church, D. Scott, pp. 32-33; quoting from reminiscences of Dr. Mitchell of Glasgow, professor to the United Secession Church.

University he studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Mathematics, Logic, and Moral Philosophy. The professor in the latter subject, Dugald Stewart, was a particular favourite of McCrie and "from him he learned the habit of accurate unwearied research, the happy art of perspicuous statement, and the invaluable secret of pointing all his statements into conclusions of practical utility."¹ Other instructors at the University at this time were: Dr. John Hill--Humanity Class, Mr. Andrew Dalzell--Greek, Dr. James Finlayson--Logic, Mr. John Playfair--Mathematics, and Mr. John Robison--Natural Philosophy; but to none was he more indebted than to Professor Stewart.

In May, 1791, he began to teach at an Anti-Burgher school connected with the congregation of Rev. John Gray in Brechin, Forfarshire, and he retained this position for three years. Apparently he was a successful teacher since he began with three pupils and before he left had nearly filled the house. Rev. James Gray, a son of the above minister and a very intimate friend of McCrie, reveals something of his private life at this time. He was often to be found "in the fellowship of some in the humbler ranks, who retained a portion of the spirit of the olden times, [and] the author who knew how to turn every

1 Memoir, p. 7.

opportunity to its proper use, acquired his graphic, compressed, business style of writing; discovered both the lights and shadows of Scottish character; was taught to form a just estimate of the spirit and transactions of the Reformation, and was prepared to furnish that representation of them which was so much calculated to interest and inform the Scotsmen of his day."¹ From all that his son could ascertain about McCrie's early life it appears "that while his good taste and studious tendencies preserved him from all extravagance or frivolity, he was full of youthful vivacity, a ready wit, a prompt arguer, foremost in exercises of skill or peril, affable, polite, playful, delighting in innocent relaxation, and quite ready for adventure, competition, or amusement, when a sense of duty, or considerations of propriety interposed no bar in the way of his natural inclinations."²

In August, 1791, as a member of the congregation at Brechin he joined in a bond for the renewing of the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three nations. Here he made a public confession of his attachment to the Scottish Reformation and its principles--an attachment which was to characterize his whole career. In September of this same year he

1 Memoir, p. 13.

2 Ibid., pp. 18-19

commenced his studies of Theology in the Divinity Hall at Whitburn under the direction of Rev. Archibald Bruce who was professor of Theology for the General Associate Synod of Anti-Burghers from 1786 to 1806, and from that time until his death in 1816 filled the same office for the Constitutional Presbytery. Bruce and McCrie became close friends and were associated together in the Old and New Light Controversy with the Synod which ended in their separation from that body in 1806. McCrie had a very high opinion of Bruce and he gave the following character of him in an address which he delivered to the students after his death:

For solidity and perspicacity of judgment, joined to a lively imagination,--for profound acquaintance with the system of Theology, and with all the branches of knowledge which are subsidiary to it, and which are ornamental as well as useful to the Christian divine,--for the power of patient investigation, of carefully discriminating between truth and error, and of guarding against extremes on the right hand as well as on the left,--and for the talent of recommending truth to the youthful mind by a rich and flowing style,--not to mention the qualities by which his private character was adorned,--Mr. Bruce has been equalled by few, if any, of those who have occupied the chair of divinity, either in late or in former times.¹

In the summer of 1794 McCrie left Brechin and in the winter of 1794-5 he completed the formal education appointed for students of theology by attending the class in Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh.

1 Memoir, p. 56.

He was licensed to preach on the ninth of September, 1795, by the Associate Presbytery of Kelso and on this occasion he gave the first public indication of his independent spirit and his alert and inquiring mind. During this period the question concerning the powers of the civil magistrate in matters of religion occupied much of the public attention and certain changes in the profession of the Synod were under discussion in that body. McCrie, therefore, considered himself justified in objecting to the formula unless he could accept it with some qualification regarding the powers of the civil magistrates. The Presbytery were sympathetic to his qualms and agreed that it should be inserted in the minutes that in answering the questions in the formula he was not to be understood as giving any judgment upon the matter of the civil magistrate's powers in religious matters.¹ About ten years before this a probationer in the Presbytery of Dunfermline, Mr. David Hepburn, had complained by letter to the Burgher Synod regarding the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith on this subject, but he seems to have been convinced that he was mistaken in his views and was subsequently ordained in

1 Rev. Thomas Gillespie made similar reservations in 1741; see C.G. McCrie, Church of Scotland, her Divisions and Unions, p. 90.

the congregation of Newburgh.¹ McCrie was considerably more adamant in his views and he refused to submit to ordination unless the reservation that he took with his vows was as publicly declared as the vows themselves. The case along with a similar one concerning Mr. William McEwan was referred to the Synod which met in May, 1796. The Synod had already received an overture from the minister at Greenock on the same subject and a committee prepared a Declaratory Act which was adopted by the Synod and which removed the scruples of McCrie and McEwan.²

A month after his licensing, McCrie received a unanimous call to be the first minister of the newly formed second Associate congregation in Edinburgh, meeting in Potterrow; and on May 26th, 1796, after the above questions had been settled by the Synod, he was ordained. The Rev. Robert Chalmers of Haddington, with whom he was later to be intimately associated in the Constitutional Presbytery, preached and presided at his ordination service. Shortly after his settlement in Edinburgh McCrie married Janet Dickson, daughter of a farmer in Swinton and she proved to be an agreeable choice, providing him with

1 History of the Secession Church, Rev. John McKerrow, p. 562.

2 See chapter 4 for further details on Church and State.

a happy domestic life.

From the very beginning of his ministry he was most interested in subjects of general interest and public importance. In 1797 his first acknowledged publication appeared; it was a sermon, which he later was anxious to forget, entitled "The Duty of Christian Societies towards each other, in relation to the measures for propagating the Gospel, which, at present engage the attention of the religious world. A Sermon, preached in the meeting-house, Potterrow, on the occasion of a collection for promoting a mission to Kentucky. Edinburgh, 1797." The object of the sermon was to guard against the extremes of latitudinarian pliability of principle on the one hand and bigoted zeal on the other. But McCrie decided, afterwards, that some of his statements were liable to misconstruction and he retracted them in a sermon at the opening of Synod in 1800. The fact was that McCrie had very definite views on a strict profession and a pure fellowship in the Church and his first paper in the Christian Magazine in February, 1797, was "On the importance of right principles in religion, and the danger of those which are false." In this paper he contends against those who say that religion is a matter of feeling, and morality an instinctive and natural principle, and who ridicule the friends of revealed truth as sticklers for opinion, who, overlooking

the substance, contend about the form. "If we are endowed with a moral faculty, which makes a distinction between virtue and vice, sin and duty," McCrie says, "we have also an understanding given unto us to discern between truth and error: it is equally our duty to rectify our understandings, and to conform our hearts to that which is good and virtuous."¹ "Our conduct towards God will be regulated by the opinions which we have formed of his being and perfections" and "our opinions respecting the nature and perfection of the Supreme Being, are calculated to have a universal influence upon us, and will regulate us not only in the performance of those duties which are more strictly called religious, but also in our intercourse and dealings with men."² It is important to men to consider and receive the revelation of God in the Bible. "The very nature of the gospel demonstrates the importance of its doctrines. We must attend to them as we regard the glory of God, and the salvation of our own souls."³ "The opinion of those who plead for indifference about truth and religious principles, is founded upon a mistaken view of the nature and duty of man, of the importance and influence of these upon the heart and life, and especially upon ignorance and

1 Christian Magazine, February, 1797, p. 24.

2 Ibid., p. 26.

3 Ibid., p. 30.

misapprehension of the doctrines of revelation, and their connection with the interests of morality and mankind."¹ With these and other well considered observations McCrie delineates the decisive influence of right doctrine on character and conduct.

In the same periodical for November and December, 1798, there are two "Letters on Bigotry," written by McCrie under the pen-name Phlegon, which express similar sentiments. "The man who is so attached to his own opinions, as to wish to deprive others of the liberty of maintaining theirs, while they do not directly affect the peace of civil society, undoubtedly merits the character of a bigot," says McCrie.² A bigot denies salvation to all who are not of his own religious society but the man who condemns the sentiments of another, in so far as he seems to err, is not therefore chargeable with bigotry. "He must be a strange man indeed, who would account the belief of any particular form of government essential to salvation. But is it therefore a matter of indifference. . . ? To me it appears, that the form of government which Christ has given is Presbyterian; and that I am bound to contend for this, as a branch of the faith once delivered to the Saints."³

1 Ibid., p. 31.

2 Ibid., November, 1798, p. 494.

3 Ibid., December, p. 542.

The thoughts expressed in these articles were to have a particular application to his own career for it was not long before he himself was accused of being a bigot. There was something prophetic in his remarks when he wrote that it undoubtedly discovers a spirit of bigotry if a man entertains a personal dislike to another, because of the difference of their sentiments. "It is much to be regretted, that, from the weakness of human nature, this temper has been frequently manifested even by good men. The influence of self-conceit or of party zeal, has often soured tempers naturally amiable, and inclined men greedily to swallow reports to the prejudice of those from whom they differed, and even to propagate them as widely as possible."¹ At about this same time, too, he was associated with his good friend, Rev. George Whyttock, in the publication of a first and second "Dialogue between John, a Baptist, and Ebenezer, a Seceder." The subject of these dialogues was Faith and they were intended to correct some erroneous statements made in a work by Mr. John McLean, a Baptist minister in Edinburgh.

In August of 1798 McCrie was sent with his friend James Gray to the Orkney Islands. The evident religious revival which McCrie witnessed there had a telling effect

1 Ibid., p. 497.

upon him. The eagerness with which the people sought to hear the gospel was in great contrast to the apathy and carelessness manifested in the more favoured parts of the country. Whereas, previous to this visit, McCrie's preaching was said to be too abstract and intellectual for the ordinary hearer, now his preaching became more evangelical in tone, and before he attained renown as a historian he was recognized as one of the "most respectable preachers of his day."

McCrie was now on the eve of the most crucial events of his life--events which were to give rise and direction to practically all his future literary labours--events which were to end with his separation from the religious body in which he had grown up and begun his ministry, and with the formation of a small Secession group, the Constitutional Associate Presbytery, of which he became the recognized leader.

CHAPTER 2

SEPARATION FROM THE GENERAL ASSOCIATE SYNOD

To understand the public controversy in which McCrie became involved at this time it is necessary to be acquainted with the background of Secession history, of which only a brief sketch may be given here. The original Secession in 1733 had as its real object the assertion and defence of the principles of the Reformation, necessary because of the long period of defection in the Established Church, from the reformed and covenanted principles. The immediate causes, however, were the pressure of patronage, the toleration of erroneous doctrine (e.g. Professors Simson and Campbell), and the restraint of ministerial freedom.

They appeared as a part of the Church of Scotland, adhering to her reformed constitution, testifying against the injuries which it had received, seeking the redress of these, and pleading for the revival of a reformation attained according to the Word of God in a former period, approved by every authority in the land, and ratified by solemn vows to the Most High.¹

By 1745 the Secession Church had grown large enough to be broken up into three Presbyteries which constituted the Associate Synod, but in this year the controversy began

1 Appendix to Sermons on Unity, by McCrie; quoted in Memoir, p. 43.

over the Burgess Oaths, which in the towns of Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth contained a clause which would necessitate the burgess's approval of "the true religion presently professed within this realm." The question was whether this would require a Seceder to approve the existing "establishment" if he desired to hold the office *status* of Burgess. The controversy ended in 1747 with a separation of the Synod into two bodies: all Seceders who allowed the taking of the oath were called Burghers; all who denounced the taking of it were called Anti-Burghers.

About the close of the eighteenth century symptoms which had been appearing from time to time on both sides of the Secession of a disposition to qualify their adherence to the standards of the Church of Scotland on the subjects of the magistrate's power in religion and national covenanting, began to come to a head. In 1743, when the renewing of the Covenants was under consideration, the Associate Presbytery condemned two extreme views: one which would impugn yielding subjection to civil authority and the other which would inculcate the lawfulness of propagating religion by offensive arms. This condemnation caused Rev. Thomas Nairn, after much debate, to sever his connection with the Presbytery and join the Cameronian United Societies, which eventually became the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The replies made to Nairn

at this time became a secondary standard of reference on these matters.¹

During the years which followed, the question respecting the powers of the civil magistrate in religion was a topic of constant discussion. Some found the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, upon this subject, objectionable as ascribing to the magistrate, in religious matters, a power which did not belong to him and some entertained conscientious scruples about giving unlimited assent to such passages (W.C. of F. XX, sect. 4; and XXIII, sect. 3). It became a common occurrence to modify an assent to the formula by a vague exception, which, by its vagueness, neutralized the whole profession in its references to the question of civil establishments. A general wish prevailed that the Synod would take steps to remove all ambiguity and inconsistency in this matter by making an explicit declaration of its sentiments. Some were definitely opposed to the received standards of the Church of Scotland while others did not deem the points in dispute of sufficient importance to warrant any resistance to a neutralizing expedient. Two overtures, one from Glasgow and one from Forfar, were laid upon the table

1 The Church of Scotland, her Divisions and Unions, C.G. McCrie, pp. 69-70. See also McKerrow's History of the Secession, p. 184.

of the General Anti-Burgher Synod in 1791; the former concerning the Confession's seeming sanction of interference by the civil magistrate in matters of religion and the latter calling for a simplification and modernizing of the Secession Testimony. A committee was appointed to prepare a draught of additions to the Testimony but instead of additions the committee composed a new work: the Narrative and Testimony. Before the committee had finished its work, however, the cases respecting the ordination of McCrie and McEwan came before the Synod in 1796 (see above pages 8-9). A Declaratory Act was passed on May 3rd of that year which stated that as the Confession of Faith was at first received by the Church of Scotland with some exception as to the power of the civil magistrate relative to spiritual matters, so the Synod extend that exception to everything in the Confession of Faith which, taken by itself, seems to allow the punishment of good and peaceable subjects on account of their religious opinions and observances: that they approve of no other means of bringing men into the church, or retaining them in it, than such as are spiritual-- that is, the power of the Gospel not the sword of the civil magistrate. Now, in answers to the formula, the Confession of Faith was to be accepted "according to the Declaration of the General Associate Synod in 1796."

In this year, too, the new Narrative and Testimony was introduced to the Synod by the committee and was under consideration from then until 1804.

All the histories dealing with this period concerning McCrie's activity discuss his apparent change of opinion with regard to the magistrate's power, especially when it came so soon after the strong stand he took at the time of his ordination. The simplest and most reasonable explanation is that given in the Memoir -- that it was a change from indecision to decision. At the time of McCrie's indecision the whole matter was under discussion in the Synod and he was not prepared to commit himself. When he finally reached a decision on the question the Synod was also coming to a decision but one opposite to that of McCrie. His son says that he had a definite leaning towards the "New Light" principles during his period of indecision but when he began to realize that the tenet of excluding all civil powers in religion would really be a condemnation of the principles and transactions of the Reformation and of the Seceders' profession regarding them, then he soon abandoned the "New Light" for the "Old Light" principles. McCrie decided that the Declaratory Act of 1796 was erroneous in principle and dangerous in its consequences to the profession of the Church and he realized with sorrow that he himself was partly responsible

for that act being passed. In September, 1799, a new and revised Acknowledgment of Sins and Engagement to Duties was passed by the Synod and a clause was inserted in the second question of the formula stating that assent to the doctrine of the Confession of Faith and of other standard books was to be understood as qualified by the Declaration of Synod of May, 1796, which was renewed in September, 1799. Five of the Members, George Whyttock of Dalkeith, John Smith, Archibald Bruce of Whitburn, James Aitken of Kirriemuir and McCrie protested against this move and desired, instead, a reconsideration of the action taken in 1796. In 1800, in a sermon before the Synod as retiring moderator, McCrie retracted some of the statements in his printed Sermon of 1797 which seemed to suggest a latitudinarian spirit and he also declared his regret at being an accessory to the act of 1796. At the same time he presented to the Synod a Representation and Petition in which he craved that the Synod would review the Declaratory Act, examine the passages of the Confession of Faith which seemed to be objectionable, and give such a determination as would maintain truth and preserve the unity of the body. Because of his difficult and embarrassing position he had no desire to take a leading part in the controversy but he now became associated with Bruce and others in opposition to the

new deeds which came under discussion in the Synod.

In a letter to Bruce, dated July 14, 1800, he expresses some of his sentiments at this time.

My distress respecting the matter of our differences and the state of religion among us, is in some respects peculiar, inasmuch as I must look on myself as instrumental in contributing, in a considerable degree, to produce or at least to hasten them on. . . . It not only gives me uneasiness when I take a retrospect of my conduct, but it is a source of great discouragement, when I look forward.

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I have been lending my attention, so far as other avocations would permit, to the subject of the magistrate's power circa sacra. The more I think and read upon it, I am the more convinced of the difficulty of settling in many cases the just limits of magistratical and ministerial power, and am astonished at my ignorance in formerly pronouncing upon the question with so much decision and indifference. At the same time, I am more convinced of the general principles which for a while I was brought to doubt, but to the belief of which I have been made to return--of their importance to the civil and religious interests of mankind, and their close connection with the cause of Reformation and the Secession Testimony.¹

McCrie followed an intensive course of reading of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth century divines who had anything to say on the subject of the magistrate's powers circa sacra. He determined never again to make important decisions and statements without first knowing all the facts available concerning them and there is no doubt that his embarrassment at this juncture was partially responsible for the subsequent meticulous care and

1 Memoir, pp. 70-72.

accuracy of his literary labours. As a result of this reading his attention was drawn to the study of church history, particularly that of Scotland, and in 1802 he began collecting the facts regarding the Church of Scotland from the time of the Reformation and arranging them in chronological order. During this period the men who protested the trend of the Synod's activities, Bruce, Aitken, Whyttock, Hog, Chalmers and McCrie were drawn into closer association, and though it seems that Bruce was the guiding hand at first, Dr. Wylie considers McCrie the leader of the movement to preserve the received standards. Of McCrie at this stage in his career Wylie writes in an article on Chalmers:

When one is sent forth to do a special service it is rare that he is left to work alone. A little band is commonly given him as associates and fellow labourers. Their share in the work may be very small, but even while they act very subordinate parts, their presence is helpful, and in some respects essential. They mitigate the isolation and solitariness of the chief actor--an isolation to which the peculiarity of his work exposes him--they hold up his hands by their prayers, they aid him by their counsels, and they cheer him by their sympathy.

McCrie, in the great task to which he was called, of rehabilitating the Scottish Reformation in public sentiment, would have been placed in utter isolation, but for a small band of congenial men who were placed around him as associates in the work. Though following him at a considerable distance, they were all men of large capacity and of rich spiritual gifts. They steadily devoted their lives to the maintenance of the same principles and they strove with singleness of aim, entire devotion, and at the cost of many sacrifices, to bring back the nation to a more intelligent apprehension, and a more faithful adherence to the

cause of the Reformation.¹

As the overture for the New Testimony passed through its various stages in the Synod McCrie and his associates continued to protest, and the doctrines they opposed were materially the points which were to be at issue in the Voluntary Controversy which broke out in 1829.

The question is now no longer, under what limitations, or in what manner may magistrates exercise their power circa sacra? but, whether there be any power of this kind competent to them?--The authority itself, in whatever degree, or however applied, is at last by the Synod declared to be a nonentity.

Therefore national religion, national covenants and national churches are an absurdity; all religious "tests" are condemned and all constitutions and laws which imply the exercise of civil power in religion ought to be abolished.²

In September, 1800, Mr. Bruce introduced a motion to the Synod which stated in part that since there is already an Act, Declaration and Testimony, judicially authorized, in which the principles of the Associate body are explicitly stated, the Synod should cease consideration of and dismiss the New Testimony; but this motion was rejected, McCrie and Aitken voting for Bruce.

1 Annals of the Original Secession, p. 527

2 Memoir, p. 88.

In October, 1801, the Testimony was enacted and published despite the protests of Bruce, Hog, McCrie, Whyttock and Chalmers and in September, 1803, the Narrative was enacted and published along with the Introduction and the Testimony and it was moved that it should become a term of communion with the Associate body.¹ Whyttock, Aitken and McCrie tendered a formal protestation which was afterwards adhered to by Bruce, Chalmers and Hog. They were not averse to adapting the Testimony to modern times and they approved of some of the measures directed to this end; but they strongly disapproved of several injuries to the cause of the Reformation which were a departure from the original state of the Secession Testimony. The Synod undertook corrections and additions to the new deeds in order to obviate the objections of the remonstrants but since the basic issues remained unaltered, they were only more confirmed in their protest. On May 2nd, 1804, the Synod agreed to adopt the Introduction, Narrative and Testimony, as now corrected and enlarged, as the term of admission to communion with the Associate Synod. All who were already in communion with the body who had scruples about accepting the New Testimony were granted liberty to retain their views and to receive into

1 History of the Secession, McKerrow, p. 437

communion such as might better understand and approve of the former Testimony. But they also had to admit to communion those who preferred the New Testimony; they were forbidden from opposing the new principles from the pulpit or in the press; and they were obliged to attend the church courts and assist their brethren on sacramental occasions. Whyttock, Aitken, Hog, Chalmers and McCrie were unable to comply and renewed their former protests. In May, 1805, a paper giving their reasons of protest was presented to the Synod by Whyttock, Chalmers, Hog, and McCrie. Bruce presented a remonstrance on his own account stating that if the Synod did not review and disannul their late deeds he would be obliged to withdraw from their communion. And then on May 7th, 1806, Bruce Aitken, Hog and McCrie¹ presented a paper renewing their protests and virtually declining the jurisdiction of the Synod under the New Testimony. Consideration of this latter paper was delayed until August.

Events rapidly moved to a climax. Bruce and McCrie were cited to appear before Presbytery on July 22nd for not attending meetings while in a state of good health and for declarations made to the people which were opposite to the New Testimony and tended to schism.

1 Whyttock died on October 24th, 1805

When they did not appear they were summoned to appear before Synod in Glasgow in August. While the Synod was in session on August 26th, 1806, Bruce, Aitken, Hog, and McCrie were meeting at Whitburn and "after two days of conference and prayer" they constituted themselves into a presbytery-- the Constitutional Associate Presbytery, with Bruce as Moderator and McCrie as Clerk. In their Deed of Constitution they bewailed the defection of the Synod in adopting a New Testimony, in altering the bond for public covenanting and in sanctioning a new formula, by which actions some important doctrines in the Confession of Faith and different articles in the previous Testimony are renounced and dropped and certain errors introduced. "Particularly, the duty and warrantableness of civil rulers employing their authority in an active support of the interests of religion and the kingdom of Christ, and in promoting reformation (which was an eminent part of the testimony and contendings of the Church of Scotland in behalf of the reformation of our native land, civil and ecclesiastic, explicitly approved in the Secession), are by the new deeds denied and set aside."¹

Meanwhile the Synod had deposed Aitken for following a schismatical and disorderly course and on information

1 History of the Secession, McKerrow, p. 452

on McCrie's part in forming the new presbytery being received from the elders of his session, the Synod, without any formality, passed a sentence of deposition and excommunication on McCrie. The other ministers concerned were deposed in short order. Mr Hog died before he could be deposed but Bruce was deprived of his office in October and Chalmers in July of the following year. Bruce published a "Review of the Proceedings of the General Associate Synod", and most of the ministers published addresses to their congregations in which they explained the grounds of their separation. The Constitutional Presbytery which they formed continued for twenty one years until in 1827 it was blended with another body of ^Protesters from the same Synod, under the common name of Original Seceders. *B. J. J.*

Dr. Wylie writes as follows of the brethren who formed the Constitutional Presbytery.

This Presbytery was the least of all the sections of the Secession, and yet out of it came the man (Dr. McCrie) who was the first to sound the knell of the revival of the Scottish Reformation.

Of this little band, so diversified in talent, and all animated by an ardent love of liberty and inspired by genuine piety, Professor Bruce was the first to depart; Mr Chalmers, of Haddington, was the last. He survived all his brethren. None of them lived to see the rise of the Free Church of Scotland. They all passed from off the scene, --Professor Bruce excepted, who went early,--just as that great conflict was beginning for the constitutional rights and ancient liberties of the Reformed Kirk of Scotland, for which they, and in particular he who was chief

among them, had done so much to prepare the way.¹

It is generally agreed that the Synod dealt too harshly with these men whose only real crime was steadfast adherence to the original principles of the Synod and their own ordination vows. McKerrow, who is entirely in favour of the Synod's actions and sentiments, allows that the Synod were hasty and severe when he says: "That the sentence of deposition, however, ought to have been inflicted on them, I am not inclined to admit. All that appears to have been necessary was to suspend them from the exercise of their ministry. . . . In the case of McCrie, also, I admit that the sentence was too hastily pronounced."² It is possible that McCrie was thinking of his own experiences with the Synod as well as of Melville when he wrote:

Even in the ordinary management of affairs in the best regulated churches, instances will occur in which conscientious individuals may entertain serious scruples as to the lawfulness of particular decisions, and may decline to take an active part in executing them, without being guilty of contempt of the court, or maintaining a factious opposition to the measures which they condemn. By giving place to such scruples, at the expense of deviating a little from the strict line of ordinary procedure, a court neither testifies its weakness nor compromises its authority: it merely evinces that moderation which becomes a tribunal confessedly subordinate and fallible, and does homage

1 Annals of the Original Secession, p. 517.

2 History of the Secession, McKerrow, p. 460.

to the sacred rights of conscience and private judgment.¹

However, it is difficult to know how the Synod could have accomodated the protesting brethren without denying the voluntary principles which seemed to have become those of most of the Synod, at that time, though not recognized under that name.

In the Memoir McCrie, the Younger, writes with feeling on the subject of the New Testimony and in vindication of his father's stand.

It is now placed beyond all reasonable disputing that the New Testimony, adopted by the General Synod in 1804, differed toto coelo from the original Testimony, in every point peculiar to the profession of Seceders. The difference did not lie in a few unessential points, but in the very spirit and specific nature and design of the two documents. The Secession Testimony was neither more nor less than an appearance in behalf of the principles of the Church of Scotland, as exhibited in the Westminster standards, and of the whole work of reformation, civil as well as ecclesiastical, with an adherence to the solemn obligations by which the Church and State, in their respective spheres, are bound to maintain them.

.....
 The Original Testimony was not a declaration of adherence to certain truths simply on the general grounds of their being agreeable to Scriptures; but a testimony for the profession of the Church of Scotland, and the national reformation.²

In the New Testimony, he continues, under the pretext of "resting the whole of their constitution on the testimony

1 Life of Melville, I, 370.

2 Memoir, pp. 47-48.

of God in his Word," the primary affinity of the Secession to the Church of Scotland is wholly evaded. The Original Testimony approved the duty of magistrates to support and promote true religion but now the Synod maintains that the magistrate's sole concern is with the secular interests of society, which seems to be a radical change.

Recent events have placed the true character of this change beyond all question; and the great body of modern Seceders, moving, as might be expected, from one step of defection to another, are now ready to avow, and glory in the avowal, that in following out the principles then adopted to their legitimate consequences, they have landed in Voluntaryism, and now find themselves directly at antipodes with the sentiments of the fathers of the Secession, and with that Testimony which continued to the close of the last century to be the recognized and unqualified term of communion in the body.¹

Few at the time, were aware of the importance of the principles involved in the controversy--principles on which the "establishment" was later defended in the Voluntary Controversy. The Established Church at the time regarded it as a mere party difference; the public was uninformed and not interested and the courts did not realize the consequences of the tenets contained in the New Testimony. The general opinion of the protesters is expressed by J.G. Lockhart when he writes: "Their dissent is only to be accounted for by the extravagant vanity and self-importance of a few particular theorists--absurdly

1 Memoir, p. 50.

inherited and maintained by men whose talents, to say nothing of their piety, should have taught them to know better."¹ Even in 1840 McKerrow fails to consider the points at issue so very important even though he admits that the Voluntary principles were being introduced in the new deeds. McCrie and his friends foresaw that the changes in the Synod's Testimony would eventually issue in the questioning of Civil Establishments as such. Speaking to his congregation in June, 1806, before he was deposed McCrie says:

The principles for which we have been called to contend may appear to many disputable or trivial matters. They do not appear so to us: we view them as involving the glory of God, the honour of Him whom his Father has placed on his holy hill, the advancement of his public interest on earth, and the welfare of nations. We look upon religion as the common concern of all mankind, and that it is the duty of persons to promote and advance it in every station which they occupy. We consider 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 institution. 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;

.....
 Is it any wonder that there should be Seceders who cannot submit to receive such doctrine? The time will come when it will be a matter of astonishment that so few have appeared in such a cause, and that those who have appeared should be borne down, opposed and spoken against. And low as the credit of the principles for which we contend is now sunk in the body, and few as are now disposed to appear for them, I entertain not

1 Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk, third edit., vol. III; Edinburgh, 1819, pp. 101-102.

the smallest doubt but that their credit will yet be revived, not only in the Secession, but in a more general way.¹

The question of endowment, which was so important an issue in the Voluntary controversy, was of little interest in this dispute. The Establishment principle was important to the protesters because of its bearing on the History of the Reformation from Popery and Prelacy in Britain. "How far were our ancestors right in legalizing the profession of the true religion?--in passing laws in its favour?--in protecting the Sabbath, and repressing gross violations of the first table of the law? Are they to be justified or condemned for having combined civil and religious matters in those solemn covenants by which the Reformation, at both its periods, was confirmed?--and how far, consequently, has the nation as well as the church, become bound by those engagements?"²--were the questions to be decided. However, although the Constitutional Presbytery maintained the Establishment principle they did not approve of the existing Established Church of Scotland. They declared their adherence to the constitution of the Church of Scotland as stated in her standards and acts of reformation and they always hoped for an evangelical revival in the "establishment" and a

1 Memoir, pp. 128-29.

2 Ibid., pp. 134-35.

return by that body to the standards of the Church of Scotland upon which it claimed to be based.

After McCrie's deposition prolonged litigation ensued before the courts over the possession of the property; the case was protracted until March, 1809, when it was decided that McCrie and his group should be ejected from their Church even though a majority of the congregation adhered to him. An appeal was made to the House of Lords but before it was heard the parties came to an agreement and McCrie's people accepted a cash settlement and gave up their rights to the property. The congregation assembled from 1810 to 1813 in Whitefield Chapel, at the foot of Carruber's close, and in 1813 they entered a new Church erected at the corner of Davie St. and West Richmond St., where McCrie officiated until the close of his life and which later became McCrie Free Church.¹ The writer of the Memoir finds it the most remarkable feature of the whole disputation that the Synod, which was so averse to the use of force in religion and so irreconcilable to any connection between Church and State, were so quick to appeal to the civil courts in order to banish from their pulpits and manses men who denied the Synod's view that magistrates had no concern

1 Annals of the Original Secession, pp. 323-25. These pages contain a full history of this congregation.

with religion.

The expulsion of the deposed ministers was sought from the civil power expressly on the ground of the ecclesiastical censure; interdicts, sheriff-officers, legal prosecutions, and even military force, were called into action, to carry into effect the sentences pronounced by these foes to the magistrate's power circa sacra; and those who had denied to king and parliament the right of judging, for the state, between true and false religion, now committed to sheriffs and Lords Ordinary the delicate task of deciding, for the church, whether the Narrative and Testimony was a material departure from the principles of the Secession, and how far the change in the constitution of the General Associate Synod affected the validity of the censures pronounced by them. Lords and lawyers, accustomed only to sharpen their wits on the dry pandects and practicks of the bar, were unexpectedly called upon to pass sentence on points which involved a proper understanding of "Gib's Display," and "Nairn's Reasons of Dissent."¹

In April, 1807, McCrie published a "Statement of the Difference between the Profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as adopted by the Seceders, and the Profession contained in the New Testimony and other Acts lately adopted by the General Associate Synod, particularly on the Power of the Civil Magistrates respecting Religion, National Reformation, National Churches and National Covenants." Dr. George Smeaton, Professor of Exegetical Theology, New College, Edinburgh, edited a reprint of this work in 1871 and he makes much of its powerful support of "establishments" in his remarks in the preface, of which the following are a sample.

¹ Memoir, pp. 136-37.

It is a masterly defence of the principle of Establishments as a scripture truth; and the most complete vindication ever given to the world of the position occupied by the Reformed Church of Scotland on the whole subject of national religion, and of the magistrate's legitimate power in promoting it. (page v)

Of all the publications, however, which owed their origin to these discussions, by far the most important was the statement of the differences by McCrie now reprinted. . . . It rests on a foundation of mingled argument and historical fact, which serve to make the reader feel that he is standing on firm ground. The Scripture-testimony for national religion, is developed by means of such a natural and convincing exposition that few will think of calling in question the conclusion to which he arrives. (page xi)

The design of this reprint is to make Dr. McCrie's statement of the difference accessible to all. The general circulation of the work has long been felt to be a desideratum. . . . And it is hoped that its circulation will have no inconsiderable influence in forming opinion in the present crisis; more especially as the questions now raised in the country, and which seem destined to divide and to convulse the nation, are in substance the very same as those which called forth Dr. McCrie's invaluable statement. (pages xx-xxi)

The original publication, however, aroused little interest at the time and did not attain to fame until the outbreak of the Voluntary agitation in 1829 when it came into great demand, by the anti-Voluntarists, as a source book, for it contained "a full and Scriptural defence of the great principle of the duty of nations, as intimately affecting all their interests, civil and religious."

