Scottish Presbyterians and Union with England, 1603-1745

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Introduction

On 25th March 1707, at the close of the final session of the last Parliament to sit in an independent Scotland, James Ogilvy, 1st Earl of Seafield acknowledged that the moment represented, ‘the end o’ an auld sang’. As a leading architect and promoter of union, it seems more likely that he spoke the words as a matter of fact rather than regret. As far as Seafield and the other unionists were concerned, an incorporating union with England offered Scotland a better, brighter future than any of the alternatives before them. Less well known but no less pertinent were the sentiments expressed on that same day by the Queen’s High Commissioner to Parliament, James Douglas, 2nd Duke of Queensberry, who urged members to recommend the union to the nation upon the firm conviction that they and their posterity would reap great benefits from it.

1. Union attempted 1603-1703

The idea of a union between the kingdoms was not new. In 1603 the two kingdoms became partners in a regal union when James VI of Scotland became James I of England. As an enthusiastic unionist, regal union alone would never satisfy James. He had a vision of a united kingdom of Great Britain ruled by the Stuart dynasty in which the two ancient peoples would be united in hearts and minds, dynasty, parliaments, administration, legal system, economy, and religion. Unfortunately for James, despite the propaganda, the unionist iconography and attempts to foster a British identity through flags, seals, coins, and a change of royal style, his subjects shared neither his vision nor his enthusiasm for union. His son Charles I fared no better; in fact his policies, in particular his demands for religious uniformity based on an Anglican model, tore the Kingdoms apart. Charles lost his head, England abolished the monarchy and Scotland was forcibly incorporated into the Commonwealth and from 1654 into the Protectorate. Scotland’s reaction to the execution of Charles I was immediately to proclaim his son Charles II as king of Great Britain. The Scots may have objected to absentee monarchy but they were not against monarchy nor were they republicans.

Following the restoration of the monarchy and Charles II, discussions were held in the 1660s on creating a commercial confederation between the kingdoms and further negotiations on an incorporating union were held in 1670. Both ended in failure. In 1689 union was back on the political agenda during the upheaval that accompanied the Glorious Revolution. There was a consensus within the Scottish Convention of Estates that union would be advantageous to both nations and would help secure their peace and political and religious liberties. In
particular it would help secure Protestantism against the Roman Catholic threat posed by the now exiled James II and his French allies. Commissioners were appointed to negotiate ‘an entire and perpetual union betwixt the two kingdoms’. What was essentially an incorporating union, in which the two kingdoms would become, ‘one body Politick, one Nation to be represented in one Parliament’, was also seen as a solution to the troubled constitutional relationship between the kingdoms.

Despite William’s support, negotiations never took place because there was little interest in the project in England. For much of the rest of William’s reign, union was not a live political issue. However, his experience of the constitutional, political, and economic problems associated with regal union had led to a stronger commitment to the idea of a political union and he made a final attempt to initiate negotiations in 1702, only days before he died. This conflict of interests between the kingdoms led to a widespread Scottish perception that William was willing to sacrifice the interests of Scotland to those of England. At the forefront of complaints were those associated with trade and commerce, which culminated in the recriminations that followed the ill-fated attempt to establish a trading colony on the isthmus of Darien in Central America. The intention was to create a free port connecting and controlling trade between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This would be accomplished by carrying goods across the narrow isthmus in the way the Panama Canal does today. Darien was a disaster and what was intended to revive Scotland’s economic fortunes and lessen its economic dependence upon England, plunged the country into an economic abyss. William and England were blamed for the failure because William had disavowed the scheme and sacrificed it in the interests of English trade and his foreign policy. Queen Anne maintained William’s initiative on her accession in 1702 but negotiations were concluded without agreement.

2. The legislative war 1703-1705

The 1703 session of the Scottish Parliament proved to be highly significant. Its legislation became the unintended catalyst for union. The Revolution Settlement had determined that Mary’s sister Anne and her heirs and successors would succeed William and Mary. However, despite seventeen pregnancies, Anne had only one surviving child, William, Duke of Gloucester, who died in July 1700. The English Parliament reacted by passing an Act of Settlement in which the succession was settled upon the Dowager Electress Sophia of Hanover and her Protestant heirs. Sophia was the granddaughter of James VI.

The Act of Settlement was a unilateral move resented in Scotland as an infringement of national sovereignty and the country’s right to settle its own succession, so Scotland left the succession open. The belief that the union of the crowns had given England undue influence over Scottish affairs, and that Scotland had fared badly under the relationship, was near universal in the country. Maintaining the status quo was now widely regarded as incompatible with Scottish interests. The experience and bitter recriminations of Darien had focused minds on all the disadvantages Scotland had laboured under since 1603 and
underlined the need for a change in the constitutional relationship. It was believed that the succession crisis offered that opportunity.

