

Alexander Stewart of Cromarty

Alexander Stewart was born in the Church of Scotland manse at Moulin, near Pitlochry, on 25 September 1794. He was the son of Dr. Alexander Stewart¹ the minister of the parish. Three events were to mould his childhood. The first was his father's conversion in June 1796, when the Church of England evangelical, Charles Simeon², accompanied by James Haldane,³ visited Moulin for two days and stayed in the manse. The minister showed Simeon to his bedroom. There the vicar of Holy Trinity, Cambridge, held a short heart-to-heart conversation with Dr. Stewart that was the means used by the Holy Spirit to bring new life to his soul.

The second event that helped to shape Alexander Stewart's childhood was the revival at Moulin⁴ that followed his father's conversion. Dr. Stewart's preaching became very different – he began to teach and preach Jesus Christ. His declaration of the gospel had a 'Simeonite strain' as he started to emulate Charles Simeon's energetic manner. The first sign of blessing was a decrease in the number of communicants from fifty to nine.⁵ This was followed by an increase in soul concern as Dr. Stewart preached a four-month series of sermons on regeneration. Seldom did a week pass without at least three parishioners being brought under conviction of sin. In his account of the revival Dr. Stewart reckoned that around seventy were converted, the greater part being under thirty-five years of age. A notable consequence of the revival was the fifty year ministry in India of Alexander Duff⁶. Among the parishioners who were converted under Dr Stewart's preaching were James Duff and Jean Rattray. They were both under seventeen when Simeon preached at Moulin. In due time they married and Alexander Duff was born near Moulin in 1806. Alexander Stewart lived in this parish until he was eleven. His formative years were spent amidst scenes of revival in a community vibrant with spiritual life.

¹ A full account of Dr. Stewart's life can be found in James Sievwright, *Memoirs of the Late Rev. Alexander Stewart DD*, Edinburgh, 1822, For a short account see Donald Beaton, *Some Noted Ministers in the Northern Highlands*, Inverness, 1929, pp.179-184. (Reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications, Glasgow, 1985).

² The classic account of the visit is in William Carus, *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon*, London, 1847. See also, Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon of Cambridge*, London, 1997, pp.136-140.

³ James Haldane was the brother of Robert Haldane, now best known for his commentary on Romans. See Alexander Haldane, *The Lives of Robert Haldane of Airthrey and of his brother James Alexander Haldane*, Edinburgh, 1855.

⁴ Dr. Alexander Stewart wrote his own account of the revival in the form of a letter to David Black, the evangelical minister of St. Madoes, near St. Andrews: Alexander Stewart, *Account of the late revival of Religion in a part of the Highlands of Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1800.

⁵ An even more striking reduction of communicants occurred during the revival in Uig, Lewis, in 1827 under the ministry of Alexander Macleod. There were 800 to 1000 communicants formerly in Uig. This was due to the practice of indiscriminate communion. After the revival began, the number was reduced to six.

⁶ G. Smith, *The Life of Alexander Duff*, London, 1881, pp.7-8.

The third event to affect Stewart's childhood was the death of his mother, during the Moulin revival, when he was just four and a half years old. Three years later Dr. Stewart married his second wife Emelia Calder, the eldest daughter of Charles Calder of Ferintosh⁷ – a man described by John Kennedy as 'a man among a thousand'⁸. Angus Mackintosh of Tain was married to Calder's younger daughter. His assessment of Charles Calder was, 'Mr Calder, Ferintosh, is the holiest man I ever met on earth'⁹. His father's second marriage brought the young Stewart into close connection with the Calder family and its links to the best in Highland evangelicalism.

Alexander Stewart received the first elements of his education at Moulin parish school. After his father was translated to Dingwall, he was sent in 1805 to Tain Grammar School¹⁰. Unknown to him at the time the next eighteen years of his life would be spent away from his family. Between 1805 and when he was licensed by the Presbytery of Lorn, in 1823, were years of preparation for the notable ministry he was to exercise in Cromarty. During these vital years he was influenced by a succession of evangelical ministers – each of whom left a mark on his life. The first was Angus Mackintosh of Tain¹¹ in whose home he stayed during his time at Tain Grammar School. Mackintosh was one of the eminent ministers of Ross-shire who could hold the attention of immense congregations in the open air at communion seasons during the 'days of the fathers in Ross-shire'.

