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ADDRESS.

THE Publishers of the Volumes of the Early Literature and History of the United Presbyterian Church have now completed the issue to their subscribers of the Volumes stipulated for during the first year. When their Prospectus was issued, it contained the following proposal:—

“Assuming that 20,000 subscribers shall be obtained, there will be four volumes published annually, or a volume every three months, costing thus 1s. 6d. each. The publishers feel so confident of the liberal support of the Body, that they guarantee *at least* three volumes in the year.”

As respects the number of these volumes they have perhaps only fulfilled to the letter the terms of their Prospectus, but as regards their character, matter, and style of getting up, they have not only, as it will be admitted, exceeded any promises held out in it, but have even surpassed their own expectations on the occasion of its being issued. When offering in that prospectus these publications to the Church at the minimum of price which every improvement in printing machinery, and the most extensive sale ever before realized, had yet enabled the trade to accept from the public, they were aware they incurred some risk of having their proposal undervalued and their motives misconstrued.

The connexion between extensive sales and low prices, and the necessity of having a numerous constituency to act upon in order to command extensive sales, is not always, is not perhaps at all, before the mind of the public.

Cheap books are produced as cheap travelling is effected, by machinery of very recent origin. The steam-press and the stereotype produce the same results, and upon the same principles as the locomotive and the rail. Both classes of machines must however be employed by great numbers, otherwise they remain unproductive: both are effective in their result of cheapness, in proportion as they are extensively used; and the probabilities of the extensive use of both depend upon the numbers of their constituencies. The constituency of the railway is the numerous population to which it is contiguous; of the press it is that to whose sympathies its subjects appeal.

The Publishers of the Early Literature and History of the United Presbyterian Church knew they could not command a constituency extending over every order, party, and sect in the Empire,—such as reads the amusing and instructive papers of the Messrs. Chambers. They could not even calculate upon one composed of all Protestant and Evangelical Britain, like the spirited publisher of the Puritan Divines. They had not behind them an organized committee, representing and comprising influential men of all denominations, sustained by immense subscriptions and a stock and capital of a quarter of a million, the accumulations of nearly fifty years, like the Religious Tract Society. They had seen some organizations for the issue of cheap books, appealing to and supported by large constituencies, suspended or discontinued. They have witnessed other speculations of a similar nature, like that for the publication of Henry's Commentary on the Bible, after having ruined the projector, terminate,—even though the machinery and stock had passed into other hands at considerably under cost value,—in the new proprietor being constrained to raise the prices once and again to the public. Notwithstanding these comparative failures however, and with the knowledge that

they had the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland, *and that Church alone*, to appeal to in support of the scheme, they undertook to supply a series of publications inferior to none of those referred to in cheapness, and superior to any of them in comparative originality and attractiveness, *provided only* that a sale of 20,000 copies were secured.

To ensure such a circulation no effort was spared on their part. Circulars were addressed, and in many instances a second and third time, to every minister in the denomination, inviting them and their sessions to suggest a local agent who should undertake to procure subscribers. Endeavours were made to excite attention and a favourable interest in every channel that seemed fitting and available. It seemed but reasonable that an undertaking of this character, whose success was to result in supplying a religious body of moderate extent with its literature and history at prices fully as cheap as any works that have yet appeared although adapted to command a *national* sale, should be aided by the ministers and sessions of that association.

It would be at once unjust and ungrateful on the part of the publishers not to acknowledge,—and they are pleased at having this opportunity of doing so,—that as well on the part of their committee and of the reverend Authors and Editors, as on that of the leading Ministers and Sessions throughout the kingdom, they have received that aid with a readiness and an effect which has fully realized all that they could have anticipated,—an aid, that had it been universally rendered, would have placed the circulation, if not at the full number of 20,000, at least so near to it, as would have induced them to carry out, even if without profit to themselves, their *conditional* promise of giving four volumes in the year to each of their subscribers.

The depressed state of trade throughout the kingdom has no doubt contributed, in some, perhaps in a great,

degree, to limit the circulation of the volumes. But a misapprehension of the motives of the publishers and the object of the undertaking has, they apprehend, contributed still more to the production of this result.

THE SCHEME WAS NOT THEIRS; IT WAS PROPOSED TO THEM, AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, BY A HIGHLY RESPECTABLE AND INFLUENTIAL PORTION OF THE MINISTERS AND ELDERS OF THE BODY, AND SOLELY WITH A VIEW TO THE ADVANTAGE AND EDIFICATION OF THE CHURCH. Unless it had been so proposed, it is not at all probable that the scheme would have suggested itself to the mind of the publishers. If in numerous instances their request to have parties suggested to them who might act as congregational agents has not been responded to, and the entire proposal has been treated as a bookseller's scheme with which the parties had nothing to do; if, in consequence, there are still nearly 150 congregations amongst whom as far as they know not a single copy circulates; and if in certain fishing villages which could be named there are more subscribers than in towns whose population ranges from 20,000 to 50,000;—these circumstances are not otherwise here referred to than as explanatory of the reason why the anticipations of a circulation of 20,000 has not been attained, not even reached by one half, and why therefore instead of the *conditional* issue of four volumes, they have been constrained to abide during the present year by the guaranteed issue of three.

The publishers, however, are neither disappointed nor discouraged by the results of the scheme as far as yet carried out by them. The union of the bodies is recent. The experiment was a new one. It is not to be wondered at, that some parties should doubt of its acceptability or that others should question its success. The publishers are grateful for the measure of support their undertaking has met with, and for the kind opinion expressed by many as to the part in it

executed by them. They are not less sensible of the valuable assistance rendered them in the selection of subjects by the Committee of consultation, nor of the great obligation under which they as well as the community lie to the reverend Gentlemen who have contributed their writings and editorial labours. Under the same advice and with similar facilities they confidently trust the volumes yet to be published will give equal satisfaction, and merit increased support.

The following volumes are in preparation, and will be issued as regularly as is in the power of the publishers to accomplish; and as nearly as possible at the rate of one volume every four months. Instead of annual subscriptions and prepayment, however, the price of the volumes will be collected by the local agents at the time of delivery. Should their circulation, as the publishers are disposed to hope may not long hence be the case, reach 17,500, that price will be, in the terms of their original proposal, viz. One Shilling and Sixpence per volume; *until it reach that number*, however, it will continue as heretofore to be Two Shillings:—

- 1st, Devotional writings of Boston and Bain, with Introduction, by Professor Macmichael.
- 2d, Life and select Works of Moncrieff by the Rev. Dr. Young. Life and select Works of Fisher by the Rev. Dr. Brown. Illustration—Portrait of Moncrieff.
- 3d, Sermons of R. Erskine, with Memoir by the Rev. Wm. Pringle. Illustration—Portrait of R. Erskine.
- 4th, Fisher's Catechism, first half, edited, with Introduction, by Rev. Dr. Brown.

During the remainder of the present year, subscriptions will be received *for the volumes already issued* on the same terms as heretofore, but as they cannot be reprinted in small quantities at the same cost as when thrown off by thousands, the charge for *them* will be raised, after 1st January 1850, to Three Shillings per volume.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

VOLUME I.

(*Scottish Press*, 15th July, 1848.)

“This is the first volume of ‘The Early Literature and History of the United Presbyterian Church,’ and, in so far as the spirited publishers are concerned, it is a perfect marvel of cheapness, accuracy, and elegance. It also contains a beautiful engraving of the farm-stead of Gairney Bridge. But the literary execution of the work, which is the principal matter, is quite in keeping with the ‘goodly outside, and the historical sketches of the two denominations, now so happily one, are extremely creditable to the research, taste, and ability of the parties to whom the task was assigned. With considerable diversity of style, as might be expected from their age and original structure of mind, it is manifest that each of them has a clear, forcible, and graphic pen; and considerable tact has been exercised by them both, in selecting the principal incidents in the early history of the churches, and thus throwing an interest around their narrative, which it could not have possessed had they attempted to introduce more into their limited space, and, instead of giving us a picturesque statement of facts, had presented us merely with an expanded table of contents.”

(*North British Mail*, 9th Aug. 1848.)

“We have read this volume with great pleasure. We have missed from our literature an authentic history of the origin of these churches; but that is now supplied; and in it we have a concise and comprehensive, as well as able and complete account, of the first beginnings of the Secession and Relief Churches, now happily united into one. It is worthy of the United Church and of the spirited publishers; and every member of the United Presbyterian Church, both male and female, ought to have this series in their library.

“Mr. Thomson and Dr. Struthers have done their parts well, and the historic sketch of each section of the now United Church is written with much ability, with great candour, and with acute discrimination.”

(*Free Church Magazine*, Sept. 1848.)

“This beautiful volume is the first issued in connection with the Publication Scheme of the United Presbyterian Church. We cannot speak of the merits of the whole volume, having found time to read only the first portion by Mr. Thomson. But in *it* the scheme has had a most

happy commencement. Considering the extent and richness of the field to be travelled over, and the small space (not two hundred pages) at Mr. Thomson's disposal, his 'Historical Sketch' is a singularly felicitous production. It is written in a peculiarly graceful and attractive, and, withal, terse and vigorous style, the pictorial passages, in which it abounds, are characterized by extreme taste and beauty, and as a whole it deserves high praise. Mr. Thomson has performed a service to his own denomination, the value of which they will not easily appreciate; and the volume, we have no doubt, will find its way into the hands of many who, although they were never connected with the Secession, yet will thankfully recognise in her history and labours a blessing from the Lord to their country."

(*Glasgow Examiner*, 9th Sept. 1848.)

"Mr. Thomson ably sketches the rise of the Secession, and Dr. Struthers beautifully narrates the origin of the Relief Church. The production is well timed, following as it does the formal union of these important bodies. Both writers display many of the essential requisites of the historian. Impartiality and candour are predominant throughout, while there is no lack of fidelity and honesty. We commend the book to the United Presbyterian Church."

(*Aberdeen Banner*, 22d Sept. 1848.)

"This volume is the first of a projected series connected with the Publication Scheme of the United Presbyterian Church. With great appropriateness it has been devoted to a sketch of the distinctive history of the two denominations lately so happily amalgamated under that title. To the members of that church it must possess a peculiar interest, but we make no doubt the volume will overstep denominational confines, and be extensively read by many connected with other religious bodies than the one under whose auspices it is put forth. Both authors have done their parts well. Mr. Thomson's especially is a most attractive sketch. It is written in a rich, flowing, vigorous, and attractive style; and its perusal has afforded us high pleasure. We most cordially recommend the work."

(*London Christian Times*, 3d Nov. 1848.)

"We regard these publications as a happy omen. The present generation can have no better legacy than a record of the struggles and sufferings of their predecessors. In these days, when principle is so often sacrificed to expediency, it must be a seasonable lesson to call to mind the heroes of a former century who battled manfully with prevailing corruptions, and at all hazards preserved their fidelity to the great cause of Evangelical truth and liberty. That the spirit of the Fathers of the United Presbyterian Church may yet continue to stir and animate all their children in the truth—that their love for a pure Gospel and a Free Church may never cease to be cherished by their numerous and increasing posterity—that their consistency in scenes of trial, and their unswerving allegiance to Christ and conscience, may be known, remembered, and imitated, is the instructive object of these serial volumes.

"The task assigned to Mr. Thomson has been executed with great

spirit and fidelity. He gives a very luminous and succinct account of the doctrinal controversy which immediately preceded and paved the way for the Secession. His statements are accompanied with well-arranged documentary evidence; scenes of interest are sketched with vivid and picturesque effect; and such is the elegance and liveliness of the diction, that the interest of the reader never flags. It is altogether an attractive composition, combining popularity of style with exact and careful investigation of facts.

"The contribution of Dr. Struthers is very similar, but more discursive toward the conclusion. It is occasionally quaint, but always graphic. The subject is one with which Dr. Struthers has been long familiar, and he treats every portion of it with masterly power and precision.

"The typography and getting up of the volumes are also excellent indeed; they are from the press of Messrs. A. Fullarton & Co., Edinburgh. The cost of the volumes is so very small, that the publishers can only be remunerated by a very large circulation. The boon to the United Presbyterian Church is great, and we hope that every family will appreciate it, and have its own copy of these 'Fathers.' Other volumes of similar utility are yet to follow. The friends of truth and liberty in other churches may receive both instruction and delight from these interesting volumes. The Founder of the Secession was the son of an English pastor, ejected by the Act of Uniformity, and the Father of the Relief was trained under Doddridge. The United Presbyterian Church is thus intimately allied to English Puritanism and Nonconformity."

(*Glasgow Citizen*, 9th Sept. 1848.)

"The story of the origin of the Secession and Relief Churches (now conjoined) is ably and agreeably told by Messrs. Thomson and Struthers. A more interesting volume we have rarely met—clear, simple, and forcible in its narrative, and lively and graphic in style and expression. We return our thanks to the able writers for the pleasure it has afforded us, and warmly commend it to the public attention."

(*Christian Treasury*, Edinburgh, Oct. 1848.)

"The work itself is, throughout, one of the highest interest. Mr. Thomson has a singularly felicitous style, which stamps every page of his narrative with beauty. The 'History of the Secession' is in itself full of interest, but as told by our author, it is invested with many additional charms."

(*Evangelical Magazine*, Sept. 1848.)

"In drawing the attention of our readers to this instructive and excellent volume, we would request them to reflect what a powerful sympathy has always existed between the pious in England and Scotland, whenever interests of evangelical religion have been at stake. We are struck with finding that while God was raising up a Watts, a Whitefield, a Wesley, and a Fletcher to rouse the churches in the southern part of the island from the lethargy into which they were sinking, he was also employing in the north the Bostons, the Erskines, the Willisons,

and the Gillespies to perform a similar work among their own countrymen. Mr. Thomson gives an interesting and able sketch of the efforts which were made at an earlier stage by Boston, Webster, and other kindred spirits to stem the torrent of worldliness which was fast setting in on the church; and then of the measures of silencing and suspension which were adopted against Messrs. Ebenezer Erskine, Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher, which compelled them, however reluctantly, to adopt the step of secession from the Establishment. We perfectly agree with the remark of Mr. Thomson, that 'there is considerable danger of our not forming a sufficiently high estimate of the self-denial and the faith manifested in the movement which we are now describing.' Mr. T., after tracing the first proceedings of the Secession fathers and the accessions which were made to their number from time to time, takes, in a single chapter, a rapid masterly survey of the results of the Secession upon the religious and the moral condition of Scotland. Of the sound judgment and good feeling with which the whole is written, we cannot give a better proof than his excellent remarks upon the objections which some entertain to the very notion of a historic church.

"The latter portion is written by Dr. Struthers, author of the 'History of the Relief.' The writer, therefore, travels over ground with which he is familiar, and every sentence shows him to be perfectly at home with his subject. He draws with a power of truth which has all the effect of keenest sarcasm, the proceedings of the fashionable ecclesiastics of the last century, after they had expelled the Erskines from the church, and intimidated their friends; the high hand with which they put down all popular rights in the election of ministers; and the manner in which they strained the law to compel Mr. Gillespie to take part in an ordination at Dunfermline against his strongest convictions of duty.

"We very cordially congratulate the United Presbyterian Church on the auspicious union which has been formed between the two oldest and leading branches of secession from the Establishment; and especially do we congratulate them on the circumstance that there has been no concealment, compromise, or abandonment of principles by either party, and that the ministers of the Relief Church will in their state of Union find a larger scope for the exercise of their Christian sympathies. We can scarcely too highly commend the kind, generous, and Christian spirit which breathes in Dr. Struthers' pages; the skill and graphic power which distinguish his slightest touches, and the full and satisfactory account from authentic sources of the great doctrines which have from the beginning been taught in all the pulpits of the Relief body; and we most unfeignedly join in the devout aspirations with which the writer closes his subject."

(*Scotsman Newspaper*, 18th Oct. 1848.)

"If one wishes to know the ecclesiastical history of Scotland for the last century and a quarter, it is necessary that he make himself acquainted with the origin and progress, the principles and position, of the United Presbyterian Church, which holds so important a place among the religious bodies in Scotland, and which in its two sections, now amalgamated, has confessedly exerted a mighty influence on the

moral and social condition of this country. The subject possesses an intrinsic and relative importance which will draw to it, not merely the members of that denomination, but the student of general history, and every one who wishes to be thoroughly informed upon those questions of doctrine and church discipline which are mixed up with the earlier and later secessions from the Established Church. The volume before us will not only supply the general reader with luminous and full views on the subject, but will be very suitable as a manual to direct the researches of the inquirer who may wish to examine more in detail the historical facts which are here concisely stated. The writers have executed their task admirably; and henceforth their volume will be pointed to as the guide to an acquaintance with this chapter of Church History. Full of their theme, and admirers as well as followers of Erskine and Gillespie, the authors have in nothing extenuated the weaknesses and errors of their predecessors; and we like their narrative all the better that it has not the blemish of indiscriminate eulogy. The fluency and elegance of Mr. Thomson's style lend a charm to his sketch to which no reader can be insensible. His views, too, are characterised by breadth; and in the reflections which he occasionally intermingles with his facts, we are furnished with glimpses at once delightful and instructive, of the philosophy of the history. His estimate of the men who originated the Secession, and of the movement with which their names are associated, is calm and judicious; and a candid reader will scarcely fail to obtain from his graceful story a correct appreciation of the importance of the era on Scottish Church History, which dates with Ebenezer Erskine and his associates."

(Perthshire Advertiser, 12th Oct. 1848.)

"The little volume before us is an interesting chapter of the ecclesiastical history of Scotland. While it will be peculiarly interesting to the members of the United Presbyterian Church, the members of other churches will find that it throws a gleam of light upon their own respective communities. It is, in fact, the history of crises or epochs in the National Establishment, and treats of principles, policy, and events which, in due time, issued in the memorable Disruption, and laid the foundation of the Free Church. There is a remarkable similitude in the immediate causes which drove the Erskines and Fishers, the Guthries and Bostons, the Chalmerses and Candlishes, out of the church of their fathers.

"These causes are traced with a clear eye and steady hand, and, so far as we perceive, with much impartiality and fairness, by the Rev. Mr. Thomson.

"The history of the Relief Church, by Dr. Struthers, is, in its leading outlines, a repetition of the history of the previous secession, as regards the separation of both from the parent stock. Each of the authors has the rare gift of condensation—which is a merit as well as a gift, and entitles them to our meed of praise. They have written their sketches with good taste and in good style. Terse nervous brevity is the characteristic feature of a work which we can honestly recommend to the general public, and especially to the members of the United Presbyterian Church."

(*United Presbyterian Magazine, Aug. and Nov. 1848.*)

"The projectors of the present series have judiciously limited themselves to selections from the more important productions of the fathers of the United Presbyterian Church; at the same time varying these by original works illustrative of the character of the writers, and of the time in which they lived. The first volume of the series is now before us; it is a production of first-rate excellence; and if the volumes which are to follow fulfil the promise thus held out, we venture to predict that the undertaking will meet with brilliant success.

"Mr. Thomson's sketch of the origin of the Secession Church displays all the author's characteristic excellencies, and is clear, elegant, succinct, and comprehensive. He (Mr. Thomson) has done his subject the fullest justice. He has not produced a mere compilation of details, or an epitome of a general history, but a narrative that bears evidence of having been fused in his own mind, and cast afresh. This gives it the charm of novelty, and makes it arrest the attention and maintain it to the close. The style is felicitous. With a tendency, not unfrequently, to season it with epigrammatic point, it is yet easy, flowing, rich, and warm, kindling, as it rises with the subject, into the fire of true eloquence. The manner in which Ebenezer Erskine in the second chapter, and Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher in the third, are introduced and portrayed; the description of the first Sabbath in the parishes of the Seceding ministers after the deposition; and the medallions of the distinguished ministers of the denomination, that closes the narrative, are illustrations of this. The spirit of the reflections interwoven with the narrative is of the most healthful kind—a thorough sympathy with our seceding fathers, with neither an unreasoning adherence to them in all they said and did, nor unreasonable hostility toward all with whom they came into collision. We have read with peculiar delight the brief, yet perspicuous and most complete account of the Marrow Controversy. Such sketches as these present the subject in a form so condensed as to be capable of being read by all, and at a price so low as to be capable of being purchased by all.

"The narrative of Dr. Struthers is worthy of his high reputation as the historian of the Relief Church, and displays on a miniature scale all the fidelity and spirit of the full-length portrait. There is a vigour, a point, and raciness in his style that give interest to all he touches; a keen sarcasm on occasion intermingled, that borrows its edge from its truthfulness, and yet shed over the whole that warm glow of Christian charity which becomes one who argues so stoutly for the unrestricted communion of the saints. The great interest of the narrative centres, of course, in Gillespie himself; and it is impossible to read it without both loving and admiring the man for that singleness of eye and heart which formed the prominent feature of his character. We know few cases in the history of the church that show so strikingly how much may be done by a man undistinguished by genius, by splendid talents, or glowing eloquence, but possessed with a firm conviction of duty, and a resolute determination to follow its path, fearless of consequences. The narrative is enriched by many profound philosophical remarks, never needlessly intruded, and always arising naturally out of the events related. For the graphic power of Dr. Struthers in description, we may refer to his

account in this chapter of Boston's first sacrament, on the Ana at Jedburgh. Dr. Struthers refers with laudable pride to the steadfast testimony borne by the Relief Church in regard to the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and to free communion, to the reproach it bore for that testimony in other days, and to the growing homage it is now receiving.

"It would be unjust to deny their meed of praise to the enterprising publishers. They have 'set apples of gold in pictures of silver.' The style in which these two volumes are got up in exterior, accompanying engravings, and general appearance, places the series unquestionably at the head of all similar publications we have yet seen. They have laid the church under a debt of gratitude which we hope to see acknowledged in the support given to their spirited undertaking."

(English Presbyterian Messenger, Feb. 1849.)

"The United Presbyterian Church has acted wisely in furnishing its members with these popular histories of the two bodies which now compose it; and the brethren to whom it has intrusted the compilation have executed their task with vigour and good-will. Dr. Struthers has told succinctly and clearly all that an ordinary reader desires to know of the rise and progress of his church. It is impossible to read its history and not sympathize most thoroughly with its reluctant founder, Gillespie. The victim of arbitrary and oppressive proceedings, and a man of deeply exercised and unostentatious piety, the pupil of Doddridge, and the lover of all good men, no nature could be more remote from the schismatic or the sectary. On the other hand, there is something very admirable in his calm and faithful adherence to convictions in which he was almost solitary, and which promised him little except a life of persecution and poverty.

"Mr. Thomson has a great advantage over Dr. Struthers in his more affluent materials. The Secession boasts a copious literature, and its early records have been carefully preserved. Mr. Thomson has collected his materials diligently, and has employed them skilfully. His sketch is lively and eloquent, abounding in anecdotes and picturesque delineations of persons and incidents, and in every page betokens scholarship, taste, and accomplishment. Whilst glowing with affection for the fathers and founders of the Secession, it bewrays no bitter nor vindictive feeling towards those who did not follow them; no vaunting nor censorious feeling towards those who do not follow now. It is such a book as a Scottish Seceder should have written; it is such a book as a catholic Christian should write.

"To Dr. Struthers and Mr. Thomson we are deeply indebted. In narrow limits they have written two eventful chapters of Scottish ecclesiastical history, and have given us a welcome supplement to the history of Dr. Hetherington, and the sketches of Mr. M'Crie. And we hope that even amongst Christians of other communions the perusal of these narratives will elicit many prayers for the now United Churches."

(British Banner, 15th Nov. 1848.)

"There is something unusually graceful in this publication. Readers, conversant with the history of sect and party, in Scotland, are aware

that, until lately, the Secession Church and the Relief Church, although one in doctrine and in polity, were two distinct bodies. The Secession Church was both the elder and the stronger; but the Relief Church, from the outset, was the more enlightened and catholic on certain matters affecting civil and religious liberty, and the intercommunity of Christians: Hutchinson published a work, at the outset of the Relief body, which sufficed to confer lasting distinction on his name, although, we regret to say, that name is but little known. But, at length, the Secession Church, with respect to light on the matters referred to, not only overtook her younger sister, but even advanced, and was accompanied by her in their noble enterprize of Scripture discovery with respect to the kingdom of Christ. These two bodies, assisted by the Independents and others, carried on that memorable warfare which resulted in the Disruption of the Scottish Establishment,—a warfare by which they have laid the whole Christian world under a debt of obligation. They have now ceased to be two, and constitute one body, under the new designation of the Scottish Presbyterian Church. Consequent upon this event, the two excellent magazines of the respective bodies were merged, and, with like propriety, the histories of the two bodies, prior to the Union, are here presented in a cheap and popular form, in a single volume. The original production of the volumes separately was a valuable service, and their united publication cannot fail to prove useful to the community newly-formed, as well as instructive and edifying to the public at large. Mr. Thomson is well and favourably known, and this work will conduce not a little to his reputation. Dr. Struthers, who was first brought into general notice by his ‘History of the Relief Church,’ added to his reputation by his famous Essay—alike praised and censured—which appeared some few years ago in the Union Volume. It is to be regretted, we think, that a man of his knowledge, spirit, vigour, and penetration, does not write more. Although the volume may appear principally calculated for the meridian of Scotland, yet it will constitute very interesting and instructive reading in the south, and it deserves a place in every Nonconformist library.”

(*Eclectic Review*, Feb. 1849.)

“The union of the United Secession and the Relief Churches is an event full of hope for the interests of dissent in Scotland. They have a glorious vocation in Scotland. May they have wisdom to act worthily of it! Constituted of large masses of the people, above the average of intelligence and moral worth, they have a power to wield in this war of moral and spiritual freedom, from which we anticipate the best results. The instruction of their people in the history of their principles, is a wise, and will be a fruitful, course. The Presbyterian Dissenters will, in these volumes, and in those which are to succeed them, learn to venerate the integrity and manhood of their heroic fathers—and may be themselves—and train their children to be, men of a ‘stalwart’ bearing like them. The volume before us is creditable to its twin authors. Dr. Struthers is well known in the historic vein already; he has *reduced* his history in a style as workman-like as he showed in its original construction. This is no mean praise. Mr. Thomson’s virgin pen is prophetic of some good work to his day and denomination. His style is popular,

his spirit liberal, his principles just, his selection of materials judicious; his work, as a whole, well adapted to its purpose.

“The United Presbyterian Church, in originating and sanctioning this series, have wisely resolved not to be themselves publishers. Even if the work were to be equally well and cheaply done by doing it themselves, which we much doubt, we have serious questionings of the right of religious bodies to invade, for mere purposes of economy, the province of legitimate trade. A spiritual church should entangle itself as little as possible with secularities in any shape. Judging by this first volume in the series, the wisdom of their scheme is determined. The Messrs. Fullarton, of London and Edinburgh, have undertaken all the responsibilities of publication; and certainly, of all the cheap series, we have seen nothing more handsome and inviting, both in its internal and external execution, than this first volume of the United Presbyterian series.”

VOLUME II.

(*London Christian Times*, 3d Nov. 1848.)

“The second volume of the issue consists of a selection of Ebenezer Erskine’s Doctrinal Sermons. They are marked by simplicity, earnestness, and fulness of thought. The views of Evangelical truth contained in them are broad and impressive. Bradbury said of them, that they are distinguished by ‘a strong force of argument, and a happy flow of words, that they are a clear defence of those doctrines which are the ground and pillar of the truth.’ Hervey, in his ‘Theron and Aspasio,’ says, ‘Were I to read to the edification of my heart in true faith, solid comfort, and evangelical holiness, I would have recourse to Mr. Erskine, and take his volumes for my guide, my companion, and my familiar friend.’ Mr. Smith, the editor, has displayed his usual tact and discrimination in the selection he has given. Both volumes have beautifully engraved frontispieces—the first, a vignette of the farm-house of Gairney Bridge, Kinross, where the first Secession Presbytery was organised; and the second, a fine likeness of Ebenezer Erskine.”

(*Glasgow Examiner*, 11th Nov. 1848.)

“This is the second volume of a cheap series now issuing from the press under the auspices of the United Presbyterian Church. The volume consists of fourteen sermons, entirely doctrinal, selected by the editor under the conviction that such discourses were peculiarly suitable to the present state of the religious world. But although doctrinal, the greatest stickler for practical sermons will find the doctrinal discussion so practically treated, and the connecting truths so forcibly borne home upon the conscience, that they cannot fail to quicken and excite to increased obedience. It is not our intention to enter into any critical examination of these discourses, nor is this needed. The name and writings of the revered author are well known, not only in that body of which he may be regarded as the father, but the name Ebenezer Erskine is of itself a sufficient passport to every religious family in every part of the civilized world. Than Mr. Smith, we are of opinion, a more judi-

cious common-sense editor could not have been found in the whole united body. We are assured that in preparing these discourses for the press he has introduced nothing of his own—not even a single sentence. The volume is got up in the customary neat style of the publishers.”

(*Scottish Guardian*, 10th Nov. 1848.)

“For the publication of this elegant edition of Erskine, we are indebted to the United Presbyterian Church, which, following the example of the Free Church, has commenced the publication of a series of cheap religious books, the works of the fathers of the Secession, and other early writers. Mr. Smith, who was fitly chosen to edit Erskine’s sermons, mentions that he was limited by his instructions to a selection of the doctrinal discourses only, and to such of these as more particularly exhibit the author’s views on the leading doctrines of the gospel. He has, in accordance with this design, included in the selection all the sermons bearing upon the points for which the celebrated “Marrowmen” contended. Beyond the duty of selecting, which has been performed with judgment and discrimination, the editorial task only extended to collation and correction, in which Mr. Smith has shown a laudable degree of care and accuracy, giving his church and the religious public, who will receive the gift with thankfulness, a creditable edition of a work which has long been held precious by the pious people of Scotland, and which contributed so powerfully, under the Divine blessing, to the revival of pure religion in our country at a period when Moderatism prevailed in the pulpits, as it ruled in the courts and counsels of the Established Church. The volume is adorned by a beautiful portrait of Erskine, copied from the original in the possession of Mr. Walter Wardlaw, of this city.”

(*United Presbyterian Magazine*, Nov. 1848.)

“We must bear witness to the great judgment and care with which Mr. Smith has discharged the duties of editor. For securing the objects he had in view, he has chosen a judicious course. To have given entire discourses, would, from their great length, have been to occupy the volume with but a few, and to have given extracts disjoined from their connexion, would have been to mar their effect. A plan between these has been adopted. What is not doctrinal, has, in each discourse, been excluded, and the whole re-arranged as far as the omissions rendered it necessary. We have compared several of the sermons thus re-cast with the original forms, and have admired Mr. Smith’s discrimination in selecting, tact in re-arranging, and scrupulous fidelity in presenting Ebenezer Erskine as he really spoke and taught. The volume is an admirable one, and will do much, we trust, to make the names of these sermons again familiar in our churches as household words; to increase in ministers the desire to give, and in members the taste to receive, that pure milk of the word with which they every where abound.”

(*Belfast Monitor*, Jan. 1849.)

“As full and clear exhibitions of the glorious Gospel, as developing the experience of believers, and as specimens of searching and faithful appeals to the conscience of the sinner, these discourses have few equals in our language. The editor has made a very judicious selection, and

the discourses contained in this volume are among the most powerful and useful that Mr. Erskine preached and published. Some of them—such as *God's regard to worthless man—the broken law magnified—the rainbow of the Covenant—the believer exalted in imputed righteousness—the assurance of Faith—and the Stone rejected by the Builders*, are well known, and have always been justly prized as displaying the sovereignty and freeness of the Gospel, and holding forth a faithful banner for the truth. We give this volume our fullest commendation, and shall rejoice most cordially in the publication of many such volumes by the Council of the United Presbyterian Church.”

(*Perthshire Advertiser*, 14th Dec. 1848.)

“Ebenezer Erskine has a name and reputation in the churches. He is well known as an able expounder of the views of human life and destiny designated evangelical. The most orthodox will find him up to their mark on this point. He debases human nature, and exalts divine grace and sovereignty, to the utmost limits which the most literal application of sacred writ permits. In short, he is an able, and we must add eloquent, exponent of the Calvinistic theology, which is, and has been, the creed of Scotland for centuries. Ebenezer Erskine is an historical name, and a re-issue of his *Select Discourses* will meet with more general acceptance on that account.”

(*Aberdeen Banner*, 15th Dec. 1848.)

“* * * A most fitting and appropriate selection * * * This handsome volume is a most valuable one.



THE OLD MILL

Illustration of the Old Mill, showing the building and the surrounding landscape.

LIVES

OF

EBENEZER ERSKINE, WILLIAM WILSON,

AND

THOMAS GILLESPIE,

FATHERS OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY THE

REVS. JAMES HARPER, D.D., JOHN EADIE, LL.D.,

AND

WILLIAM LINDSAY, D.D.,

PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY TO THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

A. FULLARTON & CO.:
EDINBURGH, DUBLIN, AND LONDON.

1849.

*

EDINBURGH:
FULLARTON AND CO., PRINTERS, LEITH WALK.

MEMOIR

OF THE

REV. EBENEZER ERSKINE, A.M.,

FATHER OF THE SECESSION CHURCH.

BY JAMES HARPER, D.D.,

MINISTER OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION, NORTH LEITH.

AND PROFESSOR OF SYSTEMATIC AND PASTORAL THEOLOGY

TO THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

P R E F A C E.

To the friends of the Scottish Secession of 1733, no apology is necessary for embodying among the memorials and writings of the United Presbyterian Fathers a Life of Ebenezer Erskine. If true that public questions frequently take their form and colour from those that handle them, it will follow that, to estimate great movements aright, we must take into account the spirit and purpose of the men.

The life of Ebenezer Erskine and the progress of the Secession are mutually illustrative. They are indeed often blended—thus rendering it impossible to pursue the line of biographical narrative without stepping into the track of public history. But for this very reason it is all the more obvious, how much it is akin to the plan of the present series to find, in the goodly fabric which Erskine and his compeers were instrumental in raising, a tablet on which to record their graces and services—to the glory of Him who made them what they were, and in whose name they “did exploits.”

For a memoir of Ebenezer Erskine, suitable and somewhat ample materials exist. Besides brief notices in one or two works of general biography, the sketch by the Rev. John Brown,* the delineations of personal character which may be gleaned from the richly furnished pages of Dr. M'Kerrow,† and numerous writings and documents relative to the controversies of the period, the biographer of Erskine has now the advantage of his *Life and Diary* by the Rev. Dr. Fraser, a work replete with interesting matter, digested by an able, accurate, and candid pen—my obligations to which I have had frequent occasion to acknowledge.

Why attempt anything more than an abridgment of Dr. Fraser's volume? Such a work, it was apprehended, would have been deficient in ease, while it would have involved a servile adoption of another's views, even when a motive might be felt to form an independent, and perhaps somewhat modified opinion. These reasons led to the composition of a new and original biography—so far as the latter term may be applied to a performance which, while based on a careful examination of sources and authorities, embraces so many materials which have been provided by the previous industry of others.

* Gospel Truth Illustrated.

† History of the Secession.

J. H.

LEITH, *March* 17, 1849.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Parentage—Birth—Education—License—Ordination at Portmoak—Marriage—Eminent Piety of Mrs. Erskine—Deep religious impressions of Mr. Erskine—Increased Spirituality—Acceptance and success in the Ministry—Personal and domestic afflictions.—Pp. 7—31.

CHAPTER II.

Act of Toleration—Occasion—Motives—Management—Marrow Controversy—Act of Assembly 1720—Representation—Queries—Answers—Act of Assembly 1722—Views of Mr. Erskine—Spirit manifested by him.—Pp. 32—50.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Erskine's Translation to Stirling—Pastoral labours—Assembly 1732—Speech by Mr. E.—Synod's Sermon—Found censurable—Defence of his conduct—Assembly 1733—Mr. E. rebuked—Procedure of Commission—Loosed from his charge—Assembly 1734—Act reponing Mr. E.—His refusal to return, with the grounds of it—Mr. E. not a Secularian—Libelled and deposed—Scene of his ejection.—Pp. 51—74.

CHAPTER IV.

Erskine's correspondence with Whitefield—Whitefield at Dunfermline—Rupture with the Associate Presbytery—Cambuslang revival—Mr. Erskine's conduct in reference to it—Covenants renewed—Act concerning the doctrine of grace—Rebellion 1745—Mr. Erskine's loyalty—Breach of the Associate Synod—Mr. E. Professor of Divinity—Domestic and personal afflictions—last illness and death—character—Notices of his family.—Pp. 75—88.

MEMOIR
OF THE
REV. EBENEZER ERSKINE.

CHAPTER I.

Parentage—Birth—Education—License—Ordination at Portmoak—Marriage—Eminent piety of Mrs. Erskine—Deep religious impressions of Mr. Erskine—Increased Spirituality—Acceptance and success in the Ministry—Personal and domestic afflictions.

EBENEZER ERSKINE was the fourth son of Henry Erskine, of the Erskines of Shielfield, in Berwickshire,—a branch of the ancient house of Mar.

His father, who was the ninth of twelve children, was born in 1624. Having at an early period embraced the Presbyterian cause, he prosecuted his studies with a view to the ministry. After license in the usual form, he was ordained at Cornhill, in Northumberland; but in what year is uncertain. One account bears that he was ordained in 1649;* another not till ten years later.† The latter date we apprehend to be nearest the truth. Among other domestic notices in a small MS. volume of Mr. H. Erskine's, which we have seen,‡ there occur the names of his children, with the dates of

* Wodrow.

† Calamy's Continuation, &c. Palmer's Noncon. Memorial.

‡ This interesting family relic, which is in the possession of my honoured friend and colleague, the Rev. Dr. Brown, contains the names of the children of Ralph Erskine, father of Henry. Instead of multiplying to *thirty-three*, as the story goes, they were *twelve* in number.

their birth, from which it appears that of his three eldest, one was born at Galashiels, and two at Wooler. His fourth child, Katharine, was born at Cornhill in August 1659. From these things we infer the correctness of Calamy and Palmer, whose statement bears that he was minister of Cornhill only three years.

Mr. Erskine's ministry at Cornhill, though of brief duration, was accompanied with no small measure of success. At first the people very generally regarded him with aversion; but the holiness of his life, and the prudence of his deportment, together with his unfeigned zeal for their temporal and spiritual good, soon wrought a striking change in their sentiments towards him, not unaccompanied with pleasing proofs that many of them had profited by his unwearied labours that they might not receive the grace of God in vain.

From this field of usefulness Mr. E. was ejected by the Act of Uniformity in 1662. For many years after, his life was passed in retirement, partly at Dryburgh; but not without annoyance from the persecuting zealots of those unhappy times. He was repeatedly called before the committee of the Scottish Council to answer charges of sedition and disobedience, because he presumed to exercise his ministry without conforming to the new order of things. On his refusal to swear that he had not altogether refrained from the duties of his office, and to "give bond that he would preach no more at conventicles," he was heavily fined, and committed to the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, to be afterwards sent to the prison of "the Bass." On his petition for a commutation of the sentence into leave of exile from the kingdom, his request was granted. For a length of time he lived in obscurity in Northumberland, where, nevertheless, he found opportunities of doing good, and where it was also given him to suffer for Christ's sake.

