

The Fight for the Reformed Faith

The Decline of Reformation
Calvinism
in 19th Century Scotland

Part Five

The Erosion of Biblical Psalmody

Indubitably, the testimony of 2000 years of Church history documents the demise of Biblical Psalmody as a phenomenon that marks periods of spiritual and doctrinal declension in the churches. One notes this right from the 2nd century AD, with the rise of the Gnostic Heresy,¹⁰¹ one follows it right through the development of Romanism in the Dark Ages, one finds it as characteristic of all the wild sects that grew on the fringes of the Reformation, one finds it in Lutheranism, which, retaining extra-Biblical hymnody, also retained extra-Biblical doctrines and practices all too saliently. Then one finds it amongst such doctrinal deviants as Richard Baxter, Philip Doddridge, Isaac Watts, Wesley and the Methodists, and all the phalanx of evangelical and charismatic sects that have multiplied over the last 200 years. Hymns galore have streamed from all these popular personalities and deviant movements over this period, and the flow continues apace today with the wave after wave of Charismatic extremisms that surge to and fro across the face of the globe. Such is the volume of this output of extra-biblical lyrics that the figures make one stagger.....Charles Wesley alone wrote over 6,000 (yes; six *thousand*) hymns,¹⁰² and by 1892 when the Rev. John Julian (1839-1913) published his

¹⁰¹ In AD 154 the Gnostic heretic Bardesanes composed a rival "psalter" of 150 hymns as a means to wean people off the 150 Biblical Psalms and thereby away from orthodox Christianity. Cf. **Michael S. Bushell: *The Songs of Zion***: (Publ. Crown & Covenant USA 1980) PAGES 123-124.

¹⁰² Cf. *The Oxford Companion to Music* by **Percy A. Scholes** (LONDON: Oxford University Press 1975 reprint of 10th edition 1970) page 500; article: **The English Hymn**. Notable too is the output of one modern Welsh Evangelical hymnist, the Rev. Vernon Higham, minister since 1962 of Heath Evangelical Free Church, Cardiff. We are appraised that his output of hymns now is in the region of some 400, and equivalent to an fair-sized hymn-book.

The Erosion of Biblical Psalmody in Scots Presbyterianism

famous *Dictionary of Hymnology* he was able to supply the particulars of "well over 400,000 hymns."¹⁰³ Yes! Four hundred thousand! Alongside this one finds that Dr. Gauntlett (1805-1876) believed that he alone had composed "as many as 10,000 (ten thousand!) English hymn tunes" !¹⁰⁴ As the learned writer in the *Oxford Companion of Music* well says, "what purpose has been served by such excessive production?"¹⁰⁵ Indeed the net result of all this mad production rate has been to produce gargantuan swirls of innovations in worship that have generated a self-feeding momentum of their own, a momentum that has swept on for another 100 years since Julian's time, and suffused the churches under a smog of "strange fire" and even "stranger-still fire". (Indeed, the longer it goes on, the "stranger" the fire seems to become). One might well venture that Julian's figure of 400,000 has by now been left well behind, if only it were possible to make another such census as he made. And with this enormous glut of hymnody, there runs in parallel the modern apostasy from the Biblical doctrines of the Reformation.

Contrawise, those periods of Church history marked by Reformation and spiritual advance are characteristically periods marked by a revival of Biblical Psalmody.

It is with cast-iron historical and doctrinal justification, therefore, that the pure stream of the Reformed Faith issuing through the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, together with the Anglican churches, can be asserted to be the main upholders of true Biblical Worship over the last half millenium, exclusive Psalmody being a universal characteristic within their communions for a solid 250 to 300 years from the Reformation. Amongst them, the advocates of extra-Biblical hymnody found little encouragement in those early centuries after the Reformation, but with the burgeoning rise of Methodism, crypto-Romanism, and a mass of independent sects, "hymns" finally became "fashionable" and began to find their way eventually into the sacred precincts of Reformed Churches. Characteristically, hand in hand with their introduction, one can trace the unmistakable signs of firstly, a cooling off with regard to the doctrines of the Reformation, then gradually, the introduction of Amyraldianism, followed by Arminianism, then Socinianism, Arianism, and finally Modernism. A different religion, a different ethos, a different outlook and world-view, all metamorphosed out of the shambles of a Reformation ruined and "stabbed in the back" by those who professed adherence to it.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Scholes, op. cit. page 501.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* page 505 article: *The Composition of New Tunes.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.505 in loc.

