

13th January 2024

World

“The wide world is all before us.”

Robert Burns *Strathallan's Lament*

Clearing out my study, I came across a tattered copy of a *Year Book of the Church of Scotland* from 1889. Not surprisingly, the Church of 1889 trumpets its successes. Figures for ministers, parishes, members and finance are truly staggering. And given that more than half the publication is given over to what the Church stands for – Home Mission work, Sabbath Schools, education, work with fishermen, overseas Missions, publications, and much more besides – this is a remarkable demonstration of the Church's place in Scottish society in the latter part of the 19th century.

But I was surprised by the extensive nature and variety of the advertising. Adverts for *The Religious Tract Society*, bibles from *Oxford University Press* and clerical robes from *MacDonald, Middlemass & Wood*, along with lists of stationery, classic novels, psalmodies and hymn books, might be expected. We shouldn't be surprised to find *Investment Life Policies*, *The Mercantile Bank of Sydney* or *The Scottish Widows' Fund* aimed at the canny Scot. And making use of information from *The Leith and London Shipping Company*, *The Royal Atlas of Modern Geography* and the *Midland Railway* can broaden the mind. But what about adverts for *McDowell's Celebrated Shortbread*, *The Simplex Convertible Closed or Open Fire Ranges*, *Doughty's Voice Lozenges*, a book from Sampson, Low, Marston & Co entitled *Portraits of Celebrated Racehorses of the Past and Present Centuries?* And – would you believe it – from J Anderson, Chemist, Dundee, there's a “new and effective remedy” called *Brain Salt*, which, we're informed, “speedily relieves those suffering from over-brainwork” and “quickly refreshes those suffering from nervous derangement.”

Surprised? A little amused? But pleased too. For here was a Church, proud of its status, but also standing firm in world of commerce and industry, not afraid to take money from business and readily apply it to its extensive good works. I don't think I'm suffering from “over-brainwork” when I respond positively to this. “The world is all before us,” wrote Burns. So it isn't “nervous derangement” to say that a Church set in the midst of that world, and serving it well, is a Church where it rightly should be.

A prayer for today

“Nervous derangement?” I don't think so, not when I'm where my Lord calls me to be!