On the proclamation of King James's Indulgence in 1687, Mr. Erskine took charge of a small Presbyterian congregation at Whitsome, near Berwick. His residence

here, which was short, was chiefly memorable that it was under his ministry in this place the celebrated Thomas Boston received his first religious impressions. After the Revolution, Mr. E. was admitted to the parish of Chirnside, of which he continued minister till his death in August, 1696. His departure took place in the midst of his family; and the circumstances of it as related by Dr. Calamy,* are peculiarly interesting from the impression which they appear to have made on the young hearts of his sons Ebenezer and Ralph. Long after, the scene was referred to by them as one of their hallowed recollections. "The Lord helped me," says Ebenezer on one occasion, "to speak of his goodness, and to declare the riches of his grace in some measure to my own soul. He made me tell how my father took engagements of me on his deathbed, and did cast me upon the providence of his God." Ralph, in like manner, more than thirty years after the event, put on record, "I took special notice of the Lord's drawing out my heart towards him at my father's death." †

Mr. Henry Erskine was twice married. His first wife died in 1670 after a lingering illness. She was the mother of eight children—one of whom, Philip, conformed to the church of England, and, receiving episcopal orders, held a rectory in the county of Northumberland. Few traces remain of his intercourse with his father's family. Another child of the first marriage became afterwards well known as Mrs. Balderstone of Edinburgh, a woman of superior intelligence, of simple-hearted and devoted piety. Her correspondence with her step-brothers evinces the warmth of their mutual affection, and much free and confiding interchange of sentiment on religious subjects.

Mr. Erskine's second wife was Margaret Halcro, a native of Orkney, who, to the lustre of a highly honourable extraction, added the incomparably higher honour of genuine Christian worth. The second Mrs. Erskine was the mother

* Continuation.

† Memoir of Rev. H. Erskine.

of seven children—five sons and two daughters. Henry, the eldest, was cut off by a decline in the same year with his father. The second emigrated to Caledonia with his step-brother William, who died on the passage. Hugh, the third son, died an infant. Ebenezer and Ralph lived to be eminently instrumental in the accomplishment of a work which will transmit their names with honour to distant generations.

Of the early childhood of Ebenezer not much is known. The place of his birth has hitherto been matter of conjecture. There is a tradition that his parents were imprisoned in “the Bass,” and that the subject of our memoir was born there in 1682. But this is without foundation, the sentence of imprisonment, as above stated, not having been put in execution. Dr. Fraser thinks it probable that Ebenezer was born at Dryburgh. This conjecture it is now in our power to verify by an extract, which we give *literatim* from the MS. volume above referred to.

“Eben-ezer was borne June 22d, being Tuysday, at one o’clock in the morning, and was baptized by Mr. Gab: Semple July 24th, being Saturday, in my dwelling house in Dryburgh 1680.”

The education of Ebenezer appears to have been conducted under the immediate eye of his father, till he was qualified for attendance on the classes of an university. A reference to his early days, in an “Abbreviate” written by him of the life of his father, gives us reason to believe that his youth afforded hopeful indications of a pious disposition. “Some time prior to his death, Henry Erskine was heard to say, that he would desire to live no longer than to see his son Ebenezer, then in the 16th year of his age, succeed him in the work of the ministry.”

In his 14th year he matriculated at the university of Edinburgh, where he held a bursary on the presentation of Pringle of Torwoodlee. He laureated in June 1697. Whatever value his degree may have as a proof of proficiency at his time of life, there is little doubt, when we consider the advantages of his childhood, and the promise

of usefulness which his father so feelingly recognised, that he must have given himself to his academical studies with becoming assiduity, and have made good progress in the branches both of a literary and theological education.

On leaving college, Mr. Erskine was engaged as tutor to the family of the Earl of Rothes. He also officiated in the capacity of domestic chaplain. This was a truly Christian household, if we may judge from the character of the Earl himself, and from the arrangements maintained by him for the instruction and welfare of his family. That Mr. Erskine's residence here was mutually advantageous and agreeable, may be inferred from the affection between the parties that survived during future years, and on the Earl's part was testified by repeated acts of kindness to Mr. E., especially during the agitations to which the oath of abjuration gave rise, when the course Mr. E. took exposed him with many others to the penalties of law.

Mr. Erskine was after the usual trials licensed by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, on the 11th of February 1703. In course of the same year he received an appointment to preach in Portmoak. So acceptable were Mr. Erskine's ministrations, that an unanimous call was presented to him to fill the vacant charge. In those days the mode of settling vacant parishes was by a call from the heritors and elders, with the concurrence of the parishioners; and in this case all parties were united in their choice. In sustaining the call the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy was not less cordial; Mr. Erskine, however, had some difficulties in accepting the charge, of what nature does not appear; but so intent were the brethren upon his settlement, that the Presbytery acceded to the condition of granting him an "act of transportability,"* in the event of his finding any

* The act so denominated was a form resorted to in cases in which a minister found himself labouring "under insupportable grievances in a parish." The Presbytery, on being persuaded of the existence of such obstacles to his comfort and usefulness, might "declare him capable to receive a call to any other charge, without the parish being called as having any interest;" the minister in the meantime continuing to exer-

grievances connected with his incumbency which it might not be in their power to redress. His very accurate and judicious biographer seems in doubt whether the insufficient state of the church and manse, which the heritors were unwilling to repair, might not be felt by him as a discouragement, or whether he might not be apprehensive of trouble from persons in the parish disaffected to the Presbyterian interest. If we were under the necessity of making a conjecture on the subject, it would be to the effect that Mr. Erskine's fears had reference to obstructions to his work, not to the dilapidated condition of the buildings, — a difficulty not likely to appear formidable to a person of Mr. Erskine's fortitude, and one besides, which at the time of his ordination could not be known in the full extent of the evil, seeing it was after the settlement of Mr. Erskine that the question of "repairs" engaged the attention of the Presbytery.

Mr. Erskine's settlement in Portmoak took place in Sept. 1703. Compared with other parochial charges that of Portmoak was of small extent, so that the prospect of difficulties which at first discouraged him could not have arisen from the amount of pastoral duty he was about to undertake. It is indeed true, that the oversight of souls is a work the arduousness of which is not to be estimated merely by numbers; and that, however few the sheep committed to the pastor's care, if he know the worth and feel the love of souls, he will reckon his charge to feed them a trust of high and solemn responsibility. But it does not appear that Mr. E's. difficulties were of the kind now referred to, since they were connected with the peculiar circumstances of the parish at the time. Undoubted, too, as were Mr. Erskine's integrity of purpose and seriousness of disposition, there is reason to believe that his views of divine truth were at first defective; indeed there is ground to conclude that at that period he knew not the gospel as the power of God to his

cise his office and to enjoy the benefice as formerly, "till an occasion of removal be offered."—*Stewart's Collections*, Book I., Title iii.

own conversion. Certain it is, that he dates his experience of a thorough and saving change at a time posterior to his ordination, and describes as then taking place a quickening in the divine life such as may justly be regarded as a crisis in his moral history.

Six months after his ordination at Portmoak, Mr. Erskine married Alison Turpie, daughter of a writer in the town of Leslie. The union was eminently blessed of God. His wife was a person of decided godliness, and soon proved a help meet for him in spiritual as well as in temporal things. Of the great advantages which he derived from her conversation on religious subjects, especially in the time when his own views were comparatively dark and defective, he once and again makes grateful mention. For this Mrs. Erskine had been qualified by long training in the school of temptation and of spiritual conflict. Her course at the beginning was beclouded so as almost to plunge her into inconsolable despondency. Of the sympathy which her case excited among friends, and the recovery of peace in believing which Mrs. E. had granted her, her husband gives a somewhat particular narrative in reflections written on her death. It is in this part of his diary he refers most explicitly to the spiritual mindedness of his spouse, as particularly helpful to his own improvement, and therefore we deem this the most fitting place for a few reminiscences on the subject, as they are found in his diary.

“About the third year that she and I were married, the Lord was pleased to plunge her into the greatest depths of humiliation that I ever knew. Before she fell into these depths, she told me, that the Lord gave her such a discovery of the glory of Christ, as darkened the whole creation, and made all things appear as dung and dross in comparison of him. This view, she said, was but a transient glance or glimpse of his glory; and immediately upon this discovery, she got such a sight of the enmity and unbelief of the heart, and of the strength of its opposition to Christ, and the way of salvation through him, that she fell under

the most dreadful apprehensions of her having sinned the unpardonable sin; and that what she had met with was only a taste of the good word of God, and of the powers of the world to come, spoken of in Heb. vi. 6. O that was a terrible scripture to her, and also Heb. x. 26—29. For a month or two the arrows of the Almighty were within her, the poison whereof did drink up her spirits; and the terrors of God did set themselves in array against her. The law of God in its majesty, authority, and spirituality, was set before her. The particular sin she complained of was her unbelief. In those depths she continued till the Lord moved me to call some neighbouring ministers to join in prayer on her behalf, particularly Mr. Andrew Wardrope in the parish of Ballingry; Mr. Andrew Thomson of Orwell; Mr. John Shaw, then minister of Leslie; Mr. John Currie of Kinglassie. Every one of them prayed by turns with her in my closet, and conversed with her; but no relief appeared till Mr. Wardrope proposed that she should pray with them before they parted. She was exceedingly averse from it; yet being constrained to it, and being in an agony of spirit through the terrors of God, she at last complied.

“But oh! that her words were now written and printed in a book,—that they were graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock for ever! For to the conviction of all present the Spirit of God spoke out of her. There was not, I suppose, a dry cheek among all the ministers or others of the family that were present. Her expressions were full of the Spirit,—so suited to the case of her soul, and in such a heavenly eloquence, that if a general assembly of ministers had compiled and studied it, they could not have been better digested. The Lord indeed gave her the Spirit and helped her to pray. When she arose from prayer, though the Lord had melted her soul and the souls of all present by her heavenly words and frame, still she continued to charge herself with the unpardonable sin, and to conclude that she was but a castaway. The Lord however heard the voice of her weeping; for that same day he was pleased

in some measure to calm her spirit, and to break the strength of the temptation, so that though she did not feel full clearance, she had more quiet and composure of soul. The Lord particularly blessed a little book, which Mr. Currie left her, called Collings on Desertion, Temptation, &c. Within some few days after this, though clouds were still around her, the Lord quieted the storm. He gave her a sweet serenity of mind, and helped her to a holy, tender, and circumspect walk, and an humble waiting upon him in the way of duty both in public and private for many years.

“ I remember, that one day when I was walking through my closet after the Lord had delivered her out of the depths, he was pleased to bear in upon my spirit a sense of his goodness towards her, and towards me and my family in her deliverance. The consideration of the Lord’s goodness in calming her spirit made a deep impression on my soul. This, I think, was the first time that ever I felt the Lord touching my heart in a sensible manner. I dare not say much on this head. Only her distress and affliction with her deliverance, I always think, were blessed not only to her but to me also. I saw the fruits of it on her evidently discernible; and as to myself, I found the Lord after this now and then touching my heart, so that he drew me with the cords of love and with the bands of a man. I remember particularly, some few days or weeks after the Lord had quieted the agony of her spirit, she and I were sitting together in my closet, and while we were conversing about the things of God, the Lord was pleased to rend the vail and give me a glimmering view of the way of salvation and redemption, which, I think, made my soul to acquiesce in Christ as the new and living way to glory. After this, she and I lived comfortably together for many years, her conversation and company being most savoury, edifying, and helpful to me.”

Although in anticipation of our narrative, we are induced, by the connection of the subject, to add the following very characteristic notice of Mrs. Erskine’s high-toned

spirituality by which her husband was so willing to profit.

“One day, about twenty days before her death, I remember Anne Archer and Margaret Walker being here on a Saturday; she and they two went out to my garden, and sat down upon the seat below the east window, where I heard her and them fall a talking about the Marrow of Modern Divinity, and some points that are controverted among us at this day. I listened and heard my worthy Dear talk of the freedom of the covenant of grace, of the nature of faith, and some other things, to my astonishment and admiration; so that for my life I could not have made an extempore discourse upon them to such purpose, and for such a long time, as her discourse lasted very near three quarters of an hour without any considerable interruption,—in so much that I was afraid that by her long and continued discourse she would do herself harm. I therefore at length opened the window, and spoke with a design to interrupt their discourse, and desired my Dear to come into the house lest she should catch cold,—which she accordingly did.” Again, in a letter to his sister, Mrs. Balderston;—“it is matter of praise that the Lord made her not only an instrument in building my family and cherishing my body, but I hope a sweet instrument in bringing me to an acquaintance with Christ and religion; the Lord’s way of dealing with her being blessed of the Lord, I hope to me also. It was in the time of the Lord’s working effectually with her, that he was pleased, as I would hope, to reveal his Son in me.”

The spiritual training through which Mr. Erskine passed gave pledge of an earnest ministry. From the time of his ordination indeed, he applied himself with exemplary diligence to the duties of his office; but as his own impressions of divine things grew more distinct and vivid, his pastoral labours partook more of vitality and less of merely conscientious routine. In particular, his work in the pulpit now assumed a higher tone of spirituality. His discourses exhibited an insight into the doctrine of grace, and breathed a heavenly unction which equally marked the religious

progress of the preacher, and contributed to the improvement of his flock. 'Christ and him crucified,' the covenant of grace in its fulness and freeness, became the prevailing topics of his ministry. On these he spoke from the heart. His diary not less than his sermons affords delightful evidence of his deep feeling of the preciousness and power of evangelical doctrine. Nor was this dissociated from practical instruction in Mr. Erskine's ministerial labours. He felt the importance of such teaching, and under the discouragement of 'natural faintness and pusillanimity,' he set himself to reprove iniquity with the fidelity of one who was called to 'blow the trumpet in Sion,' and who as a watchman had an account to render.

"Once," says he, "I was without Christ, knew not his excellence, and saw no form or comeliness in him why he should be desired; but now he is to me the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely. He is the very darling of my heart. I see him to be the end of the law and the all of the gospel, and I would be content to have the clay tabernacle dissolved that I may be for ever with him. O that while I am in this world, I may be made useful to proclaim his excellency and glory to others! This is the great desire and ambition of my soul, and that which I desire to aim and level at in all my ministerial work,—to commend him to immortal souls." Again;—"Sitting in my closet, it pleased the Lord to give me a sharp challenge for my silence in not bearing a testimony against the profanation of God's day, which happened some while ago in — house, by the master of —, and the laird of —, by drinking there till after the time of divine worship in the forenoon. I remember I spoke of it to — himself, and challenged him anent keeping an open house in the time of public worship on the Lord's day, and told him of the great scandal which it had occasioned through the country. But my heart smote me, that seeing the thing had occasioned a public offence, I had not given a public testimony against it, and therefore I resolve, if the Lord will, the next time that I preach in public to my own congre-

gation, to enter upon it, having a fair occasion to introduce it by the reading of the King's proclamation against profanity. The Lord help me to manage my work with zeal and prudence, and Lord forgive me for my slackness in reproving sin."

To those who have hitherto known Mr. Erskine only as the dauntless champion of injured truth, and of the violated rights of the Christian people, it will doubtless be new, and perhaps somewhat startling, to hear his confession of 'faintness and pusillanimity.' To some extent we may set it down to the severe impartiality with which he was ready to judge himself. But in the main we may admit the truth of his self-imputation, without involving any incongruity which it is difficult to explain. The strong points as well as the weak points of a man's character are brought out by circumstances. A heavy trial in private, or a great crisis in public life, by rousing one's energies may develop a force of purpose which the individual did not know himself, and was not by others suspected, to possess. But especially is it to be taken into account, that Mr. Erskine's change of views and deeper vitality of Christian character, to which reference has been made, could not fail to show itself in increasing zeal, and 'great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.'

The following anecdote is quoted by Dr. Fraser* to show the bashfulness of Mr. Erskine's early appearances in the pulpit, and the manlier freedom to which he speedily attained. "Formerly he was subject to considerable embarrassment in public speaking, and found himself apt to lose command of his ideas unless he kept his eyes steadily fixed on a particular stone of the wall opposite to the pulpit; but now (i. e. after his heart had received its first powerful impressions of evangelical and vital religion) he spoke with the calm composure and unfettered energy becoming an ambassador of Christ; was fully master of his mind and voice; looked round on his audience with a dig-

* Portmoak MS.

nified yet sweet and engaging aspect, and commanded deep and universal attention. That fervent love to the Saviour which now glowed in his heart repressed the power of unmanly cowardice, and inspired him with a new and most impressive eloquence."

The most encouraging tokens of success as well as of acceptance followed this change of spirit and style in Mr. Erskine's public ministrations. The word came with power to the conversion of not a few, and the people of God were built up in holiness and comfort. His ministrations in the pulpit were the result both of careful study and of earnest prayer; feeling the sacredness of his work, he sought the blessing of God to rest on him in its performance, and to make it effectual to the profit of many. The man who conducted and closed his studies in the spirit which the following extract breathes could not fail to be owned of his Master:—

"After I had ended (Saturday) the writing of my sermon and read it once over, I went to prayer to beg the Lord's help and assistance in all and in the several parts of my studies, and I found my soul drawn out to the Lord, choosing him as my alone portion and heritage. I thought my soul grounded itself anew upon the satisfaction and mediation of the glorious and ever blessed Redeemer. Here do I rest; here do I venture my soul for time and eternity."

Equally devout was the frame of mind in which he addressed himself to the other parts of pastoral duty.—"I was made," says he in another part of his diary, "to plead the promise that he would by the Spirit of truth lead me into all truth, and that he would go along with me this day, and help me to a faithful discharge of that part of ministerial work that I was going about in the ground of Arnot, namely visiting, that he would help me to a solid impression of God upon my spirit and of the great worth of precious souls, and direct me to speak a word suitable to the case of the people."

Life thus marked the character of the man and of his

ministry. Corresponding were the effects on the minds of his people. Great was the thronging to hear the word from his lips, and equally marked was the interest manifested by his people in the other duties which he undertook for their improvement. "The Thursday lecture," which he commenced in the early years of his incumbency, "was well attended. Masters and servants studied mutually to arrange their affairs, so that neither the opportunity of public worship, nor the necessary business of their secular callings, was neglected. Even diets of examination were often attended by a large audience. During the time of public prayer and praise the hearts of the worshippers seemed much engaged. The services of the Sabbath were frequently closed by singing the concluding verses of the 72d Psalm. And "O," added a pious eye and ear witness when relating this circumstance, "with what rapture was it sung! Never can I hear such delightful melody till I get to heaven."*

This lively state of things was very far from mere excitement. It was a work of revival; marked by activity of mind as well as by strength of feeling. Mr. Erskine's flock prized the truth, and grew thereby. It was a novel and significant feature which his indefatigable biographer relates, that note-taking became a prevalent practice among the good people of Portmoak,—that this class was so numerous that Mr. E. sometimes referred to the "scribes" from the pulpit, giving them hints for their direction,—and that the gleanings of instruction which they were thus careful to gather, were conned over at many a rural fireside on Sabbath evenings, when neighbours came together to renew, as far as possible, the seasons of refreshing which had come upon them in the sanctuary. Specimens of these memorials, which were sometimes very full and accurate, are still to be met with in the parish. Nor was Mr. Erskine's popularity and usefulness confined to Portmoak and its immediate vicinity. From all parts

* Life by Fraser.

of the country in every direction, sometimes at the distance of sixty miles, eager listeners flocked to his preaching. On sacramental occasions particularly the gatherings were great. From all accounts of the sacred oratory of the man, there is no doubt that there was in it much to impress a promiscuous audience. His bodily presence was commanding,—his voice full and melodious,—his manner grave and majestic,—and after the fullness and fervour of his heart broke through the trammels of his earlier delivery, his bearing in the pulpit combined ease with dignity in an unwonted degree. But to whatever extent these external advantages commended him to the people, it is gratifying to remark the most unequivocal proofs that the great charm—the element of power which signalized Mr. Erskine as a preacher—was the thoroughly evangelical matter and spirit of his discourses. His sermons speak for themselves, and the impressions on the hearers very often corresponded. In his diary, of date July 7, 1714, he writes: “Being the Sabbath immediately before the sacrament—I was under great fears as to my through-bearing in the work of this day before I went forth to public worship, which I remember put me to my knees, and made me pray that if the Lord did not go with me, he would rather lay his hand on me and put a stop to my going further to discredit the gospel. The Lord was pleased graciously to hear and pity; for I never remember that I had more freedom in my life than this day in delivering my Master’s message. There was a great company of people, so that I was obliged to preach in the open field. The Lord gave me a composure of mind, and suggested many things to me in speaking which I had not so much as thought on before. The people heard with a great deal of greediness and attention, so as if they would have drawn the word out of me; and I cannot but think some souls have this day been either converted, or confirmed and comforted. I have heard since sermon was over, that some were made to go home with vehement longings after Christ. I preached on Isaiah xlii. 1.; the second doctrine drawn from the connection, viz., that the

gracious discovery of Christ darkens all the pretended excellency of idols. I went to see some sick folk; and one David Wilkie, a very judicious person, told me, that his daughter Margaret was made to go home with a strange work upon her spirit, as if a flame of love and desire after Christ had been kindled in her breast. I take the Lord's countenance in this day's work as a seal of my ministry, and a pledge of his being with me on the great Feast-day."

In the earlier years of his ministry, Mr. Erskine was visited with successive and severe personal and domestic trials. Shortly after his ordination he was seized with fever at Leslie, and appears to have been for some time in considerable danger. This affliction is referred to by him in his diary, several years after, in such terms as more than bear out the account above given of his spiritual change as a conversion to God from a previous state of unconcern and unbelief. In the year 1711 he was again brought low by a lingering and dangerous illness, during which, amidst deep convictions of unworthiness and much perplexity, he was not left without some knowledge of the comforts of God.

The year 1713 was one of sorrow upon sorrow. Within the period of a few months he was bereaved of three of his children, Ralph, Henry, and Alexander, of the ages of two, nine, and five years respectively. In the same year also died his sister at Dunfermline. The remembrances of these losses in his diary are the effusions of genuine Christian grief, the sorrow of one who, when his very heart was bleeding, "heard the rod and Him who had appointed it."

"April 27, 1713.—My dear, sweet, and pleasant child Ralph died on Tuesday last week, about a quarter after 7 in the morning. His death was very grievous and afflicting to my wife and me; but good is the will of the Lord. He takes and gives, blessed be the name of the Lord. * * * About half an hour before the child's breath went out, he fell perfectly calm and was relieved from the sore tossings

he had, and being laid down on his back in the cradle, his eye appeared quick and lively, his countenance serene and pleasant. He looked round upon the company with his eyes, sometimes casting them up towards heaven, as if nothing had ailed him. An air of heaven and glory appeared in his very face, and his countenance, in a manner, thus addressed the spectators: 'Now farewell, father and mother, farewell brother and sisters, farewell friends and spectators; now I am at ease, I behold glorious Christ, glorious angels, receiving me into their abodes of joy. Farewell weary world; welcome Christ, welcome heaven, welcome angels, welcome the spirits of just men made perfect.' His countenance invited all that beheld him to follow him to glory, and to prepare for that inheritance he was going to."

"July 1st, 1713.—Since the last time I have here marked, I have been sadly, *sadly* afflicted with the loss of other two pleasant children. My dear child, Henry Erskine, my first-born, having died, by the will of God, June 8th, being Monday, about 2 o'clock in the afternoon—about 8 years of age. He took his disease with the measles, about half a year ago, in Dunfermline, which did cast him into a decay; and having brought him home, the small-pox came into the family, which carried him off about two or three days after the height. He was a blooming, pleasant child; and, according to his age, had an excellent capacity, was profiting exceedingly in his learning, and knew many of the fundamentals of religion above many of his age. While he lay on his sick-bed, I frequently conversed with him about the affairs of his soul; and he gave me great satisfaction by expressing a desire for Christ, and a desire to be with him rather than with father and mother, and friends and relations, here in this world. And that same day that he died he frequently desired me to pray with him, and would frequently cry out when he saw me, 'Oh! father, father, pray, pray, pray for me!' And I thought it observable that, although all the day he died, he was almost continually raving; yet, about half-an-hour before his death, having desired me to pray, he lay per-

fectly calm and silent during the whole time of prayer. All these things I take as grounds of hope that my sweet Henry is now praising and triumphing with Christ in glory."

After a 'touching' notice of the death of his son Alexander, Mr. E. proceeds:—"My brother Ralph and I were sent for, by express, on Wednesday, to see my dear sister, who having been very ill, fell worse that day, which made my mother send for us. * * * She frequently expressed her love to Christ, and her high esteem of him, and desire after him; and just about the time of her death, I was exhorting her to roll her soul over upon the merits of the exalted Redeemer, and asked if she were content to venture her eternal all upon him; and she answered, 'Yes, yes,' which was all she was able to say; and I observed her cast her eyes and hands up towards heaven. I have now ground to hope that she is with the Lord. My brother Ralph told me that he was helped to great importunity with God on her behalf, and I cannot but say the same. I was helped, I recollect, to plead the blessed ransom and propitiation on her behalf. God is willing on his part to save lost sinners, and has found a ransom for this very end. I could not, therefore, but believe that he would be gracious to her, seeing I was confident that she was willing, and declared her entire satisfaction with the method of salvation through a Redeemer. On this ground I build my hope that she is this day singing hallelujahs with the ransomed on Mount Sion. * * * I got my soul, I thought, sometimes sweetly enlarged for my poor sister in distress. I found particularly a great melting of soul at a time when my brother and I went alone, and prayed together on her behalf. Both he and I were very much touched with tenderness, accompanied with a pleading and wrestling spirit.—Her death was very weighty and affecting to me; yet it pleased the Lord to turn the edge of my thoughts and affections towards an endless eternity, which was approaching fast to myself." *

* Diary.

From this and other references in his diary, Mr. Erskine appears to have had the impression that his own death was near. His health at this time was somewhat impaired; but his spirit was calm and heavenly.

“Jan. 10, 1714. This morning my soul was exceedingly refreshed with the thoughts of my approaching dissolution, when I shall be guarded by angels into the place of blessedness, and ascend into God’s holy hill, where I shall meet with my father and my little children, that are gone before me, and all the ransomed on Mount Sion; especially when I shall see Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and God, the Judge of all. And oh! these words of Job, xix. 25, 26, were like marrow and fatness to my soul:— ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth, and though worms destroy this body, yet in the flesh shall I see God.’ My heart leaps within me at the thought of it, that these things are the evident truths of God, which are more firm than the foundations of the earth.”*

In the course of this year renewed afflictions befel him. Shortly after the date of the previous entry, he adds, “My pleasant child, Ebenezer, is at this moment laying in the fever. I have been entreating the Lord for him, and the answer I have got is a discovery of God and his sovereignty, which fills me with dread, and stops my mouth, that I dare not quarrel whatever be the issues. But glory to his name, that along with this, that word came, ‘I am thy God and the God of thy seed; the promise is unto you and to your children.’ I have got also this night some admiring views of the blessed Jesus. Oh, he is precious, precious to me, and a sight of him lightens my heart. Though I have still some doubts and hesitations anent my claim to him, because of the woful prevalency of unbelief, my soul, I think, adheres and cleaves to him, like the weak ivy to the strong oak.”

His child was restored, beyond expectation, but he was himself next seized with fever, although the attack does

* Diary.

not appear to have been severe. His meditation was of God. "For the first two days of my fever I was in great darkness, and could not see the Lord or rejoice in him as sometimes I could have done. Even in the dark, however, I was helped in some measure to trust in the name of the Lord, and stay myself on my God. He helped me to look to and roll myself upon the righteousness of Christ, as the only ground of my justification and acquittance before the bar of a holy and righteous God, before which I was not sure but I might shortly appear. After these two days were past, though I began to rave, yet the Lord was pleased to manifest himself to me in his awful power and majesty. I thought I beheld him working wonders before me as in the land of Egypt; rending rocks, levelling mountains, making crooked things straight, filling up valleys, doing great things for me; yea, wonders without number. Yet I was not in the least terrified at the sight, because I thought I saw him to be my God, my Father, reconciled to me in Christ, and doing all these things with a design to form suitable conceptions and impressions in my soul."*

A few months after his recovery, his daughter Jean fell sick at Kirkcaldy, also of fever. Again the father's faith and resignation were severely tried; but he knew it was of the Lord; he committed all into his hands; and it pleased the Father of mercies to compass him and his family about with songs of deliverance. Amidst these domestic afflictions, Mrs. Erskine proved herself to be indeed a help meet to her husband; but she too was a sufferer. Her health, at best but feeble, was still more shattered by an attack of fever; and from this period till her death, a few years after, she continued in a state of much debility, with occasional seasons of mental depression; but the Lord, who does not contend for ever, spoke peace to the weary soul.

The effect of these successive afflictions, mixed with so much mercy, was beneficial in respect both to Mr. Erskine's personal improvement and his ministerial labours. "His

* Diary.

parishioners tenderly sympathized with him under his repeated and heavy distresses; and, at the same time, they observed with pleasure that these trials were succeeded by an increased fervency in enforcing personal religion, and in making a close application of the truth to the conscience and the heart, and infused fresh energy into all his efforts on behalf of immortal souls." *

Mrs. Erskine died in 1720. The reader is already somewhat acquainted with her character and experience as a sister in Christ, whose way was often "in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." She appears to have suffered from a constitutional tendency to depression of spirits; but amidst many infirmities, the joy of the Lord was her strength. Her knowledge of divine things was deep and spiritual; and hence she was a helper of the faith of others even when she herself walked in darkness.

Remarking on instances of "the Lord's goodness" in connection with his bereavement, Mr. E. says, in a letter to his sister and her husband, "It is matter of praise that, though for a long while she was held in bondage through fear of death, yet about twenty days before her death the Lord loosed her bonds and spoke peace to her by this word, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you,' whereby the fears of death were in great measure removed. The Lord also took her through Jordan without ever letting her know (when she was in the midst of it) till she was on the other side in Immanuel's land; for the fever carried her off both insensibly as to herself, and easily without the least visible pang or distortion of her countenance."

This renewed affliction was a fresh occasion of his receiving from friends, and especially from his brother Ralph, very tender and consoling tokens of their sympathy. Nothing in the way of fraternal attachment can be more beautiful than the interchange of affection between the brothers and their surviving sister Mrs. Balderston of

* Fraser, p. 280.

Edinburgh. They felt that each other's griefs were their own. Welcome to the sorrowing breast of Mr. E. as were the soothing accents of Christian friendship, still it was the compassions of the Great High Priest on which his heart was stayed. "O to be helped to honour and serve him while in the weary wilderness, and to be found so doing. I was made to wonder at my own folly in sinning against the Lord, and to wonder at the Lord's pardoning grace and mercy."

A few months after, Mr. E. was again a mourner by the death of his brother-in-law, Mr. Balderston,—a relative who had proved himself worthy of his confidence and affection, and whose removal he thus laments and improves as a common bereavement, in a letter to his widowed sister:—

"Nov. 25th, 1720.

"DEAR SISTER,—The melancholy news of the death of my dear and worthy brother did not reach me till Friday about 7 at night. My tender sympathy with you and my entire respect to his memory, fill me with a strong desire to be at Edinburgh, that I might, in person, condole your loss, and comfort you with the same consolations wherewith I have been comforted in the like case, and that I might also concur in the funeral solemnity of such a near and dear relation. But considering that it is impracticable that I could reach Edinburgh to-morrow, as the tide falls, so as to be present at the funeral, and that I have been, and still am labouring under such indisposition that I have not preached these two Sabbaths bygone, I am laid under a necessity of deferring my journey.

"Dear afflicted Sister,—I know, or at least I may know, the heart of a stranger in losses of this kind, which you are now visited with. My wound is yet fresh and green, and therefore my sympathy with, and concern for you cannot fail to be the more lively. But glory to our exalted Lord, that neither you nor I have any reason to mourn as they that have no hope. Your worthy friend and mine had his conversation adorned with the genuine characters

of a true citizen of Zion, Psalm xv., and therefore you have reason to believe and hope that he has now his abode in God's tabernacle and holy hill, even in Mount Zion, the city of the living God, where he is joined to the 'general assembly of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect,' who are beholding the King in his beauty, and singing the new song, Rev. v., 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches, wisdom and strength, and honour and glory, and blessing. Oh! how sweet a balance may it be to our spirits under the loss of such dear relations, to think of the heartsome work they are employed in, the heartsome company they are joined to, and the lightsome house of many mansions wherein they dwell, not as passengers, but as pillars that shall go no more out. Should we not rather long to be with them than grudge their removal from us, and from the crazy tabernacles of clay wherein they groaned under so many burdens? Let us then lift up our heads in the hope of that life they desired, and are now actually possessed of. The time is short; and therefore let us be encouraged, for that within a little we shall follow them, and then they and we shall be for ever with the Lord; which, indeed, is best of all. What an excellent thing is it, to be fairly landed on the other side of Jordan, standing on the banks of Immanuel's land crying, 'Victory, victory, victory, for evermore through the blood of the Lamb, over sin, the devil, death, and hell!' How sweet is it to be sitting with overcomers on the same throne with the Son of God, as he also overcame and sat down with his Father on his throne! Let us *up with our drooping hearts*; for the same chariot that has carried our worthy friends to glory, where they walk with Christ in white, will speedily return to fetch us also; and, though they and we drop the mantle of the body in the passage, yet we shall receive it again with advantage in the morning of the resurrection, when these vile bodies shall be made like unto the glorious body of the Lord Jesus. Christ's dead men shall live; as his dead body shall they arise, when the dew of God's Spirit shall, like the dew of

herbs, descend upon them ; and when that melodious sound shall break through the clouds as with the sound of a trumpet, 'Awake ye that dwell in dust, and sing.' Then they and we shall say one to another, 'Let us be glad and rejoice, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.'—But I must conclude, and remain, your affectionate and sympathising brother,

“EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

The cup of trial was not yet full. In December following Mr. E. lost his “dear, sweet, and pleasant child Isabel” by smallpox. Amidst the overflowings of natural affection the father’s soul went forth in earnest wrestlings with God for the eternal welfare of his darling ; nor did he plead in vain :—

“I remember that a day or two before the child fell sick she was in my closet. She and I being alone, I took her on my knee and dandled her, and she was very fond of me, and took me round the neck and kissed me, which engaged my heart very much. But my love and affection to the child filled me with a strong desire to have Christ formed in her soul, and thereupon I began to commend Christ to her. The Lord helped me to speak of Christ to her in such words as were suitable to her capacity, to which she seemed very attentive. Particularly I told her that she would die, and that it would be better to die and go to heaven, where Christ is, and where she would meet with her dear mother, than to be here ; at which words the dear child gave a *broad look* in my face, as if she had been taken with the thing. I bless the Lord who put it in my heart and mouth to converse with her at that time. I hope the Lord entered into her heart with what I said to her. She died pleasantly without any pang or throw ; her soul, I hope, being carried by angels into Abraham’s bosom, and her body buried at her mother’s side in the chapel burying-ground, Scotland Well, in her brother Alexander’s grave.

“I take it kindly that the Lord comes to my family to

gather lilies wherewith to garnish the upper sanctuary, 'for of such is the kingdom of heaven.' And oh, it sometimes affords me a pleasing prospect to think that I have so much *plenishin* in heaven before me, and that when I enter the gates of glory I shall not only be welcomed by the whole general assembly of saints and angels, but my wife and four pleasant babes will, in a particular manner, welcome me to those regions of glory, and I shall join in the hallelujahs of the higher house which shall never have an end."

Mr. Erskine had now six children surviving, concerning whom thus writes the watchful and affectionate parent,—
"It is the very desire of my soul that they may be a seed to serve the Lord, and to make his name to be remembered through all generations."

CHAPTER II.

Act of Toleration—Occasion—Motives—Management—Marrow Controversy—Act of Assembly 1720—Representation—Queries—Answers—Act of Assembly 1722—Views of Mr. Erskine—Spirit manifested by him.

For several years after Mr. Erskine's settlement in Portmoak, his course of life was, on the whole, private and tranquil,—diversified only by such succession of labours and of trials as may be expected in a greater or less degree to enter into the lot of an awakened, earnest, and faithful minister of Jesus Christ. Questions however soon arose to agitate men's minds, in which a man of his honest, not to say public, spirit, could not forbear to take a part. "Faint of heart" as he thought himself, Mr. Erskine did not shrink from declaring his opinions, however indisposed to create contention or causelessly to give offence. It is matter of traditionary remembrance in Portmoak to this day, that when the Union of England and Scotland was in progress, Mr. Erskine openly avowed himself in favour of it to the great umbrage of many of his parishioners, among whom, as throughout Scotland generally, it was regarded as an unpatriotic and injurious measure. Soon after, matters occurred more directly affecting the interests of the church, of which his principles did not allow him to be a passive spectator.