CHAPTER 3

"ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORIOGRAPHER OF SCOTLAND"¹

During this period of great trial and stress when he was so much occupied with the Church and State controversy McCrie devoted more and more of his time and effort to literary labours and endeavours. Early in 1803 he began to assist his friend Whyttock in conducting the Christian Magazine, a monthly periodical which was published from 1797 until 1806 and which was supported by both branches of the Secession. McCrie wrote a great variety of articles under various pen-names. Anything in the way of a historical sketch was usually signed Philistor. In January, 1803, he wrote an article on the History of the New Testament, which was a survey of the coincidences and conformity of Josephus with what is contained in the New Testament and which he deemed of service in confirming and illustrating the gospel history. In July he wrote a memoir of Mr. John Murray--"Those persons who have been faithful in bearing witness for the interests of Christ deserve to have their memories preserved, even although there may be nothing very remarkable in their story. . . . Mr. John Murray was a witness and sufferer for the

1 Presbyterian Review, March, 1836, p. 4.

reformed principles of the Church of Scotland, against the usurpation of the bishops, in the beginning of the seventeenth century." In October, he presented a short article "On the Divine Institution of Sacrifices" and in November, a "Sketch of the Progress of the Reformation in Spain"; the latter he subsequently expanded into a book-length treatise and it became a very popular work in Britain and on the Continent. In March, 1804, there appeared a short study, "Remarks on Matthew xx; 25,26," which dealt with the parity of powers among all ministers of Christ and the office of minister being one of service not dominion. In April he wrote on the "Origin of the Taborites" in which he made corrections of Mosheim and L'Enfant and suggested that Laurentius de Byzinius was the most credible and authentic source for this area of history. And then in November and December he gave to the public a survey of the life and death of "Martyrs in Britain from the time of Wickliffe." Of note in these is his reference to the particular influence of Wickliffe with regard to the Church of England maintaining Reformed principles of the Eucharist. The following year, in October, November, and December issues he published the "Life of Dr. Andrew Rivet," and in this work the controversy in which McCrie was involved at the time seems to have had its effects. Speaking of Dr. Rivet's treatise on Universal Grace

McCrie says:

This treatise, which is published among the author's works, may justly be pointed out as a specimen of the most candid and pacific controversy. He first states distinctly, from their writings, and often in their own words, the sentiments of the patrons of the new doctrine, on the different articles which were controverted. Secondly, he separates and mentions with due commendation, those things in which they departed from the common doctrine, shews briefly the invalidity of their arguments, their inconsistency with other sentiments to which they still professedly adhered, and that all their refinements did not free the doctrine of predestination and grace from the objections alleged against it or satisfy the adversaries.

.....
 Those who have attempted to introduce novel opinions into churches which had a fixed profession of faith, have often refused a departure from this, and defended themselves from the writings of those who were never before suspected of entertaining sentiments similar to theirs. . . . It is not difficult to extract from former authors, detached sentiments, or incidental and loose expressions, which seem to favour an error which was not then broached, or which they were not guarding against while they wrote against adversaries of an opposite description.¹

Did McCrie model his "statement" after the style of Rivet's "candid and pacific controversy?" There is no doubt that the Synod, too, sought to introduce new opinions while professing to be restating what were long recognized precepts. It seems certain that in the above article McCrie was also thinking about the controversy in which he himself was involved.

The death of Whyttock, in 1806, left McCrie the sole editor of the Christian Magazine and he found it necessary

1 Christian Magazine, November, 1805, pp. 444ff.

to write much of the material himself in order to keep the magazine going. In January he published an article on the "Life of Patrick Hamilton, the proto-martyr of the Reformation in Scotland;" in February, the "Life of Francis Lambert of Avignon;" in the June, July, August, September, and October issues the "Life of Alexander Henderson" appeared; and in December, besides a series of historical notices respecting learned Scottish Divines who worked in England and abroad during the sixteenth century, he wrote an article "On the Discipline of the Primitive Church"--a study of Apostolic and post-Apostolic practice in the Church in matters of discipline. The next year he gave up the editorship of the Christian Magazine but he published a pamphlet entitled: "Letters on the late Catholic Bill, and the Discussions to which it has given rise: addressed to British Protestants, and chiefly Presbyterians in Scotland, by a Scots Presbyterian." It had reference to a Bill to admit Roman Catholics to places of command in the army and navy and McGrie was convinced that all barriers against Popery should be maintained.

By this time all his leisure hours were entirely devoted to historical studies and he commenced, during this period, the preparation and composition of the work that was to raise him from a position of obscurity as a

little-known minister of a small Secession body to a high place among Scotland's great historians. There can be little doubt that the controversy relating to the religious profession which he had supported and maintained had a great influence in directing his mind to the investigation of Scottish Church History, which produced his biography of Knox. He said himself that if it had not been for the "new light" he would probably never have thought of writing the life of Knox and it was as much for his own satisfaction as anything else that he sought information on the reformation brought about by his ancestors. Many years later, in a speech to the Anti-Patronage Society, he said that he had read the deeds of her reformers and confessors at first with mere youthful curiosity. It had not been until he had satisfied himself that the system of doctrine and discipline they had introduced was not more consonant to the oracles of truth than it was conducive to the best interests, temporal and spiritual, of the nation, that he had minutely studied their history. Then, he confessed, the fire began to burn, and he could not forbear to impart to others what he himself had felt.¹ The task of writing the Life of Knox was not an easy one--

Obscure authors had to be discovered, and long

1 Appendix to Life of McCrie, 1840, p. 496; bound with Miscellaneous Writings in Vol. X of McCrie's Works.

forgotten books resuscitated; contending facts had to be weighed, and contradictory statements reconciled; while a mass of manuscripts, such as might have daunted the most zealous antiquary at a period when Scottish antiquarianism was still in infancy, had to be pored over and deciphered, in quest of facts that were already fading away with the ink in which they were embodied, but whose final extinction his patriotic zeal sufficed to prevent. And all this was to be accomplished. . . by one who had the weekly and daily toil of a Scottish Secession minister to interrupt him, as well as its very scanty emoluments to impede his efforts and limit his literary resources.¹

The first edition of the Life of Knox was published in November, 1811, and the second edition, with many alterations and additions, in March, 1813. Between that time and 1840 there were six more editions and the work was also translated into French, Dutch, and German in 1817. The reviews were, in the main, full of praise for this biography of Knox and McCrie's reputation as a historian was ensured. To give only one example of the admiring reviews, the following is an extract from the Quarterly Review, July, 1813.

Compact and vigorous, often coarse, but never affected, without tumour and without verbosity, we can scarcely forbear to wonder by what effort of taste and discrimination the style of Dr. McCrie has been preserved so nearly unpolluted by the disgusting and circumlocutory nonsense of his contemporaries. Here is no puling about the "interesting sufferer", "the patient saint," "the angelic preacher." Knox is plain Knox, in acting and in suffering always a hero; and his story is told as a hero would wish that it should be

1 Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen, edited by Robert Chambers, revised and continued by Thomas Thomson; London, 1875, vol. iii, p. 6.



told--with simplicity, precision and force." 1

The University of Edinburgh |so admired his achievement that they were pleased to| grant him the degree of Doctor of Divinity. McCrie acknowledged the great influence that Bruce had exerted on his labours and in a letter to him in December, 1811, he writes: "If I have been able to do any justice to the Scottish Reformation and the Reformers, it may, in a very great degree, be ascribed to your example and influence; as you first directed my attention to the subject, and from your conversation and writings I received many of the hints of which I have availed myself."2

The friendship that existed between these two scholars was very deep and intimate and it was a great loss to McCrie when his valuable and venerable friend died in 1816.

After the publication of the Life of Knox McCrie began to emerge from comparative obscurity to a more public life. He always had a particular aversion to making public appearances and this prevented him from taking part in the religious associations which became so abundant in the early nineteenth century. With regard to the Missionary Societies, McCrie approved of their general aims but he felt that their work should properly be undertaken by the Church itself. The Church is the true missionary society,

1 Ibid., p. 7.

2 Memoir, p. 170.

he maintained, and to her belongs the duty of examining the qualifications of Gospel missionaries and of appointing them to fields of duty. He did, though, take an active part in the Gaelic School Society; besides being one of its founders and one of its liberal supporters all his life, he frequently served as a director. McCrie's lack of sectarian animosity is illustrated here by his friendly association in the work of this society with Dr. Charles Stuart who was a very zealous Baptist.

In March, 1813, McCrie attended an interdenominational meeting in Edinburgh concerned with the Christianizing of India. The main purpose of the meeting was to demand liberty for all Protestants to send out ministers and teachers to India. McCrie, in a speech to the meeting, suggested that their plea for toleration in India was a tacit recognition of the Church of England as the official Established Church in India and that it would be more useful to demand recognition of the Church of Scotland as entitled to a share of the legal countenance and support in that part of the Empire. His well expressed views exposed the true basic issues involved and were not without their effect on subsequent developments in this matter.

Along with the recognition that came to McCrie on his publication of "Knox" there commenced a close friendship

between himself and Dr. Andrew Thomson. After the long reign of "moderatism" Thomson was bringing about the ascendancy of "evangelicalism." His devoted attachment to the standards of the Church and his zeal for her reformation engendered a natural affinity between these two men and McCrie began to contribute occasionally to his paper, the Christian Instructor. The first of these articles appeared in July, 1812, and was a Review of "Milne on Presbytery and Episcopacy," and many others appeared in the succeeding years, the most prominent of which was a long review of Walter Scott's "Tales of my Landlord", appearing in January, February and March, 1817. He undertook this review at the suggestion of Thomson who advised him to "Praise his Scotch, which is exceeding good, but reprobate his principles with all your might." The writer in the Biographical Dictionary speaking of this review says it was--

a complete historical refutation of the misstatements of the novel, and a successful vindication of the vilified Covenanters, But it was also something more than this in the eyes of Scott and his admirers; for it attacked him with a strength of wit and power of sarcasm that threatened to turn the laugh against himself, and foil him at his own chosen weapon. So at least he felt, and his complaints upon the subject, as well as his attempted defence in the Quarterly Review, bespoke a mind ill at ease about the issue of such a controversy. The result was that the novelist was generally condemned, and that his tale, notwithstanding the popularity which at first attended it, sank in popular estimation, and became the least

valued of all his admired productions.¹

In the previous year the persecutions of the Protestants in France had again aroused McCrie's public interest. At a meeting in the Merchant's Hall on January 25th, 1816, he made a long speech seconding Thomson's resolutions pledging the meeting to interest themselves in the suffering French Protestants. Later he preached a sermon on behalf of the sufferers and he published in the Instructor of February and April a "Review of Pamphlets and Documents on the Persecutions of the Protestants in France." McCrie was convinced that the persecution in France from the days of Louis XIV was one of the principal causes of the Revolution and perhaps explained some of its severities.²

In November, 1817, McCrie felt called upon to write an article in defence of his friend, Thomson, who was being severely criticized for his action in refusing to have a divine service in St. George's Church on the occasion of Princess Charlotte's funeral. The magistrates of Edinburgh at the suggestion of the Court and with the concurrence of some of the clergy had issued a proclamation that all the Churches would be open for this service, but

1 Biog. Dict. of Eminent Scotsmen, vol.iii, p. 8.

2 See also Chapter 7.

St. George's remained closed. After much polemical writing on both sides of the question McCrie published his "Free Thoughts on the late religious celebration of the funeral of her Royal Highness, the Princess Charlotte of Wales; and on the discussion to which it has given rise in Edinburgh. By Scoto Britannus." He points out the impropriety of attempting to prescribe to the Scottish Church in matters of divine worship and the dangers of adopting, even occasionally, Episcopalian usages. All in all his arguments were so powerful and so conclusive that there was no further criticism of Thomson on the subject.

During the years 1817 and 1818 he was prevailed upon to act as theological professor to the Constitutional Presbytery but would not consent to carry the work on any longer.¹ And at this period, also, he began to contribute articles to Blackwood's Magazine such as: "An Account of the Manuscript of Bishop Lesley's History of Scotland," in October, 1817, and "An Account of the Manuscript History of Scotland, by George McKenzie," in June, 1817. In the meantime his work on the Life of Melville, which he had begun shortly after the publication of "Knox", was nearing completion and he was able to have it published in November, 1819. This biography was really a continuation

1 Memoir, p. 231. Crichton in his memoir, p. 56, says McCrie was Professor of Divinity from 1817-1827 (Life of Knox, Belfast, 1872).

of the account of Scottish Church History begun in the Life of Knox, and much of its content was written in defence and elucidation of the principles of Presbyterianism. McCrie, as we have seen, had long been interested in the various aspects of Church Government and had read intensively into the subject. After all his research he was persuaded of the scripturalness of the form of policy adopted by the Churches of the Reformation. Apart from the strong criticism he received from the British Critic, which resented his treatment of the Episcopalians, the reviewers were full of praise for this second great work of McCrie. The work was re-edited in December, 1823, with extensive alterations in style and arrangement. The Edinburgh Christian Instructor reviewed the second edition of Melville in 1824 and referred to the work as a "literary history, an ecclesiastical inquiry, and a private memoir." In his praise of the work the reviewer writes in part:

Independent of the great variety of miscellaneous information and literary anecdote which it contains, it abounds in the most enlightened views of many public questions, which cannot fail to prove attractive to every man of real patriotism and genuine piety. We would wish particularly to recommend it to all ecclesiastical persons, whether connected with the Church of Scotland, or with the different bodies of Presbyterian Dissenters, as a manual of sound instruction, equally pointing out to the former the pure principles which they are bound to maintain; and, to the latter, the proper limits within which they ought to restrict

their separation.¹

In 1820, a union of the larger Secession bodies, the Burghers and Anti-Burghers, was effected under the name of the United Associate Synod. This union was interesting to McCrie because it illustrated the distance that the two bodies had drifted from their original Secession Testimony. "The Confession of Faith and Catechisms were received under limitations, which attached to them, in vague terms, the stigma of teaching intolerance and persecution; a general declaration, informing the world that they were Presbyterians, was substituted in place of the Directory for Public Worship and the Form of Presbyterial Church Government, which were discarded." "Many of the Anti-Burgher ministers, objecting to this union, separated and formed a new synod of "Protesters." They felt that the union had adopted principles which were no longer aimed at the reformation of the Establishment and a possible reunion with it but were rather intended to render a continued struggle against the national Church inevitable. The "Protesters" realized the similarity of their sentiments with those for which McCrie had laboured years before and soon correspondence began between the "Protesters" and the Constitutional Associate Presbytery which finally

1 Christian Instructor, October, 1824. Review of Life of Andrew Melville, p. 772.

bore fruit in the union of these two groups.

Early in 1821 McCrie published his "Two Discourses on the Unity of the Church, her divisions and their removal." The main object of these was to indicate the weaknesses of modern plans of union which were principally founded on latitudinarian principles, and to point out the dispositions and principles necessary in the negotiators of ecclesiastical peace. The following quotations will give only a limited view of the style and content of this excellent treatise.

Divisions in the church may often be traced to a spirit of vanity, pride, and ambition. Than this, nothing can be more repugnant to the Spirit of Christianity, or prejudicial to ecclesiastical peace. It is often found combined with a spirit of error, and has formed a very prominent feature in the character of heresiarchs and founders of sects. (P.31).

Feelings of personal offence and injury form no inconsiderable obstacle in the way of removing divisions in the Church. In one degree or another these are unavoidable, when religious differences arise and grow to a height. They are no proper ground of separation, and the recollection of them ought not to be allowed to stand in the way of desirable re-union. . . .

. . . . Self-love will lead us insensibly to confound and identify the two; and what we flatter ourselves to be pure zeal for religion and hatred of sin, may, in the process of a rigid and impartial examination, be found to contain a large mixture of resentment for offences which terminated on ourselves(pp.40-41).

Sensible of these difficulties, and despairing of being able to remove them by the ordinary mode of conference, explanations, and discussion, many have come to adopt the opinion that there is but one way of putting an end to the divisions of the church; that is, by abstracting totally the points of difference, consigning all the controversies which have arisen to

oblivion, and bringing together the separate parties on the undebatable ground which is common to all. A remedy which would prove worse than the disease--an expedient which would lay the basis of union on the grave of all those valuable truths and institutions which have been involved in the disputes of different parties, and which constitute the firm and sacred bonds of ecclesiastical confederation and communion (pp. 45-46).¹

Even the British Critic, in its review of this pamphlet, though it deploras McCrie's support of Presbyterianism which it considers a separation from the true Church--the Episcopal--, considers him "an able defender of the great principles of unity itself," "a forcible expositor of the evils and miseries of schism," and "an earnest insister upon the necessity of their removal," and "the restoration of that peace and harmony which they have violated."² In an Appendix to these discourses entitled: "A Short View of the Plan of Religious Reformation and Union adopted originally by the Secession," he presented in a condensed form the arguments in favour of establishments as well as a defence of the Reformation, the Confession of Faith and the National Covenants. In the Christian Instructor for July, August and September of this year he published a review of Orme's Life of Owen, with the aid of some material from Dr. Brown of Langton;

1 Two Discourses on the Unity of the Church. Edinburgh, 1821.

2 British Critic, New Series, Vol. XVI, 1821, pp. 449-477.

in this review he undertook a historical vindication of the Presbyterians from the misrepresentations of the Independents.

The intense studies in which McCrie had been engaged in order to produce these many historical and controversial works coupled with the sad loss of his wife who died on June 1st, 1821, began to affect adversely his health. Besides his illness, his eyesight, overstrained from the perusal of old manuscripts, began to fail and there was fear of him becoming totally blind. He was prevailed upon in May, 1822, to take a holiday and visit the Continent. He spent two months visiting the Hague, Leyden, Haerlem, Amsterdam, and Utrecht but much of his time was taken up with historical research in the libraries and universities of these places. However, the journey seems to have restored to him a measure of good health and during the summer of that year he became involved in yet another public cause--taking an interest in and sending aid to the Greeks who were struggling to assert their long lost independence. It was their sufferings that brought about a surge of public sympathy and in August 7th, 1822, at a public meeting in the Merchants' Hall to promote a subscription for their aid McCrie took the lead and made a most impressive speech which aroused a lively public interest. Besides the Classic associations of Greece it



was a zeal for the cause of true religion that engendered McCrie's interest, for he always associated true religion with the triumph of liberty and the progress of education. And of course McCrie's love of liberty and hatred of oppression, which breathe through all his works would direct his sympathies towards any people who were struggling to escape from slavery. He also lent his support to a scheme organized by the Edinburgh ladies to raise funds for the education of the Greek women and he spoke again for the Greek cause at a public meeting in April, 1825, which was called to form a "Scottish Ladies Society for promoting education in Greece."¹

His health again took a turn for the worse and between 1823 and 1826 he was obliged to curtail many of his historical labours. However he did begin, in 1824, to carry on correspondence with Sir George Sinclair on the subject of Union with the Established Church. In a letter, dated May 19, 1824, McCrie expressed his sentiments on the matter of a union between the various Secession Groups and the Established Church. No one could be more deeply affected than himself by the lamentable schism in the Christian body, McCrie said. The divisions tend in many ways to prevent or to paralyse efforts in behalf of the

¹ See also Chapter 7.

common cause of Christianity, and there will be no general revival of religion in the country until Christians are effectively united under "one faith, one baptism, one creed, one discipline." However, McCrie was unable to discover any plan by which the union of the "establishment" and the Secession could be effected on sound principles, or attempted with any chance of success, for errors in doctrine and immorality of practice went uncensored in the Established Church and Patronage, which was one main cause of the Secession, was still in use.¹

McCrie was always anxious about the reunion of the Scottish Church and he was most gratified with the successful conclusion of the negotiations to unite the Associate Synod of Protesters with the Constitutional Presbytery. On May 18, 1827, they united to form the Associate Synod of Original Seceders and their new Testimony claimed that they stood together on the same ground as that occupied by the first Seceders from the Church of Scotland. Much of the credit for this satisfactory settlement belongs to McCrie and he was responsible for drawing up the historical section of the Testimony. McCrie refused to exact or receive from his former associates any acknowledgement of the illegality or severity of the sentences passed by the

1 Memoir, pp. 291-298.

Associate Synod against the brethren of the Constitutional Presbytery but, as Hugh Miller says, the Protesters "virtually confessed that the excommunicated and deposed minority had occupied all along the true position,--a position to which they themselves now deemed it necessary to return."¹

These events must have brought great satisfaction to McCrie and perhaps were influential in bringing about the gradual improvement in his health and spirits. At the same time, his marriage in 1827 to Mary, daughter of his friend, Robert Chalmers of Haddington, brought him much happiness. He was able then, with renewed vigour, to take up his historical endeavours. In May, 1825, he had edited the "Memoirs of Mr. William Veitch and George Brysson, written by themselves," to which he had added biographical and illustrative notes but two years later he published his third major work the History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Italy. In a note in the Life of Knox he had mentioned that he once intended drawing up an account of the Italian Reformation but he had laid it aside hoping someone else with more leisure and better

1 Headship of Christ, Hugh Miller, pp. 110-111. For a full presentation of the negotiations between Paxton, McCrie and others on Union see pamphlet by James Black: Dr. McCrie and Professor Paxton, Edinburgh 1872.

access to the materials would undertake the task.¹ Apparently he despaired of anyone accepting the invitation and decided to produce the work himself. It was re-edited in an enlarged edition in 1833 and was translated into French, German, and Dutch. It also earned the distinction of being inserted in the Index Expurgatorius at the Vatican. Two years later he enlarged into a major work an early sketch he had made of the Reformation in Spain. Thus the first of his historical productions published in 1803 in the Christian Magazine became merged into his last historical work the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the Sixteenth Century. In the preparation of these two works on Italy and Spain he had found it necessary to master the Italian and Spanish languages; and they were considered by some to be his two most original and delightful compositions. Grichton in his memoir speaks admiringly of them.

In these works, as in those connected with Scottish history, Dr. McCrie displayed an inexhaustible fund of learning, of minute and exact information, such as could only have been amassed by years of severe and patient industry. The same spirit, too, pervades them all--a conviction that Popery is a system opposed to the religion of the Bible, and hostile to the liberty and happiness of men. Nor do they bear the slightest trace of sectarian narrowness, or national prejudices.

1 Life of Knox, Second Edition, Vol. II, p. 309, Note M.

The author's Christianity takes a more comprehensive range.

.....
 Wherever men lived and laboured, or suffered and died to communicate the knowledge of a purer faith, the various shades of opinion on minor subjects, never abated his esteem, or cooled his zeal to honour their memory.¹

His study of the cruel and intolerant character of Popery in the ascendant naturally led McCrie to regard as dangerous the Catholic Emancipation Bill which was introduced by the Government in 1829. He was decidedly opposed to any persecution for conscience sake and in the previous year had taken an active interest in the petition for the abolition of the Test and Corporation Acts even though he knew that this was only the thin edge of the Catholic wedge that would finally force the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act. McCrie was responsible for drawing up a petition to the House of Commons against the Roman Catholic Claim in which he stated, among other things, that any repeal of the Laws excluding Roman Catholics from the Legislature and from places of power in the Executive Government is replete with danger to the best interests of the nation, its Protestant Institutions and its Constitutional Monarchy; and that he had no desire to deprive the Roman Catholics of freedom of worship but he

1 Crichton's Memoir in Life of Knox, (Belfast, 1872), p. 11.

was still convinced that the Roman Catholic system is contrary to the Word of God and full of superstition and idolatry and its adherents have proved themselves unfit for the safe government of the country, particularly on account of their divided allegiance. He reminded the House of Commons that a great struggle against Popery was necessary to achieve the Protestant constitution; that the Revolution Settlement was intended to maintain the Protestant religion and that the Bill was inconsistent with the Act of Union and an infraction of the Act of the Scottish Parliament regulating the election of Peers and Commoners, which was declared to be as valid as any of the articles of the Act of Union, and also an infraction of the Act of the Scottish Parliament for securing the Protestant Religion as then professed in Scotland. McCrie felt very warmly about this subject and it was the one point of public principle over which he and Dr. Thomson differed.

In 1830, we observe further evidence of McCrie's increasing anxiety about the continuing schism in the Church of Scotland when negotiations, looking towards union were begun between the Original Seceders and the Original Burghers. The union did not come to pass but McCrie was very much in favour of it for he sought to bring together all Presbyterians who were friendly to the

cause of Reformation. Early in 1831 he prepared some articles on the "Marrow of Modern Divinity" which was a compilation of sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant writings on the subject of justification and the distinction between the Law and the Gospel; it had been republished in 1718 by Rev. James Hog of Carnock and later republished with some notes added by Thomas Boston. The "moderate" party in the Assembly were greatly alarmed at the boldness of the Marrow sentiments on freedom from the Law as a covenant of works and in 1720 the Assembly condemned the Marrow as antinomian. The Seceders took up the Marrow cause and McCrie, following the Original Secession sentiments, was a staunch advocate of the Marrow doctrines. He made an intense study of the problems involved and published his findings in several issues of the Instructor.¹

It is to be expected that McCrie would take a great interest in the Voluntary Controversy which commenced about this time, since many who had once professed the principles of the first Secession were now supporting Voluntarism which was far removed from the original Secession Testimony. McCrie still maintained the principle which he had defended at such great cost in

1 Christian Instructor, August, October, December, 1831, and February, 1832.

1805, that it was the duty of nations and rulers to recognize, countenance and support the true religion. It must have given him much personal satisfaction at the time to see the principles recognized by many and publicly applauded, which previously had been regarded as trifles; and to see his "Statement" of the old controversy republished and quoted as an authority on the subject of the defence of Establishments. However the political aspects of the controversy as well as his own position as a Seceder, opposed to the existing "establishment" with its corrupt constitution and administration, prevented his active participation in the debate. His sentiments on Voluntarism and on a return to the Established Church are expressed in an address by the Synod of Original Seceders --"Vindication of the Principles of the Church of Scotland, in relation to the questions presently agitated"--which was prepared and published in 1834 under McCrie's supervision. It is stated that it is the right and duty of a nation in its collective capacity as well as of a man in his individual capacity, to decide on the true religion, and having decided, to recognize and countenance the profession of it. The original Secession from the Church of Scotland "was not because she was an Established Church, but on account of her defection from her original constitution and principles. . . . In stating their

secession, they solemnly declared their adherence to 'the principles of the true Presbyterian covenanted Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, government, and discipline;' and at the same time gave a solemn pledge to the judicatories from which they seceded that upon the return of these to their duty, they would cheerfully return to their ecclesiastical fellowship."¹ It is disturbing, then, to observe many of the Secession now appearing in the ranks of what is called the "Voluntary Church Association" which attempts to hold up as "unscriptural and anti-Christian, not only a national establishment of religion but every thing national connected with religion." Not that the Synod would maintain that an Established Church is necessary to the existence or extension of Christ's Church or that the present "establishment" deserves approval, but it does condemn the "Voluntary System" which has for its object not merely the overthrow of the present "establishment" but the formation of a civil constitution that shall recognize no religious system or sect, as such, but shall simply extend protection to them all, indiscriminately. The "Voluntary System" is condemned in this address because it is atheistical in character and tendency; it is at variance

1 Vindication of the Principles of the Church of Scotland &c; Edinburgh, 1834, pp. 6-7.

with sound policy; it is unscriptural; it is opposed to one important design of supernatural revelation--the improvement of human society; and it strikes at the foundation of God's moral government. As well as the reasons for disapproval of "Voluntaryism" the report goes on to give reasons for refusing to unite with the "establishment". The Synod disapproves of its constitution established at the Revolution. "They are aware that the established church of Scotland has it not in her power to correct all the evils of the Revolution settlement which they feel themselves bound to point out; but they cannot warrantably quit their position of secession, until the established church show a disposition to return to that reformed constitution" by the use of powers which belong to an ecclesiastical and independent body under the headship of Christ and "by due applications to the state for having those laws rescinded or altered which affect her purity and abridge her freedom."¹

In April, 1832, McCrie became involved in another publicly agitated question--the Irish Education Bill. He attended a meeting called for the purpose of petitioning Parliament against its plan of Education for Ireland and he defended the petition on the grounds of "Christian

1 Ibid., pp. 19-20; also quoted in Memoir, pp. 340-41.

principle and the real interests of education." Among some unpublished letters of McCrie, preserved with the Lee Papers in the National Library of Scotland, is one which relates directly to the Irish Education Bill. He wrote to Dr. Lee as follows:

Salisbury Place, 4 May, 1832. My Dear Sir. I hope you will look particularly into the proposed Resolutions for the intended meeting, & get them formed in the most unexceptionable plan. By hearing them once I could not judge of their [?]tenor but it struck me that they were not quite what they ought to be. Should they not be abridged in number, if not also in length? Is there any need for resolving that the Scriptures are the word of God etc.? Allowance, I think, should be made for the peculiar state of Ireland, and we cannot expect that the same mode of education would be introduced there which has been practised, and with much success in Scotland. My leading and great objection to the new Government plan is that it recognizes the Popish principle that the Bible is a Dangerous book, and allows the prejudices or ambitious designs of the Popish priesthood to rule national education. I have no doubt your statement was perfectly correct as the rule and practice of the Assembly's Schools in the Highlands; but I confess I am averse to the idea of compelling the Catholic children to read even the Bible--for so it would be constructed, unless it was provided that literary instruction would not be with-held, in the public schools from those whose parents scrupled at the Scriptures.

You will have seen the result of the Glasgow meeting, I have reason to think that perhaps something of the same kind may be attempted here, or at any rate a counter meeting will be held. I am, My Dear Sir, Yrs. faithfully, Tho. McCrie.¹

In this year also he became active in the support of the Society for promoting a proper observance of the

1 M.S. 3439, National Library of Scotland; Lee Papers; Correspondence.

Lord's day. However, in 1833, his attention was attracted to a public question of much greater interest at the time, the question of Church Patronage. He attended a meeting of the Anti-Patronage Society and delivered a speech advocating the abolition of Patronage as the "only means of saving the Establishment and promoting its efficiency." He suggested that the Established Church's failure to reform its constitution had caused much of the Secession to give up hope of ever being able to return and had caused many to drift into "Voluntaryism" and to seek the overthrow of all Ecclesiastical Establishments. In May, he published an anonymous pamphlet, entitled: "What ought the General Assembly to do at the present Crisis?" In this pamphlet, which turned out to be his last, he answered the question in the title--"Without delay, petition the legislature for the abolition of Patronage." Arguing from Scripture, from history and from expediency, he suggested that it was absurd to continue the yoke of Patronage along with the recently acquired political franchise. The next year he was summoned along with others to appear before a committee of the House of Commons on Church Patronage. McCrie considered Patronage to be glaringly inconsistent with the Presbyterian constitution and only its entire abolition, in his opinion, would secure the Church's independence. The Veto Act

would merely yield a right of rejection not of election and it was only a half-measure which would give satisfaction to neither side. He preached a sermon against the "Veto" in which he said: "They say they have muzzled the monster: it is a mistake; they have only muffled him, and they have muzzled the people."¹ McCrie had doubts of the legality of the Veto Act and these doubts were later to be confirmed; but he condemned it because it tended to perpetuate Patronage and really was a virtual recognition of the system by the Church.²

Although McCrie had been collecting the necessary materials for some time it was not until this period that he began to write the Life of Calvin. His son, John, had been doing considerable research for him in Geneva and in 1833 the materials he sent became so copious that McCrie commenced more serious work on Calvin. About this time, also, he discovered that a Rev. William K. Tweedie of London was working on the same project and he offered to transfer all the information he had to him. However, Tweedie insisted on sending his manuscripts to McCrie, who continued for a time his work on this biography; but he was never able to finish the composition, which,

1 Sermons, Thomas McCrie, D.D., Edinburgh, 1836, p. 346.

2 For greater detail of McCrie's views on Patronage, see chapter 5.

judging by the few chapters he did finish and which were published posthumously, would have been a monumental work. During these latter years, besides his historical research and his ordinary ministerial duties, he was continually involved in public questions and meetings, and heavy correspondence. In 1833, also, he undertook to assist Professor Paxton at the Divinity Hall. With all his many labours his health began to fail and on August 5, 1835, he died at the age of 63 and in the fortieth year of his ministry. Crichton, in his memoir, (page 55) quotes the following from an obituary notice on McCrie.

. . . the wonder is, that any physical strength could have held out so long under such incessant pressure. Times past, and times present--interests the most remote, and interests close at hand--counsels to churches and nations, and counsels to the humblest members of a humble flock--correspondence with the living, and fatiguing researches into the cross lights and casual glances at forgotten facts, in the letters of the long-departed dead--languages dead and living--opinions old and new--parties, schools, and sects of all times and descriptions--well may we stand aghast at the contemplation of demands so manifold and various on the time and thoughts of this withal so thoroughly domestic man and faithful Christian minister.

The respect due to McCrie and the sorrow of the city and the nation at his passing was most evident at the funeral.

His funeral was attended by nearly 1500 persons including the magistracy of Edinburgh, its ministers of all persuasions, the preachers and students attending the halls of the Establishment and the United Secession, and by a deputation from the Assembly's Commission, headed by the Clerk and the Moderator. Nor could his remains have found a more appropriate resting-place

than the ancient cemetery to which they were conveyed,
--the burial ground of the Greyfriars.

A massy and tasteful monument of white stone, erected by his sorrowing flock, as a memorial of "his worth and their gratitude," marks out his final resting-place, and bears an inscription whose rare merit it is to be at once highly eulogistic and strictly true.¹

LINES ON THE DEATH OF DR. MCCRIE.²

Weep Zion, weep, a faithful watchman falls,
Skilfull, in troublous times, to build thy walls,
And tell thy tow'rs, repelling every foe,
Within, without, that seeks thine overthrow,
Learned in sacred, and classic lore,
McCrie the great, and good, is now no more.
With his own Knox, and Melville shall his name,
Be ever dear to Scotia, and to fame;
Foremost in battle, 'gainst the insidious foe,
He stood with Thomson, now alas! laid low.
O tell it not in Gath, nor Askelon,
Lest haughty foes should boast of vict'ry won.

That hand that guided oft the classic pen,
Is cold in death, nor e'er shall write again;
That tongue so eloquent of late to tell
The Church's triumphs o'er the pow'rs of Hell,
Is mute forever,--that benignant eye
Has felt the sentence, "Thou shalt surely die."
But he shall live in each illustrious page,
Proclaiming heavenly truth, to every age
Of man, from worse than Egypt's bondage free,
The Reformation's glorious light and liberty.
And what fell mortal, shall immortal rise,
To live in yonder realms above the skies,
To tell of wisdom manifold, divine,
Th' incarnate God, in whom all glories shine;
While principalities within the veil,
In deep amazement listen to the tale,
And all the heavenly hosts, with loud acclaim,
Sing Hallelujahs to his honoured name.

