
Rev. James Wright of Infirmary Street and Lauriston Street, Edinburgh

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James Wright (*c.* 1803-1878) represents one of the extremes of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Scotland in the mid-nineteenth century. He was a diehard Anti-Burgher – so committed to that position that he could not contemplate union with conservatively minded Burghers even after the Burgess Oath had been abolished in 1819. The history of the small denomination that he founded with Andrew Lambie in 1842 has been told in detail by Archibald MacWhirter,¹ and in this present article we want to look at some further aspects of Wright's ministry which were not touched on there.² While extreme in his ecclesiastical views, Wright was orthodox in his theological position (with the exception of certain views on the Book of Revelation which are discussed in this paper). His circumstances in a very small Presbyterian denomination were rather similar to those of a number of Scottish Presbyterians today, and it is instructive to see some of the issues that confronted him and how he and those around him responded to them. It is also interesting to see some points of contact between him and better-

¹ A. MacWhirter, "The last Anti-Burghers: a footnote to Secession history", *Records of Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. 8 (1944), pp. 244-291; reprinted in *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 275-340 (hereafter cited as *SRSHJ*).

² Our principal source for this paper is the manuscript material in the Wright-Macleod archive, a collection of documents belonging to James Wright and Walter Macleod which were left in the Scottish Reformation Society building on George IV Bridge, Edinburgh, when the heirs of the Lauriston Street congregation discontinued services there.

known Presbyterian figures such as Francis Macbean; the elder and the younger Thomas M'Crie; and Robert Shaw.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first considers matters relating to Wright's ministry at Infirmary Street from 1830 to 1842; the second his ministry (mainly at Lauriston Street) after the separation of 1842; and the third his activities as a writer and expositor. Appendices give information on his ordination sermon for Thomas M'Crie junior; on professions of faith in his congregation; on the conflict in the Lauriston Street congregation on the role of deacons; and on his views on Divinity training.

I. WRIGHT'S MINISTRY FROM 1830 TO 1842

1. Wright's settlement at Infirmary Street

James Wright was from Ayr, and was licensed by the Ayr Presbytery of the Original Secession Church in 1828. In 1830 he was called to Coupar Angus, being ordained and inducted on 3rd February 1830.³ By a curious quirk, one of the sermons on that occasion was preached by Andrew Lambie, his closest ally a few years later but after that one of his bitterest foes. Wright was not to remain long in Coupar Angus. In 1834 two calls were sent to him by the Infirmary Street congregation in Edinburgh, the first in April (signed by 106 members and 151 adherents) and the second in July (signed by 385 members and 68 adherents).⁴

The founding minister of the Infirmary Street congregation had been Rev. George Paxton (1762-1837).⁵ The congregation was formed in 1821 when sixteen members of various congregations asked Paxton to preach to them following his role in forming the Synod of Protesters.

³ The main published source of information on Wright's life is the account in David Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church* (Edinburgh, 1886), pp. 562-3 (cited hereafter as Scott, *Annals*). In addition there is the material in the Wright-Macleod archive and all MS. citations in this article are taken from this archive. For a succinct account of the origin of the Secession Church in 1733, of the division into Burghers and Anti-Burghers in 1747, and of the abolition of the Burgess Oath and the various reunions among conservative Seceders in the first half of the nineteenth century, see MacWhirter, *SRSHJ*, Vol. 4, pp. 277-280.

⁴ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 294, 326.

⁵ For George Paxton, see Scott, *Annals*, pp. 549-551; Nigel M. de S. Cameron (ed.), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 650 (cited hereafter as *DSCHT*).

As Paxton's fame grew, the Infirmary Street building, with seats for 980 people, came to be full to the point of there being standing room only.⁶ Many of those coming to him when the congregation began were from the Potterow and Nicolson Street congregations.⁷ In the autumn of 1832, on the basis of medical advice, Paxton told the Kirk Session that he was unable to continue in a full-time capacity and he encouraged them to find partial supply. A year later, it was reported that a congregational meeting had requested the Session to petition the Presbytery for supply from the probationers James Williamson and Thomas Callender.⁸

Nothing came of this, however, and it was James Wright who was inducted as "Helper and Successor to Paxton" on 2nd October 1834. James A. Wylie of Dollar (subsequently author of *The History of Protestantism*) preached from Jeremiah 23:22, Robert Shaw of Whitburn (subsequently author of *Exposition of the Westminster Confession*) addressed both Mr. Wright and the congregation, and the induction service was concluded with a sermon from Mr. Sturrock of Midholm on Psalm 132:8. The members of Presbytery present were "Professor Paxton, Dr. McCrie, Mr. Gray, Mr. Shaw, Mr. Wyllie, Mr. Sturrock" and the Infirmary Street elder John Cameron.⁹

James Wright's call to Infirmary Street does not appear to have been harmonious. Not long after his induction, the Session clerk resigned that post and the office of eldership.¹⁰ The former clerk stated the following spring that he had no sooner signed the call to Mr. Wright "than he repented it". The Session unanimously agreed to transmit the man's case to the Presbytery.¹¹ Another man in the congregation had allegedly proposed calling another minister shortly after the induction; a

⁶ Scott, *Annals*, p. 326.

⁷ Robert Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church, 1733-1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1904), Vol. 2, p. 279.

⁸ MS. *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume 1 (1822-1848)*. Meetings of 3rd September 1832 and 19th August 1833. "Mr. Callender" appears to have preached briefly in the Dundee congregation which adhered to Wright and Lambie in 1842. Williamson gave up preaching appointments in 1836, emigrated to the USA, and became a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in Massachusetts. See Scott, *Annals*, pp. 138, 572.

⁹ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume 1 (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 2nd October 1834.

¹⁰ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th October 1834.

¹¹ *ibid.* Meetings of 6th April and 4th May 1835.



The Infirmary Street church, Edinburgh, was where Wright acted as assistant to Rev. George Paxton. The section of the congregation which resisted the reunion of 1842 retained the building, sold it in 1844 and then moved to the Lauriston Street church.

[Photo: courtesy of Mayfield Salisbury Parish Church, Edinburgh]

committee of elders was appointed to speak with him about the effect that the proposal would have “on his own character”.¹²

In March 1835, after long negotiations, one of two men agitating in the congregation about unspecified complaints finally admitted that he was unhappy with Mr. Wright. A Mr. David Gordon told the Session that “he was not edified by Mr. Wright’s discourses and that for the glory of God and his own comfort he thought it better to leave the congregation”. It then emerged that he had not been in the church since Mr. Wright’s induction. Once again, the Session agreed to transmit the entire matter to the Presbytery.¹³

In early February 1835, Mr. Gordon and a Mr. Alexander Wood had attended a meeting of Session, to make a “statement of grievances”. The two men had insisted, contrary to the expectations of the Session,

¹² *ibid.* Meeting of 30th October 1834.

¹³ *ibid.* Meeting 30th March 1835.

that they were not purely speaking on their own behalf but were present as “Commissioners on behalf of a number of others”. The Session refused to hear them in that capacity but the two men refused to speak on a personal basis.¹⁴ A few days later, it appeared that Messrs. Wood and Gordon had then claimed to others in the congregation that the Session would not “duly consider of, nor afford relief for, their several grievances”. The Session decided to intimate that it would be open to hear any grievances.¹⁵

At the meeting of 30th March when Mr. Gordon stated his unhappiness, the Session was also led by Mr. Wood to believe “that he was not edified by the discourses he heard”. When the Session made clear that the paper of grievances would not be taken up by them as a petition from those he claimed to represent, Mr. Wood “laid down a sixpence, in absence of the Clerk, protested and appealed to the presbytery and withdrew”.¹⁶ The Kirk Session records contain nothing further on the matter.

In 1837 Paxton died and Wright became sole minister of the Infirmary Street congregation. In May 1842, he and Andrew Lambie separated from the Synod of Original Seceders in view of the impending union with the remnant Burgher Synod; and, together with William Snodgrass, a ruling elder from Wright’s congregation, they formed a new Presbytery. The previous month, a split had occurred in Wright’s congregation when a minority had decided to adhere to the Synod and had left Wright. The Infirmary Street building was retained by Wright’s congregation but was sold to the Free Church the following year, and in 1844 they moved to their new building in Lauriston Street.¹⁷

2. Francis Macbean and Thomas M’Crie, junior

Quite soon after his settlement in Edinburgh, Wright preached at the ordinations of two men who were to make a name in Scottish Church

¹⁴ *ibid.* Meeting of 2nd February 1835.

¹⁵ *ibid.* Meeting of 6th February 1835.

¹⁶ *ibid.* Meeting 30th March 1835.

¹⁷ The Kirk Session meeting of 8th May 1843 was the last one held in the Infirmary Street building, the next few meetings until Lauriston Street was opened being held at Niddry, or at 15 Buccleuch Place. The Session’s meeting of 6th May 1844 was the first meeting at which Lauriston Street was mentioned by name as the site of the new building. When the office-bearers met formally on 7th October 1844, it was decided that the next monthly evening lecture would be delivered in the new church on Lauriston Street. The Kirk Session met formally in the new Lauriston Street building for the first time on 24th

history but who were followed very different paths from his own. The first of these was Francis Macbean.¹⁸

Born in Corpach around 1794, Macbean became concerned for his soul in early youth, an experience so unusual at the time that neighbours concluded that “he had lost his reason”. He became a teacher for the Edinburgh Gaelic Schools Society, and by the mid-1820s was an inspector for the organisation. He and fellow teacher John Macrae (*Macrath Mòr*, later minister in various places in the Highlands) held the first ever question meeting on the Island of Lewis in connection with a communion season. Macbean presided over this meeting, held in 1825 or 1826.¹⁹ Thereafter Macbean joined the Original Seceders despite having taken a full theological course in the Established Church. Macbean was a hearer of the elder M’Crie, describing him as “one of the two most impressive preachers” he had ever heard, the other being Robert Finlayson, Lochs.²⁰

In the 1830s, Macbean was sent by the Original Seceders as a missionary in the west Highlands and eventually to Harris. Scott explains how this came to pass:

As it is not only the Church’s duty to hold fast, but also to hold forth the truth, and as in its earlier years the Secession had been instrumental in promoting the Gospel in Ireland and also America, the conviction was felt that it would be well the Synod should do something more than simply testify against the defections of other denominations of Christians. There being a famine of the word of life in the Western Highlands, and Mr. Francis Macbean, a Gaelic-speaking preacher in connection with the Synod, it was resolved to send him as an itinerating preacher to the Western Islands. By doing this not only was the Original Secession Church doing something towards fulfilling the commission to preach the Gospel to every creature, but it was at

October 1844. *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume 1 (1822-1848)*.

¹⁸ For Francis Macbean, see *DSCHT*, p. 504; Scott, *Annals*, pp. 575-6; Murdo Macaulay, *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis up to the Disruption of 1843* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 219-221.

¹⁹ John Macleod, *By-Paths of Highland Church History* (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 22-23. John Macrae (1794-1876) was licensed as a minister in 1830, after which he assisted the Gairloch minister until 1833, then went on to pastor congregations in Cross, Knockbain, Greenock, Lochs, and Carloway.

²⁰ *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, p. 25.

the same time procuring suitable employment for a Gaelic-speaking probationer, whose Highland accent was not very acceptable to Lowland ears.²¹

Macbean itinerated as a missionary for the Synod in Lochaber, Sunart, Uist (where a hillock still bears his name) and in Harris.²² In autumn 1835, he received a call, “signed by thirty persons, together with an adherence paper subscribed by 179 males and 209 females” from Harris. As the situation was unusual, the Synod asked for the opinion of Presbyteries. In December 1835 the Presbytery of Ayr passed the following resolution:

As the people in the Hebrides are in the meantime destitute to a great extent of evangelical preaching, and as one important object of the Secession was to afford relief to persons so circumstanced, the Ayr Presbytery think that they cannot withhold that relief from those who have applied for it. At the same time they think it proper to add that, in the event of the mission taking place, Mr. Macbean should be instructed to exercise great prudence in the way of confining his labours to those places where the Gospel is not preached, and avoiding as much as possible any interference with the ministerial labours of the more faithful pastors. Though some of the latter may have carried the principle of strict communion to an extreme, yet it might be inexpedient for Mr. Macbean to admit to sealing ordinances any whom these ministers have rejected.²³

On 1st March 1836, Macbean was ordained in Infirmary Street church, as “Missionary to the Hebrides”. James Wright preached the sermon and Robert Shaw of Whitburn gave the address to Mr. Macbean “who was missioned generally to such parts of the Hebrides and Western Highlands as he shall find most destitute in respect of hearing sound evangelical doctrine”.²⁴ Macbean’s remit to areas “most destitute” of sound preaching is puzzling because the main centre of Macbean’s

²¹ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 130-131.

²² *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, p. 26. Notes of Macbean’s preaching are given on pp. 36-39.

²³ Scott, *Annals*, p. 11. By the expression, “have carried the principle of strict communion to an extreme”, the Presbytery may have had in view the great caution about taking communion which had accompanied the revival in Uig, Lewis.

²⁴ Scott, *Annals*, p. 131; *The Scotsman*, 5th March 1836, p. 2, “Ordination of a Missionary”. The newspaper wrongly gave Macbean’s first initial as “J”.

activities – Harris – had already experienced a spread of gospel truth in the previous two decades.

Wright's sermon at the ordination was on 2 Thessalonians 3:1: "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you." In it he majored on the ways in which ministers should approach their work, as well as listing some obstructions to the spread of the gospel implied in the text. "A relation of the closest kind subsists between ministers and the Christian people – especially those who have been born again under their instrumentality."²⁵ He stressed that Paul had been "faithful and honest in dealing with men's consciences" and that this "gave him boldness and freedom in requesting their aid".²⁶ Ministers were "greatly indebted for their success to the prayers of their believing brethren". Despite Paul's gifts and his own prayers, he realised his need of the prayers of the "poor saints".²⁷ In an early example of the eloquence which Wright could wield in the pulpits of the Secession, he went on to ask rhetorically: "What shall we say of those clothed with ministerial powers, who calculate upon success by dint of intellectual strength or the fleeting breath of popular applause and are listless about and ashamed to request the prayers of the favourites of heaven, whose breath moves the hand that moves the world."²⁸

Macbean's time in Harris was not entirely happy and, probably in 1837, he had a serious disagreement with John Morison, the Harris blacksmith. Morison was a leading local evangelical and his forge was in the village of Strond, Macbean's base of operations. The cause of this contention is said to have been an announcement by Macbean that Rev. Roderick Macleod of Bracadale would assist at the Harris Original

²⁵ MS. *Hardback notebook, note on spine: "1836: Ordination Mr. McBean & Thomas M'Crie"*, pp. 66-67.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 68.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 69.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 69-70. The preaching of the Word was for Wright the paramount means used by God for evangelising the world. Without its already being present, there is no Scriptural evidence of any other means being effective in conversion and no direct warrant to expect an "assailment on the kingdoms of darkness and superstition". The congregation present at Mr. Macbean's ordination also heard an analysis of the obstructions to the success of the gospel. The carnal mind's opposition "to the searching purity of the doctrines of the Word" was then illustrated. Justification "stains his pride and irritates his corruption", while teaching man's moral inability and the need for holiness assails all that he "has esteemed and held dear". Pride, persecution, and Satan's power and influence, as well as false teachers, also play their part in obstructing the progress of the gospel. *ibid.*, pp. 73-79.



A view of Strond in Harris, the main base of operations for Francis Macbean, the Original Secession missionary to the Hebrides who was ordained by Wright. The Free Presbyterian meeting-house in the picture is close to the forge where John Morison, the preacher-poet, worked, and is up the hill from the site of the former village school.