One of these was a bill brought into Parliament by the ministry of Queen Anne, for the toleration of Episcopal worship in the kingdom of Scotland. A Tory ministry was now in power, who bore no good will to the Presbyterian interest. Influenced by Jacobite predilections, their accession to office inspired the friends of the Pre-

tender with courage and hope. To this party the adherents of the Episcopal persuasion in Scotland generally belonged. Since the Revolution, Episcopal worship had been suppressed; but about this time an "outed" clergyman of the name of Greenshiels, opened a chapel for public worship in Edinburgh. It was shut by order of the magistrates of the city, Greenshiels was thrown into prison, and these proceedings were confirmed by the Court of Session. On appeal to the House of Lords, the sentence was reversed, and the magistrates were subjected to damages. The subject of toleration for Scotch Episcopacy thus became one of the questions of the day. The act to this effect was passed in 1712, in the face of strong opposition by the Church of Scotland. A memorial against the measure was presented to the Queen by a deputation from the Commission of Assembly;—but in vain. It is curious as a specimen of the spirit and temper of the age. The toleration of "Episcopal dissenters to meet and assemble for the exercise of divine worship in their own manner," is deprecated as a violation of every act passed in favour of the Established Church at and subsequent to the Revolution settlement, as involving an infraction of the terms of Union and the coronation oath, and as periling the peace of the country.*

The Toleration was rendered still more offensive to the Presbyterians by a clause disabling the church courts from giving effect to ecclesiastical censures by aid of the civil power. Without such provision, the act would have been nugatory, seeing that the General Assembly protested against the exemption from the church's censures of persons who disowned her communion. With a view to nullify the toleration, the Presbyterian party procured insertion of an oath abjuring the Pretender, which they well knew the Scottish Episcopalians would almost to a man refuse. But in this they outwitted themselves. By a

* The case of the Church of Scotland with relation to the Bill for a Toleration, &c.

counter stroke of policy, the court party succeeded in extending the abjuration oath to the Presbyterian as well as the Episcopal clergy;—and nothing indeed could seem more fair, than that ministers of the establishment, who enjoyed exclusively the countenance and pay of the state, should swear allegiance in the fullest possible terms which it was reasonable to require from a body of men who enjoyed, as an act of grace, the mere toleration of their worship. By this enactment, the Church of Scotland throughout her length and breadth was thrown into violent agitation. The objections of the Presbyterians to the oath of abjuration turned upon the conditions of the act of succession, which provided that the successors to the crown of Great Britain should be of the communion of the Church of England. The succession to the crown, *as* limited by this act, being sworn to in the oath of abjuration, the great body of the Presbyterians judged it inconsistent with their principles; and not a few of the ministers on this ground refused it, although it was enjoined under penalty of an exorbitant fine and deprivation. On both sides politics mixed with the controversy. Episcopalians demanded toleration in the hope of recovering their ecclesiastical status and their ascendancy in the affairs of state; and it was the dread of this, as much as the spirit of intolerance, which made the Presbyterians, in their turn, cling with such tenacity to the exclusive and oppressive privileges which, as the dominant party, they now held in their hands.*

To judge correctly of the conduct of parties, we must place ourselves amidst the circumstances as well as amidst the men of the times. That matters were now in a train for restoring the exiled family on the death of Queen Anne is well understood; and that the scheme was so well laid and with such apparent chances of success, as to inspire the Jacobite malcontents with very confident expectations, is not less clear, from the light that has since been

* The Scottish Toleration argued, &c.

thrown on the machinations of the party. "On a review of the causes of many disappointments, and of all the designs in favour of that Prince and his father, it would seem that Providence, as a punishment to this nation, wrought against them. For they were more occasioned by the immediate interposition and visible hand of God, than the power and contrivance of their enemies."*

Mr. Erskine took his place among the non-jurant brethren. His own views were decided respecting the inconsistency of the Abjuration Oath with the principles of the Church of Scotland; but he appears to have conducted himself with moderation towards such of his brethren as were otherwise minded. It was difficult, however, altogether to avoid collision; nor do we mean to say that the non-jurors were always sufficiently careful to avoid it. Great was the outcry throughout the country against the defection of the conforming clergy; and for a period it was hardly possible to speak of the sin of backsliding without being suspected of insidious allusion to those who in popular estimation had afforded so recent an example of it. On a Monday after the dispensation of the Lord's supper at Dysart, Mr. Erskine had occasion to preach along with Mr. Anderson of Falkland, who, with some others then present, had taken the oath. Mr. E. was led by the subject of his discourse to testify against defection, and in the improvement of his discourse "took notice of some who had taken the abjuration oath with a design to serve the Pretender's interest." But he made no reference to his non-jurant brethren. He was aware, however, of the probability that such application would be made by others. Nor was he mistaken. In pointed allusion to what had passed, Mr. Anderson, who succeeded, cautioned the people against giving heed to insinuations to the prejudice of ministers of Christ as guilty of defection because of differences of opinion about lesser matters. The incident is illustrative of the state and spirit of the times, but is worth remember-

* Lockhart Papers, vol. i. p. 480.

ing in connection with Mr. Erskine's character chiefly as having given him an opportunity of showing, and posterity of appreciating, the candid and pacific disposition which a sense of duty led him to indulge. Dr. Fraser has preserved the following letter to Mr. Anderson in reference to this affair, which will be admitted to be well worthy of a place in a memoir of Mr. Erskine :—

“R. D. B.

We design, if the Lord will, to celebrate the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper in this place, on the 2d Sabbath of August. The Fast-day will be upon the Wednesday immediately preceding. I hope you will do me the favour to take a diet of preaching on the Fast-day with Mr. M'Gill and Mr. Clow, who, I suppose, will be collegiate with you.

It is uneasy for me to think there should be any misunderstanding betwixt me and a person whom I so much love and value ; and therefore, Dear Brother, let all unhappy differences be buried for ever in silence, and let us in time coming construe favourably one another's words and actions, as becomes brethren—which I hope we are, in more respects than one. For my own part, whatever harsh thoughts you may have of me, I can freely declare, with the utmost sincerity, that (though indeed of small value, yet such as they are,) you have had my cordial sympathy in your late affliction, and prayers for the Lord's countenance on your labours, and particularly on the great work you have in hand, and I hope I shall on all occasions show myself, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Your very affectionate Brother and Servant,
EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

Portmoak, July 20th, 1715.

Few will read this letter without acknowledging that it *should* have had the effect of conciliating an offended friend and even of disarming an opponent. There exists no evidence, however, of any such impression on the person to

whom it was addressed ; indeed there is ground to fear that the quarrel was a verification of the proverb, that "a brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city."

The same year which witnessed the Toleration act was rendered yet more memorable by the introduction of a bill into Parliament for the restoration of patronage in the Church of Scotland. We are not aware of any prominent part taken by Mr. E. on the first announcement of this obnoxious measure. It would, however, be a most mistaken inference, either that his views upon the important subject of the people's rights were undecided, or that his zeal slept when the enemy was in the field. He was then in the youth of his days and of his ministry, and would naturally exert his influence with less observation, and in a more limited sphere, than when afterwards in equally perilous times he felt himself called upon to maintain the post of a standard-bearer as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

An event very soon occurred which gave occasion to Mr. E. to act on, as well as avow, his principles. The neighbouring parish of Ballingry having become vacant in 1717, the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy proceeded to settle the presentee with hardly the form of a call by the people. On the day of "moderating" the call,—a duty in which Mr. E. was appointed to preside,—the signatures to the deed were so few, that Mr. Erskine and a co-presbyter, who was conjoined with him in conducting the business, withheld the usual attestation, and referred the matter to the presbytery. These brethren very probably expected a stand to be made by the presbytery for a *bona fide* call as necessary to give validity to the claim of the presentee. Within a few years,—immediately on the passing of the patronage restoration act,—the presbytery, in their zeal for the people's liberties, "cheerfully and with one consent" recorded a declaration, that the relation of pastor and people is founded on the election or free consent of a parish thus calling ; and "consequently hereto resolving to go into no settlement but where the people's freedom of electing their minister is maintained." On this, how-

ever, the first occasion of showing practically the value of their plighted principle, it was found to have evaporated into a mere paper protestation. The call was sustained,—Messrs. Erskine and Currie dissenting. After various contentions in the church courts, the presentee's ordination was effected; but Mr. E., consistent to the last, followed up his reasons of dissent, which he had given in to the presbytery, by declining to take part in the settlement. In this he was joined by other four members of presbytery. The following anecdote forms an appropriate conclusion to this characteristic passage of Mr. Erskine's public life:—

“At the close of one of the meetings held at Ballingry during the course of these proceedings, the clergymen present were invited to dinner by Sir John Malcolm, the patron of the parish; but resenting the firm opposition given by Mr. Erskine to his views, he thus addressed him: ‘Mr. Erskine, you are none of us to-day.’ To this repulsive intimation he instantly replied with becoming spirit, ‘Sir John, you do me great honour. It gives me the truest pleasure that in this we are agreed; for I scorn to be one of them who dare to oppress the Christian people, and to rob them of their just principles.’”*

The political events which at this time agitated the kingdom put the characters of men to the proof. It became but too apparent what were the designs of the disaffected to the existing order of things when, in 1715, the Jacobites, soon after headed by the Pretender in person, attempted the overthrow of the reigning family. Such were the panic and commotion in the district of country where Mr. E. resided that public worship was suspended for a time. As his loyalty was well known, it became necessary for him to consult his personal safety in temporary concealment. Happily the causes of apprehension were of short continuance; and Mr. E., with the friends of liberty and order, had soon the pleasant duty to perform of rendering thanks to Him who judgeth among the na-

* Portmoak MS. quoted by Dr. Fraser.

tions for the deliverance which his arm had wrought for these lands from the attempts of a numerous and desperate faction to subdue and enslave them. Mr. E. regarded in those things the operation of God's hand. It was, doubtless, with providence in view, and not with the wrath of man in his heart, that he penned the following meditation while the scheme of rebellion was in progress:—

“August 28, 1715.—This day I have got certain news of the death of the tyrant of France. He died Wednesday was eight days. Glory to God for cutting him off. ‘He cutteth off the spirit of princes, and is terrible to the kings of the earth.’ The mercy is so much the more remarkable that at this very time the Jacobites are gathering to a head and forming a camp in the Highlands at the Braes of Mar.”—*Diary*.

The “Marrow Controversy” belongs to the public history of these times. It commenced in 1719, with the instructions of the Assembly to their Commission to “inquire into the publishing and spreading of books and pamphlets tending to the diffusing of that condemned proposition, and promoting a scheme of opinions relative thereto, which are inconsistent with our Confession of Faith; and that the recommenders of such books or pamphlets, or the errors therein contained, whether by word or print, be called before them to answer for their conduct in such recommendation.” The condemned proposition here referred to was the famous testing question regarding the sinner's free access to the Saviour, which the Presbytery of Auchterarder had proposed to candidates for license, but which the Assembly had prohibited as unsound and detestable. The mention of “recommenders” was also well understood to have a particular reference,—Mr. Hog of Carnock having the year previous re-printed Fisher's Marrow of Modern Divinity, with a recommendatory preface, to the great offence of some leading men in the church. Mr. Hog was the more obnoxious to the Arminian portion of the clergy, that he was well known as the warm advocate of the doctrines of grace. He had already proved

his zeal from the press as well as from the pulpit.* His chief assailant was Principal Haddow of St. Andrews, who first attacked him in a synod sermon. The Principal afterwards took the lead in the Assembly in the prosecution of the cause, and was mainly instrumental in procuring the condemnation of the "Marrow," by act of Assembly 1720.

From the first, Mr. Erskine took a lively interest in the discussion. The part assigned him, by the brethren with whom he acted, in the steps which they deemed it necessary to take for the vindication of the truth, bears decided testimony to the esteem in which he was held for ability and acquirements. The "Representation" of the twelve brethren, which Mr. E., at their request, completed from an original draft, may be appealed to as evidence that the confidence reposed in him was not misplaced. Still more creditable to his abilities and attainments are the answers to the ensnaring questions of the Commission which was appointed by the Assembly to "call the representers before them, and to ripen these matters for the next Assembly." These answers, it is well known, were originally the composition of Mr. E.; afterwards extended and improved by Mr. Gabriel Wilson. No candid reader, possessing a competent knowledge of the subject, can peruse this document without admitting the deep and accurate acquaintance which it shows with the matters in debate, together with the intrepidity and honest zeal of the author and his brethren. It is such features as these, rather than the merits of the controversy, which it falls to us to record. And we confess that we have felt no small gratification in remarking the many unequivocal proofs there are of the single-heartedness and the Christian temper which, during the whole of the case and amidst its many irritations, distinguished the subject of our memoir. That personal feeling mingled with these contendings, we regret to say there is too much reason to apprehend; but Mr. E. and his brethren for the

* Brown's Gospel Truth; Life of Rev. James Hog.

most part appear to have ruled their spirit, and to have spoken the truth in love. The other party were the assailants; and the attack was marked by keenness, too often by asperity. Principal Haddow, the chief prosecutor of Mr. Hog, was understood to have had an early difference with him, which perhaps should have prevented his taking so prominent a part in the business. Mr. Erskine, on the other hand, was the chief object of Mr. Alexander's hostility,—the same brother with whom, as above mentioned, Mr. E. came publicly into collision on the subject of the Abjuration Oath. On various occasions Mr. A.'s conduct was such, that it is impossible to acquit him of unbrotherly temper.

The charitable state of mind which Mr. E. cherished towards his brethren was the more to his honour, that the feeling of hostility against "the Marrow men" entertained by many ministers in the church, showed itself by frequent annoyance in the subordinate courts, and in attacks from the pulpit and the press. These persecutions were the worse to bear, that they were frequently made in a spirit of contemptuous derision as well as of enmity. This was indulged on some occasions in a manner very unbecoming the position of the parties and the importance of the cause. In waggish allusion, as was understood, to the number of the representers, the queries put to them by the Commission were in number twelve. In the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale this childish humour was carried to a very undignified excess. A committee of their number appointed to consider a sermon by Mr. Gabriel Wilson at the opening of the synod, "drew up a charge," as we are informed in a preface to that sermon, "consisting of *twelve* remarks, *twelve* questions, and *twelve* slanders."*

The process before the Assembly was terminated in 1722, by an act confirming and explaining the previous acts of Assembly of 1720, and appointing the subscribers of the representation to be rebuked and admonished at

* Fraser's Life of Erskine, p. 237.

the bar of the house for the injurious reflections on the Assembly which that document contained. The act, of which this was the conclusion, is a document of decided ability. Its design obviously is to save the credit of the ruling party, by seeming to retract nothing, and yet to give out a more evangelical sound than had issued from the Supreme Court in the act condemnatory of the Marrow. With this view it sets forth a declaration of faith in certain heads of doctrine which are expressed in the words of the Confession and Catechisms. In the sequel of the act, its framers labour with much dexterity to make it appear that the representers, in disclaiming the sentiments which the Assembly's former act extracted from the Marrow, proved nothing but that they (the representers) attached a different sense to the expressions complained of than the author of the Marrow intended. In the body of the act, the Assembly keep to the question as regards the merits of the book, and defend their own interpretation of the statements objected to as the undoubted meaning of the author. In the concluding part the Assembly animadvert on certain "positions and expressions" of the representers, as of a "pernicious and dangerous tendency," and prohibit the use of such statements "under pain of the censures of the church;" and finally, on account "of the injurious reflections" contained in the paper of the representers, the Assembly appointed them to be rebuked and admonished.

Throughout the management of this business there was plainly manifested a disposition to bear hard on the twelve brethren. When the subject was under discussion before the Commission in August 1721, which the representers were instructed to attend, they were not allowed to be present till an overture to the Assembly was adopted, containing a reply to the representation. "We waited on," says Boston, "three days, and were never but once called before the committee, on Wednesday, to tell us the committee had prepared an overture about our affair, to be transmitted to the Assembly, and we were appointed to wait in November again." This, if not unjust, was cer-

tainly supercilious treatment. Nor was the conduct of the Commission in November fair and brotherly. The step taken was to put into the representers' hands the twelve queries, which the brethren, in their replies, justly remark on as "an uncommon and undue manner of procedure." "Nevertheless, for the sake of truth, and to take off any shadow of suspicion," they framed and gave in the answers above referred to at next meeting of the Commission; and what was the fate of this document? Instead of being carefully considered, as was due, though it had possessed no higher claim than as the defence of the accused, it was not so much as read, but referred to a committee. It seems never to have reached the Assembly, whose decision in May 1722 having been pronounced in ignorance of this document, was virtually the condemnation of parties who were denied a hearing when put on their defence.

The spirit in which all this was borne by Mr. Erskine and his associates was honourable to their character as Christian men and as ministers of Christ. They railed not; they threatened not. When the measure was resolved on of a rebuke and admonition, they submitted to the authority of the Supreme Court; but, acknowledging a higher authority, that of conscience and of truth, they immediately laid on the table, in due form, their protest against the deed, and their claim of liberty "to profess, preach, and still bear testimony to the truths condemned."

Whatever may be thought of the consistency of submitting to a rebuke for a course which they deemed not blameworthy but dutiful, there can be no doubt that Mr. Erskine and his friends bowed thus far to the authority of the Assembly with the fullest integrity of purpose, and that they regarded the protest which they forthwith tabled as neutralizing the censure so far as it might appear to imply acquiescence on their part in the justice of such procedure, or to involve compliance with the injunction to refrain from the avowal and dissemination of the tenets in dispute. On the other hand, the Assembly appear to have thought their authority duly maintained, and their views of truth suffi-

ciently vindicated, by the infliction of the censure. No attention was paid to the protest; it was not so much as read; and thus, by a sort of technical compromise, the case was hastily disposed of,—both parties remaining of the same mind as before. It might, however, have ended otherwise. The brethren anticipated a different result; and their protest, which was a bold step, was undoubtedly calculated to bring upon them, what they apprehended,* a sentence of exclusion from the church; but the King's letter contained a caution against "unhappy divisions;" the Assembly understood the royal hint, and showed themselves dutifully disposed to lenient measures.

It were out of place here to go largely into the merits of the case between the Assembly and representers as one of doctrine; but justice to the character of Mr. Erskine requires us to state that the "Answers" which he had the chief hand in framing, and his numerous printed discourses, sufficiently evince his entire innocence of those Antinomian extravagances which the Assembly charged upon "the Marrow," and by implication in the close of their act 1722, imputed to the "representers." One leading point of debate was the sense in which the believer is not under the law. So explicit on this head are the statements of Mr. E., along with his brethren, that it is difficult to conceive how the reproach of Antinomianism could be kept up against them, except on the supposition that the body of their opponents were unacquainted with the systematic distinction between the law as a covenant of works and as a rule of life; or that, in the keenness of controversy, they had acquired a morbid acuteness of vision in detecting what could not be shown to exist. There are circumstances which almost lead one to suspect both this oversight and oversensitiveness in the proceedings of the Assembly. Thus among other matters of complaint by the representers, they objected to the "act for preaching catechetical doctrine," passed by the Assembly 1720, "as teaching legal

* Wodrow's *Analecta*, Boston's *Memoirs*.

error, in that it directs ministers to preach the necessity of a holy life in order to the obtaining of everlasting happiness." In the act explanatory, the Assembly having either considered the matter more maturely, or having learned their lesson better, skilfully attempt to escape the consequence of their statement by declaring that "it relates to the obtaining of enjoyment and possession, and not of right and title to everlasting happiness."

On the points, too, debated in the definition of faith, it is explicitly stated in the "Answers," that the deed of gift and grant of Christ to all mankind was understood by them to mean "no more than the revelation of the divine will in the word affording warrant to offer Christ to all, and a warrant to all to receive him," and that "we become actually possessed of Christ, remission of sins, &c., in and by the act of believing or confidence in him."* To one who attentively examines Mr. E.'s language, whether in the Answers or in his printed discourses, it will appear that in the distinctions adopted by him in describing faith by its acts of assent, and appropriating persuasion or assurance of application, &c., he considers faith with reference to the character of the testimony which it receives, as this testimony includes a declaration of truth and a promise of good, and as it is addressed to every human being who hears the gospel, insomuch that he who hears it, but not as a message to himself, does not believe the gospel,—does not even understand it. Whether, in adopting the phraseology of the "Marrow," the representatives took the best mode of expressing their sentiments is a different matter. To tell the sinner that Christ is his, and to call on him to believe that this is true, is language which, without explanation, might well startle as involving the consequences which the Assembly charged upon it; it seems to say that the object of a man's faith is his own justification; and certainly, in any view of it, the presumption is all against a mode of statement which

* Answers to Queries VIII., X.

requires elaborate explanation to guard the hearer against mistaking its import and tendency.

On the whole, if we would form a right estimate of Mr. E.'s character and principles, as brought out by the Marrow controversy, we must keep in view the state of the Church of Scotland in those times, and the relation which the discussions above noticed bore to others which, a few years previously, gave such prominence to "the Auchterarder creed." The censure which the Assembly then passed was inimical to the unfettered freeness of the gospel. The Auchterarder query, let us admit, is unhappily expressed. To teach that men are not required "to forsake sin in order to coming to Christ, and being instated in covenant with God," may be alleged to leave room for the inference, that a man may be in a justified state without and prior to repentance; in other words, that a man may believe while impenitent, and that believing yet impenitent, he may be in covenant with God. It is not to be wondered at that the other party seized upon this view of the subject;—but they pressed their advantage to a dangerous extreme; for their condemnation of the query plainly implied, that till the sinner be a penitent, and even till he know it, he is not warranted to believe in Christ. Now the act condemnatory had not been rescinded. The men who passed it were still the prevailing party in the Church courts; and was it not then a seasonable and a wholesome jealousy which led Mr. E. and his brethren to look with apprehension on deeds of the Assembly which bore a sinister aspect to the known and strenuous advocates of the doctrines of grace? The deliverances given forth by the Assembly were justly viewed as receiving illustration from the well understood principles and spirit of the men. It is in this view we perceive a reason why Mr. E. and his friends contended for a certain form of words in their definition of saving faith. That the hearer of the gospel should be called on to believe that Christ died for him in particular, and that Christ is his, they defended as the true sense of the gospel call; the Assembly

condemned this statement, on the ground that it implied universal atonement and pardon ; but this sense of the words the friends of the Marrow disclaimed, and the sentiment itself is distinctly repudiated by the Marrow ;—was there not in these circumstances ground to fear that the Assembly's condemnation, if not designed, might be understood as denying the universality of the gospel call, and the warrant of all, without any preliminary condition of self-preparedness, to come to Christ and partake of his benefits ? In fine, it should be borne in mind that Mr. E. and his brethren did not enter the lists as defenders of *the book* so often referred to, but as the friends of important principles of divine truth, which they conceived the Assembly had, through "oversight," injured in condemning the book ; and in their representation, while they express no disapprobation of the language of the six Antinomian paradoxes, they accompany the references made by them to those passages of the Marrow with a qualifying clause to limit and explain their signification. It is so far satisfactory to observe this caution ; for unquestionably the Assembly's quotations from the Marrow under the head of Paradoxes, from whatever authorities derived, do in terms strikingly contrast with the sobriety of the Westminster Standards, and are, in more than one instance, couched in phraseology which, taken by itself, is revolting to pious ears, and which, with all the aid of the context, cannot be reconciled to any sense of propriety.

Mr. Erskine had the testimony of a good conscience to cheer him amidst contention and no little reproach, and was upborne by the lively hope that the truths for which he suffered would one day be brought forth to victory.

" I look upon it as a piece of the greatest honour that was ever put upon me, that the Lord called me forth to lift up a banner, or yet to suffer reproach for his precious truths, which I am convinced suffered so much injury by the act condemnatory 1720, and act explicatory 1722, that as I live, so I desire to die in this hope, that when some of this generation, who were the principal authors and are

the principal supporters of these acts, are off the stage; and when matters come to be impartially examined by a succeeding generation, whose honour shall not be dipt in the support of these acts, the design of our petition to the Assembly and of our prayer to God shall be answered, in their being repealed both as injurious to truth and to the true honour of the Church of Scotland; and that the children who are yet unborn shall praise the Lord, who stirred up any of this generation to contend for injured truth, that it might be handed down to them in purity.”*

Though the Assembly's decision in 1722 terminated the controversy in the Supreme Court, Mr. E. had still a fight to maintain for his principles, and no small annoyance to try his constancy. As the act “ordained presbyteries and synods to take particular care that its injunctions should be punctually observed,” the subordinate courts were vigilant in their surveillance of the suspected brethren, according to the measure of their party-zeal. The Synod of Fife in particular distinguished itself by its inquisitorial fidelity to the letter of the Assembly's injunction. The prejudice which some members of that body cherished against Mr. E. broke out at times in an unseemly manner. In 1725 an attempt was made by the parish of Kirkcaldy to call Mr. Erskine, but it was defeated in the church courts by the ruling party. At a meeting of the Commission, to which the matter was ultimately referred, his former friend, Mr. A. Anderson, now of St. Andrews, embraced the opportunity of making a virulent attack on him in his absence, decrying his sentiments as unsound, and in proof of the charge, referred to sermons of Mr. Erskine's, which he had heard preached by him at a distance of years. That the Commission should have allowed a railing accusation in these circumstances is as surprising as the spirit of the attack was unbrotherly; but they appear not to have sympathised with the assailant so far as to take any steps in consequence of his defamatory indictment. This occur-

* Preface to Sermon on Rev. iii. 4.

rence was the occasion, above referred to, of Mr. Erskine becoming known to the world as an author,—a character in which he so often appeared in his subsequent contendings, so much to his own honour and to the advancement of the good cause.

To fasten suspicion the more effectually on Mr. Erskine, his accuser divulged it as a significant and painful fact, that Mr. E. had not signed the Confession of Faith at his license or ordination. Mr. A. was correct in his information, but wholly at fault in the reason for the omission which he assigned or insinuated. It turned out that, through the Presbytery's neglect, various other members were in the same predicament with Mr. Erskine. As it had been entirely an omission, and one which had escaped his own recollection, he tendered to the Presbytery his subscription on the circumstance being adverted to, but his proffer was rejected "because, as was alleged, he differed in his sentiments from the received principles of this church, asserted in the Confession."* About the same time the Synod of Fife enjoined on its members a new subscription of the Confession understood in conformity with the acts of 1720 and 1722. With this demand Mr. E. and the representing brethren refused compliance, and the affair was referred to the Assembly.

Previously to the movement for a call by the parish of Kirkcaldy, Mr. Erskine had been called to Burntisland and Tulliallan. In full concurrence with his own views and inclination, the church courts decided against his removal. As above hinted, party feeling had its influence in preventing his translation to Kirkcaldy as a situation of greater prominence, and where his influence would be more widely felt. Alluding to this pitiful motive, he gently remarks:—

"I very heartily acquiesce in the sentence of the reverend Commission continuing me minister of Portmoak. I adore Him who hath the stars in his right hand, who ever fixed me in that corner of his vineyard, where I hope I

* Pref. ut supra.

shall have my crown and rejoicing in the day of the Lord. And therefore, whatever might have been the particular views either of persons or judicatories, or however unfavourable their sentiments or sentences have been meant, yet I can freely declare they have not crossed my inclination in that determination; and I have no manner of resentment against the judicatories of the church on that head, for whom I desire to have all due deference in the Lord."

In January 1724, three and a half years after the death of his first wife, Mr. Erskine married Miss Grace Webster, daughter of Mr. James Webster, one of the ministers of Edinburgh,—a name which stands honourably connected with the prosecution of Professor Simson of Glasgow, for various errors, at a time when, in such contendings for the truth, consistent friends were few, and church judicatories showed no haste to be faithful.

Mr. Erskine's mother died at Portmoak the January following, after a widowhood of thirty years, a great part of which she passed alternately under the roofs of her two sons. She was a woman of good understanding and of much energy; her life was godly, and, according to the testimony of her sons, she died happily in the Lord.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Erskine's Translation to Stirling—Pastoral labours—Assembly 1732—Speech by Mr. E.—Synod's Sermon—Found censurable—Defence of his conduct—Assembly 1733—Mr. E. rebuked—Procedure of Commission—Loosed from his charges—Assembly 1734—Act reponing Mr. E.—His refusal to return, with the grounds of it—Mr. E. not a Sec-tarian—Libelled and deposed—Scene of his ejection.

It was during these two years of domestic change in which affliction and mercy were mingled, that the church courts had their attention engaged with the attempt by the parish of Kirkcaldy to obtain Mr. Erskine's settlement among them. The discussions to which this movement gave rise were formerly referred to as illustrative of the ill-feeling and unfair treatment to which, in connection with the Marrow Controversy, Mr. E. was subjected. In other respects there is nothing of importance in that affair to require more particular narration.

In hope, no doubt, of better success, the parish of Kinross gave him a unanimous call in 1728. The call was sustained by the Presbytery of Kinross without, so far as appears, any objection or delay, and transmitted to that of Kirkcaldy, by whom it was presented to Mr. Erskine. The form was observed of receiving reasons for translation, and answers by the people of Portmoak, after which Mr. E. expressed his desire to remain at Portmoak. The presbytery decided agreeably to his wishes. The cause was taken by appeal to the Synod of Fife and to the Assembly, but in both cases with the same result.

A few years after, in May 1731, Mr. Erskine was called to Stirling. The choice was again unanimous and cordial. When the matter came before the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, Mr. E. expressed the affection which he felt for the people of

Portmoak, but left the question of removal to the presbytery. The presbytery decided in favour of translation,—a decision in which he immediately acquiesced. Rumour accounted for his altered views of duty by various considerations,—contentions that had sprung up in the session to cool his attachment to his present charge,—decline of zeal among his people in profiting by his ministry,—causes which, if existing, were likely enough to operate in the way alleged. Whatever were the grounds on which Mr. E. accepted of the invitation to remove, his consent will not be imputed to levity or ambition by any one who considers his previous course of retired labour and unobtrusive usefulness, and the duration of his connection with Portmoak,—eight and twenty years—notwithstanding repeated openings for a change. It is certain that, in leaving the good people of Portmoak, he did not in any degree forfeit their esteem and affection; they appear to have felt that, having had the benefit of the most and best of his days, they had no cause to complain; such indeed was the hold he had of their hearts, and such the savour of his work among them, that several members of his original flock removed their abode to Stirling, that they might continue to enjoy the privilege of his ministry.

Mr. Erskine's translation to Stirling took place in September 1731. The charge into which he was inducted had been lately erected in addition to the original collegiate church of the parish. His place of worship was the "West Church," a building of popish times, that had not till now been stately used as a Protestant place of worship.

At Stirling his acceptableness and usefulness as a minister of Christ suffered no abatement. In every part of his work his diligence was unwearied and his faithfulness exemplary. He found like-minded coadjutors in the ministers of the town, Messrs. Hamilton and Muir. The former in particular, now advanced in years, was a man of an excellent spirit, and a zealous fellow-labourer with Mr. E., according to his strength, in promoting the power instead of the form of godliness in the parish.

“Early in the year 1737 these two ministers, in order to prevent the profanation of the table of the Lord, formed a resolution to examine privately all that should be admitted, and to appoint diets for that effect. They determined, at the same time, with the concurrence of a large majority of the session, to read from the pulpit an advertisement with respect to intended communicants,—giving notice that none should apply for admission to that ordinance who were ignorant of the first principles of religion, or hostile to the distinguishing tenets of the Church of Scotland, or habitually negligent of secret and family worship, or who absented themselves without a sufficient apology from public worship, or from diets of catechising, or that were ungodly and immoral in their practice.”

This was no common amount of labour, for the examination embraced the whole body of communicants; and still more rare, we apprehend, was the rule of discipline become, which Messrs. Hamilton and Erskine declared their intention to apply.

Mr. E. seems to have carried the same assiduity into all the duties of his office.

“Besides at least six volumes on ‘Catechetical Doctrine,’” says Dr. Fraser, “written at Portmoak between 1717 and 1723 inclusive, he has left in all forty-seven note-books of evangelical, sacramental, and miscellaneous sermons; *fifteen* of which books were composed subsequently to his translation to Stirling. Most of them consist of 220 pages; and all of them, with the exception of a few words in common hand interspersed, are written in short-hand characters. Each may contain on an average about thirty-six sermons of an hour’s length. He left also several volumes of expository discourses, including a series of Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews, studied and delivered immediately after his admission to his second charge.”*

At the time of Mr. Erskine’s translation to Stirling, ecclesiastical affairs were hastening to a crisis, which was destined

* Life, p. 341.

to issue in the determination of questions vitally affecting the interests of Christian liberty and the character and future usefulness of the Church of Scotland. The year which was memorable to not a few as the date of Mr. Erskine's entering on a more conspicuous station, witnessed the first step by the General Assembly which, in another brief twelvemonth, constrained him to lift his decisive testimony against encroachment on the people's rights. It was in the Assembly of 1731 the overture was brought forward "concerning the method of planting vacant churches," and which, being transmitted to presbyteries according to the prescribed order in such cases, was at the same time adopted as an interim act. Next Assembly passed the overture into a standing law in disregard of the adverse judgment of a majority of presbyteries, so far as ascertained. In vain had a representation against the proposed law, when it was passed as an overture, been presented by upwards of 40 ministers, besides elders; and a complaint and petition to the same effect from fifteen hundred people. And equally in vain did Mr. E., being that year a member of Assembly, demand that his dissent should be received and recorded. His claim was barred by the Assembly's tyrannical act of 1730, forbidding the entering of reasons of dissent in the inferior judicatories,—an act which the Assembly made to apply to its own proceedings. Mr. Erskine's speech on this occasion is one of the *memorabilia* which Dr. Fraser's research has discovered among Mr. Erskine's papers, and which, if not very important as a link in his history, is at least an agreeable illustration of the consistency of his conduct, and the intrepidity of his spirit when duty summoned him to the breach.

"An extempore speech I had in open Assembly when the overture anent the planting of churches was passed into an act by the Assembly, May 16, 1732.

"MODERATOR,

"I find, by the reading of the minutes, that the Dissent that was entered yesterday by some mem-

bers of the Assembly is not marked, and I crave that it may be marked, it being a privilege common in every free country. Moderator, the reason why I insist that it may be marked is, that I consider this act of Assembly to be without warrant from the word of God, and inconsistent with the acts and constitution of this church since our Reformation, particularly in our books of Discipline. As I said before in the Assembly, viz., in the case of Kinross, so, Moderator, I now say it again: I know of no ecclesiastical authority under heaven but what is derived from Christ, the exalted King of Zion. It is in his name and authority that we are met and constituted in a national Assembly. He is the alone foundation that God hath laid in Zion. His righteousness is the foundation of our justification and acceptance before God; and his authority as a King is the alone foundation of all government and discipline—laws and acts—that are to be imposed upon his church. And in regard I do not see upon what part of the word this act is founded, I therefore conclude that it wants the authority of Christ, and that the Assembly, in this particular, has gone off from the true foundation of government.

“We are charged with the custody and feeding of his lambs, his sheep, his little ones. It is not the world’s great ones, or rich ones, that we are intrusted with. No, Moderator; and yet by this act, the privilege of his little ones is conferred upon heritors, and the great ones of the world. I am so far from thinking this act conferring the power upon heritors beyond other men, to come and choose ministers of the Gospel to be founded on the word, that I consider it diametrically contrary to it. What difference does a piece of land make between man and man in the affairs of Christ’s kingdom which is not of this world? Are we not commanded in the word to do nothing by partiality? whereas here is the most manifest partiality in the world. We must have ‘the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ,’ or the privileges of his church, ‘without respect of persons;’ whereas by this act we show respect to this man

with the gold ring and gay clothing beyond the man with the vile raiment and poor attire. I conceive, Moderator, that our public managements and acts should run in the channel with God's way, not diverging. We are told that 'God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith.' It is not said he hath chosen the heritors of this world, as we have done, but he hath 'chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom.' And if they be heirs of the kingdom, I wish to know by what warrant they are stript of the privileges of the kingdom.

"Moderator, I consider that by this act the Assembly have sunk one of the principal branches of our Reformation inserted in our books of Discipline; I mean the right of the Church and members thereof to choose their own pastors—a privilege with the custody of which we are intrusted. Our worthy forefathers handed down this among other branches of the Reformation at the expense of their blood and treasure. And that I may not be accessory to the betraying of a trust which we are obliged to hand down in safety to our posterity and the generation following, I insist that my Dissent may be marked in the Records of this Assembly."

What course was now open to Mr. Erskine and his friends for exonerating their consciences and resisting the course of defection? They had still freedom of speech in the pulpit; and that freedom Mr. E. felt himself shut up to use. He testified to his people against the mal-administration of the church courts and the backslidings of the times. When he was thus prepared fearlessly to lift up his voice with all the publicity he could command, an occasion peculiarly opportune presented itself which he was not slow to embrace. Having been chosen Moderator of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, it became his duty to preach at the opening of next meeting of synod. His discourse was intended for the times, and accordingly contained a bold but not a railing denunciation of the evils referred to. He spoke as a strenuous advocate of the right of God's people to the free election of their pastors, instead of being limited

or coerced in their choice. In the sermon Mr. E. refers to the principles of the Church of Scotland, as asserted in her books of discipline, in proof of the defection from scriptural views of the people's rights which he charges on the act of Assembly. His sentiments, however just and sound, being in advance of the practice of the church as prescribed and fettered by the act of settlement at the Revolution, it is not to be wondered at that the protestation on behalf of the people's claim proved distasteful to many of his synodical auditors ; but that which was most calculated to stir their resentment, was the freedom with which he characterized the act of Assembly, and by consequence reflected on the supreme court itself. For a son of the church to speak of the Assembly as "giving a wound to the authority of Christ" by this its act—an act which, "whatever church authority may be in it, wants the authority of the Son of God,"—was language not likely to be heard where it was spoken without indignation and rebuke. Mr. Erskine's unanswerable defence of his conduct was, as stated in his prefatory note to the printed sermon, "that there is now no other way left to bear testimony against such things but by warning the world against them by press or pulpit ; representations and petitions from ministers or church members at the bar being utterly disregarded, and no access to enter any protest or dissent against these proceedings in the public records for the exoneration of conscience or the information of our posterity, that such things did not pass in our day without a struggle and testimony against them."

It has been alleged as an inconsistency in Mr. Erskine, that he lifted his protest against the act of Assembly with a vehemence calculated to destroy the church's peace, though he had himself entered the ministry of the church under a law of settlement the same as that which was enacted by the Assembly of 1732,—nay, more, that he had continued in the church under the yoke of patronage re-imposed by the government of Queen Anne. Mr. Erskine's defence was, that "till the act of patronage there were no

settlements but where the body of the people concurred in the election, and that in the practice of the church, till of late, they were allowed to vote." He did not, it is true, secede from the church on account of the Patronage Act ; but at that time the church reclaimed against its imposition. Mr. E. had full liberty to join with others in condemning the measure both in the church courts and in the pulpit ; and so strong was the feeling against it among the people that patronage, though legalized, was not extensively put in practice for some years after the passing of the act in question. By and bye, from stealthy beginnings to bolder and more undisguised intrusion, presentees laid aside their reserve, and church courts played fast and loose with their principles, and a course of ecclesiastical oppression advanced apace to its extremity. One of the results of the contest was, on the part of Mr. E., the very proof of sincerity demanded, namely, his "taking joyfully" expulsion from the Establishment, now that the alternative lay between mother church and honest principle.

Equally invalid is the charge as regards the alleged identity of the act of settlement 1690, and the act of Assembly 1732. On a cursory perusal they may appear the same ; but on two points there is a certain and not inconsiderable difference. The one act was the enactment of the state to which the church submitted ; the other was the act of the ecclesiastical courts themselves restricting the liberties of the church in a case in which they were invested with an unchallenged power of legislation. The difference here is not small in the indication afforded of the state of opinion among the church's rulers. Besides, in the nature of the two acts themselves there was a point of dissimilarity to which no small importance has been attached. "According to the act 1690," says Willison, "the election was not to be held as finished until the man was proposed to the congregation, and their approbation had ; and if they disapproved, the affair was to stop as unfinished until the presbytery gave their judgment whether to proceed in it or not ; but the act 1732, holds the election as

finished by the votes of the heritors and elders, and the man to be legally elected and called to be minister of the parish before the consent of the people be asked.”* In a word, the Assembly was considered as by its act annihilating the call—hitherto regarded by the church as an essential element of a regular vocation to the ministry.

The defence of Mr. Erskine’s consistency, on the grounds just referred to, seems to be called for, seeing that the sentiments which he advanced in his synod sermon were avowed by him as those which he had understood and held as the principles of the Church of Scotland. Had he undergone a change of view, and pleaded his right to follow the light of better information and of fuller evidence of the truth, his vindication would have been equally conclusive, although he would have stepped elsewhere than into a synodical pulpit to lift his testimony and to make his defence.

The Synod’s condemnation of Mr. Erskine’s conduct, and his refusal to submit to the censure of rebuke at their bar, brought the affair to the Assembly at its meeting in May 1733. From this stage of the business as a question in the church courts, to its termination of the process in 1740 by the deposition of Mr. E. and his protesting brethren, his life is almost entirely a matter of public history; and accordingly this, the most eventful period of Mr. E’s career, is that on which,—confining our narrative as much as possible to biographical details,—we have least to say.

