

**SCOTTISH  
UNITARIAN  
CHURCHES**

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## ABERDEEN UNITARIAN CHURCH

by COLIN GIBSON.

### THE CITY OF ABERDEEN.

ABERDEEN is the most northerly of our Churches, as far north of Edinburgh as Sheffield is from London. The city is located at the mouth of the Dee and the Don. Up Deeside is Balmoral, and the Grampians rise to the Cairngorms. It is scenically lovely and the towns of the Buchan peninsula, with many ancient castles, are historically among the most interesting in Scotland. It is the Macbeth country. Its University, the most northerly of British Universities, has a fine tradition of learning. Visitors to Aberdeen are made very welcome, and will see a unique and different part of the country.

### THE CHURCH'S HISTORY AND CHARACTER.

THE CHURCH has sprung from the life of the people and possesses strong democratic qualities. It was founded in 1833, and the Church in George Street, now no longer standing, was built in 1840. The present Church building was the result of the devoted labour of a great Unitarian leader, Rev. Alexander Webster, and was opened in 1906. His book, *Memories of a Ministry*, is exceedingly lucid and interesting to a Unitarian reader, and is one of several he wrote. Alexander Webster had two periods at Aberdeen, from 1884-91 and from 1895-1910. He set the seal upon the character of the Congregation. His popular preaching on the Broad Hill drew hundreds to hear him. An advanced Unitarian in his theological emphasis, he believed "in setting religion free from all clan and sectarian limits." "Hitherto," he wrote, "the Unitarian promulgation of religion has been Christian, but the hour has come for the universalising of Unitarianism." He believed, too, that in order to inspire energy for the Democratic State, our Churches must not content themselves with promoting Fatherhood, but that "they have now to proclaim Brotherhood as the moral side of religion, and evoke a practical enthusiasm for it." He embraced with his whole

heart the then new and liberating Gospel of Socialism. He wrote: "Then Socialism emerged, and I was in for it." "The members of a live Church," he contended, "are inevitably concerned with everything proper to life—with politics and economics as well as with theology and ethics, and seek for light and stimulation in their concern. I was politician, Socialist, humanitarian in radical form because I was a Unitarian. I read my commission in the widest sense and did not stint the scope of my activity."

In the summer of 1889, Alexander Webster started the scheme known as the Fresh-Air Fortnight. He secured an old cottage in the country with quite a lot of land around it, and gave the poor children in the town who were in poor health a holiday in the summer. This has now grown into the Linn Moor Home for Children, which is a residential home catering for children all the year round. His portrait hangs in the Home as its founder.

### **CHARACTER OF RECENT MINISTRIES.**

Rev. Lucking Tavener (1911-17) and Rev. Arthur Scruton (1922-27) and Rev. H. H. Ceiron Jones (1931-44) died while in office. All three were beloved and their deaths deeply mourned. Arthur Scruton was an intrepid speaker. He would do battle in the Castlegate and give lectures in the Music Hall to take Unitarianism to the people. He was a man with broad popular sympathies. The Church was full, including the Gallery, when he preached on the subject: "Was Lenin the Jesus Christ of Russia?" and cheers ended the sermon.

Rev. Ceiron Jones was a devoted pastor and household friend. What he would do for people needing helping knew no limits of love and endurance. He was a Town Councillor in the Socialist interest. Goodness knows how he got through the double task of Council and Church work without neglecting either, but he spent himself without stint. At the Memorial Service his friend, Rev. Herbert Barnes, said of him: "In absolute simplicity and perfect trust, he went on helping and loving to the end." These were days of urgent and pressing poverty when a partisan word and a helping hand could be a gospel in



*The Parable of the Sower by John M. Aitken,  
Aberdeen Unitarian Church.*

itself. Rev. L. Baker Short (1945-50) held the ideal of a Christian Socialist ministry and combined it with service on the Council.

Times are different now. Local politics today is a matter of techniques and requires the specialist. There are no glaring wrongs, and the minister is not needed the same, but he is needed more than ever in the pulpit and on the pastoral side at a time when people do not know what to believe.

