

The Development of Ecclesiastical Art in Scotland.

THIS article is based upon a Sermon delivered to the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale in 1925 by the writer, when he was Moderator of that Court. It deals with a subject which is engaging the attention of members of the Church of Scotland to an increasing degree. The demand for a place of worship which is æsthetically satisfying is one which, having grown rapidly for many years, is widespread at the present day. The Reformers and their successors felt no such demand. For over two centuries preachers and worshippers in the Church of Scotland were contented with buildings which, both outside and inside, were of an extreme simplicity. The plainness of churches erected during that period was due to a variety of causes. The bitter reaction from all that savoured of Roman Catholicism continued to endure, and caused a persistent aversion to all forms of religious art. It is true that some seventeenth-century churches had paintings. The Chapel of Grandtully, near Aberfeldy, has a wooden barrel vault painted with medallions, four of which contain portraits of the Evangelists.¹ Yet it can hardly be doubted that paintings were exceptional. In wide districts it would have been thought idolatrous to admit into the House of God the creation of the artist's brush or the sculptor's chisel. The Second Commandment was quoted against the practice as it prevailed in the Church of Rome.

The architectural simplicity of the buildings must have been often due to the frugality of the heritors, who from 1690 were responsible for their erection and maintenance. The religious strife of the seventeenth century, the break with mediæval tradition, the deficiency of artistic fervour, and, above all, the poverty and backwardness of the country, all helped to contribute to the result.

The old post-Reformation Scottish Churches are not

¹ Mr Ian G. Lindsay, "Some Post-Reformation Churches," *Scot. Eccles. Soc. Transactions*, 1929, p. 133.

altogether devoid of architectural features. Some of them have spires, which themselves are outward indications of the purpose of the building. Others have on their belfries decorative features which constitute an attempt at architectural embellishment.

The ground-plan of the country church was often that of the so-called 'hall-church,' a simple rectangular plan which has had a universal vogue in the Christian World from the earliest days, but which in Scotland did not possess the apse that terminated the eastern end of churches in other lands.

The T-shaped plan was a much more interesting variety, being one which was evolved by the Church of Scotland as suited to its needs in worship. It was essentially an auditory church, adapted to the requirements of congregations who laid supreme stress on the Preaching of the Word of God. It was equally suitable for other purposes. Baptisms were celebrated in the face of the congregation, and needed no special chapel. The 'Baptism-room' was beside the Pulpit. As communicants partook of the Lord's Supper seated around a table or tables (boards on trestles) placed longitudinally in the body of the church, it was not necessary to construct a Sanctuary for a Holy Table.

The plan of the Scottish Presbyterian Church was formed mainly by the types of service held within its walls: for these services it was eminently suited.

The eighteenth century has been described as "the dark age of ecclesiastical architecture in Scotland."¹ The towns possessed some spacious and well-built churches, notable among which were the Tron, Edinburgh (1637-1653); S. Andrew's, Glasgow (c. 1740-1755), whose plan was based on that of S. Martin's-in-the-Fields in London²; and the West Church, Aberdeen. The country churches were simple structures, and are said to have been often in an unsatisfactory condition.

Nevertheless, these churches should not be despised because their appearance was plain or their condition was bad. Their walls were not enriched with the wreathed foliage of the sculptor's art, but they have a greater merit than has sometimes been accorded them. They often possess a homely dignity and a simple reverence.

¹ Principal Cunningham, 'Church History of Scotland' (second edition), Vol. ii., p. 419.

² Mr J. C. Thomson in 'Scot. Eccles. Soc. Transactions,' 1923, p. 105.

They harmonise with their surroundings in the villages in which they are set. They are not weak or tawdry. Their proportions are well maintained. They fulfilled their object well, and in their austerity expressed the religious character of the age.

With the incidence of the Gothic Revival, a more definitely 'ecclesiastical' type of architecture again arose in Scotland. Many Scottish churches of last century have considerable external beauty, being admirable in their proportions, refined in their detail, and impressive in their mass. As time went on the interiors also were approximated to those of medieval Gothic churches. The spacious nave with its adjacent aisles, and the long ranges of columns or piers leading the sight to the terminating apse, appealed to the æsthetic sense and induced the spirit of reverent devotion.

In recent years the Romanesque Style has been beautifully used in Scottish ecclesiastical architecture.

Churches of the above type, when of large size, have often a considerable defect.¹ They are ill suited for purposes of hearing. The voice of the preacher is lost in the long aisles and lofty vaults. The medieval church was built for the celebration of the Mass, and a church of similar plan may be ill fitted for the effective delivery of the Sermon. The Gothic Style, moreover, is not a living expression of the character of the Church of Scotland as revealed in its historical development and its present attitude. The Church of Scotland needs to formulate an architecture which, linking itself on to the past, connects itself with the traditions of Presbyterianism, which is an expression of the contemporary spirit which is suited for present demands in preaching and worship, and which, by its beauty, is a worthy temple of God.