1 Headship of Christ, Hugh Miller, pp. 124-26.

2 From the Christian Instructor, November, 1835.

Weep then, O Zion weep, with downcast eye,
And hear, with contrite heart, the deep drawn sigh,
 Iniquity abounds, love waxes cold,
 The faithful fails, the enemy is bold.
But He who holds the stars in his right hand,
Has sworn that all his purposes shall stand;
And while he calls from earth each chosen one,
 A Hamilton, McGillivray, and Patterson,
 Ay, and McCrie, He'll other shepherds raise,
To feed his flock, and sing their Maker's praise.

PART II.

THOMAS MCCRIE, THE CHURCHMAN.

CHAPTER 4

CHURCH AND STATE

In the Daily Review of Monday, May 17, 1875, there was a report of a sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Wylie on the occasion of the death of Thomas McCrie, the Younger. In this sermon there was much praise of the father of the deceased and among the remarks were the following concerning his contribution to the proper understanding of Church and State relationships.

Thomas McCrie, the Original Seceder of 1806, was the first or among the first to raise the question of the relation of the State to the Church to the high platform on which it has now been raised. In the discussion of that question in his "statement", he eliminates the sordid element of endowment; he eliminates the nearly as sordid elements of all actual and existing State connections, and he reasons the question on the high abstract grounds of the duty which nations and their rulers owe to Christ and his Church as laid down in the Bible; and I am not aware that after all the sifting and discussion this question has undergone of late years on the part of the Scottish Churches, any of his reasonings have been found to be fallacious, or that our conclusions have advanced beyond those at which he had arrived seventy years ago in his "Statement".

The Statement referred to is the pamphlet published by McCrie in 1807 at the request of the Constitutional Presbytery, entitled: "Statement of the Difference between the Profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as adopted by Seceders, and the Profession contained in the

New Testimony and other Acts, lately adopted by the General Associate Synod; particularly on the Power of the Civil Magistrates respecting Religion, National Reformation, National Churches, and National Covenants"; and it is from this Statement that an understanding of McCrie's views on the subject is to be obtained. This work, which was intended to be the joint production of the Constitutional Presbytery, was, in the end left entirely to McCrie and it is his composition except for some assistance he received from Bruce on the section dealing with Liberty and Conscience. With few exceptions the principles contained in this publication, which excited little interest in 1807, were in popular demand during the Voluntary controversy as a basis of support for the Established Church. In all his contendings McCrie sought to defend the Presbyterian System as delineated in the Second Book of Discipline, a system which he loved and admired and desired to preserve in a purified and reformed state. Writing of the Presbyterian plan of church government in the Life of Melville he lauds its many advantages.

Its leading principles rest upon the express authority of the word of God. Its subordinate arrangements are supported by the general rules of Scripture -- they are simple, calculated to preserve order and promote edification, and adapted to the circumstances of the church for which they were intended. It is equally opposed to arbitrary and lordly domination on the part of the clergy and to popular confusion and misrule. It secures the liberty of the people in one

of their most important privileges, the choosing of those who shall watch for their souls, without making them the final judges of the qualifications of those who shall be invested with this office It encourages a friendly cooperation between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities; but it, at the same time, avoids the confounding of their limits-- prohibits church courts from "meddling with anything 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. It is a form of ecclesiastical polity whose practical utility has been proportionate to the purity in which its principles have been maintained. 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 opportunity favourable of demanding its restoration; and the principal secessions which have been made from the national church in this part of the kingdom have been stated, not in the way of dissent from its constitution, as in England, but in opposition to departures, real or alleged, from its original and genuine principles.¹

The opening chapters of the Statement deal with the particular controversial issues between McCrie and his associates and the Associate Synod. McCrie says that the questions at issue may be summed up in this general question: "Whether may the authority of civil rulers be exercised in various ways about matters of a religious nature and about the church of Christ; or, do the natural rights of private judgment, or the liberty of conscience, belonging to all men, and the peculiar nature and independence of the church of Christ, render such an exercise

¹ Life of Melville, I, 123.

of that authority unwarrantable?"¹ Although, at the time, many considered this question comparatively unimportant, McCrie had the opposite view for, as he says, "Government and religion may be said to comprise under them the chief good of man in this world, including his external and spiritual felicity. Any one of them separately forms a great and important object of discussion, much more when they are considered in their union and mutual relation; as they always are in the present question, which is neither merely political nor purely religious, but of a mixed nature." (p.11.) It is necessary, he continues, in coming to any conclusion to this basic question to consider many questions of Church and State relationships. Since these questions really provide a basis for the discussion it seems wise to quote them in full in order that we might understand the issues involved.

Such questions as the following are evidently of very general concern: Is religion, in any view, a proper object of human laws? Ought not religion, as well as reason, to be considered as belonging unto man, not only individually but also socially? and is not religion necessary not only to the welfare, but, in some degree, to the very existence of civil government and morality? Ought all people and nations to have a religion publicly professed, authorized and maintained among them? Ought the church of Christ, as an external and visible society, where it is introduced, or where revelation is known, to be recognized

¹ Statement, p. 10. Further references to this work will be indicated by bracketed page numbers after the reference.

by the legislature? Ought it, or a pure system of religion, which can justly claim a divine warrant, not only to enjoy common protection and indiscriminate tolerance, but to be positively countenanced and supported by government; and the gross impieties, abuses and disorders, prevailing in corrupt societies or among individuals, to be reformed or repressed by the authority and means competent to bodies politic, as well as by those which are purely spiritual or ecclesiastic, when the interests of both societies or the public good require? Are civil and religious societies in their nature incapable of union and cooperation? Or, are kingdoms and churches by institution, because distinct, rendered incapable of stipulated connection, and of affording mutual benefit and aid? May they not have certain common interests and objects, about which they may unite in the means competent to both, and employ, with regard to these, the powers, means, and sanctions peculiar to each without confusion or encroachment upon the province or privileges of each other? Is religion merely a personal concern, so that men's natural rights and liberties, in any thing respecting it, cannot fall under the direction of public authority, and the restriction and control of laws? Has every man, upon the plea of conscience, an unbounded liberty of professing and acting in all religious matters, without being accountable to, or liable to restraint by human authority, except in the case of attacking the existence or disturbing the peace of civil society as such? (pp. 11-12)

These questions are still of prime importance in this twentieth century. Today one can still hear discussions, often heated, about the government regulations and rules regarding such things as the observance of the Lord's Day; and those who would remove the last vestiges of any Church and State connection are fond of repeating the catch phrase which is expected to silence all further argument -- "You can't legislate people into church." In the pamphlet we are considering, McCrie sets out to answer

the above questions and to show that the Church-State connection ought to be maintained and that the relationship is one of mutual benefit.

He gives a brief sketch of the history of the Church's sentiments on the subject and of the growth of opposite opinions, "formerly known by the name Sectarian and at present vulgarly termed new light." At an early period of the Reformation some separatists from the main body of Protestants appeared, who began to propagate peculiar doctrines regarding civil magistrates and Christian liberty. The best known among these were the Anabaptists. In Holland, during the early seventeenth century, after the difference between the Calvinists and the Arminians came to its height, the latter, finding the majority of magistrates unfriendly, began to deny their authority to interfere in religious matters. In England, during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly, a number of sectaries appeared who insisted on general toleration and liberty and did not cease to agitate for it until Cromwell seized power. Under the reigns of Charles II and James, when all dissenters suffered for nonconformity, the sectarian principles were urged to expose the injustices of persecution. About this time, too, philosophical and political writers, such as Locke, took up the cause of the rights of subjects against the en-

croachments of power. The apparent tendency of the sectaries to rid the world of persecution disposed many to favour their principles. In Scotland, during the course of the eighteenth century, after these principles were expounded by Mr. Glass, they were condemned both by the National Church and the Secession. Now, however, they are being revived and combined with the principles of civil liberty and have become popular in both branches of the Secession as well as among the Baptists and Independents. Such tendencies will lead inevitably to the disturbance of the whole life and growth of the Church.

Sectarian principles are opposed to unity and uniformity in religion, and to the proper means for promoting these, whether by civil or ecclesiastical society. In the present controversy they are considered chiefly with reference to civil authority, and are so called, not only because they have been commonly held by sects that had separated from the great body in Protestant churches, but also on account of their tendency to produce and foster endless sects, by patronizing, instead of checking all sorts of religious opinions and different forms of worship. Though they are sometimes denominated a new scheme, or new principles; and sometimes new light . . . yet it will be evident to any acquainted with modern church-history and literature, that, from whatever source they may have been immediately drawn . . . they are far from being new. (pp. 17-18)

Following the historical sketch McCrie writes in full detail of the differences between the Synod and the Constitutional Presbytery. He maintains that the Original Secession ministers who left the communion of the Estab-

lished Church entertained no new or peculiar principles different from those of the standards of the Church of Scotland but, rather, they complained of a deviation from the standards by the Established Church. Their Testimony was a redeclaration of the doctrines contained in these standards as they had been received and owned by the reformed Church in Scotland; and they viewed themselves as part of the Church of Scotland and as distinct from other sects who objected to the reformed constitution and the standards of the Church of Scotland. (p. 39) The New Testimony, on the other hand, purports to be taken directly from Scripture and has no regard to the previous attainments of the Church, particularly in her reforming and covenanting periods. There is little concern in this new document that there should be agreement with the Confession of Faith or any other sub-standards and many changes are introduced in the formula of questions put to those who are to be admitted to public office which substitute an unqualified and unlimited approbation of the sub-standards and of the National Covenants by a limited acceptance of them in so far as they agree with the New Testimony.

The Narrative, which was previously a witness to God's work in the Reformation of the Church of Scotland and was inseparably bound to and recognized as a part of the

Judicial Testimony, is by the new deeds separated from the Testimony proper and has had certain changes made in its historical content to satisfy the new doctrines. Besides there is a much different attitude to the national reformation. The New Testimony seeks to separate the acts and measures by which the Reformation was obtained from the Reformation itself; it seeks to proclaim that religion and reformation are purely church matters whereas the old Testimony was a declaration of the Reformation as a national concern, involving both civil and ecclesiastical reformation; it seeks to confine the practice of covenanting to the church courts whereas, in the past, the covenants were public national oaths by which Church and State were bound to foster the Reformation. All in all, "the principle which calls in question the propriety of a national establishment of religion, and the duty and warrantableness of civil rulers employing their authority in promoting religious reformation is totally incompatible with the Secession testimony" (p.70)

In section vi of the Statement McCrie commences the consideration of the basic point of the controversy -- the difference as to the exercise of civil authority with reference to religion and the general question of the connection between Church and State. It is readily granted that Church and State with their respective authorities

are distinct and mutually independent but "societies and powers which are distinct and independent may have common objects about which they are employed, and may act in these with harmony and co-operation." (p. 77)

Religion is an object of common interest to mankind and one in which Magistrates, Ministers, Masters, and Parents have all a distinct and peculiar concern; the authority of each may be employed in regard to religion without encroaching on the others or usurping their power. The fact that ecclesiastical officers are more particularly concerned with religious administration does not set aside the more general concern which others have with it.

When masters and parents employ their authority for promoting religion, they do not interfere with the office of ministers of the gospel, nor does their power thereby become ecclesiastical, but still remains herile and parental. In like manner, when civil rulers employ their authority for the same purpose, they do not encroach upon the proper business of church courts; their power remains civil and political, and does not become ecclesiastical and spiritual, although it be exercised about objects religious and ecclesiastical. To set aside or deny the powers belonging unto any of these, because we may not be able exactly to define their limits, or because they may interfere with or encroach upon one another (which in real life, and among erring and corrupt men, may be expected), would be unreasonable and absurd. (p. 78)

There is a necessary distinction between Church and State as has been maintained by the Church of Scotland in opposition to Erastian tenets and the encroachments of civil powers. The protesting brethren would maintain just

as strongly as the Synod that Christ is the sole Head of the Church and has an exclusive right to appoint all her laws and ordinances of worship; that all administrations in the Church are to be performed in his name and by his authority; and that his servants in the Church do not act by the authority of or by delegation from any earthly prince or legislature, so as to receive and execute their mandates and be responsible to them for their ministrations. They had no intention of making the magistrate the head of the Church but never the less in full consistency with these principles they maintain that "civil authority may be lawfully and beneficially employed in the advancement of religion and the Kingdom of Christ."

It is the civil ruler's office to watch over the external interests of the Church, to seek to impress upon his subjects the obligations and sanctions of religion and to suppress irreligion, impiety, profanity, and blasphemy. They should also seek to introduce the gospel into sections of their territory where it may be only partly enjoyed and to provide them with Churches and ministers, especially in poor and desolate or in ignorant and irreligious areas. All of this they may do without propagating religion by the sword or forcing a profession of religion on their subjects by means of penal laws. When religion has become corrupt and has degenerated

into a system of falsehood, superstition, idolatry, and tyranny carried on by churchmen who are aided by the civil powers, then an eminent exercise of civil authority is essential for a reformation by the magistrates taking an active part in prosecuting public reformation, removing external hindrances, correcting public and established abuses and allowing and in some cases calling together and supporting ecclesiastical assemblies for settling the internal affairs of the Church and of religion. Even in normal times civil rulers should maintain and support the interests of religion by publicly recognizing its institutions and giving legal sanction to a public profession or confession of its faith and by making a permanent provision for religious instruction and the maintenance of divine ordinances. These and similar duties civil rulers may perform without encroaching on the office or business of the Church and its office-bearers and without compulsion of belief or punishment of conscientious dissent from the established religion.

The New Testimony, contrary to these views, says McCrie, advances no principles upon which the civil reformation of Scotland can be vindicated but instead exhibits doctrines eversive of this and directly opposite to that which is contained in Scripture, in the Standards of the Church of Scotland, and in the public papers of

the Secession, respecting the authority and duty of civil rulers. The New Testimony maintains that the magistrate's power is wholly temporal, respecting only the secular interests of society except perhaps for the protection of the Church in possession of her rights and the securing of a universal liberty of worship. In their official capacity magistrates are to do no more for a true Church than a false. By these views, alleges McCrie, the New Testimony presents a glaring departure from the Westminster Confession of Faith. By means of extracts, he also illustrates how the New Testimony differs from many other Protestant Confessions, such as the Helvetic Confession, the French Confession, the Confession of the English Congregation in Geneva and reveals that these along with the Second Book of Discipline and the Westminster Confession are in harmony with regard to the special field of the magistrate in "nourishing the kirk." And in further support of these principles he has recourse to the writings of those who were concerned with the drawing up of the Secession Testimonies or with their vindication, such as William Wilson of Perth, Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, William Campbell of Ceres, David Wilson of London and Adam Gib of Edinburgh. Though McCrie thus defended the rights and duties of the civil magistrates in regard to religious matters, he was

most sensitive to encroachments of the civil power into matters which were entirely ecclesiastical in scope. An instance of this is found in his objection to observations of royal fasts which implied an assumption of Erastian power by the state. Strangely enough the "new light" party with all its horror of any connection between Church and State, were not so scrupulous in this matter.¹

With section VII of the Statement McCrie begins to deal with the subject from first principles and presents what he calls a "Brief View of the Evidence for the Exercise of Civil Authority about Religion." He seeks to draw his proofs from natural principles, from the moral law, and from Scripture examples in both Old and New Testaments, concluding with some answers to various objections to his views of the relations between Church and State.

By the Light of Nature.

Since the institution and end of magistracy is founded in natural principles; so may the employment of civil power in the support of religion be founded in the light of nature. "The general consent of mankind is allowed to be the strongest presumption in favour of a natural principle; from this moralists and divines have argued strongly in

1 Memoir, p. 99; footnote.

support of the Being of God, public and social worship with its various parts, a providence, the distinction between moral good and evil, and a future state." And there has been no sentiment more common among the nations than that it is a most important duty of the magistrate to concern himself with the interests of religion. McCrie considers that this common and reasonable conclusion is really the voice of God, speaking through men of all ages and countries. "A constitution which did not recognize religion nor make any provision for its maintenance and defence, would be, in so far, an atheistical constitution. -- As magistracy is an ordinance of God, and those invested with it, though chosen by men, are 'ministers of God', such persons must be under special obligations to maintain his honour", not merely by the preservation of justice and peace but by promoting his worship.

The sum of this argument is, that the honour and worship of God ought to be preserved and promoted by those large societies which are collected, superintended, and maintained by his providence; by magistracy, which is his ordinance; by laws, which are an emanation from his authority and justice; and by magistrates, who act as his viceregents on earth; -- and consequently, that these are not to be confined to mere civil and secular concerns, to the exclusion of religion.

This principle is farther confirmed by the consideration that religion lies at the very foundation of civil society, and that its sanctions and influence are necessary, in order to gain even the direct and immediate end of government, in the preservation of

justice and peace among men. (p. 112)

Both Christians and Magistrates have a common aim in desiring to make every citizen a better subject and a better member of society and where the true religion is fostered by a public establishment which provides religious instruction and a dispensation of religious ordinances this common aim is furthered. These sentiments he also expressed in a Review of Sismondi's Considerations on Geneva.

That religion is the firmest bond of human society; that the Protestant religion eminently tends to strengthen all the ties which subsist among the members of the same state, and to promote national prosperity; and that on these grounds, as well as on account of its intrinsic truth and excellence, every wise government will be disposed to give it the most decided public support and countenance, are propositions which few Protestants, who have duly attended to their import and connection will hesitate to admit.¹

Revelation Confirms what the Law of Nature Teaches.

"The revealed law contains a more sure and full exhibition of the rule of righteousness, by which the conduct of all ought to be regulated." (p. 116) If the warrant for any duty is to be established by the precept of approved scriptural examples, the Scripture, in giving guidance to persons in every character and station of life, should

1 Miscellaneous Writings, 1841, p. 225. This volume is printed as Vol. XI of McCrie's Works and will be referred to as simply Miscellaneous Writings. Vol. X, which also consists of Miscellaneous Writings, will be distinguished by use of the volume number.

contain some particular examples of Godly magistrates and this is certainly the case. We do not read in the Bible of approved magistrates who confined themselves, in their official capacity, to the secular and the civil and did not employ their authority for the advancement of religion. Men like Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon, and many others were zealous in their religious administration and even the Persian monarchs did more than merely tolerate the Jewish religion but encouraged it with material aid. Not that Christian magistrates are in the same position or are to act exactly according to the Old Testament examples but that does not entirely remove the argument for the religious activity of magistrates from Old Testament examples, any more than the differences between any modern situation and the Bible would deny the application of biblical truth to that situation. Those who maintain that the Jewish constitution was altogether peculiar and inimitable do err as well as those who hold that it is in all respects a model for Christian nations. Although it was a system particularly adapted to the state of the Jewish nation, it does provide an example of a system of legislation adapted to a people who followed the true religion.

The laws expressly recognized religion, provided for the maintenance of its ordinances, and the rulers were taken solemnly bound to support them in their

station. Thus, those principles which are founded in the light of nature, and by which all nations are obligated to regulate themselves, in framing their constitution and conducting their administrations, so as to promote the honour of God, and to accord with, secure, and advance religion, the highest of all their interests, -- were recognized and sanctioned by Jehovah himself, and applied to the true religion revealed from heaven. In this respect the Jewish constitution is exemplary to Christian nations. (p. 124)

McCrie considers a series of Old Testament passages concerning the future of the Church and suggests that the "whole tenor of the declaration, promises, and predictions of the Old Testament lead to the conclusion that Christianity shall be owned, countenanced, and supported, in a national way." The plea was put forward that there is nothing in the New Testament which countenances a national religion, or proves that magistrates, as such, have any concern with the interests of religion and the Church of Christ. But McCrie says that the Old Testament as well as the New Testament is a rule of faith and manners and it would be sufficient to find a warrant for such duty in the Old Testament. He has shown that the law of nature and the Old Testament teaching support the magistrate's exertions in a religious activity and those who object to these ought to be able to prove the principle inconsistent with the New Testament. It is true, he admits, that the New Testament does not give express commands or directions to magistrates, as such, either as to their

civil or their religious duties; but Timothy does exhort Christians to pray for kings and magistrates that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. This would suggest that rulers are not to be indifferent to godliness any more than to honesty -- both are to be countenanced and promoted by them.

Answers to Objections.

It is objected that the magisterial power in religion is liable to be abused and has been abused in all ages and also that magistrates may easily support false religion as well as the true. It is not just reasoning, says McCrie, to argue from the abuse of anything against its use. Practically any human power may be abused by fallible and corrupt men. It is well known that the power committed by Christ to church officers has been grossly abused. Great as the encroachments of the civil power upon the prerogatives of Christ and upon men's consciences have been and are, the greatest enemy the Christian Church ever had was a power not civil but spiritual and ecclesiastical which for a long period usurped the headship of Christ as well as the prerogatives of rulers and the rights of man. It is unreasonable to decry all church power, such as is held by Presbyterian courts, on this account and it is just as unreasonable to discard the exercise of civil authority about religion, when duly limited, on account

of a dread of the wild excesses which have been committed in past ages of tyranny, bigotry, and fanaticism.

It is further objected that "the principle itself involves, or necessarily leads to persecution, for if magistrates have a power about religion, they must also have a right to punish those who do not comply with what they enact, command, or prohibit, in these matters." But there are various actions of men about religion respecting which magistrates may justly employ their authority in the way of restraint and punishment, such as blasphemy, the open contempt of religion and the profanation of the Sabbath, without being chargeable with persecution. Nor does it follow that magistrates are warranted in forcibly imposing a profession of faith upon their subjects or in obliging them to worship God in a certain mode. Nor is anything of this kind implied in laws which recognize, establish and support a particular profession of Christianity and Church-State.

When a particular profession, or confession of faith, form of worship and ecclesiastical government, obtain the formal sanction of civil authority, they are recognized by the legislature, as declaratory of that religion which obtains the national countenance and support, and according unto which the legal privileges and emoluments appropriated for this purpose are to be conferred and enjoyed. But this by no means implies that all shall be obliged, under civil pains, to conform unto this establishment, or be punished for dissenting from it. (p. 144)

It is also objected that "magistrates, by sanctioning

the laws of Christ, or by enacting laws respecting religion, encroach upon his prerogatives, as the sole King and legislator of his church." Magistrates may and often do invade the prerogatives of Christ, replies McCrie, but this is not necessarily implied in the exercise of civil powers in the furtherance of religion where a proper respect to God's laws and his Church are expressly fostered by the civil power which thus acknowledges and does homage to God's authority. But, it is objected, the Kingdom of Christ is wholly of a spiritual and heavenly nature and therefore cannot be promoted by a secular power. The Church, says McCrie, is very much in the world and has a definite and visible connection with earthly things. It must not be spiritualized out of all contact with this world for the countenance and aid of civil government can be most helpful in the diffusion of religious knowledge and the maintenance of divine ordinances. In the Review of Sismondi, mentioned above, he says, regarding this point, that many public questions involve religious as well as political considerations. The abolition of the Slave Trade, for example, was a political question "but it was a question in which the friends of religion, morality, and humanity, were all interested."¹

1 Miscellaneous Writings. p.224.

Also, in his Life of Melville, when speaking of the "Law", McCrie writes: "When, instead of being made to rest on the arbitrary dictates of mere will, whether exerted by individuals, or communities, or the prescription of custom, or on the uncertain deductions of indeterminable expediency, the Law of Nations is founded, as it always ought to be, on the Law of Nature, and the eternal principles of equity and justice, sanctioned by the Supreme Legislator, the study of it is closely allied to that of Theology; " -- the promotion of the temporal and the spiritual welfare of mankind is a unified endeavour.¹

Those who disagree object further that the primitive Christian Church did not enjoy the advantages which might follow the support of civil power and it still managed to grow and prosper. McCrie attributes the phenomenal success of the early Church to a special blessing of providence -- a blessing not to be expected at all times and under any circumstances. To ban civil support of religion because of the peculiar circumstances at the beginning of the Christian religion which allowed the Church to prosper without it would be as illogical as the thought of banning all learning and scholarly advancement because the first disciples were unlearned men. And

1 Life of Melville, I, 45.

it is not a fact as some would assume that corruption entered the Church with the onset of civil support.

Many aberrations and corruptions had previously entered the Church and in any case the abuse of this civil power does not necessarily demand its abolition for there were many blessings which also accompanied its introduction such as the freedom from persecution.

Certain texts are also urged, in objection, as being unfavourable to the use of civil power in the support of religion, such as Zech. 4:6 -- "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts." -- or 2 Cor. 10:4 -- "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." But no Presbyterian would allow that the Church's weapons are carnal or that carnal weapons should be used to enforce religion upon men. However, besides those means which are properly spiritual there are others of an external kind "which tend to promote the more free, convenient, extensive and permanent use of the spiritual means." "Money, for example, is not adapted to convert or edify the souls of men, but it is necessary, and useful for building Churches and supporting religious ordinances." Civil authority belongs to this class of external means and since it is not inconsistent with the purely spiritual, it may be lawfully employed in defending

and maintaining the Church.

To the final objection, which is perhaps the one most often advanced -- a plea for liberty of conscience -- McCrie devotes another section (VIII). The Synod's New Testimony states that "a liberty of worshipping God in the way which they judge agreeable to his will, is a right common to all men;" and McCrie sets out several propositions which are intended to remove some of the ambiguities in which this plea is involved and to set aside the objections which are made, on the basis of it, to the lawful exercise of authority in such matters. Absolute uncontrollable liberty is not the right of any man either politically or ecclesiastically for he must be subject to the common authority. To suppose that men subject to divine law are exempt from blame in anything done in accordance with their judgment and conscience would make conscience the ultimate standard rather than any fixed moral law. All rights among men imply corresponding obligations and duties. Religious liberty to "all" men exempts from any restraint those who choose to live in ignorance of religion or who act in hatred or aversion to it as well as those who act from motives of conscience. However the powers which God has ordained are not destructive of liberty of conscience. Some subordination and limitation may be necessary to ensure the public good

but civil authority exerted in this respect does not imply a denial of private judgment or liberty. Since the Synod will allow civil interference where principles or practices in religion are hurtful to civil society or subversive of it the claim for full liberty of conscience is really denied and the controversy resolves itself into this question; "Whether civil authority is confined merely to the secular interests of society, or if the public maintenance and support of religion is not an important branch of the duty of magistrates?" This question McCrie has already answered. Finally, McCrie maintains that the urging of the plea of conscience to gain freedom from civil restraint eventually leads to similar pleas against ecclesiastical authority and the establishment of numerous sectarian groups. In the Life of Melville he points out the need of rules of government and discipline. "The advancement of the interests of religion, the preservation of purity of faith and morals, the regular dispensing of religious instruction and of all divine ordinances, and in general, the promoting of the spiritual improvement and salvation of the people, have always depended, and must always depend, in a high degree, on the form of government established in a church, and in the rules by which discipline is

exercised in it".¹

The following section of the Statement deals with a subject closely related to the Church and State question, and, in fact, for McCrie, entirely inseparable from it. "By their doctrine respecting covenants," McCrie says, "the Synod have condemned some of the most noted covenants, leagues and oaths, respecting religion, which have been entered into in this and other Protestant countries". Whereas the denial of the State's powers in religion would discountenance the whole work of reformation in Scotland, the denial of National covenants would be an overt criticism of the Covenanters and a criticism of either one was anathema to McCrie. According to the New Testament covenants are of two kinds -- civil and religious. Religious covenanting is an ecclesiastical duty and is confined to matters purely religious with which magistrates, as such, are not concerned. Civil covenants, on the other hand, are obligations accepted in respect of purely secular and civil matters. Besides these two types of covenant there are no other. Yet it is a matter of history that none of the public covenants famous in Europe since the Reformation are merely one or other of the above. It cannot be said that any of the

1 Life of Melville, II, 333.

bonds entered into in Scotland before the Reformation, nor the National Covenant of Scotland, nor the Solemn League and Covenant, nor the leagues and covenants of the Protestant princes in the states and cities of Germany, Switzerland and the Low Countries, were either merely political secular bonds or merely ecclesiastical deeds. The leagues of Germany and the Netherlands professed the Protestant religion and engaged in mutual assistance and defense to preserve their religion against the common enemies. In the same way the Solemn League and Covenant was neither one nor the other; it was intended to promote the Glory of God and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom and also to promote the honour of the king and true public liberty, safety and the peace of the kingdoms. These causes are interwoven so closely that no real separation was possible or even wise for the Covenanters.

When the interests of nations, both religious and political, the privileges of churches and states are at stake, opposed to the same dangers, and having the same friends and foes, why should they not be conjoined in the same oath, and why should not churches and states enter into and swear such an oath and league . . . ? When religion and liberty are exposed to the same dangers, why should they not be maintained and defended by the same means, and why should not their friends associate and solemnly pledge and bind themselves to stand by one another, and to discharge their duty, in the common cause, against common enemies? The preservation or reformation of religion is a great national concern, and the maintenance of a just and free government is a great

blessing to the church at any time (pp. 176-77).

The covenants which have been entered into by the Scottish Nation with great formality and solemnity and so often ratified and approved, must continue to be binding on the nation in both a civil and religious capacity. With this defense of the national covenants McCrie brings to a close his Statement except for the conclusion in which he presents a vindication of the conduct of the "protesters" in their separation from the Synod and in which he reiterates the importance of these doctrines of Church and State relationships. Though the matters contended for may be represented by opponents as small and unimportant that is no reason for relinquishing them. "The fact is, that every truth, during the time that it was controverted, has been uniformly represented by its opponents as inconsiderable and minute" The present controversy, says McCrie, is neither speculative nor unimportant; it directly affects the interests of religion and morality and claims the attention of all who have any regard to these.

What can we reckon it but another subtile stratagem of that envious enemy of our happy Reformation, who, when he sees it not practicable to get the Beast's wound healed, by making direct attacks upon it, and the great truths thereby established, goes about to make breaches in the necessary hedges of order and government, and would throw down all the valuable fences of these truths; such as National Churches, Confessions of Faith, Covenants, Formulas, Human Laws,

Penal Statutes, Acts of Parliament, Defensive Arms in favour of Religion, the Magistrate's Power Circa Sacra, the Power and Authority of Synods and Church - judicatures over Pastors and single Congregations. And in order to get these Ramparts of our Reformation the more effectively demolished, the most taking and plausible pretexts are invented for catching serious people; such as, "what are all these but the inventions of men? There is no warrant for them in the New Testament. They are inconsistent with the nature of Christ's kingdom. . . ." But whatever specious words of this kind be brought forth, it is easy to make it appear, that these things now impugned, are sufficiently warranted both by the word of God and sound reason, and are means which God hath blessed both for preserving and promoting religion and reformation. O! that these who seem to be otherwise minded had their eyes opened to these things¹

The importance of the Statement with its careful delineation of the whole Church-State controversy and the true Presbyterian attitude towards it, is enhanced when one considers that "Scotland's main contribution to Reformed Theology has been within this domain of the Erastian Controversy"² and also when one hears that the Free Church of England in March 1953 proclaims the value and service of an Established Church from its own position of dissent, even as did McCrie. The stand that he and his brethren took in 1806, considered at the time so fanatical and so unimportant, was soon forgotten by the main stream of church life in Scotland. But in 1824

1 Statement, p. 204. -- quoting Willison's Defence of National Churches, pp. 4-5.

2 Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, Hugh Watt, p. 354.

a publication appeared in Edinburgh which was later owned to be the work of Rev. John Ballantyne, entitled: A Comparison of Established and Dissenting Churches, by a Dissenter. In this book the views which McCrie had effectively countered in his Statement are advanced anew.

"All a ruler's endeavours to advance Christianity by Church Establishments are, in the author's judgment, violations of the rights of conscience, involve injustice, and do more harm than good to religion".¹ Still the dangerous attacks on the existing Establishment were ignored by the bulk of the Church. However, nine years later a sermon, published by Dr. A. Marshall, minister of the United Secession Church at Kirkintilloch, entitled: Ecclesiastical Establishments Considered, "precipitated what was to prove one of the most wordy, bitter, and devastating pamphlet wars ever waged in Scotland".² The same objections to the "establishment" which were brought forward and successfully answered by McCrie in 1806 were now resurrected. Perhaps the only feature that was novel in this renewed controversy, now called the Voluntary Controversy, was the emphasis by the Voluntaries on the need to establish free-will offerings as the means of support-

1 The Church of Scotland, Her Divisions and Unions, C.G. McCrie, D.D., p. 171.

2 Chalmers and the Disruption, p. 97.

ing the church's institutions rather than endowments.

C.G. McCrie claims that the Voluntaryism of this period had both an affirmative and a negative side.

" . . . positive Voluntaryism is the assertion and practice of self-support on the part of the Church, it is the recognition of the dependance of the Church on Church members for the maintenance of ordinances and the diffusion of the gospel." Negative Voluntaryism denies "that it is the right or duty of a civil ruler, whether supreme or subordinate, to deal with Christianity by enacting and adopting the creed of a particular Church, by constituting it the National Church, and by providing for its support by endowments, assessments or any other kind of payments."¹ With regard to the positive side McCrie considered "free-will offering" as a method but not the only method of finance; and with regard to the negative side, the only side with which he had any real concern, his defense of the "Established Church", as such, was not surpassed during the whole controversy. George Smeaton, D.D., professor of Exegetical Theology, New College, Edinburgh, in his preface to the second edition of the Statement, published in 1871 writes: "It is a masterly defence of the principle of Establishments as a

1 The Church of Scotland, pp. 169-70.

scripture truth; and the most complete vindication ever given to the world of the position occupied by the Reformed Church of Scotland on the whole subject of national religion, and of the magistrate's power in promoting it." (p. v.) It is certain, too, that had he been spared for a few years more McCrie would have been just as vehement in his defence of the Headship of Christ and the independence of the Church against the Erastian encroachments of the State, as any of the Free Church enthusiasts ever were, for he had always been most careful in his defence of the Establishment principle to guard against any suggestion of Erastian views either in his own thought or in the minds of the founders of the Scottish Church.

