PREFACE

When 'The Church and Literature' was proposed by Dr Sheridan Gilley as the theme for his presidency of the Ecclesiastical History Society in 2010–11, it prompted strong approval but also much debate within the society's committee. Some considered the theme too broad, but Dr Gilley wished to keep the theme as broad as possible so that it would attract a wide response and result in a volume of wide interest. The editors of SCH certainly received offers of a wide range of communications in relation to the theme, and in order to keep the Summer Meeting and the year's volume to manageable proportions, we had to make a rigorous selection among them. Two main interpretations of the theme have emerged: the representation of the Church and its teachings in literature; and the influence of different literary genres on Christian writing. Not all the literary works discussed here might be seen as 'canonical' but they all address Christian themes and sometimes reached extensive Christian readerships, particularly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The contributions edited here comprise seven plenary papers given at the Summer Meeting in 2010 and Winter Meeting in 2011, and a selection of the communications delivered at the Summer Meeting.

The editors are grateful to those who chaired communication sessions at the Summer Meeting and peer-reviewed with such thoughtful expertise and efficiency the communications offered for publication. We are also grateful to the authors of all papers in the volume for their timely and cooperative responses to our requests for revisions, and we and the society remain much indebted to the assistant editor, Dr Tim Grass, for his sterling copy-editorial work. We further thank the society for continuing to fund his essential post.

The society wishes to thank the University of St Andrews for hosting the Summer Meeting and Dr Williams's Library, London, for accommodating the Winter Meeting. It is also grateful to the conference secretary, Professor Michael Walsh, for organizing both meetings, and to Stephen Holmes for arranging the excursion which concluded the Summer Meeting. Finally, the society is

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grateful to Professor Tony Claydon, outgoing co-editor of SCH, for leading the Round Table together with Peter Clarke in its customary exploration of the president's theme across all periods of church history and in the light of the papers presented at the Summer Meeting, the academic proceedings of which it concluded.

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