

Transcription, February 2015:

Glasgow Herald (No. 10385) (11 April 1873): 4b-4d (anon.).

[p. 4b]

There is a secondary point in connection with our religious and ecclesiastical life which seems to be not generally noticed, if, indeed, it be generally known—the tendency of certain phases of ecclesiastical view and of religious life to associate themselves with certain names and even with certain families. There, for example, are the Hills. What clergyman is there but confesses that, according to the well-worn joke, to them he has at one time lifted his eyes, because from them has come the best attainable aid on knotty matters of Scotch Divinity? Can one think of the Church of Scotland without its Cooks, those admirable Moderates, in their cautious and safe statesmanship, in their freedom from cant, in their tolerance and charity? There is a powerful Clan Macleod in the Church, flavoured with the spirit of the late minister of the Barony, marked out by the geniality of its dispositions and the liberality of its views. Leaving families, what is there, or rather what is there not, in a name? The name Ferguson suggests a little eccentricity. There is our own Fergus Ferguson, who used to tickle the public into the service of the sanctuary—or the Dalkeith Fergus, who hates Burns with a perfect hatred—or the North Knapdale Ferguson, who looks upon quadrilles and reels as devices of Satan. We must add to our list of names, associated with marked tendencies, that of Wallace. Everyone knows the Professor of Church History in the Edinburgh University, who has so much exercised Dr Phin. That active defender of the Scotch faith, Mr Milne Home (who, by the way, seems likely to have enough to do in a month or two to defend his own faith, especially his own faith in the faith of other people), has, in hunting this Wallace, unearthed another clergyman of the same surname, the minister of the parish of Traquair, who, from the fact of Mr Milne Home castigating him for a published sermon, in the belief that he was the Professor, must have, we should guess, some sympathy with that gentleman. And, finally, we have Mr Alfred Wallace, the well-known *savant* and Darwinian—not connected, so far as we are aware, by the ties of blood with either of the ministers—giving forth, on the 1st of the current month—*absit omen!*—and through the columns of *Macmillan's Magazine*, a theory of Establishments characterised by a great freshness and boldness. Can no explanation but the helpless and unsatisfactory one of “curious coincidence” be found for this connection between names and opinions?

There is one point of resemblance between the theories of the minister of Greyfriars', Edinburgh, and the advocate of “natural selection.” Both contend for freedom of thought for the clergy, or the officials who are to occupy the place of the existing clergy, in the Church of the future. This is the essence of Dr. Wallace's plan for saving Establishments. He would convert them into what he himself styles “institutes of free religious thinkers and teachers.” Mr Alfred Wallace's plan is more fully expounded. He too, would convert the clergy of the Church into officials of a very novel character. He would devote the money which would revert to the nation upon the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of England to the maintenance of parish State officials, whom he calls Rectors. He proceeds to explain their education and duties. “He (the Rector) is to be a permanent representative of the best morality and culture of the age—a man whose first duty is to be the friend of all who are in trouble; who lives an unselfish life, devoting himself to the moral and physical improvement of the community; who is a welcome visitor to every house, who keeps free from all party strife and personal competition, and who, by his education and training, can efficiently promote all sanitary measures and healthful amusements, and show by his example the beauty of a true and virtuous life.” Regarding his education, we are told that he “should be

specially trained in the laws of health and their practical application, and in the principles of the most advanced political economy;" and also that he must have "a fair knowledge of physiology and of simple medicine and surgery, of the rudiments of law and legal procedure, of the principles of scientific agriculture, and of the natural-history sciences, as well as of whatever is considered essential to the education of a cultivated man." According to this scheme, also, the duties of the Rector would comprise all those of the existing clergyman, "but he would never conduct religious services of any kind." His actual work Mr Wallace does not exactly define, but he would be an *ex-officio* Magistrate and an *ex-officio* member of the School Board, while he would "lecture in the church on moral, social, sanitary, historical, philosophical, or any other topics which he judged most suitable to the circumstances of his parishioners." Stating the theory briefly, Mr Wallace's rector would be neither more nor less than a State-paid Centre of Civilization.

Surely this is a pretty oasis of Utopia in the waste, howling wilderness of controversy. But Mr Wallace's Establishment is but a "fancy" Establishment after all. Like most fancy articles, when examined and touched, it proves to be brittle. There are two objections which have merely to be stated to show themselves to be insurmountable. The one is that the scheme is self-contradictory. Even supposing that the British Parliament could or would devote the revenues of the Church of England—revenues given for the teaching of religious dogma—to lectures on sanitary science, agriculture, philosophy, &c; how can we account for the fact that, according to Mr Wallace, the Rectors must be "religious?" Thus we are told that the Rector should be of a "religious frame of mind." How on earth is this to be found out by examination or otherwise? We are further told that "his religion should be quite free from sectarian prejudices." Even admitting that such a religion could be found, or that there is machinery in existence for finding it, even it must be at the least that "sentimental Deism" which your genuine Positivist so heartily despises. And yet Mr Wallace's theory proceeds on the assumption that whatever the funds of the disestablished Church may be devoted to, they are not to be devoted to the support of the teachers of any "Ism" whatsoever. Another fatal objection to Mr Wallace's theory of parish Rectors, is its sentimentality. Besides the ambiguity involved in the Rector being "of a religious frame of mind," we are also told that "his first duty would be to promote harmony and goodwill, and to gain any object he might think beneficial by persuasion, rather than by an abrupt exercise of authority;" and that "it would be an essential part of his duty to be on good terms with the ministers of all religious sects in his district, to bring them into friendly relations with each other, and to induce them to work harmoniously together for moral and educational objects." In other words, the State is to pay men at the average rate, according to Mr Wallace's figures, of £600 a year, mainly for being endowed with a sweet temper and a conciliatory disposition. The State may do many unwise and unnecessary things, but the last thing it is likely to do, in these days of "payment by results," is to handsomely endow officials, not for performing certain statutory duties, but for possessing, or being supposed to possess, certain agreeable moral qualities.

But while Mr Wallace's fancy Establishment is, like a house of cards, pleasant to look at and easily overthrown, the fact of its being constructed at all is not quite without significance. It shows, what so many other things have shown of late, that by men of the highest literary and scientific culture the prospect of the triumph of Voluntaryism is not looked forward to with happiness, and scarcely even with equanimity. Such men seem to look upon the Establishments as the only Churches in which they can breathe easily; and only the other day Mr Vance Smith, the Unitarian clergyman who is admitted among the Revisers of the Scriptures, expressed his preference for a creed settled by Parliament. Hence all these attempts to reconcile the faith in religious equality with the Establishment theory. Propositions like those

Mr Alfred Wallace point to no practical issue except the maintenance at the public expense of virtuous newspaper editors in the towns and of select Justices of the Peace in the counties. It would be ill become us to express an opinion upon a proposition so advanced! But they help to measure the estimate which some men of scientific culture and a religious frame of mind have come to entertain of the real uses of our Christian civilisation.

[\[Return\]](#)

The Alfred Russel Wallace Page, Charles H. Smith, 2015.