The great aim of the Assembly of 1733, appeared to be to push the process against Mr. E. to a speedy and decisive conclusion. As an earnest of the temper in which they were prepared to proceed, they decided one of the most aggravated cases of forcible intrusion, that of Kinross, in open and utter disregard of the declared sentiments of both presbytery and people. “The parishioners had given a call to a Mr. Francis Craig, but another person, Mr. Stark, had received the presentation. As this latter gentleman had scarcely a single vote, the presbytery of Dunfermline re-

* Fair and Impartial Testimony.

fused to ordain him." The Commission effected the settlement by a committee of their appointment; at the meeting of the Assembly above-named, complaints were brought against the presbytery of Dunfermline that they had refused to enrol Mr. Stark; for this recusancy the offenders were sharply rebuked at the Assembly; they were commanded to encourage and strengthen the hands of Mr. Stark in the work of the ministry; members of presbytery were prohibited on pain of censure from offering, and the presbytery from receiving, any protest or dissent against the settlement, and the presbytery was enjoined to appear before the Commission in August to report concerning their own obedience.*

With this hopeful beginning, the Assembly next day, May 15th, gave judgment in Mr. Erskine's cause. The other protesters against the Synod's deed, Messrs. Wilson, Moncrieff, and Fisher, having been refused a hearing, Mr. Erskine's appeal was considered; and the Assembly found that he had vented expressions tending to disturb the peace and good order of the church, approved of the proceedings of the Synod, and appointed Mr. Erskine to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar, which was done accordingly.

Mr. Erskine's protest, which the other brethren adhered to, against the decision of the Assembly,—the refusal by the Assembly to insert it in their minutes, or even to hear it read,—the tabling of it by the parties as they left the house,—the incidental manner in which it was picked up by a member of court, and brought under the notice of the Assembly,—the outburst of offended dignity which ensued,—the recal of the protesting brethren to hear the Assembly's good pleasure that they should withdraw their protest,—their refusal—together with the reference of the cause to the Commission, with powers to suspend the brethren from the exercise of their ministry in the event of their adherence to their paper of protest, and to loose them from

* M·Kerrow, vol. I. 55.

their respective charges if they should disregard the act of suspension,—and the issue of all this in the brethren's doing what the Assembly hoped by menace to prevent, and in the Commission's carrying into effect the instructions of the Supreme Court step by step, with unfaltering purpose,—these are events which the prevailing party, bent on the suppression of popular influence in the management of church affairs, crowded into the brief space of a few months, thereby giving birth to a train of consequences which they were too impetuous to anticipate and found themselves equally impotent afterwards to control or to counteract.

Under protest against the measures of the ruling party, and unheeding of the Commission's hasty acts of censure, Mr. E. with the other brethren continued to discharge all the parts of their pastoral office in their several parishes and churches, no man hindering them. Public sympathy was with them; and their prosecutors were beginning either to cool in their anger, or to fear the consequences. At the meeting of next Assembly a spirit of conciliation prevailed. Three acts were passed designed to secure the return of Erskine and his associates to their place in the church; and all these acts partook of the character of concessions. First of all, the Assembly repealed the act 1730, "discharging the recording reasons of dissent," and the act 1732, "anent the method of planting vacant churches." A few days after, an act was passed, empowering and recommending the Synod of Perth and Stirling to take measures for uniting the four brethren to the communion of the church. Same day, the Assembly by another act declared that ministerial freedom was not, nor shall be understood to be impaired by the late process against Mr. Ebenezer Erskine and others.

On the first Tuesday of July following, the Synod of Perth and Stirling, agreeably to appointment of Assembly, met at Stirling and reponed the brethren; the Presbytery of Stirling soon after the meeting of Synod elected Mr. Erskine in his absence to the Moderator's chair, and by a

deputation of their number acquainted him with their choice, and invited his acceptance. Mr. E. declined the honour, and in a letter* to the Presbytery gave reasons for remaining in a state of secession from the judicatories of the Established Church. His brethren concurred in this—though Mr. Wilson for a time had his doubts respecting the path of duty.

This was a turning point in the history of the new denomination, for such was the character which the movement now assumed. Mr. E. and his friends still cherished the hope that a time would come, when a return to their duty on the part of the courts of the Establishment would warrant the return of the Seceders to its pale. But to the most sanguine this must have appeared a distant and doubtful prospect, after the overtures for reunion in 1734 were deliberately and firmly declined. As this conduct of the brethren alienated many of their friends in the Establishment who had hitherto favoured their cause; and has given occasion to the opponents of the Secession since to assail the motives and principles of its originators, and as Mr. Erskine from his prominence in the movement has ever been the main object of attack, it is necessary to consider this part of the case with some degree of attention.

If we view the question between Mr. E. and the Assembly on narrow and merely technical grounds, making our decision to rest simply on Mr. Erskine's reasons of protest against the deed of Assembly, it might with some show of reason be alleged that the acts of the Assembly 1734, essentially modified, if they did not altogether remove Mr. Erskine's grounds of secession. The protest by Mr. E. homologates the testimony of his Synod sermon against the innovations of the Assembly on ministerial freedom, and on the rights of the people; and particularises the act 1732 as an encroachment; but this act having been now rescinded as illegal and informal, and the due freedom of the pulpit

* Printed in Christian Repository for August 1819.

having also been asserted, what, it may be asked, remained of the grounds of protest? We admit there is some force in the question; but to judge fairly of the case, we must enquire whether in the circumstances of the times, and in the temper and spirit of the church courts, these steps of amendment were a sufficient guarantee against ecclesiastical oppression. The Assembly of 1733 had confessedly gone wrong;—were the acts of the Assembly 1734 an adequate pledge against a similar course for the future? Two considerations shut us up to the negative. As a representative and changing body, the Assembly of one year is not a certain expositor of the mind of the church. The very fact we are referring to is proof of this. Did not the decisions of 1734 run counter to those of 1733. Is it not pleaded that the merit of the Assembly's measures in 1734 lay in this very opposition? From these things it clearly follows, that the true spirit of the "judicatories" was to be learned from a *course of procedure*, and not from the acts of a particular Assembly, especially when there were obvious reasons of policy for retracing their steps at the time. That the subject was so considered by the brethren, and that in their view the course of administration was such as to render it a matter of duty to maintain the separate position which they had assumed, we know from their published statements. In addition to their official documents, the following expression of opinion is valuable as coming from one of the wisest and most dispassionate of Mr. Erskine's associates: "It was not violent intrusions, it was not the act 1732, neither was it any other particular step of defection considered abstractly and by themselves, upon which the Secession was stated; but a complex course of defection, both in doctrine, government, and discipline, carried on with a high hand by the present judicatories of this church, justifying themselves in their procedure, and refusing to be restrained."* The justness of these views was fully evinced by subsequent events, and has been ad-

* Wilson's Defence, p. 40.

mitted by writers on the opposite side, who allow themselves to speak of Mr. E. and his brethren as popular demagogues, and of his sermons as things to be sneered at, which the notice of the church courts saved from oblivion.*

Another consideration here, is the fact that the rescissory acts of the Assembly did not go the length of annulling the sentence against Mr. E. and his friends. Not only was there no admission of injustice done him, but the Synod of Perth and Stirling was prohibited to "judge of the legality or formality of the former proceedings in this affair." To what was this to be attributed? Was there no party or person in the Assembly prepared to do this act of justice? Doubtless there were such; and their refraining from the attempt is explicable only on the supposition that, constituted as the Assembly was, they knew the attempt to be hopeless.

It is necessary, however, in writing the life of Mr. Erskine, to defend his reputation against insinuations still more disparaging to him personally;—that he kept his ground because he felt his honour committed, and that the Assembly did not win him back because it did not pay court to the favourite of the people. Now, we cannot but think that this point is of all others the one on which the defence of Mr. E. is most triumphant. The whole course of the Assembly, Synod, and Presbytery, when seeking his return, was complimentary to him as an individual. The supreme court rescind acts to reconcile him, and appoint the Synod to make advances to him and his brethren, and to say not a word to them of censure for the past. The Synod reponed them without waiting for the slightest hint from the brethren of a readiness to return. With still greater alacrity of complaisance to the wounded pride of Mr. Erskine, the presbytery beckoned him to the Moderator's chair, and so long as there is a hope of his condescending to accept of it, they keep it vacant in token of respect. As a mere personal matter then, the deference shown him was so unctuous

* Sir H. Moncrieff's Life of Dr. John Erskine.

and flattering, that had he been the weak and vain man which some represent, he could not have resisted the temptation. A weak man might have been excused if in Mr. Erskine's circumstances he had imagined himself vaulting into the saddle while the presbytery held the stirrup, and with studied civilities attended him as he rode over rescinded acts and recanted charges to the Hall of the Assembly amidst the abashed looks of humbled dignitaries and the shoutings of a triumphant people!

These things in view, what motive is conceivable for his standing aloof but that of public duty? His return to the courts of the Establishment would have carried the people with him; he would have resumed his place with eclat; such a result would have been equally a mortification to his enemies and a victory to himself and his friends. What then *could* restrain him but a concern for the cause which was in his hands, in comparison with which all personal considerations—the fear of bad report when enemies prevail, and the applause of men on the day of triumph—are to be held “as the small dust of the balance?”

The charges then of schism, of opinionativeness, and of self-importance which have been so freely brought against Ebenezer Erskine, we hold to be not only unsubstantiated, but disproved by fair reasoning and by admitted facts. An incident that has come to our knowledge* may be introduced here, not as of itself of much importance, but as illustrative of the unschismatical spirit of the founder of the Secession:—

After Mr. Erskine's removal from Portmoak, a delay took place in filling up the vacancy caused by disputes about the patronal rights. At length the Commission of Assembly, in 1734, gave the heads of families the privilege of unfettered election. By undue influence and a palpable manœuvre, an unpopular candidate, named Douglas, procured a majority of votes. A committee of presbytery being appointed to induce the supporters of the other can-

* Communicated from an authentic source by the Rev. Dr. M'Kelvie.

didate to accede to the settlement, they presented a declaration to the effect, that, though they could not depart from their objections, yet, to show their "respect for the judicatories of the church who had had this affair under their consideration," and their love of peace, they would fall from their appeal, and "take a further trial of Mr. Douglas," and that it would be their joy and rejoicing if, upon experience, they should not find occasion to withdraw from his ministry. Previous to the day of ordination, an influential member of the congregation wrote to his former pastor, Mr. Erskine, asking his advice. This was in 1735, and as occurring a considerable time after Mr. E. had been loosed from his charge by deed of Assembly, his reply deserves a place as a specimen of the spirit of the man under circumstances of no small provocation:—

" STIRLING, 28th April, 1735.

" DEAR FRIEND IN CHRIST,

" At present I cannot see what is advisable for you, unless it be, when the edict is called, to go in a band to the presbytery and declare that you resolve to countenance this ordination of Mr. Douglas upon the terms of your declaration given in the last presbytery, to which you desire your adherence to be marked this day. As for the presbytery minister that comes with your declaration, it is what you cannot help or hinder, neither are you much concerned with it, it being only a resolution of their own, and which you do not require to homologate, neither can it be binding on you in case what you fear you should undergo afterwards. I pray the Lord may prevent your fears, and make Mr. Douglas a blessing to the church of Christ, and to my dear people in Portmoak particularly.

" Yours as obedient in our dearest Lord,

" EBENEZER ERSKINE."

Will any one venture to say that this was the advice of a man who was actuated by a spirit of vindictiveness or by the paltry ambition of being the founder of a sect?

In every view the circumstances through which Mr. E. had passed were a criterion of his principles as a Christian and of his temper as a man. We say with confidence, he stood the test. On the other side he has been accused of introducing into his sermons "inflammable matter," and of manifesting "intemperance" in the management of his cause.* But we look in vain for something in the way of proof to justify the charge. If a plain statement of the right of the church's members to a voice in the appointment of the church's rulers be "inflammatory," Mr. E. was guilty as alleged; but to accuse a man as an incendiary for maintaining such a principle is language fit only for the mouth of a despot or a slave. We admit that in pleading for the scriptural right of the people to a direct vote as well as free consent in the election of their ministers, and in vindicating this their unfettered privilege as a principle recognised by the Church of Scotland in former times, Mr. E. put his own interpretation,—in some points debateable,—on the earlier documents and procedure of the church; but Mr. E. was not singular in this, as the reasonings of members of the Establishment evinced in the controversies of his days and not less fully in those of our own.

Of intemperance of language and of personal attacks his writings are honourably free. The corrupt measures of the time are indeed characterised with the plain speech of a man deeply in earnest; but when he and his brethren speak of their opponents, it is commonly under such phrases as "the prevailing party," "the ruling side," "the managers in the present course of defection." If examples of scurrility could be found in Mr. Erskine's testimonies against ecclesiastical corruption, they may surely be looked for in the extracts of his sermon, for which the Synod of Perth and afterwards the Assembly found him censurable. These were

* Moncrieff's Life of Dr. Erskine.

published by order of the Assembly* as the grounds and the vindication of the proceedings against him. To take an example or two:—The first charge was, “that the strain of a great part of the (Synod) sermon appears to compare the ministers of this church with the most corrupt teachers under the Old Testament.” To this Mr. E. replies:—“The charge is not, nor can it be, proven by any passages in my discourse, for I know there is a great body of faithful ministers in the Church of Scotland with whom I do not reckon myself worthy to be compared.” In a strain quite in keeping with this commencement, he proceeds to reply to the particulars of the charge. On another head it was alleged, “That he charges our forefathers with a sinful silence or negligence in not testifying, after the late Revolution, against encroachment in the times of Popery and Prelacy.” Mr. E.’s answer is, “I have a very great regard for the instruments of our deliverance at the Revolution, particularly the godly ministers who survived the flood of persecuting tyranny, and my own father among the rest; yet I hope the reverend Synod will excuse me, though I do not look upon these earthly ministers or those who have succeeded them to this day as infallible,” &c. &c.

This is very remote from the style of a railer, and might suffice to put many professors of a more polished taste to shame.

In Mr. Erskine’s personal appearances before the church courts there was no want of respect to their authority, while he maintained his rights with a promptitude and presence of mind that sometimes put his prosecutors out of countenance. The scene before the Commission in August 1733, when the pride of power was high and mighty, was equally characteristic of the domineering and arbitrary spirit of the “prevailing party,” and of the self-possession, penetration, and firmness of the object of their attack. It is clear that they were resolved to carry everything with a high hand,

* A Narrative of the Procedure of the Judicatories of the Church of Scotland with relation to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, &c.; Edinburgh, 1739.

and that they hoped to make very short work of the matter.

Mr. E. and his friends had prepared written defences. These the Commission refused to hear, insisting upon pleadings *viva voce*. Mr. E. (the others having been removed) stood to his right to make his defence, either "by word or writ," as he judged best. No browbeating could move him. He saw the necessity of keeping to his purpose that he might bring out the case in his own vindication more fully and correctly than he could hope to do by speaking on the spur of the moment in answer to questions designed to perplex or mislead him; and also, that his defences given in writing and with due formality, might be engrossed in the process for his vindication. This was not at all to the mind of the prosecutors, who, finding him inflexible, asked if "his paper was a retractation of his protest or not," to which he replied, "The court was abundantly able to judge upon their reading his answer." Very captious this, it will be said; Ebenezer will not so much as say whether his paper is or is not a retractation of his protest, but snarlingly tells them they will learn on reading it. Let us judge by the result. Erskine knew his men; by his firmness he carried his point for himself; and what followed? A committee of the Commission met next morning with the protesters to induce them to retract; this they refused to do. On the report of this to the Commission by their committee, "Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff were asked if they agreed to the truth of the report. They answered in the affirmative; upon which *advantage was taken to refuse a reading of their written answer, which obliged the said two brethren to deliver themselves viva voce.*"

An eye-witness of one of those scenes in which, as we judge, Mr. Erskine triumphed both in management and in temper, describes it as follows:—"I saw Mr. Ebenezer Erskine then standing at the bar in a most easy and undaunted, yea, majestic appearance, amidst warm and browbeating reasonings against the refusal which he then made,

particularly by the Earl of Isla. Before the Commission found themselves obliged to reverse their forenoon's resolution against receiving any written answers to their question, and before what is narrated in the preface to the representation, a proposal was agreed in for allowing him to read such parts of his representation as contained a direct answer to their question. The paper being then handed over to him, he entered upon the reading of it, beginning with the address and title. The Moderator immediately stopped him, telling him that he was to read only such parts as contained a direct answer to the question. Mr. E. replied that these would come in due order. This produced new reasonings, which issued in his being allowed to read the whole paper; and he did so in a very deliberate manner and with a very audible voice: Mr. Archibald Rennie, who was next year intruded into the parish of Muckhart, holding the candle to him as it was then late.*

Equally defensible in our view was the firmness with which Mr. Erskine and his brethren dissented from a proposal of accommodation made by the Commission in November 1733, that "if the next General Assembly shall declare that it was not meant by the act of the last Assembly to deny or take away the privilege and duty of ministers to testify against defections; then we shall be at liberty, and willing to withdraw our protest against the said act of Assembly; and particularly we reserve to ourselves the liberty of testifying against the act of Assembly 1732 on all proper occasions."

It is one of the many alleged proofs of "intemperance and pertinacity" which various assailants of Erskine and his brethren have adduced, that to this fair and moderate proposition they refused to accede. But what was the proposition? Did it do justice to Mr. Erskine? Was not the bearing of it rather the reverse? Did it not imply that, so far as concerned him personally, it should remain unmodified—untouched; but that so far as the sentence

* MS. Note by Mr. Gib quoted by Dr. M'Kerrow and Mr. Thomson.

due to him might be supposed to impair ministerial freedom, *thus far* it should be held as of no effect? Thus viewed, the committee of the Commission gravely proposed that the *intent and operation* of the decision should stand as before, but that *an inference* that some drew from it should be disavowed by the Assembly, and that this should be accepted by the party censured as a basis of accommodation. Besides, in the words of the brethren, "any declaration that a subsequent Assembly can make, cannot remove the ground upon which we protested against that decision, in regard that any act and declaration of the following Assembly, though agreeable to the word of God, can never take away the ground of protesting against a wrong decision of a preceding Assembly." What is there, we would ask, in all this but the conduct of men who understood their cause, and who adhered to it from principle?

To the irreproachable temper and deportment of Mr. E. during these agitations, the most decided testimony was borne by various parties,—the Presbytery, Kirk-session, Magistrates and Town Council of Stirling. One sentence from the representation to the Commission by the Town Council may suffice:—"We beg leave to represent that we have always lived in good friendship with Mr. Erskine after now two full years' acquaintance; that we find him to be a man of a peaceable disposition of mind and of a religious walk and conversation, and to be every way fitted and qualified for discharging the office of the ministry amongst us, and that he has accordingly discharged the same to our great satisfaction; that therefore our being deprived of his ministerial performances must undoubtedly be very moving and afflicting to us, and that the putting of the aforesaid act to execution, we are afraid, will in all likelihood be attended with very lamentable circumstances, confusions, and disasters, not only in this place in particular, but also in the church in general." In giving an account of Mr. Erskine's life we are led into this course of remark in illustration of his character and in vindication of his conduct. For a full defence, dealing more with the pub-

lic and less with the personal view of the case, the reader may have recourse to the "Reasons by Mr. E. Erskine, &c. why they have not acceded to the judicatories of the Established Church."

From the sentence of the Assembly loosing Mr. Erskine and the brethren from their charges to their final expulsion from the Established Church, and their deposition from the ministry in 1740, little occurs in the personal history of Mr. E. that calls for notice, apart from those events which form the public history of the period; nor is there in these events any new development of character, however fitted they may be to serve as increasing illustration of those high principles and virtues, of which full proof had already been given in the labours of his ministerial and in the contentings of his public life. The incident that chiefly calls for notice was a trial that befel him about four years after the adverse sentence of Assembly in 1733. Actuated by feelings that had every appearance of personal estrangement, five elders of the West Church, of which Mr. E. was minister, commenced a course of opposition and annoyance to him that gave rise to some painful scenes. Their hostility was the more remarkable that their names, with one exception, are found at the Kirk-session's address to the Commission in the process against Mr. E., bearing affectionate testimony to the acceptable gifts and blameless life of their minister. But in the progress of the controversy, a Mr. Mackie, who had been intruded into the parish of St. Ninians, ingratiated himself with a party of the West Church session, and succeeded so far as to induce them to take a course very hurtful to the peace and comfort of their minister. An occasion of open complaint occurred in the practice which, as mentioned before, Messrs. Hamilton and Erskine had adopted to exclude scandalous and unqualified persons from the fellowship of the church. This resolution was exclaimed against as arbitrary and incompetent; the case was carried to the General Assembly, who declared the minority to be the kirk-session of Stirling; and under sanction of the magistrates, "the five" placed themselves

at the church doors as the legal guardians of the money collected for the poor. Mr. Erskine from the pulpit denounced such conduct, as an Erastian intrusion on the independence of the church, and summoned "the five" by name and surname to appear before the judgment seat of Christ to answer for their conduct. It is to be admitted, that Mr. Erskine's zeal in this instance exceeded the limits of discretion. But the provocations which he received were many; and in the commencement of the strife he had the full concurrence and support of his venerable colleague, Mr. Hamilton—who died soon after—and the cordial co-operation of more than two-thirds of the session to the close.

Along with his other associate brethren,—now eight in number,—Mr. Erskine was libelled before the Assembly 1739 for following insubordinate and divisive courses; and by the Assembly of next year was cast out of the church and deposed from the ministry. Notice was forthwith given to the presbyteries and to the magistrates of the respective burghs concerned, that they might give effect to the Assembly's sentence of exclusion from the pulpits of the Establishment. In several of the cases the civil authorities were reluctant and slow to interpose. It was otherwise, however, with the magistrates of Perth and Stirling. On the Sabbath morning after the decision of Assembly, Mr. Erskine, on proceeding to the church, found the doors locked against him. Protesting with great solemnity against his exclusion, he withdrew. The multitude would have forced an entrance, but this Mr. E. forbade. Repulsed in his attempt to obtain admission to the church, Mr. E., accompanied by the people, repaired to an open space in the vicinity of the town; and there, under the walls of the castle, lifted up the banner of truth, with a spirit unbound and free as the breeze that wafted the solemn accents of his message to the ears of the listening multitude. The traditionary remembrances of this day's work are those of vivid and profound impression.

A similar scene took place at Perth, where Mr. Wilson

demanded admission in the face of the magistrates, who, with their guards, were valorously drawn up in battle array to defend the "legal synagogue" from invasion by the minister of peace. Mr. Moncrieff of Abernethy, with a juster sense of what was fitting the occasion, refused to occupy the pulpit, although no one hindered him.

The ejection of the Associate brethren from their parishes and temporalities, followed of course their "declinature" of the church's jurisdiction; nor would it have accorded with the self-denying and martyr-like spirit of the men to have clung to their parochial charges after they felt themselves necessitated to renounce both the communion and authority of the courts of the Establishment. But the spirit of intolerance would be satisfied with nothing less than the denuding of Mr. E. and his brethren of the ministerial character. The men whose zeal for the doctrines of grace was looked on with disfavour by many, and whose advocacy of the people's rights was offensive to still more, behoved to lie under the ban of the highest censure as no longer fit to be ministers of Christ. Such haste to depose, and the painful betrayal of a spirit that is not of God in the grounds of censure or the manner of its infliction, is one of the presumptuous sins of ecclesiastical authority. To this lordly arrogance, churches that lean on the arm of the state have ever shown a constitutional proneness. Intolerance is the inherent vice of privileged corporations. If it be alleged that churches with less temptation have sometimes imbibed the same spirit, we do not deny the mischievous tendency of bad example, and admit that, so far as its influence has been felt, the fact is to be mentioned for a lamentation.

CHAPTER IV.

Erskine's correspondence with Whitefield—Whitefield at Dunfermline—Rupture with the Associate Presbytery—Cambuslang revival—Mr. Erskine's conduct in reference to it—Covenants renewed—Act concerning the doctrine of grace—Rebellion 1745—Mr. Erskine's loyalty—Breach of the Associate Synod—Mr E. Professor of Divinity—domestic and personal afflictions—last illness and death—character—Notices of his family.

FROM 1733, when the Associate Presbytery was formed at Gairney Bridge, Mr. Erskine and his brethren, though retaining their parochial charges, occupied in some respects a distinct ecclesiastical position. By their deposition in 1740 their denominational character became fully defined and established. As their design in originally seceding was to bear witness against the corrupt administration of the church courts, with the intention to resume their place in the Establishment when such a measure of reform should be effected as would admit of their return, they continued to maintain their testimony on the ground they at first adopted, till they were driven from it by the deed of Assembly. Without relinquishing in any point the principles which they had avowed from the beginning, they now prosecuted with growing ardour and unrelaxing energy the course that belonged to them as an organised and independent body.

Attracted by the accounts he had heard of the Associate Presbytery, and deeply interested in some sermons of the Erskines which had come into his hands, the celebrated George Whitefield commenced a correspondence with the brothers, which speedily led to their invitation of Mr. W. to Scotland, to take part with them for a time in their labours. Their motive in this was not secta-

rian. "It would be unreasonable," says Ebenezer Erskine in a letter to Mr. Whitefield, "to propose or urge that you should incorporate as a member of our presbytery, and wholly embark in every branch of our reformation, unless the Father of lights were clearing your way thereunto, which we pray he may enlighten in his time so as you and we may see eye to eye. All intended by us at present is, that when you come to Scotland, your way may be such as not to strengthen the hands of our corrupt clergy and judicatories." * * * "We preach not upon the call and invitation of the ministers, but of the people, which I suppose is your own practice now in England; and should this also be your way when you come to Scotland, it could do the Associate Presbytery no manner of harm."

Whitefield came as invited; and though much caressed by the church party in Edinburgh, he refused co-operation with them till he had conferred with the Seceders. An interview took place between them at Dunfermline. It ended in a rupture. The authentic accounts of the conference are somewhat general and scanty; but it is easy to gather from the statements on both sides, that the Seceders required more of Whitefield than it was reasonable to expect. Their object was to make him a convert to the *jus divinum* of Presbyterian government, which might have been seen from the first to be a fruitless attempt upon one who avowed neutrality and almost indifference on points of the kind. It is equally plain, that the Associate brethren expected of Mr. Whitefield a closer identification with them in their public capacity, than was consistent with those views of his mission as an evangelist on which he had acted hitherto, and which he had unequivocally avowed in his correspondence with the Erskines. The mistake of the Seceders lay in expecting Whitefield's co-operation with them on such grounds; and in making overtures to him on the subject, unless they had been prepared to hold ministerial communion with him on a more general basis than the distinctive principles of their own Association. On the other hand it is equally plain, that on this point White-

field had no cause to complain of being taken at unawares, after the significant hints of Ebenezer Erskine's letter. We cannot however form a just estimate of any question of the kind as it affects the character of parties, by looking merely at its abstract merits. And if we take into account the spirit of the times, the reflection to which we are led is, that on the subject of toleration and the "communion of saints," the Seceders were not as yet in advance of their age. We can see nothing in a comparative view of the case, in which the church party had any cause to triumph. Whitefield was indeed cordially welcomed into various of their pulpits; but if the church courts connived at certain of their number who leant to this liberal policy, they were at the very time in the course of trampling on every vestige of popular rights in their public administration; and if the Seceders acted on narrow views in their rupture with the great preacher, it was in the very heat of their disinterested contendings for the liberties of God's heritage, and under the burden of obloquy and persecution for righteousness' sake.

Not to lose sight of Ebenezer Erskine's individual share in this affair with Mr. Whitefield, it is gratifying to have it to record, that his conduct in the Dunfermline conference was in harmony with the spirit of his previous correspondence with Mr. W., and such as to contrast favourably with the spirit of others, and to secure Whitefield's unabated personal esteem. "I wish all were like-minded with your honoured father and uncle; matters would not then be carried on with so high a hand."*

It is painful, however, to think that from this time forward all personal intercourse between Ebenezer Erskine and Mr. Whitefield appears to have ceased. Shortly after, Mr. W. being in Stirling, sat in the tent where Mr. E. was preaching, and at the close of the discourse rose to address the people. Mr. Erskine would not stay to hear him!† To such extent may good men forget themselves. White-

* Letter from Mr. W. to one of Mr. E.'s sons.

† M'Kerrow, vol. i. 207.

field's conduct from first to last, was in accordance with the resolution expressed in his letters to stand "neuter" on points of order and government, so that the disappointment of the Erskines and their friends arose, from no deception of his, but from their own too sanguine expectations.

Matters unhappily did not rest here. The "Cambuslang Work," and Mr. Whitefield's concern with it, were subjects of discussion on both sides; the friends of the church appealing to the revival as Heaven's owning of the church against the Seceders,—these in turn depreciating the movement and its promoters. On the part of some of the Associate brethren exceedingly rash and presumptuous things were said, for which the authors afterwards expressed their sorrow. Ebenezer Erskine took no such prominent part as others in the dispute; but that his sentiments in the main coincided with them, we know from the Act of the Associate Presbytery on the subject, which the best friends of their cause will be the last to defend. Mr. Erskine had no hand in framing the deed; but he was Moderator of Presbytery at the time of its appointment.

In the renewing of the Covenants by the Associate Presbytery, Mr. E. took an active part. He preached at the meeting held for this purpose at Stirling in December 1743, and read the bond which the Presbytery had previously adopted, to be sworn and subscribed by the members. By a subsequent act the Presbytery made the renewing of the covenants a term of ministerial and Christian communion,—an unwise and unwarranted rigour which not a few—Ebenezer Erskine among the number—saw cause afterwards to repent.

It was at this period of the Secession that the presbytery emitted their famous act concerning the doctrine of grace; Mr. Erskine being the senior member of the committee appointed to frame it. It was a document after his own heart. His zeal for truth found welcome utterance in the testimony borne anew, against prevalent errors from the time of Simson downwards. Already we have seen Mr. E.'s determined bearing in the Marrow controversy. Al-

though his position was not so prominent in the earlier controversy, his diary and discourses bear witness to the glowing zeal with which he cherished in his heart, and upheld in his ministrations, the divine honours of "Christ the Lord."

Mr. Erskine's loyal zeal in the rebellion of 1745 is well known. Animated by his example, the Seceders of Stirling took arms in support of the government, and were formed into a regiment for the defence of the town. Mr. Erskine's courage was not only ardent, but had an air of the chivalrous. "One night when the rebels were expected to make an attack on the town, he presented himself in the guard-room fully accoutred in the military garb of the times. Dr. John Anderson, late Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Glasgow, and Mr. John Burns, teacher, father of the Rev. Dr. Burns, Barony parish in that city, happened to be on guard the same night; and surprised to see the venerable clergyman in this attire, recommended to him to go home to his prayers as more suitable to his vocation. 'I am determined,' was his reply, 'to take the hazard of the night along with you, for the present crisis requires the *arms* as well as the *prayers* of all good subjects.'"*

This trial past, another came quickly. Our task relieves us of the painful duty of entering on "the breach." But in a Life of Ebenezer Erskine, we cannot avoid glancing at the disaster, although but for the purpose of learning to humble ourselves for the frailty of human nature; to adore the wisdom of God who made the wrath of man to praise him; and to acknowledge the inherent vitality of a cause which, to the disappointment of the vaticinations of hostile on-lookers, did not sink under the opprobrium of so grievous a rupture. Mr. E.'s views were those of the "Burgher" party, regarding the lawfulness of the disputed clause in the burghess oath. These views it is no part of ours either to condemn or to defend; but as marking the spirit of

* Life by Fraser, p. 439.

the man, let it be mentioned, that he did not indulge in asperity towards brethren who differed from him, and that he advocated the opinion that the point contested was one on which honest difference might exist, and mutual forbearance ought to be exercised. Amidst the alienations and separations that followed, he stayed himself on God, and hoped for good out of evil;—"Here is comfort that the great Manager of the house is looking on; he permits and overrules all these confusions and disorders for his own holy and wise ends for the trial of faith and patience, and to show his own skill in bringing order out of confusion; and when he has performed his whole work in Mount Sion and in Jerusalem, he will reign among his ancients gloriously."*

Mr. Moncrieff, professor of Divinity to the Associate Synod at the time of the disruption, having adopted the opposite views of the Burgess oath, the section of the Seceding body to whom Mr. Erskine belonged, appointed him their professor. The duties of this office he executed in 1748, and resigned the chair in 1749.

Years and infirmities were now increasing upon him. Fresh bereavements too occurred to weaken him in the way.

On the 15th March 1751, he lost his second wife; and his brother Ralph died on the 6th November 1752. "When the interesting intelligence of his dear brother's decease was communicated to him, he said with great emotion, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ and now he is first in glory." Amid all his bereavements and afflictions, he made Jehovah his confidence and hope. "Many of God's billows are going over me," says he in a letter to a friend, "yet still I hope the Lord will command his loving-kindness in the day-time, and his song shall be with me in the night."†

No longer able for the labours of the ministry, he had the happiness of seeing his nephew, Mr. James Erskine,

* Works, vol. ii. p. 349.

† Dr. Fraser.

ordained as his colleague in the commencement of 1752. Mr. E. was so well as to be able to preach on the occasion. But his remaining strength speedily gave way; though his good-will to his Master's service suffered no abatement. Within a few weeks of his death, to gratify the earnest wishes of his people, he went from his bed to the pulpit, and preached on the words of Job, ch. xix. 23. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," &c.

The following letter to his daughter Alice, wife of Rev. James Scott, Gateshall, was written at this period, and is the last memorial extant of his pen.

STIRLING, — 1753.

"MY DEAR ALICE,

"My nephew James read me your letter to him yesterday, which brought me under a new sympathy with you, on account of the death of your dear uncle Ralph, and the staggering condition of your father. According to the course of nature it was my turn to have gone off before him. But the will of the good and sovereign God has determined otherwise, and that I should tarry behind for a while in this weary wilderness. It seems I am not yet made meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of saints in light, but need to be more beaten in the wilderness with the hammer of affliction before I come to the upper temple and sanctuary. But good is the will of the Lord.

"As for the state of my health about which you appear so anxious, I bless the Lord I have no formed sickness; only I have borne, and am still so much afflicted with pain, that I am still unable to follow the work of the ministry. I am mostly confined to my bed. I sometimes get up, but in a little I am forced to return to my bed again through pain, which abates as to the severity of it whenever I get to bed, in so much that my tottering hand becomes steady, and both body and mind are more easy. This letter is a proof of what I say, for it is wrote in bed—leaning on my elbow. I could neither have written so much, or so well,

had I been sitting at the table. The Lord makes me to sing of mercy on this account, that my bed is made to ease me, and my couch to comfort me; nor am I, like poor Job, scared with dreams or terrified with visions. Many a time my meditations of Him are sweet in the silent watches of the night. Many, many a time, the Lord says, 'I am the Lord thy God;' and then follows, 'O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my God.' 'Thine am I, O David, and on thy side will I be, thou son of Jesse.'

"On Sabbath last, in the afternoon, as the people were very urgent to see and hear me, I went from my bed to the pulpit; and after preaching half an hour from these words, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth,' I returned from the pulpit to my bed again.—I begin to weary on my elbow.

"Your affectionate father,

"E. ERSKINE."

The closing scene we give in the words of Dr. Fraser. "His last sermon was literally preached from his bed to a company assembled in his room, where he baptized a child, after discoursing on a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, viz. Psalm xlviii. 14. 'This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our God even unto death.'

"His private conversation with relatives and other kind inquirers, during his last illness, was at once cheerful and edifying. He often expressed himself in language to this effect: 'I have always found my times of severe affliction my best times. Many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them—a good God, a good conscience, a good cause.' When one of his elders thus accosted him: 'Sir, you have given us many good advices; may I ask what you are now doing for your own soul?' 'I am just doing with it,' he replied, 'what I did forty years ago; I am resting on that word, "I am the Lord thy God."' Another friend, surprised at the serenity and

cheerfulness he possessed in the immediate view of death and eternity, put the question, 'Sir, are you not afraid of your sins?' 'Indeed no,' was his answer, 'ever since I knew Christ I have never thought highly of my frames and duties, nor am I *slavishly* afraid of my sins.'

"To another of his relations who came to see him, and began to comfort him thus: 'I hope you get now and then a *blink* to bear up your spirit under your affliction,'—he promptly returned this spirited reply: 'I know more of *words* than of *blinks*. Though he slay me yet will I trust in him. The covenant is my charter; and if it had not been for that blessed word, my hope and strength had perished from the Lord.' To his beloved children he unbosomed himself in the most endearing manner, mingling consolation with his dying counsels: 'Though I die, the Lord liveth. I have known more of God since I came to this bed, than through all my life.'

"During the night on which he finished his earthly career, Mrs. Fisher, having come from Glasgow to visit her dying father, was sitting in the apartment where he lay, and engaged in reading. Awakened from a slumber, he said, 'What book is that, my dear, you are reading?' 'It is your sermon, father,' she replied, 'on that text, "I am the Lord thy God."' 'O woman,' said he then, 'that is the best sermon ever I preached.' The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as well as to many of his hearers. A few minutes, after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his daughter to bring the table and candle near the bed; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, *he quietly breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer*, on the 2d of June 1754. Had he lived twenty days longer, he would have finished the seventy-fourth year of his age; and had he been spared three months more, he would have completed the fifty-first of his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmoak, and nearly twenty-three at Stirling."

As our narrative has been conducted with a view to bring

out the prominent features of Mr. Erskine both in his public and private capacity, and to vindicate his good name from charges which we deem uncharitable and unjust, we feel ourselves in a great measure relieved from the task of attempting in form a delineation of his character. We shall confine ourselves to a very few remarks.

It would be foolish to claim for Mr. E. a first place as a man of intellect or of genius; but we think it must be plain to every candid observer, that no man could have passed through the trying events which were crowded into his personal history, and accomplish what he did, whose mental endowments were not of a superior order. The originator of a great religious movement; a leader in important theological controversies; the vindicator of popular rights; the pulpit orator who thrilled the hearts of thousands; the debater who stood his ground in church courts, when numbers and authority, and the pride of place, conspired to browbeat and overbear him—the person in whom these things were realized—and such was Ebenezer Erskine,—must be admitted to have been in point of capacity no common man.

Many pronounce dogmatically on the talents of others, from some particular indication or single test, and consequently from a narrow view of the case on which they sit in judgment. In this way the mere *belles lettres* critic settles the question of a man's standing by the qualities of his style. Tried by this test alone, Mr. E. would not rank as he ought. His composition is often careless; his expressions quaint and homely; and especially, his diction on topics of experimental religion, has a familiarity and an unction which the fastidiousness of classical taste, the dry æsthetics of the dialectician, and the cold temperament of the mere professional ecclesiastic will regard as the verbiage of mediocrity, because the sentiment itself they contemn as a proof of weakness. To such tribunals of taste we do not allow that Ebenezer Erskine is amenable; it is not by such verdicts that we can consent he shall stand

or fall. We appeal from the criterion that deals with the rhetoric of words, to the test of sound doctrine, of doings and of facts.