[Photo: courtesy of Catriona Maclennan]

Secession communion which he was organising. Mr. Macleod at this point was at the height of his dispute with the Church of Scotland over baptism, but, his case going well at the Assembly, he did not come to Macbean's communion in Harris. Morison took the matter badly and composed a bitter satirical song about the office-bearers in Strond.²⁹ "Seisean Shrannda" – Strond Kirk Session – criticises three elders in the congregation. Morison tells of a dream in which he saw Macbean grave-robbing body parts to build a composite body made up of Calvin's head and brains, Whitefield's chest, and Matthew Henry's shoulder and neck. This body had no real breath but was moved by electricity to

²⁹ The poem is described by Principal John Macleod as "verging on profane", *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, pp. 26, 27. It is evident from the English poem referred to below that Morison was also far from happy with the tone of Macbean's religion and with the authority claimed by the Strond Kirk Session.

fake life. In another section Morison likens himself to Balaam's ass and Macbean to Balaam.³⁰

Macbean seems to have replied with a satirical poem of his own purporting to praise Morison, and to this Morison responded with another poem, "An Sgiobaireachd" or "the skippering". Macbean had satirically compared Morison to meek Moses for his patience and calm and Morison's response is to describe a boat whose equipment is being used without skill. Verse three can be translated: "O dear Francis, you sang the music too long; you let the main-sail/boom out too far, and the sail to the stern-post; When the course should have been kept to, the ripple(?) became a storm, a useless crew on board." Morison probably punned in using the word "sgòd" for boom/main-sail, as it also means conceit. He describes the crew as putting the ballast on the masts and tying the sails to the keel. In the last verse there is also an implied warning of the dangers of head-knowledge.³¹

Some time before the Disruption, Macbean left the Original Secession and moved from Harris to Stornoway; and at the Disruption both he and the Harris Original Secession congregation "were absorbed by the Free Church".³² Soon after this, Macbean became the first Free Church minister in Fort Augustus and Glen Moriston. Mr. Macbean was very strong minded. He took a similar position to that of Rev. Roderick Macleod, Bracadale, regarding baptism. "He would hardly give baptism to anyone that he was not prepared to admit to full membership of the church as a communicant and he was unusually strict in admitting communicants." Macbean frequently preached the Gaelic services at the East Church, Inverness, communion seasons – these were open air services held in what was then known as Bells Park, part of which is now occupied by the Inverness Public Library next to Farraline Park.³³

³⁰ G. Henderson (ed.), *Dain Iain Gobha, The Poems of John Morison* (2 vols., 1893, Knox Press reprint in one vol., undated), Vol. 2, pp. 24-32. An unnamed reviewer in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* commented: "It is a cause for grief that the song for the Strond Session was ever composed." The reviewer also said that the foreword in the 1893 edition of Morison's poems clearly showed that the editor did not understand what kind of man Morison was. "Dain Iain Ghobha", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 1, No. 12, April 1897, p. 474. An English poem of Morison's against the Strond Session can be found in *Dain Iain Gobha*, Vol. 1, pp. xlv-xlvi.

³¹ *ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 33-37. Macbean and Morison were subsequently reconciled "and lived for the future on terms of amity and esteem", *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. xlvi.

³² Scott, *Annals*, p. 131.

³³ *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, pp. 28, 29, 32, 34. An obituary stated: "Mr. Macbean was possessed of a natural eloquence. . . . Not a few who have listened to his discourses

Macbean may have left the Original Secession before the Disruption but from within the Free Church in 1869 he took up a position of opposition to their ecclesiastical rivals within the Secession “family” in the shape of the United Presbyterian Church. Macbean opposed the negotiation for union with that body which the Free Church leadership was promoting.³⁴

Among Macbean’s various literary contributions were two of significance to Scottish church life. The first was in 1813 when he published an unauthorised reprint of Dr. Ross’s 1807 version of the Psalms in Gaelic, but added a Gaelic translation of notes on the Psalms by John Brown of Haddington and his own edition of the Shorter Catechism.³⁵ The second was an account of a young woman in Edinburgh who suffered with lockjaw but showed great Christian fortitude in her affliction.³⁶

A few months after the ordination of Macbean, Wright was to preach the ordination sermon of another man who subsequently became eminent, the younger Thomas M’Crie. We have seen that the elder M’Crie had been present at Wright’s induction at Infirmary Street, though he was to die ten months later. Wright would sometimes remind his hearers or readers of M’Crie’s far-seeing prognosis of the eventual outcome of the ecclesiastical movements of his day: “I am persuaded that Voluntaryism in this country will carry the day”.³⁷ In his biography of his father, the younger Thomas M’Crie confirmed his father’s view of Established Churches: “He was disposed to be very apprehensive of their fate, and to despair of their being defended with success, – an anticipation which, though considerably relieved from its gloom by subsequent events, was never wholly removed from his mind.”³⁸

on the 107th Psalm, and on our Lord’s miracles as illustrations of his method of grace, will agree with us in thinking that a man of power became a man of faith, and a man of prayer was removed from the church when Francis Macbean died.” *The Home and Foreign Missionary Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, 2nd August 1869, pp. 183-184. The obituary inaccurately refers to the island of Mull as being adjacent to Ayrshire.

³⁴ *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, p. 40.

³⁵ D. Maclean, *Typographia Scoto-Gadelica* (Edinburgh, 1915), pp. 323-4.

³⁶ Francis Macbean, *Recollections of Betsy Lindsay; A Godly Young Woman who passed through much tribulation, and died at Edinburgh in 1839* (1881). Described in *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, pp. 24-5. The *Recollections* were serialised in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vols. 15-16.

³⁷ *The Ark*, Vol. 6, No. 7, July 1863, p. 56.

³⁸ Thomas M’Crie, *Life of Thomas M’Crie, D.D.* (Philadelphia, 1842), p. 295.

On 9th June 1836 Wright preached at the ordination and induction of the younger M'Crie to his father's former congregation of Davie Street, Edinburgh. Wright's text was Luke 8-13: "Take heed therefore how ye hear." The heads of the sermon were, "first – the manner in which we are to hear the gospel and 2ndly, the reasonableness of the caution".³⁹ Not only were hearers to think of the minister as the messenger of God, but to also hear the message with "reverence and humility". Wright added: "The importance of the message itself, the authority with which it comes and our great, our infinite need of it, conspire in producing devoutness at least externally. An irreverent hearer insults God, dishonours the place of His holiness, His especial seat on earth, not to speak of the discouragement of the servant."⁴⁰ More extracts from this sermon can be found in Appendix I. The subsequent paths of Wright and the younger M'Crie were divergent, with M'Crie not only helping to create the Original Secession denomination in 1842 but also leading a majority of that body into union with the Free Church of Scotland in 1852. In 1856 he moved to England and joined the English Presbyterian Church.

3. Pamphlet exchange with Robert Shaw on Church union

Robert Shaw of Whitburn is better known today for his *Exposition of the Westminster Confession* but he was also a leader of the majority which took the Original Seceder Anti-Burghers into the union of 1842. The ensuing clash with Wright and one of Wright's elders was more a pamphlet skirmish than a pamphlet war, but it nevertheless pitched two of the Secession's most talented minds against each other on a topic which had arguably restrained the body's usefulness over the years.⁴¹ The issue for Anti-Burghers in 1842 was whether union with a denomination which had never balked at taking the Burgess Oath was a surrender of principle, or a desirable step for the Reformed cause in Scotland. The

³⁹ *Hardback notebook, note on spine: "1836: Ordination Mr. McBean & Thomas M'Crie"*, pp. 191-192.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

⁴¹ Robert Shaw (1795-1863). "Though somewhat lacking in fervour, he preached the gospel in its purity, freeness, and completeness. He was distinguished for solidity and accuracy. . . . In private he was grave and dignified, a true friend and a man of sterling integrity. . . . He was highly esteemed in the district in which he lived and laboured, and also in the Original Secession Synod to which he was Clerk, as one who would support what he believed right, and resist what he considered wrong." Scott, *Annals*, pp. 333, 541; *DSCHT*, p. 770.

choice was brought into sharp relief by the fact the Burgess Oath had been abolished in 1819 by the Royal Burghs Reform Act.⁴² In 1842, Wright issued an *Address to the Associate Congregation, Infirmary Street, on the Projected Union between the Synod of Burghers and the Synod of Original Seceders*. This was the pamphlet to which Robert Shaw responded, and his reply was in turn answered by one of Wright's elders.

In his pamphlet, Wright argued that the Burgher Synod was being more honest than the Anti-Burghers in the negotiations. For him the issue at stake was that the sinfulness of the Oath was being fudged in the new Articles of Union. While the Burghers saw the Oath itself as ambiguous, Original Seceders could not do so, as they had "solemnly defined its meaning and brought themselves under highest obligations to maintain and defend it [i.e., their definition] against all tenets to the contrary".⁴³ Wright included a table showing the differences between the original Anti-Burgher position as of 1746, and that of what he called "Burgher Letters" in preparation for the 1842 union.⁴⁴ In his reply Shaw said that this was neither authorised nor official Burgher Synod correspondence but was in fact private correspondence published without permission.⁴⁵ Wright claimed that as part of the smoothing over of differences, the phrase "difference of opinion" was judicially admitted by the Synod of Original Seceders and that various draft Articles of Union had included it.⁴⁶ Shaw challenged this and several other assertions about the wording used in the various drafts of 1832, 1841, and 1842 – and about reasons why union had not been achieved sooner.⁴⁷

One factor in the pamphlet skirmish was the legacy of Thomas M'Crie senior. Shaw claimed that M'Crie senior and other Original Seceder fathers such as Paxton, Dr. Stevenson, and Thomas Gray, had participated in meetings of the 1829 Synod which had accepted a statement that they did not see "any difference" about "the meaning of

⁴² Scott, *Annals*, pp. 109-110.

⁴³ James Wright, MS. *Address to the Associate Congregation, Infirmary Street, on the Projected Union between The Synod of Burghers and The Synod of Original Seceders* (Edinburgh, 1842), p. 26. Our quotations and page numbers are taken from a MS. version of the published pamphlet.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁵ Robert Shaw, *Remarks on an Address by the Rev. James Wright to His Congregation, Infirmary Street* (Edinburgh, 1842), p. 5.

⁴⁶ MS. *Address to the Associate Congregation, Infirmary Street, on the Projected Union between The Synod of Burghers and The Synod of Original Seceders*, p. 14.

⁴⁷ *Remarks on an Address by the Rev. James Wright to His Congregation, Infirmary Street*, pp. 1-5.

the oath” as “a sufficient bar to fellowship” with the Burghers; this, provided that it was not sworn again by the latter and that it would be avoided by them, either for the sake of the ambiguity in its wording or in order to avoid offence.⁴⁸ Wright had quoted a passage from the elder M’Crie stating that the simple abolition of an offending oath would not “in itself heal the divisions which they had occasioned”.⁴⁹ Shaw implied in his *Remarks* that Wright had carefully extracted this passage to avoid revealing that the context was that of M’Crie’s pointing out that the removal of matters which cause division and offence may be divine preparation for facilitating a union.⁵⁰

A sustained answer to Robert Shaw came in a pamphlet by an elder from Infirmary Street, published later in 1842.⁵¹ The elder opposed Shaw’s view that there was no judicial acceptance of the Burgher position in the Synod of Original Seceders’ 1842 endorsement of the Articles of Union. “If a Synod, judicially met and constituted, approve – and that, too, by vote – of these articles, containing an allowance of difference of opinion, this is all that we common people understand by judicially allowing this difference of opinion.” He also characterised the Articles as being drafted in such a way that a person could read into them any meaning he chose. No two people could be found who understood them in the same way. Accusing even ministers of contradicting each other from the pulpit by their differing interpretations of the Articles, he branded them as written with “studied ambiguity”.⁵²

The elder also challenged Shaw’s use of the word “forbearance”. It should not mean “a parting with the truth or the profession of it”, said the elder. Rather, “to sacrifice any truth, or attainment in behalf of it, is not ‘forbearance’ but unfaithfulness”. He added that if, in order to obtain union, Churches either “bury or obscure the truth”, then they were

⁴⁸ *Remarks on an Address by the Rev. James Wright to His Congregation, Infirmary Street*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹ MS. *Address to the Associate Congregation, Infirmary Street, on the Projected Union between The Synod of Burghers and The Synod of Original Seceders*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ *Remarks on an Address by the Rev. James Wright to His Congregation, Infirmary Street*, p. 11.

⁵¹ “An Elder,” *Letter to the Reverend Mr. Shaw, Whitburn, Occasioned by his “Remarks” on the Reverend Mr. Wright’s “Address”* (Edinburgh, 1842). The identity of this elder is unknown, although William Snodgrass may be a possibility. The *Letter* is a vastly better performance than Wright’s original *Address*, and one suspects that Wright had learned some debating lessons from Shaw’s attack on his *Address*, and that he had a considerable hand in the *Letter*.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 5.

sinning. “If for this end we cease to testify openly and explicitly against public sins, either of past or present times, we are not forbearing one another in love, but are in reality encouraging one another in sin.”⁵³

He also argued that mutual confession should have characterised the union and that although the term might be “mean and dishonourable” at the time that he wrote, nevertheless it would have been the correct course of action. Concern not to “hurt the feelings of the Burghers” was one reason that Shaw had given for the way in which the Basis of Union was framed. The elder suggested that the best thing for the feelings of the brethren on the other side would have been to challenge them. “Should we, from a fear of hurting their feelings, wound our own consciences and dishonour Him in behalf of whose cause we had lifted up a banner?” he asked. “Instead, Sir, of uniting without confession, it would have been dutiful had confession, open and explicit confession, been the foundation on which to build the union. You had a duty to perform to the Burghers, and that duty was to use Scriptural means to bring them to a sense of sin committed against the Most High.” Shaw and the 1842 unionists had neglected this, a known duty, because to do so would have “hurt the feelings” of the Burghers; had they done their duty to them it would have been right and scriptural and could have led to a positive outcome.⁵⁴

Perhaps the clearest challenge made by the elder to Shaw’s assertions was to suggest that he try using the same reasoning as used in the 1842 union with regard to the Burgess Oath in dealing with other errors of the past. Shaw had used the yardstick of saying that “Scriptural forbearance” is necessary where the sinfulness of any Church decision depends on “the exact meaning and necessary application of the terms”. The elder then showed where that logic leads. Running that line of reasoning would have seen them justify accepting the sin of the Resolutioners in the 1650s, the sin of the Indulgences, the Oath of Supremacy, and the Professor Simpson heresy case, he argued.⁵⁵

The elder responded to Shaw’s interpretation of what the Seceders had been protesting about in relation to the Church of Scotland as recognised by the state at the Revolution Settlement:

⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

Did not the civil authority assume the power of judging, approving and ratifying, a Confession of Faith for the Church, before she had herself judicially done so? Did not the same authority establish a Form of Government without the Church's judicial concurrence, and that too, solely on the ground of it being agreeable – not to the Word of God – but to “the inclination of the generality of the people”? Can the Revolution Church be properly called the covenanted Church of Scotland? Now, Sir, have not Original Seceders not simply testified against Patronage and such evils of the National Church, but against the Erastianism of her constitution?⁵⁶

There are those that have suggested a different line of conduct from that which has been pursued by Mr. Wright. They talk of exonerating their consciences by Dissent or Protest. This is both a precarious and selfish way of dealing in the things of God, and a way heretofore cried down by Original Seceders. They may thus, to a certain extent, hold fast the *faith*, but it is impossible in this way to hold fast the *profession* of the faith. Nothing is thus done for the generations to come; for no provision is made for exhibiting and handing down the Banner, around which our children may rally. It is only the language of unbelief that reasons otherwise; for great is God's cause and truth and they shall prevail. Its friends, how few and feeble soever, have no greater cause to be ashamed of it now than at any former time.⁵⁷

II. WRIGHT'S MINISTRY AFTER 1842

1. Maintaining the Second Reformation testimony

Their belief in the continued obligation of the National Covenant of 1638 and the Solemn League and Covenant of 1643 had been one of the factors contributing to the separation of the Secession fathers in the 1730s. Once separate, the Secession Church had renewed the Covenants in 1743, and the renewal of the Covenants continued to be regarded as a duty among Old-Light Seceders.⁵⁸ This position was maintained in

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁵⁸ Scott, *Annals*, p. 8.

