
This small volume is based on the author’s Chalmers Lectures delivered in Glasgow and Aberdeen in 1976 and on the Thomas Burns Lectures given at Dunedin, New Zealand, in 1980. In seven chapters the Professor of Ecclesiastical History of New College, University of Edinburgh, examines the forces that changed the patterns of religious thought and practice in Scottish Presbyterianism during the second half of the nineteenth century. The first chapter, “Prelude: Before the Revolution”, when individualistic spirit infected social ethics, sets the scene by showing how religious conservatism in theology, in biblical and confessional interpretations, and in worship, was being undermined piecemeal before the middle of the nineteenth century. Puritanism was in decline as a new evangelicalism challenged church moderation in its two most obvious forms—rigid and restrictive sabbatarianism and word-centered pietism.

Chapter II, “Biblication Revolution”, first of the five thematic studies, points out that this Revolution ironically owes most to the conservative Free Church which in defending orthodoxy actually asked and answered the basic “critical” questions of the day. The challenge to biblicism is examined through the careers of Robertson Smith, Marcus Dods and A.B. Bruce, and Professor Cheyne concludes that Biblical Revolution in the kirk (all Scottish Presbyterian churches) was victorious by 1914. The Confessional Revolution is next dissected to show that by 1850 many people were uneasy with the worship accorded to man-made confessions. “The Great Confessional Controversy” arose from a new sense of history, from a new scientific world-view and estimate of man, from tolerance, moral sensitivity and a new evangelicalism—all departures from a traditional Calvinism. Cheyne’s chapter on the Liturgical Revolution is perhaps his most intriguing. The groundwork for a new openness in worship was complete by 1860 and again the course of development was interwoven with the other facets of the Revolution. His study of the Social Revolution covers better-known ground as he traces the roots of social Gospelism. To its credit the kirk was not afraid to stand boldly for social justice amid the horrors of industrial society. The final and shortest study, entitled “Revolution in Life-Style” or “De-Puritanisation” traces the reaction against the fanaticism of ultra Calvinism and against the tyranny of the “law” in distinction to Christian freedom.

In his Postlude Professor Cheyne asks, “How durable was the revolution...?” and concludes that a continuing and vital Presbyterianism in the *via media* will learn to appreciate the achievements of Victorian revolutionaries. This is a valuable, challenging, important book whose contents are of interest not merely to historians or religion and ideas but also to the social historian seeking to explain human behaviour. Its topic is Scottish Presbyterianism in Victorian transition, but Professor Cheyne has provided signposts for the understanding of present-day Presbyterianism, and that not least in Canada.

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