In 1808 Stewart entered Kings College, Aberdeen, and came under the influence of James Kidd¹² of Gilcomston Chapel of Ease, and Professor of Oriental languages at the neighbouring Marischal College. Kidd was almost a lone evangelical in an area dominated by moderatism; he was extraordinarily popular and his preaching is

⁷ Charles Calder was the son of James Calder whose diary is one of the classics of Scottish devotional literature: *Diary of James Calder of Croy*, Edited by William Taylor, it was published in 1875 and has been reprinted as issues 130-131 of the *Banner of Truth Magazine*, July-August 1974. For Charles Calder see – John Kennedy, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire*, Inverness, 1897, (Fifth edition), pp.57-61, John Noble, *Religious Life in Ross*, Edinburgh, 1909, p.90-92, Beaton, op.cit., pp.109-116. Calder's successor at Ferintosh was Dr. John MacDonald.

⁸ Kennedy, op. cit, p.58.

⁹ Noble, op. cit, p.92.

¹⁰ The biographical introduction to the first edition of the *Tree of Promise* was written by Charles Calder Stewart (Alexander Stewart's stepbrother) and Alexander Beith. The introduction states 'It was deemed advisable that the boy should now be sent to Tain Academy, the best seminary in the north of Scotland at that time for Classics and Mathematics.' Biographical introduction to *Tree of Promise*, Edinburgh, 1864, p.x (references to this introduction are cited hereafter as "Stewart and Beith"). This statement cannot, however, be correct, as Tain Academy did not begin to admit pupils until 1813. See W. Taylor, *Researches into the History of Tain – Earlier and Later*, Tain, 1882, p.97-98. Constance Davies, *Extracts from the Royal Academy Minute Book, 1800-1855*, 15 February 1813, p.5. unpublished typescript in Inverness library.

¹¹ For Angus Mackintosh (1763-1831) see Kennedy, op.cit. p.78-81; Noble, op. cit, p.228-237. Beaton, op.cit. p.194-199, Hew Scott, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, Edinburgh, 1915, Vol. VII, p.72-73. Angus Mackintosh was the father of Charles Calder Mackintosh of Tain and Dunoon.

¹² For biographical information on Dr. Kidd see James Stark, *James Kidd of Aberdeen*, Aberdeen, 1898, and Robert Candlish's biographical introduction to J. Kidd, *A Dissertation of the Eternal Sonship of Christ*, London, 1872, pp. vii-lxii.

described as ‘Whitefieldian.’ After just two sessions at Aberdeen, Stewart left his studies to become a clerk in a relative’s business in Perth. He soon mastered daybooks, ledgers, recording invoices and adding up columns of figures and longed for release from what he considered to be drudgery. Through the influence of an older cousin he obtained a position in a London mercantile house. It was thought this would give him experience of business transacted on a much larger scale. What in providence it did, was to bring him under a Gospel ministry, which for him ushered in the day of salvation.

Instead of attending the famous Crown Court - Covent Garden congregation of the Church of Scotland, Stewart became a hearer in a Congregational church on York Street in Walworth. The minister was George Clayton, the son of John Clayton,¹³ who was also a London Congregational minister at the Weigh House Congregation. The elder Clayton had been converted under the preaching of William Romaine and was trained at the Countess of Huntingdon’s College at Trevecca. His three sons were all congregational ministers and thoroughgoing evangelicals. Both John and George Clayton were members of an organisation called the Eclectic Society where the leading London evangelicals discussed doctrinal and experimental theology¹⁴. It was probably the Claytons’ connection with the Eclectic Society that explains why Stewart attended York Street in preference to one of the London congregations of the Church of Scotland. Dr Stewart had kept up a correspondence with Charles Simeon of Cambridge who was also a member of the society and a friend of the Claytons.¹⁵

Stewart was nineteen when he arrived in London; George Clayton was twelve years his senior. The young Independent’s ministry was, at that time, having a marked effect on the community. For Alexander Stewart and many others it was life changing. Stewart’s call to grace seems to have been linked to his call to the ministry. Having found a Saviour himself he longed to proclaim him to others. He soon left his commercial duties and returned to his studies and his books.

