

THE SEABURY CENTENNIAL

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The Seabury Centennial by Morgan Dix

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MORGAN DIX

**THE SEABURY
CENTENNIAL**

THE SEABURY CENTENNIAL

SERMON

PREACHED IN TRINITY CHURCH, NEW YORK

ON FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH, A.D., 1884

BEING THE

ONE HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONSECRATION OF
SAMUEL SEABURY, FIRST BISHOP OF THE
CHURCH IN AMERICA

BY

MORGAN DIX, S.T.D.

RECTOR OF TRINITY CHURCH

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JAMES POTT & CO.

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1885

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SERMON.



PSALM lxxxix. 3, 4.—“I have made a covenant with my chosen :
I have sworn unto David my servant ;
“Thy seed will I stablish for ever, and set up thy throne from
one generation to another.”

UNEXPECTEDLY called on to fill the preacher's place this morning, I comply with a request which I sought to evade. And yet, dear brethren, it seems not out of order, that one of those whose privilege it was to receive the delightful Christian hospitality of our own people in Scotland, and to give them greeting in your name, should bring back words of love from them to you. It was my good fortune, on invitation of the Bishops of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, to be permitted, on more than one occasion, to address congregations of the Scottish Church ; to speak to them of our gratitude for the past and our hopes for the future. Now, at home again, I ought, perhaps, to be glad of the opportunity to tell you, though at very short notice, something about the sister communion to which we owe the first gift of the Apostolic Succession.

Churchmen, here and abroad, must by this time be familiar with the leading facts relating to the consecration of Samuel Seabury at Aberdeen, by Bishops Kilgour, Skinner, and Petrie, one hundred years ago this day. Beyond a doubt, the touching and sympathetic interest which invests that scene is due to the fact that the American priest represented a little flock in poverty and deep distress, while the Scottish prelates were as men ready to die, persecuted, yet not forsaken, cast down, yet not destroyed. There are no high colors in the picture, there is no shine of visible glory; the lights are like those which flared in the dark catacombs under the Campagna, the feast is of bitter herbs, eaten in haste, with the loins girded up and staff in hand; the greetings are exchanged between an exile and men under the ban of a frowning populace and a vigilant secular power. The scene is one to rivet the attention and awaken curiosity. When we go back one hundred years and look for the Church of Scotland (or what Catholics mean by that name), we seem to be looking for what could hardly be said to exist. And it occurred to me while recently in that country, and looking with wonder on the "desolations of many

generations," to ask of history how it was that, in the land of St. Columba and St. Ninian, St. Kentigern and St. Margaret, nearly every vestige of the old religion should have been obliterated, and men should have settled down into the condition in which we find the Scottish people of to-day? History, in reply, tells a strange and confused story; it has a fascination, however, of which he will become aware who studies the records of the past. Let me speak, briefly, on this subject.

If you turn your eyes to Scotland, as she was about the year 1530, asking yourself that question, how it came to pass that the old religion, instead of being substantially preserved as in England, should have been, then and there, repudiated and lost, you will find four factors in your problem—the king, the nobles, the clergy, and the people. You will find them all at variance. The feudal system retained its authority there longer than in any other kingdom of modern Europe. The nobles were powerful chiefs, each with his clan, a little army, at his back; many were their feuds with each other, and with the king. The Crown was weak; it was like David among the sons of Zeruiah; its effort was to assert its inde-

pendence of the nobles, and its right to rule and command. The clergy formed a class by themselves; the Crown sought in them allies against the nobility; it so far succeeded as to make the nobles the enemies of the Church as well as of itself. The people were disgusted by the vices of the clergy, and no wonder; for reform, in morals, in doctrine, nay, in everything, was the crying need of the day. And so things stood when the Reformation began its work on the continent and in Britain, and set everything agog. Who can wonder at what followed? The story of the Scottish Reformation is one of confusion and perpetual surprises. The Crown, whether that of monarch or regent during minority, was unable to control the nobility. The prelates of the Church were detested by the people, and envied and disliked by the nobles. When the time came that the Church needed aid, there was none to give it. The monarchy, bent on strengthening itself, at home by currying popular favor, abroad by foreign alliances,* let the Church go, a prey to its brace of enemies.

* The long minority of Mary Stuart, the unfortunate daughter of James V., afforded ample room for intrigues, quarrels, and conflicts. Mary of Guise, the Queen Mother, represented that party whose aim was to maintain the Papal religion and to make Scotland substantially

One cannot but feel that the demoralization of the old religion at that date must have been terrible ; it is impossible to account, otherwise, for the fury of Scottish reforming mobs. Imbued with extreme views by popular preachers fresh from the Genevan camp, they seem to have thrown to the winds all their former convictions, with every sentiment of affection or respect for the religion of their ancestors, and to have resolved to leave not one stone upon another of the ancient Church. In the island of Iona, alone, it is said, there were three hundred and sixty stone crosses ; of these but two escaped the wrath of the reformers.* The thoroughness of the work of destruction attests the intenseness of the popular rage.

a province of France. She found herself compelled to dissemble and temporize, and even to court and conciliate the Protestants, who looked to England for sympathy and help, and of whom many desired to bring about a union of the English and Scottish crowns. In pursuance of her policy, she succeeded in making a marriage between her daughter and the Dauphin of France, and in obtaining the crown matrimonial for Francis and the Regency for herself. Her death in 1560 and that of Francis in the same year, left the unhappy Queen of Scots at the mercy of her bitter foes. It is almost impossible to tell, in studying the annals of that troubled era, what was of religion and what was of mere worldly politics, so inextricably are things interlaced. During the regency, the government was always vacillating between conflicting parties and opposing interests, now showing itself zealous against the reformers, and again shamelessly bidding for their favour when it seemed its interest to do so. Politicians in all ages are the same.

* See *Iona and the Ionians, their Manners, Customs, and Traditions*, by W. Maxwell, pages 18, 19. Glasgow, 1857.