Wright's congregation after 1842, and in the run-up to an ordination of ten office-bearers, it was ensured that all of them had either recently renewed the Covenants or intended to do so at the next available opportunity. They had also to state that "Public Religious Covenanting is a moral duty seasonable at the present time" and that the National Covenant and the Solemn League and Covenant were of perpetual obligation.⁵⁹

The split in the congregation over the 1842 union with the remnant Burgher Synod, and the refusal of most of the people in Infirmary Street congregation to join the union, led to some discussion as to who should be considered members of the Kirk Session. Mr. Wright answered: "those who according to their ordination vows adhere to our present testimony and reject the Basis of the proposed Union." The Session voted seven to three in support of Mr. Wright's answer, but three of the elders protested against the decision and appealed to the Presbytery.⁶⁰ Later, a class was set up for "instructing the young of the congregation, under the superintendence of the Session" which met on Friday evenings.⁶¹ Wright at this time stressed his views on the oneness of the visible Church which, to him, meant primarily the Church most closely following Scripture and Second Reformation attainments.

Wright expressed himself strongly when he felt that a part of the visible Church was retreating from its attainments. In a lecture dating from the Disruption period, he equated the garment of Revelation 16:15 to the garments of Revelation 3:4 and both to the Testimony (a word he spells with a capital "T" in his lecture notes) of the Church. He states clearly of the word "garment" in the lecture on Revelation 16:15: ". . . in the Apocalypse it denotes the Church's public profession." He adds: "We are told . . . that the witnesses are slain because of this testimony which they are finishing and with which they tormented their adversaries which slew them." Formerly they were exhorted to keep the garments clean but now they were to keep the garments themselves. "If in former trying occasions it was difficult to keep a clean profession, now it will be most serious work to keep by the profession itself." The influence of the three

⁵⁹ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume 1 (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 3rd November 1836.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* Meeting of 4th April 1842.

⁶¹ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th August 1842. There was clearly a desire to instruct the young people and, given the date of its inception, this class may well have aimed at clarifying what was a very distinctive position ecclesiastically.

frogs in Revelation 16:13 and “the wicked popularity” of the standards they fly would be so great that “very few names will be found adhering to the profession”. People would become indifferent to it and regardless of it, to the extent that “they will not scruple even to desert it and swell the ranks of the adversary”. Those who in contrast would obey the injunction to keep their garment clean would enjoy “the blessing of God”. This blessing included “eternal communion with the Trinity”. But they would meet with “opposition from the world – from the world called religious, from acquaintances and relations according to the flesh, near and dear”.⁶² These words, uttered in 1844, may have been referring, obliquely at least, to those who in his view had given up the Anti-Burgher witness in their union of 1842.

The Lauriston Street congregation renewed the Covenants in 1845, soon after moving into their new building. Mr. Lambie commenced the service, preaching from 2 Samuel 21:1. Mr. Wright intimated that those who would join in renewing the Covenants for the first time would stand up and give their agreement before the congregation and three people did so. The Covenants were then renewed.⁶³ The ritual of renewing the Covenants was not a frequent occurrence in the Secession. Scott states:

The service was only occasional, and not stated; or, in other words, it was not observed at stated periods like the Lord’s Supper, but only at rare periods, of say twenty or thirty years, or immediately after some ecclesiastical epoch – of a disruption, or a union. Intimation of the approaching solemnity was given months beforehand, and discourses were delivered from the pulpit on Sabbaths, and instructions given during week-days, bearing on not only the duty of consecration to God, but also conveying intelligence of what both ancient Israel and the Scottish Covenanters had achieved in connection with similar deeds. All intending Covenanters were conversed with by the minister, and required to be approved by both him and the Session.⁶⁴

⁶² MS. *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845*. “Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon.”

⁶³ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume 1 (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 24th April 1845.

⁶⁴ Scott, *Annals*, p. 11.

In early 1853, the need for a continued separate witness was sufficiently on the mind for one elder, John Angus (who had not been able to devote as much time to his duties as an elder as he wished), to resume office on a more full-time basis. It emerged that Mr. Angus and the elder John Smith had heard statements to the effect that “some of our brethren, were alluding to something in the shape of negotiations, with another religious association anent amalgamation, at the expense of our distinctive profession”. The Kirk Session agreed that “it furnishes an additional call to acknowledge the goodness of God, in having mercifully and almost miraculously preserved us during the last thirteen years, in formal adhesion to it, and to take courage, in prosecuting the same duty on the same ground, and by the same means; and also that, they view as an act altogether unwarrantable the dealing of our brethren, with any of another, and abjured profession – and in conclusion the Session agreed to declare their incompetency as a Court of Christ, to entertain any application of such an inconsistent object”.⁶⁵ A Mr. James Wood was to be spoken to privately by one of the elders because of his “giving out certain opinions utterly at variance with the Testimony in our hands”.⁶⁶

The need for precision in maintaining the Testimony was also seen in their handling of an application to join their ranks from a Mr. John Tyndal, described as a “preacher of the Free Church”, when he requested to be admitted into communion at Lauriston Street in April 1862. He submitted a Petition and Protest which he had presented to the Free Church Presbytery of Edinburgh and it was agreed to ask him to attend the following meeting of Session.⁶⁷

Later that month, the Session received Mr. Tyndal as a *member*, instead of admitting him as a preacher of the Gospel. In subsequent discussion with the Session Mr. Tyndal professed –

that he holds the doctrine of the Unity and continuous identity of the visible Church of Christ; and that the Original Secession, adhering to the Covenanted principles of the Second Reformation, is that one Visible Church; and that the Judicial Act Declaration and Testimony emitted by the Seceders in 1736, along with their

⁶⁵ MS. *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 30th May 1853, pp. 90-91.

⁶⁶ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th April 1862, p. 216.

⁶⁷ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th April 1862, p. 216.

Declinature in 1739, as more fully developed in the Anti-burgher Controversy brought to issue in 1747, define the true position and principles of this Church at that period. Mr. Tyndal further professed that, in consistency with the principle of Unity declared above, he would reckon it a violation of principle and profession to join in public worship with any other religious association under any circumstances.⁶⁸

He was then separately admitted as a preacher in the body in the next month, May 1862. It appears that Mr. Tyndal's precise stance and circumstances were not clear prior to his being licensed and this was investigated. Clarification was sought as to a phrase he used in his pamphlet *Dissectors Dissected* which seemed to imply approval of a role for the government in the spiritual sphere of the Church's work.⁶⁹ At page ten he had written: ". . . the Word of the Lord, and the Confession of Faith, expounding its meaning, allows the magistrate's interference in things spiritual also." Mr. Tyndal explained that this simply meant "matters ecclesiastical, *circa sacra*, without any reference to the administration of the Word, and Sacraments or to the power of the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; which as they affect the heart and the conscience, are properly called spiritual". The Session was satisfied with this explanation.⁷⁰

The precise contractual terms on which Mr. Tyndal was being licensed were spelled out to him. A note in the margin of the Minutes of the Session meeting where he was licensed refers to this. It states: "before the questions of the Formula were put to Mr. Tyndal he was expressly informed that the Session could not promise him any pecuniary help nor even employment; but that he was to be licensed in order to itinerate and preach wherever an opportunity was afforded in providence. Mr. Tyndal said he understood this well, and that he was satisfied."⁷¹

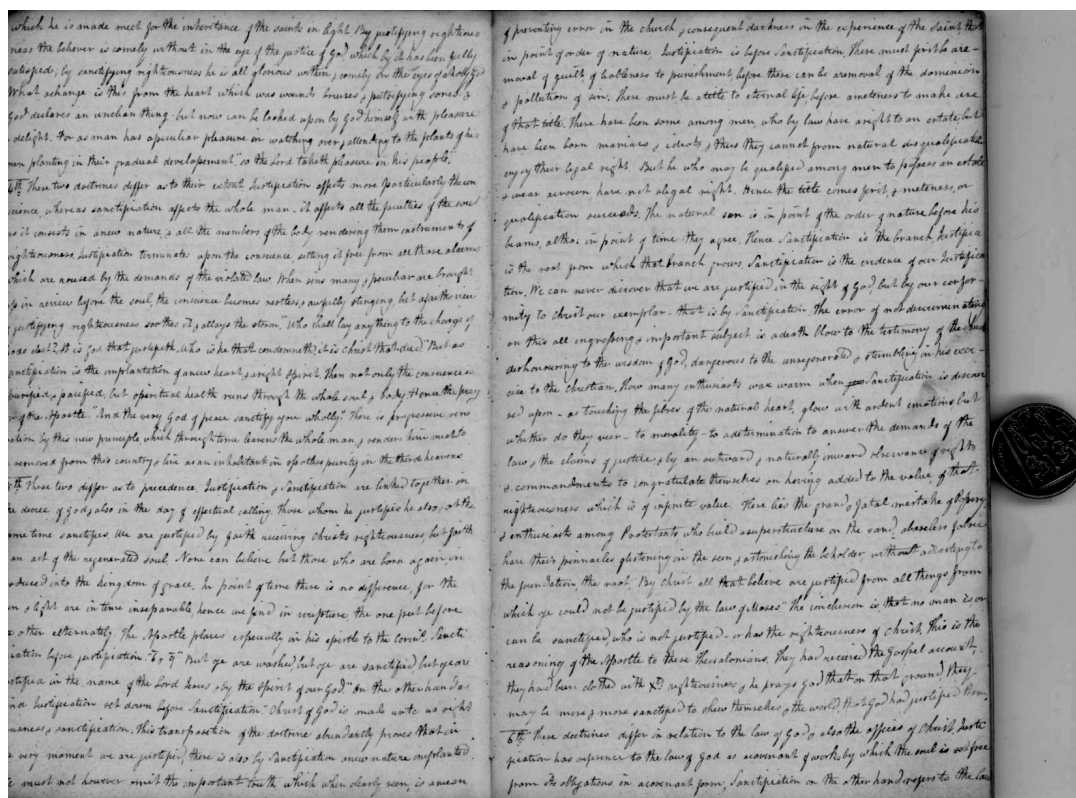
In 1844 Wright had written to Thomas Chalmers expressing his regret that the Free Church was reluctant to commit herself formally to

⁶⁸ *ibid.* Meeting of 14th April 1862, pp. 217-219.

⁶⁹ "Scrutator", *The Dissectors Dissected, Or, A Review of the Opinions of Certain Leaders of the Free Church Regarding the Doctrine of Christ's Headship Over the Visible Church on the Cardross Case* (Edinburgh, 1860), 128 pages. The book was advertised on the front page of *The Scotsman* of 17th August 1860.

⁷⁰ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 5th May 1862, pp. 223-224.

⁷¹ *ibid.* Meeting of 5th May 1862, pp. 224-5.



An example of Rev. James Wright's sermon notes in miniscule hand-writing, with a 10p piece, dated 2013, beside it for comparison.

the attainments of the Second Reformation. "Up to this hour," he warned Chalmers, "great dubiety hangs over the vague deliverances of the Free Church . . . the vagueness to which I allude, bears not only on one point but upon the whole character and standing of the Free Church." Wright was exercised by the Free Church leadership's use of the Covenants and Martyrs in their rhetoric but their failure to enact "any judicial measure, in regard to this claim of identification". He was particularly disappointed by the conclusion of a Committee chaired by Dr. James Buchanan which had been tasked with considering a Testimony for the Free Church. The decision was not to do so, "as the Protest and Deed of Demission sufficiently show her distinctive principles".⁷² In what seems with hindsight an early suspicion that all was not right in the new Free Church, Wright claimed in his *Letter* that there could only be two reasons: either the Committee could not agree as to what was essential to the Church's Testimony, or they deliberately

⁷² "A Free Church Presbyterian", *Letter to Thomas Chalmers, DD, LLD, on the Present Position of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1844), pp. 4, 7, 9.

avoided taking a specific stance in order to facilitate the eventual incorporation of other denominations.⁷³

In the mid-1840s the Ross-shire Free Church minister, Rev. David Carment (1772-1856), had stated that he believed the Covenants should be renewed. "I hold the descending obligation of the covenant," he told the 1843 General Assembly.⁷⁴ At the special General Assembly of the Free Church, held in Inverness in 1845, Mr. Carment said he wished they would go to Culloden Moor and renew the Covenants there. He told the Assembly that he viewed the neglect of the Covenants as "a great national sin".⁷⁵ These remarks may have also encouraged Wright. The issue was further discussed by the Free Church in their 1847 General Assembly.⁷⁶ In 1851 the Free Church issued an Act outlining its position with regard to the Covenants, the Second Reformation of 1638-1650, and the Revolution Settlement of 1690. This argued that while there were failings in the Settlement, nevertheless it was something to be thankful for. The 1851 Act also presented the Ten Year's Conflict and Disruption of 1843 as a "Third Reformation" which moved the Church on from the 1690 situation.⁷⁷

In the summer of 1862, Wright was intrigued by a neo-Covenanter movement within the Free Church. It was called the "Association in Connection with the Free Church for Promoting the Principles of the Covenanted Reformation" and it was campaigning for the Free Church to recognise "the continued obligation and the renewal of the covenant engagements". The Association had emerged in the early 1850s and

⁷³ *ibid.*, pp. 11-19. Wright also traced the role of Erastianism (state control of the Church) down through Scottish history and denied the Free Church's claim to be the continuation of the Reformed Church between 1638 and 1650.

⁷⁴ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland; with a Sketch of the Proceedings of the Residuary Assembly* (Edinburgh, 1843), p. 139. For Carment, see J. A. Wylie (ed.), *Disruption Worthies: A Memorial of 1843* (Edinburgh, 1881), pp. 147-152.

⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland held in Inverness, August, 1845* (Edinburgh, 1846), p. 94.

⁷⁶ *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland held at Edinburgh, May 1847* (Edinburgh, 1847), pp. 247-259.

⁷⁷ *The Subordinate Standards and Other Authoritative Documents of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1851), pp. v-xv. In 1910 the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's Synod expressed continued agreement with the 1851 Act: "The Synod heartily concur in the above statement of the Church in 1851, and they declare that, in their humble judgment, the fact that the 'Rescissory Act' has been left unrepealed on the Statute Book leaves the Presbyterians of Scotland in a dangerous position, and that effective steps should be taken for its repeal along with all the other pernicious cognate Acts of that period of our history." See "A Declaration anent Reformation Attainments, and the Church's relation thereto", *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, Vol. 15, August 1910, pp. 147-153.

published several documents then and in the early 1860s. Wright's analysis was careful and sympathetic in tone but was to the effect that they would not succeed in their aims, and would have more influence by adhering to the position taken up by the elder Dr. M'Crie and by entering discussions about joining Wright's own ranks.⁷⁸

For Wright the existence of multiple denominations was a cause for concern as he believed that there should be only one Church in Scotland and that it should be based on Anti-Burgher Secession principles. For him the fragmented state of the Church had practical consequences: one of his evening lectures was to be entitled "Inadequacy of Denominationalism to meet present exigencies". Wright also planned a concise series of Sabbath evening lectures on Presbyterianism and used as his main source Lorimer's *Manual of Presbyterianism*.⁷⁹ He also devoted two issues of *The Ark* (May 1862 and May 1863) to the "Unity of the Visible Church", as well as a series of lectures in 1873.

2. Vows

A member of the Lauriston Street congregation, who had enrolled himself as a Volunteer in the cause and defence of the Queen of Spain, was suspended from sealing ordinances, and appeared to be "extremely sorry for his conduct".⁸⁰ The seriousness with which the Lauriston Street Kirk Session took the issue of oaths was seen in their refusing access to the Lord's Supper to a soldier of the British Army in October 1850. A Corporal Wood of the 93rd Highlanders had applied for communicant membership, but the Session came to the conclusion "that as the Military oath which he has sworn is a 'general and unqualified oath of Allegiance to the Sovereign', it does not consist with the Testimony in our hands and it would involve Mr. Wood in contradiction upon such a solemn matter".⁸¹

⁷⁸ *The Ark*, Vol. 5, No. 6, June 1862, pp. 41-48, "The Covenanting Movement within the Free Church". The secretary of the Association in 1857 was Rev. Robert McCorkle, St. Ninian's, Stirling. See advertisement in *The Home and Foreign Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1st May 1857.