Stewart now enrolled at Glasgow University. From 1815 he attended the literary classes and then from 1818 to 1821 the University’s divinity hall. These were momentous years in Glasgow as they corresponded with most of Thomas Chalmers’ ministry in the city.¹⁶ Stewart was, therefore, a witness to Chalmers’ historic ministry in Glasgow. The student and the preacher were quickly ‘drawn to each other by the power of mutual attraction.’ Thomas Chalmers was at ‘the zenith of this popularity’

¹³ For the ‘Clayton dynasty of ministers’ see Thomas Aveling, *Memorials of the Clayton family*, London, 1867. In addition for John Clayton senior see, AW Light, *Bunhill Fields*, London, 1915, p.206-209.

¹⁴ *The notes of the discussions of the Eclectic Society London during 1798 – 1814* were published in 1856. This volume was reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1978 with a different title, John H. Pratt, *Thoughts of the Evangelical Leaders*, London, 1978. John Clayton Senior, as will be seen from perusing the volume, took a large part in the discussions.

¹⁵ Aveling, op. cit., p.383.

¹⁶ Chalmers’ Glasgow ministry extended from July 1815 to November 1823. For details see William Hanna, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Thomas Chalmers DD, LL.D.*, Edinburgh, 1850, vol. 2; Stewart J Brown *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland*, Oxford, 1982, p.91-151.

and Stewart was ‘speedily drawn within the vortex of his marvellous eloquence.’ ‘Each discerned in the other the unmistakable marks of genius.’¹⁷ After hearing Stewart preach, Chalmers considered him to possess outstanding gifts. It was well known by his contemporaries that Chalmers was so impressed by Stewart’s pulpit powers that he tried to persuade him to become his successor at St. John’s Glasgow when he was about to move to the Moral Philosophy Chair at St Andrews University. In the Divinity Hall Stewart was taught by Chalmers’ predecessor at the Tron Church, Glasgow – Dr. Stevenson Macgill.¹⁸ He soon became one of Macgill’s favourite pupils. It was through him he had been first introduced to Thomas Chalmers.

The Presbytery of Lorn licensed Alexander Stewart in 1823.¹⁹ As the twenty-eight year old probationer already had the reputation of being an able preacher he was not left long without a call to a charge. This came on 31 October 1823, when he was chosen to be the minister of the Chapel at Ease at Rothesay, on the Isle of Bute. Stewart’s ordination took place on 10 February 1824. His ministry at Rothesay was, however, very short; it lasted little more than seven months. Within six weeks of his ordination an event occurred that was to have far reaching consequences: Robert Smith the minister of Cromarty died. The majority of the Cromarty parishioners set their affections on Alexander Stewart to be their minister even though most of them had never seen him or heard him preach. Donald Sage in his *Memorabilia Domestica* provides the reason; he was chosen because he was the son of Dr. Alexander Stewart, ‘whose praise was in all the Churches.’²⁰

Cromarty was in the Presbytery of Chanonry, which was within the bounds of the Synod of Ross. It is located at the tip of the peninsula called the Black Isle, which is situated just north of Inverness between the Moray Firth and the Cromarty firth. The 1820s were blessed days in Ross-shire. The spiritual atmosphere was intense, God’s tabernacles were amiable and the feet of His messengers were beautiful upon the mountains. Within the Presbytery of Chanonry were two outstanding ministers, John Kennedy²¹ of Killearnan (the father of Dr. Kennedy of Dingwall) and Donald Sage²² of Resolis. In the other two Presbyteries that made up the Synod of Ross were a galaxy of able gospel preachers. Among these were Dr. John MacDonald of Urquhart

¹⁷ Stewart and Beith, op.cit, p. xviii.