Led by the Country party opposition, the Scottish Parliament passed the Act of Security that placed the power of appointing a successor to Anne in the hands of Parliament. The successor should be of the royal line of Scotland, Protestant, and not the same as the successor to the English crown unless there were conditions of government settled and enacted to secure the sovereignty of the kingdom, and ensure that its political, economic, and religious affairs were free from English or any foreign influence. Importantly, the Act stated that Parliament did not have the power or authority to name the successor to the crown of England as the successor to the crown of Scotland, nor was that person entitled to succeed even if nominated by Parliament, unless there was free trade with England and freedom of navigation and trade with the colonies. The Act was the Scottish response to the English Act of Settlement. It asserted Scotland’s independence and sovereignty and anticipated a union that was federal rather than incorporating.

From England’s perspective the Act created a dynastic crisis which became a crisis of security because of her involvement in the War of the Spanish Succession against France, which had also given refuge, recognition, and political and military support to the exiled Stuarts. The risk for England was that a Stuart restoration in Scotland opened up the possibility that Scotland could become the base for a military attack by France. The English Parliament called the Scots bluff in February 1705 and issued an ultimatum demanding that unless the Hanoverian Succession was accepted, or a treaty under negotiation, by 25th December 1705, all Scots, except those already residing in England, were to be treated as aliens, and the cattle, linen, and coal trades banned. The Alien Act, as it became known, broke Scottish resolve because the Scottish economy was so heavily dependent upon trade with England. The 1705 session of Parliament passed an Act for appointing commissioners to negotiate a treaty with England. When negotiations began the parties quickly agreed on three main principles: (a) incorporating union; (b) freedom of trade; (c) the Hanoverian Succession. By 23rd July a treaty with twenty-five articles had been drawn up. All that remained was for them to be ratified by the respective Parliaments.

3. The Church and the Union

Historically the Church was not averse to the idea of a union with England, but had always favoured one that protected the sovereignty and independence of both kingdoms; developed closer economic, political, and military links; and had a distinct confessional element. It was a model of Anglo-Scottish union, which may be regarded as a confessional confederation in which, as John Knox expressed it, the two Protestant nations would be united ‘for ever in godly concord.’ As he expressed it to William Cecil in 1559, ‘My eie hath long looked to a perpetuall accord betuix these two realms, the occasion wharof is now present.’ He wrote of a ‘perpetuall accord’, a ‘perpetuall amytie’, and a ‘joyfull connection’. The proposed union would help promote and establish the true religion in each kingdom and provide mutual
security against the forces of the Roman Antichrist. In July 1559 Knox was given instructions to discuss the matter with English commissioners. It was to be a league entirely different from any other that had previously been contracted between the kingdoms and was to be sought for two principle reasons:

That the glory of God, the trew preaching of Christ Jesus, with the rycht ministration of his Sacramenti, may be universallie and openlie manteaned in this Yle, and that the tyrannye and superstition of that Romane Antichrist may be utterlie suppressed and abolissed in the same, Secondarlie, That the liberties, lawes, and priviledges of both these Realmes may remane inviolated by any straunge or foren power.

Knox’s vision and ambitions were shared by his successors. The 1583 General Assembly urged James to instruct his ambassador to England to make a ‘Unione and Band’ with England and other Christian Princes professing the true religion. In 1590 ministers writing to Elizabeth hoped God would grant England wisdom to reform ‘the great present abuses of your church government, according to the word of God, to the glorie of his name, and sure establishing of amitie between the two realms’. The union of the crowns added an extra dimension to the relationship. James Melville looked forward to a future when both kingdoms would be united in a more perfect union accomplished through the success of the gospel. It was under the Covenanters in the 1640s that the search for a closer, confessional union reached its fullest expression in the Solemn League and Covenant. The Covenanters were at the forefront of efforts to secure religious uniformity in doctrine, discipline, worship, and government. The federal union envisaged by Scots in 1706 had similarities with that of the Covenanters. It would secure the Protestant Succession, and provide political, economic, and military benefits while reducing English interference in Scottish affairs; and it would not threaten the Presbyterian establishment. The most notable absence was that of a formal alliance or covenant to create religious uniformity on a Presbyterian basis.