⁷⁹ MS. *Notebook*, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857".

⁸⁰ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 28th December 1835.

⁸¹ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 21st October 1850, p. 45.

A member of the congregation, Thomas Lindsay, had “become involved in certain oaths condemned in the Testimony as sinful” and the elders, John Angus and William Snodgrass, were appointed to speak to him.⁸² The next Session meeting heard that Mr. Lindsay had been spoken to at considerable length due to his “qualifying for council. . . . He does not admit that he sees the oaths he has taken to be inconsistent with our Testimony, that he views them as binding merely to support the Queen being protestant, but not as being of any particular denomination of protestants.” The Session decided to ask Mr. Lindsay to attend their next meeting.⁸³ Mr. Lindsay did not appear. The Session agreed to accommodate Mr. Lindsay by further requesting him to attend a meeting on 19th February.⁸⁴ Still Mr. Lindsay did not turn up so the Session decided to cite him a third time, stating in the letter that “the glory of Zion’s King in the maintenance of our holy profession” was their aim.⁸⁵ That month, Mr. John Wood had written to the Session announcing himself to be no longer connected with the congregation. The Session took the view that people who had made a public profession of their principles by joining in communion with the congregation could only relinquish that profession “in violation of their solemn vows and therefore two elders were appointed to visit Mr. Wood”.⁸⁶ The two elders appointed to speak to Mr. Wood reported that it had been “without any good effect”. Mr. Lindsay likewise had been cited the third time but had not appeared.⁸⁷

Despite disapproval of various public oaths relating to the basis of the British Constitution, Wright and his followers were loyal subjects of the crown. They believed they had a duty to witness to the government, including the reigning monarch. One example of this came in November 1862 when they decided to “address the reigning Monarch by a solemn Representation of the National Apostacy from God, and the judgements that must inevitably follow, unless averted by a speedy repentance and

⁸² *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 4th December 1843.

⁸³ *ibid.* Meeting of 8th January 1844.

⁸⁴ *ibid.* Meeting of 5th February 1844.

⁸⁵ *ibid.* Meeting of 19th February 1844.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* Meeting of 19th February 1844.

⁸⁷ *ibid.* Meeting of 8th April 1844.

reformation”.⁸⁸ Progress on the Address to the Queen appears to have been slow as the Session was not asked to approve a draft until the end of May 1863. This was duly sent to the Duke of Argyll in his capacity as Lord Privy Seal.⁸⁹ The Address was presented to Her Majesty in June.⁹⁰

3. Occasional hearing

One boundary which the congregation would not allow its members to cross was attendance at the services of other denominations. The term used for this in old Scottish Church life was “occasional hearing”. This was analogous to “promiscuous hearing” in other times. Wright may have seen the prohibition on occasional hearing as foundational to consistent Anti-Burgher practice. As a divinity student he had been set the task by the Presbytery of writing a negative answer to the following two questions: “Is it consistent to attend upon any one ordinance in a church with which we cannot hold fellowship in all the ordinances of religion?” or, “Does an attendance upon any one ordinance in a church constitute the attender a member of that church?”⁹¹

However, the prohibition on occasional hearing was not an Anti-Burgher distinctive but a wider practice in Scottish Church life. Dr. Candlish was for a time in favour of the stance: James Wright wrote once that at the time of the Disruption Dr. Candlish said in the Free Church Assembly that it would be “inconsistent in any of the adherents of the Free Church to worship God even occasionally in any of the Established Churches”.⁹² The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland enforced

⁸⁸ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 10th November 1862, p. 234.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* Meeting of 31st May 1863, p. 249. George Douglas Campbell (1823-1900) was eighth duke of Argyll in the peerage of Scotland and first duke of Argyll in the peerage of the United Kingdom. He opposed the Disruption but felt that Scotland had not been properly treated by Parliament in the matter. He had played a large role in Scottish and British public life, promoting Jewish civil rights in Britain and slave emancipation in the USA, as well as writing on evolution and land management among other topics. He was Secretary of State for India from 1868 to 1874. See entry in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

⁹⁰ The Address plus ensuing correspondence are to be found later in the *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)* at pp. 252-257.

⁹¹ Scott, *Annals*, p. 126.

⁹² Wright conceded that Dr. Candlish had subsequently changed his mind, calling with others for pulpit exchanges and free communion with other churches. *The Evangelical Alliance the Embodiment of the Spirit of Christendom* (Edinburgh, 1847), p. 126.

the prohibition on occasional hearing until 1831. In what was to be their last debate on the issue, the Reformed Presbyterian Synod in that year deemed it “inexpedient” to accept a request by a minority of elders in Stranraer, which would have seen members disciplined for attending a service in the Established Church.⁹³ One historian of the Secession stated that the efforts to prevent occasional hearing “were frequent, and sometimes severe; yet that they were not efficacious, appears now and again in both Sessional and Presbyterial records”.⁹⁴

The Anti-Burgher union of 1842 had in its foundation document, the Basis of Union, a strong opposition to occasional hearing: “The Synod do earnestly recommend and urge greater strictness in this matter; as believing it to be more conducive to edifying and consistent fellowship, more fitted to excite to serious efforts for the healing of existing divisions, and, therefore, more accordant with the spirit even of a true and enlarged charity, to refrain (until such differences shall have been adjusted on scriptural grounds) from everything that would imply a slight estimate of matters of difference, or incline to a resting contented with a partial, instead of a real and thorough union.”⁹⁵

The elder Thomas M’Crie enforced the policy during his ministry,⁹⁶ but his son, the younger Thomas M’Crie, came to oppose the stance. “In their extreme aversion to incur the charge of schism, they were led into that course of narrowness and exclusiveness for which they were blamed from the commencement of their history,” he once wrote. “On the same principle they condemned the practice of what was called ‘occasional hearing’ or joining in the acts of worship with other churches.”⁹⁷

Opposition to Seceders’ worshipping in other denominations sometimes helped in Church extension. As occasional hearing was in 1752 “a laxity too detestable to be tolerated”, large numbers of Seceders had gathered from up to twenty miles away to one of their first outposts in the north-east: at Craigdam, Aberdeenshire. As this grew, new congregations were hived off, including one in the city of

⁹³ M. Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland, Its Origin and History, 1680-1876* (Glasgow, 1893), pp. 168, 178, 250.

⁹⁴ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 126-128.

⁹⁵ Scott, *Annals*, p. 144.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 127.

⁹⁷ Thomas M’Crie, *The Story of the Scottish Church from the Reformation to the Disruption* (Glasgow, 1988 reprint), p. 470.

Aberdeen.⁹⁸ The application of the policy within a Church was even contemplated by Rev. James MacGregor, a Seceder in Canada, with regard to disapproval of a clerical colleague who owned a slave.⁹⁹

At one point in the late 1830s the Infirmary Street Session felt the need to take the topic of occasional hearing to the Synod. Scott comments:

There was laid on the Synod's table a representation and petition from Infirmary Street Session, Edinburgh, relating and objecting to occasional hearing, granting certificates of moral character to members leaving their profession, and supporting various religious societies, or societies having religious objects in view . . . however, the Supreme Court acted wisely, since whilst they enjoined kirk-sessions to prevent by every suitable means occasional hearing, they considered it unnecessary to pronounce at present any judgment respecting the granting certificates of moral character to members leaving their profession. . . .¹⁰⁰



The grave of Thomas M'Grie (1772-1835) in Greyfriars churchyard, Edinburgh. While maintaining a wide circle of friends in other denominations, and strongly believing in Christian unity, M'Grie firmly believed that the Anti-Burgher Secession should remain separate. Wright was to refer often in his writings and preaching to him.

⁹⁸ Robert Angus, *Sermons of the late Rev. Henry Angus* (Aberdeen, 1861), p. xxxviii. The wider work in Buchan and the whole north-east in the 1750s onwards is movingly and edifyingly described in Scott, *Annals*, pp. 27-32, 288. See also J. T. Findlay, *The Secession in the North* (Aberdeen, 1898).

⁹⁹ George Paterson, *Memoir of the Rev. James MacGregor, DD* (Philadelphia, 1859), p. 114.

¹⁰⁰ Scott, *Annals*, p. 133.

A man who had moved to Glasgow in the late 1830s in pursuit of employment had been disciplined by the Infirmary Street Kirk Session for “occasionally going to other churches”. The Session had dealt with him in order to show him “the sin of such conduct”. The disciplined member promised to “act consistently in all times coming and was therefore restored to church privileges”.¹⁰¹ An occasional attender living twenty miles away from Infirmary Street was refused admission to the Lord’s Table, not because of his irregular attendance but because he had “been in the habit of hearing with other denominations”.¹⁰² A man requesting baptism at short notice, as he was just about to leave for three months’ work elsewhere, was refused baptism as he intended to go to services in the Established Church during that period.¹⁰³ The Session once refused a token of admission to the Lord’s Table to one of the members who had been out of town and “hearing in the Free Church”, on the basis that this was inconsistent conduct.¹⁰⁴

It is interesting to note that the minority section of the Original Secession Church, which refused to join the Free Church in 1852, also still appear to have opposed occasional hearing. Their magazine quoted with approval an American analysis of the issue which stated: “If we may hear such because the distance between them and us is so small, how are we to justify ourselves in excluding them from partaking of the government of the church, administering to us the sealing ordinances, and holding fellowship with us in these ordinances as private Christians?”¹⁰⁵

Employment patterns may have been adding to the temptation for people to stray if they had to live at a distance from the church. The problem of members being resident at a distance from the church, or even out of Edinburgh, was raised in late 1863. The Session even discussed the duty of each elder to look out for employment for them and

¹⁰¹ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 29th April 1839.

¹⁰² *ibid.* Meeting of 11th May 1839.

¹⁰³ *ibid.* Meeting of 9th October 1842.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* Meeting of 25th April 1844. The opposition of Wright to the Free Church was seen in the next decade when, in September 1858, he prepared an article for *The Ark* based on an article in the *Witness* entitled “more Popish facts”. The notes show that in Wright’s view the body to which the *Witness* belonged “denies (the) Solemn League and Covenant”. *Notebook, commences “General Notebook, Nov. 1857”*.

¹⁰⁵ *The Original Secession Magazine*, March 1855, pp. 160-162.

in other ways “trying to smooth difficulties in the way of their coming to reside in town”.¹⁰⁶

However, it should be noted that the congregation had been circumspect in maintaining the discipline of other branches of the visible Church. On one occasion Mr. Paxton’s Session refused to admit into fellowship a woman belonging to Rev. Duncan Stalker’s United Secession congregation in Peebles. She had moved to Edinburgh, having become pregnant outside marriage and wished to “submit to censure” in Infirmary Street and to “enjoy her privileges afterwards, as a member of the church”. The reason for refusing her request was “because she was not a member of our church, was not certain of remaining in Edinburgh, because the law of the church required in all ordinary cases, that the scandal be purged, where the offence had been given, because the scandal was quite unknown here and to take her under discipline, would, in such a case have the effect of spreading, not of suppressing the scandal; and in fine that, that Session and congregation to whom she belonged would certainly use it as a handle against us, and the cause of God among our hands”.¹⁰⁷

4. Communion practices

Wright saw large numbers profess faith at many communion seasons. Twenty new members were received into communion at Infirmary Street in summer 1837, and another peak was seen at Lauriston Street in April 1863 when fourteen were received.¹⁰⁸ However, there was long-term decline in attendance from the heady days of a thousand people listening to Paxton in the 1820s and early 1830s – and indeed the large congregation evidenced by Wright’s own second call in 1834, signed by 453 (385 members and 68 adherents). In 1865 a call to a colleague and successor to Wright was signed by around 200 people.¹⁰⁹ By the early 1870s, however, he may only have had an actual attendance of 110-plus

¹⁰⁶ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 2nd November 1864, p. 274.

¹⁰⁷ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 23rd June 1822.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* Meetings of 4th May and 6th May 1837. *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 13th April 1863, p. 244. For the numbers professing faith in various years, see Appendix II.

¹⁰⁹ *SRSJH*, Vol. 4, p. 297.



Victoria Terrace Original Secession meeting-house in Edinburgh, now used by the Quakers. This was where the section of the Infirmary Street congregation which entered the union of 1842 against James Wright's advice, worshipped until the late 1950s. The steeple in the background is that of the Tolbooth Kirk on the Royal Mile which was the meeting place for the Church of Scotland's General Assembly between 1842 and 1845.

and this was to be decreased by the division of 1873. By the early 1880s, a few years after his death, around 60 were attending Lauriston Street.

On Sabbath, 9th January 1882, the attendance at public worship of the various sections into which Infirmary Street Original Secession congregation has now been divided was as follows:—Lauriston Street, representing original congregation, 59; Victoria Terrace, representing first disruption party, 152; South Clerk Street, representing second disruption party, 34; Oddfellows' Hall, representing minority of second disruption party, probably 20.¹¹⁰

New members were interviewed by the minister and then attested at the Session meeting by an elder or communicant; people coming with disjunction certificates were listed as being attested by the minister issuing the certificate from their previous congregation.¹¹¹ A steady trickle came from other congregations and denominations in Edinburgh, including the Tron, Pilrig Free Church, Morningside Free Church and, as seen already, Dr. Begg in Newington Free Church. Five of the ten new members at the October 1860 meeting were from other churches.¹¹²

Vast numbers could gather to Secession communions, as seen in the 1,400 tokens prepared by a Glasgow Burgher congregation in 1802 – and moulds prepared to make more should further numbers of communicants appear. People came from a number of congregations. Secession Communion seasons saw services held on Thursdays, Saturdays, Sabbath, and Monday.¹¹³ This was the normal pattern in Lauriston Street. Two services would be held on the Thursday. There appears to have been no service on the Friday of Secession communions, unlike the situation in the Highlands where the “Question Meeting” – a fellowship meeting similar to each congregation’s own regular ones – was

¹¹⁰ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 327, 329. The Victoria Terrace party were those who refused to remain with Wright in 1842 and had instead entered the union with the Burghers.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Catherine Pringle, who was “attested by James McFaggan, deacon” in spring 1862 – and Joseph Purves “attested by Dr Begg”. *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 21st April 1862, p. 220.

¹¹² *ibid.* Meeting of 22nd October 1860, pp. 196-7. One accession was an Alexander Dickie, attested in both the April and October 1860 Kirk Session meetings by Andrew Ritchie. He was described in one of Wright’s notebooks as “Alexander Dickie, Glasgow, of Western Bank; elder of late Rev. Jonathan Anderson”. MS. *Notebook, commences “Memoranda, October 18-7”*.

¹¹³ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 457, 597-598.