There were the ministries of Rev. Henry Dawtrey (1918-21) and of Rev. Leslie Belton (1927-31). A fruitful ministry was cut short by the appointment of Leslie Belton as Editor of the *Inquirer*. Rev. Gordon Beverley had an effective ministry of seven years (1950-57). Then, in 1958, Rev. Wallace Tavener returned to his wife's native Aberdeen, where his father had been minister, but he was overtaken by death after an all too brief period of two years. Both father and son have left behind an honoured name.

### **THE DEVOTED LAYMAN.**

Ministers come and ministers go, but the devoted layman continues. There has been a succession of these devoted laymen from the beginning at Aberdeen. Two most recent ones are the late Mr. William F. McRobb, who always used to attend General Assembly Meetings and the late Mr. George Stephen, who used his annual railway pass to visit Unitarian Churches all over Great Britain; one moneyed, one unmoneyed but equally devoted. A fine tablet in plain woodwork, done by Mr. J. D. Murray, has been erected in the Church to the memory of Mr. McRobb. It is adorned with the Unitarian emblem of the flaming chalice and bears the inscription: "May the knowledge of his life's work inspire succeeding Congregations."

### **THE CONGREGATION AT PRESENT.**

So we come to the state of the Congregation now. No longer has politics the religious reason it had, and religion has to find its own good reason for itself. Unitarianism is an adventure of belief. The task before the Church is

to seek God and revive the lost interest in religion by giving it a new expression. Instead of minimising, we need to increase religious fervour and faith. Can this be done?

Aberdeen has a thriving Sunday School, with a very regular attendance. Four of the thirteen teachers have 25-year service medals, and ten are former Sunday School scholars. The Unitarian Young People's League meets every Sunday afternoon, and this year boasts the President and Secretary of the Scottish District. Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies meet weekly and Scottish Country Dancing is a popular weekly event. There is a strong Women's League. Two different groups meet weekly on Wednesday afternoon and twice monthly on Tuesday evening.

The Government of the Church is largely in the hands of the men, but the women do a great deal of the work in all Church activities. There is no social distinction inside the Church. All the organisations work together with give and take and goodwill. A Congregational gathering takes place each month. Much activity has to be devoted to money raising because the Church is not endowed, and the members of the Congregation are not wealthy.

### **THE CHURCH BUILDING.**

They say that in Aberdeen we do not build for time but for eternity. The Church is a granite edifice, which has hardly been affected by 56 Aberdonian winters. The architecture is unusual. The Kirk is upstairs on top of the Hall below, and there are a number of small rooms, making possible the holding of Sunday School Classes in Church time. A painting of the Parable of the Sower, done by the Scottish artist, John M. Aitken, covers the wall behind the pulpit. The Hall has a fine full-curtained stage.

One of the memories of the Church is that in September 1859, the revered Dr. Martineau preached in it on the occasion of the meetings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. The British Association is meeting again in Aberdeen this year from 28th August-4th September. No doubt Unitarians will be among visitors from all over the country, and we look forward to welcoming them at Church.

## THE WILLIAMSON MEMORIAL UNITARIAN CHURCH, DUNDEE

*by* DOUGLAS WEBSTER.

Founded by Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer, M.A., in 1785, Dundee has the Third Unitarian Congregation formed in the English-speaking world. Many Unitarian Churches have an earlier origin than 1785 but they were not all founded as Unitarian Churches. Rev. Theophilus Lindsey is recognised as the first minister of a Unitarian congregation in Essex Street, London. The first service in London was on 17th April, 1774. The second English-speaking congregation was formed in Montrose, Scotland, by William Christie, son of Thomas Christie, Town Provost, in 1781.

Rev. Fyshe Palmer, a graduate of Queen's College, Cambridge, was influenced by the writings of Dr. Joseph Priestley. He left his office as a Church of England curate of Leatherhead, Surrey, and offered his services as a preacher to the Unitarian Society at Montrose (14th July, 1783). In November, 1783, Palmer reached Montrose and remained as Christie's colleague until in May, 1785, he went to gather a congregation at Dundee which (besides missionary adventures in other towns) he served for eight years.

