

**THE RELIGIOUS
CONTROVERSIES
OF SCOTLAND**

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The religious controversies of Scotland by Henry F. Henderson

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HENRY F. HENDERSON

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RELIGION IN LITERATURE AND LIFE

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OF SCOTLAND

BY THE

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ABSTRACTS

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INTRODUCTORY

THEOLOGICAL controversy in Scotland, since the Reformation, dates only from the eighteenth century. Prior to that time there had been controversy, fierce and incessant controversy, but it had been ecclesiastical rather than theological, and had to do with the question of Church Government, whether by prelates or presbyters, and not with the fundamentals of the faith or any of the doctrines of Christianity. Speculation on these high themes, even a free expression of opinion regarding them, was hardly known before the date mentioned, and could not be said to have been much encouraged in a land where unbelief was counted a crime, and blasphemy was visited with the punishment of death. Besides, the times were far too stormy and sanguinary to be favourable to the culture of theological studies. The despotism of the Stuarts had first to cease, a period of tranquillity to

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interpose, and a halt to be called to the hostilities of civil and ecclesiastical strife. We have to remember, also, the stimulus given to every form of energy by the union of the two kingdoms. Every kind of enterprise—social, commercial, intellectual—went forward at a bound. Both countries, but especially Scotland, reaped the benefit of friendly intercourse and interchange of sentiment. And it is a significant fact that the first theological controversies in Scotland entered from across the border, and had their cradle on English soil.

But although a late comer, theological activity in Scotland has more than compensated for this by the vigour and resourcefulness of its career. The ordinary Church historian has, indeed, hardly ever taken notice of this fact. He has seldom condescended to note the progress of religious opinions among us. He has never given a chapter to the history of heresy in Scotland. All his attention has been applied to the Church's contendings and sufferings in the defence of her rights, to the story of her struggles and collisions with rulers and civil magistrates, to the battle against patronage and the intrusion of presentees, while the work done in the theological cloister and the contributions of the Church towards the preservation and enrichment of her treasures of wisdom and knowledge—a Church's true riches—have been, as a rule, passed by as of little consequence.

Yet a thrilling story can be told under this heading, since to Scotland has fallen the honour of leading the way among English-speaking nations in the dispersion of religious ideas and the discussion of theological pro-

blems. She has had a democratic Church, and that, along with a rigid adherence to the Confession of Faith, has carried her into this proud position. As she has been accustomed to bring all her affairs before a popular tribunal of clerics and laymen, every apostle of progress that has appeared in her midst has had to fight his way through a phalanx of resistance and prejudice, with the result that he has always had a large and influential constituency to address; and the more his views have been challenged, the more widely they have spread.

For two centuries, then, Scotland has been a home and battlefield of theology; and while, during that long period, no theologian of the first rank has appeared, none of the calibre of Aquinas or St. Augustine, there has never been lacking men remarkable for their spiritual genius, interpreters of the mind of God, defenders and expounders of the Word, and masters in the understanding and unfolding of the method of Divine revelation.