CHAPTER 5

CHURCH PATRONAGE

McCrie, having spent much of his life in defence of the Established Church of Scotland as it existed in Reformation times, was always keenly interested in the life and work of the "establishment" as it existed during his own lifetime. He could not unite with it as it was but he was always anxious that it should reform and return to its old standards for which he and the Secession as a whole had steadily witnessed. Any controversial issue that affected the career of the "establishment" was sure to attract McCrie's attention and sometimes his active participation. The "church patronage" question, which was so closely related to the larger field of church-state relations, was an issue into which he was drawn and one on which he was not afraid to express his opinions despite his position of separation from the National Church as a member of the Secession. This vexed and perennial question of "patronage" was considered by Professor Hugh Watt to be the real dividing issue between the Moderate and Evangelical parties in the Established Church.

From the days of the Robertson Manifesto of 1752 there were two planks in the Moderate platform; steady and uniform acquiescence in, and support of, the law of

Patronage, against which their fathers had constantly protested; and a definite concern for the orderliness of Presbyterian Church government, the subordinate courts in all respects to obey the higher. And these two were normally one, for the sole necessity for their insistence on this orderliness arose out of the disorders of the time, and these, in turn, arose, one and all, out of the exercise, or the abuse, of patronage. The Evangelicals, from the beginning, were supporters of popular rights, determined that, in some fashion, effect should be given to the desires of the people as to their future pastor. By the law of the land they had little say in that choice, by the regulations and resolutions of the Church under the Moderate regime they had still less, asserted the Evangelicals.¹

It was in the process of seeking a solution to this long discussed and agitated question that the Evangelicals finally rose to the supremacy in the Established Church under the leadership, first of Andrew Thomson and then of Thomas Chalmers.

McCrie did not, of course, join the Anti-Patronage Society which had been formed to advance the Evangelical aims for, as he said, he had been an office bearer in an Anti-Patronage Society for 36 years; but he was present at one of its meetings on January 30th, 1833, when he made a speech expounding his views on the subject. From a report in the Society's paper, the Anti-Patronage Reporter, we are able to gather the gist of his remarks.² In the first place he considered that a lay patron was as foreign to the

1 Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, p. 8.

2 See app. to Miscellaneous Writings, vol. X of "Works", pp. 480-89.

Church of Christ as a lord bishop and had as little necessary connection with an Established Church as a lord bishop had. He felt that the day of the lay patronage of any lord or landed proprietor was past and that the idea would soon be looked upon as antiquated and obsolete as the old favourite court maxim, "No bishop, no King." He also considered that lay patronage was a usurpation of the liberties of the Church and was an outmoded relic of feudal times; it was a badge of slavery; it exerted undue restraint on church courts in the exercise of the important duty of fixing the relation between minister and congregation and it was calculated to "mar the usefulness of a Christian ministry and the edification of a Christian people." Historically speaking a patron was one who defended his clients from oppression and pled their cause when they were accused but the patrons no longer performed these functions. In the middle ages under barbarous civil conditions the patron was very necessary for the Church's protection but he had become redundant. Now church patronage was an anachronism which maintained its life as if to remind the Church of early barbaric and uncivilized conditions; and the proof of the pernicious influence of patronage was obvious in the long endurance of it and the apathy with which it was now regarded.

McCrie was opposed to any attempt to ameliorate the

evils of church patronage by means of amendments and modifications. It is no use to "sweeten the pill" at this late date, he said. Total abolition of patronage is necessary, for the whole scheme is founded on the neglect of the rights of the Christian people. He sharply criticizes those who suggest that dissenters are still free to leave the "establishment" if they do not care for its administration. If the dissenters were to stay close to the "establishment" and act as a spur to the established clergy by stimulating their vigilance, all would be well; but unfortunately dissenters tend to move farther and farther away until they reach a point of direct opposition to the Established Church. The Original Secession, which occurred in 1733, produced a body of dissenters still friendly to the "establishment", but through the years the main body of these wearied of a return to the national Church and finally entered into a league with the Independents and other sects to overthrow all ecclesiastical establishments. Many of the dissenters now wish "patronage to hang as a millstone about the neck of the Establishment" and that is just what it will be unless total abolition of the practice is finally attained.

In the same year McCrie published a pamphlet entitled: What Ought the General Assembly to do at the Present Crisis? and here again he appealed for the

immediate termination of the practice of patronage. He considered the time to be one of crisis in the ecclesiastical history of the Church of Scotland and the General Assembly which was to take place in a few days to be a meeting with the highest responsibilities. The recent changes in the political state of the nation, effected by means of the extended franchise, have had a powerful influence on the opinion of men with regard to the Church and the formation of the Anti-Patronage Society is just one instance of this alteration in current belief. There are many suggestions as to what the General Assembly ought to do ranging all the way from a "wait and see" policy to a system of patronage checked by a popular negative. But there is only one answer, says McCrie: Without delay, petition the Legislature for the abolition of patronage. McCrie doubts whether there would be one minister who would stand up in defence of lay patronage or would deny that it was a grievance. There might be some, though, who would seek to palliate the evils of the system, who would magnify the difficulties in the way of redress, and who would suggest the great dangers which would result from popular agitation and from any innovation on long established laws. This being the case, McCrie does not feel justified in spending much time on the historical developments of patronage and concludes a brief survey of its

history with this remark:

It is unnecessary for me to demonstrate that the continuance of this servitude is inconsistent with the inherent freedom of a Church, and that the long boasted- of liberties and independence of the Church of Scotland must be in a great measure nominal, so long as a sentinel is placed at the door of her 900 churches, without whose permission no minister can enter, and so long as a power, chiefly foreign and extrinsic, has the right of directly or indirectly filling her judicatories, and directing her councils.¹

However the Church has become habituated and reconciled to what at first appeared intolerable and disgusting and no change in the existing laws can be effected without great exertion and sacrifice in which many are not willing to engage. McCrie, therefore, feels called upon to "produce some considerations in support of the proposed measure, urging its necessity, and demonstrating its safety." In the first place it is not a new and unprecedented measure, for if there is one principle which the Church of Scotland has decidedly avowed, it is that patronage is an unscriptural encumbrance and inconsistent with Presbyterian polity. In the Second Book of Discipline the General Assembly declared that patronage was not in agreement with the church order based on Scripture and that its removal was a special branch of reformation. Although the Church accepted a settlement which allowed the continuation of this abuse

1 What ought the General Assembly to do &c, in Miscellaneous Writings, 1841, p. 619.

she continually sought for redress of the grievance from the Government. Patronage was abolished by the parliamentary statute of 1649 but was reimposed at the Restoration, only to be reabolished with the Revolution Settlement. In 1712, however, it was restored by a Tory and High Church administration, despite the protests of the Church of Scotland representatives. From that time protests continued to be made whenever fit opportunities arose until 1784 when the Assembly decided to cease agitating for the repeal of the odious law. If the Assembly adopt the proposed measure they will only be following in the steps of their predecessors. In the second place, McCrie continues, the times are favourable for making the proposed application, for we have a reformed Parliament and a reforming ministry. Some would allege that the Government would not be agreeable but how could any man connected with the Whig administration and known to be an advocate of the late Reform oppose a petition to the Legislature for the abolition of patronage, as "either improper and unnecessary, or as inexpedient and unseasonable?" How could those who have removed political patronage oppose the removal of ecclesiastical patronage? In the third place, the proposed measure is demanded by the circumstances of the time. "To redress grievances in the State, and to continue a grievance of similar descrip-

tion, and originating in the same causes, in the Church; to remove monopolies of power, and grant an extension of popular right in civil matters, and to perpetuate a monopoly of power, and antiquated restrictions on popular rights in ecclesiastical matters, is unwise, preposterous, and impolitic. It forms an unnatural and monstrous state of society; and presents such a contrast as renders the remaining burden altogether intolerable."¹

At this point McCrie reiterates his defence of the proper connection between Church and State. Civil and religious society, he says, are intimately connected; the political and the religious opinions and habits of a people must and will exert a mutual influence on each other. In fact the close affiliation of a man's temporal and spiritual interests is the natural origin of the connection between Church and State and "every enlightened defence of national establishments of religion must ultimately rest on this principle." When people are taught that they have not only a right to protection in life and property and to be ruled justly but also a voice in electing those who compose the Legislature and thus securing for themselves the benefit of good government, it is natural that they should perceive the importance of

1 Ibid., p. 629.

possessing a similar privilege in what concerns their spiritual and eternal welfare.

At a time when the interference of the Crown in a parliamentary election would lead to the impeachment of the prime minister, and rouse the whole nation to a tumult of indignation, is it to be borne that the Government should not only interfere with the elections of the Church, but engross them, and enjoy the patronage of filling nearly 300 parishes?¹

Patronage, continues McCrie, deprives the people of Scotland of their legitimate control which, according to its Presbyterian Constitution, they are entitled to exert over the judicatories of the Church. In England, where the Church is the creature of the State and has no independent jurisdiction, the people, in voting, choose representatives to watch over and manage their ecclesiastical as well as their political affairs. But in Scotland the Church has a separate and independent jurisdiction, and the General Assembly is the court of final appeal in ecclesiastical matters. It is neither proper nor consistent with the genius of Presbytery that the popular check on the absolute powers of the Assembly should be abolished by the imposition of patronage. If church patronage is to remain alongside the benefits of the Reform Bill then the same people are both freemen and slaves.

As members of the State, they choose their own legislatures; as members of the Church, they have

1 Ibid., p. 632.

neither part nor lot in that matter; as members of the State, they have much to say in the management of its affairs; as members of the Church, they are condemned to utter silence. What sort of "connection between Church and State" is this . . . ? A nation labouring under political and ecclesiastical bondage has been fitly compared to "an ass couching down between two burdens." But a nation released from political and retained under ecclesiastical thralldom, would exhibit the ridiculous figure of an ass with one of his paniers cut off, while the other dangled at his side, causing the patient animal to stagger at every pace, and threatening ever and anon to land him in the ditch.¹

If this state of things is allowed to continue either the people, accustomed to ecclesiastical bondage, will become indifferent to political liberty or else, observing that the privileges attained in the political realm are denied in the Church, they will become indifferent to religion -- either a country of slaves or a country of infidels will be the result.

A further and most important reason for hastening the immediate end of the patronage system is the rising tide of hostility to the "establishment" itself on account of this and other grievances. The Voluntary Church Association has recently been formed and its avowed aim is to overthrow all ecclesiastical establishments and secularize their funds. This feeling of hostility to establishments is no new thing but has existed since the beginning of the century, (as McCrie had good reason to know). It is

1 Ibid., pp. 634-35.

unavoidable when Dissenters begin to form a large proportion of the inhabitants that the utility, expediency and even lawfulness of church establishments should be questioned. And this very situation can be directly imputed to the rigorous enforcement of patronage by the church courts. It ought to be noted, too, that the Voluntarists do not favour reform in the establishment for such reform would undermine their claims. It will be of no avail to trust for safety to the landed proprietors for the true safety of the "establishment" lies in the popular support of the people and without it the "establishment" would come to an end despite the favour of patrons, landed proprietors and government.

In concluding his pamphlet McCrie seeks to put at rest the many fears expressed at the probable results of popular election. "Liberty has its inconveniences as well as slavery; but who that has a spark of humanity within his breast would hesitate in his choice between the two?" The members of the Church are supposed to be qualified persons, men of Christian knowledge, and of good moral and religious character; as such, they are capable of wisely exercising their franchise. If they are not so then it is time some remedy to the laxity of discipline was applied. If men are considered capable of electing a member of Parliament, why should they be thought incapable of

choosing a minister of the Gospel? Are the people better versed in jurisprudence and political economy than in the knowledge of the Bible? In any case, the people will only have power to choose persons duly qualified by the Presbytery and the people may surely be allowed to choose from the qualified the individual best suited to their edification. It is alleged that popular election would produce confusion, canvassing, and scenes disgraceful both to the candidate and the congregation; but popular election has been carried out among the many congregations of the Secession without producing these anticipated evil conditions.

The Presbyterian polity, when provided with the intrinsic checks which essentially belong to its machinery, and where its operation is set free from extrinsic control, is so admirably adjusted and nicely balanced; it guards so wisely against lordly domination and tyranny on the one hand, and popular anarchy and misrule on the other; it is so congenial to the dispositions, and so hallowed in the recollections of the people of Scotland, -- that it is safe from the rude hands of reckless and headlong innovation. If any fears of this kind should haunt the imagination of a single individual, he may be relieved by reflecting that it continues to be the form of government among by far the greater part of Dissenters in our country, who, though destitute of an establishment and legal stipends, have their church judicatories, subordinate and supreme, in regular progression, in which every cause is decided by their ministers and elders without the least attempt or motion on the part of the people to usurp their authority, or transgress the limits of their jurisdiction.¹

It will be a grievous disappointment, McCrie concludes, if

1 Ibid., pp. 655-56.

the representatives of the Church fail in discharging their duty at this juncture. If that, however, should be the case then the next question must be, -- "What ought the members of the Church -- what ought the people of Scotland, to do at the present crisis?"¹

In January, 1834, McCrie again appeared at a meeting of the Anti-Patronage Society and when he arose to speak was most warmly welcomed.² He professed his reluctance to attend the meeting because he felt obliged to condemn the Seceders who had deserted the principles of their fathers and instead of seeking for the reformation of the established Church of Scotland aimed at its destruction; also because he felt obliged to condemn the "establishment" for retracting the testimony it had always borne against the grievance of patronage; finally because he could not agree with the Anti-Patronage Society that patronage was the only ground on which the "establishment" could be assailed.

He considered it disgraceful to the country that patronage should be a question in the nineteenth century. On the one hand he observed a Whig ministry which, after extending the elective franchise and reducing the civil patronage of the crown, refuses to relinquish any portion

1 Ibid., p. 657.

2 Report of speech from newspaper, App. to Miscellaneous Writings, Vol. X, Works, pp. 489-96.

of patronage in ecclesiastical matters. On the other hand, ministers of a Church which had long protested against the imposition of patronage by the State, not only refuse to petition for its abolition, but are afraid of being emancipated against their will. The Whigs may find church patronage politically useful but what good reasons can the Church find for retaining the practice? The people have been told that they have no right to choose their own minister but they are free to choose what minister they will hear; as a result many have left and will continue to leave the "establishment". Patronage is being retained at a terrible cost which will end in the bankruptcy of the Church itself.

The Church of Scotland is essentially the people's church. It is not a royal church nor a Parliamentary church. It is not the church of the aristocracy, nor of the patrons, nor of the clergy. If it had not been for the people, the church would never have survived her persecutions; after the last standard-bearer had fallen, the banner of Presbytery was kept waving in the mountains of Scotland by the people, when there was not a minister who dared to dispense among them her ordinances. When it ceases to be the church of the people, it ceases to be the Church of Scotland -- its establishment is undermined.¹

McCrie sought to correct some misconceptions regarding the Books of Discipline which had been circulated even by such men as Dr. Cook. For instance it is suggested that the First Book of Discipline was never ratified by

1 Ibid., p. 492.

Parliament, just as if the Second Book was. It is said that the First Book never obtained the sanction of the Church nor were its regulations respecting the choice of minister ever put into effect. But the opposite of these facts is the truth of history as can be verified by examination of the Acts of the Assembly. Another mistaken conception is that the First Book of Discipline was set aside by the Second but a study of the Acts of Assembly after the Second Book was received, reveals constant reference to the First Book as an authority; in fact the First Book still is an authorized standard. The Second Book was meant to give a more full explanation of certain points which were generally stated in the First Book. After an explanation of certain points in the Second Book which might seem to be contradictory of the First, McCrie concluded the speech by proclaiming his deep-rooted attachment to the Church of Scotland, by which he meant neither the "establishment", nor the branch of the Secession with which he was connected, but the Church of Scotland in her reformed constitution as delineated in her standards.

In May, 1834, McCrie was summoned, with several others, to give his evidence before a Committee of the House of Commons on Church Patronage. Extracts from this evidence were published in several issues of the Presby-

terian Magazine from July until December, 1835. He was not very happy about the summons for he did not expect any good to come from the committee because of the state of mind of the legislators and of the people for whom they should legislate; nor did he consider himself a proper person to give evidence on the subject. Much of the evidence consists of material which he has already published in his pamphlet but some of it helps to further clarify the controversy.

There are two principles regarding the election of ministers which may be derived from Scripture, McCrie explains; one is that the choice and appointment of ministers lie within the Church herself and must be free from control or interference of any extrinsic authority; the second is that the private members have an interest in the choice while the trial of the gifts of those elected and their designation belong to those who are already office-bearers. He makes further reference to Cyprian and Chrysostom in support of these statements. The Christian Church has no right, therefore, to part with or abridge her rights for the sake of secular advantage. Patronage originated in the dark ages or earlier and the patrons were, originally, founders and protectors of the Church; but from the beginning the Reformed Church of Scotland was unfavourable to patronage. This being the case, the Act of Queen Anne,

restoring patronage, was exceedingly offensive to the Church of Scotland and there was no simple acceptance of presentation until 1731 -- presentees until that time, were obliged to wait for the call of the people and to agree to a number of conditions, such as that patronage was contrary to the principles of the Church of Scotland. When he was asked if the introduction of election by communicants would endanger the "establishment" and break the link between the Church and State or the Church and heritors, he replied:

I do not think so by any means. But it may be proper to give a more specific answer to this question. If by an Established Church you mean a political engine under the management of the State, intended to keep the people in order, and always ready to second the measures of the political administration of the day, then no doubt Patronage, if not absolutely necessary, is highly conducive to the support of such an establishment, and a stipendiary clergy appointed by the Crown, either directly or indirectly, through landed proprietors who depend on the Crown, may be of the greatest consequence; but permit me to say, that this system is inherently bad; it violates the sanctity of religion, degrades its ministers, vitiates the principles on which alone they can discharge their duty But if by an Established Church be understood a church countenanced, recognized, and supported by the state for the purpose of enabling it more effectually to gain its proper object, that of instructing the body of people in the gospel of Christ, and governing them by his laws, thereby promoting at once their eternal and temporal welfare and thus contributing indirectly but powerfully to the benefit of civil society and the welfare of the state by checking vice at the fountain, forming habits of sobriety and industry, and producing conscientious and cheerful submission to public authority; if an establishment of this kind is meant, (and it is the only one that will stand the test of reason and Scripture) then patronage, . . .

so far from being necessary is prejudicial to it and calculated to defeat its grand end.¹

McCrie admits that the abolition of patronage would remove one of the things which operate to keep Presbyterian dissenters out of the Church but he adds that the great body of dissenters despairing of seeing any reformation in the Church of Scotland have come to the conclusion that abuses are necessary consequences of establishment and the voluntary principle has been called into life, creating new forces of division in the Church. McCrie was not one of those who attributed all the evils in the Church of Scotland to patronage but he was convinced that without patronage the Secession would have been unlikely. He strongly objected to the motion put before the Assembly of 1834 by Dr. Chalmers which was intended to eradicate the evils of patronage by means of a popular veto. The Veto Act, if passed, would, according to McCrie, tend to perpetuate patronage by giving the formal sanction of the Church of Scotland to a measure that she has always regarded as a grievance and an imposition at variance with her principles and ecclesiastical independence. It would not produce tranquility, for a half-measure would not give satisfaction and the subject would continue to be agitated; it was an indirect method of crippling the power

1 Presbyterian Magazine, September, 1835, p. 262.

and abridging the rights of patrons which was previously abandoned and it was questionable whether the restrictions it sought to impose were legal and whether the patrons might not resist its exercise; and finally it was not honourable to set aside a law by indirect means instead of a regular repeal.¹

Towards the end of his evidence before the Committee he summarized his reasons for desiring the abolition of patronage. He considered it an invasion of the liberties of the Christian Church; it had been condemned, remonstrated against, and resisted by the Church of Scotland in her best times; it was inconsistent with the genius of presbytery and irreconcilable with the fundamental principles of the Church of Scotland which reject interference in her internal affairs by an outside power, (No society or community can be independent if a foreign power has the choice or nomination of its office-bearers); it sets aside the proper bond of union between pastor and people, which is formed by the choice and free consent on the part of the latter and so mars the usefulness of the minister and the spiritual profit of the congregation; it has a prejudicial influence on the minds of candidates for the ministry who will be led to ingratiate themselves with patrons; it places the choice of the minister in the hands

1 Ibid., November, 1835, pp. 328ff.

of the patron who, generally speaking, is the most unfit for the task and has no sympathy with the feelings of the bulk of the people; by vesting such power in a single uncontrolled individual it is apt to be abused; and finally the circumstances of the time, including the enlarged political franchise and the opposition of the voluntaries to the establishment, call for an immediate abolition of the antiquated machinery of patronage.

Not satisfied with the appearances he had already made in favour of overthrowing the practice of patronage, McCrie preached a sermon on the subject, at the time the Assembly was meeting, entitled the "Aspect of the Times", with the text: Daniel xii; 8: "O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things?" In the sermon he proclaimed his views in no uncertain terms and was most critical of those who prevented the possible abolition of patronage by their support of the Veto Act. The tone of the sermon may be gathered from the following quotations.

Those who are loudest in their cry for political privilege, in Parliament and out of it, are not only indifferent about ecclesiastical privileges, but are the most determined foes to them. And those Churchmen, who derive their distinctive name from the people, and who, under God, owe all to the voice of the people, are too generally hostile to popular rights. Not satisfied with having the yoke imposed by state authority, it must be riveted by a church authority, and by means of the golden screw of a veto Really our friends of the Establishment ought not to be surprised that dissenters are moving a disjunction of Church and State, when they

themselves are pleading for the separation of civil and ecclesiastical privileges, and insisting that there is no analogy between them.¹

The decision on Calls, so much applauded by many, together with its strange but not unsuitable accompaniments, I can look upon in no other light but as an attempt to gull the people with a show of privilege, while it subjects them to be fettered, at every step, in the exercise of it, and involves them in the inextricable meshes of legal chicanery. And this boon is presented to them by the hands of those who have scornfully thrown out and rejected their petitions for relief from a grievance of which the Church of Scotland has always complained; and this at a time when the legislature, by which the yoke was imposed, had so far listened to similar petitions from the people, as to appoint a committee to enquire into the grounds of complaint I say it is more than suspicious that the alleged boon should be presented by the hands of those who have summarily and haughtily thrown out the petitions of the Christian people against patronage. They say they have muzzled the monster: it is a mistake; they have only muffled him, and they have muzzled the people.²

The "crucial" Assembly of 1834 passed the Veto Act, corrected the anomalous position of the "chapels of ease", and faced the future with optimism. There were many who voted against these measures but only one elder seems to have voiced the fears expressed by McCrie in his many contendings and to have shared his premonitions of disaster. Mr. John Hope, the Dean of the Faculty, entered a special dissent to the Veto Act in which he maintained that it was wholly incompetent and beyond the powers of

1 Volume of Sermons, 1836; p. 334.

2 Ibid., pp. 345-46.

the Church to restrict the right of patronage by a veto, and that a presentee, though rejected by a veto, who had not been disqualified by Presbytery, would still be a legal and valid presentee to the benefice and would have a right to the stipend and all other rights pertaining thereto.¹ McCrie's views on the Veto were to be amply vindicated before long for the "Battle of the Veto" was resumed within a short time. In the closing months of his life in the summer of 1835 the Auchterarder Case was being brought before the civil magistrate and in 1838 the Court ruled the Veto Act as illegal.² As Dr. Hector MacPherson says, it would have been better in every way for the Church if she had taken the heroic course in 1834, and had demanded the abolition of patronage instead of adopting the Veto.³

In this issue, as in the Voluntary Question, McCrie illustrated his penetrating insights into the heart of the problem, based on his great store of historical knowledge, and he proved to be amazingly prophetic regarding the eventual outcome of the adoption of what he considered, and which proved to be, erroneous principles not in accord with the standards of the Church of Scotland as

1 Professor Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, p. 141.

2 The Church of Scotland, C.G. McCrie, pp. 115ff.

3 Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence, p. 215.

they were proclaimed and owned by the Church and Nation at the establishment of the Reformation.

Looking to what has since taken place -- to what is now (1840) the position of the Church, with her Veto Act declared illegal by the House of Lords -- her lawsuits for damages for refusing to comply with the decisions of the Civil Courts -- her interdicts in the matter of parish settlements -- the suspension of numbers of her clergy -- her non-intrusion agitation which shakes the Establishment to its base; -- looking to these facts, we cannot but feel surprised at the accuracy with which his sagacious mind predicted the futility of attempting to introduce the free exercise of popular rights, so long as the law of patronage was left unrescinded.¹

1 Memoir of McCrie, Andrew Crichton, LL.D., in McCrie's Life of John Knox, Belfast, 1874; p. lx.

CHAPTER 6

MCCRIE, THE PREACHER

Although McCrie's writings had brought him from obscurity to fame and his interest and participation in matters of public interest had won him respect, his ability as a preacher cannot be passed over as unimportant. To be sure he did not acquire the prominence as a pulpit orator of men like Andrew Thomson and Thomas Chalmers but his sermons were highly regarded by many and he had a large following of hearers as well as a large congregation. Professor W. G. Blaikie, speaking of McCrie as a preacher has this to say.

He was a preacher for the thinking few rather than for the many, but he was one of those who raise their congregations towards their own level. Under his preaching his people were taught to think as well as feel; not only were their souls fed, but their minds were enlarged, and their taste was purified. He commands our respect as a man of severe taste and scholarly precision, of a mind too well schooled by the discipline of study to imitate the somewhat luxuriant style and random exegesis of the Erskines; he was one who not only counted it a privilege to preach free grace, but would have deemed the Gospel to be no Gospel without it, and yet had a wider horizon round his pulpit than many of those who, while professing to despise narrowness of mind, were probably the narrowest of all.¹

Professor Blaikie also quotes a paragraph from John Gibson

1 Preachers of Scotland, pp. 270-71.

Lockhart's Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk which presents a portrait of Dr. McCrie in the pulpit.

I went to hear Dr. McCrie preach, and was not disappointed in the expectation I had formed from a perusal of his book. He is a tall, slender man, with a pale face, full of shrewdness, and a pair of black piercing eyes, a shade of deep secluded melancholy passing ever and anon across their surface and dimming their brilliancy. His voice, too, has a wild but very expressive shrillness in it at times. He prays and preaches very much in the usual style of the Presbyterian divines; but about all he says there is a certain unction of sincere, old-fashioned, haughty Puritanism, peculiar, so far as I have seen, to himself, and by no means displeasing in the historian of Knox. He speaks, too, with an air of authority, which his high talents render excusable, nay proper -- but which few could venture upon with equal success.¹

Many were attracted to hear McCrie preach because of the powerful effect his historical writing had had upon them and no doubt were partially led by curiosity as to whether he could preach as well as he could write. One who was a great admirer of McCrie and has written several articles on his life, describes the impressions made upon him the first time he heard McCrie preach. He was first impressed by the simplicity of his manner and style but noted no particular originality of view in the opening part of the discourse. However, it wasn't long before he was jarred from his complacent enjoyment of the smooth-flowing sermon.

1 Ibid., p. 271.

By and by, however, when the first obvious principles were laid down, the Doctor began to draw inferences. Ah! thought we, as we sat up erect in the pew, there now is something we never heard before. The discourse, simple and quiet at its commencement, had assumed a new character. The unquestioned but common truths were but the foundations of the edifice; the edifice itself was such a one as the historian of Knox and Melville could alone have erected. There were remarks on human nature, that, from their graphic shrewdness, reminded us of Crabbe, and yet the mode was entirely different; there were gleams of fancy that, falling for a moment on some of the remoter recesses of the subject, lighted them up into sudden brightness, and, when fully shown, the gleam disappeared; there were strokes of eloquence, condensed at times into a single sentence, that found their way direct to the heart; and far conclusions attained by a few steps through vistas of thought unopened before.

.....
 Never have we listened to a preacher -- and from that day until we quitted the district he was almost our only minister -- on whose judgment and integrity we could more thoroughly depend Not that he saved us the trouble of thought; -- his discourses were by much too intellectual for that, and his remarks had a germinative quality, suited to fill the mind which received them in their unbroken vitality.¹

This is warm praise, indeed, but apparently not undeserved as far as one can judge from other contemporary reports. In a pamphlet series entitled the Portfolio, which was edited by a group of Edinburgh literary critics, there appeared a succession of articles on the Pulpit Eloquence of Edinburgh, and the seventh of these which appeared in the issue for December 31, 1818, dealt with Thomas McCrie, D.D. He was classed as the type of preacher who considers he has fulfilled his whole purpose

1 Headship of Christ, Hugh Miller, pp. 81-83.

if he informs and calls his hearers to a proper exertion, without enchanting them into the regions of fancy, or drawing their thoughts entirely from the present world. It is suggested, too, that the style of his preaching has its roots, as we would expect, in his understanding of the "magnanimous and high-toned feeling of the times which he has described" in his biographies and from his knowledge of the "pollutions of the church" and the sacrifices made by the Reformers to remedy the defects under which it laboured. The article describes his preaching in the following terms.

It is like none of the present day, and yet it is captivating; it excites no high emotion, and yet it is enticing; it is pervaded with none of that boisterous ejaculation now so common, and yet it is well calculated to improve. It is set off with no outward graces of appearance, nor no varied power of external eloquence, and yet his scriptural discourses are admirable. It is the matter which is brought forth, not the manner in which it is uttered, which in this instance calls attention -- it is for the information which is received, not the fancy entranced that his church is now filled.

Dr. McCrie's delivery is slow, uninviting and monotonous; never roused to what is called eloquence, even when the preacher himself is warmed with the subject he discusses. But to make amends for this -- his intellect is strong, his reasonings solid, his advices are from the heart, and his book of reference is the Scriptures. His favourite theme is the sin of which all partake, and the source from which all may draw what is sufficient to destroy its effects -- the never-failing mercy and forgiveness of God.¹

¹ Portfolio, No. VIII, Dec. 31, 1818, pp. 57-59.

The above views of his preaching ability seem to agree in the main with those held by his son. In the Memoir he writes of his father's preaching and quotes from many letters he received which were imbued with approbation of the great influence of McCrie's discourses. He seems to have been impressed with the particularly edifying nature of his father's sermons as were the others.

In the general strain of his preaching I would say that he addressed himself more directly to the edification and comfort of the believer, than to the conversion of the unbeliever, -- dwelling more on the allurements of the love of God, than on the terrors of his law. But his art seemed to lie in reaching conviction to the sinner, while apparently engaged in ministering consolation to the child of God. Without looking the sceptic in the face, or professing to reason with him, he spoke to the humble and simple Christian in such a manner as to convey the severest of all rebukes to the man of opposite character. Preaching, as he did, from the promptings of his own heart experience, as well as from his general knowledge of human nature, his discourse found a response in the breasts of many of his hearers, and frequently produced that searching and startling effect which, to the awakened mind, conveys the idea that the preacher is acquainted with the whole history of the person's exercise, and has purposefully adapted the message of the day to his particular case.¹

Among his works published posthumously there is a volume of sermons which convey some impression of his ability as a preacher and the reason for his popularity in this respect; although McCrie himself was most loathe to publish his sermons for, as he said: "The opinion which

1 Memoir, p. 285-86.

is formed of a spoken discourse depends much upon the feelings both of speaker and hearers at the time, feelings which cannot be easily communicated to the public, nor called up by themselves at a future period".¹

One notices immediately the predominantly expository nature of the sermons; they are liberally supplied with explanatory and illustrative material which bring the reader a deeper and surer understanding of the scripture and of his own spiritual condition. This expository style is perhaps to be expected from McCrie's keen interest in Biblical Criticism. Much of the critical material available in Scotland was in the European languages and he had contemplated a large work on the subject himself. In 1814 he was instrumental in forming an interdenominational minister's society for mutual improvement in this field of theological endeavour and for procuring rare and costly books on this field of inquiry. A library was started and was placed in McCrie's care but he was disappointed by the lack of interest shown. As he said, the minister's time was so much taken up with the various new religious associations which had sprung up, that he had no time for books. The society soon lapsed but not before McCrie had read to them some essays

1 Memoir, p. 36.

with subjects such as -- "The Necessity and Advantages of Biblical Interpretation" -- "The Types of Scripture" -- and the "Revival of Oriental Literature."¹

One other feature which the sermons possess is their deep practicality combined with their timeliness. They never fail to push home the truths explained by making explicit and direct applications to the hearers in practical suggestions and their material is so well arranged and clearly presented that one has no difficulty in following the argument. In fact they read more like lectures in their style of presentation. For example in a sermon preached in Edinburgh before the Synod of Original Seceders in September, 1829, entitled the Spirit of Judgment with Isaiah xxviii: 5,6. as a text, he expands and expounds the nature and the need of authority in the Church and the qualities and spirit necessary for the proper exercise of this authority in the church judicatories. He concludes the sermon with five practical lessons which are furnished by the subject. In the first place he stresses the great importance of ecclesiastical discipline, preserved in its scriptural purity and primitive vigour, as necessary to the maintenance of a flourishing and vital religion; a need that has been particularly realized in the past in the Church of Scotland where "discipline

1 Ibid., pp. 289-91.

executed according to the word of God" was added to the European Confessions as a mark of the true Church. In the second place he indicates that it is the duty of ministers and of students for this office to qualify themselves not only for preaching but for taking care of the Church of God. They should make a study of ecclesiastical jurisprudence as contained in scripture, in the authorized books of discipline, and in the acts and proceedings of the best reformed churches. McCrie calls attention to the too common custom among young ministers, even in the Secession, to come up to the meetings of the supreme court rather to visit their friends, and enjoy themselves, than to attend to public business. (Apparently what we consider modern tendencies have long ago been deplored as bad habits among commissioners to Assemblies.) In the third place he points out that there is need of great care in the choosing and setting apart of those who are to bear office in the Church. "The privilege granted to the Christian people to choose their own pastors and elders, imposes an obligation on them to exercise it with serious deliberation and fervent prayer." In the fourth place the subject proclaims the divine institution of ecclesiastical government with its necessary accompaniment of subjection to authority and obedience to the determinations of church rulers; and finally it

suggests that all members of the court of the Church at large should humbly and fervently pray that "the Lord of Hosts may be to us for a spirit of judgment when we sit in judgment." This single example will suffice to illustrate the careful and detailed practical application he made in his sermons.¹ The timeliness of so many of his discourses has been illustrated already in the chapter on church patronage where we noted the sermon he preached during the meeting of the Assembly which passed the Veto Act and in which he openly criticized their error in judgment. This criticism was part of the concluding section of the sermon when he was making his usual particular and necessary applications of the thought and pointing out the obvious duties that confronted the congregation when they understood the Aspect of the Times.²

Some further insight into McCrie's character as a preacher may be deduced from his address at the Ordination of Rev. William White at Haddington on July 1st, 1835, which was printed in the Presbyterian Magazine shortly after his death. He offers much sage advice to the new minister. He should "strive not only to be a Christian but strive to be an eminent Christian." "Every

1 Sermons by the late Thomas McCrie, D.D. pp. 304-27.

2 Sermons, pp. 328-46.

Christian needs to be converted but a Christian minister requires to be converted again and again." He suggests that grace in the heart of the minister is like gold in the hand of the traveller -- "it meets all charges and exigencies." He instructs the minister to stir up the sacred fire in his heart -- "open your Bible for yourself, study for yourself, preach to yourself, pray for yourself." With particular regard to the preaching he advises that a great deal of the minister's attention should be devoted to his preaching. "Let the cross be your beginning and ending theme," he says. "Preach the cross as God's device for man's salvation." "Speak as it becometh the oracles of God. Let nothing sheathe the sharp sword of the Spirit." "Preach to every man, preach at no man." "Let your preaching be edifying, not superficial and showy, but solid and profound" -- not speculative but practical. A minister must be diligent; he has least excuse of any for idleness. "If a young minister, whatever be his talents, yield himself to indolence, if he is not adding daily to his store of knowledge, if he is not regular and assiduous in his preparation for the pulpit, his discourses will become formal, and contract a sameness, disgusting to the judicious, and soporific to the careless." It is well to remember that "a minister's life should be the life of his preaching." From this

sermon, replete with advice to a young minister, we perhaps get the best understanding of McCrie's particularly edifying style, assuming, of course, that he followed his own advice. But more revealing is his further advice to the minister that he should study humility, seek disinterestedness, mix in friendly intercourse with the people, cultivate harmony with his session and not be over-anxious about success or about the numbers in his congregation, for these were among the qualities that explained McCrie's own position of high esteem and respect among Edinburgh's famous ministers.