¹⁸ See R. Burns, *Memoir of the Rev. Stevenson Macgill*, Edinburgh, 1842. H M B Reid, *The Divinity Professors in the University of Glasgow*, Glasgow, 1923, vol.2. p.285-309.

¹⁹ This is the date given by Alexander Beith in Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p. xviii, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, vol. 7, p.7, gives the date as 1822.

²⁰ Donald Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica*, Wick, 1899, p.280.

²¹ The second part of John Kennedy’s, *The Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire* is a biography of his father – The Minister of Killearnan, op.cit, p.163-267. The memoir begins with a prefatory note that opens with these momentous words, ‘The minister of Killearnan was my father. I could not forget this while I was writing this memoir. In the only sense in which he was my father, while he lived, I lost him when he died. But the memory of that loss I can bear to recall, as I cherish the hope that his death was the means of uniting us in bonds that shall never be broken.’

²² Dr. John Kennedy wrote the biographical account of Donald Sage in *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*. Edinburgh, 1877, p.45-52.

(the Apostle of the North) and Angus Mackintosh of Tain, in whose house Stewart had lived whilst he was at school in Tain. Seldom in the history of the church has such a group of gifted ministers been located in such a small area.²³

After hearing Stewart preach, the congregation was united in the desire to have him as their minister. The settlement took place on 23 September 1824. Donald Sage presided at the induction and many of the leading ministers in the Synod of Ross were associated with the Chanonry Presbytery. The ministry that commenced in 1824 would last for twenty three years.

Biographical materials for a detailed account of Stewart's Cromarty ministry do not exist. Adding to this difficulty is the fact that Stewart was a private person who loved seclusion. To him it was a most satisfactory thought that he could not be more out of the world in any other parish in Scotland. 'I have got into the toe of the hose',²⁴ he would say with much glee. This was a reference to the shape of the Black Isle with Cromarty at the extreme point at the end of what was then a bleak wilderness track of cheerless moorland. All we possess of his Cromarty ministry are a few glimpses of events that interrupted the routine of his life as a Highland parish minister. Then, as now, such a minister's task was to provide pastoral care to his flock, preaching to them Sabbath by Sabbath, and assisting at Communion seasons – particularly in neighbouring parishes. A further difficulty the biographer faces is the fact that Stewart was a bachelor; hence, there was no wife or children whose recollections would preserve his memory. Stewart's household consisted of an elderly aunt, who was his housekeeper, and two servant girls.

Alexander Beith, then of Glenelg, records a communion season in the summer of 1838 when he and Stewart assisted David Carment at his communion in Roskeen. He writes,

In the summer of 1838 I assisted our mutual and much-loved friend, Mr Carment, at his communion in Roskeen. I came from Glenelg for that purpose – a long journey – one attraction being that I was to meet Mr Stewart. He had arranged that I should afterwards accompany him on a short visit to Cromarty. Mr Stewart's service was in English, on the Monday. It concluded with the baptism of an infant of Mr Carment. On this occasion his preaching excelled everything I had ever heard from him before, – the power and the pathos of his discourses being equally remarkable. Had Dr. Pusey, on the one hand, with his followers, and Mr Spurgeon on the other with his denominational followers, been his hearers, they might have been the better for it. Sure I am, they would have heard views of divine truth, bearing on their

²³ A letter of Dr. John MacDonald written from London to his wife giving her instructions for the Urquhart communion season in the early 1820s gives a glimpse of the privilege Easter Ross enjoyed; 'You will see the following brethren at Resolis: if not write to them, mentioning their diets: Mr Fraser, Kirkhill, English on Saturday and one service at the tent on Monday. Mr John Kennedy one sermon on the Fast Day either Gaelic or English, as I shall determine when I return, and the whole service of Saturday in Gaelic and a share of the table services on Sabbath, Mr Sage: a sermon in Gaelic on the Fast-day, and an English Sermon on Sabbath Evening, with table services. Mr Mackintosh the action sermon in English and a Gaelic Sermon on Monday. Mr Flyter – table services on Sabbath and an English Sermon on Monday. In all these things you will have to act the clergywoman.' John Kennedy, *The Apostle of the North, The Life and Labours of the Rev. John MacDonald DD of Ferintosh*, Inverness, 1932, p.105-106. (Reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications, Glasgow, 1978).