In 1793 Palmer was deported to Botany Bay for his part in assisting George Mealmaker prepare an address attacking the government's "extravagant war taxation." Palmer died in 1802 on his way home—his body was eventually moved to Boston, Mass., U.S.A., by an American Captain, in 1804.

The cause in Dundee struggled on aided by two laymen—Mr. Robert Miller and Mr. George Speed. But the congregation passed through a difficult period through lack of funds and other drawbacks until 1865, when it gained the membership of prominent citizens including the late Henry Currer Briggs and the late David Jobson, who lost his life serving the cause in the Tay Bridge disaster. In





*The Williamson Memorial Unitarian Church, Dundee*

1865 the congregation was sufficiently virile to secure the support of The Scottish Unitarian Association, and efforts were made to appoint a minister. On 6th October, 1865, the Rev. Henry Williamson preached for the first time in Dundee and thus began a remarkable ministry of 60 years. It was mainly through the resulting labours of Henry Williamson that the present building now stands.

A man of considerable experience, having worked as a carpenter and at the age of 18 emigrated to America, Henry Williamson returned to England at the outbreak of the civil war. His contact with Dr. John Relly Beard, then Principal of the Unitarian Home Mission College, led to his being called to the ministry. Early in 1866 he was inducted to the charge of the Unitarian Church in Dundee which at that time met in the old Exchange Hall at the foot of Castle Street (now the site of a printer's). Later meetings for worship were in the Thistle Hall in Union Street until determined efforts were made to obtain a proper place for worship.

In 1870 the present church was erected at a cost of £1,700. A few years later a further £950 was raised to purchase the feu or freehold. The structure includes two good schoolrooms under the church which are also used for other week-day activities. It is recorded that between 500 and 600 people attended the stone laying on 12th March, 1870, by H. Curren Briggs, although only a few days previously some religious bigots had pelted Mr. Williamson with mud and stones on account of his Unitarianism. Today Dundee considers Henry Williamson as one of its own sons because of the outstanding service that he gave to its citizens. On 21st August, 1924, he was publicly presented with his portrait in oils at a meeting held in the Victoria Art Galleries, Dundee. The portrait was the work of Mr. Tom Ross who studied locally and in Paris; he died in 1961.

Tribute was paid to Henry Williamson at the presentation for his many forms of service to the community. These included helping the unemployed and founding an emigration scheme which had assisted 600 working girls to find work in America. For education he had instituted free

evening schools and had served on the Schools Board showing an active interest for many years. In industry he was founder and President of the Dundee Mill and Factory Operatives Union, which had secured better conditions for the workers in the Jute Mills. One year after his public recognition Henry Williamson died suddenly on 15th October, 1925. He died still in charge of his flock, having preached on the previous Sunday.

Succeeding Ministers to the great ministry of Henry Williamson have continued to serve their charge in the same spirit of devotion to their ideals. They include Rev. Albert Whitford (1929-1954), who is still remembered with affection by those who knew him. Rev. A. E. Potts served from 1955-1958. Rev. George Foote, who came to Scotland to retire at Carnoustie, found himself pressed into service in Dundee from 1959-1960 until the present Minister was settled and still continues to be a valuable supporter of the Dundee Church.

The situation of the Church in Dundee in 1963 is quite a healthy one. Although many members have found themselves removed to the suburbs they continue to give loyal support. Dundee itself is undergoing considerable changes which will eventually cause an upheaval to the Williamson Memorial Church. A new inner ring road is scheduled to be constructed on the site of the present Church and at some time in the near future plans will have to be made for moving to another site and another building. This is a situation that provides opportunity for improving the amenities of the congregation, but the Church has always been a central church and to meet the needs of the present congregation it must continue to be centrally situated.

Dundee will look to its neighbours in the Scottish Unitarian Association and to the General Assembly for guidance when the time for a new place for worship comes. It will be sorry to lose a building that has served such devoted members for so long—but the Church recognises the need for progress and would echo the sentiments of Henry Williamson in furthering the needs of the community.

That the community needs a liberal witness is clearly evident in the support the Williamson Memorial Church has not only from its own members, but also from many friends who attend special social and religious functions. There is an active association with the Friends of India and an annual service of All Faiths established in 1960 is instrumental in making friendships that otherwise might not be. The Men's Club and the Women's League have social interests that are appreciated by a wide circle of friends and provide many opportunities for meeting people of other churches.

