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The St Mary's Heritage Project

The Rev. George Almond, 1848

SOURCE:

This 'Ship of Fools'-style review first appeared on the front page of the Glasgow Examiner, of Saturday 26 February, 1848. The shortened version transcribed here was published in OUR SCOTTISH CLERGY - FIFTY-SIX SKETCHES, BIOGRAPHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND CRITICAL, Ed. John Smith, Edinburgh, 1849. [RGE 2010]

The Rev. George Almond, St Mary's Episcopal Chapel, Glasgow.

February 26, 1848.

ALTHOUGH religion consists in supreme love to God, and consequent obedience to his laws, it is essential, in a world such as this, that it assume visible, external profession. In the early ages the forms of worship were simple as the lives of the patriarchs and prophets. Altars were erected in the open field under the wide canopy of heaven, and there the devout worshipper prevented the dawn of the morning, and offered his evening orison by calling on the name of the Lord the everlasting God. How intensely interesting to follow some of these simple but devout men of antedeluvian times pitching their tents in the fields of Moreh, Mamre, and Beersheba, and with all the fervour of primitive piety, pouring out their souls to Him who is, from everlasting to everlasting, God. Patriarchal simplicity, however, gave place to a more imposing economy. Religion, which had been more an individual and family matter, next appears before us in a national form. The children of the faithful Abraham had their tabernacle and temple. A house of prayer was built in Judea for Israel and for all people. A gorgeous and costly ceremonial was then instituted, and in the midst of surrounding nations the God of Israel had a temple, and altar, a sacrifice, a united and favoured people.

After four thousand years had rolled on, and forty-two generations had passed away, Christ appeared in Judea among the people chosen from all the nations of the earth to preserve the knowledge and worship of the true God in this world. He proclaimed the great extension of the worship of God, and offended the prejudices of the Jews by asserting that the time was at hand when neither the Samaritan nor Jewish temple would be required - then God, who is a spirit, would be worshipped in spirit and in truth - when religion would cease to be represented by any one nation, and would be alike the property and the privilege of every nation, under heaven which received the testimony given concerning the Son of God.

As a matter of course, religion, since that time, has appeared in every possible form, from the great hierarchy of Rome to the half-dozen Separatists, who, with devout horror, thus address all Christendom, 'Stand by, for we are holier than thou.' For several centuries of the Christian era circumstances forbade any gorgeous external. By and by, however, Christianity came into favour, and its emblem (the cross) flourished not only on the place of worship but before the army marching to battle. Since then Christianity has existed by sufferance - now patronised by royal favour - now among the mountains of Switzerland - now in the fertile fields of Germany - now almost without form - now crushed under the incubus of a showy and imposing ceremonial.

The churches in Glasgow.

In Glasgow it appears in almost every possible variety. Here religious monarchy and religious democracy meet. The creed of one sect is sanctioned by Rome - of another by the British Parliament - of another by Calvin - of another by Irvine. One class think they must be right because they believe as do their betters - another believe they are right because they differ from every one past and present. One congregation is part of some great ecclesiastical hierarchy - another stands alone and refuses to acknowledge

any other as a part of the Church of the living God. With the exception of the parties whose creed has not yet assumed any definite shape, the forms of Protestant Christianity in Britain are the Episcopalian, Presbyterian and Independent. Events are hastening the union of all bodies under these three forms, and it is possible, if not indeed probable, that these three may also become one. Mutual explanation, and mutual concession, and denominational equality, may destroy denominational shibboleths, and the followers of Christ may yet be known, as they were in primitive ages, simply as Christians.

At present we take denominations as we find them, and deal with the clergyman of each altogether irrespective of their sectarian views, and simply as ministers of the Christian dispensation. The clergyman whose name stands at the commencement of these remarks belongs to the Scottish Episcopal communion, who, though Dissenters in Scotland, agree essentially with the Episcopal Establishment of England. The denomination consists of about 115 congregations, four of which are in Glasgow, namely - St Mary's, of which the subject of our sketch has been minister above 20 years; St Andrew's; Christ Church, Mile End; and latterly the congregation in Anderston under the pastoral care of the Rev. A. J. D. D'Orsey. The form of worship is essentially the same as that of the Church of England.