²⁴ Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p.xxxiii.

erroneous notions respectively, such as had never entered into their minds. His text was Mark 10, 13-16.²⁵

From the other glimpses that remain it is clear that Stewart took an intense interest in the theological controversies of his day. Letters remain where he interacts with his correspondents concerning the heretical teachings of John Mcleod Campbell of Row. In the late 1820s Campbell had begun to teach a form of Universal Redemption and claims were made that some connected with his congregation had spoken in tongues.²⁶

A third glimpse from his early Cromarty ministry is Stewart's public catechising of Hugh Miller, in 1826. Then a stonemason in Cromarty, Miller would later become a close friend of Stewart and play a major role in the Disruption struggle as the editor of the *Witness*.²⁷ Miller writes,

'I was catechised today by Mr Stewart. It is an unpleasant thing to stand exposed point-blank to the gaze of two or three hundred people; each man more provokingly keen eyed than the other. Had you seen me standing before the minister this day, as conspicuous as Saul among the people, – my face changing from crimson to pale and from pale to crimson by turns, you must have either pitied my confusion or laughed at it.'

The questioning as Miller records it went as follows,

Stewart	Who is the Spirit?
Miller	The third person of the Trinity.
Stewart	Is He a person?
Miller	He is termed so.
Stewart	Yes, He is. Do you recollect any passages of Scripture, which show? Him as a distinct person?
Miller	Silence
Stewart	I thought from your readiness in answering my first two questions that you would answer me this one too. In what form did the Spirit appear at the baptism of the Saviour?
Miller	In the form of a dove.

²⁵ Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p.xxxviii.

²⁶ The letters are in Stewart and Beith, p.liii – lxviii. For a recent account of the "Row controversy" and of John Mcleod Campbell's circle (which included Alexander Scott, Edward Irving and Thomas Erskine of Linlathen) see Nicholas R Needham, *Thomas Erskine of Linlathen – His life and theology*, Edinburgh, 1990, pp 210-364. J Macleod Campbell's teaching on the atonement is contained in his book *Nature of the Atonement*, London, 1959 reprint.

²⁷ The *Witness* was a newspaper established at the height of the Ten Years Conflict. It was published twice a week and its aim was to further the evangelical, non-intrusionist cause. It was launched by a group of leading evangelicals one of whom was Robert Candlish. Hugh Miller was the editor and produced it at times almost single-handed. See article, '*Witness, The*' by J A H Dempster in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, Editor N.M. de S. Cameron, Edinburgh, 1993, p.880-881.

Stewart Yes, the Spirit, then, is a person, not a mere influence proceeding from the Father and Son, as some believe. In what manner were we baptised?

Miller With water, in the name of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Stewart Yes, The Holy Ghost is a person. What is the work or province of the Father?

Miller He created all things and from Him all things proceed.

Stewart You speak of Him as the Creator. I desire to know what share He was in the redemption of sinners?

Miller He sent the Son.

Stewart Yes, what did the Son do?

Miller He died for us.

Stewart And what was the work of the Spirit?

Miller He applies Christ.

Miller in his account of the incident then adds, ‘Here he spoke a good deal which I forget, and concluded by desiring me to sit down. I did so most willingly for my legs were trembling beneath me.’²⁸

Alexander Stewart played an active part in the struggle between the Church of Scotland and the law courts, that is known as the ‘Ten Years Conflict’ which led in 1843 to the Disruption of the Church of Scotland. The issue at the centre of the conflict was the spiritual independence of the church and the right of a congregation to call a minister, rather than have one imposed upon them by a patron.²⁹ The civil courts, in several cases that were brought before them, upheld the rights of patrons over those of the congregation.