¹⁰⁶ It can be quite fascinating to trace out how, in church history, the demise of exclusive psalmody goes hand in hand with spiritual and doctrinal declension. A further salient indicator embedded in all this evidence is of course the correspondence between the rise of "Revivalism" and the production of extra-biblical lyrics. There appears to have been some idea widespread in those "times of Revival" that various "choice poets" had some kind of "inspiration from God" which propagated their hymn-writing. In English Evangelical and even Calvinist circles one was accustomed to hear (*Contin. foot next page....*)

Scotland, with its imposing bastion of Presbyterian Orthodoxy, was deeply permeated with the lyrical praises of Pure Biblical Psalmody. As far back as 1542 the Wedderburn brothers had introduced Psalmody, translating some of Luther's versifications,¹⁰⁷ and after 1561 the Scots adopted the Anglo-Genevan 1561 Psalter containing 87 Psalms replete with French tunes for many of them.¹⁰⁸ By 1564 another edition was produced, containing also forty-two additional psalms from the English 1562 Psalter, and finally after 1650 the post-Westminster Assembly Psalter of Francis Rous became the universal English-language Book of Praise for all Scots worshippers.¹⁰⁹

In the Gaelic-speaking areas of the North and West, the vigorous labours of the Synod of Argyll made translation of a versified Psalter for Gaelic singing a higher priority even than the translation of the Old Testament. First appearing in 1658, followed by a revised and corrected edition¹¹⁰ in 1659, the Gaelic Psalter initially contained only the first fifty of the Psalms of David. The whole Psalter was not to appear in Gaelic until the year 1694, the delay being occasioned by the "killing times" caused by the persecuting intrusion of Quasi-Romanist Episcopacy after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy.¹¹¹ Subsequent revisions of this Psalter were undertaken by MacFarlane, Ross, and Smith, in the years from 1753 to 1807, and finally the Church of Scotland published the definitive edition based on the best revisional work of MacFarlane and Smith in the year 1826. This Third edition proved to be a Psalter eminently suited to the needs and style of the Gaelic peoples, and its "overall style is less contrived and contorted" than that of the English lan-

(Footnote 106 contin. from previous page.....) often over the last half century that "whenever God revives His church, he'll always provide His hymn-writers". Man-made hymns marked the rise and progress of these "revivals", and there has been throughout the last 250 years a distinct trait of suggestion that the likes of Charles Wesley were inspired by the Holy Ghost every bit as much as was David. In accordance with the implications that follow from all this, i.e., that the "words of such as Wesley" are, well, in some way at least, de facto, the "words of the Holy Ghost", then of course it has become the fashion in modern evangelical preaching to quote "hymns" galore within the structure of a sermon. The late Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was adept at this, and though a Calvinist himself, held the Wesleys in high esteem, as also the hymns of Charles. This contrasts alarmingly with the New Testament, where the writers make their lyrical quotations exclusively from the book of Psalms. (Some 413 in all from 104 of the Psalms, Cf. British Reformed Journal, No. 26, page 12.) As a further and obnoxious but entirely logical development from all this, is the rise of hymns to the status of Scripture, (something which has effectively almost happened when preachers quote them in sermons), and the usage of such hymns as TEXTS for a sermon! Lest the reader should gawp at this, I can testify to having experienced such on one occasion at least amongst Pentecostals in South Wales in the early 1960's.