Lauriston Street in the present day. The gap between the tall glass building on the left and the older tenement on the right is the lane by which worshippers gained access to the Original Secession church.

held on the Friday.¹¹⁴ In a list of services held at Lauriston Street during the October 1861 communion season, there is a tantalising hint of there being some kind of gathering for discussion, rather than preaching, on a Thursday evening – this in addition to preaching services earlier in the

¹¹⁴ One strange exception is that a list of collections at the 1802 communion at East Campbell Street Burgher congregation, Glasgow, includes one being taken on the Friday. Scott, *Annals*, p. 456.

day in the church. It is perhaps too much to make this a quasi-Question meeting; it is not clear whether this was at the manse or church, who was present, or how formal the gathering was.¹¹⁵ Communion services, in the early 1860s at least, appear to have involved at least three successive tables being served. A precise order was agreed in April 1863, with specific elders tasked with collecting the tokens, distributing the bread and wine, and pouring the wine from the flagon into the cups.¹¹⁶ On some occasions, the Lord's Supper was served at four tables.¹¹⁷

In 1862, a number of members were failing to collect communion tokens at the usual time, i.e. the Thursday Fast Day service or the Saturday Preparatory service. These people were to be admonished and asked for their reason why.¹¹⁸ At the autumn 1863 communion, Mr. Wright was assisted by three ordained ministers associated with him in Lauriston Street – his son Duncan, John Tyndal, and Andrew Ritchie.¹¹⁹

Several examples have survived of the way in which Wright fenced the Lord's Table. A style more familiar in conservative reformed Churches today was used when assisting at the Pitcairngreen communions in July 1844; he surveyed the Ten Commandments, contrasting the attitudes and practices of believers and non-believers towards them. He summarised by stating of the believer: "Conscious of many failings, deviations, violations – is it grief so far as that, honestly desiring strictest conformity and love to law?" and contrasted this with the unconverted person's inner attitude: "those who prefer known sin to holiness – consult flesh and blood before Christ's law – and regard iniquity in their hearts".¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ The words in James Wright's handwriting are: "Fast Evening; Conversation on Externals of Last Judgement". *Notebook, commences "Memoranda, October 18-7"*. Note titled "Discourses Preached on Sacramental Occasion 4th Sabb [sic] Octr 1861".

¹¹⁶ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 20th April 1863, pp. 245-6.

¹¹⁷ *Notebook, commences "Memoranda, October 18-7"*. Notes titled "Discourses Preached on Sacramental Occasion 4th Sabb Octr 1861" and "Discourses Preached on Sacramental Occasion, 4th Sab April, 1863". These are simply lists of Scriptural texts and do not give the content of the discourses.

¹¹⁸ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 21st April 1862, p. 220.

¹¹⁹ *Notebook, commences "Memoranda, October 18-7"*. Note titled "Discourses Preached on Sacramental Occasion 4th Sabb Octr 1861".

¹²⁰ MS. *Hardback notebook, sermons from April 1843 to 1st Sabbath December 1844*. 4th Sabbath of July 1844.

A different approach, but similar guarding of access to the Lord's Table, had been employed earlier that year at the Pitcairngreen communion Sabbath in March 1844. At that service he had used the words of John 21:17 for the fencing: "And he said unto him Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." Urging prospective communicants to apply the passage to themselves, he stressed that the whole passage showed an exercise of Church discipline.¹²¹ He then gave various characteristics of "genuine love" to Christ. He said that it is always preceded by, and accompanied with, a knowledge of its object. Genuine love to Christ "is distinguished by loving especially what of him is overlooked and despised. Natural affection for natural objects starts up to defend the weak and despised". True love runs to the rescue. This genuine love cannot tolerate "airy and heartless distinctions between essentials and circumstantials" in connection with "all Christ's laws, statutes, ordinances and truths".

A third mark given was "a willing obedience to all Christ's commands and cheerful submission to his will. . . . It is not enough in order to discriminate our love, that we say, we love the Lord – nor is it enough that we think we love him; he calls for proof 'keep my commandments' . . . his commandments may be felt painful to flesh and blood; yet love will strengthen and animate". Wright went on to say that true love would be reconciled to trials for Christ's sake and added: "how few submit to trials and make sacrifices for Him whom they say they love! They cannot worship but with a crowd – but when the sun shines and men smile. Is this love?"¹²²

The fourth mark Wright gave of genuine love was that it preferred the giver to the gift. "He who prefers the dowry above the person displays his character without a veil." A fifth mark was that genuine love gives "its best to the beloved object. Natural affection in matters of religion rests greatly upon convenience. True love on the other hand never concludes it has done too much for its object. It spares no time, no pains, no trouble, no efforts and no sacrifices, not only to minister to the necessities, but to the pleasure of its object. No road is too long or too rough for it to travel – no tide too stormy to encounter – no reproach too cutting to endure – no gift too costly to be given."¹²³

¹²¹ *ibid.* 2nd Sabbath of March 1844.

¹²² *ibid.* 2nd Sabbath of March 1844.

¹²³ *ibid.* 2nd Sabbath of March 1844.

Having applied these searching criteria, Wright then showed his listeners some of the minute traces of genuine love in the desires of the heart. Insisting that Christ would not have put the question, “lovest thou me?” unless it was capable of being answered, he added: “you may have doubts and fears, but when grieved, on what account is it? (1) that your sins brought to your remembrance have been against Christ? This is love. (2) although you cannot use these words, “love thee” yet desire it – wish it – aim after it? (3) Peter was not bold; although sincere, he could not say “love thee ardently, supremely” but only “love thee”. Wright then gave his exhortation in closing his fencing of the table: “look to Him who can kindle and inflame your love to Him.” Finally Wright warned that those who were without love and who had no delight in Christ’s Person, character, law, service, and people, were none of His and were not His friends.¹²⁴

5. Fast days and other aspects of Church life

The Infirmary Street and Lauriston Street congregation strongly believed in holding fast days but this was very much on their own terms. Fasts were treated with great seriousness. In spring 1843, it was decided to hold the Presbyterian Fast on the same day as their own Sacramental Fast Day. The Kirk Session expressed “firm conviction that conjoining these duties gives not to either the proper prominence that the word of God warrants, but came to this conclusion because the bearings of the act would probably be affected if deferred beyond the month of May”.¹²⁵

However, attempts by the national government or other Churches to organise national fasts with the intention of all taking part were met with stiff resistance. The (Established) Church of Scotland occasionally called on the nation to hold a Fast Day. In summer 1835, the Infirmary Street Kirk Session decided that they could not adopt the General Assembly’s Fast Day “without in a considerable degree sacrificing our consistency and rendering nugatory our influence as a Witnessing Body”.¹²⁶

In spring 1847, the Queen had proclaimed Wednesday 24th March as a Day of National Fasting and Humiliation. “The Session agreed that,

¹²⁴ *ibid.* 2nd Sabbath of March 1844.

¹²⁵ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848).* Meeting of 3rd April 1843.

¹²⁶ *ibid.* Meeting of 19th July 1835.

in consistency with our avowed principles the aforesaid proclamation cannot, as regards its spirit, and the source from which it emanates, be recognised by us.” The minister was briefly to explain this stance to the congregation.¹²⁷ Further opposition to Her Majesty’s calling a Fast came eight years later. Queen Victoria had announced a Day of National Humiliation and Fasting but the Session decided that “in consistency with the church’s distinctive principles – the authority exercised in the aforesaid matter cannot by us be recognised”.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, down through the years Wright’s congregation held fast days as they saw appropriate. They called a congregational fast for Thursday 27th September 1849. This was because there were “so many visible tokens of the Divine displeasure against us for our sins and for the sins of the nation to which we belong”.¹²⁹

Late in his ministry, Wright gave a series of lectures on fasting, setting it in the context of Fast Days before the Lord’s Supper, describing its nature, replying to modern objections to public religious fasting (for example as expressed in the United Presbyterian Edinburgh Presbytery in their meeting of March 1876). Books to be consulted included George Gillespie’s *English Popish Ceremonies*, Robert Shaw’s *Exposition of the Westminster Confession*, the National Covenant, the Directory for Public Worship, and Calvin’s *Institutes*.¹³⁰ How literally Wright and his people fasted, i.e. in the sense of abstaining from food, is not clear. Francis Macbean believed in literal fasting on the Thursday of the communion season: this was as much a Lochaber trait as anything he may have picked up among the Original Secession.¹³¹

Shortly after beginning to use the new building at Lauriston Street, the Session agreed that a fellowship meeting should be held in the Lauriston Street church on Thursday evenings at 6 p.m. Soon afterwards there was a discussion about holding fellowship meetings in other parts

¹²⁷ *ibid.* Meeting of 21st March 1847.

¹²⁸ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 18th March 1855, p. 147. For an advertisement promoting a similar fast called by the Queen in the previous year, see “The Day of Fasting and Humiliation”, *The Times*, Monday, 17th April 1854, p. 5.

¹²⁹ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meetings of 10th September and 16th September 1849, pp. 24-25.

¹³⁰ *Notebook, commences “General Notebook, Nov. 1857”*.

¹³¹ *By-Paths of Highland Church History*, pp. 34-35.

of the city.¹³² In the Secession Churches the normal pattern was for there to be a monthly congregational prayer meeting as well as district fellowship prayer meetings. In the late 1830s the Synod had turned down an overture from the Toberdoney congregation “to make attendance on Congregational praying societies a term of church communion”.¹³³

It is not clear when the Lauriston Street congregation ceased to give out the line (“read the line”) in the singing of the Psalms. MacWhirter implies that Lauriston Street did so before its South Clerk Street breakaway fragment, which only discontinued the practice in 1912. He also states that the reading of two lines, instead of the time-honoured one, came in, but gives no date.¹³⁴ As far back as 1835 the Session agreed “not to allow anyone presenting in the congregation to give out double lines of the psalm, that method being offensive to many”. An Alexander Wood had recently “deserted his post as precentor” but it was not clear if the attempt at two-line innovation was related to this.¹³⁵ One of the innovators had been hit on the head with a psalm-book by Mr. Paxton when he tried it.¹³⁶

Repeating tunes were another source of controversy in the Secession but do not appear to have raised their head in Lauriston Street, Mr. Wright’s opposition to them possibly having precluded that step being taken. Arguing in 1874 against musical instruments and choirs in public worship, he added: “What are called repeating tunes in public divine worship fall under the same category as instrumental music of Old Testament typical service.”¹³⁷ By contrast, the younger M’Crie’s congregation at Davie Street appears to have taken a *laissez-faire* attitude to policing the precentor’s choices.¹³⁸

The vexed question of using public transport for attendance at church on the Sabbath was raised by elder James MacLeod in late 1862. He was concerned at people hiring cabs to get to church. It was agreed to take up the matter again “on an early occasion” but it does

¹³² *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meetings of 4th November and 2nd December 1844.

¹³³ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 133, 450.

¹³⁴ *SRSJ*, Vol. 4, p. 311.

¹³⁵ *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 6th February 1835.

¹³⁶ Scott, *Annals*, p. 129.

¹³⁷ MS. Sermon notes Ezra 3:11-13, preached 2nd Sabbath of August 1874.

¹³⁸ Scott, *Annals*, p. 454.

not appear in the Session minutes to which this writer has access, i.e. to April 1864.¹³⁹

Mr. Macleod's concern was part of mainstream evangelical thinking at the time in both Scotland and England. This held that not only was cab provision on the Sabbath a breach of the Fourth Commandment but that church-goers should not use commercially-run methods such as cabs to get to their place of worship. The 1850s had seen a surge of usage of cabs and trains for Sunday recreation, particular impetus being given to the trend in London by the opening of Crystal Palace on the Sabbath day.¹⁴⁰

The use of commercial public transport on the Sabbath in order to attend church was seen by many believers, and indeed those involved in the trade, as damaging to the witness of the Churches. "The cabmen naturally look on those who employ them as cruel robbers of their day of rest, and upon those who hire them on that day as hypocrites," noted one observer. "For it is a proverbial saying among them, that but for church and chapel goers, their masters would find it too unprofitable to require their services on that day."¹⁴¹

In February 1853, the *Free Church Magazine* published a "Memorial of the Edinburgh Cabmen's Sabbath Observance Committee to the Inhabitants of Edinburgh" against the use of cabs by those who were going to church. The memorialists affirmed, "That if anyone under the restraint of Providence is unable to attend the means of grace without the use of a cab, they do not consider such a person justified in shifting this restraint off from himself upon another, and thus depriving his fellow-being of attendance upon the worship of God, which he himself reckons such an inestimable blessing". The editor of the *Free Church Magazine*, W. G. Blaikie,¹⁴² added a preface stating: "The following memorial brings out a grievance of which we have often thought with sadness. We are persuaded that a multitude of cabs are employed

¹³⁹ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 9th December 1862, p. 235.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Cox, *The Literature of the Sabbath Question* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1865), Vol. 2, pp. 313, 360, 406. Cox leans towards liberalisation of Sabbath observance but he fairly reflects the material produced by both sides in the controversy.

¹⁴¹ Micaiah Hill, *The Sabbath Made for Man, or the Origin, History and Principles of the Lord's Day* (London, 1857), p. 240.

¹⁴² See N. L. Walker, *Chapters in the History of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1895), p. 327.

inconsiderately and needlessly on the day of rest; and without affirming that exceptional cases may not occur, we are thoroughly persuaded that, as a general rule, persons who, through the hand of God laid on them, are unable to walk to the church, act wrongly in systematically depriving a poor cabman of that privilege, in order that they may enjoy it themselves.”¹⁴³

A public meeting in 1860 was told that cabmen thought it dishonest in Church members to hire them on the Sabbath day. A cabman had torn up a tract on Sabbath observance given to him by a lady who had just hired him to take her to church in his vehicle.¹⁴⁴ People hiring cabs to get to church were the subject of a solemn poem by a missionary to cabmen, John E. Gray:

The Sabbath is a day of rest; so easily you ride
That you may use the privilege, the cabman is denied
Before you trample on his right to have the Sabbath day
Ask counsel of the Lord your God and for direction pray. . . .
Give up the use of Sunday cabs, and walk to church instead
Or your poor brother’s blood may cry, for vengeance on
your head.¹⁴⁵

In London, cabmen came under commercial pressure to work on the Sabbath but at one stage over 2,000 of them refused to ply their trade that day.¹⁴⁶ Later in the decade, Dr. James Begg was to take a leading role in opposing the Sabbath cab trade in Edinburgh, a trade against which the Free Church Presbytery of Edinburgh was lobbying the city council.¹⁴⁷

6. The Diaconate revived

One example of Mr. Wright’s following wider trends in Scottish Church life was in the revival of the office of deacon in the congregation. The *First Book of Discipline* and the *Second Book of Discipline* prescribed the office of deacon, while both the Westminster Assembly and the leaders of the Second Reformation in Scotland promoted the role. Thomas

¹⁴³ *Free Church Magazine*, February 1853, p. 94.

¹⁴⁴ *The Times*, Thursday 6th September 1860, p. 12, “Sunday Cab-driving”.

¹⁴⁵ *Illustrated Sabbath Facts*, reprinted from “*The British Workman*” (London, 1883), p. 80.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Smith, *Memoirs of James Begg, D.D., minister of Newington Free Church, Edinburgh* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1885-8), Vol. 2, pp. 425-426.

Chalmers suggested the revival of the office of deacon in the early 1820s as a temporary measure. John Lorimer in 1842 campaigned for its reinstatement as a permanent fixture. Calvin had argued that deacons were a legitimate order within the church.¹⁴⁸

However, the office had largely fallen into abeyance early in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁹ One theory traced its decline as far back as the 1660s. “The Act Rescissory, in 1661, broke down at once most of the fabric which had been erected at the Second Reformation. . . . After the Revolution Settlement, in 1688 . . . deacons existed for a short time in the Scottish establishment. . . . It appears, that this office had been, at least partially, neglected before the year 1719; for in that year an act of Assembly required ‘ministers to take care that deacons, as well as elders, be ordained in the congregations where deacons are wanted’. This law was ineffectual. . . . Not very long after that period, deacons were not generally found in the congregations of that establishment. This accounts for the want of that class of officers in those denominations which derive their origin from that period. . . .” The writer names as the “chief” cause of this loss, “the transferring to other hands of the deacon’s duties”.¹⁵⁰

Deacons had been appointed in Infirmary Street in 1836.¹⁵¹ Two years previously, there had been turmoil when several members of the congregation took offence at the Session’s appointing a Treasurer, an appointment which these members saw as the congregation’s right.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ “Diaconate, Deacons, Deaconesses” in *DSCHT*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁴⁹ Hetherington takes the view that an act of the 1709 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland persuaded the government to hand the power over welfare back to the Kirk Sessions and away from the civil authorities, in the form of the justices of the peace who had taken over the role. W. M. Hetherington, *History of the Church of Scotland* (3rd edition, Edinburgh, 1843), p. 194.