Although it is probably not wise to depend upon obituary notices, which tend to be somewhat fulsome in their praise, for accurate information, still one may accept a good part of them as accurate when they seem to be well supported by other sources. In the Presbyterian Magazine there is a long notice of this kind which is supported by articles on the same subject quoted from other papers and journals. Only the part of this notice which deals with McCrie as a preacher will be given here.

As a preacher, his excellences were peculiarly his own. The ground-work of all his ministrations was the communication of divine knowledge, -- particularly, the knowledge of Christ and him crucified. It was through informing the judgment, by plain but striking exhibitions of Scriptural truth, that he sought to reach the grand practical end of the Christian ministry. From the whole tone and tenor of his doctrine, the impression was practical. His mode was

not to talk about the blessedness of the gospel, but by leading to its sources, to infuse it. There was no theorizing in his discourses, no attempts to shine, by striking out original views of doctrine, or startling interpretations of scripture. In his theology there was a catholicity which led him, almost invariably, to fix on the generally received creed and the commentary of the protestant church, and confine his ingenuity, his acuteness and his fancy, to the task of throwing around the familiar truths of the gospel a light that seemed to render them almost palpable, and a charm approaching to that of novelty.

Those who have heard him in prayer, will realize as if they heard him still, and will ever retain, the solemn impression produced by his manner of performing this part of divine service, while, with a mind evidently wrapt up in the contemplation of the Being whom he addressed, his thoughts clothed themselves naturally . . . in the most striking and appropriate language

As a minister, the hearts of his congregation were his and were becoming more and more so every day: his loss to them must be in many respects irreparable. They were justly proud of their minister; and if that expression can be applied to the high value which they set on their near relation to one who, in addition to ministerial qualifications which challenged their admiration, and which had never reached a higher point in their esteem than at the period when he was removed from them, occupied so lofty a place in the estimation of the country and the world.¹

And finally mention should be made of Dr. Wylie's sincere commendation and admiration of McCrie's preaching talents. D. Scott in the Annals of Secession has made a very long quotation of Wylie's remarks on McCrie's whole career of which four or five paragraphs are concerned with his preaching. Again we feel obliged to

1 Presbyterian Magazine, Vol. III, No. IX, p. 269.

make only a short quotation from these remarks, but a paragraph will suffice to reveal the trend of Wylie's opinion and also provide a fitting conclusion to this chapter on McCrie, the Preacher.

When from his library, where he had been hard at work all week, he passed on Sabbath morning to the pulpit, there hung around him not a little of the secluded, abstracted air of the scholar. But the coldness and stiffness soon passed away. He read out the psalm with peculiar solemnity. There was a reverence and majesty in his opening prayer which prepared the people for all that was to follow. He always, except on rare occasions, lectured at the forenoon diet, choosing his subject, especially toward the latter end of his ministry, from the historical portions of the Old Testament. These subjects afforded ample scope for his knowledge of human nature, his power of painting character, his genius for throwing events into a dramatic form, and his wonderful power of making an ordinary narrative rich in great lessons or solemn warnings. His lectures were unique and inimitable. They were not only historic but histrionic. They were great masterpieces of Scripture-painting. The grander passages in them were not merely recited, they were acted. It was easy to see when the inspiration fell upon him -- the tall, worn, yet warrior-looking figure drew itself up; it became suddenly clothed with a new youth, as it were; the large prominent eye began to burn, and to shoot out livid gleams from under the shaggy eyebrows. The voice, instead of rising, suddenly dropped into a lower key, but continued distinctly audible in the deep stillness that reigned in the assembly. The tones were intensely earnest and had a strange, indescribable power of thrilling the hearers. The scene was such as was not to be witnessed in any other pulpit of the age. The eloquence of Dr. McCrie was not characterized by that immense physical vehemence and Demosthenic ardour, and by that gorgeousness of imagination which gave to the oratory of Chalmers its unquestioned supremacy over all contemporary eloquence; but in its electrical intensity and brilliance, and its spiritual grandeur and force, it rose above it, and above that of all the great orators of his day.¹

1 Annals of the Original Secession Church, p. 532-33.

PART III.

THOMAS MCCRIE, THE HISTORIAN.

CHAPTER 7

AIM AND METHOD

- A. The study of Scottish Church History and its connection with national life is the central theme but McCrie also gives his attention to an examination of the general development of Protestant civilization and the advancement of civil liberty and religious freedom.

Despite his important and lifelong labours in the Church and his involvement in its various changes and developments, it was his work in Historiography that brought fame to McCrie and earned for him a place among Scotland's great historians. In the field of history his primary interest was the study of the Scottish Church from the time of the Reformation to his own day. His son tells us that it was the query of an old woman belonging to his flock regarding the national church history, which he was unable to answer, that started McCrie on a course of reading on the subject;¹ but it was the controversy over the "New Light" principles, which condemned the whole plan of the Reformation as introduced by the Reformers, that led him to the serious study of the history of the Reformation.² Along with this main theme

1 Memoir, p. 161.

2 Memoir, pp. 84 and 162.

went a keen interest in the general development of Protestant civilization as a whole, and in the advancement of civil liberty and religious freedom, which induced him to make studies of other Reformations, such as the Italian and Spanish, and also to follow with interest and sympathy the vicissitudes of the Protestants in France and the struggles of the Greek nationalists.

McCrie was convinced that civil liberty and religious freedom went hand in hand. "Despotism has rarely been established in any nation," he tells us, "without the subservience of the ministers of religion."¹ He found this was the case in Spain where civil and religious despotism were natural allies and where every reflection on politics was denounced by the monks as "damnable heresy."² In his investigation of the history of the Church of Scotland during its struggles against the forces of despotism he deepened this conviction and determined not only to seek the vindication of the Reformers and their work of Reformation but also to ensure that due praise was meted out to those same men who had been so instrumental in furthering the cherished civil liberties of the country. "It was the preachers,"

1 Life of Andrew Melville, vol. I, p. 213.

2 History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the Sixteenth Century, p. 379.

McCrie writes, "who first taught the people to express an opinion on public affairs and the conduct of their rulers; and the assemblies of the Church set the earliest example of a regular and firm opposition to the arbitrary and unconstitutional measures of the court."¹ And in similar vein he praises the Aberdeen Assembly of 1605 in its opposition to James I: "This is a summary account of the assembly at Aberdeen. . . which the King resented so highly. The conduct of the ministers who kept it, instead of meriting punishment, is entitled to warm and unqualified approbation. It was marked at once by firmness and moderation, by zeal for the rights of the church and respect for the authority of the sovereign. Had they done less than they did, they would have forfeited the honourable character which the ministers of Scotland had acquired - disgraced themselves, and discredited those to whose places they had succeeded. They would have crouched to the usurped claims of a royal supremacy, which they and their predecessors had uniformly and steadily resisted, which were not more inconsistent with Presbyterian principles than contrary to the laws of the country, and which if yielded to, would have converted the free and independent

¹ Life of Melville, vol. 1, pp. 213-214.

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland into a Parisian parliament or an English convocation. They are entitled to the gratitude of the friends of civil liberty. 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. . . . This question came afterward 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. In this respect complete justice has not yet been done to their memory; nor has expiation been made for the injuries done to the cause which they maintained by the slanderous libels against these patriots which continue to stain the pages of English history."¹

McCrie held that there was very little truth in a favorite maxim of his day that the benefits we owe to the

1 Life of Melville, vol. 2, pp. 116f

Reformation are ulterior and remote results of that event rather than effects contemplated and intended by the reformers.¹ He points out that the Act of Parliament of 1592, which was still the charter of the Church of Scotland, was a great and important step in national reformation. "It reduced the prerogatives of the crown, which had lately been raised to exorbitant heights; and by legally securing the religious privileges of the nation against arbitrary encroachments, it pointed out the propriety and practicability of providing similar securities on behalf of political rights."² The Presbyterian form of Church Government established by the Reformation in Scotland won McCrie's staunch support for "as a Seceder, he was pledged to the approval of the principles on which the Reformation was founded; and in his private judgment, matured by years and close investigation, he coincided, in every material point, with the opinions of its founders."³ In his biography of Melville he takes the opportunity of setting out his own as well as Melville's views in the "defence and elucidation of the principles of Presbyterians."⁴ His son tells us in his Memoir that McCrie was persuaded of the "divine

1 Ibid., vol 1, p. 47.

2 Ibid., p. 321.

3 Memoir, p. 165.

4 Memoir, p. 233.

right or scriptural appointment of that form of policy which has been generally adopted by the Churches of the Reformation" but that he avoided all dogmatizing and spoke of it with extreme caution. His feelings were so "delicate" on the subject that he preferred to allow Melville to speak for him on the question of Episcopacy, "by giving the substance of his speech before the Assembly, 1575." Melville maintains that prelacy has no foundation in the Scriptures and that even as a human expedient its tendency was more to hinder than help the interest of religion. Having witnessed the good effects of Presbyterian parity in Geneva and in France he was convinced that the maintenance of prelacy in England was "one cause of the rarity of preaching, the poverty of the lower orders of the clergy, pluralities, want of discipline and other abuses which had produced dissensions and heart-burnings in that flourishing kingdom."¹

However, McCrie seems to have been able, at times, to overcome at least some of his caution and delicacy and before the publication of the Life of Melville he becomes quite outspoken; in fact, he maintains that the particular form which the Reformation took in Scotland is responsible for the marked superiority

1 Memoir, pp. 233-234

of Scotland over England in matters of religion and moral conduct. Writing in the Edinburgh Christian Instructor he replies vehemently to the criticism of the Christian Observer on the Standards of the Church of Scotland.

As to the present religious and moral state of the two kingdoms, nothing but the most consummate ignorance and inveterate prejudice will deny, that the great mass of the people in Scotland stand unspeakably higher than their neighbours in England. It is unnecessary to go into details on a subject universally acknowledged by all who are in the slightest degree competent to judge on the subject. Look at England, and you will see the great majority of the lower classes unable to read; in Scotland, not one in a thousand destitute of that valuable attainment. . . . in England, pauperism risen to such a height as to be altogether alarming; in Scotland scarcely felt as a burden; - in England, crimes so prevalent, as that there are more criminals condemned at a single Manchester Sessions, than in all Scotland during a year. Ask the officers in the army concerning the respective character of the Scotch and English regiments, for order, sobriety, and regularity, or for the character of the individuals of these nations which are mingled in the same regiment, and you will find a unanimous testimony in favour of the Scots. In a word, Scotland, so far from being a warning to all her neighbours of the evil effects of a particular creed. . . . is entitled to be held up as an example of religious and moral improvement, worthy to be imitated by every other nation in the world. . . . Whence then her present superiority? It would show the same weakness and bigotry, which we are condemning in our accusers, to impute it wholly to her creed. But it will surely be allowed us to infer, that the creed cannot be a very pernicious one, which, after 250 years trial, leaves the nation which has adopted it, superior to every other nation on earth in religious knowledge and moral conduct. . . . Whence is the inferiority of England, an inferiority acknowledged by every candid and competent judge, if not from the inferiority of her formularies, and

mode of church government?¹

On reading remarks such as these and on perusing all his works and especially his reviews, it early becomes apparent that McCrie is most sensitive to criticism from South of the Border, particularly when it is directed against the Scottish Church, and he makes scathing and sharp retorts to any such criticism of the Church of Scotland from Episcopalians or from anyone in sympathy with prelacy. An example of the ever-ready rebuke awaiting any who should venture to slander his beloved Church of Scotland is to be found in the same article from the Christian Instructor.

Nothing but the most consummate ignorance, with regard to Scotland, could have led any person to say, that there is more bigotry there than in England. In fact, the Scottish clergy are liberal minded a thousand degrees beyond the English. We are, indeed, attached to our own standards, and to our own form of Church government; but it is far from being that weak, childish, overweening attachment, which can scarcely see anything good or right, except as it approaches to Presbyterianism,- which can scarcely rejoice in the progress of the Gospel, except as it is effected by Presbyterians,- and which thinks a man who is a saint, at least doubly so, if he is a Presbyterian. . . . Where is the Scottish clergyman who will not allow the name of church to any but his own, and those who conform to it? Where is the Presbyterian clergyman who doubts of the salvation of all but Presbyterians, and leaves every other sect to the uncovenanted mercies of God? Where is the Presbyterian who denies the validity of all ordination except Presbyterian ordination, and of baptism except as

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, June, 1816, p. 409.

administered by one of his own church?¹

We might feel justified in accusing McCrie of a narrow nationalism but this he himself denies and avows that he only desires to defend the Church of Scotland against unwarranted attacks and to emphasize the atrocious ignorance of Scottish affairs that exists in England.

Writing further in the above article he states:

It is an old proverb, and like most old proverbs a very true one that comparisons are odious. It is with much reluctance, therefore, that we enter on the disagreeable task of making comparisons between the English and Scottish creeds and churches; but such an attack as this cannot be allowed to pass in silence, or it would be thought by the public that we felt obliged to plead guilty to the charge brought against us. . . . We do not expect to make converts of our neighbours to our creed and form of government but convinced as we are of the real excellence and superiority of our own to theirs, we must not suffer Episcopalian publications, however high their general merit may be, to create prejudice and dislike among us to what ought to command the highest esteem.²

And in a review of Scott's Tales of my Landlord he says that "it is long since we were satisfied that no dependence was to be placed upon the judgments, whether favourable or unfavourable, which English censors of the press may be pleased to pronounce upon any historical work related to Scotland. . . . We would be ashamed of being found to cherish a spirit of narrow and illiberal nationality, especially towards the natives of our sister

1 Ibid., p. 414.

2 Ibid., p. 405.

kingdom, but we confess that we have felt proud of the superior knowledge which our countrymen have displayed of the history of England, compared with the knowledge which Englishmen have of ours. . . . It is but of late that Englishmen have come to entertain correct notions of Scotland, or of the character of its inhabitants; and to this^{day} their knowledge of its history, and its parties, political and religious, during the 16th and 17th centuries, is extremely imperfect and erroneous."¹

McCrie was, indeed, far from being a mere nationalist. The cause of Protestantism and of liberty in any country was sure to catch his interest and sympathy, and he is full of praise for Sismondi's desires for international co-operation among Protestant nations. In a review of Sismondi's Considerations on Geneva he expresses his delight at finding "a philosopher of the present day. . . appreciating with such justice, the relation between the Reformed religion, civil liberty, and literature, and pointing out so seasonably and so eloquently, the importance of a close connection and intimate union, among all the free, enlightened and Protestant States of Europe."² It is to be expected, then, that he would

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 396.

2 Ibid., pp. 223-224.

have a deep concern for the plight of the Protestants suffering persecution in France and would feel obliged to take a part in the controversy which arose in Britain concerning their ill-treatment. Here we get some insight into McCrie's historical method, and his cautious and careful assessment of all the available material concerning any problem with which he is dealing. In the Christian Instructor he published a Review of the Pamphlets and Documents on the Persecution of the Protestants in France and in that review he makes a magnificent defence of the Protestants and a successful attack on and exposure of those who would minimize the seriousness of the atrocities by unreasonable skepticism and various artifices; but that, at the same time, he seeks to be fair and just in his treatment, is evident when he writes:

This precaution against hasty and premature judgment we would have been disposed to adopt from a sense of the duty which we owe to our readers. . . . but in the present instance it was powerfully urged upon our minds by the conviction that it was absolutely necessary to do justice not only to the unhappy sufferers but also to those who have been instruments of inflicting these sufferings upon them, or who have been suspected of abetting their enemies and oppressors. We were aware that the cause of innocence may be materially injured by an injudicious though well meant defence, and, we wished not to forget, that, while it is our duty to defend the oppressed and 'deliver them that are drawn unto death', we are not warranted, in the indulgence of the most sympathetic emotions, to throw out charges at random, or to fix accusations upon everyone whom we may presume or

or imagine to be the author or instigator of the oppression. But we apprehend, that the evidence, both accusatory and exculpatory, is now as fully before us as we can expect it to be at any future period; and as the cause has been warmly taken up in this country, we have pleadings on both sides: we are therefore in possession of all the materials requisite for forming a judgment upon the subject.¹

In his writing on this subject it is not difficult to observe sentiments similar to those which moved him while he was writing the Life of Knox and in his defences of the Covenanters. He writes in this same review that he is ready "to enter into an examination of the crimes and political delinquencies with which the French Protestants are charged. . . and we are prepared to refute these accusations when they are false, to defend the conduct of the accused where we are convinced that the charges brought against them imply no crime, and to confess their faults where it appears to us that they have erred. . . . We shall not dwell on the well known fact that persecutors have in every age, endeavoured to brand the innocent victims of their cruelty with the blackest and most odious crimes, and that these accusations have, for a time, gained credit, and been handed down as truths by writers of no mean name."²

A few years later McCrie's "ardent zeal for the

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, June, 1816, p. 114

2 Ibid., p. 131

cause of true religion, the success of which he always associated with the triumph of liberty and progress of education," induced him to take a deep interest in the cause of the patriotic Greeks. As always, McCrie was eager and willing to lend the help of his influence to any deserving cause and particularly any cause which was in the name of freedom and liberty. "The mere fact that the Greeks were struggling to get free from the degrading thralldom of a despotic and barbarous government, was sufficient to enlist all his sympathies on their side; for in his mind there burned, not merely the love of liberty, which is natural and common enough among men, but an intense and conscientious abhorrence of oppression. . . ."1 He made one of his few public appearances in Edinburgh to speak on behalf of the suffering Greeks and his eloquence and interest on their behalf were most influential in arousing the interest of the citizens in their struggle for freedom. However, it was in the vindication of the Reformers and Covenanters that he exerted most of his historical research and literary ability.

1 Memoir, pp. 277-278

B. Vindication of the early Reformers and of their labours.

From a perusal of McCrie's early writings in the Christian Magazine we come to the same conclusions as his son that "he was fond of a species of literary adventure, which delights in investigating the unknown regions of the world of history, exploring sources of information to which few have access, and from thence collecting materials which might serve to illustrate long-neglected worth, or to vindicate much-injured innocence."¹ From his studies of the Taborites, of Wickliffe, and of the early British martyrs he soon formulated certain conceptions of reformers in general which were to guide him in his vindication of the Scottish Reformers in particular. Writing about the Taborites and the Calixtines he says: "Some things they may have carried too far; this is common at the beginning of a reformation, where men, in avoiding one extreme, are ready to fall into another; but still, as one has said, extreme for extreme, that of the Taborites was infinitely preferable to that of the church of Rome."² And again, in July of the same year, in an article on Wickliffe he writes:

1 Memoir, p. 312.

2 Christian Magazine, June, 1804, "On the origin of the Taborites."

Every man who knows anything of human nature is assured, that those who attempt reformations of any kind, lie under great difficulties, and are subject to numberless misrepresentations. Reformers are men, and as such they have their faults; and it too frequently happens, that the zeal for truth wherewith they are animated, and without which they would not be reformers, carries them too far and causes them to overshoot the mark, which they strain all their nerves to hit. These faults are greedily laid hold of by their adversaries, while even their minutest slip is aggravated into the most enormous stumble. So many too are irritated, nay, and interested to blacken them, that it is no wonder their characters are loaded with a weight of infamy.¹

As early as 1793, in a letter to his uncle, quoted by his son in the Memoir, it is clear that his thoughts are beginning to reveal a keen interest in the cause of civil and religious liberty and a desire to defend the unjustly accused. In this letter he jeers at those who behold the excesses of the French Revolution with such horror and amazement and yet have been able to observe the thousands who were crushed under the heel of French despotism without shedding a tear. He declares that the "cruelties of the Inquisition, the persecution and massacres for the sake of religion, were incomparably more fierce than any exercised by the French; yet they were never represented in such hideous colours." In the same letter he continues:

And is cruelty more tolerable, or more excusable, when exercised by those who profess the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus, than when exercised by those who profess to be the friends of liberty? For my part

1 Ibid., July, 1804, "Life of John Wickliffe."

I have always been averse to join in calumniating a great nation, or in condemning a whole people, struggling under such difficulties, for a few excesses. A candid observer will find many palliations for these, and while he is grieved at partial evils, he will wonder that greater have not happened. He will consider that when the passions of men are raised to such a pitch as is necessary for effecting a revolution from despotism to liberty, they must naturally vibrate to the opposite extreme, and that some time is required before they can be poised so as to settle upon the medium.¹

In addition to these ideas on reformation and liberty in general, certain contemporary trends in public opinion of the Scottish Reformation turned McCrie's attention to the need of restoring the activities and the character of the Reformers to the high reputation they deserved. And there is no doubt that there was need for such a champion to enter the lists in defence of those much maligned individuals. An illustration of the kind of misrepresentation that was being published at the time is brought to the public attention in McCrie's review of a book by the Rev. James Milne, minister of St. Andrew's Chapel, Banff, The Difference Stated Betwixt the Presbyterian Establishment, and the Episcopal Church of Scotland. Two quotations made by McCrie will serve to reveal the general tenor of the work. One concerns Knox: "It must be confessed that John Knox, by his stern temper, his violent zeal, his seditious principles, and his

¹ Memoir, p. 19-20.

stubborn fanatical prejudices, contributed not a little to mar the work of reformation in Scotland."¹ The other concerns Melville: "Upon his return into Scotland in July 1574, he (Melville) began immediately, with the gloomy austerity of the puritanical religionist, the confident arrogance of the meddling demagogue, and the satirical ill-nature of the snarling cynic, to provoke discussions, and to create jealousies, with the intent of overturning Episcopacy, and establishing upon its ruins the ecclesiastical republicanism of Geneva."² As long as such indictments were being propagated, it is obvious that McCrie's defence was both necessary and timely. And it was not only from the Episcopalians that the attacks were forthcoming; the Independents also sought to depreciate the efforts of the Presbyterians and to uphold "Independency" as being the originator of the principles of religious liberty in Britain and the only sect constantly to maintain these principles. McCrie successfully defended the Presbyterians against the attacks from this quarter in a review of Orme's Life of Dr. Owen, which advanced such views--a review which, according to Dr. Brown of Langton, was "the most valuable historical

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 178.

2 Ibid., p. 171.

vindication of Presbyterians from the misrepresentations of Independents that is anywhere to be met with."¹ Besides the deliberate attacks on the Reformers and Covenanters, our author was keenly aware of the general changes in public opinion regarding the Covenanters and he felt that it was only an overflowing of spite against the Reformation principles of Scotland, religious and political, which has always been present with a certain section of the people. He traced the causes of this change to the renewed interest in hereditary rights and royal legitimacy, and a growing tendency to non-resistance; to the progress of infidelity, "which natively generates a contempt for religious reformers" and indifference or even hostility to "all struggles for the rights of conscience;" and to the "adoption, by different parties, of religious opinions very different from those which were once almost universally embraced in Scotland, and especially of that opinion common to almost all of them--that religious and civil concerns ought to be completely separated, a principle which lays the proceedings of our reforming and suffering ancestors open to easy attack and upon which it will be found impossible satisfactorily to vindicate their conduct."² But no change in public opinion could

1 Memoir, p.270.

2 Miscellaneous Writings, "Review of Tales of my Landlord," pp. 328-329.

deter McCrie from embarking on a task that was to take up most of his career as a historian, the task of vindicating the Scottish Reformers and Covenanters in more formal biographies as well as in reviews of other works which would give him the opportunity of furthering these aims.

He was filled with a deep sense of gratitude to his forefathers for their immense labours in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties and set-backs. He was thankful to those who had witnessed to their faith even to the extent of martyrdom, to those who, in their efforts to throw off the yoke of superstitious popery, had defied even the demands of the crown, to those who had refused to buy religious toleration at the price of civil liberty, and to those who had established on a firm biblical foundation a strong national Church with a deep and rich faith, a healthy discipline, and an educated and faithful ministry. He was not willing merely to express his thanks and then to stand by and allow those same devoted men to be criticized, slandered, and vilified. No, he must strive to support and defend them and seek to pay his debt of gratitude by maintaining unspotted and pure, the faith by which they had lived and died. Writing in his review of the Tales of my Landlord he says: "One reason why we will not suffer our ancestors to be misrepresented. . . is the gratitude which we feel to them, for

having transmitted to their posterity a hereditary and deep veneration for the Lord's day."¹ And again in his sketch of the Life of Alexander Henderson he writes: "To that band of illustrious Reformers, who stood firm against the encroachments of tyranny and superstition, we owe, under God, whatever we enjoy most valuable in religion and liberty; although justice is seldom done to their character and actings in the histories of that period, and their memories have often been loaded with the most odious charges and libelous abuse."²

It was natural that he should be most concerned with the reputations of Knox and Melville, perhaps the two greatest names in the history of the Church of Scotland. Both of these men had suffered considerable abuse during their lifetime and perhaps even more afterwards. The denunciation and criticism leveled at Knox, like so much of the mud of slander that is thrown indiscriminately, had a tendency to stick and even the valiant efforts of McCrie were not able to remove completely the undeserved stains that even to this day continue to mar and distort the picture of Knox that is developed in the mind of the public at the mention of his name. In its review of

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 276.

2 Ibid., p. 1.

McCrie's Life of Knox, the Edinburgh Review describes the standing of Knox in the public estimation in 1812:

In the reformed island of Great Britain, no honours now wait on the memory of the greatest of the British Reformers: And, even among us zealous Presbyterians of the North, the name of Knox, to whom our Presbyterian Church is indebted, not merely for its establishment, but its existence, is oftener remembered for reproach than for veneration:- and his apostolical zeal and sanctity, his heroic courage, his learning, talents and accomplishments, are all coldly forgotten,--while a thousand tongues are still ready to pour out their censure or derision of his fierceness, his ambition, and his bigotry.

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 . . . it seems to be undeniable, that the prevailing opinion about John Knox, even in this country has come to be, that he was a fierce and gloomy bigot, equally a foe to polite learning, and innocent enjoyment; and that, not satisfied with exposing the abuses of the Romish superstitions, he laboured to substitute for the rational religion and regulated worship of enlightened men, the ardent and unrectified spirit of vulgar enthusiasm, dashed with dreams of spiritual and political independence. . . .¹

Melville was just as severely attacked, perhaps, but seems to have been more successfully restored to his proper reputation since McCrie's day. Of course, he never has acquired the fame of the Scottish Reformer but of him McCrie says: "If the love of pure religion, rational liberty, and polite letters, forms the basis of national virtue and happiness, I know no individual, after her Reformer, from whom Scotland has received greater benefits, and to whom she owes a deeper debt of

1 Edinburgh Review, July, 1812, pp. 1-3.

gratitude and respect, than Andrew Melville."¹ However, the two great biographies of Knox and Melville were concerned not only with their vindication but also with the vindication of the whole Reforming and Covenanting movement.

The Scottish Protestants were accused of displaying the same spirit of intolerance by which the Roman Catholics were distinguished because they refused to allow even the slightest vestiges of Catholicism to remain in force, a spirit evident in Knox's remark that "one mess [mass] was more fearful unto him than if ten thousand armed enemies wer landed in ony parte of the realme, of purpose to suppress the hole religion."² Such fears seem ridiculous in this day and age and they did in McCrie's time, too, but he desires that men should be "just as well as liberal" and complains that ignorance, lukewarmness, and ideas of religious liberty make it impossible for his contemporaries to sympathize with the fears of their forefathers. Whatever later times may have seen fit to uphold as a proper spirit of toleration, no siren song of toleration was to put the Reformers off their guard against the ascendancy of Roman Catholicism.

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, p. 449.

2 Knox, Historie, pp. 284-287, quoted in McCrie's Life of Knox, pp. 24-25.

and the persecution which would accompany it; the evidence of which had been open to their observation in France, the Netherlands, Spain and also in England. In any case, McCrie denies any over-zealous intolerance on the part of the Reformers and quotes a statement by a French author who, he says, "had formed a more just notion of the transactions than many of our writers." This French writer maintains that if the situation had been reversed and a Huguenot Queen had come to take possession of a Roman Catholic country with the retinue with which Mary came to Scotland, she would have been arrested and thrown to the Inquisition for burning as a heretic.¹ Knox is accused of allowing intolerance so to rule his mind that he went so far as to treat Queen Mary with rudeness and disrespect--a charge which McCrie refutes by reference to various interviews between Knox and the Queen. Queen Mary has been the subject of much romantic interest and sympathy all through the years and is just as much so today. Even the accurate historian, William Robertson, had a strong prejudice in her favour. William Tytler recognized that he had come under Mary's spell and he writes in the preface to his work on the evidence against Queen Mary: "Who can even read Dr.

1 Life of Knox, pp. 24-29.

Robertson's history of the ill-fated Queen Mary, without wishing to find her innocent."¹ This predilection, though not strong enough to satisfy the ultra-Catholic party, was recognized by his friend Hume and is noted by Dugald Stewart in his Biography of Robertson, when he writes: ". . . the story of the beautiful and unfortunate Queen, as related by him, excites on the whole a deeper interest in her fortunes, and a more lively sympathy with her fate, than have been produced by all the attempts to canonize her memory, whether inspired by the sympathetic zeal of the Romish Church, or the enthusiasm of Scottish chivalry."² Since his time sympathetic pictures of Mary have presented Knox in a harsh light and many with only a vague notion of his true worth as a Reformer remember him well as the persecutor of Queen Mary. The Edinburgh Review attributed much of Knox's unpopularity to this "supposed rudeness and personal hostility to the unfortunate princess who then swayed the sceptre of his native country; and whose cruel sufferings, and celebrated beauty, seem not only to have effaced all sense of her crimes from the mind of the public, but

1 An Inquiry . . . into the Evidence against Mary Queen of Scots &c., 2nd edit., 1767; Preface ix-x.

2 Account of Life & Writings of William Robertson, prefaced to Vol. I Robertson's History of Scotland, 18th edit.

have actually called forth, at the distance of two hundred years, the zeal and chivalrous defiance of a more enthusiastic band of champions, than ever were mustered for her defence in her lifetime."¹ McCrie's evidence, however, makes it clear that "though the Reformer addressed her with a plainness to which crowned heads are seldom accustomed, he never lost sight of the respect which was due to the person of his sovereign, or of the decorum which became his own character."² There is no doubt that it was Knox's singleness of purpose that obliged the Queen to act with greater moderation; that restored the zeal of the nobles when they were beginning to succumb to the personal charms of the Queen; and that aroused and kept awake the ardour and the fears of the nation, "which, at that period, were the two great safeguards of the protestant religion in Scotland."³

Melville came under a similar attack and in his enthusiasm for the establishment of Presbyterianism was accused of being most intolerant, overbearing, and violent in his conduct, and of treating Archbishop Boyd most rudely at the time of his deposition. These accusations came mainly from Spotswood, and McCrie

1 Edinburgh Review, July, 1812; Review of Life of Knox, p. 3.

2 Life of Knox, vol. II, 39.

3 Ibid., p. 41.

carefully contradicts every one of his charges and proves them either "childish and ridiculous" or "unfounded and calumnious" by means of evidence drawn from Calderwood, Keith, James Melville, Row's History and Boyd's own son, Robert Boyd.¹ Knox was also attacked for his supposed connection with the assassination of Cardinal Beaton. Some accused him of actually being one of the conspirators, others of having, at least, been an accessory since he moved into the castle at St. Andrews along with the conspirators, and others still have pointed with horror at Knox's justification of the deed in his writings as a proof of his savage temper. McCrie is willing to admit that Knox did justify the action of the conspirators who murdered Cardinal Beaton for Knox held the opinion, "that persons who, by the commission of flagrant crimes, had forfeited their lives, according to the law of God, and the just laws of society, such as notorious murderers and tyrants, might warrantably be put to death by private individuals; provided all redress, in the ordinary course of justice was rendered impossible, in consequence of the offenders having usurped the executive authority, or being systematically protected by oppressive rulers." McCrie

1 Life of Melville, vol. I, 134-39.

confesses that this is a principle of dangerous application but it is a principle not to be confused with the principle which would legitimize assassination as an individual's means of revenge, a belief which the Reformers were said to accept.¹ McCrie has little time for those who blithely assert that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" and that when Christians resort to the sword in order to resist persecution for the Gospel's sake, they will perish by the sword. In his book on the Reformation in Spain he discusses this specious argument and suggests that we must distinguish "what is effected by the special interposition and extraordinary blessing of heaven, from what will happen according to the ordinary course of events."² In a footnote in the same work he produces sufficient evidence to make it clear that history does not support the facile affirmations of many critics of the Reformers' resistance by the sword. The defensive wars of the Protestants in Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and the Low Countries "were crowned with success," and the non-resistance of the Protestants in Italy and Spain ended in their extermination.³

1 Life of Knox, vol. I, pp. 47-49, and Note M. pp.369-72.

2 History of the Progress and Suppression of the Reformation in Spain in the sixteenth century, p. 344.

3 Ibid., pp. 343-44, footnote.

Another accusation, which raises the ire of McCrie and brings him to the quick defence of the Reformers, is that which is still propagated today by tourist guides among the ruins of Scotland's cathedrals and abbeys, that the Reformers, in an excess of zeal, indiscriminately destroyed churches and burned libraries to the everlasting loss of the country. In a letter to his friend, Mr. Bruce of Whitburn, he freely expresses himself on this subject.