Sunday services at St Mary's Chapel.

The following is the order of the services at St Mary's Episcopal Chapel, as observed on Sabbath week: - Worship commenced at eleven o'clock, and the Rev. Mr Almond read the service, which was over at a quarter past twelve, having occupied an hour and a quarter. Part of the 103rd Psalm was then sung, and at 25 minutes past 12, his assistant having entered the pulpit, and repeated a short prayer, and also the Lord's prayer, gave out Luke ii. 25-31, and preached on it forty minutes. The sermon being over, after a few words of prayer and the benediction, the congregation separated at ten minutes past one.

The afternoon services commenced at a quarter past two, and the service was read by Mr Almond's assistant. At eight minutes past three the service was over, and the Rev. Mr Almond ascended the pulpit, and gave out the first three verses of the 122nd Psalm, as the subject of discourse.

George Almond's sermon.

He commenced his sermon by saying that on David's exaltation to the throne he gave the worship of God his earliest attention. The ark of God was restored to its place in Jerusalem. This Psalm (the 122nd) was in all probability composed when he had completed his arrangements, and when peace and prosperity prevailed in the land. He displayed an amiable zeal for the honour of God and for the good of his people. This is a test of spiritual condition, and indicates that the heart is right with God.

In illustrating these verses, we remark the delight that David had in the ordinances of the house of God. 'I was glad,' he says, 'when it was said to me, Go ye up to the house of God.' When the love of God is in the human heart, it produces a delight in the house of God. Some think the service of the house of God a task rather than a privilege, but in proportion as the light of the present dispensation excels that of the Jewish, should

be our attachment to the house of God greater than that of the Jews. We have the substance, they had only the shadow, and we should therefore avoid the mere semblance of devotion. If we form a proper estimate of our privileges, we will say, 'One thing have we desired, and that will we seek after, that we may dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold his beauty.' But again, this delight in the house of God was greatly augmented by those around him - his fellow-worshippers. He was glad when it was said to him by them, 'Go ye up to the house of God.' The diffusion of true godliness expands the heart. The spiritual good of others ought to have a place, and will have a place, in our hearts, if we have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Hitherto, in our churches, the dead professor has had the semblance of the living saints - many languish and decay, and their piety is ready to die. To such we would say, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhort one another daily, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching. Be assured that those who take offence at being warned respecting their duty are yet strangers to the grace of God. But further. The ardour of affection which dictated this expression of joy, in the view of going up to the house of God, is indicated by the second and third verses:- Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is builded as a city that is compact together.

I may appeal to you who love his sanctuary, Do you seek His face in vain? After the fatigues of the week do you not renew your strength and find a day in God's house better than a thousand elsewhere? What is it that delights you most? Is it to inquire in the holy temple of the Lord? What soothes affliction and lightens adversity? What prevents death from having its terrors? Those who have made the Sabbath a delight enjoy peace, as they attend to the divine ordinances and find the Sabbath a pledge of the Jerusalem above - of every dwelling in the house of the Lord. Such say, If we forget thee, O Jerusalem, let our right hand forget its cunning.

But though our best efforts should fail to induce others to go along with us the promise remains sure to ourselves. Where two or more meet in his name there the God of peace is present in the midst. We shall have the fellowship of the Father and the Son and of all the faithful in heaven and earth who are knit together compactly as a city. Be ye, therefore, steadfast, immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Be ye glad when it is said, Go ye to the house of God. You have the fellowship of patriarchs and prophets, and of the general assembly and church of the first born written in heaven. Such honour have all the saints, and may this honour be yours, through God's mercy. Amen.

The sermon was over at twenty minutes to three, having occupied thirty minutes. On account of our distance from the preacher some words were imperfectly heard, but the substance in most cases is given.

The reading of the Liturgy.

The reading of the liturgy of the Episcopal Church is no unimportant part of the service. The repetition every Sabbath-day of the same words in the same order, unless read with propriety, would become a heartless ceremony. A considerable part of the service is always the same, and, consequently, requires to be gone through with rhetorical as well as with Christian propriety. Of all that is intolerable and wearisome,

nothing is more so than the dull monotonous reading of this service; and, on the other hand, no service is more attractive when gone through with that propriety and energy befitting its importance.