With the negotiations completed, the nation’s attention focused upon Edinburgh where the Parliament was due to sit on 3rd October 1706 and the Commission of the General Assembly on 9th October. The role of the Commission was to act in accordance with the instructions given to it by the Assembly and to protect the Revolution Settlement and the interests of the Church. Exact details of the treaty were unknown. The expectation in Scotland had been that the commissioners would negotiate some kind of federal union, which was the preferred choice of the nation including the Church, but news had already been filtering through that it was for an incorporating union. There was alarm at the potential consequences for the Church of an incorporating union because Presbyterians did not trust a British Parliament to safeguard and maintain the constitution of the Church of Scotland, hence their concern over the resignation of national sovereignty. There was a widespread concern that in a union in which Scotland would be governed from London by a British Parliament dominated by Anglicans, including twenty-six bishops in the House of Lords, the Church’s position as the established Church would be under threat. What was there to prevent such a Parliament imposing religious uniformity on an Anglican basis across the kingdoms? After all, having
two legally recognised Church governments in one nation was unprecedented and, they believed, not likely to last. These fears were not groundless. There was a widespread perception that in every reign since the union of crowns their religion and religious liberties had been invaded or endangered by English influence, in particular by Crown efforts to impose prelacy upon them, and that this had been at the root of all the oppressions the country had suffered in that time. As Thomas Boston remarked in a sermon:

But surely these hundred years bypast, the poverty this poor land has groaned under, and the troubles the Church of Scotland has had, were much owing to the influence of our neighbours, and it will be next to a miracle, if our prosperity come from that quarter.

The question was clear: having suffered as it had under regal union when Scotland was a sovereign and independent state, how was the Church likely to fare in an incorporating union governed from London? Many regarded incorporation as the prelude to the complete overthrow of the established Church and the restoration of prelacy. John Sharp, Archbishop of York, one of the English commissioners at the negotiations in 1702-3, expressed the view that the time was ripe for restoring Episcopacy in Scotland, ‘and that, if that was not intended by the Union, both the nation and Church would be the losers by it.’ An Episcopalian pamphleteer also wrote that after union, when there was a single British Parliament, no Scotsman should be suffered to sit in either House who did not entirely ‘submit to all the rights of Episcopacy, which he must also agree, shall be re-established in Scotland.’

The Presbyterian reaction to the prospect of incorporating union underlined the importance to the Church of the Scottish Parliament. Building upon the Revolution Settlement, the Church was seeking to create a national Church whose presence and influence extended across the whole country. Presbyterianism was to be the civilising and unifying factor in national life. It was a vision they shared with their reforming and covenanting fathers. Crucial to the Church’s success was its relationship with the Scottish Parliament, which was characterised by a high degree of cooperation in which Parliament assumed the role of protector and promoter of the Church’s interests. On more than one occasion Parliament was described as the nursing father to the Church. The established Church looked to Parliament to support its work through legislation, and that support was forthcoming on a wide range of issues. The two institutions, as political and religious beneficiaries of the revolution, were seen as allies united in the cause of maintaining and defending it against a common Jacobite/Episcopalian enemy. It was perfectly understandable in light of the protection and support it received that the Church should be so concerned at the loss of the Parliament. Its loss would end the intimacy, accessibility, and influence that the Church enjoyed. This close working relationship would be hard to replicate with a British Parliament dominated by Anglicans. A British Parliament would prove harder to lobby and influence than a Scottish Parliament sympathetic to the aims of the Church.
4. The Act for securing the Church in the event of Union

The Commission wasted no time in preparing an address, presented to Queensberry on 17th October, asking Parliament that, in the event of a union, it establish and confirm the doctrine, discipline, worship, and Church government presently established in Scotland in accordance with acts of Parliament. The present religious establishment was to remain unalterable and to be held and observed in perpetuity as a fundamental article and essential condition of any treaty or union concluded between the two kingdoms. The address raised no objections to incorporating union but was a strong criticism of the treaty as it currently lay before Parliament with no provision for the security of the Church and the Protestant religion currently established in the kingdom. Such a treaty posed an unacceptable threat to the Church. Only the removal of that threat by the inclusion of specific legal securities could make it acceptable.

The debates that followed within the Commission were lengthy and stormy because of the wide range of issues it believed ought to be included in any act of security for the Church, and also because many of the ruling elders who were members of the Commission were also union-supporting members of Parliament who tended to be obstructive. A lengthy list of issues that the Commission believed should be covered by any act of security was drawn up, and over of the next three weeks these were debated down to six.

1. The Coronation Oath:- It was objected against the coronation oath that the sovereign swore to maintain the rights and privileges of the Church of England without any respect to the Church of Scotland. The commission was concerned that there was no provision in the treaty for the security of the Church of Scotland by a coronation oath and they asked that in the coronation oath to be taken by sovereigns of Great Britain they promised to maintain the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Church of Scotland.

2. The imposition of oaths:- The commission was concerned that Presbyterians would be exposed to the imposition of new oaths by a British Parliament. They asked that no oath, bond, or test that was inconsistent with their known principles be required of any minister or member of the Church.