The General Assembly meetings which are to be held in Edinburgh in 1963 are usually a stimulus to Unitarians in the area where the meetings are held. Perhaps the Edinburgh meetings will have the additional effect of stimulating the visitors after they have experienced the vitality of Scottish Unitarianism.

## ST. MARK'S UNITARIAN CHURCH, EDINBURGH

*by* BRUCE FINDLOW.

St. Mark's Unitarian Church has stood in Castle Terrace near the west end of Edinburgh's Princes Street since 1835 and today under its twelfth minister it displays an active and expanding life. It has a membership of nearly two hundred people of all ages and what the Americans call a "constituency" of about two hundred and fifty. To its Sunday morning family worship come week by week about one hundred people and their children including always visitors or strangers coming for the first time.

During the three weeks of the Edinburgh Festival many overseas visitors join the special services of worship related to the arts which bring into the church the talents of artistic people. In recent years the church has become better known in the city through its Services for Strangers, its lecture series on Unitarianism, and its coffee hour after morning service on special occasions. In 1962 the church was completely redecorated and re-lighted as part of a comprehensive scheme of repair and improvement which is still continuing and which it is estimated will cost a total of £3,000.

But before St. Mark's was built, the cause of liberal religion had known other homes and other names in the eighty years since a handful of people in Berwickshire broke away from the Cameronian Presbyterians on the question of the extent of Christ's atonement. These few took the view that Christ died for all men, not only for the elect as John Calvin taught; but more important than the beliefs which call them apart from the majority was the method which gave rise to those beliefs; the method of free inquiry in independence of all human creeds and confessions.

In 1769 at Auchencraw in Berwickshire this group of people who came to believe in universal salvation chose James Purves, by lot, from three candidates, to be their

first pastor. He was the first and by no means the least of a remarkable series of ministers. In 1776 Purves became the first minister of some of these Berwickshire folk who had moved to Edinburgh and it is from that date that the story of liberal religion in Edinburgh begins. Purves had a school and place of worship at Broughton until 1792 and he and his people were known as Universal Dissenters. For a time then the congregation met in Barber's Hall, but when Richard Wright came to Edinburgh on a Unitarian missionary visit in 1809 he called them "Antitrinitarians though not as a society strictly Unitarian." Two years later he found that Unitarianism had made some progress but was divided into two societies, one meeting in Skinners' Hall Chapel and the other in a hall at the head of the Anchor Close off the High Street.

When Richard Wright came again in 1814 he found Thomas Southwood Smith to be the minister. He increased the congregation considerably and assisted in the formation of the Scottish Unitarian Association in 1813, and in the course of his ministry he graduated M.D. and went on to become famous as a sanitary reformer. In his time the congregation moved to an old Episcopal Chapel in Carrubber's Close off the High Street, but this was an inconvenient situation and the members began, in faith, in 1816, to build up a fund to erect their own chapel.

The Young Street Chapel was opened in 1823, but with the coming of the Rev. Batholemew Teeling Stannus in 1831 the ordinary attendance doubled in less than two years and the need of a larger place of worship became apparent. In 1834 a fund was opened for the purpose and in due course arrangements were made for the erection of a new chapel in Castle Terrace with David Bryce as architect. Stannus made a money-raising tour of England for five months, his eloquence being well rewarded, and the present church, sometimes called "Italianate" and sometimes "Flemish," was opened on 18th October, 1835. The organ casing survives from the Young Street Chapel and is a notable piece of woodcarving which has been attributed to Grinling Gibbons but which is thought to be the work of one of his pupils.