¹⁰⁷ DSCOT article: **Psalms, Psalter**, page 682.

¹⁰⁸ DSCOT op. cit. p. 683.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 683. The first book of tunes for the Psalter was published in Aberdeen in 1666.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. article **Psalms, Psalter (Gaelic)**. The initial production of 1658 was found to be "defective in syllabilization". Also, the Gaelic-speaking Scots found problems with the "common metre", it being a measure they were not then familiar with.

¹¹¹ Ibid. op. cit. page 683: Only the 2nd edition of 1702 of this Psalter survives.

guage Scottish Metrical Psalter.¹¹²

This whole era of Scotland's Church history is marked by deep piety and strong, even stern Christian testimony under the most arduous conditions. It was the era that stretched from Knox, Melville, Welsh, and Bruce, and on through Rutherford, Gillespie, Henderson, Guthrie, Blackadder, Dickson, Durham, and hosts more of the nation's brightest and best Saints of God. With the Psalms on their lips they faced hell and highwater for the Glory of God, with tongues aflame with the Gospel and the inspired lyrics of the Holy Ghost, by the thousands they looked death fearlessly in the face..... an age of spiritual giants.....

Under the cross, through the Post-Restoration "killing-times", rallying to the majestic lyrics of the Heavenly Paraclete, some 18,000 of Scotland's bravest and best Saints of God held firm their Christian testimonies unto death. And among them we count the young, too, like the 18 year old Margaret Wilson, who, tied to a stake in the Solway Firth, is reported to have sang,¹¹³ as the threatening tidewaters lapped higher around her.....these plaintive words of Psalm 25.....

My sins and faults of youth
Do thou O Lord, forget.
After thy mercy think on me,
And for thy goodness great.

In all areas and conditions of their persecuted lives, they carried with affection in their bosoms the memorised verses of their Psalter....ready to burst into praise at any required moment.....the very words of God in their hearts, and on their lips.....the awesome tones of Biblical Psalmody.....

Come the turn of the years, as the 17th century rolled over into the 18th, a new spirit was at work in Scotland's Reformed Kirk. A new note, a new sound, a new dogma had blown in from the turbulent spiritual atmosphere of Europe. Amyraldianism had poisoned the pure streams of Reformation Calvinism, and was opening the way for a new form of Arminianism. In Geneva, the old stronghold of Calvin, the insidious error had taken grip surreptitiously in the theological faculty, and soon, by the death of Benedict Pictet in 1724 issued forth in the full blown deism and arianism that wrecked Switzerland's Reformed Churches.¹¹⁴ In France,

¹¹² *Ibid.* D.E.Meek's assessment in *DSCOT* in loc.

¹¹³ Cf. **Dr. John Ker**: *The Psalms in History and Biography* (Edinburgh 1888) page 49.

¹¹⁴ Regarding the demise of Calvinism at Geneva after the death of Francis Turretin in 1687, useful information can be found in JEAN-ALPHONSE TURRETINI AND THE ABROGATION OF THE FORMULA CONSENSUS IN GENEVA by **Martin I. Klauber**, being pages 325-338 in the *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. 53 No. 2 (Fall 1991). Klauber documents therein how Amyraldians wormed their way into the Genevan Academy and Theological Faculty by adopting "stealth" tactics.

the Reformed Churches had been devastated by the error, and in England many of the later Puritans had fallen hook, line and sinker for it. Scotland too, felt the icy chill of this deviant wind, but put up more substantial resistance. At the University of St. Andrews the great Thomas Halyburton (1674-1712) took up his polemic against the Amyraldian deviations of Richard Baxter, Daniel Williams, and late 17th Century English Presbyterianism.¹¹⁵ Dying young in 1712, Halyburton could be called the last of the great theologians of Scotland's heroic Reformation era. The Scots would see no more of his calibre until the days of Begg, Cunningham, and Kennedy in the 19th century.