3. The Sacramental Test:- As a result of the Test and Corporation Acts, all holders of public office in England had to take the Anglican sacrament. In order to avoid these requirements, dissenters resorted to what was called occasional conformity; that is, occasionally taking the Anglican sacrament in order to qualify for office, after which they returned to their normal dissenting services. The Test had serious implications for Presbyterians: one observer considered it to be an ‘insuperable obstacle’ to union because it directly impinged upon Scottish rights. The Commission pointed out that because the Sacramental Test was a condition of access to public office and employment by the Crown, members of the Church of Scotland would be excluded from such employments, if not in Scotland, at least through the rest of the Dominion of Britain. It foreseen dangerous consequences for the Church because Presbyterians might be tempted to take the Test in order to secure positions.
4. The Oath of Abjuration: The Oath of Abjuration, which favoured the Protestant succession and abjured the Pretender, was to be sworn by holders of civil or military office, teachers, ministers, and members of Parliament. The Commission argued that in the second part of the Oath, there were references made to some acts of the English Parliament that Scotsmen obliged to take the Oath may not be familiar with, and therefore could not swear with judgement. It was pointed out that the entail of the Crown as outlined in the second act of Parliament contained in the Oath, required them to swear that the successor should be of the Church of England. It was inconsistent with their principles to maintain such an entail. They insisted that they could not swear an oath in which the successor is obliged to maintain prelacy and the office of bishops. Nor did they think it lawful for them to perpetuate by an oath, an obligation upon their sovereign that they could not come under themselves. They argued that such a position would be ‘a virtual renunciation of our principles’.

5. A commission for the plantation of Kirks and the valuation of teinds was sought to take the place of the Privy Council, should it be abolished.

6. The Commission objected that if the proposed treaty were concluded, the constitution of Britain would be such that Scotland would be subjected, in its civil interests, to a British Parliament that had twenty-six bishops as constituent members of the legislature. They could not approve of churchmen having civil places and powers and lest their silence be interpreted as approbation, they felt it necessary to state that it was contrary to their known principles and covenants that any churchman should hold civil office or bear power in the commonwealth.

The sixth and final article proved to be the most controversial. A group of ruling elders generally associated with the Court party and supporters of the union accused the Commission of going well beyond its sphere of influence and of meddling in state matters. They argued that the aims of the National Covenant were restricted to Scotland and that the Assembly’s ruling against churchmen holding civil office applied only to the Kirk and not to English prelates. They insisted that the article would be regarded as an address against an incorporating union and warned of dire consequences for the Church if it was retained. The ministers reiterated that for a clergyman to hold civil office was contrary to the word of God and to the covenants, especially the National Covenant, and was incompatible with his spiritual function. They acknowledged that the covenants had not been renewed at the Revolution but stated that the Church had always walked in conformity to them. Restrictions on clergymen holding civil places were based on Scripture and applied at all times and in all places in the world, including the House of Lords. If it was unlawful for prelates to sit in the Scottish Parliament, it was unlawful for this nation or the Parliament that represented it to agree voluntarily, in event of a union, to receive or submit to a British Parliament that had prelacy in its constitution and bishops sitting as our legislators. Choosing to receive the English Parliament and their lords spiritual to be part of our Parliament would be the same as allowing prelates to sit in the present Scottish Parliament.

On 12th November Parliament passed the Act for Securing the Protestant Religion and Presbyterian Church Government. It had four main points.
1. The true Protestant religion as expressed in the Confession of Faith and the worship, discipline, and Presbyterian Church government established by Acts of Parliament was to remain and continue without ‘any alteration to the people of this land in all succeeding generations’. Presbyterian Church government was to be the only Church government within Scotland.

2. For the further security of the worship, discipline, and government of the Church, all office-bearers in any school, college, or university must acknowledge the civil government as prescribed by Acts of Parliament, subscribe the Confession of Faith, conform to the worship of the established Church, and submit to its discipline and government.

3. No Scot should be liable to, but should be free, from any oath or test within the kingdom of Scotland contrary to the religion and Church government established by the Act. No oath or test should be imposed upon anyone within the bounds of Church and kingdom.

4. All sovereigns should be required to swear and subscribe to maintain and preserve the settlement of the true Protestant religion and Presbyterian Church government as established in the Act.