What form would such an architecture take? In particular, where should the Communion Table be placed? In bygone days when communicants sat around a Table placed in the body of the church, the Pulpit, which on ordinary Sundays was the point of focus, was dethroned from its position of eminence. The old Scottish Presbyterian Church, in structure and arrangement, was

¹ Hope Bagenal, "Influence of Buildings on Schools of Music and Declamation" in 'The Quarterly of the Incorporation of Architects in Scotland,' No. XIV., p. 47. Mr Bagenal discusses the question of the old Scottish plan and the revived Gothic plan with reference to acoustics.

eminently adapted for *both Services*—the Ordinary Service and the Eucharist.

When the Sacrament came to be celebrated with the people seated at the pews, a Communion Table was placed below the Pulpit. It was usually set near the Pulpit, which dominated it completely. It often had little artistic merit. The sides of the space in which it was placed were occupied by seats for the choir. Such an arrangement could be neither fitting nor beautiful, much less devotional.

In recent years, however, the tendency to build churches with a Chancel has greatly increased. In these churches the Communion Table is placed within the Chancel and the Pulpit is at the side. This is, of course, the revival of a tradition going back to early Christian times, as far at least as the Holy Table is concerned.

In the pre-Reformation long church with altar in the Chancel the Eucharistic Service was the normal Sunday Service. The plan was largely dictated by the requirements of the regular form of worship. The altar was the point of focus for the vision of the worshippers. In Scotland the Communion is not the normal Sunday Service. It is usually celebrated twice or four times a year. Nevertheless, even though this be the custom, the Communion Table should hold a higher position of dignity and importance than it often occupies at present. Its very presence may remind worshippers of the Sacred Rite.

With the Pulpit in the centre it seems difficult so to arrange the space that the Communion Table obtains a sufficiently worthy and outstanding position in the church. It is still dominated by the Pulpit.

If the church terminates, like the early Christian Basilica, in a simple semicircular apse, the Communion Table, when placed on the chord of that apse, receives its due place. The apse would form the Sanctuary which would not be combined with a choir to form a Chancel.

[*Note.*—Strictly speaking, a Chancel is a railed-off or screened-off place comprising both Sanctuary (Bema) and Choir. Some basilical churches in Rome, in spite of restoration, show the old arrangement. The choir of S. Clemente was enclosed with a marble parapet and placed within the four east bays of the nave. The choir of S. Maria in Cosmedin, and that of the Cathedral of

Torcello, on an island in the lagoons of Venice, are also in the nave.

This type of choir was superseded in Romanesque buildings by the choir built out to the east of the transepts and terminated by the apse.

In the basilica the altar stood sometimes on the chord of the apse (S. Apollinare in Classe, Ravenna), sometimes in front of it (S. Paul's-outside-the-Walls, Rome), and sometimes much lower down (as formerly in S. Maria in Trastevere in Rome).]

The Pulpit could then be placed well to the side, in the angle of the walls. It might be made much more spacious than many modern Pulpits. There is no point in having a Pulpit small and cramped. Like the Communion Table it should be made an object of beauty, and would be fittingly carved with the symbols of the evangelists or figures of prophets or apostles. The body of the church would resemble the hall-church, planned as an undivided whole so as to be suited for preaching.

The arrangement suggested would appear to harmonise with present conditions and connect itself with traditions of the past. The Pulpit would be in a suitable and effective place; the nave would maintain the Scottish Presbyterian tradition of the auditory church; the Communion Table would occupy that position of dignity and importance which it deserves.

The interior would be beautified by the wise treatment of windows and walls.

Stained-glass windows have been a familiar feature of our churches for many years. The day is long past when any plea would need to be made on their behalf. Richly glowing patterns of ruby and emerald and blue, they are magnificent decorations, breaking the plain walls with hues which gleam when pierced with falling shafts of sunlight. Professor Cooper¹ quoted the words of Milton to express the ideal in stained glass:—

Storied windows richly dight
Casting a dim religious light.

A good church window would tell the old old story; it would be rich in colour; its light would be sufficient but not glaring; it would be a work of religious faith.

The ordinary worshipper demands a certain measure

¹ "The Fine Arts as Handmaids to the Church's Worship," at p. 13
² Scot. Eccles. Society's Transactions' (1913).

of simplicity in stained-glass windows. He becomes confused by the presence of too many patches of colour or by an excessive complexity of symbolism. The religious as well as the artistic purpose will best be attained by bold design, broad masses of colour, and the representation of some familiar Scriptural incident. A window with these features can appeal both to eye and soul.