To demolish a Gothic arch, break a pane of painted glass, or deface a picture, are with them [antiquarians] acts of ferocious sacrilege not to be atoned for, the perpetrators of which must be ipso facto excommunicated from all civil society, and reckoned henceforth among savages; while to preserve these magnificent trifles, for which they entertain a veneration little less idolatrous than their Popish or Pagan predecessors, they would consign whole nations and generations to-- ignorance and perdition.¹

In the same tone in the Life of Knox he writes indignantly:

What! do we celebrate with public rejoicings, victories over the enemies of our country, in the gaining of which the lives of thousands of our fellow-creatures have been sacrificed? and shall solemn masses and sad dirges, accompanied with direful execrations, be everlastingly sung, for the mangled members of statues, torn pictures, and ruined towers?²

Even Melville was charged with being an accessory to an attempt of the magistrates and ministers of Glasgow to demolish the Cathedral, but the sole authority for the

1 Memoir, p. 94; Letter to Bruce, February 9, 1802.

2 Life of Knox, p. 276.

charge was Archbishop Spotswood. McCrie marshals his evidence in denial of this charge. There is nothing in the public or private writings of Melville or of any contemporary minister that would give the smallest ground for the conclusion that they looked on Cathedral Churches as monuments of idolatry or that they would have advised their demolition on this ground. There is no mention in the records of the Town Council of Glasgow or of the Privy Council of any disturbance with such designs on the Cathedral, and satisfactory documents show that the magistrates and ministers of Glasgow were anxious to uphold and repair the Cathedral.¹ McCrie is satisfied that the delations usually brought against the Reformers on the subject of their destructiveness are "highly exaggerated, and in some instances altogether groundless. The demolition of the monasteries is, in fact, almost the only thing of which they can be accused." Cathedrals, parish Churches and even monastery chapels were appropriated for Protestant worship, and in stripping them of their idolatrous images, pictures and decorations, directions were given to avoid any destruction of the buildings themselves. However, some did suffer due to the violence of certain unruly elements and others became

1 Life of Melville, vol. I, pp. 84-85.

dilapidated because their most valuable materials were sold to defray the expenses of the war in which the Protestants were involved.¹ In any case, McCrie considered that the destruction of the monasteries was a "piece of good policy, which contributed materially to the overthrow of the Roman Catholic religion, and the prevention of its re-establishment. . . . There is more wisdom than many seem to perceive, in the maxim which Knox is said to have inculcated, 'that the best way to keep the rooks from returning, was to pull down their nests.' In demolishing, or rendering uninhabitable all those buildings which had served for the maintenance of the ancient superstition (except what were requisite for the protestant worship), the reformers only acted upon the principles of a prudent general, who dismantles or razes the fortifications which he is unable to keep, and which might afterward be seized, and employed against him, by the enemy."²

With regard to the burning of vast libraries and the consequent literary impoverishment of Scotland, the charge against the Reformers again proves to be highly exaggerated and in the main without any support in fact. In the

1 Life of Knox, vol. I, pp. 274-75.

2 Ibid., pp. 277-78.

first place the monastic libraries were very meagerly supplied and what they did have consisted mainly of Roman breviaries and missals. The monasteries, no doubt, at one time were the centres of learning, but this was not the case in the age of the Reformation when the Universities were coming into prominence. The Reformers took care to preserve anything that was valuable among the literary treasures of any of the monasteries and even kept copies of the mass-books which they produced in their disputes with the Roman Catholics. Besides, in case one should think that the Scottish Reformers were particularly fanatical and barbarously ignorant, McCrie points out that the destruction of monasteries and libraries in England, where the Reformation was supposed to have been conducted with such moderation, was much more severe and uncontrolled.¹

Another tendency of the Reformers which brought forth much criticism was their interest in and free discussion of politics. McCrie defends Melville's discussion of civil affairs as being worthy of praise. "Melville's countrymen," he says, "will listen with pride and gratitude to the information, that, in an age when the principles of liberty were but partially diffused,

1 Life of Knox, note HH, pp. 435-441.

and under an administration fast tending to despotism, there was at least one man, holding an important public situation, who dared to avow such principles, and who imbued the minds of his pupils with those liberal views of civil government by which the Presbyterian ministers were distinguished, and which all the efforts of a servile band of prelates, in concert with an arbitrary court and a selfish nobility, were afterwards unable to extinguish."¹ Alexander Henderson also came under fire for his participation in civil affairs. Bishop Burnet remarks in his Memoirs of D. Hamilton (p. 143) that it is strange that Mr. Henderson, who was opposed to bishops meddling in civil affairs, should be made a commissioner to negotiate a treaty with the king. McCrie easily distinguishes this occasion from the normal course of events and justifies the presence of two churchmen at the conference to settle a conflict which was chiefly an ecclesiastical one. Such an occasion was vastly different from the practice of "bishops sitting as Lords of Parliament, or filling the highest offices of State."²

Further criticism of the Reformers, particularly from the South, came when an effort was made to belittle

1 Life of Melville, vol.II, p. 28.

2 Life of A. Henderson, Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 30-31.

their ability and learning, and they were accused of being uncultivated and unlettered savages. From this indictment, also, McCrie was quick to vindicate his ancestors. It was a favourite topic of his that the union of literature and religion was important for the safety of religion and the success of literature, and he regarded the secularization of literature in his day as a most ominous symptom of evil tendencies.¹ It was the literary men of Scotland, too, who were partially responsible for the black cloud of infamy which continued to surround the memory of the Reformers and to obliterate any praise or justification which was their due. In order to gain fame or even acceptance at London, the centre of the literary world, many sought to ingratiate themselves with their English neighbours and either deny any connection with their reforming ancestors or apologize profusely for their unseemly, hardly intelligible, and most blameworthy conduct. The reforming period was a dark age in Scottish literary life and that dark age was not to be allowed to dim the new literary lights of a more liberal era. The Edinburgh Review describes this very attitude in its review of the Life of Knox. While there was little intercourse between Scotland and England, the former enjoyed

1 Memoir, p. 237.

her religion and was satisfied with her own attainments, having little concern over her neighbour's opinions. With the greater intermingling which developed, the Scottish gentry aimed at rivalling the elegance and civility of the South and Scottish writers aspired to share the literary honours. But they felt themselves handicapped by the English disdain for or even abhorrence of any thing Scottish, attitudes engendered by their dislike of the Scottish Reformation.

It seems to have been thought prudent to soften this cause of repulsion, not merely by representing our modern presbyterianism as a very mitigated form of the old distemper, but by admitting, in a great measure, the justice of the charges that had been brought against its original founders. Despairing, as it would appear, to conciliate the favour of our English brethren to the spirit and the doctrines which they had reprobated so violently in the person of Knox and his associates, it was thought wiser to ward off the blow from ourselves, by giving up those victims to their doom, and assenting, somewhat too readily, to the sentence by which they were condemned.--To deliver ourselves, in short, from the imputations of bigotry and intolerance, we have contracted the habit of allowing their justice, when directed against the founders of our national establishment; and are so anxious to show that Presbyterians of the present day can be liberal and temperate, that we do not scruple to renounce all pretensions of this kind for their great predecessors.

This, no doubt, is the chief cause of the prejudices that still subsist with regard to the character of our reformer, and of the desertion of that cause even by those who have adopted his scheme of reformation.¹

This reviewer says, further, that the Reformation is

1 Edinburgh Review, July, 1812, pp. 2-3.

supposed to have engendered a neglect of scholarship and polite learning, whereas the reverse is nearer the truth. The papal superstition had always depended on ignorance in maintaining its control over the people and it wasn't until the reformed doctrines had made a considerable progress that Greek or Hebrew were taught in any seminary in Scotland, for they were introduced and first taught by the reformed pastors.¹ Hume, judging by his History of England, is one Scottish historian in particular who is ashamed of his ancestors and accuses them of rudeness and ignorance--an error in judgment for which McCrie takes him to task.

We are apt to form false and exaggerated notions of the rudeness of our ancestors. Scotland was, indeed, at that period, as she is still at the present day, behind many of the southern countries in the cultivation of some of the fine arts, and she was a stranger to that refinement of manners which has often been a concealment to vice than an ornament to virtue. But that her inhabitants were "men unacquainted with the pleasures of conversation, ignorant of arts and civility, and corrupted beyond their usual rusticity by a dismal fanaticism, which rendered them incapable of all humanity or improvement" is an assertion which argues either inexcusable ignorance or deplorable prejudice. Will this character apply to such men as Buchanan, Knox, Row, Willock, Balnaves, Erskine, Glencairn, Maitland, and James Stewart, not to name many others; men, who excelled in their respective professions, who had received a liberal education, travelled into foreign countries, conversed with the best company, and in addition to their acquaintance with ancient learning, could speak the most polite languages of modern Europe?²

1 Ibid., p. 28.

2 Life of Knox, II, pp. 17-18.

And again in the Life of Melville, he suggests that the neglect of poetry in the Scottish tongue during the sixteenth century was not, as had been alleged, because the Reformers discouraged such poetry nor because of the disturbances of the Reformation period, but was due, almost entirely, to the new interest in Latin poetry acquired by the great number of Scots who studied abroad.¹

Melville himself was spoken of disparagingly by Spotswood as having his learning "chiefly in the tongues," a form of learning which he himself lacked. Of this derogation McCrie says that the "superior skill in ancient languages, upon which the members of the Church of England in the present day plume themselves, and which I have no desire to deny them, was in the sixteenth century so unquestionably due to Presbyterians in Scotland, that their opponents thought it necessary to depreciate it as a minor acquisition, and as calculated to do more hurt than good."² McCrie cites both Isaac Walton and Dr. Zouch in support of his own high opinion of Melville's talents. Zouch recognized the fact that Spotswood was "uniformly unfriendly" to the memory of Melville and affirms that Melville's learning and ability "were

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, p. 377.

2 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 131-32.

equalled only by the purity of his manners and the sanctity of his life."¹

McCrie wants to prove to the Scottish people that they need not look back with shame on the supposed abysmal ignorance of their reforming ancestors, but rather that they should hold up their heads in pride at the thought of such a noble, enlightened and able ancestry. Scots had no need to look to the South for an example of learning and ability as a source of inspiration; they had in their own history much of which to be proud and much which deserved, if not demanded, emulation to the continuing advancement of Scottish life and culture.

The defence of the Covenanters, the worthy successors of the Reformers, also engaged McCrie's attention. They were, perhaps, more severely criticized than their predecessors, and were generally held to have been a wild and barbarous sect of fanatics, a most bigoted and rebellious group who would not be fit to associate with members of modern enlightened society. In the Christian Magazine McCrie reveals how, early in life, he was aware of the fact that these sentiments were generally accepted, even among the descendants of the Covenanters, when he writes: "Among Presbyterians especially, the term bigotry

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, pp. 330-31, (quoting Dr. Zouch, Walton's Lives, p. 354).

seems now to be generally substituted for what was formerly called zeal for the truth, or stedfast adherence. Were those men to arise who were the instruments of a glorious reformation from Popery, or of another from Prelacy, they would be flouted off the stage, as a parcel of ignorant, ill-bred bigots."¹ McCrie locked horns with a famous contemporary on this very subject when he wrote his excellent review of Walter Scott's Tales of my Landlord. This review was of great service in restoring the Covenanters to their rightful place among the honoured founders of the Church of Scotland. In introducing the review, which was published in a volume of McCrie's miscellaneous writings, his son makes the following comment.

Each of the authors may be said to have succeeded, to a remarkable extent, in accomplishing the respective objects which he had in view. The author of the Tales has certainly succeeded more than any other modern writer, in prejudicing the minds of many against the Covenanters, and reawakening the dormant spirit of Jacobitism, especially in the upper classes of society; while the biographer of Knox, by his defence of these worthies against the misrepresentations of the novelist, has been almost equally successful, chiefly with another class of readers, in converting what was intended as a caricature of our pious ancestors, into the occasion of exalting them, more highly than they were before, in the esteem and veneration of his countrymen.²

And McCrie, himself, in his criticism of the Tales, writes:

1 Christian Magazine, December, 1798, "Letter to a Friend on Bigotry," p. 539.

2 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 257.

But when he [Scott] speaks of those men who were engaged in the great struggle for national and individual rights, civil and religious, which took place in the country previous to the Revolution, and of all the cruelties of the oppressors, and of all the sufferings of the oppressed, he is not to be tolerated in giving a false and distorted view of men and measures, whether this proceed from ignorance or from prejudice. Nor should his misrepresentations be allowed to pass without severe reprehension, when their native tendency is to shade the atrocities of persecution, to diminish the horrors with which the conduct of tyrannical and unprincipled government has been so long and so justly regarded, and to traduce and vilify the characters of those men, who, while they were made to feel all the weight of its severity, continued to resist, until they succeeded in emancipating themselves, and securing their posterity from the galling yoke.¹

But perhaps that for which the Covenanters were most criticized was their rebellious insurrection against the lawful authority of the crown; and for some, not even a deep sympathy with their cause or their condition would allow them to condone such rebellion. However, McCrie says that "instead of being surprised at the insurrection of the Presbyterians, and the resistance which they made at Drumclog and Bothwell, may we not rather feel astonished that their patience held out so long under such intolerable oppressions?"² He provides a satisfactory, trustworthy and unbiased answer to the charge of rebellion in the words of Daniel Defoe from his Memoirs of the Church

1 Miscellaneous Writings, Review of Tales, p. 270.

2 Ibid., p. 295.

of Scotland.

What a shame is it to us and how much to the honour of these persecuted people, that they could thus see the treachery and tyranny of those reigns, when we saw it not; or rather, that they had so much honesty of principle, and obeyed so strictly the dictates of conscience, as to bear their testimony early, nobly, and gloriously, to the truth of God, and the rights of their country, both civil and religious! While we all, though seeing the same things, and equally convinced of its being right, yet betrayed the cause of liberty and religion, by a sinful silence, and a dreadful cowardice, not joining to help the Lord, or the people of the Lord, against the mighty; sitting still and seeing our brethren slaughtered and butchered, in defence of their principles (which our consciences told us, even then, were founded on the truth), and by those tyrants who, we knew, deserved to be rejected, both of God and the nation, and whom afterwards we did reject!¹

Yet these are the same people of whom Scott writes so disparagingly in his Tales of my Landlord, for, after all, Old Mortality is not a purely fictitious story but "embraces the principal facts in the real history of this country during a very important period." And, as McCrie maintains, since his work sets out to give a "genuine and correct picture of the principles and conduct of the two parties into which Scotland was at the time divided," then the author is subject to laws far more strict than those which bind the ordinary class of fictitious writers.

It is not enough that he keep within the bounds of probability,--he must conform to historic truth. If he introduces real characters, they must feel, and speak, and act, as they are described to have done in the faithful page of history, and the author is not at

1 Miscellaneous Writings, Review of Tales, pp. 295-96.

liberty to mold them as he pleases, to make them more interesting, and to give greater effect to his story. The same regard to the truth of history must be observed when fictitious personages are introduced, provided the reader is taught or induced to form a judgment from them of the parties to which they are represented as belonging. . . . Besides fidelity, impartiality, and judgment, it requires an extensive, and minute, and accurate acquaintance with the history of the period selected. . . .¹

Scott, apparently, did not rise to this high standard which McCrie has set for the writers of historical fiction. McCrie accuses his work of "gross partiality and injustice." It "gives an unfaithful picture," he says, "of the sufferings which the country endured from military depredations and outrage." The arrest of Morton, for example, creates the impression that the soldiers have conducted themselves with great moderation and the "tragic scenes of military violence, described by the faithful page of history, sink, in the mimic representation of our author, into a mere farce!" The story also gives an unfaithful picture of the judicial procedure against the Covenanters, in that MacBriar's trial does not excite our sympathy because he has previously been involved in a plot to murder Morton. And, finally, Scott reveals a partiality to the persecutors in his "excessive tenderness and delicacy" to the Episcopal clergy. They, though they acted a very important part in the transactions of the

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 268-69.

period are "concealed and kindly kept out of view." "Not one bishop or curate is introduced on the scene, and we seldom even hear of them, except when we are told of their being religiously employed in reading prayers. . . . The gross ignorance of the greater part of them, the vices with which their morals were stained, and the violence with which they instigated the Government to persecution, were so glaring as to be undeniable." These facts, which were confirmed by Bishop Burnet, would certainly have relieved the dark picture which Scott has painted of the Covenanters.¹

From the above survey of McCrie's efforts to defend and vindicate the lives and activities of the Reformers and the Covenanters, it is obvious that they could not have had a more enthusiastic, persevering, and sincere champion; and his labours were not in vain, for along with their immediate success in awakening a new interest in the early history of the Church of Scotland, they were to have their effect in the subsequent life of the Church. Professor Hugh Watt, in his book, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, says that, McCrie's publications played no small part in stimulating the courage and shaping the policy of the leaders of his day"

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 296-99.

for by his writings he "drew many to admire and to emulate the earliest contendings of the Scottish Kirk."¹ This awakening of the old Reforming and Covenanting spirit was to bear rich fruit in the contendings of the Church of Scotland for its spiritual freedom, and even after the lapse of over a hundred years, McCrie's works still have the power to jolt one out of the rut of easy-going religion and to set one on the path of faithful contending for the cause of Christ, the path along which the Reformers so bravely fought.

C. Correction of errors and revealing the prejudices of previous historians.

In the course of his wide research McCrie recognized the weaknesses of previous histories and historians and he would have agreed with J.B. Black when he speaks of the eighteenth century historians:

. . . in the absence of specialist training the basis of historical research was simply a wide and generous culture, and every man of letters who felt he possessed this deemed himself capable of trying his hand at what was then described as "historical composition."

.....
One and all, the outstanding figures in the realm of

1 Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, pp. 121-22.

history, during this period, were primarily men of letters, and they grounded their appeal to the reading public more upon the broad sweep of their humanistic culture than upon their mastery of the technical apparatus of the professed historian.¹

This was a weakness which McCrie sought to correct in his own work and which he was quick to point out in the works of others. He early recognized the need for a more accurate and authentic presentation of the facts which could only be effected by a diligent research into the sources. He maintains that the author who writes on a comprehensive subject of history, which embraces a period of great extent, cannot succeed unless he has been "long familiar with the period of which he undertakes to write, --he must so to speak, have lived and breathed in its atmosphere,--he must have conversed at leisure with all classes, and not merely with a few notables, or a few stragglers whom he casually picked up on the road, before he can be qualified for giving a faithful, and full, and spirited description of the men, and measures, and parties, and opinions and transactions of the age."² More fully, in his review of Scott's Tales of my Landlord, he advances some opinions on the subject of historical reading.

1 J.B. Black, The Art of History, pp. 16-17.

2 Miscellaneous Writings, "Review of Orme's Life of Dr. Owen," pp. 457-58.

In the first place, there is a wide difference between the consulting of books and manuscripts in order to acquire what may be called the facts of a period, and a consulting of these in order to ascertain the character of the age, including the opinions, talents, acquirements, and moral qualities of the principal persons who figured in it. This last required a compass of reading, a minuteness of investigation, a slowness in progress, a patient and long continued attention to the subject, which few are inclined to bestow, and which is scarcely to be expected from those who write general history, or the history of a particular nation during a long period of years. Even the most accurate historians will commit very great mistakes in this respect if they are not extremely cautious and diffident in giving their judgment on points which they have not carefully investigated. In the second place, we must remark, that a spirit of indifference to religion incapacitates a person in a great measure for doing justice to our history during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Religion had such influence in all the revolutions of that period, and its disputes were so much involved in all the great political questions which were then agitated, that it is impossible to give a just view of the latter, without an extensive and accurate acquaintance with the former.¹

He sets a high standard of historiography not only for other historians but also for himself, and in all his writings his sincere search for the truth is easily discernible. He does not demand of historians the strictly objective attitude that was sought by Ranke, for he says in his review of the Life of Dr. Owen that he was persuaded "that when the sentiments of the author of any biographical work coincide closely with those of its subject, this circumstance will serve powerfully to

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 405.

stimulate his researches, and will fit him for writing, if not always with strict impartiality, at least in a style which is always agreeable, and con amore."¹

However, he decries any attempt to hide such partiality under a cloak of affected objectivity and he is most careful, himself, in the use of his sources, to ascertain, if possible the prejudices that were present in the minds of the writers concerned.

W.L. Mathieson seems to have come to conclusions in this regard, similar to those of McCrie. Writing in the Scottish Historical Review in an article on Hill Burton, he speaks of the need for absolute impartiality in a historian.

The ideal historian must be so; and yet the impartiality which proceeds, not from control over one's personal feelings, but from mere lack of sympathy and interest may be far more conducive to careless writing than the partisanship, which does indeed warp a man's judgment, but which may at the same time inspire him to take great pains with his work. McCrie, for example, the biographer of Knox and Melville, was intensely prejudiced; but no writer of Scottish history is more reliable, more studiously accurate, in his statement of facts.²

With such historiographical ideals as his guide, McCrie seeks to correct the errors and reveal the prejudices of both former and contemporary historians and he utilizes

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 460

2 Scottish Historical Review, October, 1903; "Hill Burton in Error," p. 49.

every opportunity to further these aims in the course of his primary aim, which was to provide his countrymen with a correct view of their own history. He reveals these purposes in his review of Milne's work on Presbytery and Episcopacy: "We have been induced to bestow attention on this work, chiefly because it afforded us an opportunity of correcting a number of misrepresentations in the history of our Church, which we know to be extremely common among a certain class of writers."¹

Although in the preparation of the Life of Melville he made much use of Spotswood's History, he is fully conscious of that historian's strong prejudice and his many errors. Spotswood had a particular dislike for Melville and allows this personal animosity to colour all his history. McCrie points out this bias in the process of recounting Melville's life.

The eagerness and success with which Melville laboured in the erecting of the Presbyterian system naturally rendered him obnoxious in the eyes of the adherents of Episcopacy. Accordingly, writers of that persuasion have endeavoured, by the representations which they have given of his conduct on this occasion, to excite prejudices against his character and the cause which he promoted. Archbishop Spotswood, whose ambitious views he long crossed, and who has never mentioned his name with temper in the course of his history, set an example of this treatment; and we shall

1 Miscellaneous Writings, "Review of Milne," p. 202.

quote his words, which subsequent writers of the same description have done little more than repeated. "In the church this year began the innovations to break forth, that to this day have kept it in a continual unquietness. Mr. Andrew Melville, who was lately come from Geneva, a man learned (chiefly in the tongues) but hot and eager upon anything he went about, labouring with a burning desire to bring into this church the presbyterian discipline of Geneva; and having insinuated himself into the favour of divers preachers, he stirred up John Dury. . . to propound a question touching the lawfulness of the episcopal function. . . ."1

McCrie contradicts all the articles of this "libel."

The church was certainly not at peace when Melville arrived as is evident from the acts of Assembly and the acts of Parliament as well as from private writings of the period; the protests against Episcopacy were loud before Melville took part in the proceedings; and the charge that Melville sought to force Calvin's system on the Scottish Church is an old charge first levelled against Knox. This latter charge was introduced by Hooker, was afterwards urged by Bancroft, and "it has been retailed with unvarying and monotonous uniformity by Episcopalian writers down to the present day."2 McCrie acknowledges that Knox and Melville were greatly indebted to Calvin and Beza but denies that they slavishly copied the institutions which they had seen in Geneva, for

1 Life of Melville, vol. I, 126-27; quote from Spotswood, p. 275.

2 Ibid., p. 129

there was no need to copy: "Presbytery can accomodate itself to any extent of country; and its genius, and the exercise of its powers, are not incompatible with any reasonable form of civil government, monarchical or republican."¹

Spotswood makes no mention of the valiant efforts of Melville and the General Assembly to arouse the King and nation to take strong defensive measures in view of the threatened Spanish invasion;² whereas he distorts his account of the trial of Melville before the Privy Council in 1583 in order to present Melville as a most undutiful subject of the King.³ He ignores the fact that it was due to the meritorious service of Melville that many of the parishes in St. Andrews ^{parish} were supplied with ministers but he sets forth with great minuteness the details of a dissension which arose in that Presbytery on the occasion of the settlement of the parish of Leuchars. However, Calderwood, an eye-witness, provides a corrective and shows how Spotswood misrepresented and exaggerated this affair in order to suggest that Melville would not submit to the parity of the ministry which he had established.⁴ The occasion of the Royal Commission

1 Ibid., p. 131

2 Ibid., pp. 291-93.

3 Ibid., p. 217.

4 Ibid., pp. 343-44.

sent to investigate the affairs at the University of St. Andrews gave Spotswood another opportunity to misrepresent the facts concerning Melville by preserving all the accusations which were made against him and suggesting that they were proved true; but the Acts of Visitation, which were in Spotswood's possession, disprove every one of the allegations and do not even suggest that the affairs at the University were out of order. McCrie feels himself obliged to expose what he calls "these unpardonable perversions of a public document."¹ And again, in his short account of Melville's life after he left the Tower, Spotswood "betrays his ignorance, as well as his spleen" when he says that Melville was sent to Sedan where he lived with little respect and almost bedfast to his death. McCrie proves how active and vital were Melville's pursuits during his stay at Sedan by quoting from various letters which reveal his continued good health and his keen interest in the general welfare of the Reformed Church and of the Church of Scotland in particular.²

Spotswood's errors were not only concerned with

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, pp. 25-27

2 Ibid., pp. 306-10.

the disparagement of Melville but also with other events in the history of the Reformation and some of these are noted and corrected by McCrie. In recounting the affair at Holyrood, when some of the Edinburgh citizens interrupted a Roman Catholic service, Spotswood, in his history (p. 188), gives a report contrary to that given by John Knox and suggests much more violence than actually occurred; but McCrie considers that Knox would have more opportunity of ascertaining the facts.¹ Furthermore, in his account of James' address to the congregation at St. Giles on the first Sunday after the coronation of the Queen, Spotswood omits entirely the part of the speech which is in commendation of the Church of Scotland as the "purest kirk in the world."² Many more examples might be cited and all go to prove, without a doubt, that Spotswood is not to be trusted for the truth concerning the affairs of the Church of Scotland, for his history reveals a strong prejudice (against that Church,) a prejudice perhaps made more obvious by his own hypocrisy regarding the supposed efforts of the bishops to have the Scottish ministers restored to Scotland, which was uncovered by a copy of

1 Life of Knox, vol. II, p. 96.

2 Life of Melville, vol. I, p. 303.

his own letter to the King in November, 1609, which has been preserved, and in which he urges that the ministers should be left in exile.¹

Turning from Spotswood, we find that McCrie also traces the history of the misrepresentations first put forward by Archbishop Adamson in a libellous attack on the proceedings of the Scottish Nation and Church which was published under the name of a Royal Declaration. "This declaration," says McCrie, "deserves particular notice as the original of those misrepresentations of Scots affairs, which prevailed so long in England and are not completely removed at this day." The answers given to this publication by Melville and others exposed its falsehoods but being republished in the King's name in London, the Declaration was "embodied, as an authentic and official document, in Holinshed's Chronicle, from which it continued to be quoted, and copied, and reprinted, after James had disowned it, and Adamson had retracted it, as a false and slanderous libel."² But this was not the end of this false declaration for in 1646 it was revived, reprinted, and assiduously circulated by the friends of the parliament in London who had, just

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, p. 210.

2 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 229-30; also Review of Scott, pp. 397-99 in Miscellaneous Writings.

previously, expressed great thanks to the Scots for their assistance. Baillie expresses his disgust at such proceedings in a long quotation given by McCrie in his review of Scott's Old Mortality.¹ "It is curious to observe," says McCrie, "how uniformly the defenders of Scottish Episcopacy have had recourse to falsehood and forgery for the support of their cause." He cites four glaring instances of fabrication, within little more than a hundred years, all of them pretended recantations by prominent Presbyterians.² On the same subject, in his review of Milne, McCrie writes: "The Scottish Episcopalians have, somehow, been always singularly fond of availing themselves of the argument from the recantations of Presbyterians on their death bed, and they have been as singularly unfortunate in managing it."³

Under the reigns of both Charles I and Charles II there was a systematic circulation of false accounts of Scottish affairs and McCrie claims that even recent Scots historians have failed to correct the mistakes,

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 399, quote from Baillie's Historical Vindication, Ep. Dedic., "Review of Scott".

2 Ibid., p. 67, footnote, "Life of Alexander Henderson."

3 Ibid., p.183, "Review of Milne."

but because of "prejudices felt by them on the score of politics or religion, have, instead of correcting, confirmed the erroneous impressions previously made on the public mind with relation to some of the most estimable characters and important transactions in our national annals." As an example of this McCrie refers to Laing's History of Scotland where Laing claims the support of Clarendon and Hume for his statement that all the Covenanters were fanatical. But Clarendon does not, in fact, give him the support he claims, and it is evident that Laing borrows from Hume's History (p. 54); McCrie proves conclusively that Hume had no basis for his remarks that the Covenanters were fanatics or that their lectures were delivered with "ridiculous cant and a provincial accent, full of barbarism and ignorance."¹ Not that McCrie did not appreciate Laing's worth as a historian for he mentions in his Life of Knox that the public are under obligations to Laing for exposing the literary forgery of Crawford, in his Memoirs of Scotland;² but he feels obliged, in the interest of truth, to correct erroneous history wherever he finds it.

We have pointed out this instance of inaccuracy and unfairness in the writings of Mr. Laing, because

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 400-402, "Review of Scott."

2 Life of Knox, vol. II, p. 186, footnote.

many, who are on their guard against the palpable prejudices of Hume, may be in danger of being imposed upon by his representations. With the political sentiments which he avows in his history, we have the happiness in general to agree; and on many points we have been much indebted to the accuracy of his researches. But no coincidence in political opinion, nor in any set of opinions, and no obligations which we may feel to the labours of an individual, will induce us to overlook any act of injustice done to truth, or any attempt to detract from the hard-earned praise so justly due to men who, in critical times, stood forth as the defenders of religion and liberty. It is but justice to say, that we know none of our historians who has been more exact in examining his authorities than Mr. Laing, and we have never in one instance found him chargeable with anything like intentional unfaithfulness in reporting the result of his inquiries.¹

McCrie deals much less kindly with two other historical writers of the period, Milne and Orme. Milne wrote on Presbytery and Episcopacy and he refers to Collier's Ecclesiastical History and to Sage's Fundamental Charter of Presbytery as his authoritative sources, but McCrie points out that "both Collier and Sage were Tories and jure divino prelatists, of the very highest stamp; keen opponents of the Revolution and of the Presbyterians; who wrote more as polemics, than as historians." Even Spotswood, with whose work he had much fault to find, is suggested as an authority much superior to both.² He finds Milne's work full of prejudice and error which he

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 404-405, "Review of Scott."

2 Ibid., p. 176, "Review of Milne."

sets out to reveal and, if possible, to correct. Two corrections may be mentioned. One is a vindication of the Scottish conduct in their turning over King Charles to the English Parliament and a denial that the Scots had anything to do with his execution. In fact, McCrie blames the Bishops for supporting Charles in his conduct to the extremes which led to his execution, despite the protests of many Presbyterians.¹ The other is a satisfactory proof by McCrie that prior to the Romish trend under Laud, influenced by Arminianism, the dignitaries of the Church of England were highly Calvinistic judging by the Lambeth Articles and by the sentiments of the English bishops and divines at the Synod of Dort, where Arminian tenets were condemned and the Calvinistic doctrines ratified. The Scottish Episcopalians were also Calvinist in outlook, for they adhered to the old Scots Confession in 1616 and when the Test Act was passed in 1681 it included a Profession of the True Protestant Religion contained in the Old Scots Confession of 1567. This is a direct contradiction of Milne's views on the anti-Calvinistic nature of the Episcopalian Church.²

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 188-90, "Review of Milne."

2 Ibid., pp. 196-199.

Orme comes under similar sharp criticism and McCrie says of him that in maintaining that the Independents were the first to avow and defend the genuine principles of religious liberty, while the Presbyterians were in complete ignorance of the subject, "he has betrayed gross ignorance of history, glaring partiality, and a disposition to avert his own mind, and that of his readers from evidence that is destructive of his favorite hypothesis."¹

But perhaps no one was more censured than Walter Scott, who, though not strictly a historian, was not allowed, therefore, to escape the criticism of McCrie on his seemingly continual lack of historicity, several examples of which we have already noted. McCrie recognizes the superiority of Scott "with respect to all that kind of information which the antiquary possesses," but he is not disposed to defer to Scott's opinions of the moral and religious habits of the Presbyterians. The latter had been very keen on sports since the Reformation and only remained away from the government sponsored "weaponschaws" because they were held on Sundays and were for the purpose of recruiting troops intended to harass the Covenanters. But Scott is anxious to impress his readers with the

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 470, Review of Orme's Life of Owen.

"moroseness and rigidity" of the Presbyterians and not to/ anxious about the truth.¹ He suggests that one other reason why the Presbyterians stayed away was the fact that they would have to attend a service where prayers would be read. But the Prayer Book was never introduced into Scotland at the Restoration although Episcopacy was established; and there was very little difference between the Presbyterian and Episcopalian worship.² Another fault in this novel is obvious to McCrie who is always on the watch for any injustice to the Presbyterians.