The Act represented an about-turn by the government, forced upon it by a Church galvanised by the danger to its position. The debates in Parliament and the Commission were set against a great deal of national discontent and civil unrest and the government blamed the Church for inciting much of it, accusing ministers of using the pulpit to preach down the union. While there were some anti-union sermons and pro-union sermons the majority kept the issue out of the pulpit. With few exceptions, ministers generally took their lead from the Commission which acted at all times in the interests of the Church and sought by all means to ensure those interests were protected in the event of a union. The Commission kept the wider Church informed of its work and wishes through a series of circular letters that it sent out to Presbyteries. No minister was prepared to express his anti-unionism through violence and Presbyteries did all they could to discourage it. Out of sixty-eight presbyteries, only three (Hamilton, Lanark, and Dunblane) submitted anti-union addresses to Parliament. The Commission did not attempt to organise such addresses. Nevertheless, there was a great deal of Church hostility directed at the terms of the treaty, which contained no specific security for the Church and the Reformed Faith it professed and thus proposed a union that threatened its position. The effect of the Act was to make the treaty more acceptable to many in the Church. Most of this opposition could have been avoided at the negotiation stage when the commissioners should have included security for the Church in the articles, were warned of the likely consequences of not doing so, but elected against it.

And so it was that the Act was designed to protect and secure within the United Kingdom of Great Britain, Scotland’s distinctive, Protestant, Reformed, and Presbyterian identity. It was designed to secure the principles that had characterised Scotland’s reformed heritage since the Reformation—to secure the religious dimension of Scotland’s Revolution Settlement which was the foundation upon which they intended to build a national Church.
5. Facing up to the Union

With union now a political reality there was a determination to do everything possible to make it work in the interests of the Church. There was a prayerful desire that God would bring good out of the union to his own glory, the good of his Church, and the well being of Britain. The Church realised the necessity of working with the new British Parliament and arrangements were made to ensure that a Commission sat at the same time as Parliament in London and that a small delegation would regularly travel to London to lobby court and Parliament about Church issues and concerns. However, in the years that immediately followed union the Church could have been forgiven for thinking that the guarantees it had secured were not worth the paper they were written on. Within a year, Scotland’s Privy Council was abolished, which was a great loss to the Church in light of the assistance it had given since the Revolution. While the Scottish Parliament had provided the Church with supportive legislation, the Council had acted as an executive body ensuring that the legislation was enforced.

Fears expressed during the union debates about the ability or willingness of a British Parliament to protect the interests of the Church were finally and fully realised in 1712 when Parliament enacted a legal Toleration for the use of the English liturgy in Scotland, imposed an Oath of Abjuration upon ministers of both communions, and restored Patronage. The first of these parliamentary Acts has historically been referred to as the Toleration Bill, which is very misleading because it implies that Episcopalians had no freedom or toleration to worship in Scotland prior to the Bill’s passage. This was not the case. Acts of Parliament passed in 1693 and 1695 permitted Episcopalian clergy to remain in the parish churches they occupied and gave them and their congregations freedom to worship. The controversy that led to the Bill was over the use of the English liturgy in Scotland, something which Episcopalians were already entitled to use, as a legal judgement in 1710 had made clear. To this Act was added the highly divisive Oath of Abjuration and both were quickly followed by the restoration of Patronage. At the heart of the Patronage issue was the question of who had the right to appoint a minister to a parish. The Church had always argued that the right lay with the congregation. In 1649 during the covenanting revolution, Parliament and the General Assembly abolished Patronage and placed the right of appointing ministers in the hands of Kirk Session. Patronage was restored in 1661 but overthrown again in 1690 when heritors and elders were allowed to nominate a minister and submit their choice to the congregation for approval or disapproval. The 1712 Act restored to all patrons who had not renounced it their right of presentation. If a patron did not present within six months the right passed to the Presbytery.

Of all the alarming legislation then passed, Toleration proved to have the least impact. Of more immediate concern was the Abjuration Oath that threatened to split the national Church. In the long term, the restoration of Patronage proved to be the most damaging. An Erastian encroachment that undermined the spiritual independence of the Church, Patronage became a
source of contention within the Church and between Church and state for the next century and a half, which saw the national Church suffer a series of harmful splits and secessions.