Not only the openings in the walls but the walls themselves can be utilised for religious purposes. The finest form of wall decoration is mosaic. A mosaic picture is composed of a number of cubes cemented together, the cubes being made of a vitreous but opaque material coloured with certain metallic oxides. Mosaic was early used for the adornment of the church, and many mosaics are magnificent expressions of Christian thought and feeling. The mosaic of the enthroned Christ in the apse of Santa Pudenziana at Rome, that of the Good Shepherd seated among His sheep in the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna, those of events in Our Lord's Life in the Capella Palatina at Palermo, and those in the Mosque of Kahrié-djami at Constantinople, are superb memorials of Christian sentiment. The figures in Christian mosaics were set against a deep blue, and, later, a gold background, and the effect produced by natural or artificial light upon the gold and coloured tesserae is very splendid. The material adapts itself to the composition of stately figures and boldly-drawn scenes, so that both for richness and simplicity mosaic is unsurpassed.

Churches in Eastern and Southern Europe often had the lower part of their walls panelled with slabs of coloured marble. These panels formed a sumptuous decoration, and were a worthy base for the mosaic pictures above.

In the beautiful War Memorial Chapel in S. Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, the late Dr Macgregor Chalmers used marble panelling with telling effect. One can readily see how a building, small in size and simple in plan, can be made exquisitely lovely by the fine treatment of its walls. The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia at Ravenna is a simple Latin Cross, small in size, and enlivened on the outside only by a series of round-headed niches; yet the interior, glistening with marble and gleaming softly with mosaics, is one of the loveliest in the world.

A form of art suitable for small panels is 'opus sectile.' This consists of coloured glass, or marble, cut to shape to fashion the design. The Pulpit and Communion Table

in the old church of Inchinnan are beautifully decorated with 'opus sectile' panels. Prophets and evangelists are represented on the Pulpit, and the Lamb with Banner on the Holy Table.¹ In Newbattle Church there is an alabaster tablet with an 'opus sectile' panel showing Christ as The Sower.

Mural paintings have been largely employed to adorn the walls of the Christian Church. Byzantine churches are often covered with mural paintings, arranged in accordance with a fixed iconographical scheme. Each painting is placed in the most appropriate position, the Communion of the Apostles, for example, being painted in the apse, and Christ Pantocrator, surrounded by angels, in the dome. The pictures of the Greek Church played a great part in teaching the dogmas of the Church and in reminding worshippers of the events of sacred story commemorated in the Divine Liturgy. At the same time, crudely painted though they often are, they give a rare charm to the building.

Mural paintings in our churches to-day would fulfil a double purpose. They would enhance the beauty of God's House and deepen the spirit of faith. The effect caused by the representation in art of sacred persons and incidents works out in a very subtle way, but is very profound. Nowadays it may not directly teach, but the frequent sight of it impresses the subconscious mind and deepens the soul's faith in the truth set forth.

Seeing that stained-glass windows are permitted in our churches there is no reason why mural paintings should not also be allowed. As a matter of fact they have already made their entrance.

In the apse of S. Leonard's Church, Dunfermline, there is a beautiful painting of the Risen Christ with fourteen of His followers. The picture was painted in oils on canvases fastened with white lead on to the wall, thus obviating the danger from damp, which would affect painting on the wall itself.²

Where there were no broad spaces of unbroken wall to give effective display smaller oil paintings could be employed. There is no logical reason why the oil painting

¹ There is also much more opus sectile work in Inchinnan; mostly it displays heraldic designs. I am indebted to Rev. F. A. Steuart, B.D., Inchinnan, for the information given about Inchinnan in this article.

² I am indebted for this information to Rev. Dr M'Millan of St Leonard's, whose church has been so beautified, not only by his ideas but by the work of his hands.

should be refused entrance to the church. The Iconoclastic Emperors of the East attempted to banish pictures from the Greek Church because the icons had become objects of superstitious veneration, an error into which Presbyterian Scotland is scarcely likely to fall to-day.

In the country church of Foulis Easter, in Angus, paintings, one of which represents the Crucifixion, have been preserved since pre-Reformation days. They were carefully restored some years ago, and it is said that the worshippers, far from feeling anything alien to Presbyterianism in their presence, have pride and interest in these ancient works of art.

The church was once the greatest patron of the arts. Surely it is desirable now to employ the genius of the Scottish artist to beautify the shrine, to raise the spirit of devotion, and to glorify the Creator. A good painting of the sacred scene or person, set flush with the wall in a broad surround of wooden panelling, could not fail both to inspire the soul and bring an added beauty to the sanctuary. Each church might rejoice in its treasured works of art.

In this paper a plea has been made for a type of church edifice which is suited to the requirements of present-day worship, which is reminiscent both of older Presbyterian and early Christian forms, and which is beautified and enriched in accordance with the kindlier attitude now adopted by Scottish churchmen towards religious art. A plea has been made for a distinctive Scottish church, suitable but beautiful, an evolution from the past, an expression of contemporary spirit.

The writer is conscious that many of his readers may not agree with some of his suggestions, but he feels sure that they will all cordially assent to the principle that art should be more frequently employed in the service of the church.

The declared pride of worshippers in ancient churches which have been finely restored and adorned, is a sufficient testimony to the appealing power of the beautiful church for Scots people at the present day. Consciously and unconsciously they feel its attraction, and are drawn to acquire a still deeper affection for the place where God's honour dwelleth.

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