*St. Mark's Unitarian Church, Edinburgh*

St. Mark's was probably at its strongest in the few years immediately after its opening, before Stannus left to settle in Sheffield in 1838. But it has had fine ministries and long ministries; notably those of George Harris, who earned the title of Unitarian Bishop from some; John Crawford Woods, who went to build the Unitarian Christian Church in Adelaide, South Australia; John Gordon, the father of Rev. Alexander Gordon who became Principal of the now Unitarian College, Manchester; Robert Blackley Drummond, who ministered in St. Mark's for fifty-four years from 1858 to 1912 and for whom a plaque was placed in the church by his friends; S. H. Mellone who assisted Drummond for two years in his old age, married his younger daughter and went on to lecture in Christian Doctrine in Manchester University and become Principal of the (now) Unitarian College, Manchester; R. V. Holt, who extended the tradition of preaching a radical social gospel which had been established by Mellone and who also became Principal of U.C.M.; Sydney Spencer, later Principal of Manchester College, Oxford; and Wallace Tavener, who earned the second plaque to adorn our walls with a striking and individual ministry which lasted for thirty-one years.

For fifty years and four ministries St. Mark's was largely and usefully identified with socialism and a radical social gospel, but today, in its present ministry, it has moved away from the preaching of social religion to the preaching of personal religion and a liberal theology which seems to meet a need in this sceptical and insecure mid-20th century world. St. Mark's has received a steady flow of new members in recent years and found a new lease of life as the only Unitarian Church in a city of many churches. It has always been a church without endowments and there have been times when it was difficult to sustain financially and it is proper to record our gratitude to the McQuaker Fund, formed in 1889 from the generous bequest of William McQuaker of Glasgow, for long-standing support in "maintaining and diffusing the principles of Unitarian Christianity in Scotland." In recent years the church income from members and friends has risen steadily and



it is said that the contribution per head to church funds at least equals that of the best-giving Church of Scotland congregations in Edinburgh.

Worship in St. Mark's is simple and sincere; in form not unlike the worship of other churches in Scotland and of the Free Churches in England, but in content more catholic, tolerant, reasonable and relevant to life today. Worship is our chief activity, for the church is a city one and members have many opportunities elsewhere in Edinburgh to satisfy their social, cultural and intellectual interests. But, for small numbers with special interests, there is a full winter programme of meetings and events as well as Sunday School, Unitarian Young People's League, Women's League, and Scottish Country Dancing Class.

Of special interest is the Book Club in which members meet once a month to buy a book and discuss a literary subject, a programme which began in members' houses fully ten years ago and later moved into the church hall where the club now meets.

A newer enterprise is the regular occasion every Tuesday afternoon from October to April called simply "Open Doors" when the hall is open and warm to receive whatever folk come in to talk and drink tea with the Minister and his wife. Now, in 1963, we support the U.N.A., visit old people, raise money for the Cheshire Home, make a unique contribution to the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, and look for further fields of service large and small. St. Mark's is a living church, in the main stream of British Unitarianism, and, we like to think, in the van!

## THE GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH

by ALLEN KIRBY.

Unitarianism in Glasgow goes back to the year 1787 when "Jemmy" Wardrop, a business man known for his unorthodox ways, opened the first Unitarian preaching room in Glasgow, himself being the preacher. This first Unitarian Society was short lived; it lasted just over eight years under the leadership of various men, the most notable being Fyshe Palmer, Benjamin Spencer and William Christie. Fyshe Palmer was "active and zealous in propagating the Unitarian Doctrine in Scotland" from about the year 1783 and probably he was responsible for influencing Wardrop. He was later minister at Dundee three years before his deportation in 1793 for his advocacy of Parliamentary Reform. Benjamin Spencer, during his association with the Glasgow congregation from 1791 to 1793, was also studying medicine at Edinburgh University so that his energies were necessarily divided and when he moved to Birmingham, the congregation unanimously requested Mr. William Christie from Montrose to be their minister. Unfortunately, his stay was even shorter than his predecessor; in August, 1795, he left Glasgow for the U.S.A. After Mr. Christie's departure the congregation disintegrated and when Lant Carpenter and four other men holding Unitarian opinions came to Glasgow University in 1798 there was no remnant of the Unitarian congregation to be found.