6. Parliamentary efforts to dissolve the Union

Union was at its most vulnerable during its formative years. It had failed to deliver any of the promised economic benefits but had instead become the ‘great fountain’ of many political and religious grievances. This widespread disillusion was manifested in a desire for dissolution and Scottish discontent led to concerted efforts to dissolve the union between 1713 and 1716. In 1713 the government introduced a malt tax at sixpence per bushel which was to be imposed throughout Britain. The Scots regarded the tax as a breach of the Treaty of Union on two counts. Firstly, the Treaty guaranteed that taxation across Britain was to be based upon the principles of fairness and equity and that the British Parliament would, when imposing taxes, take into consideration the circumstances and ability of people to pay them. It was unreasonable to tax equally when the intrinsic value of the produce of one country was greater than the other. For example, was it fair to impose the same tax upon the barren lands of Wales and Scotland as upon the fertile counties around London? They argued that levying the same tax on Scottish malt as English was inequitable because Scottish malt was an inferior product and generally sold at a cheaper price. Secondly, Article 14 of the Treaty had granted Scotland exemption from the malt tax for the duration of the war of the Spanish Succession. Hostilities may have ceased but the treaties had not yet been fully and finally ratified and therefore Britain was still technically at war. The ministry was sympathetic to the Scottish position but despite all Scottish objections, a bill imposing a levy of 6d per bushel on English and Scottish malt was passed by the Commons on 22nd May.

As a result of the tax the Scots members of the Lords and Commons agreed upon a parliamentary motion calling for the dissolution of the union and securing the Protestant Succession. Before presenting the motion, the Earl of Seafield delivered a speech outlining Scottish grievances since the union including the recent acts so detrimental to the established Church. The vote that followed, which the Scots narrowly lost by four proxy votes, was not a vote to dissolve the union, but a vote on whether to debate Seafield’s motion for dissolution immediately or to delay it to another time. The debate and vote demonstrated that for most Scottish members, while their grievances were genuine enough, they were not enough to go as far as dissolving the union. While there was a Jacobite core who wanted to restore Scotland’s independence, for the majority, the moves for dissolution were a manifestation of their dissatisfaction at the way Scotland had been treated since 1707 and represented an invitation to the ministry to treat Scotland with the equality and fairness the Treaty required. They sought greater integration rather than separation.
7. Anti-Union agitation and the Presbyterian response

Efforts to dissolve the union switched to a sustained campaign during 1714 and 1715 that culminated in attempts to organise anti-union addresses during the 1715 elections. This campaign was as unsuccessful as the 1706 agitation they were trying to replicate. Organisation was poor and of the few addresses circulated none were ever presented to George I. There was a distinct lack of political will, and popular support was limited, not least because there was no coherent alternative to union around which people could rally. Most of Scotland’s political elites believed that Scotland’s future lay with the union and that their grievances were reasons for improving the union rather than ending it. Restoring Scotland’s independence was not a realistic option; the union and Britain were here to stay.

The campaign’s most significant weakness was the perception that it was inspired by Jacobites. Consequently it failed to galvanise the strong and widespread hostility to union among Presbyterians. Patronage, Toleration, and the Abjuration Oath had done nothing to endear the union to the Church, and while Presbyterians believed it was perfectly reasonable to seek dissolution they believed that supporting the campaign would be disloyal and were unwilling to take any action that might prove detrimental to the Hanoverian succession and beneficial to the Jacobites. If the union was to be broken it had to be by ‘Whigs and not Jacobites’ and in a manner that gave the Jacobites no handle ‘for their wicked designs’. Standing aloof from the anti-union campaign was, for Presbyterians, a demonstration of their anti-Jacobitism. Their hostility to the Stuarts far surpassed their hostility to the union. Anti-unionism was not synonymous with Jacobitism.

The Roman Catholicism of the Stuarts proved a perennial stumbling block to support. Nor did it help their cause that their European backers like France, Spain, and the Papacy, were forever associated in the popular mind with arbitrary power and popish tyranny. Union, promoted as an antidote to Jacobitism, was initially sustained by predominately negative factors: by a united front against a common enemy, rather than love for union, and by anti-Jacobitism rather than British patriotism. The paradox of Jacobitism was that in pursuit of its particular political and dynastic vision of Britain, it strengthened the Britain it sought to destroy. Jacobitism was one of the more significant factors responsible for the promotion of British state formation. Thus the association of the sustained anti-union agitation with Jacobitism served to strengthen the union.

Efforts were made to encourage Church support for the campaign on the grounds that it had little chance of redress of its grievances from a British Parliament and would be safer in the hands of a Scottish Parliament which would guarantee the Church’s security and remove all encroachments made upon it since the union. Non-juring Presbyterians were specifically targeted on the grounds that their refusal to take the Abjuration Oath somehow implied greater hostility to the union and some sympathy for the Pretender. Both sides lobbied the clergy in the hope that their influence might secure the populace. Happily for unionist politicians, instead of anti-union rhetoric, the pulpit rang out against the ‘restless endeavours of a Jacobite faction who would overturn our happy establishment’. There were some who,
while distancing themselves from the campaign to organise anti-union addresses, wanted to exploit the mood of the times and have the Commission of the General Assembly seize the initiative and prepare an address containing the Church’s grievances, to which would be added civil grievances, and all subscribed by ministers. Any address should also contain an offer of ‘brotherly amity’, that is, a federal union with England.