Stewart perceived at an early stage what the result of the conflict would be. He was, says Hugh Miller, ‘the first man in his parish, we believe, in his presbytery also – to take his stand modestly and unassumingly, as became his character, but with firmness which never once swerved or wavered. Nay, long ere the struggle began – founded on data with which we pretend not to be acquainted, - he declared his conviction to not a few of his parishioners, that of the establishment, as then constituted, he was to be the last minister of the parish.’³⁰

Stewart’s contribution to the Disruption struggle was at a local rather than a national level. Indeed, he never spoke at the General Assembly. His views, however, on the principles involved in the non-intrusion question and the spiritual independence of the Church were thoroughly formed and entirely based on Scripture. Minister and elders

²⁸ Peter Bayne, *The Life and Letters of Hugh Miller*, London, 1871, Vol. 1., p.181-182.

²⁹ Patronage was a system whereby landowners had the right to choose the minister in a congregation of the Church of Scotland when a vacancy occurred.

³⁰ Hugh Miller, *Leading Articles on Various Subjects* (editor John Davidson), Edinburgh, 1870, p.77.

in all quarters of the Highlands eagerly sought his help in explaining these principles to their people. Multitudes flocked to hear him lecture on these subjects in Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Nairn, Forres, Banff and Aberdeen. Stewart was a key figure in rallying Easter Ross and Inverness-shire behind the Free Church banner.³¹ However, he regarded others as more capable than himself in the debates of the General Assembly. His assessment of William Cunningham's contribution to those momentous debates is given in these words: 'Cunningham gives me the idea of one of those mighty steamers of the Clyde, to which all the craft in the river pay homage by getting out of their way.'³²

The 1842 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland adopted its famous Claim of Right. This remarkable statement of the Church's case was drawn up by Alexander Murray Dunlop, a lawyer of strongly evangelical convictions, and runs to over five thousand words. It detailed with precision the protection that the Church rightfully expected from Parliament. By the November 1842 meeting of the commission of the General Assembly the Church had not even an acknowledgement that the document had been received. Concurrent with the meeting of the commission, the evangelicals held a gathering known as the 'Convocation'. This private gathering had commenced with a meeting for public worship, when Thomas Chalmers preached and Alexander Stewart's co-presbyter, John MacDonald, led the gathering in prayer.³³ From that time on, preparations were being made at a congregational level for the division of the Church of Scotland. By March 1843 it was clear that no intervention was going to be made by the Government on behalf of the Church.

The division came on 18 May 1843, when the evangelicals rose in the General Assembly and, bidding farewell to the moderates, severed their connection with the Church of Scotland. Around four hundred and fifty ministers seceded and formed the Church of Scotland – Free.³⁴ In the Highlands the movement took the form not of an ecclesiastical division, as it was in the South, but of an exodus of almost the entire population out of their old and cherished connection with the State. In the Highlands it was not a separation – the church left the establishment.³⁵

On the Disruption day the evangelicals walked from the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh along George Street and down Hannover Street to a new building – Tanfield Hall.

³¹ Stewart and Beith, *op cit*, p.lxxiii.

³² Robert Rainy and James Mackenzie, *The Life of William Cunningham DD*, London, 1871, p.176.

³³ A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843*, Edinburgh, 1972, p.244.

³⁴ The literature on the Disruption is very extensive. The standard accounts are Robert Buchanan, *The Ten Years Conflict*, Glasgow, 1852; Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption*, Edinburgh, 1893. Recent accounts are A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *Scottish Church 1688-1843*, *op.cit*, p.220-265; A.L. Drummond and J. Bulloch, *The Church in Victorian Scotland, 1843-1847*, Edinburgh, 1975, p.1-34; Stewart J. Brown and Michael Fry (editors) *Scotland in the Age of the Disruption*, Edinburgh, 1993. A most helpful bibliographical survey of the Disruption is, Donald J. Witherington, 'The Disruption: a century and a half of historical interpretation' in *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, volume 25, part 1, p.118-153

³⁵ William Taylor, A sketch of the religious history of the Northern Highlands of Scotland in *Memorials of the Life and Ministry of Charles Calder Mackintosh DD*, Edinburgh, 1870, p.1-2.

