

# CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

THE BAIRD LECTURE FOR 1913

BY

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

HAD the fashion of dedications still prevailed, I should have liked to associate this book with the name of the Baird Trustees, by whose most generous courtesy a new precedent was created, and one from outside the borders of the Church of Scotland was for the first time invited to deliver lectures on this distinguished foundation. That act was much more than a personal compliment, it was a token of goodwill to my Church, and as such it was applauded in many quarters without regard to the individual selected. For this reason, I might have been pardoned if I had dedicated the book—unworthy as it is of such promotion—to that Church of Scotland which is to be, in which the ideals and the virtues of long sundered Churches shall, in God's mercy, finally be brought together. That Church has long lived in the hearts of many as an object of faith and hope; and, in spite of outburstings of

suspicion here and there, we look for the fulfilling of that hope.

The lectures were addressed to popular audiences in Glasgow and in Edinburgh, and, though they are here expanded and furnished with illustrative notes, they have not lost their original character. Though numbered now as chapters, they have something of the element of repetition which the lecture form involves; and since the topic is 'the priesthood of all believers,' it is fitting that the argument should be developed in such a way as to appeal to others than experts. I have sought to acquaint myself with the relevant literature, and students will find that I have frequently differed from many of the chief authorities; but such dissents are often barely noted without being dwelt upon and justified. Anything like a detailed commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians was excluded by the conditions of delivery; and it would have been superfluous, as sterling books are available, and the Epistle itself not only is inspired by a single idea, but issuing singularly free from exegetical difficulties. It is for all time the declaration of the profound significance of an individual experience of Christ, and of the many directions in which such an experience may serve for guidance and

for impulse. The attempt to develop and to present this theme may seem audacious, as it is virtually what Luther attempted in view of the necessities of his own time. All that one can do who, in such an undertaking, follows a man of supreme genius, is to bind himself neither to imitate nor to avoid, but steadily to pursue a path of his own. Luther's training and experience, and the circumstances of his age made him find in Paul a teacher more dogmatic and less various than we now acknowledge, and it will be found throughout the Lectures that I have oftener referred to Luther's Letters than to the Commentary on Galatians for the clearing or the illustration of Paul's meaning.

When Paul's writings are considered as a whole, one apparent anomaly may be felt; he was a supreme creator and organizer of Churches, and was forced by urgent practical interests to attach importance to the community; and yet when the ultimate sources of his certainty are explored, he is found to be almost fiercely individualistic. The longer I have worked, the deeper this impression has grown; and though I have not ignored or disparaged his uniqueness as an inspired man, I have endeavoured to present

him in his due relation not only to Jeremiah, but to Luther, and Pascal, and Vinet, and the greater Friends, as well as to mystical individualists, like Emerson, outside of the Church. To all these men it has seemed most certainly possible to have a direct apprehension of the spiritual realities, when the Church or any other society falls away, and man is left alone with the Father of his spirit. This is the distinctive part of Mysticism. In their many dialects, mystics have marked out such stages of advance as the familiar *purgation*, *illumination*, and *union*. "Simple people conceive that we are to see God as if He stood on that side and we on this," says Meister Eckhart; "but it is not so: God and I are one in the act of my perceiving Him." But such a reflection is not primary, and the essential discovery of Mysticism is that God can be apprehended not by logical reasoning but directly by the soul. This is what Paul describes as "beholding with face unveiled," and in anyone who has attained to it, this becomes so real a source of knowledge that it serves to correct and to supplement all that he has received by tradition or at second hand. In spite of the abundant talking about Mysticism, there is to-day a disappointing failure in respect to the individ-

ual courage which it supplies; men and women move only with their society, refusing to trust their own souls. And for this reason, Paul's assertion of the supremacy of the individual experience of God seems to me quite peculiarly admonitory.

I should like to acknowledge my indebtedness to many who have helped me, and in particular to these two excellent scholars—my brother and my son—who have patiently read the proofs. It is with abundant gratitude to the Lord, who orders our way in all things for us, that I end this often interrupted task.

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