It has been said that if Halyburton had not died so young, the "Marrow" controversy would never have arisen in Scotland. As it was, the controversies over the "marrow" led eventually to the formation of a new Presbyterian body in the nation, the so-called "Secession Church." Whilst adopting the Westminster Standards as their doctrinal creed, these churches nevertheless developed an alarming tendency to doctrinal and ecclesiastical confusion. Receiving the "revivalist" influences of George Whitefield initially, they later vociferously condemned the same Whitefield when he ministered in the what was then to them "anathematized" Church of Scotland, and characterised the revival phenomena following Whitefield there as being "of the devil".¹¹⁶

Thomas Boston (1676-1732), prime mover in the "Marrow" faction, was father of another, lesser known "Thomas Boston" (1713-1767). The son grew up to become a minister in the Church of Scotland, but as a result of problems concerning patronage, he separated to form a "Relief" congregation outside the aegis of the Establishment, and thence forward with Thomas Gillespie founded the "Relief Synod" in 1761, which by then was Scotland's fourth main Presbyterian body.¹¹⁷ Expressing a greater degree of ecclesiastical liberty than the "Secession" churches of the "Marrow-men", the "Relief" grew rapidly, and was libertarian enough to

¹¹⁵ Cf. DSCOT in loc. p. 388. The James Begg Society are engaged at this time in a project to reprint the complete works of Halyburton, and the first volume should be due fairly soon.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Arthur Fawcett: *The Cambuslang Revival* (Banner of Truth 1971) pages 184 - 187.

¹¹⁷ The four main Presbyterian bodies then were, in respective order of inception:

1. **The Church of Scotland.** (Old church traced back to St. Columba (c.521-597) and reformed in the year 1560.
2. **The Reformed Presbyterian Church,** formed in 1690 by those Covenanters who having survived the "killing times" remained aloof from the re-established Church of Scotland after the Revolution Settlement of 1690.
3. **The Secession Church** formed initially in 1733 by the "Marrow" faction.
4. **The Relief Church,** founded in 1761.

Amongst the Secession Churches further minor splits issued forth, mainly over the matters of Establishment Principle, and over the "New Light" opening the way for incoming Amyraldianism. The result was a multi-way splitting, between "Old Light Burghers", "Old-Light Anti-burghers" and "New Light Burghers" and "New Light Anti-burghers".

become in 1786 the first Scottish Presbyterian denomination to introduce extra-biblical hymns into worship.¹¹⁸ Possibly they had been influenced somewhat by the action of the Church of Scotland when in 1781 that body, now heavily under the influence of “Moderatism” introduced the first book of paraphrased Scriptures for singing as a supplement to Psalmody.¹¹⁹

A perusal of the contents of the Relief Church’s first hymnal tells a tale.....we find therein that it contains 180 hymns, largely productions of the English anti-trinitarian, Isaac Watts, with additions from Philip Doddridge, friend and co-religionist of Watts.¹²⁰ At long last, sadly, the lyrical deviations salient amongst the English later Puritans and non-conformists had begun their insidious penetration of the Reformed fortress in the north, as by 1794 the denomination gave official sanction to it in that it published a revised version based on the original 1786 Anderston hymn-book. It was soon to be found in general usage amongst the Relief Churches. Indeed, the Relief Synod printed within the hymnal a preface defending the use of “uninspired hymnody” in worship.¹²¹ Come the year 1833 the Relief Churches had printed another revision, between the pages of which was to be found “When Israel, of the Lord beloved....” produced by Sir Walter Scott and based on material in his famous novel “Ivanhoe”.¹²²

Parallel to these developments in the Relief Churches, there was in the early 18th Century a steady advance of Evangelical Presbyterianism into the Gaelic-speaking areas, and with this influence came the unwelcome introduction of hymnody in the Gaelic tongue. This was the period when the Gaelic Psalter was still going through completion and revision, and so hymnody had a wide open door before it. One Dugald Buchanan of Perthshire (1716-68) proved to be something of a bi-lingual poet, and he borrowed ideas from such English hymn-writers as Isaac Watts, and rendered them successfully into Gaelic. A series of budding lyricists followed in his

¹¹⁸ Cf. DSCOT. article “*Relief Church Hymnals*” page 421 where James Stewart of Anderston Relief Church in Glasgow is cited as having published a collection of hymns for his congregation in the year 1786. This is noted in DSCOT as THE FIRST SUCH BOOK IN SCOTTISH PRESBYTERIANISM and seems to have been something of a freelance effort, but evidently with at least the tacit approval of the denomination.