¹⁵⁰ James A. Willson, *The Deacon: an Inquiry into the Nature, Duties and Exercise of the Office of Deacon in the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1840), Appendix, p. 73; see also pp. 17-19.

¹⁵¹ Ten elders and deacons were ordained in the congregation.

¹⁵² The Session had a motion before it to have two treasurers: one appointed by the congregation “for the purpose of receiving the seat rents, and paying all the charges of the congregation”, and another appointed by the Session who would receive the collections and distribute from this fund “to the necessities of the poor”. However, the proposal was that the Session should also state that they had the right to appoint a treasurer for all the purposes of the congregation and were only relinquishing part of their authority “for the sake of peace”. The Session decided by a large majority “that it would be improper in them to yield the right which belonged to them by the fundamental laws of the Church of Scotland and yielding in this, to the expressed wishes of several of the members of the congregation, might ultimately prove injurious to its interests”. *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*. Meeting of 3rd March 1834.

The office of deacon must have relapsed into abeyance, however, because over a decade later, in February 1848, the Lauriston Street Kirk Session, having considered the issue of deacons “for some time past”, agreed that the minister should preach a series of discourses on the subject. This was with a view “to prepare the mind of the congregation for its adoption”.¹⁵³

By July, nineteen men had been nominated as deacons. It was decided that those accepting office should be ordained on 16th July. Later that month, deacons were listed among those attending the Lauriston Street Kirk Session for the first time. Nine deacons attended that meeting. It was also agreed to divide the members of the congregation into districts for each deacon to attend to. A rota for deacons to stand at the church door was also agreed. In a hint of troubles to come, in October it was agreed that deacons should in future manage the financial affairs among themselves “in the exercise of their own authority”, and that in the event of any misunderstanding the deacons could consult with the Kirk Session. Individual elders were not to interfere unduly with the deacons’ activities and they were to uphold the work of the deacons.¹⁵⁴ The next few years were to see tensions between the deacons and certain members of the congregation. These are described in Appendix III.

The Infirmary Street congregation had a record of helping for the poor, both of their own number and in the wider community, before Wright’s induction there. In 1822 a collection was taken for the Infirmary and another for the Schools instituted for educating poor children.¹⁵⁵ In Wright’s time, the Session agreed to help the family of a poor dying man with the costs of the impending burial. Two of the elders were then appointed to conduct the man’s funeral.¹⁵⁶ Two collections for the poor were taken in spring 1853.¹⁵⁷ The early 1860s were a time of great poverty and a special collection was made in February 1863 for the destitute in Lancashire and in the Isle of Skye, the money to be equally

¹⁵³ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th February 1848.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* Meetings of 3rd July, 21st July, and 23rd October 1848.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.* Meeting of 4th March 1822.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.* Meetings of 2nd October and 23rd October 1843.

¹⁵⁷ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 4th April 1853, p. 86.



James Wright lived at 15 Buccleuch Place (middle door), Edinburgh, in the early 1840s. The same tenement is now part of the University of Edinburgh.

[Photo courtesy of Christine Campbell]

divided between the two areas.¹⁵⁸ Mass unemployment and hunger had emerged in Lancashire due to its dependence on cotton manufacture, which was severely disrupted by an initial over-supply, the American Civil War, and further turbulence in the supply of raw materials from abroad.¹⁵⁹ The Lauriston Street Kirk Session appears to have paid no regard to the attempts by some to play down the reports of destitution in Skye, believing instead the testimony of Rev. Roderick Macleod, Snizort. Mr. Macleod wrote in December 1862 that while limited at that date, the distress was set to spread widely and that he expected it to be soon “severely felt over the greater part of the island”.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 25th February 1863, pp. 238-239.

¹⁵⁹ The availability of rich resources of water-power and coal, coupled with proximity to the port of Liverpool and other factors in the Industrial Revolution, had helped create the ideal conditions for cotton-mills in Lancashire; this led to a 100% growth in population in the three decades to 1861. Arthur Arnold, *The History of the Cotton Famine* (London, 1864), pp. 1-23, 42-47.

¹⁶⁰ See, for example, *The Scotsman*, 11th December 1862, p. 2, “Destitution in Skye”; *ibid.*, 13th December 1862, p. 7, “The alleged Destitution in Skye”.

In 1876, when announcing the annual congregational meeting, Wright told his people: “This congregation, we can say from 42 years’ ministry, has been most honourable in pecuniary matters; all the more so that we seldom have spoken of money.”¹⁶¹

7. Days of growth and planned outreach

Outreach was attempted in the early 1860s, with premises being sought for probationers.¹⁶² This is perhaps an argument for differentiating the Lauriston Street cause from their predecessors in the Anti-Burgher tradition. Scott notes: “If there had been as great zeal in holding forth the truth as there was in holding it fast, the Divine Master would have by His blessing rewarded these evangelistic labours by giving at least numerical prosperity to Original Secession congregations. The Old Lights, however, generally regarded themselves as witnesses for past Reformation attainments. They did not take such aggressive measures for the spread of the gospel amongst the careless as they might have done, and hence that prosperity was withheld which might otherwise have been enjoyed.”¹⁶³

Large numbers of people had been attracted in the early 1850s to hear Wright’s lectures on the Book of Revelation but this had not translated into significant regular Sabbath attendance or joining his congregation. Scott states: “. . . although for several years subsequent to 1850 the building was crowded to excess on Sabbath evenings, whilst lectures on the Apocalypse were being delivered, no marked increase of the membership took place.”¹⁶⁴

However, the possibility of Church extension work, or at least continuity of ministerial provision, emerged in late 1861 when the Session learned that several young men had completed university courses and might be available for “help in ministerial work” in future. Mr. Wright was requested to deliver a series of lectures. These were to be “on the system of theology in its different branches, viz dogmatic and exegetic, critical and historical, together with the languages Latin, Greek and Hebrew and the cognate dialects”.¹⁶⁵ Another hint of

¹⁶¹ MS. “Ordinary Annual Meeting of the Congregation etc.”.

¹⁶² *SRSJ*, Vol. 4, p. 300.

¹⁶³ Scott, *Annals*, p. 601.

¹⁶⁴ Scott, *Annals*, pp. 328-329.

¹⁶⁵ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 30th September 1861, p. 207. For Wright’s views on theological training, see Appendix IV.

increased vigour came with the better-organised visitation which appears to have been attempted in the early 1860s. Lists of members in the several districts of the city were assigned to elders responsible for these areas.¹⁶⁶

In late 1862 it was decided that the divinity students should publicly address the congregation more often than they had been doing, and it was agreed that this be done at least once a month. The Session commissioned Mr. Wright for a further winter as “Professor . . . to deliver lectures in Theology to the students”.¹⁶⁷ The divinity students, Andrew Ritchie and Duncan Wright, were examined with a view to licensing by the Moderator in June 1863. Having passed this stage successfully, they were then told to “deliver their Exercise and Addition” the following Wednesday, and that they would be licensed two days later.¹⁶⁸ They were licensed to preach the Gospel on 22nd June 1863, having satisfactorily answered the questions of the Formula. Rev. James Wright, Rev. John Tyndal, and the members of Session, then welcomed the preachers by giving them the right hand of fellowship.¹⁶⁹

Extension work was proposed for the newly licensed ministers to carry out in late 1863. Rev. James Wright suggested they find “a sphere of public usefulness’ for the new preachers by obtaining “at a reasonable rent the use of some Hall in any suitable locality of the town”. Two elders were instructed to investigate the possibility of using a hall in Rose Street.¹⁷⁰ The issue of outreach services continued to be investigated by the elders in the subsequent weeks. They had been unsuccessful in finding a hall but it was agreed that two elders pursue the matter with a particular focus on the Stockbridge area.¹⁷¹ They subsequently identified a hall in Stockbridge, which turned out to be leased by a solicitor who asked the Session to put their request in writing.¹⁷² Three months later the specific hall appears to have no longer been a possibility, but a potential venue had been identified in Hill Street.¹⁷³ This in turn appears to have been unsuccessful because in the following month the

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.* Meeting of 30th September 1861, p. 206.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.* Meeting of 3rd November 1862, pp. 231-232.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.* Meeting of 12th June 1863, p. 252.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.* Meeting of 22nd June 1863, pp. 259-260.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th September 1863, p. 266.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.* Meeting of 2nd November 1863, p. 273.

¹⁷² *ibid.* Meeting of 7th December 1863, p. 274.

¹⁷³ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th March 1864, p. 279.

Session agreed that each member had a duty of “looking about for some opening for our preachers”.¹⁷⁴

Thus, by summer 1863, James Wright and the Lauriston Street congregation had three “spare” preachers on their hands – John Tyndal, Andrew Ritchie, and Duncan Wright. James Wright himself was preaching in various places in this period. These included Acharn in Kenmore parish, Perthshire, in 1862 and 1863; in Ayr (lecturing on the Two Witnesses) in December 1863; and at a house-meeting in Morningside in 1863.¹⁷⁵ At this point, had they actually started regular services in some other part of the city or further afield, a second or even third congregation potentially could have been formed.

MacWhirter observes that Duncan Wright was elected as colleague and successor to his father in 1865 and that he was inducted in October of that year. It was at this stage that the promising future for the mini-denomination began to unravel. Tyndal was unhappy at Duncan Wright’s status and was excluded from membership in October 1868. Tyndal preached for a while to a few supporters in a hall, in 1873 joining the Forrest Road breakaway congregation and later joining the United Original Secession denomination. In 1869 Duncan Wright requested leave of absence for medical reasons and in 1871 returned to the city after a journey to Australia. MacWhirter states that he was “allowed to resign his colleagueship” but remained a member of Lauriston Street. In 1873, however, he was deposed from the ministry.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.* Meeting of 11th April 1864, p. 284.

¹⁷⁵ *Notebook, commences “Memoranda, October 18-7”*. The Morningside meeting was held in “Maria Scott’s”.

¹⁷⁶ *SRSJ*, Vol. 4, pp. 297, 300. In 1874, there was uncertainty as to whether Duncan Wright had been suspended or deposed by the Presbytery, partly because the Presbytery minutes had been removed by James Macleod when he left at the 1873 split. The matter was of relevance because Walter Macleod was about to be ordained and inducted as colleague and successor to Rev. James Wright; if Duncan Wright was merely suspended, then to induct Mr. Macleod would leave Lauriston Street with two colleagues and successors. Eventually it was established that he had been deposed. MS. *Notebook containing draft minutes of Lauriston Street Kirk Session between March 9th 1874 and 15th June 1874*. Meetings of 4th April and 9th April 1874.

III. WRIGHT AS AN AUTHOR AND EXPOSITOR

1. Wright's literary activities

Wright's ability with the pen could have earned him a living in journalism had he not pursued his call to the ministry. A cryptic comment in one of his notebooks sheds light on how he may have seen his own role: "During the Reformation the Pulpit was what the Press is now!"¹⁷⁷ He perhaps combined both roles in his career as editor of *The Ark*.

The Ark seems to have introduced Wright to a wider circle than his own congregation and occasionally attracted people to attend Lauriston Street.¹⁷⁸ It also gave him an international audience – twenty-five copies were being sent to Australia alone at one stage. It seems likely that it added to the burden of correspondence for him. Although very few of Wright's letters have survived, he appears to have corresponded with many people throughout the country and abroad. These included people in Australia, San Francisco, Massachusetts, Ireland, Exeter, Halifax, Barton, Ayr, Kirkintilloch, and Blairgowrie, to name a few. He also corresponded with at least one MP (Andrew Black, Esq., MP, 8 Sanctuary, Westminster), with Sergeant Niel Mcleod (First Field Battery, First Battalion, Fifth Company, Royal Artillery, Madras Mount, East Indies, by Southampton), and with Rev. Cosmo R. Gordon (who may have been minister at Christ Church, Moss Side, Manchester).¹⁷⁹

While devotional material did appear in *The Ark*, current affairs of the ecclesiastical and political worlds were the main grist to his mill. He carefully tracked ecclesiastical events such as the Cardross case,¹⁸⁰ the Irish Church Disestablishment debate,¹⁸¹ the growth of Ritualism in the Church of England,¹⁸² the decline of Scottish Sabbath-keeping in the context of the culpability of inconsistent Churches and exploitative employers in this,¹⁸³ the Australian Church Union and the "Expulsion"

¹⁷⁷ *Notebook, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857"*.

¹⁷⁸ For example, a "John Campbell, Shoemaker" was interviewed for communicant membership in 1862 and cited *The Ark* as part of what attracted him to attend Lauriston Street. *Notebook, commences "Memoranda, October 18-7"*. "Communicants for October 1862".

¹⁷⁹ *Notebook, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857"*.

¹⁸⁰ *The Ark*, Vol. 3, No. 2, February 1860, pp. 9-16. See *DSCHT*, p. 136.

¹⁸¹ See, for example, *The Ark*, Vol. 11, Nos. 5 and 6, May and June 1868.

¹⁸² Wright ran a series of articles on this in the January to July issues, 1867.

¹⁸³ *The Ark*, Vol. 5, No. 11, November 1862, pp. 84-88; *ibid.*, Vol. 5, No. 12, December 1862, pp. 89-96. See also "Sabbatarianism", *DSCHT*, pp. 737-738.

question,¹⁸⁴ as well as the ecclesiastical unions proposed for Scotland itself in the 1860s and onwards.¹⁸⁵

Wright's periodical was anything but dull. His readers were treated to some tongue-in-cheek banter as well as serious analysis of the main public and ecclesiastical questions of the day. The January 1868 issue saw him throw down a gauntlet to anyone brave enough to debate him in print by offering them space to do so in the magazine. He stated that he believed the principles he stood for could be defended with "rational argumentation" as well as on the basis of the Scriptures. "Nor have we seen," he continued, "any enthusiastic and popular abettor of the modern conflicting theories of religion or politics who has proved his ability to shake a single stone of the conservative edifice of Britain's Second Reformation . . . our meaning is that the leaders of the Second Reformation, in their symbolic books or creeds as well as in their individual treatises, have left us spiritual and rational weapons with which he who wields them is fully a match for the modern liberal combatants with their tournamental wooden swords."¹⁸⁶

In perhaps a deliberate attempt to stir up controversy, Wright attacked freemasonry in the pages of *The Ark* in July and November 1858. In addition, rough notes compiled by Wright show him using several books in order to oppose freemasonry for what appears to have been a pamphlet, including one by Professor Robertson and *Graham's Masonic Book: Encyclopaedia*. Wright's main opposition appears to have been based on the masonic use of symbols. Some of the facts collated from various books in this note were "abstracted by W Mcleod" – presumably Walter Macleod.¹⁸⁷ The Edinburgh freemasons responded to what appears to

¹⁸⁴ *The Ark*, Vol. 4, No. 7, July 1861, pp. 50-56, "The Modern Theory of Ecclesiastical Union". The Expulsion, its devastating consequences for confessional Presbyterianism in Australia, and the creation of the Reconstituted Synod, is treated at length in William Maclean, *In the footsteps of the flock: a memorial to the Rev. Walter Scott* (Gisborne, N.Z., Westminster Standard, 1960). An alternative view of Scott's stance and that of the Reconstituted Synod is taken by Rowland Ward in *The Bush Still Burns; Presbyterian and Reformed Faith in Australia, 1788-1988* (Virginia, 1989) p. 548. See also M. D. Prentis, "Australia, mission and emigration", *DSCHT*, pp. 37-38. The *DSCHT* entry is not from a conservative Reformed standpoint but is useful for context.

¹⁸⁵ This subject was taken up in multiple issues, for example *The Ark*, Vol. 5, No. 8, August 1862, pp. 57-64, "Dr Guthrie's Creed on Ecclesiastical Union". See K. R. Ross, "Church Unions in Scotland", *DSCHT*, pp. 835-836; N. R. Needham, "Thomas Guthrie", *ibid.*, pp. 380-381.