For some years organised Unitarianism was absent from Glasgow and then it was started again by a number of Calvinistic Baptists who had been expelled from the Baptist Communion because of their newly discovered Unitarian and Universalist views. These men were responsible for inviting the Rev. James Lyons of Chester to come to Scotland in 1808 on a missionary tour and in November of that year a Unitarian Fund was established in Glasgow. The following year the Rev. Richard Wright also made a tour of Scotland. He preached in Anderson's Institution in Glasgow and it is said that when he conducted



*Glasgow Unitarian Church.*

a public conference and disputation as many as two thousand people failing to get in, were turned away. About this time a Unitarian society was formed which met at the Provan's Hall, but when the Rev. James Lyons returned to Glasgow in June, 1810, he found that, "there had been a division, but it will not be at all injurious I think to the cause. The people who have left the old place were looking out for ground to build a place of worship on, when I left them . . ."

This second group held their meetings for worship in the Trades Hall and on 28th September, 1810, adopted the first formal Constitution and set of Rules of a Unitarian Society in Glasgow. From the beginning this society took an interest in the poor people of the city even though its own finances were barely enough to pay the running expenses. The small membership grew slowly and steadily and in 1811 began to make efforts to secure a regular minister in the person of Mr. James Yates, at that time a student at Edinburgh University. Mr. Yates took up his duties in August, 1811, and the two groups were reunited and worshipped together in the Trades Hall. The efforts to build a church came to a satisfactory conclusion and in November, 1812, the first Unitarian Chapel was opened in Union Street.

The life of the Union Street Chapel was a short one. The building was sold in 1853. This bold step was taken after much deliberation and it is an indication of the shrewdness and vigour of the congregation at that time. Due to the spread of the business area of the city, the property in Union Street had appreciated greatly in value and as the building was not large enough to meet the needs of the congregation it was decided to sell the old church and thereby raise sufficient money to pay off the outstanding loans, buy a new site and build a bigger church a little way from the centre of the city. The new church on the present site, in St. Vincent Street, was opened on 13th April, 1856, the first service being conducted by Dr. James Martineau.

In spite of financial difficulties and no full time minister for 13 years the congregation continued and increased in

numbers and influence until in 1869 the Rev. John Page Hopps was invited to be the first minister. Although his ministry was not marked by any very outstanding events, the church reached a level of membership and efficiency which it had not known since the time of the Rev. George Harris's ministry. If numbers are of any significance, it is recorded in the annual report of 1873 that 534 persons attended the annual congregational soiree. The enterprising work continued up to the time of the First World War and the depression which shortly followed it. The nation-wide drift from the churches had its effect and in 1922 the church membership dropped for the first time below 200.

By 1946 the congregation had dwindled still further and committee and congregational discussions began to take place to re-assess the purpose and function of a Unitarian Church. It was felt that the building as it stood was no longer suitable for contemporary needs—the church had seating for 600 whilst the hall could only accommodate 50, which meant that all social functions required the hire of expensive halls outside the church. After lengthy discussions it was decided to convert the church into a dual-purpose building. The centre pews were removed and replaced by tubular steel stacking chairs, the pulpit was removed and replaced by a platform which can be used for dramatic, choral and orchestral productions, and new kitchen, toilet and cloakroom facilities were arranged. The rehabilitation scheme was completed in 1954 and the re-dedication service was conducted by Principal Raymond V. Holt on the 27th April, 1954.

In a history as short as this it is not possible to give details of personalities, but the names of some of the famous and public-spirited men who have been members of this congregation should be noted:—Stephen Mitchell, founder of the famous Mitchell Library; Allan Glen, builder, and founder of the school which bears his name; William Teacher, distiller; William McQuaker, founder of the McQuaker Trust, from which all four Scottish Unitarian Churches benefit today; George Baillie, donor of Baillie's Institution; William Freeland, poet and

essayist. And again, no history however short, could be written without making at least a passing note of a few of the eminent ministers of the past, the most well-known being George Harris, Charles Clarke, Henry Crosskey, John Page Hopps, Albert Lazenby, James Forrest and L. Jenkins Jones.