¹¹⁹ Again, it is striking how the tendency to introduce something extra to Psalmody is coincident with a deep theological shift away from Biblical Reformation Theology, in this case the shift being into the so-called “Moderatism.”

¹²⁰ On Isaac Watts and his Anti-Trinitarian theology, see: Dr. Gilbert M’Master : ISAAC WATTS UNMASKED. This eye-opener is printed as an appendix to Dr. M’Master’s book *An apology for the Book of Psalms....* published in Philadelphia 1852. A reprint of this appendix can be found in *British Reformed Journal* No. 26. April-June 1999. Doddridge, close friend of Watts, ran an Academy for training dissenting Ministers in Northampton, England. Historical research indicates that the vast majority of his students turned out as Unitarians.

¹²¹ Cf. DSCOT articles: “*Relief Church Hymnals*”(pp. 421-22) and also (*Relief Psalmody* : p. 703.

¹²² *Ibid.* in loc. p. 422. One asks, “so is this what the hymn-lobby call *Inspiration*?”

wake, with Gaelic collections of hymns by Gaelic authors being printed in 1786, 1819, and 1851. The language barrier failed indeed to act as a firewall protecting Gaelic Presbyterianism from the baleful influences of Watts and his entourage.¹²³

Parallel again, across the years of the 18th Century, in the Secession or "Marrow" Churches there was doctrinal instability running like an undertow. By 1747, on account of dissention over certain oath-taking, this denomination was nearly rent in two, only 14 years after its inception.¹²⁴

The following decade evidenced the influx of deviant doctrines concerning the Atonement, and whilst the denominational leaders maintained a strong and worthy anti-Amyraldian stance, there was that in the "Marrow" which allowed, if not actually led on straight to, the Amyraldian position. It was as if the denomination had a congenital slant in the make-up of its theology which tended to run people off in the direction of a Universal Atonement. Indeed, some of the sermons of Thomas Boston senior contain sentiments concerning the atonement that an Arminian, let alone an Amyraldian, would rejoice to hold as his own.¹²⁵

Thus we find from 1747 onwards none other than the "right-hand man" of Secession leader Adam Gib, one Thomas Mair, began introducing the doctrines of Universal Redemption. Mair published the unprinted notes on Redemption by the late Fraser of Brea, who in an earlier generation had been a friend of Mair's father, who in turn was a friend of Thomas Boston senior. In adumbrating Fraser's work on redemption Dr. John Macleod calls it a "bizarre doctrine". To the credit of the "Marrow" leaders, they fought against this quasi-Amyraldian teaching, Gib reprinted Dr. Owen's famous work on Redemption, and eventually, Mair's teaching was "put under the ban of the Synod". But, says Dr. MacLeod, Mair's teaching "proved to be contagious."¹²⁶ He had gathered a number of sympathizers, not only in the Secession Churches, but also amongst the Cameronians of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. A certain George Thomson of Fife, who had schoolmastered with Mr. Mair in former years, continued the deviant course, though somewhat erratically.

One may sum up the "Marrow" denomination through the years of the 18th century by saying that they appear to have been led initially by good men who had espoused one or two seriously shakey principles, and consequently spent a good deal of their time trying to stand up theologically straight on the doctrinal slippery slope they had made for themselves. Eventually it all proved too much, and as the

¹²³ *Ibid.* article: *Hymnology*; Gaelic p. 424. gives all the salient details.

