





## PREFACE

IN 1876, on the thirty-third anniversary of the first General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, the Assembly authorised ‘the publication of the *Annals of the Disruption*’, which was intended to present the official history of the founding of the Free Church.<sup>[1]</sup> In the same year John Greig and Son, the Edinburgh publishers, released an elaborate volume entitled *Disruption Worthies: A Memorial of 1843*. Dedicated to the ‘Ministers, Office-Bearers and Members of the Free Church of Scotland’, it lovingly paid tribute to forty-eight ministers and laymen who played a significant role in the creation of the Free Church. In the ‘prefatory note’, the publishers stated that the purpose of the book was ‘to aid in perpetuating the remembrance of the great event of 1843 which called the Free Church of Scotland into existence’.<sup>[2]</sup> What followed were brief, highly stylised and worshipful biographies.

Ten years later, another publisher released a volume which expanded the scope of the project to include those ministers who had served exclusively in Highland congregations. The biographies of the twenty-nine ministers included

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[1] Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption: with extracts from the narratives of Ministers who left the Scottish establishment in 1843* (Edinburgh: Macnivan and Wallace, 1890), p. vii.

[2] *Disruption Worthies: A Memorial of 1843* (Edinburgh: J. Greig & Son, 1876), p. ii.



in *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands, a Memorial of 1843* were presented in such a way as to demonstrate the

... character and services of those devoted Ministers of the Gospel who were largely instrumental in bringing about so important a result as the almost unanimous adherence of the Highland population to the Free Church of Scotland.<sup>[3]</sup>

These volumes, along with the second and much expanded edition of the original *Disruption Worthies*, became standard sources for Free Church history and held pride of place in the homes of those who belonged to the church.

These books also had an ideological purpose. In addition to the biographical sketches, they included introductory essays which attempted to place the Free Church in historical context and to show how the church was a worthy heir of the Reformation. This impulse was even more in evidence in the second edition published in 1881. This edition was released when debate about the future of the Free Church was still very much alive, particularly as it related to the issue of union with other Presbyterian churches in Scotland.<sup>[4]</sup> It is important to note here that the *Disruption Worthies* volumes were never intended as objective treatments of their subjects. Rather, their purpose was to keep alive the memories of some of the

[3] *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands, a Memorial of 1843* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1886), p. iv.

[4] The inclusion in this volume of Robert Rainy is particularly noteworthy. He is included as a 'Free Church Worthy' and is depicted as an heir to Thomas Chalmers and the other leaders of the Disruption. This, despite the fact that he spent much of his career deemphasising much of what the Free Church had originally stood for, and working hard to unite the Free Church with other Presbyterian bodies who allowed a much looser subscription to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.

leading figures in the church, so that their lives might be emulated.

The origins and history of the Free Church have been examined by some contemporary scholars. Thomas Chalmers, the undisputed leader and first Moderator of the Church, and Hugh Miller, the geologist and journalist, have both received careful study. However, many of the other ministers and laymen who were featured in the *Free Church Worthies* have been largely ignored in recent years.

The work which follows will look at the life and ministry of ten figures in the Disruption era Free Church. My intent is to present as objective an account as possible of their lives, with an emphasis on why they mattered in their time and what they still have to say to us in the twenty-first century. The men chosen represent a cross-section of the Free Church, starting with Thomas Chalmers, who led the church at its beginning, and concluding with John Kennedy, who represented the Highland part of the church. All of these men shared a commitment to the reformed expression of the Christian faith. Yet while they had much in common, there was also diversity in how they lived out their faith and conducted their ministries. They were imperfect men who nonetheless were greatly used by God. All of the book's subjects deserve a much longer treatment than was possible here, but I hope these brief glimpses will be helpful to the reader.

There are a number of people I would like to thank for making the publication of this book possible. I'm particularly grateful to Willie Mackenzie, Malcolm Maclean and the staff of Christian Focus who willingly took on this project and who have seen it through to publication.