Piety was the most conspicuous, as it was the crowning excellence of his character. Its influence was all-pervading. In the pulpit, and in the courts, and in the whole tenor of his conversation, a lively and habitual sense of divine things was seen. Far from that formality of profession which would confine religion, as it is emotional, to rare and special occasions, Mr. E.'s whole cast of thought and expression was devout. In "the manner of his communication," when pleading his cause before judicatories, where he was sure to be called fanatic for his godly simplicity, there was the same savour of spirituality which so thoroughly imbued his public ministrations. From these, and from his diary, we learn, that his spirit of piety was fed from the highest and most inspiring source,—“the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” “The glorious Emmanuel” was the constant theme of his meditations; his person and work he regarded as the substance and life of the gospel, and felt to be the “power of God,” for transforming the soul from glory to glory, and elevating it with holy joy. Of these things his private reflections on occasion of Professor Simson's second process, give striking proof of deep and delightful experience.

His moral courage was conspicuous, and no doubt was a main secret of his power and success. It is impossible to mark his course without recognising his earnest conscientious conviction, his straightforwardness of purpose, his readiness to suffer loss in pursuing the path of duty; and hence his fearlessness of man's frown in maintaining the law of his God. On the field of public controversy this element of his character was signally manifested; and of course in the more retired walks of pastoral duty he failed not to prove himself an instructor who rebuked with all authority. It was such qualities as these that took hold of the popular mind, and made his very presence commanding, rather than the dignity of his per-

sonal appearance, which, had it not been the mirror of a nobler grace within, would not have so suddenly subdued the passions of a rabble, as described in the following anecdote:—

“Soon after the commencement of the Secession, while the public mind was greatly agitated by the ecclesiastical occurrences then taking place, some highly applauding and others keenly reprobating the procedure of the Associate Presbytery, several inhabitants of a parish in the vicinity of Stirling (the parish of *Airth*, it is said) requested Mr. Erskine to come and preach to them, which he consented to do. A number of the parishioners, however, displeased at the request, after mutual consultation, determined to prevent the sermon. The friends of Mr. Erskine were equally zealous, and resolved that he should not be hindered. Both parties having assembled in great numbers, and having taken their measures by placing themselves opposite to one another, on the ground that lay between the house where the minister stopped, and the appointed place of meeting for worship, the hour arrived, and nothing short of a fierce conflict was immediately dreaded. Mr. Erskine, however, no sooner made his appearance than the turbulent passions of his enemies were completely allayed. He stepped forward with so cool and collected an air, and with so much composure and dignity, that an instantaneous impression was produced in his favour. As he walked betwixt the hostile ranks, the two parties seemed to rival each other in expressing their respect, and they speedily mingled their voices in one song of praise. The psalm which he gave out on that occasion was sufficiently appropriate—Psalm xxvii. 3.

‘Against me though an host encamp,
My heart yet fearless is,’ &c.” *

Of Mr. Erskine’s numerous children,—at least fifteen in number,—several died in infancy and in early childhood. His eldest son Ebenezer betook himself to a seafaring life,

* Life by Fraser.

and died abroad.—David gave proofs of precocious talent when prosecuting his studies at the University; but his nervous system became unhinged, and he never recovered vigour and decision sufficient for close application and public usefulness. His correspondence with his sister, Mrs. Scott, discovered pleasing traits of sprightliness and piety. He died at Edinburgh in 1800.—Jean, Mr. Erskine's eldest daughter, was married to the Rev. James Fisher, his well-known fellow-labourer and fellow-sufferer in the Secession struggle.—Another daughter, Margaret, was married to Mr. James Wardlaw of Dunfermline, but died early.—Anne, after residing for a time with her uncle Ralph, then a widower, was married to Mr. James Jeffray, bookseller, Stirling, whom she survived. She was a person of lively and pious disposition.—Alison, the youngest daughter, became the wife of the Rev. James Scott of Gateshall. She was a woman of strong character and of eminent piety; and lived to a venerable age. She died at Edinburgh in 1814.—Of Mr. E.'s children by his second wife little is known. Two sons, James and Alexander, died abroad. Mary is the only daughter of the second marriage who is known to have reached maturity. She had the privilege of waiting on her aged parent in his last illness, and survived him many years,—having died at Glasgow, unmarried, in 1786.

Mr. Erskine's labours as an author consisted principally in the publication of occasional sermons. His first appearance from the press was caused by an unprovoked and unmerited attack upon his doctrine by a brother whose hostile attempts in this way have already been adverted to. He was afterwards induced, by the solicitations of hearers, to give to the public from time to time discourses which had proved especially useful. Published thus occasionally and in a separate form, a collection was made of these discourses by his son-in-law, Mr. Fisher, after the author's death, and printed in four volumes; to these in the later editions of his works are added the contents of a fifth, which was edited by Mr. David Erskine, agreeably

to directions which he had received from his venerable parent.

The only other publication that is certainly known to be Mr. Erskine's, is a pamphlet on the rupture regarding the Burgess' Oath, entitled "The True State of the Question," &c. But his pen was employed conjunctly with others in various performances, which did good service to the church. His share in the framing of papers relative to the Marrow controversy is mentioned above. To what extent he took part in the documents issued at different times by the Associate body is not ascertained. Along with his brother Ralph, he was engaged in his old age in compiling the Synod's Catechism. The materials for this valuable work furnished by "Ebenezer, extended from the eighth to the twenty-eighth question, those by Ralph from the seventy-sixth to the ninety-fifth."*

The high estimation of his works by competent judges, and the happy influence they have had on the holiness and comfort of many, bear witness that, BEING DEAD, HE YET SPEAKETH.

* Dr. Fraser.

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

THE REV. WILLIAM WILSON, A.M.,

MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL, PERTH, PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY TO
THE ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY, AND ONE OF THE FOUNDERS
OF THE UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

BY JOHN EADIE, LL.D.

“For monuments made of wood are subject to be burnt; of glass, to be broken; of soft stone, to moulder; of marble and metal (if escaping the teeth of time), to be demolished by the hand of covetousness; so that, in my apprehension, the safest way to secure a memory from oblivion is (next to his own virtues) by committing the same in writing to posterity.”—THOMAS FULLER, 1662.



PREFATORIAL NOTE.

LIKE most ministers of his day, Mr. Wilson kept a diary, in which were punctually registered his own history and experience, interspersed with brief notices of such contemporaneous events as were of interest and importance. These papers had been carefully preserved among his descendants, though it would seem that, after the third generation of them had passed away, the short-hand characters which Mr. Wilson had employed could no longer be read. The Rev. Andrew Ferrier of Newarthill, his great grandson, after repeated experiments and failures, succeeded, however, during the autumn of 1829 in deciphering the venerable record. The same gentleman, from his intimate connection with various branches of Mr. Wilson's family, had also gradually collected a number of authentic anecdotes concerning his great grandsire's life and career. Possessed of such materials, Mr. Ferrier was immediately induced to publish a Memoir of Mr. Wilson,—in which these traditionary reminiscences were incorporated with extracts from the private journal. Such a publication was of good service to the church, as it embodied a large amount of valuable information which might soon have been lost beyond recovery. The main authority for the statements in the following pages is this printed diary; and out of it, verified by other papers, and illustrated by Mr. Wilson's own sermons and other extant works, has the present biography been constructed. Every reader will perceive our obligations to Dr. Ferrier,* and he has expressed to us his hearty acquiescence in the work we have undertaken. To pronounce any critical judgment on the merit of his volume will not be expected from us, nor need we point out how, in arrangement and combination, it materially differs from our own attempt. We have no higher aim than to give our churches such a truthful portraiture of a good, earnest, upright, and able man, as may qualify them to sympathize with his spirit, imitate his excellences, and appreciate his labours.

GLASGOW, CAMBRIDGE STREET,
March 1849.

* Dr. Ferrier is now pastor of a congregation in Upper Canada.



CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.—Pp. 95, 96.

CHAPTER II.

Wilson's parentage—Youth—Piety—Studies—Temptations and License.—Pp. 97—106.

CHAPTER III.

Period of Probation—Religious experience—Acceptability as a preacher—Opposition from Moderatism—Disappointment of the parish of Dairy—Call from Perth, and ordination.—Pp. 107—117.

CHAPTER IV.

Labours—Trials—Integrity and self-denial—Growth in grace—Ministerial success.—Pp. 118—127.

CHAPTER V.

Lawsuit abandoned—Personal and domestic incidents—Marriage—Repeated family bereavements—Comfort in God, and hope in Him who is our LIFE.—Pp. 128—134.

CHAPTER VI.

Ministry, earnest and faithful—Theology, sound and sanctified—Specimen of peroration—Conflict with deists in Perth—Synod sermon.—Pp. 135—144.

CHAPTER VII.

Corruption of the Church—E. Erskine's Synod sermon—Memorable 10th of October—Wilson's boldness in defending Erskine—His preparation of public papers—Suspension.—Pp. 145—163.

CHAPTER VIII.

Wilson's hopes of return to the Establishment at length abandoned—Peace of mind—Vindication of his character—Necessity of training young men for the ministry—Wise resolution of the Associate Presbytery—Unanimous choice of Wilson as their Professor—His peculiar qualifications for the responsible charge, and his success as a Teacher of Theology.—Pp. 164—170.

CHAPTER IX.

Seceding ministers libelled—Deposed—Scene of Wilson's expulsion—Secession vindicated—Meeting in the Glovers' Yard—Blessing and Wealth of the Glovers' Corporation—Wilson's health injured by open-air preaching—Debility—Last Sermon—Death—"His household after him."—171—183.

CHAPTER X.

Wilson's Works—Sermons, with illustrations of different styles—His Magnum Opus, the "Defence"—Its merits—Mr. Currie defeated, but solaced by a pecuniary gift—Wilson's character—Talent—Attainments—Energy—Spirit—Catholicity—Whitefield—His service to "his own generation by the will of God."—Pp. 184—210.

LIFE OF
THE
REV. WILLIAM WILSON.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

To offer an humble tribute to the memory of one who, in a period of deep degeneracy, “witnessed a good confession,” and to whom his Lord intrusted a “banner,” to be “displayed because of the truth,”—to teach the present generation what they owe to the men of a former age, who maintained the sole Headship of Christ in the midst of virulent scorn and hostility,—to show how God selects a servant, and adapts his studies, experience, and early labours, so as to prepare him for duty and nerve him for trial,—to deepen the assurance that error and intolerance only exhaust their efforts in vain against the cause of truth and freedom, is the object of the following biography.

A brief sketch of the life of one who, according to competent testimony, “had all the excellencies of both the Erskines, and excellencies peculiar to himself,” will be an interesting study to those who regard the “Secession” as an auspicious and memorable era in the history of the Church of Christ in Scotland. His position, indeed, has not been so conspicuous as that of his illustrious colleagues, nor has his fame been cherished with those hallowed recollections which have gathered round the Erskines. It was the

eminent task of Ebenezer Erskine to preach the sermon which hastened on the crisis, and the genius of the author of the "Gospel Sonnets" has won through its homely minstrelsy a wide renown; while Wilson was cut off "in his full strength," and left behind him few works of a practical and popular character. But from the commencement of the agitation, he cordially espoused the cause of liberty and evangelical doctrine, and identified himself with all the struggles of the protesting ministers. His influence among them was great; for, combining zeal with discretion, and firmness with forbearance, he possessed a temperament happily suited to the delicate circumstances in which he found himself frequently placed. His counsels guided and controlled the party with whom he acted, and his prudence united their energies with successful dexterity. He composed the majority of their formal pleadings and documents, and published the best defence of their procedure. While he lived there was harmony among the brethren in all their schemes and deliberations; and, perhaps, had he been spared a few years longer, the melancholy "Breach" might have been prevented, or greatly modified in its nature and results. Such, in fine, was the value placed on his learning and piety, such the confidence reposed in his talents and character, that he was unanimously chosen the first professor of divinity to the infant church. But his health speedily sunk under these accumulated labours; and he was the first, too, of the Four Fathers who left the scenes of toil and suffering for those of reward and glory. Wilson has therefore a special claim on the homage and gratitude both of our ministers and people; and this imperfect record of his life and times may afford gratification to those who at the distance of a century are reaping the reward of his honest and consistent attachment to those leading principles which characterize the faith and the constitution of the United Presbyterian Church.

CHAPTER II.

Wilson's parentage—Youth—Piety—Studies—Temptations—and License.

THE father of the Rev. William Wilson had owned a comfortable freehold near Kilbride in Lanarkshire, but during the reign of the second Charles he was dispossessed of his property and lands by the despotic government and ruthless hierarchy which ruled Scotland in those days with sword, faggot, and gibbet. Obligated to spend a dreary and homeless winter in the Moor of Mearns, Gilbert Wilson, proscribed and impoverished, fled at length to Holland, where so many victims of tyranny found a timely refuge. On returning from this exile at the Revolution, he united himself in marriage to Isabella Ramsay, daughter of a Mr. Ramsay of Shielhill, an estate of some value in Forfarshire. This lady had, however, been disinherited by her father, and virtually banished from his household, because she had renounced Episcopacy; but she had found a happy asylum with an aunt, who was wife to the sainted martyr of Stirling, James Guthrie. The subject of this memoir, the eldest child of Gilbert Wilson and Isabella Ramsay, was born in the Gallowgate of Glasgow, on Sabbath the 9th of November, 1690, and was named WILLIAM, in honour of the Prince of Orange. In the train of this illustrious prince, who had now ascended the British throne, Wilson senior had come back from his temporary sojourn in Holland. The son of such parents must have heard much from them in his earliest youth fitted to foster within him the views and principles which he afterwards so nobly defended. The memory of those wrongs which iniquitous laws had inflicted on his father, and of the cruel injury

done to his mother by her proud and heartless parent, nourished in his breast that hatred of oppression, that integrity of purpose, and that dauntless obedience to his own convictions, which his writings evince and his life exemplified.

After enjoying such a preliminary education as the circumstances of his family afforded—for the government had so far compensated his father as to give him a situation in the Customs at Greenock—young Wilson entered the university of Glasgow. We know not what was his early proficiency, or what rank he won among his fellow students. At the end of his curriculum, however, he obtained the degree of Master of Arts, an honour perhaps more at that day than at present a proof and reward of meritorious diligence and considerable attainment. As a student, and especially after he had formally entered on the study of theology, his exertions were both methodical and laborious. In striving to obtain fresh information, he forgot not previous lessons. His whole work, as a candidate for the ministry, was “sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” There dwelt within him a living principle of piety, which shed a hallowing influence over his preparatory training and pursuits. He did all “in the name of Christ.” Classics and philosophy were to him only inferior accomplishments. His end was to win souls, and to that end everything was subordinated. Whatever sphere of mental discipline was deemed likely to give him solidity of thought, variety of illustration, facility in argument, or power of address, that he cultivated with unwearying industry, and in a spirit of humble dependence on Him who “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.” His aim was to be “a scribe, instructed unto the kingdom of heaven;” and therefore, the period of his youth spent at college and hall was no pastime. He believed that the work of the ministry demanded all the preparation which he could secure, was worthy of all the talent he possessed, and all the assiduous toil and ardent prayer by which his original powers might be developed and matured. With a mind so tutored and

solemnized, so earnest to qualify itself for serving that Master to whose sacred work he had been so frequently offered in parental dedication, so keenly alive to the necessity of present improvement, and the responsibilities of future office, we wonder not to see him note down, for his private guidance, the following division of his time :—

“ Rise at six in the morning, in summer at five.

‘Time divided:’

From rising till nine—Prayer and Scripture reading.

From nine to eleven—Natural Philosophy and Biblical Criticism.

From eleven to twelve—Latin.

From twelve to two—Hebrew and Greek.

From two to five or seven—Systematic Theology.

From six to seven—History.

From seven to nine—Common-place Book.

The rest in prayer.

“ Prayer also at ten,¹¹ at two, and at six, at lying down and rising up; read three chapters of the Bible every day; read through the Hebrew Scriptures, three chapters a-day.

“ Glasgow, 2d June, 1710.” *

About the period at which Wilson entered college, or in 1705, his mother died; and his father survived her only six years. These bereavements naturally produced a deep impression on the mind of the pious orphan. The love of his mother, especially, was the means of cherishing his youthful piety. Her prayers had often been breathed over him,—“the son of her vows;” her instructions had early furnished his mind with the “first principles of the oracles of God;” and while she had folded him to her bosom, she had at the same time lent him to the Lord. A mother’s influence often produces an impression, which, received in infancy and nursed in youth, forms the character and decides the destiny. The memory of his mother quickened him in his studies, and mingled itself with many of his religious exercises. Feeling devoutly grateful for such a mother, his tender heart bowed under its bereavement without a murmur; and, while the tear of filial affection was dropt over her ashes, his prayer was to profit by the trying dis-

* From one of Mr. Wilson’s MSS.

pensation. His father being also in a few years removed, the stripling was thrown on the care of Him who is the "Father of the fatherless." But his faith in God preserved him from that feeling of utter desolation, which is so often felt in such circumstances. From his parents' grave he looked up to heaven and cried, "my Father, thou art the guide of my youth!" Over their sepulchre he took their God to be his God; pledged himself to walk in their steps, and to follow out their ardent wishes in preparing himself for that office which they had regarded as the most momentous and honourable under heaven. And, as from this period he felt himself sustained by a firmer confidence in God, and was conscious of being urged on by nobler impulses and purer aspirations in the prosecution of his studies, he realised the truth and pathos of the psalmist's statement, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." The words of the Christian poet aptly describe his sensations and prospects—

"My boast is not, that I derive my birth
From loins enthroned, and sovereigns of the earth,
But higher far my proud pretensions rise—
The son of parents passed into the skies."

But new temptations presented themselves. His uncle now possessed the estate of Shielhill, and Wilson was his legal heir. His mother's firmness had already been tried, but she yielded not. Mrs. Wilson had visited her brother after her father's death, and was accompanied by her son, now twelve years of age. The laird questioned her as to her intentions with regard to his nephew; when she honestly replied, that her highest aim was to see him a Presbyterian minister. He promised to leave the property to him, if his connection with the Church of Scotland were dissolved; and if his mother would train him in the Episcopal faith and Jacobite politics of her family. Her reply was a simple and decided refusal, while her enraged brother scornfully shouted with an oath,—"That no Presbyterian should ever heir his lands." Wilson lived for some months with the same gentleman after his parents' decease,

and toward the conclusion of his course in theology. His uncle was still reluctant to leave the estate to more distant relatives; and the youth was again plied with arguments and threats; was promised all if he would qualify for orders in the Episcopal communion; and menaced with utter exclusion if he persisted in his present purpose. But "none of these things moved" him—either to feign a modified compliance, or hold out any hope of ultimate concession. He would not receive the inheritance on such a condition as his uncle proposed. The prospect of being a landed proprietor did not dazzle his imagination, or fetter his conscience. The dread of his relative's displeasure did not alarm him. He rejected his uncle's terms, and left Shielhill to finish his studies and become a licentiate in the Church of Scotland. The uncle did not relent. He kept his word,—for it had been confirmed with Herod's imprecation,—and bequeathed his lands to other branches of the family. To a young man left in Wilson's destitute circumstances, succession to such an inheritance was no ordinary inducement. But he had counted the cost. His principles were too precious to be lightly given up,—were adopted too deliberately to be easily shaken,—and were endeared by too many hallowed reminiscences to be carelessly exchanged for a few fields or woods, an elegant mansion, or the honours and station of a rural squire. The poor and friendless youth chose rather "to suffer affliction with the people of God." Thus had he been tried and approved ere he entered the service of the Church.

The spirit in which Wilson studied theology was a "right spirit." He had indeed "feared the Lord from his youth;" and having very early given himself to the Lord, he also gave himself to the Church "by the will of God." He was not more than fourteen years of age when he made this public profession of his faith. Religion was to him "the one thing needful." It was his life. From his first consciousness of its influence, and recognition of its claims, it directed his thoughts, animated his movements,

and inspired his energies. It gave a tone to all his engagements. It did not present itself to his mind as an intellectual abstraction, or dwell within him as a lifeless assemblage of inert and powerless opinions. He did "all in the name of Christ." When he was indeed a young disciple, he had entered into a very minute and laboured analysis of his feelings and convictions. Often did he sit in judgment on his state; and his decisions are generally tinged with severity against himself. He felt that life and death hung in the balance,—and in God's sight he attempted to ascertain his spiritual condition. In forming such an estimate, he looked not to the standard of current Christianity around him, but to the unerring verdict of the divine law. His inquiries into his religious views and feelings comprised an examination of mind and heart, conscience and daily life,—united to a review and comparison of past experiences, and wound up with earnest resolutions to attain a higher spirituality, and a more elevated tone of thought and feeling in time to come. Nothing he dreaded more than being the dupe of any lurking bias, or the victim of any secret process of self-satisfaction. The portions of his diary, which detail the frequency and fidelity of these secret exercises, afford evidence that they were occasionally conducted in a morbid spirit. The sudden and repeated variations which he notes in his spiritual moods—the rapid alternations of light and gloom, of gladness and perplexity, which he so quaintly describes as characterising his changing "frames," seem to have proceeded in part from the very modes of self-inspection in which he indulged, and to have been created, or at least greatly multiplied, by the fitful musings of a juvenile fancy on the momentous themes of salvation and eternity. He seems also to have overlooked many of those physical causes, which often cloud the spirits, and not to have given its due weight to the combined influence of a vast number of external circumstances, which tend insensibly to elevate or depress the susceptible heart of the young, and of such as are naturally under the

guidance of warm impulse and emotion. That peculiar habit which led Wilson and so many others of that period to trace so accurately the succession of religious phases within them, might have been corrected by looking less into themselves, and more beyond themselves, to the faithful Redeemer,—by ceasing to subject their own mutable souls to a keen and tremulous scrutiny, for the purpose of fixing their gaze oftener and more steadfastly on the great propitiation. From within there arises despondency; from above there descend strength and tranquillity. “*THOU wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.*”

When Wilson began the study of divinity, he formally gave himself to God. He adopted the method of a written dedication, and “subscribed with his hand unto the Lord.” Nor was this a solitary instance of pious consecration. He often renewed it, and so it became a “covenant not to be forgotten.” The following is a copy of one out of many forms used by him, and preserved among his papers.

“I, William Wilson, do declare that my coming and now entering on the study of theology, is (or, at least, the desire of my soul is that it should be) for God’s glory and the good of souls; and that I now, in his name and strength, desire to betake myself to that study (unless, in some manner, he thinks fit to call me otherwise). And, therefore, I do beg that he may be pleased to give me capacity, memory, and other qualifications for this end; and make good his promises of assisting me by his grace.

“I pray that God may, out of the depths of his goodness, give me prudence and resolution to apply my mind to my study, that I may not linger, but come through with credit and success; and, for his name’s sake, that he may honour me to be an instrument of glory to him in my body and soul. And I do promise, in his strength, to spend my time better than hitherto, and not to trifle the same away, but to lay it out for God, in my day and generation, improving it for his glory. And, I do bless him, who hath, in any manner, determined my mind to the

great study of theology, and bless him I have opportunity for the same, and plead that he may be forthcoming with his Spirit, that I may apply my mind to my studies.

“I do devote myself, with all my heart, to serve God in the gospel of his Son, in my day and generation; and I desire to guard against seeking myself in this most solemn work, and pray for pardon, through the blood of Christ, for all my past sins, and to be kept from wavering in my studies; and,—in hope of God’s gracious assistance in promoting my end, and giving all that is necessary for the study,—I do subscribe all this with my own hand, this 1st day of November, 1708,—the dreadful God being witness,—

“WILLIAM WILSON.”

Mr. Wilson’s religious exercises were always of a solemn, interesting, and decided character,—and he often wrote down for his own improvement, his peculiar spiritual wants, as well as the blessings which he longed to possess. Especially as he was in the habit of attending “communion” in Glasgow and its vicinity, did he note his religious desires, along with the special thoughts and hopes which he wished to occupy his mind on those propitious occasions. These he terms his “errands”—the definite aspirations of his soul—which he prayed to be realised during the services of a sacramental Sabbath. To show the fervour of his longings, and the singleness of his purpose in enjoying and improving the means of grace, the following specimen of these “errands” may suffice:—

“I desire, in commemorating the death of Christ,

“1st. To get a lively sense of God upon my soul, that I may walk with God, and may win to clear and distinct uptaking of God, especially in prayer.

“2d. To get a more holy and heavenly frame of spirit.

“3d. To get freedom from my spiritual enemies; and that God would make himself known in the breaking of bread.

“4th. To get a strengthening meal, for supporting and establishing my soul.

“ 5th. To renew the covenant, and set the seal to it again.

“ 6th. To get sin pardoned and subdued.

“ 7th. To get clearness about going to the North.

“ 8th. To get more concern for the glory of Christ.

“ In a word, I desire to meet with Christ, to get true faith made up in him, pollutions cured, and all needful blessings from him.

“ Also all the errands drawn up for Mearns communion, on the 26th of June 1709.”

The mind so disciplined and the heart so seriously exercised were well prepared to preach the gospel. He who has received salvation is alone qualified to impart its blessings to others. The more experience in the divine life the student has enjoyed, the more fitted is the preacher to exhibit Christ and his gifts, to press sinners to come to a Saviour, and to instruct and edify the people of God. To be Christ's is the best preparation for preaching Christ. He who has accepted the invitation can repeat the welcome he has enjoyed ;—“ Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit : then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee.”

The Presbytery of Glasgow, within whose bounds Mr. Wilson resided, seem to have had no liking to this young aspirant to the ministry. The evil genius of Professor Simson swayed them. This man, who occupied the chair of theology in the University, appears to have been prone to indulge in rash speculations and pernicious subtleties,—which at length assumed the chilling aspects of Socinian error.* There seems to have been in the west of Scotland also a spirit of hostility to evangelical religion, with a malignant effort to discourage all manifestations of its

* Simson, on reading Pictet's Theology with his students, said, that when Christ was called *summus Deus*, (supreme God,) the expression was to be taken *cum grano salis*—with considerable modification. Such an application of the Latin proverb was as repugnant to good taste as to sound divinity.

power and longings in candidates for the pulpit. It amazes us to read that any presbytery should frown upon a youth for no other seeming reason, than his adherence to evangelical principles, his attachment to sound theology, and to those principles and politics* which so many reckoned essential to the real prosperity of the Church of Scotland. But Providence unexpectedly came to the aid of the persecuted student. He had been accidentally brought into contact with some ministers of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, by whom he was warmly encouraged, and at length was invited to apply for license among themselves. The usual trials prescribed on such occasions were satisfactorily performed by him, and at length he was licensed to preach the gospel on the 23d of September 1713. Ralph Erskine being moderator, delivered a suitable address to the licentiate, and enjoined him to depend on God and seek his glory. Two days afterwards Mr. Wilson preached his first public sermon in Saline, at the week-day exercise which Mr. Plenderleith, the pious and useful incumbent, had established in the parish church.

* As for example, in his views of the Oath of Abjuration.

CHAPTER III.

Period of Probation—Religious experience—Acceptability as a preacher
—Opposition from Moderatism—Disappointment of the parish of Dalry
—Call from Perth, and ordination.

ENTERING now on a new sphere of labour, the probationer again gave himself to great "searchings of heart." The work which he had assumed was momentous and responsible. No office on earth can be compared to it in honour and dignity. It deals with unchanging truth and immortal souls, and its results stretch into eternity. It is charged with the salvation of a perishing world, and it beseeches men "in Christ's stead." It speaks in love, but it must be faithful to its awful commission. To veil the mouth of the pit, or throw a shading cloud over the burning lake, is treachery and cowardice in their most awful forms. That office is indeed important which studies the constitution of man, in order to ascertain his diseases and remove them, and so be instrumental in prolonging his life, confirming his health, and increasing his enjoyment; but the physician's duty refers only to the body which must die, and to the life that now is, and speedily passes away. That office is important which educates the ignorant, and trains the wayward, which reclaims the outcast and restores the criminal, and labours to promote the interests of science and civilization; but the province of such philanthropy is bounded by the present horizon, takes charge of interests referring rather to the mind than to the soul, and seeks the social advancement and intellectual progress of the human race, during the brief and uncertain period of their earthly sojourn. That

office is important which unfolds the resources of a nation, secures to them the blessings of a free and patriotic government, under which peace is maintained and commerce is diffused by sound policy and sagacious treaties ; but the enterprise of the statesman busies itself with those created relations which belong only to earth, and not with those spiritual destinies which are connected with the "household of God." The office of the Christian ministry is more momentous than all of them. It treats of the councils of eternity and immortal well-being of man. It illustrates the means by which he is saved from wrath and recovered from impurity. It tells him how he may obtain true dignity and usefulness, and how he may arrive at the possession of a peace so pure and rapturous as to be a foretasting of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. What in other spheres is enthusiasm, is in ours but sobriety,—"Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God ; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." "Who is sufficient for these things?" The pressure of responsibility is truly overwhelming. The heart is apt to faint beneath the load, or relinquish the task in despair, and it is only saved from dependency by the assurance that Christ gives no command to which he does not annex a cheering promise, and enforces no duty for the performance of which he does not impart sufficient grace.

Such trains of meditation occupied Mr. Wilson's mind at the commencement of that career, for which all his previous studies had been but a conscientious preparation. His thoughts and longings took the following shape, as they found a place in his diary. He had been engaged only one Sabbath in preaching, when, in the retirement of his closet, he gave utterance under deep impression to this interesting soliloquy :—

"I. What I should do before preaching.

"1st. When called to preach, go to the Lord by prayer, imploring his counsel and presence, and seeking of him if he has any errand to send, that he may send thee.

"2d. When time is allowed to prepare for preaching,

never neglect preparation-work, but be diligent in meditation and prayer, seeking a word from the Lord.

“3d. If Providence order it so, that you are called unexpectedly to preach, without having any time to prepare by studying; and, if it be so ordered, that the Lord’s work would be marred wert thou not to preach, never refuse to preach,—never stand: go in the name and strength of the Lord,—he has thus called thee.

“4th. Whatever preparation you may have for preaching, never lippen to your preparation.

“5th. Never content yourself in your preparation, but deliver what the Lord gives in the time of delivery, though you had no thought of it before.

“6th. Seek always a text from the Lord, when the Lord sends thee an errand, and seek, too, what he would have thee to say. Seek explanation and application from the Lord himself. Seek the unction of the Spirit from God himself.

“7th. Depending upon the Lord for method and matter, seek that he may direct thy mind to conceive, and thy hand to write.

“8th. Let the glory of God, and the honour of Christ, be still before thee. Seek not yourself, but Christ. Seek not your own things, but the things of others, especially the good of immortal souls.

“II. What I should do when going to the pulpit.

“1st. Go with a holy awe and dread of God,—a dread lest God leave thee for thy great unworthiness and vileness.

“2d. Go, depending on the Lord Jesus, for strength and for support.

“3d. Labour to have a weight upon your spirit, and a sense and fulness upon your own mind of the truths you are to deliver to others.

“4th. Regard not men, nor the presence of men. This is a snare in itself, and is very unbecoming a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let there be an awe and dread of God upon thy spirit, swallowing up the fear of man.

“5th. Seek not self; fight against self: beware lest this

root of bitterness springing up trouble you, provoke the Lord to desert you, and to withdraw his countenance. This is the thing I have most reason to fight against. It is that which may do much harm, if it prevail; and it is that which besets me most.

“6th. Beware of pride, and being lifted up with thy gifts;—doting too much on these, or lippening to these.

“7th. In the pulpit, let your soul only be fixed on the Lord Jesus Christ, as appearing and standing for him, as having nothing in yourself, but standing in need of all from him.

“8th. Deliver the truth of God, as the very truth of God, and not as the word of man.

“9th. Conceal not the Lord’s righteousness in the great congregation. Conceal none of the truths of Christ that come in your way to deliver. Let not the fear of men overawe thee, or keep thee from speaking the truths of Christ.

“10th. Be much in ejaculatory prayer, when in the pulpit, both for yourself, and for the hearers.

“11th. Study a grave and solid way of delivering the Lord’s truths, that they may have weight with others; and seek this of and from the Lord himself.

“III. What I should do when I come from the pulpit.

“1st. Beware of being puffed up if thou hast been helped. This may provoke the Lord to withdraw from thee again. Beware of lippening to, boasting of, or depending on, thy being helped.

“2d. Inquire into your carriage into the pulpit, and your frame in the pulpit. Ask yourself in what manner you delivered the Lord’s truths, and what you delivered.

“3d. Pray for success and a blessing on what you have delivered.

“4th. Be thankful for what you have gotten in public, and mourn for shortcomings.

“5th. Take heed unto thyself, and unto thy doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

We should indeed be greatly disappointed if duty so

auspiciously commenced were not well performed. The preaching of a man who had subjected his soul to this secret and salutary discipline, must have been faithful and earnest — no slovenly formality, no showy and heartless exhibition of ability and rhetoric. To preach for the mere sake of applause, or for the purpose of creating admiration at his intellectual acuteness, or imaginative pictures, was a species of vanity that never could be laid to his charge. Baptized with the Holy Ghost, he spoke with solemnity and unction on the things of the great salvation. There is no doubt that his preaching must have improved with age and experience. But even in his youth, and before he was ordained to a pastoral charge, his sermons seem to have been free from those juvenile excrescences which often characterise first appearances in the pulpit. Though he was a young man, his mind was ripe, and his piety matured, while his whole deportment was marked by a staid solemnity. We can easily understand why in later years his discourses were so acceptable to persons, who relished a sermon in proportion to the spirituality of its tone, and the rich fulness of evangelical truth which it contained. Our anticipations are therefore gratified when we find Ralph Erskine noting in his private record,—“I was quickened and refreshed in the time of Mr. Wilson’s sermon. I heard with pleasure and joy, without weariness, and with much application.” Mr. Brown of Haddington too, whose testimony no one will undervalue, has declared,—“Mr. Wilson was a man of great fervour, and frequent in wrestling with God; a man that, together with his learning, evidenced much prudence and moderation; and who, in preaching, evidenced the greatest concern, heavenliness, mildness, and majesty, that ever I heard. I can recollect that when sitting on the Brae of Abernethy hearing him, I got more insight into that marrow of the gospel ‘*my God,*’ than ever I got before or since.”

But under the baneful influence of patronage, neither talent nor piety could ensure a speedy settlement to a probationer in the Church of Scotland. The patron at that

period had unlimited power,—and gratified his own caprice without respect to the edification of the people. Unless a young man found means of ingratiating himself with those parochial “lords over God’s heritage,” or some interested friend recommended him to their favourable regards, all spheres of public usefulness were closed against him. The autocrat laid his hand upon the pulpit, and none were allowed to enter but his own creatures or nominees. Sad intolerance, insolent oppression,—when the man of acres felt him endowed with the right to judge for the whole people of a parish, and expected them to succumb without a murmur to his haughty dictation, even when one without mind or character, piety or acceptability, was summarily thrust upon them as their spiritual teacher. The licentiate, whose father was neither factor nor farmer on some estate—who might have never been so lucky as to be received as tutor into a nobleman’s household—who could not fawn upon manorial greatness, or bring himself under a pledged betrothment to some poor and distant relative, who ranked herself as niece or cousin of the squire—such a candidate for the ministry might weary himself with labours, only to pine away under the sickness of “hope deferred.” It was rarely that unaided goodness could secure a field of labour. In the case of Mr. Wilson, the enmity of moderatism so far defeated itself. The presbytery of Glasgow refused to license him; and yet, when licensed by the presbytery of Dunfermline, his proficiency, zeal, and pious ardour gave him immediate popularity. He had been brought into some notoriety too by his appearance as a witness in the process against Professor Simson. The evidence of a student so faithful, so diligent, so trustworthy and orthodox as Wilson, must have deeply galled the enemies of evangelical truth, and friends of a cold and supine ministry.* Accordingly, we

* Professor Simson was so convinced of his accurate knowledge of sound doctrine, and of his cordial attachment to it at all hazards, that he expressly excepted against Wilson as a witness, and his testimony was accordingly not received.

find that the parish of Dalry in Ayrshire, learning by rumour of Mr. Wilson's gifts, longed to hear him preach in their vacant pulpit. He came to them, in accordance with the wish of the patron, which had been expressed in a letter to the synod of Glasgow and Ayr in October 1715. The people of Dalry were greatly edified, and expressed a fervent anxiety that he should be their pastor. But Dalry was too near Glasgow,—the influence of Professor Simson was paramount in the presbytery of Irvine. They were alarmed at a man of Wilson's known sentiments being located among them; for Simson had assured them, that if this young probationer were settled in Dalry, the people would flock to him in such crowds, that the neighbouring churches would be left without an audience. "The presbytery," says Mr. Wilson in his diary, in reference to his proposed settlement in Dalry, "care not much for it, fearing I may be of different principles." "My opposition to Professor Simson," he adds, "is at the bottom of all." But he bore the disappointment patiently—looking in faith to the supreme Disposer of events,—“desiring,” as he adds, “to put a blank in the Lord's hand, and to submit to his will and way.”

The parish of Dalry was thus robbed of its choice, the clergy being the prime instruments in thwarting its laudable desires. But the parishioners continued to cherish a warm attachment to the object of their choice. Long after this period, in the year 1736, and after the Secession had originated, Mr. Wilson, in the course of a tour through the west of Scotland, preached in Dalry. An immense crowd collected around him. He preached from a tent to the vast assemblage. The patron was startled at the concourse, as he was riding homeward from the parish church, and on learning its nature, drew near and heard the conclusion of the discourse. Mr. Fisher of Glasgow was along with Mr. Wilson, and both were invited to breakfast with the patron on the following morning. According to the report of one of the company, the sister of the entertainer, the conversation was animated and interesting, and of

course turning frequently on recent events and discussions in the Church of Scotland. "Yet," she said, "she had observed that any argument they had was conducted chiefly between her brother and the little man, (meaning Mr. Fisher,) and that when they seemed to be at any loss about facts, or to have any difficulty to solve, or to be of different sentiments, the matter was referred to the big man, (meaning Mr. Wilson,) to whose judgment they paid the greatest deference, and who acted the part of an umpire between them, and that generally both acquiesced in his opinion." It is added, that the patron's chaplain or tutor, on being warned of the coming of two Seceders, absconded and prolonged his absence, on what pretext we know not, till both gentlemen had taken their departure. This expectant was wise in his own generation,—if he sympathised with the Secession, he abstained from showing it. It might have lost him a presentation, or cast him under suspicion; and if he was a keen supporter of the Assembly, he consulted his safety in shrinking from its vindication in the presence of men who had been the victims of its jealousy and oppression.