¹²⁴ Cf. Dr. John MacLeod: *Scottish Theology*, (Banner of Truth 1974) pages 172 ff. for details.

¹²⁵ Cf. *British Reformed Journal* No. 22 (April-June 1998) pages 16 and 17 for examples culled from Boston's sermons that illustrate this trend clearly.

¹²⁶ MacLeod: *op. cit.* page 175.

18th century turned over into the 19th, the whole denomination lost its theological footing and careered, like the Gaderene swine, down the hill into the Amyraldian waters waiting below.¹²⁷ At this juncture, the denomination which hitherto had maintained Biblical Psalmody, was evidently looking for innovations, and innovations came in 1847.

In that fateful year, some 118 of the 136 Relief Churches united with the "Marrow" Secession Churches, and formed the United Presbyterian Church (UPC), a body that was to prove itself thoroughly permeated with Amyraldianism. Within the Relief element of this union, hymnody had been established since 1794. Immediately on union, the UPC began work to produce a revised hymnal for the whole new denomination. The "*Hymn-book of the UPC*" appeared in 1852, and contained some 468 hymns, fifty paraphrases and twenty-three doxologies. Amongst the hymns were to be found some by Ralph Wardlaw and Robert Murray M'Cheyne. If M'Cheyne was a moderate or hypo-Calvinist, Wardlaw was a hypo-hypo-Calvinist. He was a Scots Congregationalist, and as a theologian he was known far and wide as the "most distinguished Scottish champion of 'Moderate, or what may be designated modern Calvinism, as held and ably elucidated by the late Dr. Andrew Fuller, Dr. Edward Williams, and others.....' which he contrasted with 'Calvinism as more generally held by the orthodox'"that is, to put it bluntly, the man was an Amyraldian. He also, in his three-volume *Systematic Theology* espoused the Grotian "governmental" view of the Atonement, thereby denying the forensic work of Christ as Saviour, and also denied the eternal sonship of Christ.¹²⁸ Need one say any more? But into the throats and on to the lips of thousands of Scotland's Presbyterians henceforth the lyrical gushings of this heretic would be insinuated, and offered in praise to the Most High, in wilful preference to the sacred lyrics of the Holy Ghost Himself. Sheer breathtaking insult!

In these middle years of the 19th Century, the newly emergent Free Kirk was flirting with the idea of joining in union with the UPC. The trends evident in the UPC found echoes in the spirits of too many Free Kirk clergy, and it was not only Amyraldian dogmas that jumped the fences between the UPC and the Free Kirk. Envious spirits in the Free Kirk were keen to imitate the UPC's stance on extra-biblical hymns, and accordingly agitations were afoot to introduce hymnody into the Free Kirk. Hence, "*Psalm-versions, Paraphrases, and Hymns*" appeared in 1873, the very same year in which, by an astute turn of policy, Dr. Begg and his supporters stymied the unification of Free Kirk and UPC, thereby delaying that union for some thirty years. It seems, however, that the Amyraldianised majority in the Free

¹²⁷ For the details concerning this "crash" see *British Reformed Journal* No. 24 (Oct.-Dec 1998) pages 43-45 concerning Marshall versus Balmer/Brown. And see also *Hamilton: The Erosion of Calvinist Orthodoxy* : Chapters 1 and 2 for a well researched and informative picture.

¹²⁸ DSCOT in loc Wardlaw.

Kirk had planned a complete “putsch” that would have overthrown Biblical Orthodoxy in that year, and transformed the Free Kirk into something grossly different to what had emerged in 1843.