We give the subject of our sketch no more than his due when we state that we know no clergyman who does the service greater justice. We have frequently listened to his *quondam* assistant, the celebrated Robert Montgomery, as he, in his own dashing and original manner, read the service, and to the sweeter and more winning strains of the successor of Mr Montgomery in St Jude's, as in his own sweet silvery tones, he repeated the sublime words; but at the risk of being accused as of a poor taste, we have no hesitation in saying, that we would rather hear that service read by Mr Almond in his own emphatic, earnest solemn manner, than by any other.

We were particularly struck with the accordance of the sound to the sense in his reading. Both in singing and reading there seems generally to be a determination utterly to disregard the analogy between sense and sound; but the subject of our sketch, in opposition to general practice, varies his manner with the topic. He has one voice for the historical and another for the devotional - one for expressing penitence, another for thanksgiving. This is according to nature, whatever art may say of it. The inferior creation has a voice of alarm, a voice of love, a voice of gratitude, a voice of joy, and is it not incongruous to hear a clergyman thanking God for mercies enjoyed in the same tone of voice in which sin is confessed and lamented!

Mr Almond reads the entire services well, but especially the Scriptures. He takes a good hold of the word and enunciates clearly, fully, and forcibly. His pronunciation is generally accurate, and his voice is pleasant and easily audible. His gestures, too, as he reads, are highly appropriate. Instead of mumbling over the service, he throws his whole soul and body into it, and, with uplifted hands and eyes, addresses Him who dwelleth in the heavens.

While we thus speak we do not mean to give any opinion of the service itself. Some parts of it might be curtailed and improved with propriety. 'Our most religious Queen, Victoria,' had better be prayed for as any of her subjects, as it is rather too much to assume that all our kings and queens (including George the IV.) are most religious. But it is not with the formula of the Church, but with the subject of our sketch, we have at present to do - it is of the discharge of his public duties we are speaking, and we repeat that in his hand the services of the church of which he is a clergyman, are very imposing, and may be very profitable.

But though we cheerfully concede to Mr Almond those great excellencies which mark his public work, we would with the same freedom state that in some matters there is room for improvement. We never saw in any clergyman so marked a difference in reading and in preaching as in his case. The reading is almost perfect; but in preaching there is occasionally a rapidity and indistinctness painful to the hearer. At times a stranger cannot follow his rapid and indistinct utterance. Would he just preach as he reads the service, his public services would be immensely improved. He has many of the chief requisites of an attractive orator, and might with a little care, be still more popular. With gestures so correct, and a voice so impressive and well modulated, he might thrill an audience, were his delivery a little more distinct and slow.

George Almond's Theology.

His theology is of a very healthy and unobjectionable character. Though he has to address ears polite, he knows nothing in his preaching but Christ Jesus and him crucified. He preaches under the impression that he addresses sinners needing salvation, and instead of complimenting his hearers on their privileges and attainments, he beseeches them to be reconciled to God, and to walk in his commandments and ordinances blameless. His views seem free of the baptismal regeneration and millenarian doctrines. He thinks soberly and has no disposition for the strange and the startling.

George Almond the man.

His appearance effectively seconds his efforts. In person he is of the middle size, and of comparatively slender habit. His scanty grey hairs cover a finely chiselled brown. His features are marked, and his countenance that of the old Puritans. He is a good listener - a rare gift among ministers, advanced in life. In general it is no ordinary infliction to witness an old minister listening to a young one. His looks now patronise, now forbid him - now jealousy, pity, scorn, love alternate. Mr Almond listens just as an ordinary auditor, and leaves the work of criticism till a fitting opportunity.

Mr Almond has been a clergyman thirty years. He was ordained in 1818, and became minister of St Mary's shortly after. He has latterly had a number of assistants, among whom was Mr Robert Montgomery, who afterwards withdrew with some of the people of St Mary's, and after worshipping for some time in a hall in Glasgow, built St Jude's. The congregation is still numerous and very influential, including a considerable portion of the *elite* of the city. We have seldom seen a congregation more devoutly attentive in the sanctuary, and they have oftener than once substantially shown their attachment to their minister.

NOTE: This review was written towards the end of George Almond's life [RGE].