The lamentable condition of the Church of Scotland at that time is almost incredible. The treatment of Mr. Wilson was but a specimen of its tyrannous hostility to evangelical truth. The people asked "bread," they received a "stone." The gospel, in its freeness and purity, was denied them. Their rights were torn from them, and their petitions for redress were either scorned as the ravings of a weak fanaticism, or scowled upon as the proofs of political disaffection. The General Assembly upheld patronage and condemned the "Marrow" with the same sturdy vehemence. The people of Scotland were tantalized with a negative gospel, and fettered with parliamentary enactments. The Assembly poisoned their faith, wrested away their privileges, and bade its bondmen feed on a theology mean and meagre as "the husks which the swine did eat." No wonder that resistance on the part of the early Seceders was so popular. Thousands were prepared to leave a

church, which openly stigmatized the "doctrines of grace," and branded its members with a degrading vassalage. They were ready to depart from Babylon,—from a community whose office-bearers fed themselves, and not the flock, and over whom the appeal of the old prophet was repeated by many a sorrowing, many an indignant heart—"Ye eat the fat and ye clothe you with the wool, but ye feed not the flock; the diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost, but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them."* So felt the parish of Dalry. It writhed under the galling burden and appealed to the synod, but it felt itself to be only "kicking against the pricks." The majority of the courts were reckless in their contempt of the people and their claims, and laughed at the fretted and chagrined petitioners. Moderatism was in the ascendant, and beneath its chilling shade piety and freedom pined away and died.

But the Master had a sphere of work for his trained disciple. A door of usefulness was opened at Perth. Sojourning for a brief period at Pitcaithley, to drink of its mineral waters, for the confirmation of his health, Wilson happened to preach in Perth, and, according to his own testimony, he preached "with much enlargement." His sermons produced a deep sensation, and excited the people to create a third charge, that the youthful evangelist might fill it. His call was unanimous, and the striking and unusual circumstances attending it induced him at once to accept it. The usual trials were assigned him, in all of which he acquitted himself to the satisfaction of the presbytery, and on the 1st of November 1716 was he solemnly ordained as third minister in the city of Perth. With what solemnity of feeling he refers to this epoch of his life! To him it was a momentous crisis,—the day on which

* Ezekiel xxxiv. 3, 4.

his imagination had long been fixed, and his prayerful anticipations had often been directed. As it drew near, his heart mused in secret, and sought anew to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Again was he seriously urgent as to his own interest in Christ, and his decided call to take the oversight of souls. So he braced and tightened up his spirit for its arduous vocation. On the evening preceding the day of his ordination, one might have seen him in the hallowed secrecy of his retirement,—alone and in the felt presence of God, giving utterance to these honest, precious, and appropriate meditations, and as he noted them in his diary, his brow relaxed, and his countenance brightened up, while a tear of joyous satisfaction trembled in his eye and fell upon the paper,—the seal of his sincerity and the witness and fruit of that relief which his self-examined bosom experienced.

“31st October, 1716.—This day I set myself to the inquiries, and to seek preparation for the solemn work of tomorrow.

“*Question* 1st. Am I interested in Christ?

“*Answer.* I have great work before me, but, alas! I am very unfit for it, and need more grace from Christ to engage in it aright. Oh, for a day of power. I cannot say that I want the grace of Christ altogether. I think he has done good to my soul. He has proved and helped me. He has determined my soul to make choice of him for my portion,—for my all,—for my righteousness, and strength, and glory,—and I will say of the Lord, he is my God.

“*Question* 2d. Have I a call to Perth?

“*Answer.* On this subject I find the following things:—

“1st. That the door was shut upon me in Dalry. Though the people were for it, yet the presbytery opposed it. I cannot take the language of this Providence to be any other than this,—that the Lord has no service for me there.

“2d. I find the call from Perth unanimous; all the godly desiring it, and praying for it. I therefore cannot stand out against it, lest I should fight against the call of God.

“3d. I have had no hand in this ^{guir}ca. I have been most passive in it. It has pursued me, when I fled from it.

“4th. It is a quiet and orderly gospel call,—free of the encumbrances which are very common in our day,—no presentation from a patron, or anything of this kind.

“5th. The people of Perth could never fix upon any, till they fixed upon me.

“6th. This day I have surrendered myself to the service of Christ in Perth, though not with the liberty and freedom that I would fain have. But, all these things being put together, I cannot say but that the movement is of the Lord. Oh! that he may come and take service of my hand in Perth, and that I may see a remnant brought unto him.

“7th. I must remark, that my education and turn of mind seem to be fitted for a public place, such as Perth. I was brought up in a public place. I cannot live in a solitary place without prejudice to my health: and my temper and habits require a public place to stir up the gift that is in me. O Lord, give me wisdom from above, furniture for the great work before me, and enable me to be diligent and faithful in discharging the solemn duties of the ministry.

“To-morrow is the day of my ordination. It is Mr. Black who is to preach the ordination sermon. O Lord, help thy servant, and help me.”

What candour, integrity, and piety characterise such an ingenuous revelation of Mr. Wilson’s feelings and prospects!

CHAPTER IV.

Labours—Trials—Integrity and self-denial—Growth in grace—Ministerial success.

As a settled pastor, Mr. Wilson's duties were now many and onerous, and he set himself to them with resolute vigour, and humble dependence on the grace of God. His first sermon was an earnest of his future ministry,—of its point, precision, and evangelical oneness of aim,—and was founded on the text, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Nor can we suppose that, as a pastor, he was remiss in any duties which belong to household ministrations,—or, indeed, to any department of labour recognised by him who would be "a workman needing not to be ashamed," and whose highest ambition is to make "full proof" of his ministry. Such fruits cannot in ordinary cases appear at once: it would be wrong to expect them,—the blade precedes the ear.

But the grace of God does not work miracles, nor exempt its possessor from either the laws that govern or the frailties which cling to his mental and physical nature. The first year of a minister's life in a settled charge is specially trying. The great business to which he has solemnly given himself, and to which he has been formally set apart, is begun, and he earnestly covets to commence under favourable and auspicious impressions. In the midst of novel and multiplied labours, he learns dependence upon God in a form and with a depth he had not felt before. The energies of mind, the powers of body, the aspirations of piety, are concentrated on the enterprise. Materials of thought laid up in past years are

brought into eager requisition. Sanguine anticipations of unrivalled success are gradually lowered, and the young pastor is effectually trained "not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." The exhaustion of daily toil in preparing for the pulpit, and the recurring experiences and conscious failures of the speaker in it, soon lead one no longer to overrate his abilities or his powers of oratory. And many things concur in making this period of a pastor's labours a crisis in his history. The desire to *benefit* the people absorbs the wish to please, and the sermon is composed without any such minor impurities of motive and hopes, as are insensibly blended with the studies and public appearances of one who officiates in a vacancy. An awful responsibility weighs upon the heart, and fills it occasionally with unutterable tremors. The prospect of the coming Sabbath dawning upon the mind, mingling with the evening reminiscences of a Lord's day not yet concluded, —yea, and haunting the spirit with mystic menace through all the hours of the intervening week ; preparation for its services begun in idea, if not in act, while those of its predecessor are scarcely finished, and continued for six days with perpetual anxiety and chequered success ; the torment produced by the want of leisure to elaborate the manuscript, so as to bring thoughts into elegant and rythmical expression ; the delicious agony with which some half formed idea is held, or the dim sketch of some figure is seized ; the constant attempt to generalize a very brief experience so as to lay down fixed principles of action for guidance in future years ; the painful effort to know and to be able to recognise all the members of the flock, and gather somewhat of their character and history ; the visit of consolation to the afflicted in their anguish, the poor in their destitution, the mourners in their solitude, or to the spiritually distressed in their gloom and sorrow ; the word of reproof to the wanderer, and of discipline upon the refractory, mingled with those sensations of melancholy disappointment which such painful incidents originate ;—all these elements of labour and obligation combined, and

laid at once upon the youthful minister, yet tender and untried, are more than enough to overpower him; and often, in the earlier epoch of the pastorate, do they fret and fatigue the spirit, so that it sinks into exhaustion and lassitude. Such severe probation also weakens the nervous system by the continuous strain and pressure upon it, excites or aggravates all constitutional debilities—especially if there be any tendency to those ills which are often borne “for the stomach’s sake,” and the “frequent infirmities” to which studious and sedentary life is generally exposed. But years and training bring new faculties; and while the duties vary not, the soul, in God’s grace, acquires energy to meet them, ay and to relish them. To all these mental agitations, Mr. Wilson seems to have been no stranger; a dark cloud occasionally settled down upon him, and a feeling of weariness and despondency crept over him; but he gradually surmounted all difficulties, and was speedily enabled, with unfettered energy, to do the work of “an able minister of the New Testament.” “Oh! what deadness and flatness,” he exclaims, “do I feel. Alas! I have no frame for preaching. O Lord, come and make me to live before thee!”* Preaching was, in truth, the work of his heart. His studies were imbued with the spirit of prayer. He watched for souls; “travailed again as in birth” for them; was “instant in season, out of season;” and his labour was “not in vain in the Lord.”

But he was not without trials in such a field of labour; the earlier years of his incumbency were not free from peculiar embarrassments. The charge from its nature was one of delicacy, for his two colleagues officiated in the same edifice. Three men, though engaged in the same work, could not be supposed to be of the same temperament: occasional jarings must have happened. One may easily imagine a few piquant scenes, in which co-operation lowered itself into rivalry, and latent jealousies suddenly blundered into a momentary manifestation, while constitutional infirmities

* Diary, 10th November, 1716.

were awkwardly fretted into a betrayal of their nature and direction by those significant looks and shrugs which usually accompany certain inarticulate expressions of surprise or dissent. Had such little discoveries of varying disposition been all, they might have been overlooked or borne with; but this juxtaposition originated deeper and more rancorous asperities. The elder colleague, Mr. Black, who had been twice translated ere he was inducted into the parish of Perth in 1698, was fallen into years, and seems to have been a man of mild and equable nature, venerated by Mr. Wilson, and respected by the people, who, in a document presented to the Assembly, describe him as "distinguished by long continued and indefatigable ministerial labours." The second colleague, at the period of Mr. Wilson's induction, was a Mr. Fleming, whose incumbency had commenced in 1713; he died in 1721, about four years after Mr. Wilson's ordination. The person appointed to succeed him was a man singularly unqualified for a united charge. From the period of his induction, in July 1721, till his death, in January 1733, Mr. Stewart was a source of continued annoyance. Mr. Wilson had to some extent opposed his settlement at Perth, as he belonged to that party in the church which was at once inimical both to the liberties of the people and to the rigid orthodoxy of the clergy. Yet we find in the diary of that date a hearty prayer for Mr. Stewart's success in Perth. Wilson's own temper was mild and tranquil, and he possessed no little of that charity which "suffereth long and is kind;" Stewart was fickle and unsettled; was not long in Perth when he wished back again to his rural charge, but the Synod refused to retranslate him. Fixed down in the "Fair City" against his will, his irritated nature was provoked and discontented; a paltry ambition had taken hold of him, and even excited him to indecent and puerile competition. Out of humour with himself, he teased and galled his colleague by his proud demeanour, and sought to overshadow him by officious and conceited intermeddling. Wilson could have borne such contumely for himself, but he grieved for

the cause of Christ. That cause, so dear to him, suffered from these unhallowed exhibitions, and at one period almost induced him to leave the scene of it, and seek tranquillity in a country pastorate. The parish of Rhynd called him, and almost got him. His only motive in ever for a moment cherishing a thought of leaving Perth was the desire of being liberated from his yoke-fellow ; but even this trial, with all its annoyances, could not break the pastoral tie,—“none of these moved him” to seek the dissolution of his connection with the church in Perth. The temptation indeed was a strong one, and his mind wavered. The Presbytery, on whom he devolved the matter, decided for his continuance, and he cheerfully acquiesced in the decision. At Mr. Stewart’s death, Wilson was relieved from this impediment ; and very freely, in his diary, does he speak of the occurrence and its results. His sketch of his colleague is somewhat graphic and severe in its details : for example—he writes, “he could not endure any one to be equal in esteem with himself ; neither could he be pleased with anything unless he was the chief manager or doer himself.” Nay, he represents him as carrying this proud and peevish temper into the very pulpit, and using it, as he says, “for the purpose of tearing and misrepresenting my expressions.” So annoyed and grieved was he with such conduct, that he adds, “often I was as one in agony, and so burdened and pressed down, as to be weary of my life.” But Mr. Wilson improved this dispensation, and we find him recording the following meditations, which evince the candour of his judgment, and the severity of the burden which he had borne so meekly for years :—

“1st. I cannot but condemn myself for impatience many times under my trial. I wearied of it. I sometimes was ready to murmur at the providence of God in trusting me with a collegiate life. Yet I was fully satisfied that, however trying the dispensations of Providence might be towards me, and particularly in this place, the Lord is righteous and holy. His work is perfect, he is a God of truth, and without iniquity.

“2d. During the whole course of my conflict, I had frequent special support and countenance in preaching. I was enabled to publish the doctrine of the free grace of God through Christ Jesus. I got some more confirming and more satisfying views of the mystery of grace, when I was withstood and opposed by a loose and very legal strain of preaching. I sometimes desired to pity and pray for my opponent.

“3d. I lost nothing in the affections and esteem of any of the godly in the place.

“4th. There was in the observation of all who knew Mr. S—— formerly, a remarkable withering and languishing in his gifts. He was not what he once was. He lost the regard that sometimes was given him,—an argument that we ought not to be high-minded, but fear. When he died, he was little lamented. I shall not be more particular, but both I and others might learn from this example godly fear, humility, and self-diffidence.

“But, 5th. I have no pleasure to write what may reflect upon any, especially upon one who is now gone to his place, and, I hope, is with the Lord. Yet, this being the issue of one of the most considerable trials of my wilderness lot, I could not pass it over in silence.”

There was another incident toward the commencement of Mr. Wilson's ministry, which illustrates that integrity by which he was always distinguished. The third charge in Perth seems to have been created for him, and no means of legal support were attached to it. The absence of this claim to temporal sustenance by law did not intrude itself into his calculations when he entered upon the charge. He was not afraid of labouring without hire. He had a generous trust in his people, and felt that in sowing spiritual things, he would be remunerated by a temporal harvest. But the magistrates had effected the matter in a way which appeared to their civic wisdom as a stroke of clever policy. They were trustees of a fund bequeathed for some benevolent purpose, and this they appropriated to the payment of Mr. Wilson's salary. Before his ordination,

he was not aware of this fraudulent generosity, but no sooner was he informed of it than he nobly refused to touch one penny derived from such a source. The corporation took advice as to their power of alienating such monies from the donor's express commands, and found that they had gone beyond their prerogatives. The presiding judge at the trial was struck with the fact that the first objections had been made by him, who was to reap benefit from the misappropriation, and commenting with admiration on the young man's disinterested honesty, his Lordship proposed a mode of raising his stipend, in which all parties acquiesced. The method adopted was some species of general assessment. At Mr. Stewart's death, however, Mr. Wilson was declared second minister, according to the following minute of the Town Council :—

“PERTH COUNCIL HOUSE, *Monday, 22d October 1733.*

“The Magistrates and Town Council, considering that the lands called Blackfriars and Charter House, which were in the town possession past memory as a fund for one of the town's ministers' stipend, were of late declared to belong to the hospital of this burgh, and taken from the town by a decree of the Lords of Council and Session, affirmed by the House of Peers of Great Britain; and that now the town has only funds for stipends to two ministers: Therefore the said Magistrates and Town Council, as patrons of the kirk and parish of Perth, do hereby translate Mr. William Wilson, one of the ministers of this burgh, who was third minister, to the stipend which was payable to Mr. William Stewart, the second minister, now removed by death; and they do hereby, as patrons foresaid, present the said Mr. William Wilson to the said second minister's stipend from and since Michaelmas last, and in all time coming during his incumbency as one of the ministers of this burgh.”

The traits of Mr. Wilson's character which are thus brought to light were ever prominent. Nothing would he take from a “thread to a shoe-latchet,”—if integrity, no

matter in how slight a form, was compromised. He kept "a conscience void of offence,"—his "eye beamed keen with honour." Providence trained him for entering at length upon a sphere of action which originated in his own convictions, and into which he threw himself without any of those mercenary calculations which pecuniary interests might dictate, or a languid and homeward prudence might suggest. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee." Mr. Wilson's final secession was no reckless adventure, hazarded from momentary impulse, or necessitated by the mere force of circumstances. It was an act in unison with his character, and for which, by a train of uniting experiences, he had been disciplined and matured. When the epoch arrived, he was found faithful. The man was there when the hour struck. He had learned the mighty strength of trust in God. The Master said to his servant, "Do this,"—and he did it.

The pastor's piety was tenderly nursed amidst his onerous toils. He kept his "own vineyard." The interests of his own soul were not neglected amidst professional labours for the welfare of others. He preached to himself as well as to his fellow-men. His heart did not suffer ossification during the mechanical labours of critical study and weekly composition. O how he wrestled for his own salvation, while he bore his people on his heart before the Lord in earnest and effectual intercession! How he watched over all his frames "with a godly jealousy!" What grief and doleful lamentation when he lost any evidence of his spiritual progress, and felt the stirrings and promptings of the new life tame and low within him! What pantings after a fuller draught of divine felicity! What aspirations after a bolder faith and a richer love! What fond longings to know Christ yet more fully, to walk with him yet more nearly, to be like him yet more closely, and to preach him yet more cordially,—with warmer interest and mightier power! How he delighted in the view of an approaching communion where he was to assist, to note down his "errands" again as in earlier times, and what specialty in his own

private exercises during similar solemnities in his own congregation! Three years after his ordination, on a calm retrospect of his ministerial career, and when the first excitement had passed away, how solemnly does he place himself before the judgment seat, and review the spirit, motives, and character of his pastoral labours, and with what eagerness of soul he cries, that the Lord would give him "some token for good, some sense of his presence and blessing in public work, and some gracious help in going forward in it." "Give thy Holy Spirit to me, O Lord, and in me come to thy people." Such a ministry must have been blessed,—such prayer and painstaking could not be without their reward. Those breathings for the Spirit must have brought down his rich and copious influences. The seed cast in prayerful expectancy upon a furrow so anxiously prepared, and watered with the dew from on high, brought forth the "fruits of righteousness." Christ's truth faithfully proclaimed will always take effect. But these results are often not matter of human record. "The day will declare." The secret history of converted and sanctified spirits is laid up before the throne. The accumulated fruits of a faithful ministry, in all their various forms, are scarce to be appreciated by human calculation, for they resemble the quick and stealthy progress of the shadow upon the dial. You see that it has moved, but you cannot say it moves. The eye is not sharp enough to detect it in movement, though its march be without pause or cessation. The impressions created by the preaching of the cross are so subtle and so numerous,—so complex in hue and aspect,—so variously adapted to mind and heart, conscience and life, in all the shifting diversities of spiritual temperament,—so suited to the careless and the active, the wayward and the sluggish, the grave and the impetuous, the cheerful and the downcast, in correspondent forms of doctrine, reproof, and correction,—that they can neither be analysed nor gathered up by any human ingenuity. The effect may picture out its cause, but it does not exhibit the process of its hidden operation. So it was in

Perth. Multitudes under Mr. Wilson's labours "were edified," and "there was much joy in that city." No wonder that, when this servant of Christ was called to a neighbouring parish, the idea of parting with him developed the strength of that hallowed affection with which he was cherished. "The whole people of Perth," he records with touching simplicity, "cleave to me with the utmost affection. All of them did in the strongest manner express their unwillingness to part with me. None of the godly," he subjoins, "in the town or country had freedom about my going away; and it would have been a hard matter to have put my thoughts against the general voice of serious people."

CHAPTER V.

Lawsuit abandoned—Personal and domestic incidents—Marriage—Repeated family bereavements—Comfort in God, and hope in Him who is our LIFE.

MR. WILSON had been advised to defend at law the claim which it was supposed he had on his uncle's property in Forfarshire,—for the testy Nonjuror had disinherited him, and given his estates to the son of a sister, who was younger than Mrs. Wilson. Wilson, in right of his mother, was thought to be the legal heir; and there was no reason why a right so important should not be enforced. Accordingly, when in Edinburgh, he went to consult counsel, and was directed to a Mr. Alexander. But this gentleman, who had for some time been an invalid, died just as Wilson stood at his door and asked admission to his house. Such a singular circumstance had a powerful effect on Wilson's mind. It seemed to him to be a peal from heaven, carrying with it the solemn question—"What shall a man profit though he gain the whole world?" He was so struck that he abandoned all idea of a lawsuit. This course was in unison with his own placid and forgiving disposition; and he preferred some private arrangement, which might not involve him in the tedious and expensive agonies of a protracted litigation. The business was finally settled by arbitration, though we are not aware of the nature or amount of compensation which Mr. Wilson asked or received. At all events, the property was left as his uncle had willed it.* It is to be remembered too that at this

* Unless we know the nature of the titles, by which the property of his grandfather was held, we cannot decide on Mr. Wilson's claim. If

period he was but a young man—without any settled income—without a call or presentation. His meekness might surprise us, and some might even brand it with the name of slackness, did we not perceive from his diary how conscience reigned supreme in all his deliberations. We find the following entry about December 1703:—

“Being at Edinburgh, I was occupied about a business that was very perplexing. I had no clearness to engage in a law process, on the affair of my uncle’s property, for the following reasons:—

“1st. I deemed it not my right to sue for this property, as my uncle had the power of doing with his own what he pleased, and had thought proper to leave none to me.

“2d. Being a preacher of Christ’s gospel, I thought I should not so entangle myself with the affairs of this life.

“3d. After all, I was made to confess, before the Lord, my sin in meddling with a matter of this kind at all; and I sought that the Lord would bring me out of it with credit and honour, by a friendly arrangement in private, that so the gospel of Christ might not be injured.”

We know not how intimacy sprung up between him and the family of the deceased advocate,—whether he had

the uncle had no restriction on his power of disposal, it is clear that he could dispose of the land to any person he pleased, provided his deed of disposal were executed in *liege poustie*,—that is, that he survived its execution sixty days, or went to kirk or market without support, otherwise the deed might be reduced as *ultra vires*. On the other hand, if the prior titles contained any prohibitive or restrictory clauses, these must have influenced the deed of disposal. But generally in heritage *ab intestato*, the rules are,—1. Primogeniture and preference of males; 2. The male issue failing, and their issue too, the female issue inherit, *pro indiviso*, as heirs portioners, the issue of those who have deceased taking their mother’s portion. In this case Mr. Wilson, in his mother’s right, would have inherited her portion. Though the estate had been entailed, yet the entail must have terminated by the fact that it fell to heirs portioners, unless previous provision had been made against such a result. We apprehend that Mr. Wilson was excluded by some such process as that last mentioned—the young man who got the property took his mother’s name—still it is conjecture, for we are ignorant of the terms of the settlement. But when the other party consented to arbitration, it is clear that they were not quite sure of their tenure.

gone back to condole with them in their bereavement, or whether an introduction from some other quarter brought him into contact with the fatherless Misses Alexander. Seven years afterwards, and in the fifth year of his ministry in Perth, he married one of them, named Margaret,—a young lady, who proved herself worthy of such a union. Of all their twelve children only three reached maturity ; and the grandson of Mary, the youngest of them, bore the name of WILLIAM JAMESON,—a name endeared to all our churches,—a name that was the symbol of all that is simple in character, lovely in temper, elevated in aim, unwearied in zeal, and enterprising in action. The sepulchre of this fallen missionary has hallowed the soil of Old Calabar. Mr. Wilson's domestic trials were severe,—for bereavements in his household were numerous. Often had he to exclaim with the sweet singer, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." The pang of bereavement had often smitten his heart,—and one after another of his offspring had he seen carried away to the cold and lonely grave. His son George died in infancy ; his eldest son, William, lived till he was eleven ; and Marjory, his eldest daughter, died, in incipient womanhood, at the age of sixteen. Another daughter, Elizabeth, was removed at the early age of nine. The infant, that could only smile its happy recognition,—the restless prattler, that could but lisp its parents' name,—the boy and girl, in the bud of early promise, and who had become the dearer as they grew older, had been taken from him in the mysterious sovereignty of God. "God taketh away, and who can hinder him,"—He taketh away, and none of his people would hinder him. Such discipline must have matured Mr. Wilson's graces, and wrought "in him the peaceable fruits of righteousness." The bereaved father was thus fitted to become the sympathizing friend and pastor in the house of mourning. His diary abounds with many remarks on the illness and death of the varied members of his household. His own spirit, in its pensive sadness, looked to God. When one member of his attached circle

suffered, he suffered with it, and found relief in prayer. Every pang that shook the frame of his suffering babes, came with a quiver to his own soul, and urged him anew to fervent petition and peaceful resignation. By the year 1729 he had lost two children; and in the month of August, that year, all his four surviving ones were seized with small-pox,—an epidemic always loathsome, and at that period attended with great danger. With what simplicity is this afflictive event narrated!

“In the month of August, 1729, there was great distress in my family. Some time in July Mr. Ebenezer Erskine’s daughter came to my family sick. Her sickness proved to be the small-pox. She was very ill, but the Lord restored her. As she recovered, all my four children fell sick. My daughter Isabella on the 11th, George and Marjory on the 12th, and William on the 14th. They were all very ill. I was in great distress about them. On the 22d, when the small-pox was about the height, they seemed to be all in danger. It was a very bad pox. The Lord was now threatening to bereave me of all my children at once. The 22d and 23d days of this month were heavy days to me. I was helped to exercise some measure of concern about the souls of my children. The Lord in his providence seemed to be striving against me, and to say that I had sinned. On Sabbath morning, about four o’clock, on the 24th of August, the Lord was pleased to remove by death my son George. The night before, I was helped to pray, with some earnestness, for his eternal salvation, and to part with him to the Lord. I was helped to be silent under this stroke, and to hope that the Lord had taken him to himself.

“This morning my other children, especially Marjory and William, seemed to be in great danger. No hopeful symptoms of recovery appearing about them, I went alone, weighted and heavy, not knowing what to think of this speaking providence,—the Lord threatening to bereave me of all my children at once,—to ‘write me childless’ in one day. I thought how my pleasant children, a few days

before, were all about me ; now, said I, are they all to be taken from me ? Oh ! what can be the voice of the rod ? I went to prayer, and was helped to pour out my heart before the Lord, and to acknowledge my iniquities with grief and sorrow, also the Lord's holiness and righteousness, though he should take all my children from me. I laid them down at his feet, and said, Let him do what seemeth right in his sight, only 'give them their souls for a prey.' I was much enlarged about my son William. I cried that he might not be spared, unless it were for the service and glory of God. I was helped to give him away to the Lord ; and, if he should live, I did dedicate him to serve the Lord in the gospel of his Son, praying that the Lord might call him, and furnish and fit him, if it were his holy will, for that great and honourable work. I came from prayer no more uneasy about my children. I preached that evening with some measure of enlargement,—and buried my son George the next day. It pleased the Lord that my three children recovered. Oh ! that they may live before the Lord.

“Tuesday, 24th March, 1730.—About half-past one in the morning, my son Gilbert was born. He was baptized on the Thursday following by my colleague, Mr. Thomas Black. The Lord has given me this son instead of George, whom he was pleased to take from me.”

These sentences pourtray Mr. Wilson's heart. Apathy did not belong to his nature. His sensibilities were keen indeed, but they had been sanctified as they had been developed. His children were to him his second self ; his heart bled over their agonies, yet he could give them to God without a murmur. There was a struggle indeed when the idea of parting first and faintly crossed his mind, and there were terror and sorrow when nearness of separation alarmed him, but at the throne of grace his spirit was quieted, his ruffled heart was subdued, and soothing hopes and anticipations filled his bosom. There might be a sob, but its language was, “Thy will be done.” His religion did not display its power only in public duty and professional labour, it

dwelt within him, and enabled him to exemplify the graces the possession of which he enforced on others. No feature of his life had been so conspicuous as his earnest desire to follow the leadings of providence, and ascertain the will and counsel of God. The same tendency of his confiding soul is seen again in these domestic trials. When the Lord gave, he accepted with gratitude; when the Lord took again, he surrendered without reluctance. He mourned, but he did not murmur. It was not stubborn acquiescence to an unavoidable fate, but pliant submission to a Father's will. The oak that yields not to the storm is torn and broken, and its glory is strewn over the plain; but the elastic willow that bends to the blast, recovers itself when the wind is lulled again. To be able to say, "not my will, but thine be done," prepares the spirit for every issue. Mr. Wilson could say so in genuine humility. God's will became his will. From the depth of his sorrow he rose to elevated peace and assurance. And when the little coffin, with the beloved name on its lid, was hidden from his view, and the dull sound of the earth covering it up fell upon his ear, he might weep,—for "Jesus wept,"—yet he forgot not HIM who is "the resurrection and the life;" and his faith rising and looking above and beyond the mournful wrecks of present mortality, anticipated the coming of that happy epoch, when the dust shall be raised, and death shall be conquered;

"And God the Lord from every eye
Shall wipe off every tear."

Thus repeated trials brought renewed consolation. What pathos in those brief expressions of the preceding extract! "I was helped to pray for his eternal salvation, 'give them their souls for a prey.'" And his prayers were heard. His children gave him comfort on their death-bed. The experience of Marjory resembled that of an aged saint. Elizabeth, who was only nine when she died, asked her father to pray with her in her sickness. On his asking her what she wished him to pray for, she replied, "Pray, father, that I

may be made sure of my interest in Christ, and may have a safe passage to glory." The health of his children was precious, and if paternal anxiety and suffering could have preserved them, none of them had died. To have received his infant or his boy back to his arms, with the recovered bloom of health upon his cheek, would have been to him the inspiration of a "new song." But he felt that the soul was beyond value, that salvation was "the one thing needful." His "heart's desire and prayer" for his offspring was not so much that they might recover, as that they might be saved. He wrestled with God that he would give them the better blessings, would redeem and prepare them for immortal glory, and take them home to that world which is alike exempted from the weakness of infancy and the decrepitude of age; where the little children, "of whom is the kingdom of heaven," are clad in immortal youth and beauty, and have come to "the fulness of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus." He hoped to meet them in heaven, that world of life, where change and separation are for ever unknown. Conscious of being in the covenant himself, he was earnest for his "seed," and hopeful of their salvation; and though his hearth had been so often thinned, he anticipated a happy reunion with his numerous young ones preceding him in death,—

"No wanderer lost,—a family in heaven."

CHAPTER VI.

Ministry, earnest and faithful—Theology, sound and sanctified—Specimen of peroration—Conflict with deists in Perth—Synod sermon.

IN the midst of such trials, and also surrounded by many enjoyments, Mr. Wilson continued to labour in Perth. He might lament the scantiness of visible fruits, but he was cheered by various indications of the power and spirituality of his labours. His sermons show that while he ever insisted on the leading truths of the gospel, and pressed them home with great simplicity and pointed earnestness on the hearts and consciences of his hearers, he endeavoured to improve public events, and read those lessons which providence is so often commissioned to teach the world and the church. Still the burden of his message was Christ the Saviour of sinners. His modes of appeal are often vehement and striking. He never tired of this theme; and if ever he becomes eloquent, it is in unfolding the richness and suitability of the divine Redeemer. His published sermons may be taken as a specimen of his ordinary pulpit ministrations. As the majority of them were not published till after his death, it is evident they were not intended for publication, and they may therefore be looked upon as fair and average samples of his preaching. They fully bear out the remarks we have made as to the prominence given to leading truths in his discourses. He opens up doctrine with correctness, analyses character with acuteness, explains duty with lucid succinctness, unriddles a case of conscience with subtle facility, extracts a warning from some public occurrence with natural promptitude, and utters a passing lamentation over ecclesiastical degeneracy with genuine

pathos ; but his spirit rises, his energy is excited, his periods brighten, and his style becomes terse and nervous as Baxter's when he exhibits Jesus and his cross, and invites sinners to believe and be saved. Thus in his sermon from Micah iv. 10. he says, " Oh, if the Lord Christ would be pleased to proclaim this redemption among you this day, not in word only but with power, and in the Holy Ghost ; liberty to the captives ! Oh, captive sinner, whoever thou art, in thy natural state thou art in captivity and in bonds, — a bond-slave to sin, a bond-slave to Satan ! Why, we tell you good tidings of great joy ; to you is proclaimed liberty and freedom, — redemption is proclaimed unto thee. Thus saith the Lord, to you, O prisoner, to you, O dark and dead sinner, go forth and show yourselves ; show yourselves to be sinners needing a Saviour ; show yourselves to the Saviour, to the Redeemer, to Him who is the mighty God, mighty to save you, — the Lord of hosts, able to save you, — the merciful God, willing to save you. ' Thus saith the Lord, I that speak in righteousness am mighty to save, ' Isaiah lxiii. 1. Mighty to save from the tyranny and power of Satan ; mighty to save from the tyranny and power of unbelief ; mighty to save from the prevailing evils in thy heart, let them be never so great, never so strong ; he is a mighty and strong Redeemer ; a Redeemer not only by price but also by power ; he paid a price of infinite worth and value for you, and will not you come and take salvation from him ? He is a powerful Redeemer : he hath an arm that is full of power, an omnipotent arm that can with one stroke (so to speak) break asunder the strongest gates of brass, and cut in pieces the strongest bars of iron. He is not only willing, but ' able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. ' Behold, sirs, on this last day of the feast, our Lord Jesus stands and cries, O prisoners, go forth and show yourselves ; O captives, go forth out of Babylon ! Haste, haste, haste ; flee out of Babylon, escape for thy life ; flee out of the Babylon of a natural state, it is the city of destruction ; haste, flee for your

lives, flee to a Saviour, flee to a Redeemer ; he is standing (so to speak) with arms wide open to receive you ; the arms of his love are wide open to receive you ; the arms of his mercy and grace are wide open to receive you ; haste, flee into the city of refuge for thy life ! the arms of the Saviour are stretched out to embrace you with God's welcome, with the welcome of God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. O then, child of the Devil, come and be the child of God. O swearer, come and speak the language of Canaan, the heavenly dialect, the pure language of the city above. O servant of Satan, come and be the servant of the living God. Thou art yet out of hell ; and, whilst thou art out of hell, thou hast access to a Saviour, access to a Redeemer. O filthy sinner, come and be washed from all thine idols : though thou hast lien among the pots, and be as black as hell with the stain of sin, yet come, thou shalt appear 'as the wings of a dove, whose wings are covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.' What should hinder thy coming to him who is a Redeemer by price and power ; one that hath infinite power to bring thee, to draw thee, to lead thee, to guide thee ? O, who can speak forth the glory of this Redeemer, the infinite excellency of this Redeemer ! O that some of this company, that never yet knew this Redeemer, that are in the Babylon of a natural state, would this day take hold of his grace, proclaimed in this gospel, and would by faith apprehend proclaimed liberty, liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound !" These pressing invitations and remonstrances are from the heart, out of whose abundance he spake. His motto was truly that of the apostle, "I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."

His theology was a living thing, and his preaching never had the tedious languor, cold formality, or heartless monotony of a dead orthodoxy. It is evident, moreover, that his sermons were pervaded by the language of his own experience. Prayer was his delight, and he rejoiced to expatiate on its duty and privilege. He often spoke of

those varying frames which he had felt, but never, indeed, adduces himself as illustration. He shrunk from such self-given publicity. Yet it is evident from the ease with which he describes spiritual changes, and the fresh colouring with which he pictured them, that he drew the secret from his own consciousness, with the feeling that many before him were no strangers to those exercises of experimental godliness. But whatever his more immediate theme, Christ was still the centre.

We find, at the same time, that Mr. Wilson was a faithful watchman. Whatever the form of the threatened or approaching evil, the trumpet gave a "certain sound." The notes of its peal were frequent and startling. The refined maxims of a heathen ethics were in that day rising into repute in Scotland, and so we hear him testifying against such a system, "as a deep plot of Hell to pluck up by the roots the true spring and ground of all acceptable obedience unto God," a system inculcated by men to whom nothing is more "nauseous" than the doctrines of "regeneration by supernatural grace, and a vital union with the Lord Jesus Christ in order to the bringing forth of holiness in the heart."* Glancing evidently at the "moderate" preaching so prevalent around him, which omitted depravity and dwelt on good intention, neglected faith and rested in sincerity, we find him exclaiming,—“Some speak of a good heart toward God,—of a sincere heart and the like,—but they know not what they are saying. The heart that is right with God, is the heart that is sanctified by the word of faith.”† And he always witnessed against current error. If the Headship of the LAMB, his sovereignty and dominion over Zion,—the hill of his holiness, be attacked (as it was “by the late act of Parliament anent Captain John Porteous”) then a testimony was at once given for it.‡ The incidents of humble life were not beneath his regard, especially if he felt that his

* Sermon on the “Blessedness lost in the first Adam to be found in Christ the second Adam.” Page 35.

† Sermon on 1 Cor. xvi. 13; page 31.

‡ Sermon on Rev. xiv. 4; page 49.

Master's honour and interests were involved. Some "itinerant" had been carrying round the country a picture of Christ in agony, and exhibiting it as a common spectacle to be seen for a few pence. Mr. Wilson felt aggrieved at such profanity, and dwells upon it in one of his discourses,—"All carnal representations of Christ and his sufferings for a profane or common use are a high contempt of the person, death, and mediation of the Lord Jesus. If it is an abomination in the Church of Rome to frame images or pictures of him for a religious use, it is no less an abomination to carry about a *pretended picture* of Christ in his sufferings, to expose it as a common show for money under a pretence of showing a fine piece of paint; this is a most profane prostituting of the sacred mysteries of our holy Christian religion. I am bold to warn you against such an abominable practice; it is with a witness, *a trampling under foot the Son of God, and a counting of the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified an unholy, or, common thing.*"* It would appear that the showman had been maltreated by the mob who surrounded him, and that some of Mr. Wilson's enemies affirmed that the crowd had been instigated by his preaching.

In short, he did the work of an evangelist. To use a few phrases of his own quaint but expressive language: when he urged on sinners their helpless and miserable condition, he insisted that they had "no moyen" to procure pardon or any blessing. Dwelling on the mediation of the Son of God, he rejoiced to expatiate on the truth that the grace, the love and mercy of the Father have "a vent through Him." Urging the necessity of union to Christ, his favourite vocable was that He is the only "conduit" of spiritual blessing. Telling his audience of the fulness and adaptation of Christ's blessings, he congratulates them on "the furniture provided" for them in Jesus. Should any be backward to a public testimony for Christ, he lamented it, for it "boded ill." Should any feel

* Sermon on Psalm lxxii. 17; page 58.

perfection to be yet far from them, he bade them not despair, but urged them "aye to be minting at it." If in the application of his discourses he had a "Use" for reproof, he had generally one for direction and encouragement.