Now it is staggering to realize that 1873 is but thirty years after the Disruption of 1843. Within the space of one generation, the apostacising drift in the Free Kirk had succeeded in intruding man-made lyrics upon the multitudes, now numbering something like 300,000, that had left the Establishment to form the new denomination for conscience sake. Again, this illustrates a salient fact about the disruption Free Kirk. It never was wholly “traditional orthodox” in the terms of the “traditional orthodoxy” of Scotland’s Reformation. Indeed, the truly “traditional orthodox” were a minority in it right from the start, and faced embattlement on all sides from soon after the denomination’s initial inception. With the rise of “generous” or “liberal evangelicalism”, which insisted on a “moderated Calvinism”, the doctrinal and spiritual apostasy¹²⁹ was running like a rip tide by as early as 1873, and right on cue, as one might say, one finds the tell-tale symptom..... Hymns in, psalms on the way out.....

However, though denied the full force of their hoped-for 1873 “putsch” the “moderate” or “Amyraldianised” faction was yet able to foist the new hymnal on to the denomination. It contained only 21 Psalm-versions, but some 123 hymns and some forty of the 1781 paraphrases. At the outset, one is struck by the paucity of psalms present, clear evidence this, of the underlying intent on the part of the book’s producers and advocates. How far it would have undermined orthodox worship throughout the Free Kirk one can never know, since before the volume could really begin its leavening work a new phenomenon had hit the nation, the sensational revivalism of the Moody-Sankey machine. Taking Scotland by storm all the way from the Borders to Wick, this whirlwind of hyper-evangelism “reconciled many in the Free Kirk to hymns” via the lyrics of Sankey and others.¹³⁰ At this time Free Kirkers themselves were emerging as composers of hymns, the name of Horatius Bonar is one well known for his extra-Biblical lyrics and also for his “diluted” or “amyraldianised” Calvinism. Doubtless the Americans gave an enormous boost to the hymn lobby, and one finds that by 1882 the Free Kirk had published a revised and enlarged “*Free Church Hymnbook*”. This contained 387 hymns, (including 23 from the 1781 paraphrases), and apparently no psalms at all. It gained a reputation for being one of the best hymnals of its day on account of the quality of its hymns and music. Production of this volume “owed much to A. B. Bruce.”

A.B.Bruce ! Let us hold the magnifying glass close in here. And we find that

¹²⁹ This apostasy we have documented in earlier articles in this series, notably in **British Reformed Journal** Nos.23 and 24.

¹³⁰ DSCOT article **Hymnology**, **Scottish** page 421 sub head FC Hymnals.

this Alexander Balmain Bruce (1831 -1899) was quite a character. He was, we are informed, a “distinguished” Free Kirk Professor at the Divinity Hall in Glasgow. And, that he “ranks with A. B. Davidson and William Robertson Smith among the the first Scottish biblical scholars whose views were highly esteemed by German critics.....” His approach to Scripture was that of a “liberal evangelical”. He had, it seems, been a sufferer from “severe religious doubts” when a student, and his subsequent career found him “strongly defending” the modernist William Robertson Smith at his trial, and being summoned before the Free Kirk General Assembly of 1890 to answer for his teaching that there were errors in the Gospel accounts..... the Assembly were too kind to him, and a judged him as “not in breach of the Westminster Confession” (!!! Gawp !) However, his later article on “Jesus” in the 1901 edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica indicated that he had fully espoused liberal modernist theories, and abandoned any semblance of conformity with the Westminster Standards.¹³¹

Well, this Alexander Balmain Bruce “had a keen interest in music and the reform of worship”. In the controversies in the Free Kirk concerning exclusive psalmody he was an advocate of hymns, and in opposition to the old orthodox position. He was “convener” of the hymnal committees which produced the first “*Free Church Hymnbook*” of 1882, and likewise convener of the committee which produced in 1898 the “*Church Hymnary*” for all Presbyterians.

Thus it was, that another heretic, filled with the self-importance of his own blaspheming audacity, conspired to “improve on” the Holy Ghost, and force uninspired lyrics down the throats of tens of thousands, nay, eventually via international connections, millions, of Presbyterian people. Thus again, one sees the tell-tale connection between apostasy, heresy, and wilful anti-psalmody.