Today the Glasgow Unitarian congregation is a group of less than 100 men and women who are seeking together, upon the traditional Unitarian principles of freedom and tolerance, the truth of religion through a simple form of worship, study and service. Although the congregation is still very small new members are appearing and there are encouraging signs of development and extension. Advertising and propaganda are being directed particularly at people who have no connection with the other churches but who nevertheless feel the need to join together with their fellow men in acts of worship. The church is situated in an area which is to be completely re-developed within the next few years and therefore concern is being expressed about the future of the present church building. Whether the church will be rebuilt or incorporated in a larger building or whether the congregation will have to adapt itself to being in an old and uneconomic building in a new environment is very much under discussion at the present time. One thing is certain, there is still the need for a central Unitarian Church in Glasgow and there is the determination among its members to keep the church alive and extend its influence.

## SCOTTISH UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

by KENNETH STREET.

*Founded 1813 — Reformed 1861.*

UNITARIANISM did not begin to come into prominence in Scotland until the middle of the 18th century, but towards its close there was considerable debate and upheaval among a section of the ministry of the Scottish Kirk, caused by the adoption by some of definitely Unitarian views. Prior to this there had been more isolated professions of such views, indeed, the last public execution in Britain for blasphemy was that of Thomas Aikenhead, who suffered near Edinburgh in 1697 for speaking against the Trinity.

From the middle of the 18th century there was a steady growth of Unitarian belief, and we read of Rev. William Christie in 1782 founding in Montrose the first distinctive Unitarian movement in Scotland. Later Rev. Thomas Fyshe Palmer followed on with the work, but later moved to Dundee, where it is on record that he had been "incited by some humble worshippers of the Most High to come to this place to aid them in their religious services," these being held in his own apartment. Palmer formed his congregation in Dundee, and preached occasionally in the nearby townships, and also in Glasgow and Edinburgh.

At the turn of the century Dr. Benjamin Spencer (of Bristol) began services in Glasgow, and a movement was already afoot in Edinburgh; each of these places had local and independent societies, such as the "Edinburgh Unitarian Fund," and the "Glasgow Unitarian Fund," for the dissemination of Unitarianism and the issue of tracts. In 1813, at the instigation of Dr. Southwood Smith, who ministered to the Edinburgh congregation while he was studying medicine (he later became a powerful social reformer in London, tackling the evils of factory life, and for 30 years devoting himself to combating bad

housing, and drainage, and impure water supplies), together with Rev. James Yates who occupied the Glasgow pulpit, an Association was formed to link up the various scattered and independent Unitarian Societies. This Association, known as the "Scotch Unitarian Christian Association," had as its objects "to promote and keep up intercourse and correspondence between different societies in Scotland . . . ; to contribute to the illustration of the doctrines by the distribution of tracts . . . ", and it was on this latter work that chief attention was focussed. There were some 40 centres between Aberdeen and the Borders with which a regular correspondence was maintained, and from which there was a regular distribution of tracts.

The necessary funds were acquired by donations and personal subscriptions. The membership subscription for the Association was established at 2/6d—at which figure it remained until an increase was made a few years ago. One of its outstandingly energetic workers was Rev. George Harris, who became minister first in Glasgow, and later in Edinburgh. Subsequently he moved to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and the activities of the Association suffered a temporary eclipse. In 1861 it was revived and reorganised, with Dr. H. W. Crosskey and Rev. R. B. Drummond as joint secretaries. The presidency was held by Mr. George Hope—the well-known advanced Scottish agriculturalist of Fenton Barns. Since that date it has continued steadfastly in its work, and has been served by a number of men of undoubted ability.

The Annual Meetings of the Association were at first held always in Edinburgh or Glasgow, but later extended to Aberdeen and Dundee. They were made the occasion for the usual business of such meetings, for reports from all correspondence centres, and an official dinner; but they also included visits from representatives from Northern Ireland, and the Northumberland and Durham Association. A close link was kept with these two neighbouring bodies, and the S.U.A. representatives visited them in their turn.

The Association has from time to time utilised the services of a missionary minister, who has visited, taken services,



or given addresses at many of the centres established for correspondence. Causes were inaugurated, and in some cases churches built, but these have mostly disappeared, largely from the inability of the local cause and the Association to provide a permanent settled minister who could maintain continued interest. Of these may be mentioned Perth, Kilbarchan, Paisley, and Rutherglen, which each had their own premises. Another was Stenhousemuir, the only Universalist cause in Scotland, and now unhappily no more. That these have gone is to be regretted, but it does not mean that their work is wasted, for there is no doubt that Unitarian thought in Scotland from 1750 on has had a very real broadening effect on the outlook of the average Scot.