Mr. Wilson's preaching and labours in Perth had one token of their power which was also unequivocal evidence of their success. The fire that melts the wax only hardens the clay. That old burden which Isaiah was commissioned to deliver, and which was fulfilled in Christ's own ministry and in that of the Apostle Paul, was again verified in Perth,—"The heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."* The enemies of Christ were enraged at his servant. They "which believed not were mad with envy." They could not preserve neutrality. Indifference nursed itself into profanity, and passed from sullen inattention into foul and flagrant deism. "Certain lewd fellows of the baser sort," had formed themselves into a kind of club to give concert and unity to the publication of their blasphemies. They had forwarded to Mr. Wilson an "unsubscribed missive," and sent it to his house by "an unknown hand,"—while they had taken pains to give it publicity in Perth and the surrounding country. Mr. Wilson's own character was assailed. For personal calumny he cared not, but the cause of truth might be so far in jeopardy; and this apprehension led him to preach a series of sermons on the leading truths of the gospel, founded on Psalm lxxii. 17,—“And men shall be blessed in him.” The discourses are styled the “Blessedness lost in the first Adam to be found in Christ the second Adam.” He modestly says in his “Advertisement to the Reader,” “I do not grudge to take hold of the occasion which those infidels had given me to cast in my mite in speaking from the press for Him ‘whom men

* Acts xxviii. 27.

despise and whom the nations abhor.'” These sermons in their published form are greatly compressed. They contain simple and succinct views of the leading truths of the gospel, with occasional strictures on national degeneracy, and the folly, waywardness, malignity, inconsistency, and dangers of deism. They are prefaced by a dedication to the gentlemen of the DEISTICAL PRINCIPLES in or about the Burgh of Perth. He tells them plainly,—“As for the malicious insinuations contained in your invidious queries, wherewith your paper is swelled, and whereby you slyly attack my character, I am not afraid that they shall do the least hurt or prejudice unto it; and, if you have any conscience at all, I am persuaded I have a testimony in your own breasts that there is no truth in any of your wicked and railing insinuations. Therefore I shall not take any farther notice of them, than to tell you I am not surprised with the treatment you give me, I am warned of it: I have the honour to be his servant in office who has told me, that ‘the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord;’ and, ‘If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?’ Matt. x. 24, 25. But it is not at me only, it is at revealed religion, it is at the gospel through me, that your envenomed arrows are directed: and though you have not the assurance to come from behind the curtain to own your wickedness, yet you have pulled off the mask in your paper when you declare, that you reckon the doctrines of the gospel, which I am honoured and called to preach, are airy speculations concerning faith, mere phantoms in religion, which are nowhere to be found but in school divinity, or in the brains of a hot enthusiast, &c. It is for this reason that I have addressed you under the character I have given you, and I do not think that I should have done you any injury though I had designed you *αθεοι*, that is without God. Your wickedness has more aggravating circumstances in it than theirs to whom this character is given by the Spirit of God. Ephes. ii. 12.” . . . And he adds with no little *naïveté*,—“It will unriddle a

great part of your mission when I tell you what is the spring of all your malicious resentment against me : it is because I concurred with the Session of Perth in their endeavours to suppress the profane diversions of the stage* in the school, a practice that has an evident tendency to corrupt the minds of our youth, and to debauch them in their morals ; yet the master of the school did, with a particular insolence, despise the friendly advice and admonition of the Session by their committee, under a pretence that he was accountable only to the Presbytery for his management in the school : it is because I endeavour to declare from the pulpit against the overspreading wickedness and profaneness of the age, and those seminaries of it, or peculiar incentives to it, which go under the name of assemblies and balls : it is because I warned the people of my charge against that indignity done to the Son of God, by an unknown stranger, in his carrying about a pretended picture of him in his sufferings for a common show : it is because I joined with the Session of Perth in the regular steps they took for bringing to a fair and impartial trial a very flagrant report of scandal in the master of the Grammar School ; and for this the Session of Perth, the most considerable body of this kind in the bounds of the Presbytery, and who are daily wrestling against a torrent of profaneness, must be lashed with your virulent tongues and pens. It is for the above, and the like reasons, that you hiss like serpents or adders in the path against me ; and yet you have the assur-

* It is probable that the "diversions of the stage" referred to in this address to the deists, may either have been akin to the "mysteries," which were so often represented during the middle ages, and which consisted of some rudely dramatised scenes taken from Scripture,—or that they were in character like the popish plays, in which figured such fantastic heroes as the Lord of Misrule, the Boy Bishop, and the Abbot of Fools. Such mummeries, which evidently sprung from the old pagan Saturnalia, were not only puerile and grotesque, but often vicious and debauching. Remains of such old customs clung to the parochial schools of Scotland till a very recent period. On Fastern's-e'en (that is, the evening preceding the fast of Lent) it was customary for school-boys to bring each his cock to the school, for the purpose of enjoying the barbarous amusement of cock-fighting. This period was the juvenile carnival of Scotland.

ance to pretend, in your missive, a respect to the doctrines of morality : but you have confirmed me that it is my duty to hold on in what, by way of ridicule, you term the beaten path, even though the reproofs of the world should gall and torment you.

“ It is like some may think I have paid you too great a compliment when I have taken any notice of you at all ; but I assure you, if you continue in your profane banter, I shall never judge it worth my while to make any return unto you. In the meantime, I sincerely wish you well ; and it is my daily prayer for you, that you may be reclaimed from the error and wickedness of your way.

“ PERTH, Sept. 16th, 1735.”

“ WILLIAM WILSON.

Thus was Wilson a “ workman that needed not to be ashamed.” He had but one end, and he steadily pursued it. He felt himself supported in this arduous task “ by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” To labour publicly and “ from house to house” was his chief desire. And we cannot suppose that in the church courts he was silent and inactive. His praise was in the churches, for he belonged to the reforming party,—a party distinguished by the purity of its character, the multiplicity of its labours, and the patience of its hopes, not more than by the virulent opposition it encountered, and the scorn and obloquy which it called down upon itself from the dominant party in the Establishment. In 1727 he preached the usual sermon at the opening of the Synod of Stirling and Perth. In this discourse we have both lucid statement and pointed appeal,—and it is well named “ The Watchman’s Duty and Desire.” There is in it no concealment, no evasion of truth, yet the censure is not mere vituperation. Its language of complaint is that of fond and faithful regret wrung from a wounded spirit. He loved the Church of Scotland, but he felt that there was in it a lamentable defection over which he mourned, and against which he was bound to strive. He made no attempt to

heal "the wound of the daughter of Zion lightly." Silence would have been association in crime, the language of congratulation would have been a silly hypocrisy, and words of bland apology would have been a weak affectation of loyal attachment. When Mr. Wilson felt that the degeneracy of the Church was deep, rapid, and shameless; that Christ crucified was not preached with honest fulness and cordial sincerity; that the rights of the people were violated without remorse; and "the freest society in the world" was bowing to a vassalage as mean as it was degrading;—when such convictions had been gathering strength from daily evidence and vexed his "righteous soul,"—he believed, and he could not but speak,—no matter who might be offended, no matter what bitter fruits he might reap from his courageous fidelity. "Prophecy smooth things!" no, rather "let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." Mr. Wilson's sermon excited no open manifestation of hostility. They who did not relish it concealed their dislike. In five years more the prevailing party in the Church became bolder. Apostacy ceased to blush at a violated covenant and a treasonable surrender of the Crown Rights of the Redeemer. It "refused to be ashamed." It courted publicity. Enraged at the charges which Ebenezer Erskine had made and substantiated in his famous Synod sermon,—galled beyond measure at his audacity in speaking of rights which they had sold, and of privileges which they had been bribed to barter away,—they proudly doomed him to a formal censure, in the vain hope of suppressing the last elements of spiritual liberty, of effacing the last vestiges of a public testimony. The attempt was a noted failure. It aimed at prolonging bondage, but it both created and proclaimed a jubilee. It originated the first Secession, and gave birth to the United Presbyterian Church. The tenth day of October, 1732, was a momentous day for Scotland. The voice of deliverance chose for its oracle the 22d verse of the 118th Psalm,—"The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner." That text was a favourable omen,—and it awoke the propitious thunder with which it was hailed.

CHAPTER VII.

Corruption of the Church—E. Erskine's Synod sermon—Memorable 10th of October—Wilson's boldness in defending Erskine—His preparation of public papers—Suspension—Address to his people—Firmness—Loosed from his charge by the Assembly—Meeting at Gairney Bridge.

THE agitation that followed Mr. Erskine's sermon was an index to the state of the Church. The discourse was indeed calm and judicious, but honest and thorough in its statements. The sensation it produced proved how deeply it was needed. The life of the Church had been waning. Ichabod might have been written on the portals of many of its sanctuaries. The soul of its earlier reformers had fled,—their mantle had not been caught by their successors. Men had been intruded into the pastorate "for a piece of bread." The facile remnant of the old Episcopacy, having thrown off the surplice, had been retained in many parishes to read homilies instead of prayers. A dull and leaden weight bore down the ecclesiastical assemblies,—the "spirit of judgment" had left them, and they had not only been gradually trained down into requisite indifference, but they even boasted of the laxness of their polity, as an evidence of their attachment to the court and government. They fawned upon "the powers that be," intoxicated the Royal Commissioner with mean adulation, and were but too happy to forward the sinister designs upon the liberties of the Kirk, which the crooked policy of the state had devised. The power of the pulpit was gone,—the preaching of a free and unrestricted gospel was frowned upon,—the sermon full of doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, had degenerated into a brief and pithless essay, disguised from Seneca or diluted from Epic-

tetus. It had no spirituality of tone or unction,—and brought no comfort or satisfaction to the weary and anxious sinner. It neither moved the careless nor refreshed the godly. Pious people went to church and came home again, feeling that in their sad experience the words of the prophet had been realized, for their anticipations so often disappointed reminded them of the scene thus described,—“It shall be even as when an hungry man dreameth and behold he eateth, but he awaketh and his soul is empty; or when a thirsty man dreameth and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh and behold he is faint and his soul hath appetite.”* But the dereliction was not universal. Good men and true were found in various parts of the country,—“faint yet pursuing,” “perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken.” By their prayers and ministrations the best of the laity were greatly blessed and edified, and often felt themselves on the eve of adopting the old thanksgiving of Ezra,†—“And now for a little space grace hath been shewed from the Lord our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in his holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a little reviving in our bondage.” The “swatches” which Mr. Wilson gives of many of the ministers are truly mournful, proving that the majority were reckless of principle, the mere abettors of a supple policy, and the haters of evangelical truth, while many were by no means either consistent in their conduct or exemplary in their lives.

Wilson had from the commencement of his ministry in Perth felt a deep sympathy with all reforming movements in the Church. That excellent system of truth the “Marrow” had been condemned by the Assembly, and a brand put on a free and complete exhibition of the gospel. Many faithful men were deeply grieved at this unworthy procedure, and laboured to secure some modification of the Assembly’s sentence. Wilson joined with those ministers as early as 1721, and attended their private meetings and pro-

* Isaiah xxix. 8.

† Ezra ix. 8.

longed consultations. "There was," he records, "much sweet satisfaction in so meeting, and in our praying and conversing together." These efforts only exasperated the reigning faction in the church. But the friends of truth were not disheartened by years of fruitless toil and anxiety. In 1731 it was agreed to draw up a representation and petition to the General Assembly; and, perhaps at Mr. Wilson's suggestion, a meeting of the friends of truth took place at Perth in February 1732. The paper was subscribed by 42 ministers and three elders. But this protestation met with such treatment as might have been expected,—the "Committee on Bills" refused even to transmit it. Another paper, signed by fifteen hundred of the laity, shared a similar fate. That same year the Assembly violated the "Barrier Act," in their haste to extend and strengthen the law of patronage. Mr. Wilson comments on this act in strong language. "By this means," he says, "the godly were grieved and wounded, congregations were rent and broken, the wicked were hardened, many were tempted to look upon religion as all a cheat, deistical principles prevailed, profanity and wickedness abounded through the land." This melancholy statement is not overcharged. Christ was wounded in the house of his friends. But man's extremity is God's opportunity. Ebenezer Erskine was the herald of divine interference on the 10th October, 1732. The cause was apparently trivial,—but the effects could not then be calculated. The course and destiny of divine truth are beyond the sphere of human vision; and it is not till after "many days" that the results surprise and delight the spectator.*

* The following lines afford a beautiful symbol of the truth contained in the text:—

I shot an arrow into the air,—
It fell to the earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,—
It fell to the earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight, so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song.

In the debate which this synod sermon occasioned, Wilson took a prominent part. Agreeing with the sentiments of the discourse, he at once and cordially identified himself with the preacher. The notes in his 'diary' on this critical transaction are very full. They are a species of reflections written four years after the events, and after himself had been suspended,—and they are recorded "for the sake of my children, especially if any shall survive me." He adds, with his usual humility, that he writes down among other things the part "I judged it my duty to take from time to time, wherein I had a remarkable series and train of trials and mercies, of difficulties and outgaits; and at the time when I write this (April 1736) I know not what the issue may be." "At the afternoon meeting," he writes in the same paper, "Mr. Adam F——, minister at Logierait, stated that Mr. Erskine, in his sermon in the forenoon, had uttered some things which gave offence, and moved for investigation. He was immediately joined by Mr. M——, minister at Aberdalgie, a hot, violent man,—a plague on the presbytery of Perth, and most active always in a bad cause. He was also joined by Mr. M——, then at Forteviot, now at St. Ninians, a man more smooth and subtle than his brother, but his hand still as deep in a course of defection. Mr. Robert C—— of Glendoig, advocate, elder, reasoned also very warmly for censuring Mr. Erskine; he is a man that follows the fashion of the present time,—his principles and conduct in the judicatories appear to be of a piece!" Thus the debate began. With men of such character as those sketched by Wilson, Mr. Erskine could be no favourite. His words, however, took effect,—but little did he dream of the momentous results. Wilson at once ascribes to its true cause the sensation produced by the synod sermon; for though Mr. Erskine made no particular applica-

LONG, LONG afterwards, in an oak,
 I found the arrow still unbroke;
 And the song, from beginning to end,
 I found again in the heart of a friend.

LONGFELLOW'S *Poems*.

tion, the consciences of many of his audience could not but tell they were pointed at,—they felt themselves sketched in the portraiture of the Jewish builders. The discussion continued three days, during which Wilson was neither silent nor supine. He moved that the discussion should drop, and pleaded the incompetency of the synod to censure Mr. Erskine, because the clauses picked out of the sermon were inaccurate representations of what Mr. Erskine had really said,—because, if opposition to the Act of 1732 be liable to blame, new terms of ministerial communion are introduced; and because the synod in threatening a penalty on free-speaking was going beyond its province, and had no warrant from the Assembly for such unconstitutional procedure. Wilson's reasonings were opposed; but he rose again and vindicated his allegations—affirmed the right of ministerial speech—dwelt upon the contemptuous way in which representations had been recently treated—solemnly warned the synod of its perilous position, and foretold that a rent in the church would inevitably follow, if the judicatories should censure Mr. Erskine for his faithful freedom. He was met with tame remarkings on order and submission, and constitutional methods of obtaining redress. His bold challenge brought upon him scowls without argument. The tone of his opponents was bitter, but their logic was naught. Their wrath was exuberant; and at length, by a majority of six votes, the synod pronounced Mr. Erskine censurable. Against this sentence a protest and appeal was taken, in which Mr. Wilson heartily joined. The part he had taken in the debate gave him “much peace.” His mind could not as yet forecast what might be the result, yet he was assured that good would follow. The appeal was brought up before the next Assembly in 1733. Mr. Wilson hesitated about going to Edinburgh, thinking that his appearances in synod had sufficiently exonerated his conscience. But he felt that more was demanded of him, and he was present in the Assembly. But it refused to hear him on the grounds of his protest. It cared not for his oratory, and relished not his intrepidity.

It interposed a sullen veto, and deemed its own authority a sufficient justification for the rigorous interdict. Without hesitation, and with an apparent gratitude for the occasion, it confirmed the sentence of the synod; and, without regard to any pleading in arrest or modification of judgment, it appointed Mr. Erskine to be rebuked forthwith at its own bar. The Assembly seems to have rejoiced in this opportunity of revenge,—and longed to regale itself with the spectacle of a reformer bowing to its stern decree. Wilson again joined in Ebenezer Erskine's protest, along with Messrs. Fisher and Moncrieff;—the “Four Brethren” were now leagued. Their confederates had shrunk and withdrawn. They were better without the fainthearted. The paper on which the protest was written had almost been forgotten, as it had accidentally fallen over the table on which it had been laid,—but it was too precious to perish so easily,—for it was the charter of a disenthralled church! The Assembly, on coming to the knowledge of it, were fired with indignation. They could scarcely credit the existence of such audacity. It surprised them out of their propriety, and they summoned the four protesters to appear next day. They obeyed the abrupt citation. A committee was appointed to converse with them; but their convictions of duty remained unchanged. The committee reported that the four brethren were unmoved by any means they had employed. The victims themselves were not allowed a hearing. Their persistence was deemed enough to condemn them, and they were commanded to withdraw and await the decision of the Court. An act and sentence, prepared by a committee, was read and sanctioned against them, ordering them to appear at the Commission in August, and to retract, on pain of being suspended from the exercise of their ministry in the first instance, and of being deposed should they still continue refractory. This irascible magniloquence did not overawe them. They offered to read a very mild complaint, but were refused. They only asked to take the affair to an *avisandum*—they wished some period for deliberation. But the enraged

Assembly could not now brook their very appearance,—and could scarce command patience enough to order its officer to expel them from the house. And, with the usual courtly forms, this gallant Assembly was the same day dissolved.

In the interval Mr. Wilson prepared a representation for the Commission in August, in which Mr. Moncrieff joined him. This paper calmly stated the whole case without colouring or reserve; enumerated the weighty reasons which led them “into this quarrelled and condemned step;” vindicated with meek dignity the various points of their procedure; solemnly avowed that they should be “guilty of dissimulation” if they either retracted or professed penitence; asked anew, with powerful reiteration, in what their sin consisted; argued at length on principles of scripture and Protestantism for freedom and plainness of speech as the privilege and duty of the ministers of Christ; and concluded with a noble declaration of allegiance to Christ, despite of any penalty which might be pronounced upon them. The peroration of this eloquent paper is as follows:—

“Upon the whole, we cannot but declare before the reverend Commission, that we have no freedom to submit to them. And, further, we are obliged to protest, like as by these presents we do protest, for ourselves, and in the name of all the ministers and members of this church adhering to us; as also, in the name of all, and every one in our respective congregations who shall adhere unto us, against any censure that may be inflicted upon us, affecting our ministerial office, or the exercise thereof, as null and void in itself; and that it shall be lawful and warrantable for us to exercise our ministry, as hitherto we have done, and as if no such censure had been inflicted upon us; in regard, we are not convicted of departing from any of the received principles of this Church, or of counteracting our ordination vows and engagements; but, on the contrary, are sentenced to censure, by the late General Assembly, for protesting against a decision, whereby we are brought

under these new and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion above mentioned, which we look upon as inconsistent with the Word of God, and our ordination vows and engagements; as also, for all the above reasons and causes why we cannot retract our paper given in to the late General Assembly. And, further do we protest, that, if in consequence of any censure inflicted upon us, whether of suspension, or of a higher nature, any minister or probationer shall exercise any part of our ministerial work in our respective congregations, the same shall be held and repute as an intrusion upon our ministerial labours. As also, we protest, that if any other minister shall be settled in our congregations, that the same shall be held and repute as an intrusion upon our pastoral charges; and that the people of our respective congregations shall not be obliged to own, acknowledge, or submit unto such as their lawful pastors, seeing we were ordained to take the oversight of them, with their own call and consent, and with consent of the presbytery unto which we were received, and have not been convicted of receding from our ordination vows and engagements. And, lastly, we protest, that whatever bad effects may follow upon the course taken with us, we shall not be chargeable with them.

“If, notwithstanding of all we have represented, the Commission shall think fit to be the executioners of this unjust sentence against us, then, adhering to this our representation, and our above protestation, we commit our cause to him that ‘judgeth righteously,’ in whom we desire to hope, and on whom, through his grace, we will wait till he make ‘the righteousness of Zion go forth as brightness, and the salvation of Jerusalem as a lamp that burneth.’

“WILLIAM WILSON.

“ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.”

But this paper was also refused, and they were forced to make an oral statement of a similar nature. The crisis was at hand. Several presbyteries and sessions had, in

the meantime, sent up papers in their behalf. The city and session of Perth were not indifferent spectators, and the situation of their minister filled them with pain and alarm. The session despatched to the Assembly a respectful remonstrance. It described Mr. Wilson's multifarious labours, urged lenity and forbearance on the court till Mr. Wilson might attain to more light, solicited delay as a "singular favour," and thus concluded:—

"And as this would be a singular favour to us, we are hopeful it would be no less to the church, especially in our bounds; and that the reverend Commission shall have no cause to repent their lenity in this matter. May it therefore please the reverend Commission to grant our earnest request,—and your petitioners shall ever pray. This in name and by appointment of the foresaid kirk-session is signed by

"THOS. BLACK, Moderator."

The magistrates and town council of Perth were not behind the session. Their paper is of the same kind,—full of affection for Mr. Wilson—gratitude for his labours—ardent desire for their continuance—great alarm at the thought of their interruption by the threatened censure of last Assembly,—and humble and fervent supplication for a postponement of the sentence:—"May it, therefore, please the reverend Commission, in their clemency to Mr. Wilson and sympathy to this burgh, to agree to delay the affair concerning him,—and your petitioners shall ever pray. Signed the 6th of August, 1733, in name and in presence of the said magistrates and town council, by

"PAT. CRIE, Provost."

The Commission was made of "sterner stuff" than to be swayed by their Christian representation. Such an appeal to their clemency and sympathy gave them but a firmer resolve to show no mercy. What though Mr. Wilson should suffer? his obstinacy had provoked them! What though his labours in Perth should be terminated, his church

dispersed, and the city spiritually damaged? their dignity must be upheld, and the majesty of their self-willed authority vindicated! Had Wilson been immoral, he might have been screened,—had he been indolent, he would never have been troubled,—had he been heretical, indulgence might have been shown him,—but he had dared to speak against Acts of Assembly, he had moved his lip against the deeds of the church, and therefore summary punishment must be meted out to such aggravated and flagrant crime without mitigation or respite. Mr. Wilson and the three protesters were therefore suspended. Mr. Wilson's session, admiring his fidelity and heroism, joined in a protest against the tyrannous edict—"We, the underscribing members of the kirk-session of Perth, do hereby, in our own name, and in the name of all who shall adhere to us in the said congregation, testify our adherence to Mr. Wilson, one of our ministers, notwithstanding of the sentence inflicted upon him; and in regard some of us came with a petition from the kirk-session, which was presented to the reverend Commission, but neither read nor regarded, we protest we shall be at liberty to complain to the next General Assembly, and hereupon take instruments. Signed by us at Edinburgh, 9th August 1733.

"WILLIAM FERGUSON.

"COLIN BROWN.

"DA. ROBERTSON.

"JAMES DAVIDSON.

"PAT. SCIOCH.

"ALEX. M'EWEN."

At the same time Wilson wisely resolved that his people should have a thorough acquaintance with the cause of dispute between himself and the Assembly. Accordingly he addressed to them a judicious and dispassionate statement, which gives a full and impartial view of the entire movement. He was not ashamed of the part he had taken,—of the course he had pursued. So thoroughly was he convinced that he was contending for the cause of God and

truth that he needed not to write with suspicious reserve. He wished but a candid hearing. He threw himself, not on the affectionate and forgiving indulgence of his parish, but he honestly appealed to the divine testimony,—to the constitution of the Church of Christ,—and to the uniform tenor of his own sermons and exhortations on the vital points of ecclesiastical freedom and popular suffrage. And thus, in the fulness of his heart and earnestness of his convictions, he wrote—

“Unto the inhabitants of the burgh and parish of Perth, grace and peace be multiplied.

“The occasion of publishing the following discourse, delivered in your hearing, is a report made by the reverend presbytery of Perth to the Commission of the late General Assembly, at their meeting in August last,—the tenor whereof follows:—

“PERTH, July 25, 1733.

“The Presbytery having caused read the Act of the late General Assembly, with respect to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, minister of the gospel at Stirling, and the brethren that adhered to his protest, whereby they appoint the several presbyteries, of which the said brethren are members, to report to the Commission in August, and subsequent meetings of it, their conduct and behaviour with respect to the Act of Assembly. And this presbytery having made inquiry as to the behaviour of two of their brethren that joined the said Mr. Erskine in his protest, since said last Assembly, they find,—that there is not only a common fame, but some members of the presbytery, who have of late heard the two brethren preach, did declare, that they continue in their sermons to reflect upon the proceedings of the late and preceding Assemblies. And the presbytery appoints the report hereof to be laid before the Commission of the General Assembly, to meet at Edinburgh the second Wednesday of August next to come. After the presbytery had agreed to the above report, it was moved, that it might be added, as a further evidence of the guilt of these brethren,—that some members, who had occasion

to hear these brethren of late, refused to inform the presbytery if or not they did in their sermons reflect on the judicatories of the church, which, even in justice to these brethren, they were bound to do, had they been innocent. Then the question being put—Add this as a clause to the report or not? Roll called, and votes marked,—it carried, *nemine contradicente*, Add the said clause. This report of the presbytery was resolved upon, at the close of their meeting, when some had gone off; but two reverend brethren having returned about the time when they were concluding the above report, dissented from it, and with them a ruling elder. My brother, Mr. Moncrieff, who was also concerned in it, was not present at this meeting of presbytery, and I was obliged to leave them before any thing about the said report was moved, being to preach our ordinary week-day's sermon next day; but though there is little more than the breadth of one of our streets betwixt them and me, yet they thought fit to lay this general charge against me before the reverend Commission,—Of reflecting upon the proceedings of the late and preceding Assemblies,—without acquainting me in the least with it. If it is agreeable to the rules of the gospel, or to common justice and equity, to receive a report of this nature against a brother, or to table such a general accusation, in so public a manner, against him without once hearing him upon the cause, I leave it to others to judge. I am credibly informed the sermon I delivered on the Sabbath evening after the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in this place, was the only preaching of mine that was mentioned as giving occasion to the common fame that the Presbytery's report bears, and as the ground of their general accusation. I am not conscious to myself that I delivered anything contrary to my duty, or improper for you to hear upon that solemn occasion; and therefore I thought it was needful, for the sake of truth itself as well as for my exoneration, to make the following discourse as public as the general charge against me has been. * * *

“It is now seventeen years since I had your unanimous call, to come and labour amongst you in the work of the gospel. The countenance and encouragement you have always given me, and your particular interest in me, oblige me to give you some account of my late conduct, for which I am condemned in so public a manner.

“The sibboleth of our divided and distracted times, is that Act of Assembly, 1732, concerning the settlement of vacant churches. By it, the power of electing and calling ministers is given to heritors as such ; yea, the Act is laid in such terms, as, though all the elders and people of a congregation are reclaiming, yet the majority of the heritors, whether they have their residence in the parish or not, whether they are of the communion of the Church of Scotland or not, may impose a minister upon them, unless the reclaiming people can fix error in doctrine, or something scandalous in walk and practice, on the man who is the heritors’ choice. This appears to me to be contrary to the laws and institutions of the Lord Jesus, the only Lord and lawgiver unto his Church and people, being contrary to the apostolic practice and example recorded in the New Testament ; an encroachment upon the rights and charters of the sheep and flock of Christ, and also cross to the end and design of the giving of a gospel-ministry unto the Church.

“It cannot be pled that heritors, as such, have any right or title from the Word of God to elect or call ministers. Civil honour ought to be given to every one to whom it is due ; and harmony betwixt heritors and the people of a parish, in an affair of such importance unto them, as it is most desirable, so it ought to be endeavoured by all proper and expedient means : but to give an ecclesiastical trust and privilege, by a Church Act and constitution, to any set of men, upon the account of their heritage or other worldly considerations, appears to me to be contrary to the nature of Christ’s kingdom, which is spiritual. And, as it involves the judicatories of Christ’s House in debates and questions about the civil rights and titles of heritors, which do not

belong unto them, so it cannot be vindicated from that partial 'respect of persons' condemned by the Word of God, which, in matters of this kind, admits of no difference betwixt 'the man with the gold ring and goodly apparel, and the poor man in mean raiment,' James ii. 2—5. To impose a minister upon a reclaiming and dissenting people, who yet make a professed subjection to the ordinances of the gospel, and declare themselves willing and ready to submit to the ministry of such as are settled amongst them, according to the rules of the Word, appears to me to be contrary to the apostolic example and practice recorded in the New Testament. I shall only touch at two passages, the one in the first and the other in the sixth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,—they are both made use of by our reformed divines in their pleadings against the tyranny and oppression of the Church of Rome. . . . What is now passed against me I know, and what I am farther threatened with I may partly know, yet I cannot see everything that my above conduct may expose me unto: but whatever I may be called to endure or suffer, according to my present views, it is stated upon the three following points. The first is,—That any ecclesiastical ordinance or constitution, contrary to the laws and institutions of our Lord Jesus, the only Lord and lawgiver unto his Church and people, is in itself sinful, and therefore can have no binding force nor authority over any of the office-bearers or members of the Church of Christ: and such the Act of Assembly, 1732, appears to me to be, for the reasons I have already given. The second point (and which is yet a more immediate ground upon which our present testimony is stated) is this,—That the ministers of the Church of Scotland ought, upon all proper occasions, to declare, even from the pulpit, the sinfulness that is in any ecclesiastical act and constitution, or the sinfulness and unwarrantableness of such proceedings of the Church judicatories, whereby the heritage and flock of God are oppressed, and whereby our constitution is wounded, by the opening of a wide door for the bringing in of a corrupt ministry into the Church of Christ; espe-

cially when the ordinary means of representations and instructions unto our several General Assemblies have been tried, but without success. This is what the Word of God, our Presbyterian principles, and our ordination vows and engagements, oblige us unto. This is our duty, as we are watchmen set upon Jerusalem's walls, and appointed to sound the trumpet, and to give the alarm of approaching danger to the city of God. The third point is,—That this freedom and liberty of testifying publicly, upon all proper occasions, against the public sins and defections of a church, ought not to be suppressed or restrained; and if it is suppressed or restrained by an ecclesiastical act or decision, then it is the duty and privilege of the ministers and members of the Church to testify against any such sentence and decision as what fixeth the ministers of the Church under sinful and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion. And this is what is our case with respect to our protestation against the foresaid decision of the late General Assembly. We have declared in our representations to the last meeting of the Commission, that we did not intend by our protestation to impugn the power and authority of the General Assembly to censure any of the ministers and members of this Church upon just and relevant grounds, or the exercise of that power and authority according to the Word of God, and the known principles of this Church; and that our foresaid protestation is only a solemn attested declaration and testimony against a wrong decision of the General Assembly, which lays a restraint upon ministerial freedom and faithfulness: and this protestation we could not retract, because such a retraction might have been justly constructed, not only to be a submitting unto a decision that lays such a sinful embargo upon ministers, but also a giving up with what is a proper and legal mean of testifying, before a church judicatory, against an unwarrantable sentence and decision. As these are the points upon which I am singled out, together with my other three brethren, as the object of the heavy and severe censure contained in the act and sentence of the late General

Assembly against us, so I hope I have no ground to be afraid or ashamed to own them.

“The Church of Scotland has been honoured to bear witness in a special manner to the kingly office of Christ, and that unto him it belongs to give laws and ordinances unto his own house, and instructions unto his ministers, who are obliged ‘to teach all things whatsoever he hath commanded them.’ And the above points, upon which our present testimony is stated, are the same, upon the matter, with that which a great cloud of witnesses in Scotland have borne testimony unto since the dawning of the Reformation light amongst us ; and though I should be exposed to suffer trouble as an evil-doer, even unto bonds, for the same, yet may I hope ‘the Word of the Lord is not bound,’ 2 Tim. ii. 9. . . . I am not convicted of anything before the judicatories of this Church, either in doctrine or practice, contrary to the Word of God, our Confession of Faith, or Presbyterian principles ; and therefore it is my duty to endeavour to fulfil that ministry among you which I have received from the Lord, and to preach his word, out of season as well as in season ; and all that I desire of you is, that you may pray for the supplies of the Spirit of Jesus unto me, that I may be enabled unto the faithful discharge of my duty amongst you ; as also that you may receive the word of reconciliation which I am honoured to bear ; and that, whatever I may be exposed unto in the discharge of my duty, you may not be ashamed of my bonds.

“The burgh of Perth was honoured, at the very dawning of Reformation light, first of all the burghs in Scotland, to make a noble stand for our Reformation rights and privileges, in opposition to the idolatry and ecclesiastical tyranny of the Church of Rome, under which the whole land groaned at that time ; and ye have distinguished yourselves in a zealous concern for, and by a steady adherence unto, our civil and religious liberties, particularly in the year 1715, when many of you suffered banishment from your own habitations, and endured some other hardships, after you were overpowered by force and violence, and

obliged to give way to the superior number of those who came against you, and made this place for some time the seat of their displayed banner against the revolution interest, our late sovereign King George, and the Protestant succession in his royal family. But our good and gracious God did scatter these clouds—he restored you to your habitations—he preserved this place, when some neighbouring villages were laid in ashes; and he has followed you since that time with a series and train of remarkable blessings. All these lay you under so many obligations to a steadfast perseverance in the truths and way of the Lord.

“My present situation may, I hope, apologize for the length of this preface. I intend not in it the irritation of any, but to discharge myself of what I judge to be a debt I owe to the people of my pastoral charge in a particular manner, whatever the consequences of this whole affair towards myself may be. As for the discourse immediately following, my design, in the several preachings on that subject, was, according unto the measure of the grace of Christ given unto me, to recommend unto you the faith of our Lord Jesus, and a steadfast perseverance in the same.

“That you may know the truth as it is in Christ, and that you may be rooted and built up in him, and may be established in the faith, is the prayer of him who is one of your pastors, more willing than able to serve you in the work of the gospel.

“WILLIAM WILSON.*

“PERTH, Sept. 22, 1733.”

The Commission met again in November,—but their spirit had not changed. The victory which they imagined they had won over their recusant members was not to be

* Preface to his sermon named ‘STEDFASTNESS in the FAITH Recommended,’—a discourse preached on the Sabbath evening after the celebration of the Lord’s Supper at Perth, July 22, 1733. To which is prefixed a short account of the occasion of publishing this, together with some reasons for his condemned conduct, directed by the author to the people of his pastoral charge.

lightly given up. Wilson and his colleagues "were dealt with," as the phrase is—were alternately flattered and menaced. The special point of inquiry naturally was—Whether the suspended brethren had obeyed the sentence passed upon them, and had abstained from all ministerial labour? The inquiry was a vain one. The four ministers avowed that they had felt as free to labour as if the sentence had never been pronounced. Their suspension had meanwhile created some sympathy in the church,—and seven synods and two presbyteries had laid remonstrances on the table of the Commission, praying them to pause ere they proceeded to the harsh extremity of final deposition. But the Commission was not to be mollified, and the casting vote of the Moderator only carried the Court to another question,—Whether the suspended brethren should be simply loosed from their respective charges, or at once be deposed from the office of the holy ministry? The majority voted that they should be loosed,—declared to be no longer ministers of the Established Church,—and incapable of discharging any of its ministerial functions. In a paper dated 16th November, 1733, the brethren protested against this sentence, and formally declared THEIR SECESSION,—“therefore do we, for these and other weighty reasons, to be laid open in due time, protest, that we are obliged to make a secession from them, and that we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes and amend them.”

The brethren had separated without any definite understanding. Mr. Wilson went home to Perth, rejoicing that he “was counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.” No course of future procedure had been planned,—he “went out, not knowing whither he went.” According to usual form, a minister was appointed to read the sentence against him from that pulpit he had so long occupied. The minister who assumed this task was Ferguson of Killin,*—a man quite adequate to the work, for it was

* As the scene of his pastoral labours appears to have been changed, he is sometimes called the minister of Logierait.

he that made the proposal in the synod of Perth that Ebenezer Erskine's sermon should be taken into consideration, and its author censured. But the chafed populace rose in rebellion, met him at some distance from the city, resisted his entrance into Perth, and so prevented him from carrying into effect the commands of the Commission. The intimidated deputy, in writing to the Commission, represents this opposition in strong terms, as if it had been a civic rebellion. A few weeks afterwards, at Gairney Bridge, on the 6th of December, 1733, the Associate Presbytery was SOLEMNLY CONSTITUTED.

These peculiar circumstances in which Mr. Wilson was placed did certainly try him, but he says, "the Lord pities, upholds, and supports me." "I am now a wonder to many, and my mother's sons are angry with me, yet I have peace that I am in the way of duty." To be contemptuously flung out of a church, for attachment to which his father had been exiled, his mother disinherited, and himself had made cheerful sacrifices,—to be rudely severed from the chosen sphere of his labours, and the people whom he loved,—to be suddenly denied the ordinary means of maintenance for himself and his family, without prospect of any new source of support,—to be laid under the ban of the Assembly at a period when ecclesiastical censures had scarcely been divested of their popish terror, and when dissent was an unknown and perilous novelty, was indeed a trial so great and formidable, that nothing could have upborne him but faith and a good conscience, with the assured hope of acceptance from Him in whose cause such labours had been undertaken and such hazards incurred.

CHAPTER VIII.

Wilson's hopes of return to the Establishment at length abandoned—Peace of mind—Vindication of his character—Necessity of training young men for the ministry—Wise resolution of the Associate Presbytery—Unanimous choice of Wilson as their Professor—His peculiar qualifications for the responsible charge, and his success as a Teacher of Theology.

THE ignominy and injustice heaped on Mr. Wilson did not destroy within him all hopes of adjustment and final reconciliation. Longer than any of his brethren did he cherish the idea of returning to the Establishment. Hope against hope lingered in his heart. He would not credit the notion that the church was so fallen and perverse, so utterly inimical to every species and amount of reformation. One Assembly however passed after another, but no vital redress was proposed. Several new acts indeed were passed, and old edicts repealed, inclining to purity and liberality, and speaking the language of a fettered forbearance and of conditional restoration to the ejected brethren. Wilson was encouraged by such procedure to write to Ebenezer Erskine, expressing his anticipation of the possibility of ultimate return to the Establishment. His record of his own feelings at this period is thus given by himself in his "Defence." "I own that after the meeting of Assembly 1734, I was in much perplexity about our continuing in a state of Secession. It occasioned many thoughts of heart unto me, to understand what was duty in the present case. But as I had no hesitation about my duty when I did, together with my three brethren, declare a secession from the judicatories of this church, in our protestation before the Commission, November 1733, so when

I have observed the said judicatories, since the year 1734, I have been gradually cleared, and more and more confirmed that it is our duty to continue in a state of Secession. . . . I desire to bless the Lord who cleared my way, and led me by his good hand upon me to join my brethren, though the unworthiest among them." Especially after the Assembly of 1736, his mind was set at rest, and he was quite prepared to form a separate ecclesiastical organization. His advice had for some time postponed such definite procedure, for the other three brethren had less hesitation in "proceeding to any step of jurisdiction," but now they all felt warranted to go forward to "the exercise of government and discipline." A "Testimony" was also published, in the preparation of which Wilson had a principal share; and which he afterwards defended with vigour and success. In this year too the brethren felt all restraints taken off them, and preached the gospel to large audiences in various parts of the country. Parochial boundaries and designations were no longer to be regarded. The cause was God's, and they were bound to advocate it at all times and in all places.