¹⁸⁶ *The Ark*, Vol. 11, No. 1, January 1868, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ *Notebook*, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857". "Free Masonry verses Christianity: via pamphlet."

have been an attack from several directions, of which Mr. Wright's was only one element.¹⁸⁸

The 1859-1860 religious revival in America and Britain attracted the attention of the editor of *The Ark*. Lay-preaching had become a matter of debate and Wright republished remarks by Professor Bruce in the autumn of 1858 as well as analysing the revival in several numbers of the periodical in 1859.¹⁸⁹ It is not clear how much else Wright wrote on the topic of the 1859 revival but he was clearly intrigued by the events of that and the following years. In his notebook, he compiled a list of books to be consulted on what he called "this interesting subject". These included Jonathan Edward's *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England* and his *Religious Affections*, as well as Dr. Sprague on Revivals which he quoted extensively in an edition of *The Ark* in autumn 1859.¹⁹⁰ He also intended to consult the evidence given before the committee of the Aberdeen Presbytery in 1841. Finney's Lectures on Revivals were part of the reading plan as were "Common Historical Accounts of Revivals at Reformation, in 1625, West of Scotland: 1638 in Clydesdale; Ireland, 1628".¹⁹¹

As described by Scott, Wright wrote a number of books.¹⁹² These included *Britain's Last Struggle, being Lectures Illustrative of the Character, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Two Witnesses*, published in London in 1851. The book attracted mixed reviews, his theory on the identity of the Two Witnesses gaining particular attention. This subject is discussed more fully in the next section. Wright also wrote *Europe's Crisis: an exposition of the four horses of the Apocalyptic Vision of the Seals*, published in Edinburgh in 1856. *The Bulwark* commented: "Mr. Wright's treatise might have been more condensed, and the tone of it less querulous in several parts; but it is evidently the work of a man who can think, and dares to express his thoughts, – a thorough student of Scripture, whose style is leavened with its sublime and noble language. His chapter on

¹⁸⁸ *A Vindication of Freemasonry from the charges recently brought against it by "Medicus", the Rev. James Wright, Edinburgh, and the editor of the "Edinburgh News"* (Edinburgh, 1858).

¹⁸⁹ See *The Ark*, Vol. 1, No. 10, September 1858, pp. 7-8; Vol. 2, No. 8, July 1859, pp. 57-64; Vol. 2, No. 9, August 1859, pp. 65-72.

¹⁹⁰ *Notebook, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857"*. The number in question was *The Ark*, Vol. 2, No. 9, August 1859, pp. 65-72.

¹⁹¹ Several pages of careful notes followed in *Notebook, commences "General Notebook, Nov. 1857"*.

¹⁹² Scott, *Annals*, p. 563.

Rome is particularly powerful and impressive; and we are disposed to think that there is great force in his interpretation.”¹⁹³

The Evangelical Alliance, an inter-denominational body set up in 1846 as part of a desire for greater unity between the Churches, was to give Wright cause for concern.¹⁹⁴ In 1847 he published a book of 133 pages on the topic, *The Evangelical Alliance the Embodiment of the Spirit of Christendom*. This was largely an extension of the arguments made in his *Letter to Chalmers*, but in addition it gave a clear call for Free Church men to leave her pale. Leading conservative Free Church figures in Glasgow had opposed the Evangelical Alliance in the Church courts but not left the denomination.¹⁹⁵

Wright was well-read in a number of fields and clearly put much effort into researching the views of other writers. For

example, his preparation for a series of lectures planned for autumn 1863 is seen in his reading plan: Shaw’s *Exposition of the Confession of Faith*, Dr. Stevenson on Christ’s Offices and on the Original Secession Testimony, Haldane on Romans, Boston on *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, Dr. Dick’s and Dwight’s *Lectures*, and Gib’s *Display of the Doctrine of Grace*.¹⁹⁶ As we have already mentioned, for a concise series of Sabbath evening lectures



The grave of Rev. Adam Gib (1714-1788) in Greyfriars' churchyard, Edinburgh. Leader of the Anti-Burgher movement within the Secession, he articulated the opposition to the Burgess Oath, a stand which Wright and his successors believed had relevance long after the Oath itself was abolished.

¹⁹³ *The Bulwark*, 1st February 1856, p. 205.

¹⁹⁴ *DSCHT*, p. 304.

¹⁹⁵ *The Evangelical Alliance the Embodiment of the Spirit of Christendom*, p. 117. The Glasgow Free Church men were Revs. Andrew King and James Gibson.

¹⁹⁶ *Notebook*, commences “General Notebook, Nov. 1857”.

on Presbyterianism he used as his main source Lorimer's *Manual of Presbyterianism*. During a series of lectures in 1844 on the Book of Revelation he frequently alluded to views of the commentators. The opinion that the seventh trumpet is the last vial is supported, according to Wright, by: "Lord Napier, Sir Isaac Newton, Mede, Brown, Whitaker, Johnstone, Dr. Macleod and many others."¹⁹⁷

Taking the correct position on one point could profoundly affect the whole interpretation of a wider passage in the Bible, in his opinion. His survey of the expositions given of the three frogs or unclean spirits of Revelation 16:13-14 sees him list Brown of Haddington and Robertson of Leuchars as giving each frog a different identity. Among those who see the frogs as being symbolic of the Papal system's emissaries are "Napier, . . . Mede, Durham, Poole, South, Culbertson, MacLeod and many others".¹⁹⁸ Wright gave his own view that the three frogs were but "instruments" in the hand of the Most High. "At the close of verse fourteenth we are told that the battle is called – the battle of that great day of the Lord Almighty. This is the antecedents [*sic*], hence in following up the narrative, He, God Almighty gathered them together."¹⁹⁹ He also quoted a commentator called Culbertson as being among those who did not see Armageddon as a particular place but rather as a name – meaning mountain of destruction – which "only shows the nature and character of the slaughter".²⁰⁰

However, his reading was with an open mind and at times he would almost appear to relish telling his listeners of the vastly diverging views taken. "This verse has occasioned no small controversy," he said of Revelation 16:16. He was prepared to challenge strongly the writers who changed the word "he" in the verse to "they". Accusing them of "an unwarrantable liberty", he added: "Upon this principle we could not know what was the word of God and what was not." Other commentators who took the "he" as referring to the Dragon were dealt with more mildly. "This breaks the grammatical construction of the context," was his rejoinder to their view.²⁰¹ In point of fact, Wright denounced himself in scathing tones over his earlier position on the meaning of "he" in

¹⁹⁷ *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845*. "Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon."

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.* "Lecture VII. Rev. XVI 13,14. 'Three unclean spirits like frogs'."

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.* "Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon."

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* "Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon."

²⁰¹ *ibid.* "Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon."

Revelation 16:16. To stress the over-riding permissive role of the Most High as the first cause of the gathering, as he himself had done in 1844, was by 1855 “to betray a lack of acquaintance with the first elements of the language in which the New Testament scriptures are written”.²⁰²

2. Wright's obsession with the Book of Revelation

As noted by MacWhirter, Wright was an attractive speaker who could pull a crowd.²⁰³ In connection with Wright's public lectures on prophecy, one commentator contrasted him with his predecessor Mr. Paxton:

Of different gifts, though possessing peculiar talents, Mr. James Wright, who succeeded the latter, gained some reputation as a lecturer on prophecy. The year 1850 was the acme of his fame, when his place of worship was crowded to the door on Sabbath evenings. His lectures were accompanied with such strong physical declamation that oftentimes the Psalm book was knocked over the pulpit, and on one occasion the pulpit Bible followed suite, accompanied by such a noise as might have awakened sleepers, had any such been among the audience.²⁰⁴

It is no disservice to Wright to say that he was obsessed with the Book of Revelation. He preached at least two series on it in the 1840s and 1850s. He was also to make claims specific to his own day and generation in interpreting it. He was deeply concerned at the reluctance of some people to engage with it, and at the careless handling of it by others.

Professors of religion have too much and too long spoken as if because of its mysteriousness we should not deal much with it. . . . Now this takes away from this book many of its plain commands and encouragements to read it, hear it and practise it. . . . It takes away not only its words but its divine authority, for their speech if driven to its legitimate consequences amounts to nothing more or less than this, that the book of the Revelation is superfluous, or is a book without which the church had a sufficiency.²⁰⁵

²⁰² MS. *Hardback notebook, sermons dated October 1853 to April 1857*. “Lecture XXVI . . . Place called Armageddon.” 1st Sabbath April 1855.

²⁰³ *SRSJH*, Vol. 4, pp. 296-297.

²⁰⁴ Scott, *Annals*, p. 596.

²⁰⁵ *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845*. “Lecture VI . . . Curse on the violators of this book.”

Wright's theology and biblical exposition was entirely orthodox (as far as we have noticed) except in one matter when it came to the Book of Revelation. Sadly, in his exhaustive studies on Revelation, Wright was to lay himself open to the charge of hinting that the Two Witnesses of the eleventh chapter of the book were somehow himself and Mr. Lambie. This was particularly implicit in lectures given around the time of the Disruption. Presumably he had to modify his position after his split with Lambie.

His main argument at the time of the Disruption centred on drawing an analogy between Seceder practice and the meaning of the word "martyr". When renewing the Covenants, Seceders would swear to uphold it while raising their right hand.²⁰⁶ In June 1843, Wright stated in a lecture:

"My witnesses," literally martyrs, Greek word denotes firm resolution to suffer rather than sin – to die rather than deny Christ. Resisting unto blood, striving against sin. Their lot a suffering lot. . . . Martyrs in original comes from "mare" the hand [Greek]. It is a judicial term – used in courts of law to denote bearing witness by lifting up the hand and swearing solemnly. Those two witnesses then, whoever they be are not merely Covenanters in spirit, but in reality – they are those who have a covenanted public profession and they are alone called Martyrs or solemn swearers because they are Covenanters. This is one of the simplest, clearest and strongest proofs of public social vowing – a proof that no man can by any ingenuity overthrow.²⁰⁷

He went on to argue that the Two Witnesses have a public profession and "that we must look for them in some association that is, and remains, distinct from all others". He added that the Testimony would be progressive over the 1260 years that they prophesy – "instead of abridging or cutting down this testimony they are adding to it until it shall be finished". The Two Witnesses occupy in the eyes of the religious world "the meanest and most disreputable station . . . their number is barely competent to render their testimony valid".²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ J. M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1839), Vol. 1, p. 250.

²⁰⁷ *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845*; "Lecture 1st. Rev. ch. 11 . . . 2 Witnesses". 2nd Sabbath June 1843.

²⁰⁸ *ibid.* "Lecture II. Rev 11:4." 3rd Sabbath June 1843.

In excluding several possible candidates for the position of the two, Wright states: “we merely ask where is now that unmutilated Covenanted testimony . . . not surely among those who in defending the Covenanted Reformation, have not engaged in that work above once in a hundred years.”²⁰⁹ When Wright gave this lecture, i.e. in 1843, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland had last renewed the Covenants in 1745 in Crawfordjohn, Lanarkshire. The Reformed Presbyterian Testimony’s historical section, originally agreed in 1839, stated that “covenanting is an occasional duty . . . the permanent obligation of the Covenants of these lands depends on their moral and Scriptural character, rather than their being publicly recognised or renewed; Yet we believe, that where a church or people have been brought under the bond of such engagements, it is a duty warranted by reason and Scripture, occasionally to renew them, as the aspects of divine providence may require . . . ”.²¹⁰ Some Irish Reformed Presbyterians did renew the covenants at Dervock on 12th October 1853.²¹¹

Wright’s expositions of Revelation Chapter 11 were detailed and systematically argued. He took the view that Armageddon was a specific locality but did not name it further than to conclude it was in the “British Dominions”. This was based on the fact that Scripture refers to it as “a place”, that a battle must take place in a locality, that in Revelation 11:8 the battle is in the streets of a city, and that in Revelation 14:20 the judgements take place near a city. By Wright’s reasoning, its location in the British Dominions is clinched by the fact that the city in this part of the book is “the regnant kingdom of this world – of greatest political and military influence”.²¹² This was a view to which he adhered eleven years later, the 1855 lecture on this verse having a slightly different approach but now justifying an identification of the place with Britain on the basis of the “city” being “the Roman earth or continent

²⁰⁹ *ibid.* “Lecture V. Rev 11 . . . The Witnesses.” 2nd Sabbath July 1843.

²¹⁰ *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland: Historical and Doctrinal* (Glasgow, 1866), p. 126. The Scottish Reformed Presbyterians have not renewed the Covenants since 1745. We are grateful to Beth Bogue for this information.

²¹¹ *The Covenanter, devoted to the Principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church* (Philadelphia), Vol. 12, 1856, p. 262. The Irish Reformed Presbyterian Synod renewed the Covenants again on Wednesday 24th June 1990 at Creevagh, Co. Monaghan, with a sermon by Rev. Hugh Blair and an address by Rev. Adam Loughridge. We are grateful to James Kerr for this information.

²¹² *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845.* “Lecture VIII . . . Gathering to Armageddon.”

of Europe” but its tenth street (the most powerful nation) not being on the continent itself.²¹³

Wright’s most focussed consideration of the Two Witnesses came in his *Britain’s Last Struggle, being Lectures Illustrative of the Character, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Two Witnesses*. This was to attract simultaneous admiration for his scholarship but strong criticism of his conclusions. “Mr. Wright is . . . continually hinting that . . . none but the Original Seceders are the ‘Two Witnesses,’” said one writer in an Edinburgh periodical. “The two serious errors running through the book, are the notions regarding the immediate overthrow of Britain, and the identity of the body of which the author is a minister, with the ‘Two Witnesses’.”²¹⁴ A reviewer in the *Original Secession Magazine* commented of Wright’s views: “That there is much ingenuity in setting forth his theories, and adducing plausible arguments in their support, is readily admitted; but the views, in several instances, want breadth of conception corresponding to the subject; and in some cases, the words of the prophet are unduly strained, to make them appear to favour his peculiar views.”²¹⁵

There is, perhaps, a parallel here with the claims of the nineteenth-century American preacher David Steele, who led a breakaway group from mainstream Reformed Presbyterianism. He was to emphasise the Cameronian witness as the clearest manifestation of the Christian

²¹³ *Hardback notebook, sermons dated October 1853 to April 1857*. “Lecture XXVI . . . Place called Armageddon.” 1st Sabbath April 1855.

²¹⁴ *Macphail’s Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal and Literary Review*, Vol. 15, 1853, p. 248. The reviewer is not named.

²¹⁵ *The Original Secession Magazine*, New Series, Vol. 1, 1852-54, p. 431. The reviewer prefixed the words quoted with the following remarks: “There is, perhaps, no prophetic announcement, as to which exponents of prophecy are so much divided, as the slaughter of the witnesses spoken of in the Eleventh chapter of the Book of Revelation. At this there are two leading points of controversy. First, What is meant by the slaying of the witnesses? And secondly, Is this a past or a future event?” In answer to the first, the reviewer approved Jonathan Edwards’ view that the slaying refers to the point at which the true Church of Christ reaches its lowest point and “nearest to an utter extinction”. In answer to the issue of its being a past or future event, the reviewer says that long study and reflection have led him to the view that the event is past. He continues: “But if the view which we have been led to adopt, for the reasons stated, and others which we cannot now state, be the true one, then the whole theory advocated by Mr. Wright in his book is built on an imaginary basis, and he has been holding up visionary terrors before the community in his *Britain’s Last Struggle*. Then, what Britain has to dread, is not being the scene of the slaughter of the witnesses, but being made to share, as a nation, in the effects of the vials of God’s wrath which shall be poured out on Antichristian kingdoms, because of the support and countenance which she has given, and continues to give, to the MOTHER OF HARLOTS . . .”, *ibid.*, pp. 431-439.