One conspicuous fault in this tale lies in it not giving a view of the state of the Presbyterians previous to the time that it commences and of the sufferings which they had endured from the Government. It begins with an account of the assassination of Archbishop Sharp, and of the insurrection of the Presbyterians; but it throws no light upon the causes which drove them to this extremity. . . . it is difficult to suppress the suspicion, that the information was intentionally kept back. We certainly do consider it as an instance of glaring partiality and injustice,-- the more so, as a great proportion of the readers of the work know little more of the history of that time, beyond what they have found in the Introduction to Walter Scott's "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," where it is described by the very elegant periphrasis of "what is called the 'Persecution'."³

And one final example of McCrie's devastating attack on Scott's historiography concerns his representation of Claverhouse as a hero, a profound politician and a

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 271 ff., "Review of Scott."

2 Ibid., pp. 276-79

3 Ibid., pp. 283-84.

disinterested patriot. The "indisputable" facts as outlined by McCrie are entirely contrary to Scott's portrayal and defence of Claverhouse; and his actions, as recorded in the history of these times, conclusively prove that he was not undeserving of the appellation:

Bloody Claverhouse.¹ So McCrie writes:

We complain, that in the representation given of him in the tale, Claverhouse's vices are shaded, and his excesses diminished, with the most glaring partiality. We complain that excuses are made for his conduct, to which he had no claim, or which ought to have been used in aggravation and not in extenuation, of his guilt. We complain, that his good qualities are industriously brought forward, and unduly blazoned, and that others are ascribed to him which he did not possess. And we complain, that by these means, a bloody, unrelenting, and remorseless persecutor, and one of the most active and unprincipled supporters of arbitrary and despotic power, is exhibited in such flattering colours, as to attract admiration to a character, which, had its features been delineated with the pencil of truth, would have excited little else than feelings of indignation and horror.²

Not that Scott lacked any support for his views of the Covenanters and of the events of these times, but, unfortunately, all his sources and authorities belonged to a long line of works written with a vigorous anti-Presbyterian bias by men like Lord Chief Justice Jeffries and Sir George Mackenzie, the King's Advocate for Scotland. McCrie traces the development of views such as theirs right down the ladder of Episcopalian

1 Ibid., pp. 300 ff.

2 Ibid., p. 314.

misrepresentation to his own day.¹ Scott, by his adoption of such errors into his work, has, with the help of his great artistry, fostered and advanced the growth of that mass of misrepresentation, criticism and calumny of the Presbyterians which McCrie earnestly seeks to destroy in order that the truth may be known and cherished.

Scotland's two great popular historians, Hume and Robertson, who were McCrie's immediate predecessors in the field of history might have been expected to have corrected the errors and brought the truth of Scottish history to light, but, unfortunately, this was not the case, although Robertson, at least, was recognized as an accurate historian. The histories, written by both of these men, which McCrie must have read in his student days, came, naturally, under the searching and critical study of his historical mind and here, too, he found much in the way of prejudice and error. He remarks that the political prejudices and skeptical opinions of Hume are well known and appear in all his History of England.²

J.B. Black, speaking of Hume's religious prejudice, says: "Hume has nothing whatever to say on the justice or efficacy of the Protestant arguments, or the alleged

1 Ibid., pp. 330 ff.

2 Life of Knox, vol. II, p. 247

moral superiority of the reformers. To him the battle was between two false religions: Catholic superstition, on the one hand, and Protestant enthusiasm on the otherthe eventual success of the Protestants was due, not to the validity of their case, but to a multitude of circumstances which played into their hands."¹ McCrie found this to be the case, particularly in Hume's treatment of Knox. It is known, from a letter written by Hume to Robertson, that he pledged himself to make John Knox and the Reformers seem very ridiculous² and he really managed to shield Queen Mary, for whom he had no particular sympathy, by his exaggerated account of the rudeness of Knox and other Reformers.³

The whole account which this historian has given of the conduct of the protestant clergy towards Mary from her arrival in Scotland until her marriage with Darnley, is very remote from sober and genuine history. It is rather a satire against the Reformation, which he charges with rebellion; against the Presbyterian Church, whose genius he describes as essentially productive of fanaticism and vulgarity; and against his native country, the inhabitants of which, without exception, he represents as over-run with rusticity, strangers to the arts, to civility, and the pleasures of conversation. History, Reign of Eliz. chap. 1. near the close.⁴

Robertson, of course, was of a much different

1 Art of History, pp. 105-106. 2 Memoir, p. 179.

3 Life of Knox, vol. II, pp. 316-19, Note Q.

4 Ibid., p. 316.

historical calibre than Hume. J.B. Black says of him that "when he comes to deal with the Reformation his superiority over Hume, for instance, is still more marked; for instead of explaining away the movement as the more or less accidental outcome of non-spiritual forces and the happy play of chance occurrences, he gives it a moral as well as a political setting and justifies the argument of the Reformers."¹ He also remarks that Robertson professed himself to be a careful scholar, intent upon the discovery of truth, and anxious above all things to convey it to his readers without distortion or abbreviation. He would go to no end of trouble to unearth information or to track a matter to its source and there is no doubt that he began a new epoch in Scottish historiography.² But though he appreciated Robertson as a most moderate and impartial historian and though he emulated him in his indefatigable search for truth, McCrie was not blind to the prejudices which led him astray. McCrie does not suggest that Robertson had the improper motives of Hume but he suggests that Robertson was misled into making Mary the heroine of his story.

By a studious exhibition of the personal charms and accomplishments of the Queen, by representing her faults as arising from the unfortunate circumstances in which she was placed, by touching gently on the errors

1 Art of History, p. 122. 2 Ibid., pp. 118-20.

of her conduct, while he dwells on the cruelty and dissimulation of her rival, and by describing her sufferings as exceeding the tragical distresses which fancy has feigned to excite sorrow and commiseration, he throws a veil over those vices which he could not deny; and by the sympathy which his pathetic account of her death naturally awakens in the minds of his readers, effaces the impression of her guilt which his preceding narrative had produced. . . 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 those men, who, on the supposition of her guilt, acted a most meritorious part, and who, in other respects, are entitled to the gratitude and veneration of posterity.¹

Besides this criticism of his sentimental attachment to and sympathy for Mary, McCrie confesses himself most disappointed with Robertson's unfavourable and unfair description of the Regent Murray; and he takes the opportunity in the Life of Knox of paying a tribute to Murray's memory. "I could scarcely have denied myself the satisfaction," he writes, "of paying a small tribute to the memory of the greatest man of his age, who has been traduced and vilified in a most unjustifiable manner, and whose character has been drawn with unfavourable and, in my opinion, with unfair colours, by the most moderate and impartial of our historians [Robertson]."² In a long note at the end of

1 Life of Knox, vol. II, pp. 248-49.

2 Ibid., p. 172.

volume II he discusses in detail Robertson's remarks on Murray and brings forward copious and satisfactory evidence in his favour and praise and in contradiction of Robertson's views.¹

Further examples of McCrie's criticism of Robertson are to be found in his Life of Melville. "It has been observed," he writes, "by a celebrated historian [Robertson], and the observation is commonly received as correct that the reformed preachers in Scotland 'gained credit, as happens generally on the promulgation of every new religion, chiefly among persons in the lower and middle ranks of life.' This sentiment does not appear to be well founded." Here was a mistaken conclusion, which, it will have become obvious by now, McCrie was constantly meeting in his reading and which he often felt obliged to correct. He suggests that such ideas rest, not upon proper evidence but upon inferences from New Testament times. The fact that the first preachers of the Christian religion and the early converts to their doctrine were found mostly among the lower and middle ranks of society does not entitle one to infer from this that the Christian religion would have spread if left to the operation of natural causes or

1 Life of Knox, vol. II, pp. 332-41, note W.

or that providence would always follow the same plan in its subsequent extension. "The principal reformers were men of superior talents and education: and their cause was espoused and essentially promoted by persons who possessed secular authority and influence. . . the Reformation, humanly speaking, and without a miracle, could not have spread as it did -- the truth could not have obtained a fair hearing, nor have come to the knowledge of the common people, if it had not been embraced and patronized by persons of superior rank and means of information."¹

Robertson also writes unfavourably of Melville on the question of his declination of the Privy Council as the proper authority to try him in February, 1584. McCrie says that it is unreasonable to identify the plea advanced by Melville with the claim which the popish clergy made to immunity from the civil jurisdiction. The plea of the Presbyterians, McCrie continues, was limited to the exercise of their pastoral functions and they made no claim that the ecclesiastical courts were the sole judges of doctrine delivered from the pulpit, or that it belonged to them to judge of treason; and McCrie quotes Principal Baillie in support of Melville.

1 Life of Melville, vol. I, pp. 8-10.

The question was not whether ministers be exempt from the magistrate's jurisdiction, nor, whether the pulpit puts men in a liberty to teach treason without any civil cognizance and punishment. Since the Reformation of religion no man in Scotland did ever assert such things. But the question was, as Spotswood himself states it, whether the Counsell was a competent judge to master Melville's doctrine in prima instantia: these were the expresse terms. n/

From the above survey of only a few of McCrie's criticisms of erroneous Scottish History it appears that he was not satisfied merely to look for the truth by historical research, to authenticate it as far as possible and then to present his findings in his own works, but he was determined, always, to detect the prejudices of the various writers with whose works he came in contact, and to make them public; also to bring to the attention of his readers the numerous palpable errors made by the most prominent of historians which have been passed on from history to history until they have gained authority as fact. In the fulfilling of these desires he was eminently successful and his works were to earn the praise of almost all the contemporary critics and also of subsequent historical writers. Dr McCrie "was, as it were, the Wodrow of the Secession, a keen antiquarian and a most scholarly investigator of the manuscript sources of history."²

1 Life of Melville, vol. I, pp. 207-209.

2 A History of Scotland, Andrew Lang, Edinburgh, 1907, vol. IV,.

CHAPTER 8

STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The most striking characteristic of McCrie's style is his tendency, when he writes about some particular incident concerning which he has deep feelings, to adopt an orat^{of}ical manner and to declare his views in a polemical way. This is most noticeable in his reviews, of course, but it also appears in his major works. He seems to burn with enthusiasm, and often with indignation, and the words seem to pour out in haste and abandon in order to relieve his pent up feelings and also to cut down with his sword of truth those who would rise up against him, or, more often, against those whom he would defend. In his review of the Tales of my Landlord, for instance, he breaks out into a great tirade against the enemies of the Covenanters.

What person of judgment 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 in every way like beasts rather than reasonable creatures; and by whom? by a perfidious, profane, profligate junto of atheists and debauchees, who were not fit for governing even a colony of transported felons, aided by a set of churchmen, the most despicable and worthless that ever disgraced the habit which they wore, or profaned the sacred function in which they impiously dared to officiate. Were these sufferers the men whom a writer of the nineteenth century would have chosen as the butt

of his ridicule, by industriously bringing forward and aggravating their foibles and by loading them with follies and vices to which they were utter strangers, while he eagerly sought to shade the cruelties which they endured, and to throw a lustre over the character of their worst persecutors? Who, after contemplating the picture which the genuine history of these times presents, can read without scorn the pitiful complaint, that "the zeal of the conventicles devoured no small portion of their loyalty, sober sense, and good breeding?"¹

McCrie's son comments on the apologetical character of his works and mentions particularly his power of sarcasm which he was often led to employ, "seldom permitting his opponents to escape without proving them guilty of faults much graver than those of which they accused the Reformers."² Several examples of this sarcastic vein have already been noted in reference to some of his writings but some further instances may serve to illustrate this feature of his writing more clearly. His sarcasm, it will be observed, is always employed when he is writing about a cause which has earned his deep sympathy. He was able, invariably, to combine impartial judgment on a subject with a warm and sympathetic interest in just causes. In a long review concerning the various works published about the persecution of the Protestants in the south of France he comments

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 293, Review of Scott's Tales of My Landlord.

2 Memoir, p. 186.

sarcastically on the activities of the British ambassador in Paris at the time. Lord Castlereagh helped to restore to the Vatican the ornaments of which it had been stripped, despite the protests of the French; but at the same time he was able to ignore the plight of the Protestants of southern France: "but then," says McCrie, "for every head of a Protestant that is lost, there is a whole length picture, or a complete statue of a saint or goddess, gained."¹ In his life of Alexander Henderson he writes in this derisive manner concerning a letter written by Laud to the Marquis of Hamilton which suggested that all Presbyterians were "deep dyed in some violence or other:" "Meek-eyed and merciful Prelacy! thou hast ever inspired thy votaries with moderation. The proceedings of the High Commission and Star Chamber will continue to bear witness, that their voice was never disgraced by rude passion, nor their hand stained with violence or blood! The censures of men disappointed in the mad project of subjugating a whole nation under tyranny and oppression will be regarded as praises by all good Christians and patriots."²

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XII, 1816, p. 264

2 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 27, "Life of Alexander Henderson."

Sometime this satire becomes more personal, especially when he is reviewing some historical work which, he feels, has sacrificed the truth in order to gain a particular end, and more especially if that end should be the derogation of the Reformers. Milne, in his work on Episcopacy and Presbyterianism which has been previously cited, comes under the critical eye of McCrie and is subjected to the full brunt of his sarcastic power.

It would be easy for us to follow Mr. Milne, kata podas, through the remaining part of his history of Scottish Presbyterianism and Episcopacy and to show that the most of his alleged facts are false, misrepresented, or irrelevant. . . .

His account of the conduct of the friends of Presbytery after its establishment, is equally inflamed with that which he had given of their previous behaviour. Believe him, and you must conceive, that a sullen, fanatical, disorderly and rebellious spirit, pervaded the whole land; actions, rash, daring, and subversive of public order, were perpetrated; ex-communications fulminated; sermons and prayers stuffed with railing against private characters, and sedition against the government, --these formed the whole history of the Presbyterian period, until the sun of Episcopacy, rising gently, but irresistably, by its benign influence dissipates the gloom, and drives the monsters of the night into their native obscurity. Believe him, and nothing was ever more quietly, more fairly, more Christianly effected, than the introduction of Episcopacy into Scotland by James VI. No violence, no bribery, or corruption, on the part of the monarch; no perjury or deceit on the part of the prelates; not so much as a High Commission Court to be heard of. But primitive order, or the entire appearance of it, being restored, religion flourishes, and the people are all contented and happy, until the hydra Presbytery, again raises its horrid head, and throws all things

back into confusion and anarchy.¹

But for anyone who ventures to enter the controversial arena with him McCrie reserves his most biting attacks. In the Christian Instructor he writes a review of a review by the British Critic on the Scottish Covenanters. In this review he berates the editors of the latter publication and seems to be delighted with the evidence that the High Church Episcopalians have been "galled beyond ordinary measure by our critique on the profane and slanderous Tales." For the author of the review he has some very pointed and personal remarks.

We have always classified him among the weak; but never, till now, did we think him so very weak and withal so very much inclined to be mischievous. We really pity him, for he must have suffered greatly in the production of this critical child of his; and, after all his labour and pain, to bring forth such a rickety, ugly, loathsome bantling! It is enough to mortify even a stupider man than he. If he must be employed in scribbling, let him confine himself to writing in some half-bred newspaper against Bible Societies, and the freedom of the press, and religious zeal. . . . Let him repair to Rome for the health of his religious principles, which seem to be dying of mere imbecility, and there perhaps, in St. Peter's he may get some tonic for his bigotry. In returning home, he may take Paris in his way; and being introduced, by some hanger-on, to the French court, he will improve his relish for persecution, and get a fresh stimulus to eulogize the Bourbon dynasty at the expense of piety and truth. And then he should not fail, as soon as he arrives in England, to call on the Editors of the British Critic, under whose direction he may manufacture an article either against us, or against any other persons he pleases to select, to shew how vastly his continental trip

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 186, "Review of Milne."

has contributed to the invigoration of his intellect as a writer in that journal.¹

McCrie was most adept at controversial writing and had few if any equals in this field when it concerned the affairs of Scottish history or the general question of civil and religious liberty anywhere. In a letter to the editor of the Christian Instructor an anonymous writer, appreciative of McCrie's ability, seeks to warn a contemporary author to beware of the power of McCrie's pen.

If Mr. Marshall has never seen Dr. McCrie's pen, I would advise him to read the reviews of the Tales of my Landlord, and of Orme's Life of Owen in the Christian Instructor, just that he might know some little thing of the nature of that instrument, the application of which to himself he seems so anxiously to desire-- that he may have some previous acquaintance with the peculiar species of martyrdom which he so powerfully and so piously covets. Whatever Dr. McCrie might say on the subject of ecclesiastical establishments, he could in five sentences demonstrate that Mr. Marshall knows nothing about it, and that he is of all men the most unfit for engaging in the discussion.²

McCrie was not unaware of the difficulties and dangers attending this type of literary labour and he offers this advice to any who are desirous of entering upon such controversial writing:

There are some controversies which are attended with such difficulties, and have been managed by persons of such established reputation, that it is incumbent, even upon him who has the truth on his side, to pause

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XV, 1817, p. 49.

2 Ibid., vol. XXX, 1831, p. 754, "Strictures on Marshall's Ecclesiastical Establishments."

before he engages in them, and to inquire if he possesses the requisite ability and information; lest he should be foiled in the contest, and expose both himself and the cause which he has rashly undertaken to defend.

.....
 All that have turned their attention particularly to the subject, will readily acknowledge, that it is not so easy a matter, as might at first be imagined, for a person to give a fair and impartial statement of the difference between two religious parties, to one of which he himself belongs, and is zealously attached. Even granting that he is perfectly well-informed as to the history and sentiments of both; granting, farther, that he conscientiously intends to tell nothing but the truth; still his partiality to one side will manifest itself, will insensibly give a colouring to his statements, and, if he is not habitually and strictly on his guard, will betray him into inaccuracy and occasional misrepresentation.¹

His awareness of the difficulties and dangers to be encountered never led him to spare any who were careless enough to allow prejudice to pervert the truth. He critically reviews a pamphlet by Charles Simeon on the English Liturgy and sometimes becomes severe in his criticism, but he maintains that this severe censure has proceeded "from no desire to hurt or expose the author, for whom we entertain much respect, and to whose able and pious efforts we think the Christian world greatly indebted; it has arisen solely from a conviction that those of his statements which we have censured are founded in error, and calculated to mislead ,

1 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 169-70, "Review of Milne."

and that they originated not so much in mere unavoidable mistake, as in that overweening attachment to the forms of his own Church, which is so apt to pervert the judgment and impair the candour. . . ."1

In spite of the fact that McCrie was a very biting critic he always made a sincere effort to be fair and just, even when dealing with historians in whose work he found little to commend or with the characters in his history for whom he had neither sympathy nor liking. It has already been observed that he constantly took issue with the history of Spotswood; but speaking of that work he writes: ". . . as I have been under the necessity of repeatedly calling in question its accuracy, I may take this opportunity of saying, that, as a composition, it is highly creditable to the talents of the author, and is as much superior to the historical collections of Calderwood in point of style and arrangement, as it is inferior to them in accuracy and variety of materials."2 Of Archbishop Adamson, who, he says, was the most disliked individual in the nation next to Arran, McCrie writes: "Without denying that Adamson merited the censure inflicted on him, I cannot help

1 Miscellaneous Writings, p. 221, "Review of Simeon on the Liturgy."

2 Life of Melville, vol. II, p. 430.

thinking that the procedure of the synod was precipitant and irregular."¹ And he criticizes both James and Andrew Melville for their part in his hasty excommunication. Summing up his record of Adamson's career McCrie again illustrates his moderation and fairness.

Nothing can be more absurd, although nothing is more common, than to identify the merits of a public cause, good or bad, with the private qualities of individuals by whom it may happen to be supported. There have been learned and pious bishops; and there have been illiterate and worthless presbyters. That the opponents of Adamson exaggerated his faults, and accused him of some things which were not criminal I allow; but on the other hand, I am satisfied that those who feel most respect for his talents and station will be pained to find, on examination, that the leading charges brought against him are supported by evidence too strong to admit of being controverted.²

And when writing of a contemporary and rival historian the same fairness is evident. In the preface to the first edition of the Life of Knox he refers to Dr. Cook's History of the Reformation which was published just prior to his own composition:

. . . the appearance of such a work gave me great satisfaction. The author is a friend to civil and religious liberty; he has done justice to the talents and character of the Reformers, and evinced much industry and impartiality in examining the authorities from which he has taken his materials. Had he had more full access to the sources of information, he would no doubt have done greater justice to the subject, and rendered his work still more worthy of public favour; but I trust that it will be useful

1 Life of Melville, vol, I, p. 273.

2 Ibid., pp. 317-18.

in correcting mistakes and prejudices which are extremely common, and exciting attention to a branch of our national history which has been long neglected. Where our subject coincides, I have in general observed an agreement in the narrative, and sometimes in the reflections: in several instances, however, we differ materially in the statement of facts, in the judgment which we have expressed about them, and in the delineation of character. The judicious reader will determine on which side the truth lies, by comparing the reasons which we have advanced and the authorities to which we have appealed.¹

It is obvious that he considers his own work superior and more accurate but he has given a fair and candid estimate of a rival work. McCrie's son is not nearly so generous in his estimate of Cook's work. He concludes that Cook has the same neutrality of feeling and looseness of sentiment regarding the Reformation as characterized the history of Robertson and that his work is not calculated to leave on the mind the most favourable impression of the Reformers or their labours, nor is it destined to rekindle the Reformation spirit which purified the Church.² The examples we have cited of McCrie's own works make it clear that, though he could be a most sharp and caustic critic when the occasion demanded, he always was able to give a sober and fair judgment on any work with which he was brought into contact.

1 Life of Knox, 2nd edit., 1813; pp. xiii-xiv.

2 Memoir, pp. 184-85.

However, in the heat of literary combat, McCrie was a great believer in the military maxim that attack is the best defence and he was, perhaps, a little too fond of the tu quoque argument, particularly when he was issuing a counter-blast to the Episcopalian critics. As a result, his vindications of the Reformers and Covenanters, which we have already noticed, are made up, too often, of retaliatory accusations of their detractors.¹

One of the qualities of McCrie's writing which makes them most fascinating and interesting is his habit of pausing to make reflections upon the history he has been narrating: these reflections may take the form of thoughts on the writing of history, reflections on human conduct, moral, religious, or political, or comments on current events. He recognized this trait as an asset to any historical work though he knew that it was a practice requiring much care in application. "A biography or history ought not to be a mere dry detail of facts unrelieved by reflections," but too frequent interpolation of personal reflections degrades the work and fatigues the reader.² In his Life of Melville he passes on some excellent advice concerning the forming of a

1 See examples in chapter 7.

2 Miscellaneous Writings, pp. 453-54, "Review of Life of Dr. Owen."

correct view of history.

It is not an easy task to form a correct and impartial estimate of the talents and character of those who have distinguished themselves in great national struggles. If their contemporaries were unduly biased by the strength of their attachments and antipathies, we who live at a later period lose in correctness of views what we gain in impartiality of judging, by the distance at which we are placed from the men whom we attempt to describe, and by want of sympathy with manners and feelings so dissimilar to our own. In forming our opinion of them from contemporary records, we are as much embarrassed by the narrow views and want of discrimination of their friends, as by the hostility and misrepresentations of their adversaries. The narratives of public transactions transmitted to us by those who lived at the time, often resemble the description of a great battle by a spectator: officers and men are beheld confusedly mingled together, and the issue seems to depend on the exertion of brute force, aided by insensibility to danger; while the military skill and presence of mind by which the whole mass is disposed, put in motion, and governed, are disregarded and left out of view. There is still another source of error. If civil history is chiefly the record of wars and bloodshed, the pages of ecclesiastical history are too often filled with accounts of theological contention; and accustomed to contemplate the principal individuals who figure in these scenes, either in the attitude of eager assault or of stubborn resistance, we are ready to form an unfavourable opinion of their moral qualities and private dispositions. Cooler reflection, and a more minute acquaintance with facts, will serve to correct our over hasty conclusions.

.....
 With respect to those who lived in former times, this information can be derived only from private memoirs and letters. When such documents relating to any individual exist, and when they have been referred to as authorities, and produced as illustrations, with fidelity and judgment, the outlines of his character are no longer left to be filled up by the fancy or the prejudices of his biographer.¹

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, pp. 322-24.

In that same work he includes some reflections on the standards of politicians.

It has been one of the great misfortunes of princes and commonwealths, that men of integrity and real patriotism have shrunk from the contest necessary to obtain and keep possession of high official stations, and have given way to the ambitious, the daring and the unprincipled, who deemed no sacrifices too dear for the enjoyment of power, and scrupled not to set a whole nation or even the world on fire, that they might rescue their own names from obscurity. This will continue to be the case until the period when a change shall take place which it will require something more to bring about than a mere reform of constitutional laws, when it shall be believed that the affairs of a nation can be managed on the same principles as other affairs, and when sound sense and sterling principle shall be more admired by the public than a talent, not for great things-- for that has always been very rare-- but for intrigue and bustle and shew.¹

These rather long quotations serve to illustrate McCrie's deep insights into the meaning of history and his profound assessment of historical and contemporary characters and events. All of his reflections throughout his works are not quite so long and many short and pithy comments which are of abiding truth and significance intersperse his writing and reveal a mind, acute and observant, and with a deep insight into the ways of men. In his study of the progress of the Reformation in Italy, after noting the great development in the study of Ancient Languages "by means of which the minds of the

1 Life of Melville, vol.I, p. 245.

learned in Italy were turned to the scriptures, and prepared for taking part in the religious controversy which arose," he remarks: "It is impossible not to admire the arrangements of providence, when we perceive monks, and bishops, and cardinals, and popes, active in forging and polishing those weapons which were soon to be turned against themselves, and which they afterwards would fain have blunted, and laboured to decry as unlawful and empoisoned."¹ This work on Italy contains many such remarks and asides. He notes that many Reformation writings were circulating and being printed under false names in Italy but, he says, "It is one thing to discover the errors and abuses of the Church of Rome and it is another, and a very different thing, to have the mind opened to perceive the spiritual glory and feel the regenerating influence of divine truth. Many who could easily discern the former, remained complete strangers to the latter, as preached by Luther and his associates; and it is not to be expected that these would make sacrifices, and still less that they would count all things loss, for the excellent knowledge of Christ."² And after writing of the piety and eloquence of Ochino, one of the Italian Reformers, and the influence he had even on

1 Reformation in Italy, p. 50. 2 Ibid., pp. 36-37.

staunch Roman Catholics, he observes that "Names exert great influence over mankind; but let not those who can laugh at this weakness flatter themselves, that they have risen above all the prejudices by which the truth is excluded or expelled. The love of the world outweighs both names and things. Provided men could enjoy the gospel within the pale of their own Church, within the circle of that society in which they have been accustomed to move and shine, and without being required to forego the profits, honours, or pleasures of life, 'all the world' might be seen wondering after Christ-- as it once 'wondered after the beast.'"¹

A few instances of these contemplative and sometimes satirical asides may be noted also from the Life of Melville. There is a fairly long satirical passage in connection with the efforts of Gladstones to introduce the granting of doctorates in Theology at St. Andrews as an incentive to the "ignorant clergy" of Scotland. McCrie comments that "it cannot be denied that our 'ignorant clergy' exerted themselves in promoting literature; but then their exertions were confined to the task of making men learned, and they neglected the work of calling them so."² And, commenting on a sermon by

1 Reformation in Italy, p. 115.

2 Life of Melville, vol. II, 314.

Bishop Law of Orkney on the subject of peace and harmony which was preached at the illegitimate General Assembly of December, 1606, he says: "None are so loud in their praises of peace as those who are pursuing courses which directly tend to violate it."¹ -- a comment which has a surprising application to the modern historical situation with its all pervading and spurious Communist peace propaganda. Finally with regard to the ability of Melville to discern men's character, a quality of which there were many verifying illustrations, McCrie, to emphasize the unusual nature of this trait, writes: ". . . there is nothing which men bred in colleges, and devoted to literary pursuits, are more deficient in than the knowledge of character; in consequence of which they are ordinarily disqualified for the management of public business, and apt to become the dupes of deceitful friends or artful opponents."²

Before leaving this particular quality of his writing some instances should be mentioned which illustrate his tendency throughout his works to make references, sometimes subtly and sometimes more obviously, to contemporary or recent events in the Church of Scotland.

1 Life of Melville, vol. II, p. 164.

2 Ibid., vol. I, pp. 76-77.

Having spent much of his literary career in correcting the erroneous impressions and opinions of their own history held by his countrymen he must have had Scotland in mind also when he penned his opening paragraph in the History of the Reformation in Spain.

Erroneous opinions as to their early history, originating in vanity, and fostered by ignorance and credulity, have been common among almost every people. These are often harmless; and while they afford matter of good humoured raillery to foreigners, excite the more inquisitive and liberal-minded among themselves to exert their talents in separating truth from fable, by patient research, and impartial discrimination. But they are sometimes of a very different character, and have been productive of the worst consequences. They have been the means of entailing political and spiritual bondage on a people, of rearing insurmountable obstacles in the way of their improvement, of propagating feelings no less hostile to their domestic comfort than to their national tranquility, and of making them at once a curse to themselves and a scourge to all around them.¹

One result of such erroneous opinions being accepted in Scotland was the contempt, and often shame, with which many of McCrie's contemporaries regarded the efforts of the Reformers and the Covenanters to throw off the civil yoke on religion and also to establish their freedom.

McCrie was most sensitive to these opinions and he comments in the same work that "His Holiness Pope Gregory VII was more clear sighted than the moderns, who, looking upon all forms of worship as equal, treat with

1 Reformation in Spain, pp. 1-2.

contempt or indifference the efforts made by a people to defend their religious rights against the encroachments of domestic, or the intrusions of foreign authority."¹

He probably had his own experience in mind, too, when he writes of the temporizing and compromising ways of some of the Italian reformers. He notes that to "speak with the many and think with the few" will always be a favourite maxim of those who, like Erasmus, would escape suffering. Although there were many of like opinions with McCrie in the Associate Synod, only four took the step of forming a separate Presbytery in that Secession section of the Church and so he comments further in the work on Italy.

An attentive observation of the conduct of mankind will, I am afraid, lead to the humiliating conclusion, that the greater part, including those who lay claim to superior intelligence and superior piety, are but too apt, whenever a sacrifice must be made or a hardship endured, to swerve from the straight path of duty which their unbiased judgment had discovered, and to act on the principle, which, though glossed over with the specious names of expediency, prudence, and necessity, amounts to this, when expressed in plain language, "Let us do evil that good may come."²

The lack of discipline in the Church today is a problem which also concerned the Church in McCrie's time and he

1 Reformation in Spain, p. 26.

2 Reformation in Italy, pp. 184-85.

and he takes the opportunity in the Life of Knox to compare the discipline of the contemporary Church with that in force in Knox's time.

There was nothing in which the Scottish reformers approached nearer to the primitive Church than in the rigorous and impartial exercise of ecclesiastical discipline, the relaxation of which, under the Papacy, they justly regarded as one great cause of the universal corruption of religion.

.....
 In some instances they might carry their rigour against offenders to an extreme; but it was a virtuous extreme, compared with the dangerous laxity, or rather total disuse of discipline, which has gradually crept into almost all the churches which retain the name of reformed: even as the scrupulous delicacy with which our forefathers shunned the society of those who had transgressed the rules of morality, is to be preferred to modern manners, by which the vicious obtain easy admission into the company of the virtuous.¹

In a humorous vein he reassures those who had no great desire for a restoration of such discipline: "Let not our modern fashionables and great ones be alarmed at hearing of such things. These days are gone, and will not, it is likely, soon return."²

From these instances of his comments on contemporary affairs and of those on general historical and philosophical conclusions which came to him in his research, it may be observed that McCrie was no dry-as-dust antiquarian or dull historian with no insight into human

1 Life of Knox, vol. II, pp. 76-77.

2 Ibid., note P., p. 314.

character or interest in modern events. His works are full of life and vigour and even today provide rich rewards for a mere casual reading as well as a fund of information for any interested in the details of the history of the Church in Scotland. In its review of the Life of Melville the Christian Instructor makes reference to this particular quality of McCrie's writings.

Independent of the great variety of miscellaneous information and literary anecdote which it contains, it abounds in the most enlightened views of many public questions, which cannot fail to prove attractive to every man of real patriotism and genuine piety. We would wish particularly to recommend it to all ecclesiastical persons, whether connected with the Church of Scotland, or with the different bodies of Presbyterians Dissenters, as a manual of sound instruction, equally pointing out to the former the pure principles which they are bound to maintain; and, to the latter, the proper limits within which they ought to restrict their separation.¹

McCrie was most proud to be a Scot and he was not afraid to make use of the Scottish tongue in his writing much to the displeasure of the Edinburgh Critics. Greatly as the Edinburgh Review admired the Life of Knox it could not allow this trait to go uncriticized and the reviewer writes:

. . . the warmth of our sympathy in most of his national sentiments, cannot induce us to disguise, that he has given us rather too much of our national phraseology. The book, to say the truth, is full of Scotisms; and is frequently deficient in verbal elegance and purity. There is not only a want of the

1 Edinburgh Christian Instructor, vol. XXIII, 1824, p. 772.

tone of the world about it, which may repel some idle readers, but, occasionally, great inaccuracy of language; though redeemed by traits both of vigour and vivacity. . . . We would therefore advise him, when he writes again-- as we earnestly hope he will be induced to do-- to submit his manuscript to the revision of some slender clerk from the south,-- who may rectify his verbal errors, without presuming to meddle with his matter.¹

Part of the lively nature of the works is given by a writing trait of McCrie, which should be mentioned before closing this chapter, and that is his use of many excellent metaphors, of which three are mentioned here. In his work on Italy he speaks of those who had adopted the reformed principles and were obliged to flee from the rigours of the Inquisition to find asylum in Switzerland as "throwing themselves on the glaciers of the Alps to escape the fires of the inquisition."² Again in the same work he comments on a statement by the Italian Ochino that "truth does not stand in need of many words like falsehood, for it can defend itself." McCrie says that this is "as if we were to strip truth and place her on the pillory, to be insulted and pelted by the mob, while we stood by and contented ourselves with crying out, 'Great is the truth and will prevail!'"³ And finally in the

1 Edinburgh Review, vol. XX, 1812 "Review of Life of Knox" p. 29.

2 Reformation in Italy, p. 309.

3 Ibid., pp. 394-95.

Life of Melville he observes that the convention at Leith established dangerous precedents in framing a new ecclesiastical constitution made up of presbytery, episcopacy, and papal monkery, and also that the design of securing the richest portion of the benefices to the court and its dependents, which gave rise to the whole scheme, did not appear in any part of the details.