Here is how one observer described the procession, 'It included Welsh and Chalmers, Gordon and Buchanan, Keith and M'Farlan, Alexander Stewart and John MacDonald, Cunningham and Candlish, everything of which a Scotchman thinks when he thinks of the Church of Scotland.'³⁶ Thomas Chalmers was chosen as the first moderator of the new Church. The other minister called upon to preach to the first Free Church Assembly was the man, next to Chalmers, who was regarded as the finest preacher in the Church. Alexander Stewart of Cromarty took the text Exodus 20:2, 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.'³⁷

Within four years of the Disruption, Thomas Chalmers was dead. His sudden death during the sitting of the General Assembly in May 1847 made many changes necessary. William Cunningham took Chalmers' place as Principal of New College and combined this with the chair of Church History, which he then occupied. It was also proposed that James Buchanan, who at that time had charge of the first and fourth year students of divinity, should be given the charge of the second and third years. Robert Candlish would be appointed Professor and have charge of the first and fourth year divinity students.³⁸ This meant there was a ministerial vacancy at Candlish's prestigious St. George's congregation in Edinburgh.

Candlish having accepted the Professorship, the congregation of St. George's appointed a committee to look out for a suitable successor. The committee resolved to recommend to the congregation Alexander Stewart of Cromarty. Apparently Hugh Miller had suggested that the committee take his former pastor into consideration.³⁹ At a congregational meeting on 22 September 1847 the congregation unanimously resolved to call Stewart to be their pastor. In due time the call was signed and the usual steps taken for his translation. An influential deputation of office bearers and members were appointed to proceed to Cromarty with the view of encouraging him to accept the call.

The prospect of so dramatic a change in the scene of his ministry, from the seclusion of Cromarty to the prominence of Candlish's pulpit, caused a violent agitation in his mind that soon completely overwhelmed him. He heard the call of the whole Church urging him to consent, while his own convictions told him of his utter inability constitutionally to encounter such a charge. The strain was too much for his delicate frame. It occasioned the illness that brought him to the grave.⁴⁰ 'Seeing it to be the path of duty to comply with the call, he replied, in the spirit of the great apostle, to some friends who warned him of the danger: 'Will I not be more useful in Edinburgh, though I were to live only three months, than if I remained in Cromarty three years

³⁶ J. Hamilton, Farewell to Egypt in *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*, op.cit., p.11.

³⁷ Stewart and Beith, op. cit., p.xlix.

³⁸ William Wilson, *Memorials of Robert Smith Candlish DD*, Edinburgh, 1880, p.405-406.

³⁹ Norman C. MacFarlane, *Apostles of the North: Sketches of Some Highland Ministers*, Dingwall, undated, p.45.

⁴⁰ A recent writer, commenting on the cause of Stewart's death, speaks of it as being due to a 'stress induced illness', see article by Hugh M. Cartwright on Stewart in, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography 1730-1860*, (Editor Donald M. Lewis) Oxford, 1995, p1054.

indulging my own ease and feelings, while God forsook me, because I forsook both Him and the path of duty?’ Though ready to obey the call he regarded it as his death warrant’.⁴¹ James Buchanan who went to Cromarty as a commissioner to plead on behalf of St. George’s asked, ‘What is wrong with you, Mr Stewart, you seem to be carrying a millstone? ‘A millstone did you say? sir, I’m carrying my gravestone.’⁴²

Alexander Stewart was never inducted to St. George’s Edinburgh; he quietly fell asleep in Jesus on 5 November 1847 in his fifty-third year. An eyewitness to the funeral has described the scene,