After the production of their hymnal in 1852, the UPC discovered as the years rolled by that many of their hymns were not popular with the people. The remedy for this ailment was of course, the usual bureaucratic nonsense, which was: “up the dosage, and give ‘em more of the same”. Accordingly in 1876, the spanking new “*Presbyterian Hymnal*” was produced with some 366 hymns, and with more than half of the 1852 book thrown out. What this says for the “inspiration” that supposedly was embodied in those hymns that were despatched into the trash-can, well, any schoolboy could figure out. And this has been the story of hymnody ever since its rise with Watts and Wesley. Hymns that “grab” the popular affection in one era, are “old hat” in the next era. How many of Charles Wesley’s 6,000 hymns ever got sung by subsequent generations of Wesleyans, we wonder? How few of them are sung today, as in this modern post-Charismatic age the hymnal is being superseded

¹³¹ Cf DSCOT p. 102 article Bruce, Alexander Balmain.

by the trite and fifth-rate versifications of the “chorus-book”? And can one not see the evidence of further spiritual decline traced indubitably in the decline of hymnody itself over the last fifty years especially? One can appreciate the doctrinal weightiness of many of Wesley’s hymns even if one disagrees with the doctrine. But in this modern era, the sung praise in churches has descended to the level of the banal. Symptomatic this, of the modern evangelical dislike for doctrinal preaching, for catechising, for earnest and deep spiritual exercises of meditation, study, and prayer. Indeed, one might say that the sung praise of any congregation is in some way a “spiritual barometer” manifesting the spiritual state of the members. Rubbishy teaching and rubbishy songs for singing are hand-maidens, one of the other.

In 1861 the Church of Scotland evidenced an accelerating downward trend, when eighty years after it had sanctioned the use of the Paraphrases, it produced the *“Hymns for Public Worship”*. Only 89 hymns were to be found therein, and within just three years a revision was printed in 1864, in which 22 of the former book’s hymns were omitted, and a further 53 added. Herein again is a salient testimony against hymnody. If those 22 hymns in the original book were “inspired”, how come their “inspiration” wore out so quick? But the mad gallop didn’t stop there, by just six years later, in 1870, the *“Scottish Hymnal”* was produced, with, we are told, “purer texts” in some 200 hymns, of which only 64 were traceable back to the 1864 book. This chopping and changing suggests a wholesale “hit or miss” approach, they seemed to think that their hymns were “inspired”, but somehow in too many of them the “inspiration” didn’t seem to work. Anyway, this new hymnal did not retain its status quo for very long. By 1898 it was replaced by the *“Church Hymnary”*, which was authorised for public worship by not only the Establishment, but also the Free Kirk, the UPC, and sadly, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland, where, around the turn of the Century, there were great battles at General Assembly level over the matter of introducing hymns.¹³² This was the hymnbook, which as we have seen, was produced under the Convenorship of the Free Kirk modernist Alexander Balmain Bruce,¹³³ and which is now in its third (1973) edition.

And thus, as Scotland’s spiritual pulse slowed, and its godly fervour cooled, so its praise decayed, the demise of Psalmody and the introduction of man-made hymns manifesting the age-old and tell-tale symptom of a profound turning away from the Word of God deep in the heart of the churches.

¹³² Cf. DSCOT pp. 182-183 article “Church Hymnary” for these details.

¹³³ Interestingly, as an indicator of how ignorant we have become concerning all these people and their theological deviations, one should note how A. B. Bruce is still revered amongst Evangelical scholarship! Also, back in the early 1970’s his book *“The Training of the Twelve”* was reprinted by Kregel of Grand Rapids, USA. The blurb put out by Kregel quoted the recommendation of the late W.H.Griffith Thomas, a salient Anglican evangelical of this century. Thomas called Bruce’s book “.....one of the great books of the 19th Century”. Bruce published the book initially in 1871, only 8 years before he “strongly defended” the modernist William Robertson Smith on trial at the Free Kirk Assembly.