As McCrie expresses it so succinctly: "The calf's skin alone appeared: the straw with which the tulchan was stuffed was carefully concealed, lest the cow should have refused to give her milk."¹ With these and many other clever figures of speech McCrie adds interest and vitality to his writing and renders it eminently readable.

¹ Life of Melville, vol. I, p. 103.

CHAPTER 9

STATUS AS A HISTORIAN

Although McCrie struck a new note in Scottish Historiography in the nineteenth century, his work was not entirely novel but was partially the product of the change in historical outlook which resulted from the Enlightenment, and particularly from the work of Voltaire and the two Scottish historians, Hume and Robertson. Lord Brougham states that "before Voltaire's, there was no history which did not confine itself to the record, more or less chronological, more or less detailed, of wars and treaties, conquests or surrenders; the succession, by death, or usurpation, or marriage, of princes; and the great public calamities, as plague, or inundation, or fire, which afflicted mankind from natural causes. . . . To deliver the facts, to describe the scenes and the actors, relating the events, and giving an estimate of their character, with perhaps a few moral reflections or inferences occasionally suggested by the narrative--was deemed the proper and the only office of history."¹ Voltaire believed that the "outstanding weakness of

¹ Henry, Lord Brougham, Lives of Men of Letters of the Time of George III, p. 83.

previous historical books lay in the thoroughly unsound and unscientific method employed by their writers in handling data; they failed to discriminate clearly between the true and the fabulous."¹ There was no account given of the social life of the people or of the influence of events upon their condition and this he determined to correct by writing a history of nations that would provide in the narrative of events some idea of their spirit and their tendency rather than their details, and would record the social and intellectual aspects of history as opposed to the purely political.² Such a history would provide instruction and example for subsequent generations and so history would fulfil its proper function, the training of men in virtue and citizenship.³ Lord Brougham observes that Voltaire excelled in the two great qualities of a historian-- his diligence and his impartiality, and his work, therefore, "had the most important and salutary effect on the great era of historical composition which now opened."⁴ Unfortunately the writings of Voltaire were not free from a strong

1 J.B. Black, The Art of History, p. 51.

2 Lord Brougham, p. 85.

3 J.B. Black, pp. 31-36.

4 Lord Brougham, pp. 86-88.

aristocratic bias and although he recognized the power of religion in the shaping of human affairs he revealed a strong prejudice against organized religion.¹

The salutary effect of Voltaire's labours, whether direct or indirect, was evident in Scotland where Hume and Robertson adopted the new approach to history. Lord Brougham takes the view that there was no historian of eminence in Britain before the middle of the eighteenth century and that Mr. Hume was the first to enter the field with the "talents of a fine writer, and the habits of a philosophic inquirer." However, he recognizes in Hume a lack of the impartiality and patience necessary to the historian.² Hume allowed himself insufficient time for full investigation of facts and weighing of authorities and he revealed in his writings a strong prejudice against the Whigs and against popular principles in general. "A contempt of popular rights, a leaning towards power, a proneness to find all institutions already established worthy of support, a suspicion of all measures tending towards change" prevails through all Hume's reflections and influences his historical judgment.³ Even though "enthusiasm

1 J.B. Black, pp. 47-48.

2 Lord Brougham, p. 168.

3 Ibid., pp. 180-89.

leads to the establishment of individual freedom, on the grounds of social utility it is to be condemned because it causes cruel disturbance in the body politic.¹ For this reason he preferred the Episcopalian religious settlement in England because of its practicality and moderation. Like Voltaire, Hume believed that the "sole justification for history as a subject of study consists in its value as an instrument of education."² In pursuit of this end, also following the example of Voltaire, "he quite perceptibly subordinated facts to the doctrine he wished to convey or to imply. The laborious amassment of detail and its scientific presentation, logically or chronologically, was to him both tiresome and irrelevant."³

William Robertson, Hume's contemporary and rival historian, advanced the historical art to a higher state of perfection. With Voltaire and Hume he recognized history as more than a record of fact; it was also a body of instruction. But his work was much more accurate and painstaking; he spared no effort in the unearthing of information and "all this varied information Robertson carefully digested and checked, paying the

1 J.B. Black, pp. 105-106.

2 Ibid., p. 85.

3 Ibid., p. 89.

greatest possible attention to the credibility of his various sources. The care with which he worked is shown in the copiousness of his notes, references, and citations, in his enumeration and scrutiny of his authorities, and in the habit he cultivated of pressing back to the ipsissima verba of the actors and eyewitnesses, if such were obtainable."¹ But Robertson, too, was subject to an aristocratic bias and considered that only dignified events and characters should be the subject of history.² Lord Brougham, who ranks his History of Scotland high among the most eminent of historical compositions, still accuses him of suppressing any feelings of reprobation when he recounts or cites the wickedness of persons in exalted stations, a practice which Brougham considers not in keeping with justice or pure morality.³

The labours of these men helped greatly in the advancement of historical science but they were subject to many limitations and handicaps. G. P. Gooch observes that despite the great advances in historiography in the eighteenth century there were great limitations which handicapped the historians of the Aufklärung; there was

1 The Art of History, p. 121.

2 Ibid., p. 131.

3 Lord Brougham, p. 254.

a failure to realize the differences in atmosphere and outlook in different ages and a tendency to be content with superficial inquiry; there was an unsympathetic attitude to religious feeling and also to the period of the Middle Ages--Hume, Robertson, Voltaire, and Gibbon being guilty on one or both of these charges; there was a real lack of the critical faculty in dealing with the value and testimony of authorities and research technique was still in its infancy; besides these disabilities there was the fact that history was neglected as a part of the curriculum in teaching and that great restrictions were placed on the access to documents. With all these disabilities and handicaps the world had to wait till the nineteenth century "for the liberty of thought and expression, the insight into different ages and the judicial temper on which historical science depends."¹ Gooch also states that the beginning of the critical era of historiography is commonly held to date from Ranke's first published work in 1824, where he first applied to modern history the principles of Niebuhr. "The novelty of his method lay in his determination to seize the personality of the writer and to inquire whence he derived his information. 'Some will copy the ancients, some will

1 G.P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, Introduction, pp. 10-13.

seek instruction for the future, some will attack or defend, some will only wish to record facts. Each must be separately studied."¹

From what has already been observed in McCrie's works he seems to have been a forerunner of Ranke in the adoption of such methods of dealing with his sources and there is no doubt that he was an admirable successor to the two great Scots historians. In fact, though he has never received the acclaim that has been accorded to them, his work far surpasses theirs in many respects as he expands and develops the scientific research and impartiality which came to be the accepted, valued and necessary traits of nineteenth century historiography.

Butterfield considers that the change in historiography in the nineteenth century was more a revolution than a development, as he says in his Christianity and History: ". . . the development of the scientific method in nineteenth century historiography did not merely mean that this or that fact could be corrected, or the story told in greater detail, or the narrative amended at marginal points. It meant that total reconstruction proved to be necessary, as in the detective stories, where a single new fact might turn out to be a pivotal

¹ G.P. Gooch, p. 79.

one . . ."1 Judging by the contemporary reviews of his works, McCrie seems to have produced just such a revolution in the accepted view of the history of the Scottish Reformation and its subsequent developments. The Belfast News Letter describes in glowing terms the effect of McCrie's first great work.

In the present literary age, when one can scarcely turn the corner of a street without running himself against an author, men who have actually done great things are still few in number. One of these benefactors of mankind is Dr. McCrie. The publication of his first great work, "The Life of John Knox," forms an important era in the progress of historical science.

.
 . . . proof of his merit was the complete revolution in public opinion which was produced by the work. All the English periodicals, except one or two which were governed by the demon of party, were filled with recantations of the error which had prevailed in that part of the empire concerning the character of the deliverer of Scotland; and his own country, which had so long been misled by her own recreant sons concerning the character and achievements of Knox, hastened to do him justice. Monuments were erected, and clubs were instituted to his memory, and his name was enrolled in the list of her patriots with those of Bruce and Wallace.²

In contrast to his predecessors McCrie brought to his historical labours a keen sympathy not only with the religious feelings of the Scottish people but also with the popular cause in the struggle for both civil and religious liberty. These sympathies, however, did not so

1 H. Butterfield, Christianity and History, p. 14.

2 Memoir, p. 192; footnote quoting from Belfast News Letter.

prejudice his mind that he became incapable of impartial judgment, for, as his son says, "the warmest enthusiasm in the cause of divine truth, and sympathy with the noble and upright spirits who contended for it, are not incompatible with the utmost candour in delineating their character and recording their history; and (that) historical impartiality is a very different thing from that Pyrrhonism and Stoical indifference, with which it was too long confounded, but which really disqualifies the historian for doing any proper justice to his subject."¹

Apparently, as we have seen, it was McCrie's interest in current events that fostered his study of Scottish history. He was most disturbed at the gradual abandonment of Reformation principles and practices which in his eyes was occurring even in the Secession Churches which professed to adhere to them. He found himself involved in a controversy over Church and State relations, a controversy which forced him to leave the Secession Church of which he was a minister, and to join with three others in forming a separate presbytery. With this controversial background his historical studies naturally led him to seek justification in the views and activities

1 Memoir, p. 187.

of the Reformers and to present to his own age the facts about their past church history which would enable them to judge rightly the important issues of the day. In this respect he was not unlike other nineteenth century historians. "To the student of historiography nothing is more instructive than to observe the degree to which history in the nineteenth century has been affected by subjective and pragmatic considerations. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the vast majority of cases, if not actually in all, the objective and contemplative ideal has been heavily overborne by subjectivism and utilitarianism of one sort or another."¹ The success of McCrie's efforts in carrying out this desire to educate his contemporaries can be judged from the subsequent developments in the Scottish Church. He seems to have followed the historians of the Enlightenment, regarding history as a body of instruction rather than a mere collection of facts. And yet, it seems certain, that McCrie would have agreed with the late Benedetto Croce who, speaking of the historical atmosphere of the nineteenth century, writes:

. . . the pragmatic historians of the enlightenment fell into discredit, not only Voltaire and the French, but the Humes, the Robertsons, and other

1 J.B. Black, p. 9.

English historians. They appeared now to be quite without colour, lacking in historical sense, their minds fixed only on the political aspect of things, superficial, vainly attempting to explain great events by the intentions of individuals and by means of little things or single details. The theory, too, of history as the orator and teacher of virtue and prudential maxims also disappeared.¹

But then, McCrie, though he had his roots in the Enlightenment, had abandoned, to a great extent, its ideals for he had developed what Croce calls the "attitude of the Christian Spirit towards history." This spirit, Croce says, was resumed in the nineteenth century and it contemplates history "as a single process, which does not repeat itself, as the work of God, which teaches directly by means of His presence, not as matter that exemplifies abstract teaching, extraneous to itself."² No one could have been more aware of the power of God in history than McCrie, and it was, perhaps, this awareness that gave him a keen insight into and understanding of the affairs of his own day which not only led him to take independent and radical steps in his own life, steps which were usually justified by subsequent events, but which also gave him the ability to discern the truth and the significance of historical facts, whether these were contrary to the accepted view or not. J.B. Black considers this

1 Benedetto Croce, On History, London, 1821, p. 279.

2 Ibid., pp. 279-80.

a necessary trait of the historian. "When the constructive work of the historian--as distinct from the documentary--is analysed in detail, it will generally be found that his understanding of the past is largely dependent upon his understanding of the present."¹ And he quotes Professor Bury in the same vein: "The point of view of the historian is conditioned by the mentality of his own age; the focus of his vision is determined within narrow limits by the conditions of contemporary civilization."² Similarly, Croce's remarks on this particular quality of the historian help us to explain the trend of McCrie's labours.

Contemporaneity is an intrinsic characteristic of every history and we must conceive the relation of history to life as that of synthetic unity.³

.....
 If contemporary history springs straight from life, so too does that history which is called non contemporary, for it is evident that only an interest in the life of the present can move one to investigate past fact. Therefore this past fact does not answer to a past interest, but to a present interest, in so far as it is unified with an interest of the present life.⁴

The critics were soon aware that a great historian, previously unnoticed, had suddenly made his appearance on the literary stage and much praise was forthcoming from all the critical ^{papers} except the British Critic, which was the

1 J.B. Black, p. 8.

2 Ibid., p. 9.

3 Croce, On History, p. 12.

4 Ibid., p. 14.

only paper openly to assail McGrie's personal character as well as the works he produced.¹ A few sample paragraphs from the British Critic's review of the Life of Andrew Melville will serve to illustrate the kind of attack that was directed not only at McGrie but also at all the Scottish Reformers by the Episcopalians.

In his own way, Dr. McGrie is another Old Mortality. With pen and paper, instead of chisel and mallet, he continues to repair the sepulchres of the prophets, whom his fathers slew; and in a mood nearly as gloomy and morose as that in which the ancient rustic traced the decayed letters on the moss-grown slab, does this sedulous author revive all the fairer recollections connected with the history of the bold rebellious fanatics, who figured most prominently in the early days of the Scottish Reformation. (p. 174)

.....
 We cannot refrain from observing, then, that the author appears throughout as a bitter and determined partizan; the eulogist of one class of men, and the inveterate enemy of their opponents. Actuated by such feelings, he pours out reproach and condemnation, on the one hand, with all the vehemence of personal animosity; whilst, on the other, he is ever ready to palliate, to excuse, and even to justify, the most intemperate and undutiful conduct. The ecclesiastical polity and ritual of the Episcopalians, too, are to him an unceasing object of attack and derision: and in carrying on this kind of warfare, he is not satisfied with assailing the immediate antagonists of his hero, Melville, but scatters his weapons around him with such indiscriminate fury, that he appears desirous to count for enemies all churches which have bishops and liturgies. (p. 175)

.....
 From the period of her foundation, until the present day, no church upon the face of the earth has been more liberal and tolerant than the Church of England; it is therefore utterly impossible for us to sympathize with the feelings of an author, who revives in his works

1 Memoir, pp. 239 f.

all the bigotry of the most ignorant times, and who labours to represent in his own person, the full amount of that enmity and fanatical moroseness towards episcopal government which could only be excused in a puritanical leader of the sixteenth century. (p. 178)

.....
 We have to observe, in the last place, with respect to the principles on which this book is written, that the narrative proceeds throughout on the most partial authority possible, namely, the Diary of James Melville, a nephew of the Reformer, and the history of Calderwood, a noted and determined partizan. No attention is paid even to contemporary historians, on the other side. Spotswood is hardly ever mentioned but with the view of rejecting his testimony and impairing his credit; and in short no one is to be believed, who does not favour Melville, and his turbulent associates. Collier, Heylin, Keith, and the author of the Fundamental Charter, are considered of no weight in the scale, when weighed against the manuscripts of James Melville and Calderwood, and the Buik of the Universal Kirk; whilst the more modern historians, such as Robertson and Cook, are writers of too liberal an order, to be permitted to modify the opinions, or correct the inferences, of Dr. McCrie. . . .

. . . but, we assert, that his book can be of no authority whatever, inasmuch as he has relied for his principal facts and intelligence, upon the evidence of a man, who, by his connections and avowed attachments, more than by his family relationship, had rendered himself completely disqualified for acting the part of a faithful witness. (pp. 180-81)¹

It has already been noted that McCrie was acquainted with the works of Collier and Keith and others, suggested by the British Critic as corrective sources, but he knew them for what they were, anti-Presbyterian polemics. He has proved himself better able than the British Critic to assess the value of his sources and he never fails to consider the material from sources contrary to his own

1 British Critic, vol. XIII, 1820.

views and to give it the weight it deserves. With regard to the other adverse criticisms cast at McCrie it is unnecessary to deal, as not only the weight of contemporary opinion expressed in other periodicals but also a knowledge of McCrie's own work would give conclusive evidence as to how little he deserved such virulent attacks. Before leaving the British Critic, however, notice may be taken of later reviews published on McCrie's Reformation in Italy and Reformation in Spain which express much depreciation of their evident value.

The friends of religion and of civil liberty are indebted to Dr. McCrie for his two volumes on the Suppression of the Reformation in Italy and Spain. It is to be regretted that his materials were not equal to his industry, and to the skill with which he works them up into narrative and description.

.
The Church historian will henceforward find himself supplied with many facts unknown to his predecessors, illustrative of that glorious struggle for mental freedom, which, although it was not successful in the dominions of Philip II, was crowned with a complete triumph in still more important parts of the European commonwealth. . . .¹

The British Critic must have been loath to grant even such faint praise to McCrie for it at the same time accuses him of a great lack of materials and a failure to make sufficient research; but, of course, McCrie had not been stepping on Episcopalian toes in the two works in question here. Another author considers McCrie's work on Italy in

1 British Critic, April, 1830, "Review of Reformation in Spain," pp. 362-63.

a far different light.

Of modern historians, to mention the name of McCrie is to bring forth a host of evidence. No English writer has so thoroughly studied the state of Italy, and the writings and sufferings of the Italian reformers as he has done. He has continued to extract by far the most interesting portion of the mass of historical documents before him, and to excite in the readers an intense desire to know more of the heroes of the Reformation.¹

The able and well known work of the late Dr. Thomas McCrie opens a mine of wealth, which only such a mind as his could properly work out. Such has been Dr. McCrie's diligence and accuracy in collecting all the most striking information relating to the more remarkable of the Italian reformers, that whoever desires to follow in his track has only to fill up his sketches by extracts from the writings and correspondence of the actors in the tragic scenes recorded and make them speak to posterity in their own stirring and spirited language.²

Favourable comment was forthcoming from many contemporary critical publications which also served to reveal the malice of the British Critic and to give deserved praise to McCrie. The Edinburgh Review, writing of the Life of Knox, has this to say: "It is extremely accurate, learned, and concise, and at the same time, very full of spirit and animation; exhibiting, as it appears to us, a rare union of the patient research and sober judgment which characterize the more laborious class of historians, with the boldness of thinking and

1 M. Young, The Life and Times of Paleario, p. 338.

2 Ibid., footnote.

force of imagination which is sometimes substituted in their place."¹ This reviewer notes also that due weight is given to the illustration of the close connection between the principles of religion and of civil liberty. The Edinburgh Monthly Review speaks in a similar vein of the Life of Melville. The reviewer, although he comments on what he considers McCrie's "negligence of style, and a supercilious disdain of all superfluous embellishment," does appreciate the untiring research involved in McCrie's works and also how much his work serves to correct the errors and shortcomings of previous histories.

The work before us, like its predecessor the "Life of Knox," contains so many particulars, hitherto unrevealed, and sheds so many important lights upon the most interesting passages of our national history, that we cannot refrain from expressing our wonder at the exertions of the author, and our gratitude for the fund of instruction and entertainment which he has afforded us. No one who has not trodden in similar paths of investigation, can form an estimate of the difficulties which he must have encountered, and the patience which he has exercised; and no one, who is not already well acquainted with the amount of our histories on the same topics, can imagine in how many points the present work rectifies inveterate mistakes, and illustrates what might have been expected to lurk for ever in impenetrable obscurity.²

But the greatest praise was to come, naturally perhaps, from his friend Andrew Thomson and the Edinburgh

1 Edinburgh Review, July, 1812, "Review of the Life of Knox," p. 4.

2 Edinburgh Monthly Review, February, 1820, "Review of The Life of Melville," p. 200.

Christian Instructor, for which McCrie was to write many articles and reviews. The Instructor feels at no loss to discover McCrie's sentiments on the essence of true religion, for he states and defends the great doctrines of Christianity on the free publication and firm belief of which the reformation from Popery was founded. The impartiality of his statements with regard to all matters of fact which come under his review is noted, along with his "soundness of judgment" and the "acuteness and strength of reasoning which mark his argumentative discussions." It is also observed that McCrie has great scrupulosity in admitting as a fact anything that lacked authentic testimony and he exerted much labour in "eliciting from the discordant statements of party writers, the real character and motives of the persons to whose conduct his history relates." In fact his research has evidently involved an "extent of reading on every point connected with his subject which has seldom been equalled by any author of modern times" and he has "more than fulfilled his expectations of having placed some of the facts respecting the reformation in a 'new and just light' and having 'brought forward others which have not hitherto been generally known.'" The Instructor was greatly impressed by McCrie's candour and impartiality. He was not blind to the failings, and misconduct of characters

whom he wished to hold up to public estimation, neither did he attempt to draw a veil over amiable qualities which are to be discovered even in persons whose character is far from worthy; he censures what was wrong in one and allows due weight to what was commendable in the other, and he did not lose any of this candour when he dealt with Knox. The minuteness and accuracy with which McCrie has examined the ground of every aspersion worthy of notice, that has been cast by Popish, or Deistical, or Episcopal writers on the character of Knox, the Instructor considers worthy of high praise and suggests that they have produced results most satisfactory and conclusive in Knox's favour.¹ No praise was too high to be bestowed on every phase of McCrie's labours as a historian by this publication.

. . . the patience and extent of research which he has discovered; his soundness of judgment, and manliness of sentiment; his uniform attachment to the cause of religious and civil liberty; the scripturalness of his doctrinal opinions and the purity of his moral being--the Christian spirit, in short, which he breathes in every page and 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; --these together with the new and important lights which he has thrown on many obscure parts of its history, and on many traits in the character of its most illustrious champion, all unite in placing his work in point of real merit far above every other composition that has yet appeared on the subject. . . .²

1 Instructor, vol. V, "Review of "Knox," pp.105 ff.

2 Ibid., p. 195.

This same publication came to the defence of McCrie in response to some adverse comment in the Quarterly Review and proceeded to refute the justice of such criticism. The Instructor accuses the above paper of a deep Episcopalian prejudice and supports McCrie's treatment of the assassination of Cardinal Beaton, his defence of the Covenanters, and his upholding of Presbytery. McCrie was accused of a lack of candour and courtesy to the Church of England but no proof of any misstatements was produced by the Review which boasted of the candour and courtesy of the Church of England towards the Presbyterian Establishment, likewise without producing any evidence.

. . . the more our Presbyterian system and history are investigated, the more reason will be discovered for refraining from these silly, sneering, injurious attacks, in which the Quarterly Reviewers, along with many other illiberal Episcopalians, seem inclined to indulge. And we cherish the hope that the same able pen that has thrown so much light on the period of the Scottish Reformation, will favour the world with the result of his researches on the period of the covenant, of which the knowledge that prevails is equally limited and incorrect.¹

Dr. Thomas McCrie, the Younger, who was responsible for editing posthumously many of McCrie's writings, had a great respect and admiration for his father's historical ability. In the Memoir of his father he writes:

Those only who have paid attention to the state of ecclesiastical history at the time when the Life of

1 Instructor, vol. V, p. 430.

Knox appeared, can duly appreciate the seasonableness of such a work The authentic records of the period, hid in manuscripts, or detailed in the antiquated and ungainly style of a past age, had become utterly unavailable for the purposes of general instruction and excitement A work was wanted in which the ancient cause, with the ancient spirit of the Reformation, might come recommended by the advantages of modern taste and refinement.¹

Whatever may be thought of the tone and spirit of the historian, there can be but one opinion as to the accuracy and fidelity of the narrative . . . his work exhibiting, to use the phraseology of Johnson, "such a stability of dates, such a certainty of facts, such a punctuality of citation." With all his contempt for mere literary antiquaries, few of that class, it is believed, were ever more patient and curious in research, or more resolute against taking things at second hand.

.
 But whatever may be the rank due to the Life of Knox as an historical composition, it is as a religious work, and as a history of the Reformation, that it will continue to hold its highest place in the estimation of all the enlightened friends of religion.²

He also inserts an opinion by Robert Hall of Bristol on his father's works. "Mr. Hall thought very highly of the two great works, the Lives of Knox and Melville, on which the fame of Dr. McCrie chiefly rests. Speaking of other historians, he gave it as his opinion, that Hume, in his writings generally, but especially in his History of England, had carried English style to the highest pitch of perfection. Of Robertson he thought less. 'Indeed', he said, 'I prefer McCrie to Robertson; there is more

1 Memoir, pp. 177-78.

2 Ibid., pp. 187-88.

vigour in it, and it is more the style of a man of genius."¹

In the years following the death of McCrie many writers and historians expressed their admiration of and gratitude to him and to his labours. Dr. James A. Wylie of the Protestant Institute of Scotland writing in the Annals of the Original Secession, proclaims McCrie as the "first to sound the knell of the revival of the Scottish Reformation."² He praises his Life of Knox as a triumphant vindication both of Knox and of his work and the Life of Melville as the finest of his works and one which laid the foundations of the Free Church of Scotland which was to emerge only a few years after his death.³

An associate of Dr. Wylie in the editorship of the Witness, Hugh Miller, was outspoken and generous in his praise of McCrie's historical ability. Writing of the Literary Character of Knox he says:

The labours of the late Dr. McCrie 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 in elucidating the history of the Reformation.¹

1 Memoir, pp. 248-49.

2 D. Scott, Annals of the Original Secession, p. 517.

3 Ibid., p. 531.

4 Hugh Miller, Headship of Christ, pp. 66-67.

In a series of articles on Dr. McCrie he further praises his real worth as one of Scotland's greatest historians.

All our sympathies, national, Presbyterian, and literary, had taken part together in our admiration of the historian of Knox.

.....
 The memory of Knox and his coadjutors was pilloried in the literature of the country; every witling, as he passed by, flung his handful of filth; and that portion of our Presbyterian people who, looking into the past through the religious medium, and believing that our Reformers, as men awakened to a sense of the truth, were far different from what our literati represented them, could only retain for themselves the juster estimate of their fathers regarding them, without influencing the opinions of their contemporaries. Such was the state of things when a nameless champion entered the lists, and threw down his gauntlet in the cause of Knox and the Reformers.

.....
 The literature of a whole century went down before him, --Hume, Stuart, Tytler, Whitaker, Robertson, and the poets, All went down who opposed him, and the rest stood warily aloof. The far known "Chaldee manuscript," so much more witty than reverent, is happy in its description of this redoubtable champion; . . . "And the Griffin," says the Manuscript, "came with a roll of the names of those whose blood had been shed, between his teeth; and I saw him standing over the body of one that had been buried long in the grave, defending it from all men; and, behold, there were none which durst come near him."¹

Miller is also filled with esteem for the Life of Melville which, he maintains, "will ever continue to be regarded as emphatically the history of the Scottish Church for the stirring and eventful period which it embraces;"² and he notes with pleasure the unparalleled success and influence of McCrie's review of Scott's Old Mortality which was to

1 Ibid., pp. 77-79.

2 Ibid., p.126.

remain undimmed despite Scott's efforts at reply in the Quarterly Review.¹

Throughout the closing years of the century McCrie's works continued to be regarded in high honour and with great respect. G. Grub, although he was not entirely in sympathy with McCrie's views, was still moved to write in praise of his efforts, through the press, to restore the old reforming spirit as a living influence. "The Life of Knox was published in 1811, and after some time, made a strong impression on the national mind of Scotland. The learning and genius which it displayed conciliated the respect of men of letters of all opinions, and induced many to overlook the partiality of its statements, and the erroneous nature of some of the principles which it advocated. This work gradually effected a great change in the popular estimate of Knox and the reformers of the sixteenth century. If there had formerly been a tendency to depreciate their character, an opposite extreme now became fashionable."² Somewhat later W.G. Blaikie in his Cunningham Lectures on the Preachers of Scotland, although he had no great esteem for McCrie as a preacher, still attributes to McCrie's writing much of the credit for the

1 Ibid., pp. 105-106.

2 G. Grub, Ecclesiastical History of Scotland, vol. IV, p. 153.

Evangelical Revival in the early nineteenth century.

When McCrie's Life of Knox appeared, it was at once acknowledged to belong to an order of historical literature higher than that which Principal Robertson himself had attained. It was a history of deeper research, based on a profounder appreciation of events, showing a better faculty of sifting evidence, and commending itself more by its inward evidence of truthfulness. It contained no such palpable blunders as that defence of Queen Mary which made David Hume ask sarcastically whether Robertson had ever heard that Mary married the reputed murderer of her husband within three months of his death. It proved that a "high-flier" might be a man of calm intellect and literary culture and that the ways and tendencies gendered by ministering to a plain dissenting congregation were compatible with a high standard of literary work. Moreover, the Life of Knox redeemed the great founder of the Scottish Church from the false estimate of him which has become common The collision of Dr. McCrie with Sir Walter Scott . . . tended to raise his reputation still higher, indicating, as Hallam said, a writer of such power that but few living controversialists would fail to tremble before him.

.
No man did more than McCrie to clear the ancestry of Evangelical Scotland, and turn what had been counted its disgrace into a fountain of honour.¹

Even with the twentieth century McCrie's reputation did not fade though attention is more and more focussed on the tremendous influence of his works in raising the evangelical tone of the Church. Hector MacPherson in his book on Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence has this to say in praise of McCrie:

McCrie, a representative of the old Cameronian spirit, combined with the warmest evangelicalism a marvellously keen intellect. In an age when it was the custom to sneer at religious zeal he set himself to defend with great historical insight and literary effectiveness the Reformers and the Covenanters. In

1 W.G. Blaikie, Preachers of Scotland, pp. 269-70.

his biographies of Knox and Melville we find this minister of an unpopular sect equipped with a wealth of intellectual resource, a masterly insight into political philosophy, and a sturdy devotion to the great principles of religious and civil liberty. His influence in reviving the doctrines of the Reformers must have been enormous.

.....
 McCrie gave to the cause of Scottish Dissent intellectual prestige and to the cause of Scottish Evangelicalism spiritual power.¹

And W.L. Mathieson in his Church and Reform in Scotland 1797-1843 attributes to McCrie, himself, much of the credit for the "creation of an atmosphere more consonant with Scottish Evangelical tradition." "His Life of Andrew Melville recalled to its many readers," Mathieson says, "a time when the jurisdiction of the Kirk had been defined with as much precision, and had been almost as jealously guarded, as its doctrine."²

It is more than obvious from this brief survey of contemporary and later estimates of the work of McCrie that as a historian he was most highly regarded and that the influence of his writings on contemporary life was no less recognized and praised. Through his efforts the people of Scotland came to recognize and appreciate the honour due to their early Reformation predecessors and the continuing great worth of the principles for which

1 H. MacPherson, Scotland's Battles for Spiritual Independence, pp. 178-79.

2 W.L. Mathieson, Church and Reform in Scotland, p. 288.

they stood. However, in the modern period the name of McCrie has almost disappeared from view and his works seem fated to oblivion. So much has his influence been forgotten in this era that Principal Hugh Watt, writing of the contributing factors which led up to the Disruption--the Reform Bill, the Voluntary controversy, and the presence of the Secession Churches--could say that there was a fourth factor which has been almost consistently ignored. That fourth factor was Dr. Thomas McCrie whose elaborate biographies of Knox and Melville changed the whole perspective of church life, and brought the policy of Non-intrusion into a wider context, and strengthened the spiritual independence of the Church.¹ In fact, as it has been observed, McCrie was fearful of the coming conflict in the Church and had advised many years before the abolition of Patronage. With Principal Watt's notice of the influence of McCrie perhaps a new phase in the recognition of his works will have been introduced and he may regain and retain his place among the continuing great of Scottish historians.

1 Hugh Watt, Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption, pp. 121-22.

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1797 February On the Importance of Right Principles in Religion, and the danger of those which are false.

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1798 November Letters to a friend, on Bigotry.
December

1799 February Letters to a friend, on Bigotry.
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Christian Magazine.

- 1802 September Translation of Principal Smeton's Account of the concluding part of the Life and the Death of that Illustrious Man John Knox, the most faithful Restorer of the Church of Scotland.
- 1803 January The History of the New Testament, confirmed and illustrated by Passages of
 February Josephus, the Jewish Historian.
 June
 September
- July Memoir of Mr. John Murray.
- October On the Divine Institution of Sacrifices.
- November Sketch of the Progress of the Reformation in Spain, with an account of the Spanish Protestant Martyrs.
- December Illustrations of Scripture, as to the grinding and parching of corn.
- 1804 January Suppression of the Reformation in Spain.
- March Remarks on Matt. XX: 25-26.
- April On the Origin of the Taborites.
 June
- July Life of John Wickliffe.
 August
- November Martyrs in Britain, from the time of Wickliffe to the Reformation.
- December Influence of the Opinions of Wickliffe upon the English Reformation; with additional notices of Martyrs.
- 1805 October The Life of Dr. Andrew Rivet.
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- 1806 January The Life of Patrick Hamilton.
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- 1806 June The Life of Alexander Henderson.
 July
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- December Historical Notices respecting learned
 Scottish Divines in England and Foreign
 Parts, during the Sixteenth Century.
- December On the Discipline of the Primitive Church.

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- 1812 May Review of the Bishop of Lincoln's
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- July Review of Rev. James Milne's "The
 Difference Stated betwixt the
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- November Review of J.C. O'Reid's "Reviewers
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- 1813 May Review of Alexander McLeod's "Essays and
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- August Review of Rev. Charles Simeon's "The
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- 1814 October Review of Sismondi's "Considerations on
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- 1815 January Review of Mant's Bampton Lecture-"A
 February Vindication of the Clergy of the
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- 1816 February Review of Pamphlets and Documents on the
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- August Review of "Sermon on Confirmation", by
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- August Character of Dr. Andrew Thomson.
- 1821 July Review of Orme's "Life of Owen."
August
September
- 1831 August Account of the Controversy respecting
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- 1832 February " " " " " "
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- 1835 March Review of the Biblical Cabinet, Vol. VII,
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- 1835 October Letter to the Editor on the Voluntary Controversy.
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