

## Lecture 32 – “Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush”: Nineteenth Century Scotland

“Realised tonight how largely I am moulded by the past. The average person of today, knowing nothing of the past, is as flotsam and jetsam floating upon the waves of time, affected by every wind and current that bears upon him. I feel as though I am fitted into my place to bear my testimony, in my day and generation, for what bygone generations counted foundation and permanent truth. I have a connection with the past and have something to pass on.” *Diary of Kenneth MacRae, 25 May 1943*

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.” *Psalms 121:1, 2*

### Prayer

From Horatius Bonar (1808-89)

“Fill thou my life, O Lord my God, in every part with praise,  
That my whole being may proclaim thy being and thy ways:  
Praise in the common things of life, its goings out and in;  
Praise in each duty and each deed, however small and mean.  
Fill every part of me with praise; let all my being speak  
Of thee and of thy love, O Lord, poor though I be and weak.  
So shall no part of day or night from sacredness be free,  
But all my life, in every step, be fellowship with thee. Amen.”

## “Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush”: Nineteenth Century Scotland

### I. Background

#### A. Settlement of 1690

1. Two state churches

#### B. Outside groups

1. Scottish Episcopalians
2. Covenanters

### II. The Reformed Presbyterian Church (1743)—“the Covenanters”

### III. The Church of Scotland

#### A. Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712)

#### B. “The Marrow Controversy”

1. Auchterarder Presbytery: “Do you subscribe to the following: I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin in order to come to Christ?”
2. Thomas Boston (1676-1732) and “the Marrow Men”
3. *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645-48) by Edward Fisher

#### C. The Moderates

“Thrawn Janet” by Robert Louis Stevenson: “Fifty years syne, when Mr. Soulis cam’ first into Ba’waery [as minister in the kirk], he was still a young man—a callant, the folk said—fu’ o’ book-learnin’ an’ grand at the exposition, but, as was natural in sae young a man, wi’ nae leevin’ experience in religion. The younger sort were greatly taken wi’ his gifts and his gab; but auld concerned, serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days o’ the moderates—weary fa’ them; but ill things are like guid—they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folks even them that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an’ the lads that went to study wi’ them wad hae done mair an’ better sittin’ in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi’ a Bible under their oxters an’ a speerit o’ prayer in their heart. There was nae doubt onyway, but that

Mr. Soullis had been ower lang at the college. He was careful and troubled for mony things besides the ae thing needful. He had a feck o' books wi' him—mair than had ever been seen before in a' that presbytery; and a sair wark the carrier had wi' them....They were books o' divinity, to be sure, or so they ca'd them; but the serious were o' opinion there was little service for sae mony, when the hail o' God's Word would gang in the neuk o' a plaid. Then he would sit half the day and half the night forbye, which was scant decent—writin', nae less; an' first they were feared he wad read his sermons; an' syne it proved he was writin' a book himsel', which was surely no' fittin' for ane o' his years an' sma' experience."

1. Robert Burns

John Witherspoon (1723-94): "Moderate preaching is like a winter's day—brief, dark, and cold."

D. Two great problems in the church

1. Dead orthodoxy

2. Patronage

IV. "The Seceders"

A. Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754) and the Secession of 1733 (Associate Presbytery)—"Judicial Testimony"

B. Thomas Gillespie and the Secession of 1761 (Relief Presbytery)

V. Other Denominations in Scotland

A. Scottish Episcopal Church organized by 1766

B. Congregationalists and Baptists emerged in the 1790s (James and Robert Haldane)

VI. State of the Roman Catholic Church

VII. Renewal and Division in Scottish Presbyterianism

A. Missions

In the early 19th century God "had a purpose of blessing for the Church of Scotland. Eminent men of God appeared to plead the cause of Christ. The cross was lifted up boldly in the midst of church courts which had long been ashamed of the Gospel of Christ." (Andrew A. Bonar)

B. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-1843)—*Memoir of McCheyne* by Andrew Bonar

C. "Ten Years Conflict" and "The Disruption" of 1843—The Free Church of Scotland

"The Misadventures of John Nicholson" by Robert Louis Stevenson: "His father—that iron gentleman—had long ago enthroned himself on the heights of the Disruption Principles. What these are...no array of terms would render thinkable to the merely English intelligence; but to the Scot they often prove unctuously nourishing, and Mr. Nicholson found in them the milk of lions."

"The Free Kirk people were very proud of their vestry because the Established Church had one, and because it was reasonably supposed to be the smallest in Scotland....It was eight feet by eight, and consisted largely of two doors and a fireplace, and its chief glory was a portrait of Dr. Chalmers, whose face, dimly seen in the light of the lamp, was a charter of authority, and raised the proceedings to the level of history" (*Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* by Ian Maclaren).

1. Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847)

Robert L. Dabney in the sermon "The Light of a Holy Example": "'Nephew,' said Mr. G., 'I have been reading lately Dr. Hanna's *Life of Chalmers*. Did you know that great divine confessed he was a Presbyterian minister many years before he was a converted man? Isn't that considered very singular among you? And Dr. Hanna—who, you know, is his son-in-law—relates, that one thing which opened Dr. Chalmers's eyes was his observing that many evangelical persons, all of whom he had considered fanatical, were more zealous to live holy and diligent lives of obedience, while claiming no merit therefrom for their justification, than he and his friends were who relied on that sort of merit'" (*Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* 1: 109).

2. Free Church leaders—William Cunningham (*Historical Theology*); “Rabbi” John Duncan (“...he was the only man I ever knew who appeared to me to believe and to love every word of God without preferring one above another,” [A. Moody Stuart, *Recollections of the late John Duncan*, 111]); Horatius Bonar (“Scotland’s chief singer”)
3. Trial of William Robertson Smith (embraced Higher Criticism)
4. Theological compromise in the Free Church—Moderator Horatius Bonar in the 1883 General Assembly warned that “fellowship between faith and unbelief must, sooner or later, be fatal to the former.”
5. Church unions culminated in 1929 union of the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church (which had formed in 1900 with the merger of the United Presbyterian Church and the Free Church); small continuing Free Church of Scotland; renewal in the Church of Scotland (Rutherford House)

*Diary of Kenneth MacRae*: “When the Lord in mercy opened my eyes I was an adherent of the United Free Church. Very shortly afterwards I came in contact with Free Church preaching and studied the position of those whom I had been taught to believe were a small body of ignorant Highlanders. On the one side I had the preaching of Christ crucified which was as honey to my soul, and on the other I had that hateful and soul-destroying thing called Higher Criticism. Which was I to choose? I did not hesitate for a single moment. For ever I turned my back upon a Church which so dishonoured my Lord” (22).

### For Further Study

\**My Uncle George: The Respectable Recollections of a Backslider in a Highland Manse* by Alastair Phillips (Pan Books, 1986), 35-43, 72-76. Alastair Phillips’s highly entertaining account of his Scottish childhood includes this informative section (pages 35-43) on Scottish church history—especially the formation of the present Free Church of Scotland. Use the following dates and facts as you read:

1843 Disruption: The Free Church of Scotland divided from the Church of Scotland (“the Auld [old] Kirk”)

1893 The Free Presbyterian Church: Divided from the Free Church of Scotland when two ministers and 14,000 people left because of their concerns over slacking of confessional commitment in the Free Church of Scotland

1900 United Free Church of Scotland: The result of the merger of the Free Church of Scotland with the United Presbyterian Church (made up of Secession and Covenanter traditions). There was a continuing Free Church of Scotland which refused to go into the union, commonly called “the Wee Frees.”

1929 Church of Scotland: United with the United Free Church of Scotland. The second selection from *My Uncle George* (pages 72-76) describes the “sacramental seasons”—the observance of the Lord’s Supper—in highland congregations. Several days were set apart for such occasions, with fellowship, food (and drink), preaching and praying, leading up to and following the celebration of the Lord’s Supper on the Sabbath.

\**The Life of Robert Murray McCheyne* by Andrew Bonar (Banner of Truth, 1960), 181-83. Robert Murray McCheyne (1813-43) was widely regarded as one of the most saintly and able young ministers of his day. During his short life, he exercised a remarkably fruitful ministry in Dundee. He died just before the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843. Andrew Bonar’s life of McCheyne continues to be read as one of the impressive devotional works of Scottish literature.

In the section included here, McCheyne sets forth the rules by which he governs his own prayer life. Read it not only to discover the Christian spirit of this beloved Scottish pastor but also to apply something from McCheyne to your own prayer life.

\**Pilgrim's Way* by John Buchan (Carroll & Graf, 1984), 5-8, 232-34, 248-51. John Buchan (1875-1940), the son of a minister, became the first Baron Tweedsmuir. As an undergraduate at Glasgow University, he published his first work, a novel entitled *Sir Quixote of the Moors*. In 1901 he went to South Africa with the High Commission charged with the reconstruction of that country following the Boer War; thereafter he combined writing with an active public life, culminating in the appointment as Governor-General of Canada in 1935. His *Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) inaugurated an era of heroic spy fiction populated by clean-living, patriotic heroes and ruthless foreign opponents. Buchan also wrote many non-fiction works, including biographies of Montrose and Scott and an autobiography called *Pilgrim's Way*.

In the first reading from *Pilgrim's Way* (pages 5-7), Buchan describes his childhood. One of the great features of that period of his life were the woodlands around his Scottish home, which the boy's imagination filled with witches and warlocks, bears and wolf-packs, stolen princesses and robber lords. He then goes on to talk about the religious environment in which he grew up. In the second reading (pages 232-34) Buchan describes the pomp and ceremony of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. The third reading (pages 248-51) gives us Buchan's memories of his minister-father.