The grief occasioned by Mr Stewart’s removal is intense throughout the whole surrounding country. I never beheld such a concourse of people at a funeral. Many have travelled great distances to testify their respect to his memory. The ministers of all denominations came from the surrounding and even remote parishes. Cromarty is a Bochim. The shops were all shut, and business quite at a stand. The grave is just between the doors of the Free Church,⁴³ reminding all entrants of him who spoke to them the word of God, and who, though dead, yet speaketh. His flock, though bewildered by the stroke, are meekly bearing their loss. As their dear pastor was ready to leave his beloved flock at his Church’s call, though he was persuaded it would be at the sacrifice of his life, so his people had made up their minds quietly and meekly to resign themselves to the endurance of the loss they would thereby sustain. Neither anticipated God’s intervention so soon. Next to Dr. Chalmers, our Church has lost her brightest ornament.⁴⁴

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The two books of Alexander Stewart were both published after his death. *The Tree of Promise or the Mosaic economy a dispensation of the covenant* was published in 1864 and was edited by his stepbrother Charles Calder Stewart of Scone. In 1883, his close friend from University days in Glasgow, Alexander Beith published *The Mosaic Sacrifices*. This book partially covers the same ground as the earlier volume, and was compiled from the notes of a lady in the congregation who committed Stewart’s sermons to writing from memory. A complete sermon ‘Man’s redemption the joy of angels’ was published in 1877 in *Precious Seed: Discourses by Scottish Worthies*.⁴⁵ Donald Beaton described it as one of the masterpieces of the Scottish pulpit and compared it with John Maclaurin’s sermon *Glorying in the Cross of Christ*.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p. 1.

⁴² Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p.xlvii.

⁴³ The present Church of Scotland West Church on Bayview Crescent, Cromarty was the Free Church of Scotland place of worship prior to the church unions of 1900 and 1929. Stewart’s grave can now be seen *outside* the main doors and slightly to the right (not between the church doors). The original Free Church building was demolished. The present building was erected on the same site and opened in 1867.

⁴⁴ Stewart and Beith, op. cit, p.li.

⁴⁵ The sermon is reprinted in Donald Beaton (editor), *Sermons of Noted Ministers of the Northern Highlands*, Inverness, 1930, pp. 150-175. (Reprinted by Free Presbyterian Publications,Glasgow,1997).

⁴⁶ This sermon is contained in *Sermons and Essays of the Rev. John Maclaurin one of the Ministers of Glasgow*, Editor John Gillies, London, 1815, pp.97-112.

Alexander Stewart's greatness was not as a writer but as a preacher. His ability to explain the Old Testament types was outstanding. This biographical sketch is concluded with the words of Norman Macfarlane and Alexander Auld as they describe the preaching gifts of Alexander Stewart.

He made the men of the Old Testament rise out of their graves and speak and act as if they had been Cromartians! Some said he created them over again. The themes he took up were presented with freshness that made hearers think these thoughts had never been expressed before. His language was singularly choice. Hugh Miller recalls a sermon of Stewart's on 'God shutting Noah in,' when the flood was about to break forth, and he gives a glimpse of Stewart's keen insight and practical applications. The very air seemed to throb with life and feeling. The Shorter Catechism orthodoxy which Hugh Miller found stiff and heavy now glowed with unusual fires and sparkled in words of new minting.... There were many days when he refreshed his people with unexpected blessing. When men thought he had given the last crush to some cluster of grapes, he would crush again and out there flowed even sweeter juice than ever, and yet another crush to what now seemed exhausted, and sweeter still the stream of blessing.⁴⁷

Alexander Auld, describing John Kennedy's estimate of Alexander Stewart, writes,

Although he had seen and heard some of the ablest theologians, preachers and orators both in the New and the Old World, he never heard the word of God so gloriously set forth, as regards loftiness of conception and perfection of oratory, as from the lips of Mr Stewart. Even the reading of the Scriptures by him was better than the average exegesis of most men; he seemed to be so surcharged with the mind of the Spirit in the word, that the effect upon his hearers was often as he had received fresh inspiration.⁴⁸

Roy Middleton
Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland
Barnoldswick
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⁴⁷ Norman C. MacFarlane, op. Cit., p.40-41

⁴⁸ Alexander Auld, *Life of John Kennedy*, London.1887, p43.