8. Jacobite rebellions and the Presbyterian response

If the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary agitation between 1713 and 1715 represented no great threat to the union, the 1715 Jacobite rebellion certainly did. Union provided the Stuarts with the opportunity to portray themselves as the champions of Scottish independence and liberty and they promised to restore a Scottish Parliament at the outset of the risings in 1715 and 1745. ‘No union’ was a prominent Jacobite slogan before and after the Treaty was ratified. In the battle for hearts and minds the appeal of nationalism certainly galvanised their existing constituency. The number of those prepared to participate in the 1715 rising had increased significantly since the abortive rising of 1708.

By the time that John Erskine, Earl of Mar raised the Stuart standard at Braemar on 6th September 1715, the European political landscape had changed to the detriment of the Stuarts. The Treaty of Utrecht, signed in 1713, that brought the War of the Spanish Succession to a close, recognised the Hanoverian succession and required the expulsion of the Stuart court from France, although initially they only moved to the Duchy of Lorraine. Furthermore, the death of the Stuarts’ long-time political sponsor, Louis XIV, guaranteed that there would be no French support for the ’15. Louis XV was only five and his regent Philippe duc d’Orleans had no desire to disturb in any way the Utrecht settlement. The decisive moment of the rebellion was the Battle at Sherrifmuir on 13th November 1715. Mar, who as Scottish Secretary in 1706 had been one of the main promoters of the Treaty of Union, led a force of around 9,000 compared to the 3,500 strong force led by John Campbell, 2nd Duke of Argyll. However, Mar was a cautious and indecisive military leader and failed to take advantage of his superior numbers. The battle ended in stalemate and the Jacobites lost the initiative. The exiled James III arrived at Peterhead in December but his triumphal entry into Dundee and Perth was followed by an ignominious retreat back to France via Montrose.

From a Presbyterian perspective the rebellion threatened the settlement they had worked so hard to achieve and establish. Its failure was greeted with a mixture of joy, relief, and a strong sense of vindication at the fact that so many Episcopalian clergy had come out in support of the Pretender. Had they not warned of Episcopalian disaffection? Had they not warned that Toleration and Patronage would encourage disaffection? Yet the rebellion did provide the Church with the opportunity to consolidate its presence in the north-east. In 1689 it had been predominately Episcopalian and Jacobite. Now the north-east was predominately Presbyterian; and in the thirty years that elapsed between the rebellions of 1715 and 1745 the Church further consolidated its position.
9. The ’45 and the consolidation of the Union

Charles Edward Stuart described the conquest of Britain and the task of restoring his family to the British throne as his destiny and a role worthy of his birth, and it is one of the great ironies of the ’45 that despite the claims of his opponents and the expectations of his Scottish supporters, he had no intention of dissolving the union. His invasion of England reflected the British and unionist ambitions of the Stuarts and was deeply unpopular with his predominately Scottish council which had a distinctly nationalist, Scottish agenda. They wanted to restore the Stuarts, dissolve the union, declare independence, call Parliament, consolidate the kingdom, and seek French help. They would contemplate an invasion of England only if the English requested help to overthrow the Hanoverians. Otherwise, what England did was none of their business. However, Charles was not interested in Scotland alone; he wanted Britain and declared himself strongly against his council’s policy of consolidation, ‘and said often that he would have the three kingdoms or nothing at all.’ He perfectly understood, as one of his opponents pointed out, that ‘it is for the common benefit of both the British nations to stand united as they now are.’ The political and economic opportunities offered by Britain were bound to take precedence over a narrow nationalistic interest.

Attitudes towards the union had also undergone a significant change and the days when Scottish politicians, or for that matter Scots generally, had wanted to end it were over. Indeed there had been a ‘growing campaign within Scotland to “complete the union” through further measures of anglicization.’ The benefits and opportunities afforded by the union had become more apparent by 1745 and they were recognized as being more than merely commercial. In 1735 The Thistle, a journal organized by James Erskine of Grange, expressed the view that,

By the Union the trade of England and the English colonies was opened to us: But this is a trifling advantage in comparison of another, that thereby we had communicated to us their inestimable constitution.

Increasing numbers of merchants and landowners were benefiting significantly through the growing transatlantic trade based around the Clyde and the export of linen, cattle, coal, and grain to expanding English and colonial markets. Scotland’s commercial sector had much to lose and ‘could not be certain that their interests lay in a violent change of dynasty.’ Britain’s commercial sector generally resisted the Prince, not just as Protestants but as businessmen aware of the disruption a prolonged civil war would make to their profits. An independent Scotland within a multi-kingdom monarchy had little to recommend it to Scotland’s elites—its burgeoning commercial sector and those whose livelihoods depended upon it.