Church represented as the Two Witnesses, and he too seemed to come close to identifying his own grouping with them.²¹⁶

The seventeenth-century Scottish commentator James Durham identified the Two Witnesses as the Ministers of the Gospel and said that a definite number – two – stands for an indefinite.²¹⁷ The respected twentieth-century Reformed author William Hendriksen likewise defined them as “the church militant bearing witness through its ministers and missionaries”.²¹⁸

Dr. James Begg was to mock Wright’s view in a speech at the 1852 General Assembly of the Free Church, welcoming the union of the Original Secession denomination with his own. “Some time ago there was a small division consisting of only two ministers, and these two flattered themselves that they were the two witnesses referred to in the Revelation. By and by, however, the two fell out among themselves, and now it has become a question whether any witnesses exist at all.”²¹⁹ The ecclesiastical historians Drummond and Bulloch took the view that Wright and Lambie saw themselves as “the sole representatives of the true church”.²²⁰

The emphasis he placed on the role of the Two Witnesses was to lead Wright in 1844 to oppose free communion, i.e. the practice of admitting people from other denominations to the Lord’s Table. This was when he was preaching on Revelation 22:19: “And if any man shall take away from the words of this book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” Wright said that the verse condemned the mutilating of the words of the book and that this was,

committed by any formal or tacit agreement to conceal any part of it. This is done to an alarming extent in what is called Christendom, by that prevalent heresy known by the name of Free Communion. This system not only takes, but must take for

²¹⁶ David Steele, *The Two Witnesses: Their Cause, Number, Character, Furniture and Special Work* (Cincinnati, 1859), pp. 27-28.

²¹⁷ James Durham, *A Commentary on Revelation* (Original edition 1658, Old Paths Publications, 2000), pp. 611-612.

²¹⁸ W. Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors, An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (1998 printing), p. 129.

²¹⁹ Smith, *Memoirs of James Begg*, p. 187. Smith has a footnote stating that this speech “called forth a blustering letter from one of the two referred to”.

²²⁰ A. L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in late Victorian Scotland, 1874-1900* (St. Andrew Press, 1978), p. 146.

granted that the conflicting parties agree not to bring out their distinguishing peculiarities; for if these are introduced then clear it is beyond all controversy that there cannot be communion, but direct opposition. Now this is an agreement condemned in this book and what can never by any amount of ingenuity be reconciled with the character and very first duty of witness. If the church be in this chapter described as composed of two witnesses, and if they are to finish their Testimony, then we ask, how can any man show that Free Communion which supposes opposite parties, ever in the nature of things consist with her witness? The plain matter of fact is that all the advocates for Free Communion build their scheme on an agreement not to bear witness, for if witness is to be borne the coalition cannot take place.²²¹

Conclusion

James Wright was a man of great intellectual talent, and his ministry appears to have been blessed in his own congregation. He and his followers challenged the Victorian Scottish consensus that ambiguously worded Church unions justified the loss of a Church's attainments. The particular ecclesiastical witness which he sought to promote did not attract enough new blood or retain sufficient in-house loyalty to allow the growth of his sub-denomination, although at one point that seemed possible. Instead, the apparently fissile nature of Secession principles increasingly affected his congregation. However, the robust grounding that Wright gave his people and Divinity students contributed to a resilience which saw them outlast all other branches of the Secession. There was an intellectual vigour among the "Last Anti-Burghers" which manifested itself not only in Wright but also in his successor, Walter Macleod, and in those who separated from them such as William Scott and Henry Paton (senior and junior). We hope to investigate this in future articles, DV.

²²¹ *Hardback notebook, sermons dated May 1843 to May 1845.* "Lecture VI . . . Curse on the violators of this book."

APPENDIX I
INDUCTION SERMON FOR THOMAS M'CRIE
THE YOUNGER

Thomas M'Crie the younger's induction sermon was preached by Wright on 9th June 1836. The text was Luke 8:13: "Take heed therefore how ye hear." The headings were: "first – the manner in which we are to hear the gospel and 2ndly, the reasonableness of the caution."²²²

Not only were hearers to think of the minister as the messenger of God, but to hear the message with "reverence and humility". Wright added: "The importance of the message itself, the authority with which it comes and our great, our infinite need of it, conspire in producing devoutness at least externally. An irreverent hearer insults God, dishonours the place of His holiness, His especial seat on earth, not to speak of the discouragement of the servant."²²³

Humility was an essential element of that reverence with which the word preached was to be heard, argued Wright. However, that humility was not inconsistent with "impartial and strict investigation" in how they heard it. "As it is no consolation to speak with an unknown tongue, it cannot be any consolation to hear what is not understood," he added. Although the things of God are foolishness to the natural man, we are addressed as "rational beings" and the Lord Himself had urged His hearers to "search the Scriptures".²²⁴

They were also to hear in faith, Mr. M'Crie's new congregation were told. "The Word of God maketh ready through the agency of the Spirit, in a most mysterious manner for the existence and exercise of faith. . . . By waiting on the appointed means we are warranted to look for the blessing, but until we have faith to apprehend and appropriate Christ as offered unto us in the Gospel, it shall not profit us."²²⁵ The congregation were also exhorted to hear the preaching of the Word "with a desire to support and advance and transmit to others this invaluable privilege".²²⁶

Wright then explained why the warning, "Take heed then how ye hear", was necessary. The natural aversion to the gospel is because "there

²²² *Hardback notebook, note on spine: "1836: Ordination Mr. McBean & Thomas M'Crie", pp. 191-192.*

²²³ *ibid.*, pp. 191-192.

²²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 193.

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 194.

²²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 195.



Thomas M'Creie "The Younger" (1797-1875), whose ordination sermon Wright preached, entered the union of 1842 and helped lead most of the main Original Succession body into the Free Church in 1852.

is nothing so prominent in an unrenewed character as self, nothing so near, so dear . . . the least approach to storm this citadel meets with firm resistance". And even in the converted person "much" of the enmity of the carnal mind remains: "Spiritual pride or pride in spiritual attainments is apt to rise above that docility which is included in that disposition with which we are to hear," said Wright.

Another reason for the warning was the natural attachment of people to the world. The world was one of the things preventing the growth of fruit in the parable and was also a "net" in which the believer could become enmeshed and if he laid his head on the lap of the world he would soon like Samson find himself without strength.²²⁷

Another necessity for the text's warning lay in Satan's activity in opposing the gospel in people's hearts. Wright stated: "He sets himself firmly to oppose any aggression of the word upon his territories and in this opposition he succeeds in the majority of cases . . . this is an enemy to God and man, of inconceivable subtlety."²²⁸

A final reason given by Wright for the necessity of the warning in the text was that continued lack of spiritual fruit in hearing the gospel would lead to hardness of heart. "This is a solemn and most touching truth calculated to find its way to every man's heart, that is favoured with a dispensation of the Gospel. Every offer of Christ resisted confirms the heart for another resistance. . . ." ²²⁹

²²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 196.

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 197.

²²⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 197-198.

Wright concluded by telling M'Cre's congregation that they had a great need of the gospel and that they were responsible as individuals for how they dealt with it. As there were so many internal and external enemies opposing the truth, he said, their duty lay "in supplicating Him who can open the eyes to see the wonderful things contained in His law and to open our hearts . . .".²³⁰

²³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 199.

APPENDIX II
PROFESSIONS OF FAITH IN INFIRMARY STREET
AND LAURISTON STREET

May 1837	20	April 1853	7
November 1837.....	16	October 1853.....	13
October 1838.....	17	April 1854.....	11
October 1842.....	14	October 1854.....	10
April 1843	16	April 1855	6
October 1843.....	9	October 1856.....	4
April 1844	10	April 1857.....	6
October 1844.....	8	(including Walter MacLeod)	
October 1845.....	7	October 1857	3
and privileges restored to another		April 1858	12
October 1846.....	9	October 1858.....	6
including an adult woman also granted the privilege of baptism as she had not been baptised as a child		April 1859	7
April 1847.....	5	(including four from other churches. A Duncan Wright was admitted, attested by John Angus)	
including one who was to be baptised as an adult beforehand		October 1859.....	10
October 1847	5	April 1860	11
April 1848	3	(including Alexander Dickie, attested by A. Ritchie)	
October 1848.....	10 ²³¹	October 1860.....	10
October 1850.....	8	(including five from other churches. Alexander Dickie, Glasgow, appears again on the list of new members at this communion, possibly having not gone forward at the previous occasion)	
April 1851.....	8	October 1861	11
October 1851	11	April 1862	11
April 1852	10	(including two communicants from Dr. Begg's congregation)	
(including a James MacLeod who was also baptised on the Thursday afternoon of the communion, not having been baptised as a child)			

²³¹ All entries, May 1837 to October 1848, from *Minute book of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders meeting in Infirmary Street, Edinburgh. Volume I (1822-1848)*.

October 1862.....	5	October 1866.....	9
April 1863	14	April 1867.....	8
(including five from other congregations or churches)		October 1867	7
October 1863.....	8 ²³²	April 1868	6
April 1864	6	October 1868.....	7
October 1864.....	2	April 1869	7
April 1865	7	October 1869.....	7
October 1865.....	10	April 1870.....	7
April 1866	10	October 1870.....	8
		April 1871.....	7 ²³³

²³² All entries, October 1850 to October 1863, from *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh. Volume II (1848-1864)*.

²³³ All entries, April 1864 to April 1871, from *Notebook, commences "Memoranda, October 18-7"*.

APPENDIX III

TROUBLES IN THE DIACONATE

The troubles of the period from 1848 onwards in regard to the role of the Diaconate were less than edifying but illustrate a failure to integrate and regulate the work of these office-bearers in the wider context of the Kirk Session and congregation as a whole. It seems that by the end of 1848 a Remonstrance had been distributed by one of the men in the Church “against the printed financial state of the church”.²³⁴ In May 1849, at the same time as offering their resignation because they had not been consulted over the collection for Dundee, the deacons tendering their resignation claimed that there was “an active spirit of opposition at work” amongst some of the members “to frustrate the operation of every measure which had been deemed by them conducive to the financial well-being of the congregation”.²³⁵ A year-and-a-half later, the deacons found themselves defending the accuracy of a printed statement of accounts, and there were divisions among themselves. On one occasion the majority of deacons reported to the Kirk Session that there was a spirit of opposition by two members of the Court to every initiative taken.²³⁶

The trouble over the role of deacons erupted again in the New Year of 1854 when a memorial was presented to the Kirk Session. This asked for a decision as to the powers of congregational meetings; complained that the Deacons’ Court had ceased to act as such and should be revived; complained that two votes at congregational meetings setting Mr. Wright’s salary at £140 had been “violated” by his being paid ten pounds extra; and stated their “alarm” at what they described as “the rapid decrease of the funds of the congregation”. One of the memorialists was James Paton. The Session “repelled” the first request for stating the powers of congregational meetings which it described as an “unscriptural position”. The meeting appears to have been stormy, with one memorialist described as having acted with “extreme rudeness . . . keeping his hat on” and saying to the Treasurer’s face that he was “unfit for office”.²³⁷

²³⁴ *Minutes of the Session of the Congregation of Original Seceders under the pastoral charge of the Revd James Wright, Lauriston Street, Edinburgh; Volume II (1848-1864)*. Meeting of 15th November 1848, p. 2.

²³⁵ *ibid.* Meeting of 7th May 1849, p. 12.

²³⁶ *ibid.* Meetings of 9th December and 12th December 1850, and 7th January 1851, pp. 50-52.

²³⁷ *ibid.* Meeting of 9th January 1854, pp. 98-100.

The Sabbath following the memorialists' appearance at the Kirk Session, it was intimated from the pulpit that a congregational meeting would be held soon to explain the issues raised in the memorial.²³⁸ Materials were prepared for "a narrative of facts" to be placed before the congregational meeting which would include the following: that on Mr. Paxton's death, the arrangements for paying Mr. Wright changed to his stipend's being advanced (presumably rather than being paid to him at the end of the year), that at another meeting it had been agreed to pay him ten pounds more, and that one of the memorialists, Mr. James Smith, had no objection to the sum of £150 being included in the printed abstracts.²³⁹

The congregational meeting finally took place on 6th February. The reading of the Narrative of Facts "gave rise to an unbecoming expression of feeling" by some of the memorialists. This was then followed by "a unanimous and unqualified declaration on the part of the congregation, as to the calumnious, untruthful statements contained in the Memorial". One of the memorialists declared that he had been "perfectly deceived" by the other memorialists. The meeting also seems to have rejected the allegation that decisions of previous congregational meeting had been violated. However, one of the memorialists, James Smith, appears to have repeatedly said during the reading of the Narrative that it was "lies". On being reproved by one of the elders, he told him "to take a snuff".²⁴⁰ To add to the financial headaches, it appears that the penny-a-week subscription for the congregational funds was unpopular.²⁴¹

Perhaps the most shocking moments in the affair of the memorialists came during a further meeting between them and the Kirk Session in March 1854, when James Smith shook his fist in the Session Clerk's face as well as that of Mr. Wright.²⁴² Further attempts to regularise the work of the deacons came at the end of 1854 including the appointment of a Chairman (Thomas Talloch), Vice Chairman, and Clerk; agreeing a quorum of four for the Deacons' Court; and declaring that all intimations of their meetings should be by printed notice. Duties of the deacons, and their rights, were also agreed.²⁴³

²³⁸ *ibid.* Note inserted between minute of 9th January 1854 and 25th January 1854, p. 100.

²³⁹ *ibid.* Meeting of 15th January 1854, p. 101.

²⁴⁰ *ibid.* Meeting of 6th February 1854, pp. 102-103.

²⁴¹ *ibid.* Meeting of 28th February 1854, p. 105.

²⁴² *ibid.* Meeting of 6th March 1854, pp. 107-8.

²⁴³ *ibid.* Meeting of 6th November 1854, p. 141.

APPENDIX IV

WRIGHT'S VIEW OF MINISTERIAL TRAINING

An undated notebook in the Wright/Macleod archive contains a lecture commenting on the vow of Scripture: "I will walk in Thy Truth" (Psalm 86:11). This led the lecturer to the discussion of theological training.

So then, when these qualities laid down by the Spirit are wanting in the minister, we see the havoc that comes upon the souls of men. It is a very serious question, in this age; how the training of the ministry is carried on. That we may examine whether they have the qualities of a minister, to enable the honest believer to walk in God's truth or whether these qualities are utterly absent and have their place occupied by others that are fatal to the souls of men.

If, then, we are to judge by the printed lectures of theological professors and the matters on which aspirants to the ministry are examined; we cannot look for good results in reference to the Truth. Because in every one of the Societies that claim to be the Church, and who are popularly regarded in that light, the matter of teaching and training to the ministry is not the Word of Truth, but what mortal men say about it: what the different expositors have settled in regard to the Gospel; and what they do say comes to the abolishing of the Gospel entirely.

Hence it is not the examination of the aspirants to the ministry – "what is the meaning of this, or that, portion of the Word – but what does such and such a writer say about it?" They go through the circle of all those who have done their best to destroy God's truth: German and other schools of thought!, so-called Biblical criticism, etc. So we may not wonder at those who are not long out of their hands putting out their books filled with heresy: although such, because of their daring honesty in telling what they have been taught are silenced, and it may be, deposed: there are more hypocritical remaining in the Church, with the same, or more heresy: and we do not single out any religious body.

What is called "Biblical criticism" – which such aspirants are bound to be examined upon – is a series of vain attempts to do away with the Divine Authority of the Word of God and make it subject to the judgement of man: to explain the history thereof as



James Wright's grave in the St. Cuthbert's parish church graveyard, Edinburgh.

mere mythology: so many of the books that enter into the composition of the Word of God are pronounced to be without Divine Authority.

When they tell us through their accredited instructors that we do not believe anymore, what our fathers believed, thus we see there is little prospect in the present time at least, of anyone who is willing to make this vow, to get any help in the performance of it in the general ministry of the Gospel.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ MS. *Jotter 15*, commences "This King is the Lord Jesus Christ etc.". Lecture on Psalm 86:11.