With the funds made available for this purpose by the generous bequest in 1889 of William McQuaker, public lectures were given in the larger Scottish towns, and these were the cause of considerable discussion, argument and correspondence. It follows therefore that the relatively small growth of our churches is really only indicative of the effect of the broadening influence of Unitarian thought on the churches in general. But on the whole the growth and development of our churches has not been without a struggle, and it is of interest to note that until 1813 a clause, even though obsolete, still stood in the Scottish statute book, making the profession of Unitarian views a capital crime.

The Association continued in its work, and was until 1931 an association of individual members. At that time, since the distribution of tracts was by then an outmoded and obsolete procedure, a major change in policy was made, and the Association became what it now is, an association of the Scottish churches, with additional support from individual subscribers. In this way it is able to keep in closer touch, and where necessary give a helping or guiding hand with the work in progress in the churches. Its main purpose now is, broadly, to promote the spread of Unitarian and Free Christian beliefs; to promote fellowship among the congregations; and to assist existing churches, and encourage the formation of new causes.

The work of the Scottish Unitarian Association today includes doing everything possible to break down any feeling of isolation or distance between the churches; giving a general oversight to the churches and providing means for the discussion of those problems common to church life, which inevitably arise; and forming a bond and link between the churches and the General Assembly. It provides for a joint yearly meeting of the members of all the Scottish congregations, Sunday Schools, Y.P.L., and Women's League, usually over a week-end, and by this the links holding together the Scottish churches are made more firm and personal. In short, an endeavour is made to make every member realise that he is not only connected with his own church, but with the Unitarian body as a whole, in Scotland and in Britain. The Association also originates and co-ordinates plans for publicity, special services and the general advancement of the denomination in Scotland.

In all this work it is well served by an executive committee, comprised of the Scottish ministers and representatives of each church, all of whom face up to the time and travelling involved in a spirit of service which is gratefully acknowledged.

## THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

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These Scottish Unitarian Churches and their Scottish Unitarian Association take their place gladly within the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches which was formed in 1928 by the amalgamation of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (1825) and the National Conference of Unitarian, Liberal Christian, Free Christian, Presbyterian and other Non-subscribing or Kindred Congregations (1881).

We receive help from the General Assembly in finding our ministers, providing material for religious education and youth work, and for publicity, financing our special developments from time to time and in many other ways. We serve the Assembly as financial subscribers and as supporters of denomination activities and occasions and sometimes by serving on its Council and Departmental Committees. In 1963 we are proud and glad to be hosts to ministers, delegates and visitors attending the Thirty-Fifth Annual Meetings of the Assembly being held in Edinburgh from Monday, 22nd April, to Thursday, 25th April. This is the first time that the Assembly has held its Annual Meetings in Scotland.

The General Assembly has its headquarters in Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, Strand, London, W.C.2, from which address information about the Unitarian Movement elsewhere in Britain can be obtained. Further information about the Scottish Unitarian Churches may be obtained from the churches themselves (see back cover).

# SCOTTISH UNITARIAN CHURCHES

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## ABERDEEN.

THE UNITARIAN CHURCH, SKENE STREET.  
Rev. COLIN GIBSON, M.A., 84 Whitehall Road.

## DUNDEE.

THE WILLIAMSON MEMORIAL UNITARIAN CHURCH,  
CONSTITUTION ROAD.  
Rev. DOUGLAS WEBSTER, 544 Strathmartine Road.

## EDINBURGH.

ST. MARK'S UNITARIAN CHURCH, CASTLE TERRACE,  
Rev. BRUCE FINDLOW, B.A., 52 Strathearn Road, 9.

## GLASGOW.

GLASGOW UNITARIAN CHURCH, ST. VINCENT STREET  
(Corner Pitt Street).  
Rev. ALLEN KIRBY, 53 Kelvinside Gardens, N.W.

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THESE CHURCHES WELCOME VISITORS AND  
REQUESTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.