This change of heart was also reflected in the Church. Union was no longer regarded as a threat to its existence, but rather a bulwark to the real threat of Jacobitism. Fifty-five years might have passed since the Revolution but as long as there was a threat from the Stuarts the hostility towards them would not diminish. The Stuarts were still regarded as a merciless and
14 perceptious race lurking in the bosom of the nation; the ‘composition of all Evil, who would at once deprive us of all those Blessings, and bring upon us All this Misery.’ Ministers attacked the rebellion as unreasonable and unnatural because it intended to replace what was regarded as the finest of constitutions with the worst form of government. Edinburgh minister Andrew Richardson reminded his people that they lived in days of liberty and knew nothing of the tyranny their fathers had suffered before the revolution. Liberty was the glory of Britain. No nation enjoyed it so fully. Extolling the benefits of the revolution, union, and Protestant succession Patrick Cumming declared:

O Happy island! If thou knewest thy own happiness, the seat of liberty and learning, the refuge of the oppressed and persecuted, the Terror of Tyrants, the Bulwark of true religion, the Empress of the sea, supreme in trade and commerce, safe in thy laws, safe in thy Sovereign, and safe in the prospect of a numerous Royal race, who may transmit these inestimable Blessings to posterity.

Attacking Jacobite nationalism in a fast-day sermon, George Wishart of the Tron Church in Edinburgh said that there was a certain kind of spirit, which leads people to prefer a whimsical and imaginary glory of their country, to the most solid public advantages. Defending the union, and reflecting an increasing perception in Scotland that the benefits of union were becoming more apparent, Wishart claimed that the rebels were willing to exchange the “happy situation” and the “substantial blessings of a Free government which we now enjoy,” for the “imaginary honour of their country,” the consequences of which would be to render the nation slaves and dependents of a foreign power.

10. Conclusion

Presbyterians were not averse to the idea of a union with England. They saw the common Protestantism of the two kingdoms as the foundation upon which to build a union with closer political, economic, and confessional ties while still maintaining the independence and sovereignty of each. They also believed that a confessional union would necessarily involve the Church of England being further reformed and becoming more closely conformed to the pattern of the Church of Scotland. The union of the crowns in 1603 was welcomed as an important step to help accomplish such a union but it was only under the Covenanters that it was most closely realised, in particular through the Solemn League and Covenant. The dynastic union proved to be highly damaging to the Church as successive Stuart monarchs, preferring a religious union based on an Anglican model, forced prelacy and all its paraphernalia upon a Presbyterian people who regarded it as unbiblical and as popery by another name. Presbyterian dissent was brutally crushed with the persecution reaching its height during the ‘Killing Times’ of the 1680s.

It was hardly a surprise, in the light of that recent history, that the Church reaction to a treaty for an incorporating union should be one of alarm and grave concern. Presbyterianism had been re-established at the Glorious Revolution but the proposed union threatened to
overthrow it yet again in favour of prelacy. The Church through its Commission successfully pressed the government for legal securities in the treaty, in the event of a union. It is important to remember that the religious dimension of the union debate was one of the most important?. No other topic produced so much paper, and without the Act securing the doctrine, discipline, worship and government of the Church as established by law, securing a treaty would have been very difficult. The government realised this, hence the Act.

The Church was a reluctant incorporating unionist, but sought to make the union work, and to work within it. However, initially it seemed as if the fears expressed by so many would be realised. The impact of union was harmful rather than beneficial. The Privy Council, which had played such an important role in helping the Church, was abolished and acts were passed permitting the use of the English Liturgy, imposing oaths, and re-instating Patronage. The Jacobite architects of the legislation hoped to turn the Church against the union at a time when anti-union agitation was the major topic in Scottish politics. Unfortunately for them, nothing, not even the promise of Scottish independence, could endear Presbyterians to the Stuarts.

During the thirty years between the Jacobite rebellions of 1715 and 1745, Presbyterian attitudes towards the House of Stuart did not change but their attitude towards the union did. Union was promoted as, and proved to be—as both rebellions demonstrated—a bulwark in defence of Protestantism and the Reformed Faith and against Jacobitism, arbitrary power, and popery. Free trade with England and its colonies had been the jewel in the crown of the Treaty. While it had taken time, it was now apparent that commercially Scotland was beginning to reap the benefits of union. Indeed, throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the empire grew, Scots and Scotland prospered. The union was a unique and momentous event in the history of both Scotland and England and few can doubt that it has, as Queensberry believed it would, proved beneficial to Scotland. That it still continues is testimony to the fact that its foundations were strong and the benefits real.

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