Mr. Wilson was now a dissenter—a member of a separate church. His secession had been forced upon him. When he raised his voice in defence of Mr. Erskine's synod sermon, he little dreamed of the issue, and would have recoiled from it with horror. But providence prepared him for it step by step; and his courage rested on the calm decisions of an enlightened conscience. His zeal was "according to knowledge." It was neither wounded pride, nor intemperate haste, nor constitutional temerity, nor love of power and pre-eminence, nor fondness of popular applause, nor reckless desire of innovation, that brought Mr. Wilson out of the Establishment; for, during the whole process, he exhibited humility, modesty, prudence, and forbearance; and he was marked by a conscientious reluctance to take one unnecessary step, utter a harsh censure, or do a provoking action. And, because he did nothing rashly, was he the firmer when

deliberation was over, and the moment for decision had arrived. There was even tardiness in erecting a separate jurisdiction, and in encouraging the people to leave the national church. Mr. Wilson waited, and was sickened through "hope deferred," ere he coalesced with the brethren, who had already felt it to be "full time to proceed to the exercise of the powers with which they were intrusted by the Head of the Church, for the vindication of his truths and ordinances, and for the relief of the Christian people, by supplying them with sermon." Mr. Wilson's language is eloquent in its concinnity and terseness, when he enumerates the grievances which led to the Secession. "It was not," he sums up, in answer to his opponent, "it was not violent intrusions, it was not the act of 1732, neither was it any other particular step of defection, considered abstractly by themselves, upon which the Secession was stated; but a complex course of defection both in doctrine, government, and discipline, carried on with a high hand by the present judicatories of this church, justifying themselves in their procedure, and refusing to be reclaimed."* And well might he add, when vindicating his party from the sin of schism,—“the Secession was not declared till some ministers were thrust out,—‘they have not gone out with haste, neither have they gone out by flight.’”†

The preceding narrative plainly shows that these Seceders were virtually expelled from the national church, because they resisted its despotic mandates. They hoped for reformation, after they had left it, but there was "burning instead of beauty." The "free, faithful, reforming General Assembly," to which they had appealed, came not. Wilson notes this declension very faithfully. An attempt had been made, as he describes it, to "relax the Four Brethren" from the sentences passed upon them, but it rested only "on some political considerations." Violent settlements in the parishes of Cambusnethan,

* Defence 40.

† Do. 32.

Denny, Troquire, &c., were evident proof that any desire of reformation was insidious and hollow. The Assembly relied on its own power and authority, and trusted that time might heal the breach. Its overtures for the return of the Seceders were only a matter of courtesy,—for it still performed the very deeds which led to the disruption,—“the voice was the voice of Jacob, but the hands were the hands of Esau.” Mr. Wilson writes in his diary, in reference to the procedure of the Assembly even at its commencement,—“I was much impressed with the importance of it, and with a view of its bringing forth things of considerable importance.” He subjoins the following true remark,—“If the brethren that were most warm for censuring had foreseen what was to follow, they had never driven the matter so far. But He on whose shoulders the government is laid is *wonderful in counsel*.” Tyranny on the one hand and principle on the other thus laid the foundation of the Secession Church. It would have been a sad epoch for these realms if a compromise had been effected, or a pernicious truce had been agreed on. A long night of darkness would have fallen upon our fatherland; and, amidst spiritual death and degeneracy, such a change would have passed over Scotland, as may be seen in the lamentable apostacy of so many of the Continental Protestant churches. But God in his mercy willed it otherwise.

A separate church was now constituted,—the “little leaven” was now “hid among the measures of meal.” It was necessary to extend her privileges. Multitudes were sighing in bondage. Societies of such persons, united together for prayer, stirred up the Associate Presbytery by craving supply of sermon. The granting of such a request naturally led the brethren to consider the propriety of training up young men for the ministry.* This idea appeared to the presbytery a “complex affair, and they commended that there be a looking to the Lord for light and direction in this important step.” Even the necessity of

* Not less than 70 such applications for supply of sermon were made to the Presbytery during the years 1737-8.

the measure did not lead them into precipitation, though it was apparent that unless they educated students in theology, the Secession must have died with its originators. Feeling the loud call of Providence, they now resolved to proceed. After long reasoning on some preliminary points,* it "carried unanimously that this trust should be committed to Mr. Wilson, their present Moderator." "And, therefore, the presbytery did, and hereby do, make choice of, nominate, and appoint, their reverend brother, Mr. William Wilson, minister of the gospel at Perth, to take the inspection, and to be teacher of the youth who should offer themselves to be instructed, in order to their being licensed to preach the gospel, as they should be found qualified, with full power to him to direct them in their studies, in such manner as shall be most conducive to their being acquainted with the holy Scriptures, and the reformed principles of this church founded thereon, contained in her Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Larger and Shorter; and, considering his parochial and other ministerial work in his present circumstances, the presbytery leave it wholly to him to judge of what time he can most conveniently spare for teaching and instructing those students; and the presbytery recommend it to all the brethren to make inquiry after fit persons to be licensed to preach the gospel or to be trained up for the ministry, and to report their diligence in this matter, from time to time, to this presbytery; and, therefore, they recommend it to their committee above named, to prepare proper overtures, to be laid before the presbytery at their next ordinary meeting, anent the admission of students, and the presbytery's procedure in licensing them to preach the gospel."

This responsible office was immediately assumed by Mr. Wilson. He selected the months of March, April, and May as the period of the divinity session; and gave himself in earnest to the work. He possessed indeed peculiar qualifications for it. His learning and his judgment were

* Minute of Presbytery, Abernethy, 5th November, 1736

matured. His habits of study fitted him for patient and prolonged investigation ; and he could well bear such labour, for he was in the prime of life. The fervours of youth were only chastened by the staid sobriety of middle age. He was "apt to teach." His mind more than any of the four brethren was adapted and trained to academic labour. Possessed of a vigorous intellect, having command over extensive stores of theological knowledge, endowed with prompt facility of illustration, blessed with firmness of purpose, dignity of demeanour, equanimity of temper, and sympathizing generosity of heart, the first Professor of Divinity in the Secession justified the confidence reposed in him, and proved himself a skilful and successful tutor in the school of the prophets. His pupils loved him, and rejoiced to rehearse his excellencies. Adam Gib, that theological giant, always warmed into eloquence when he spoke of his teacher in divinity. In choosing Mr. Wilson to this station of honour and responsibility, his three colleagues displayed their impartiality and judgment. All of them were good theologians, and two of them were popular preachers ; but they felt that in the knowledge and discussion of first principles, in his intimacy with the original scriptures, and in his general literary and philosophical attainments, he was their superior,—and they frankly acknowledged this in electing him Professor. They longed for an educated and pious ministry, and they were assured that Professor Wilson could furnish the elements of a sound and thorough theological education, and, at the same time, excite and cherish within the young men those pious emotions and aspirations which form the best part of that wisdom which "winneth souls." Mr. Wilson felt what was required of him, but he did not faint in the prospect. As far back as the year 1727, in his sermon preached at the opening of the Synod of Stirling and Perth, he says, "a corrupt ministry has ever been the ruin of the church,—it belongs to us to look well whom we receive into the ministry, that they be such who, so far as we can discern, have some feeling and experience of a

work of God upon their own hearts, and who seek into the ministry not merely to obtain a livelihood, or to make a trade of preaching, but who have higher and more noble ends before them, even the glory of Christ and salvation of others." Our first Professor thus felt truly that a converted ministry is the "article of a standing or a falling church." The Hall flourished beyond expectation under Mr. Wilson. "A band of men, whose hearts God had touched," at once placed themselves under his tuition. Ralph Erskine, in a letter dated April 10th, 1741, and written to the famous Whitfield, says,—“Our Professor of Divinity has more candidates for the ministry under his charge than most of the public colleges except Edinburgh.” The Lord blessed “the house of Aaron.” Systematic theology was the favourite and engrossing study in those days, and the scholastic lore of a by-gone period was not wholly extinct. The divinity of Holland was then a special favourite in Scotland. Not a few of its best ministers had studied at Leyden or Utrecht, and brought back with them a liking for the solid and ponderous tomes of Dutch Theology. Professor Wilson selected for his textbook Marck’s *Medulla*,—an accurate, lucid, and instructive treatise, replete with striking and compressed illustrations. His own prelections were based upon this system; and, as usual at that period, they were composed and delivered in Latin. The “whole business” of his theological class was conducted in this learned language, which the Professor could speak with perfect facility. We have long fallen from this venerable practice. Can we plead utility only for its disuse? Our students who have passed through a college curriculum should be able, by a little exercise, to speak the *lingua communis* of Europe, and understand it when spoken. We do not argue, however, for a revival of the practice, for the fluent use of Latin as a conversational medium is not necessarily either the index or the fruit of a ripe and successful scholarship.

CHAPTER IX.

Seceding ministers libelled—Deposed—Scene of Wilson's expulsion—Secession vindicated—Meeting in the Glovers' Yard—Blessing and Wealth of the Glovers' Corporation—Wilson's health injured by open-air preaching—Debility—Last Sermon—Death—"His household after him."

THE Secession Church was now fully organised. It was able not only to sustain but to extend itself. And yet it was viewed as still in connexion with the Established Church. It could not deem itself finally cast off. The wonder is that these early Seceders, mocked and maltreated as they were, did not voluntarily declare themselves at once a separate church, with an independent jurisdiction. But their doctrine was, that they had not seceded from the Church of Scotland, but from a party in the church, "who were carrying on a course of defection and backsliding." At length the Assembly felt affronted by the bold and systematic procedure of its suspended ministers, and resolved to strike a final blow. The Assembly of 1738 ordered the Commission to serve each of them with a libel as a dangerous schismatic. This libel was served upon them in March 1739. In May of the same year they appeared at the bar of the Assembly, as a constituted Presbytery, and firmly but respectfully declined its authority. The four Seceders had now doubled their number. The Assembly was afraid of turbulence among such of its members as sympathised with the remonstrants, and did not venture to carry its avowed purpose into execution. The following Assembly, on the 12th and 15th of May, 1740, consummated the work, and the assistance of the civil authorities was solemnly invoked to carry out the ecclesiastical mandate.



As of old, "the princes, the governors and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces" were summoned to the dedication of Nebuchadnezzar's image,—so now the servants of the state were enjoined to put into immediate and rigorous operation the decrees of the church. The state-church has a secular arm to defend it, as well as a national exchequer to support it. The crown yields to the mitre. The civic authorities in Perth were obsequious to the kirk,—they received the edict on the Sabbath morning, and that very day they resolved to enforce it! Their anxious haste proved that they were afraid of reflection.

Mr. Wilson had been made aware of this movement, and fortified himself by prayer. An unusual thoughtfulness was that morning visible on his countenance. The church in which he had laboured for four and twenty years was now to be shut against him. His conscience acquitted him of rash and sectarian procedure. He had suffered insult without a murmur, willing still to preach to an affectionate people. His character had been aspersed, yet he humbly discharged his duty as one of the ministers of Perth. But from that pulpit, hallowed by so many sacred associations, he was at length to be forcibly excluded. His private exercises on this eventful morning were somewhat protracted. He sought grace to be faithful when the crisis had come. The domestic meal was postponed to an unwonted season, if not altogether neglected. His household servants gathered that something strange was about to fall upon them, and whispered to one another their ominous forebodings. From his closet, nerved and resolved, Mr. Wilson went to the church.* Its doors were shut, and the civic magnates proudly guarded them with mace and halberts. An immense assemblage, filled with amazement and perplexity, crowded

* Mr. Wilson took along with him to the church an intimate professional friend, Mr. Andrew Ferrier—the paternal grandfather of Dr. Ferrier—to whom we have so often referred. This gentleman protested against the conduct of the magistrates,—but was met with the sad retort,—“that they would take men in their own hands, and answer to God when called.”



the streets,—musing in their minds what might be the issue. Mr. Wilson passed through the throng, who made way for him with profound obeisance, went up to the principal entrance of the church, and confronting the municipal authorities, boldly requested admission into the house of God,—“In the name of my Divine Master, I ask admission into his temple.” Once—a second time—a third time he repeated the solemn demand, and was met with a curt and firm denial. The expectant multitude were confounded and irritated. A low murmur ran along them,—“Mr. Wilson’s kept out of the kirk.” The aged wept, the younger heaved with indignation. There was a movement—a muttered menace, then a yell—“Stone them, stone them.” The storm was rising—a minute more, and it would have burst. But the popular fury was suddenly hushed. Wilson turned to the vast assemblage, heaving in wrathful commotion around him. His serene countenance and tranquil attitude commanded their attention. “No violence,” he exclaimed, in tones of earnest and impressive calmness, “no violence, my friends; the Master whom I serve is the Prince of Peace.” Their rage was stayed. The man of God triumphed, and the victory was sealed—when shrill and clear these words of power rang again over the wedged masses, and were heard to their outmost verge,—“no violence,” my friends, “I implore you; the Master whom I serve is the Prince of Peace.” During the lull, the deacon of the Glovers’ corporation interfered, and spontaneously offered to Mr. Wilson the Glovers’ yard as a place of temporary meeting. The proposal was immediately accepted, and the vast concourse at once adjourned. The yard was immediately filled. The services commenced with Mr. Wilson’s solemn reading of a few verses of the fifty-fifth Psalm. His vast audience felt how appropriate were the words which the minister slowly recited:—

“He was no foe that me reproach’d,
Then that endure I could;
Nor hater that did ’gainst me boast,
From him me hide I would.

But thou, man, who mine equal, guide,
And mine acquaintance wast :
We join'd sweet counsels, to God's house
In company we pass'd."

Hundreds who sung these words were thrilled by the truth of them—felt how bitter was the pang of exile from the dominant church—and how that church, in ejecting them, had renounced its own principles, and violated all its sacred professions. It was not the world, but the church that "reproached" them. It was not a "foe" that afflicted them, but an "equal," "guide," and "acquaintance," often revered in the eyes of Christian fellowship. Wilson's text was one also of peculiar adaptation to the scene and circumstances, Heb. xiii. 13, "Let us go forth, therefore, unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach." The deep solemnity in which the words were uttered, and the immediate sensation which they awakened among the people, were, perhaps, the most vivid commentary which the text ever received. The Glovers' yard was a living illustration of the duty which the apostle inculcated, and the sermon had its echo in the experience of the auditors. The meeting at length quietly dispersed, carrying with them those impressions, which ripened into decided attachment to the Secession and its interests. Round many a hearth was the scene described to wondering listeners, while the text was repeated times without number. Old men delighted to tell to their children's children, how Mr. Wilson looked and spoke in the Glovers' yard, and how at the very reading of the text each one held his breath, and a spell so deep and awful lay upon them, that not a stir or rustle was heard in all the great congregation. Two anecdotes, handed down by family tradition, in connexion with these events, are recorded by Dr. Ferrier. Mr. Wilson's father had lain hid for a season in the Mearns' Moor, in the days of former persecution, and a young girl carried his food to his place of retreat. She seems to have become an inmate of the family, and she was treated with peculiar and tender deference in Mr. Wilson's household at Perth. On the

morning of this trying Sabbath, the aged domestic was somewhat apprehensive and uneasy. Her busy memory brought back the scenes of her youth, when she glided away stealthily, both morning and evening, to the wild and gloomy morass. The privations of the father made her anxious for the welfare of the son. And as the tide of these sad recollections filled her heart, she could not help looking wistfully in her master's face, as he was leaving his home on his way to the church, and saying to him,—“Tak' tent, Mr. William, tak' tent what ye're doing, for I fear, if things gang on this way, I'll get ye're meat to carry to the moor, as I did ye're guid father's afore ye.” When Mr. Wilson returned from the services of the day, he retired at once to his chamber. Many thoughts might press upon him, and he sought quiet and uninterrupted meditation. His eldest daughter, a girl about twelve years of age, had witnessed with natural curiosity the strange proceedings, had seen her father seek admission to his own church, and had heard the gruff refusal which the magistrates gave him. She had been also in the Glovers' yard, and had beheld thousands of faces looking up to her sire with intense excitement. But she was sorely puzzled to understand these novelties. Her natural wish was to hear them explained by her father. The matter appeared to her young mind so solemn, that she was afraid to ask what she coveted. But with restless anxiety she “hung about” the door of his study, anxious to obtain at least a glimpse of his countenance. Her father at last observed her, and reading her wishes in her features, called her to him, and patting her kindly on the head, said to her,—“Bell, this has indeed been a day of trial, but we have reason, great reason, to be thankful, that it has not been a day of shame. If any body ask you, Bell, my dear, why your papa lost his kirk, you may just say, as good Mr. Guthrie before his execution bade my mother say of him, if any one asked her why he lost his head,—IT WAS IN A GOOD CAUSE.”

Thus was Wilson's connection with the Church of Scotland finally terminated. He had spoken only truth, had

done nothing rashly, and had sought merely, without tumult or excitement, the purity and welfare of the Redeemer's kingdom. He was warmly attached to the Church of Scotland, "considered, as her principles are held forth from the Word of God, in her Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Form of Church Government, and Directory for Worship." And because he deemed that she had fallen from her "high estate," both in doctrine and discipline, did he protest so vehemently against her defection. Had such liberty of protest been allowed him, perhaps he might have been satisfied. But surely oppression assumes a new element of cruelty, when even the relief and privilege of complaint are stifled. What power could keep a faithful conscience from remonstrance, when such wrongs were perpetrated, and even gloried in as a successful policy, when the gospel was mutilated and the people were enslaved? But the Assembly hoped to create silence by its stringent enactments, and so to crush the spirit of the honest and humble minority, that none of them might "peep or mutter," or offer any resistance to its nefarious procedure. When St. Giles mimicked the thunders of the Vatican, all were expected to tremble before its fulminations. But what free-born man would renounce his inalienable right, his right of speech, which nature has given him, and revelation has consecrated? Such a traitor to his own manhood and dignity, to the holy cause of truth, and the interests of unborn thousands, would deserve universal execration. But in Wilson's experience, "the word of the Lord was in his heart as a burning fire shut up in his bones, he was weary with forbearing and could not stay." And there is no wonder that such a necessity pressed upon him, and found solemn and effective utterance. In the national church, according to his own testimony, "the Lord Jesus had been blasphemed, his supreme Deity and the Deity of the Holy Ghost had been impugned, the operation of the Holy Spirit had been ridiculed and burlesqued; a scheme of dangerous errors, connected with an impudent denial of the federal headship

of the first Adam, had been vented, and that scheme had been maintained at the bar of the judicatories, and the judicatories had not lifted up the standard of a particular and express testimony against the above gross abominations, and they have been never found to deserve a place and room in causes of public fasting and humiliations ; likewise, the judicatories had lifted up their authority and power above the King of Zion in the act 1732, and in the acts 1733, against the protesting ministers, and against the ministers of Dunfermline." * An indictment, so fearful in its counts, and yet more fearful in its proofs, demanded a persistent fidelity from those who brought it. The only refuge from such Erastian impurity and domination was found at length to be in a bold Secession ; and the only safety for the advocates of corruption, was in banishing the patriotic and high-hearted from their communion. The reasons of separation, on the part of Wilson and his coadjutors, were so many and so urgent, so intimately bound up with the honour of Christ and the glory of his house ; and the hope of their removal had become so faint, for protest was malignantly forbidden, and all reforming effort disallowed, that we believe, in no other instance in our country, can dissent and secession be so fully and triumphantly vindicated. The Secession was no schism. It began not in the frothy violence of vulgar sectarianism. It was an act which the crisis justified, and which God has sealed with his blessing. Step by step was Wilson led to the inevitable issue. He was the last to renounce the hope of returning to the bosom of the Church ; but years of thought and observation gradually strengthened his conviction, that his duty was to remain apart. His withdrawal was not a hasty resolve, urged in impetuosity and followed with regret, but a decision formed in calmness, strengthened by prayer, carried out with dignity, and crowned with success.

The Glovers' yard was the place of meeting for a con-

* Continuation of Defence, p. 369.

siderable period to the first Seceders in Perth. It had been formerly granted for a similar purpose to Mr. Wilson, as may be seen in the following minute of the corporation :—

“*PERTH, 27th November, 1737.*

“This day a Report being made to the Auditor Court of the Calling by the present Deacon, that upon the ninth day said moneth, Applicatione was made to him by Colline Brown, Late Provost of Perth, and James Davidson, Late Baillie there, Desiring the ffavor of the Calling to allow the Liberty of their Howse and Yaird to Mr. William Willson to preach the GossPELL there, when it is not his turne to preach in the Church, the said Court Unnannimously Consents yrto, And orders that a Generall Court for that end be called at three of the Cloack Afternoon said day. The Generall Court being mett According to Appointment, They did Consent to the granting the said Gentlemen their Request and Disire, and that by a great majority of the Calling, and ordered this their ffavor and grant to be Registrate in their Books, nemine Contra dicente.

(Signed) “*Jo. MILLER.*”*

The period of open-air worship is said to have been unusually inclement, and it had an injurious effect on Mr. Wilson's health. A church, however, was speedily erected,—the same as is still possessed by the United Presbyterian congregation under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Newlands. But the kindness of the Glovers' corporation to the ejected minister and his people, seems to have brought upon it the blessing of heaven. There is no fanaticism in such an assertion. The God of salvation is also the God of providence. As the house of Obed-Edom was blessed because the ark of God enjoyed a temporary asylum under his roof, a similar blessing seems to have descended on the Glovers' corporation. The early Seceders, while they enjoyed the “ffavor

* For this document, and some others of interest, the author is indebted to the kindness of Dr. Barlas of Perth.

of the Calling," always prayed fervently to God to reward and bless the donors; and the remark was both universal and just, that the "good folk's" petitions had been copiously answered. The revenues of this corporation now amount to a very large sum annually, derived from purchases of land made about the period that they showed "no little kindness" to the ousted Seceders; and by recent management their wealth is still rapidly increasing.

The labours of Mr. Wilson were now multifarious; but his preaching in the Glovers' yard, during a chilly season, weakened his constitution. Fatigue and exposure produced a visible effect upon his health. He never recovered his former strength, though he continued to do his Master's work. Brief relaxations from usual toil afforded him only a temporary respite. Excited hopes of ultimate restoration to wonted vigour were doomed to repeated disappointments. The physician's art was tried in vain. Change of scene brought little amelioration. His body, which was originally very robust, was worn out. It was not any active disease which assailed him, nor was it the infirmity of any special organ under which he sunk. His constitution was exhausted, its nervous energies had been too continuously expended. "The grasshopper became a burden," and he pined away beneath that drooping lassitude, which is the very image of death. "The spirit was willing," but alas! the "flesh was weak." His friends still hoped that he might rally, and congratulated him on the prospect. He smiled and listened, while the languid pulsations of life within him spoke another tale, and created a different presentiment. Still he occasionally preached. Within eight weeks of his death, on the 20th of September, 1741, he presided at the dispensation of the Lord's supper among his people, and preached with more than ordinary emotion and impressiveness. On the confines of eternity, he spake with a hallowed solemnity. "The powers of the world to come" gave his spirit additional fervour and strength. It was the last Sabbath but one of his earthly service. On the following Lord's day, he again preached

from the ninth verse of the forty-eighth Psalm,—“We have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.” This was his last text, and it was appropriate. The loving kindness of God had ever been with him a favourite theme. Often had he expatiated on it. He had frequently “thought” of it in the temple; and soon was he to sing of it in the upper sanctuary. His last text on earth was his first song in glory. His spirit was yet vibrating under the excitement of this delicious theme, when it was summoned away to those hymning choirs that sing of love before the throne; and he felt their halleluiah to be but the melody of his own sensations, elevated and prolonged. His friend Moncrieff of Culfargie, in whom the impulses of kindness were as powerful as the ardours of zeal, had taken him out to his own rural residence, in hopes of his improvement; but a week spent there brought him no relief. His debility prevented him from improving by the air and recreation which are so grateful to an invalid when removed into the country. The “silver cord” had lost its tension, and he was not able

———“to climb
The breezy summit’s brow sublime”——

and welcome the exhilaration of such refreshing exercise. It was now the fall of the year, and the brown and faded leaves that rustled beneath his feeble tread were felt to be the emblem of his own speedy dissolution. On the first Sabbath of November, which was also the first day of the month, he baptized the twin children of his friend Mr. Fisher; and Mr. Fisher adds in his “Domestic Record,” “This was the last piece of public ministerial work performed by that eminent servant of Jesus Christ.” A fortnight longer did he sojourn on earth, and at length he “fell on sleep,” on the 14th November, 1741.*

Calm on the bosom of thy God,
Fair spirit, rest thee now;
For while thy stay was yet on earth,
His seal was on thy brow.

* Dr. Ferrier states in his “Memoir,” that Mr. Wilson died on the 8th

It is to be regretted that no record of Mr. Wilson's deathbed exercises has been preserved, though there can be no doubt that they were in unison with the graces and hopes of his previous life. The Master whom he had so faithfully served would not desert but would refresh and strengthen the dying saint. He was not quite fifty-one years of age at his death,—and he had been a minister for a quarter of a century. This early removal of a man so active and useful, whose labours too were so much needed, and had been so much blessed, suggests many striking thoughts. We bow to the divine sovereignty, and we imagine there must be in the church on high some sphere of duty and enjoyment which the translated servant is to fill,—some lofty and congenial occupation set apart for the brightest and purest of human spirits. Prepared so soon for the inner shrine, they are no longer allowed to labour in the outer court. Neither gifts nor graces are the pledges of a long life. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof fadeth,—yea these “flowers” which bloom on the verdant bosom of the field have an existence so delicate and brief, that they perish sooner than the coarser herbage which they adorn. And we must not repine. Our wishes are not wise. Too often do we feel, when we mourn over an early grave, that

“we sought to stay
An angel on the earth, a spirit ripe
For heaven,—and Mercy, in her love, refused.”

Mrs. Wilson lived only six months after her husband. The stay of her life was gone. The joy of her home had departed,—and her dwelling was covered with sackcloth. The anxious moment of maternal “sorrow” came upon her in enfeebled health and depressed spirits; and, in giving birth to a still-born infant, the widowed mother sunk and expired. And so at length the fire was extinguished on the hearth. But the young and desolate household were not alone,—the Father was with them. The

of October, but he is now convinced that the date we have given, after Mr. Fisher, is the correct one.

prayers, instructions, and example of their parents had not been lost upon them. At the period of his father's decease, Gilbert, a boy of eleven years, had been attending a school at Abernethy. The tidings of his father's alarming illness had reached him, and he ran to Perth,—but, alas! too late to behold his parent in life. His spirit failed not at the mournful scene. Claspings his hands in his mother's, he cried, "Mother, we have a new claim on God to-day." What a noble triumph for a youth. That expression of faith was too high for long residence on earth. That same boy conducted family worship, after his father's removal, with a gravity, intelligence, and pious fervour which delighted and astonished all his friends. Such religious experience was soon ripe for heaven. When his mother sickened, Gilbert drooped, fever seized him, and mother and son were conveyed together to the last resting-place. "Lovely and pleasant in their lives, in their death they were not divided." After the mother's death, the three surviving children proved themselves worthy of their lineage. John Wilson, who was born during the period of his father's suspension, and in his younger years was fondly named by a domestic soubriquette from that circumstance, was minister of Methven, and died in 1803 at the advanced age of threescore and ten,—having displayed, during a long ministry of fifty years, no little of his father's soberness of mind and variety of talents, adorned with a similar spirit of religious consecration. Isabella, who was fourteen years of age when her father died, was married to the Rev. John Muckersie of Kinkell, and inherited also her father's disposition. One of her sons was Mr. Muckersie, minister at Alloa, whom we well remember, and who is said to have borne a striking resemblance to his maternal grandfather. We can call up his portly aspect, inclining somewhat to corpulence,—the features of his broad and expressive countenance,—his eyes small and twinkling, indicative of humour and shrewdness.* Nor can we ever forget how our own mother,

* Dr. Ferrier states that when Mr. Muckersie was in London in 1797,

gifted with no little knowledge of the inspired oracles, and skilled beyond many as to the comparative merits of scripture-exposition in the writings of Boston, Watson, Flavel, Brown, Henry, and Burkitt, was especially fond of hearing a "lecture" from Mr. Muckersie of Alloa, and took peculiar delight in training our boyish fancy to wonder at his ingenuity (and wonderful it was) in extracting so many racy deductions,—so many happy and unexpected inferences—from the passage of discourse. Mrs. Muckersie of Kinkell died in 1798. Mary, the youngest of Mr. Wilson's surviving daughters, was married to the Rev. William Jameson of Kilwinning. Their son, who succeeded his uncle at Methven, and was so long pastor of that congregation, was a man of rare and exquisite endowment, of simple habits, and of playful and affectionate disposition. He possessed both the fire and pathos essential to true eloquence, while a creative genius shed its own hues and fascination over the rich imagery in which he luxuriated, as it animated the discussions and edged the appeals with which his sermons abounded. We have already referred to the fallen missionary, the son of this distinguished minister. Mrs. Jameson of Kilwinning died in 1802. Thus at length Mr. Wilson's "household after him" were successively called away—ripe in years and honours. They all delighted in the recollection, for they were enabled to walk in the steps, of their illustrious parent.

56 years after Mr. Wilson's death, an aged lady, a perfect stranger to him, met him accidentally and asked him if he were a relation of Mr. Wilson of Perth, as the likeness had struck her so forcibly. She had been brought up under Mr. Wilson's ministry. Mr. Muckersie was in old age at the time we recollect him—nearly 50 years after this interesting interview with the old lady in the metropolis.

CHAPTER X.

Wilson's Works—Sermons, with illustrations of different styles—His *Magnum Opus*, the "Defence"—Its merits—Mr. Currie defeated, but solaced by a pecuniary gift—Wilson's character—Talent—Attainments—Energy—Spirit—Catholicity—Whitefield—His service to "his own generation by the will of God."

MR. WILSON'S printed works are not numerous. Pastoral duties and public labours occupied the greater part of his time and attention, and he preached generally four times a-week. The remains of a ministry which extended through a quarter of a century are found in eight published sermons—a very few of which were given to the world by himself, others appear to have been printed after his decease from his MSS., and one professes to have been "taken from his mouth in time of delivery by a hand of suitable art and ingenuity for that purpose." Some of these discourses bear also on the title page to have been carefully revised by a "reverend member of the Associate Synod." As a whole, these printed discourses can scarce be regarded as fair specimens of Wilson's preaching. They are distinguished, not by the graces of finished composition, but by evangelical fulness and fervour. Their numerous divisions and digressions are apt to render them prolix to a modern reader. Still they are masculine in their tone of thought and vigour of expression—replete too with pointed, faithful, and individualizing applications of divine truth, and characterised by large and practical views of the nature and lessons of the peculiar events of the period in which he lived. On a former page we have given a brief specimen of the cordial and fervent invitation which he often addressed to sinners. But he pos-

essed also considerable power in reasoning out and enforcing an argument. Almost like a chain of compacted demonstration is the following pithy address to those who boast of natural religion and spurn the divine oracles:—

“ Beside what was observed on the former head concerning the ignorance and darkness that prevailed in the world before gospel light did shine amongst the nations, is it not plain that all mankind are sinners before God? The heathens themselves have acknowledged it, the despisers of revealed religion cannot refuse it. Is not sin a transgression of the law of God? Is it not rebellion against his sovereign authority? Is it not contrary to his purity and holiness? If it is acknowledged that there is any such thing as sin in the world, all this must be acknowledged. Likeways, again, if sin is an insolent affront offered to the majesty of God,—if there is an irreconcilable contrariety in it to his holy nature, the wisdom, justice, and holiness of God make a penal sanction to his law necessary, and his faithfulness pleads for the execution of the threatened punishment. Hence it is an important and weighty question—Wherewith shall a guilty sinner come before the Lord, or bow himself before the most high God? Or how shall a guilty sinner stand before him? The justice, faithfulness, and holiness of God demand that the penal sanction of the law shall be executed, the honour of the law and lawgiver must be maintained. What can give relief to the conscience perplexed and distressed under a sense of guilt? What can be a sufficient plea for the sinner against the justice and faithfulness of God? Can the religion of nature loose the difficulty? Can the laws of nature inform us of any proper mean whereby sin may be pardoned, and at the same time the dishonour done to the great God repaired, his faithfulness maintained, and the honour and authority of his law vindicated? Nay, if the conscience is awakened, the terror and dread of the righteous and holy law of God immediately strikes the sinner, the religion of nature cannot tell him where his relief is to be found: it cannot direct

him to any proper and suitable mean of relief. In the present case the sinner, if he could, he would with Adam flee from the presence of God, and hide himself from his justice ; but there is no possibility of his covering himself from the stroke of His hand. Therefore the last shift and resort of the miserable and self deceiving deist for quieting his guilty conscience, is his notion of the general goodness of God. God, says he, is infinitely good, and therefore, if we repent of our sins,—that is, if we are sorry for them and return to our duty,—He will surely pardon and forgive. Not to insist upon the contrariety that is in man's corrupted and depraved nature unto that sorrow for sin and that return to duty which is pretended, and consequently the impossibility thereof which may be observed afterwards, the question at present is about a suitable reparation of the dishonour done to God, and what is a sufficient and sure foundation for peace unto a conscience awakened under a sense of sin. Is not God infinitely just as well as infinitely good? Do not his justice and holiness require that the honour and authority of his government should be maintained, and that the sanction of the law should be executed? What security has the miserable deist for it, who has alleged that repentance can be accepted for the ends and purposes named? Who told him this? If he says it is evident from the goodness of God, it is also as evident that the justice of God pleads for the punishment. Is he a debtor for the egress of his goodness unto any of his creatures? far less is he for his pardoning grace and mercy to sinful creatures. It would not be reckoned a sufficient security for any government among men, if rebels and criminals in every case should have a title to pardon upon their repentance. Such a principle as this would unhinge government, and open a door for the greatest disorders amongst men. The authority of human laws could not at this rate be maintained. Can men think that their repentance is a sufficient atonement for their heinous rebellion against the Sovereign of heaven and earth, or that it is sufficient to maintain the

honour of his government and authority of his laws? If men own their dependence upon God and his authority over them, must they not likewise own that perfect obedience without sin is due unto the great Creator? And is it not as true that none can answer this debt and obligation that they are under? Therefore, how can we expect to be accepted in that sorrow for sin, or in that return to duty, which is alleged? Can a repentance which answers not the demand of the law, and our obligation to duty, be accepted for itself? And, if it cannot be accepted for itself, can it make an atonement for any other transgressions? To conclude this head. When that revelation of the only mean and way to obtain blessedness in and by the Lord Jesus Christ, which God gives us in his own word, is rejected, what security can miserable men have for obtaining peace and reconciliation with God? Or what can they pretend unto as a sufficient bottom and foundation for peace, quiet, and rest to their own consciences under a sense of sin? Yet vain man, like the wild ass's colt, will run himself into the greatest labyrinths and difficulties, rather than submit his carnal reason and wisdom, which is but blindness and folly, to that revelation which God makes of himself in his word. The root of all the opposition that is made both now and formerly to the word of God, the person of Christ, and the way of salvation through him, is that natural enmity that is in the hearts of men against God—'The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject unto the law of God, neither indeed can be.' "*

It must, however, be admitted that Wilson's sermons, as we now have them, want the animation and power of Ebenezer Erskine's, nor are they adorned with the opulent imagery of Ralph Erskine's. Yet, with all the disadvantages of their mode of publication, they are a pleasing proof that, in preaching the gospel, Wilson studied simplicity, and practical effect, and that, choosing a plain and

* Sermon on Psal. lxxii. 17, p. 37.

unambitious style, he kept aloof from the complications of system and the vain subtleties of scholastic refinement, and sought to present Christ and his salvation as freely and directly as they are exhibited in Scripture. When we consider his gravity of character and fervency of spirit—the purity and freshness of the divine life within him—along with the fluency and dignity of his elocution, which, as usual in those days, had the graceful pauses and mellifluous cadences of a holy song, we may well conceive what effect the unction of the following paragraph, with its savoury repetitions, must have had on the ravished multitude :—

“ And, in a word, that I may conclude, I would exhort you all, and every one of you, whoever you are, and whatever you are, or have been, to come and follow the Lamb, the worthy Lamb; O, come! I call you in his name, to come and follow the worthy Lamb. O come, come! There are a vast number gathered together here, and I am afraid a great many strangers to Christ, the worthy Lamb. O sirs, ye come to sacraments, ye come to a communion-table, ye come to sermons, but ye never come to Christ, the Lamb of God! O sirs, we tell you, the Lamb this day invites you to come to him, to come and follow him! This day you are called and invited in the word of the gospel, ‘ Whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely.’ What shall I say? Does the Lamb invite you, and will you not come? O will you not come upon his invitation and call? What should hinder your compliance with the Lamb’s call? What though you have been bearing arms against him all your days to this very moment, yet, I say unto you, there is room in the Lamb for you, room in the grace of the Lamb for you, room in the heart of the Lamb for you, and you are by the Lamb invited this day to come in. Are you a poor graceless sinner? Why, then, I tell you, there is room in his grace for you, there are inexhaustible treasures of grace in him, and these inexhaustible treasures of grace are just for them that have rebelled and carried arms against the Lamb. O that ye

knew and would be persuaded, that the Lamb hath received gifts for men, for 'such as did rebel, that the Lord God might dwell among them.' O, then, be assured the inexhaustible treasure of grace that is in the Lamb, is just for you. There is room in his grace for you; treasures of pardoning mercy and sanctifying grace are in him for you. O come, then, at his call. Open your hearts, to receive him at his call! Give obedience to the Lamb, stoop to the righteousness of the worthy Lamb; be assured there is room in the righteousness of the Lamb for you; room in the obedience and death of the Lamb for you. Whatever thy guilt is, his merit is infinite, and in it there is room for you. O come, then, in under the shadow of this perfect righteousness, this merit and mediation of the worthy Lamb, with thy guilty soul; and then, 'though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.' O come, guilty sinner! O come, filthy sinner! there is room in this worthy Lamb for thee. Ye were called yesterday to come under the Lamb's shadow, and we call you again this day to come under his shadow. O, it is a broad shadow, it is a pleasant shadow, it is a delightsome shadow. O come under the shadow of the worthy Lamb! O will you part from this place, and from one another, without coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, the worthy Lamb! O, our heart's desire for you all is, that you may come to the worthy Lamb, that ye may know the worthy Lamb, that you may share of that grace that is in Christ Jesus the worthy Lamb; and we are sure there is enough in him for you all, whatever you are, or have been. O come to him! Whatever be thy case, we assure you here is something to suit it. Are you full of wants? You will find in him a supply of all your wants. Are you an hungered? Food is to be found in him. Are you thirsty? Drink is to be found in him. Are you naked? Clothing is to be found in him. Are you poor? Unsearchable riches are to be found in him. Are you blind? Eye-salve is to be found in him. 'I counsel thee,' saith the Lamb, 'to buy of me gold tried

in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see,' Rev. iii. 18. O to be found in the Lamb! O, are you a poor diseased sinner? Why, then, we tell you, medicine is to be found in him for all your plagues and maladies, whatever they are; his name is Jehovah Rophi, 'The Lord that healeth thee.' Are you an unbeliever, and cannot trust his word? The Spirit of faith is in him. Are you dumb, and cannot seek anything from him? lame, and cannot come to him? Why, 'He maketh the lame man to leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing.' Have you an obstinate, stubborn, and rebellious heart? He hath omnipotent power to overcome all the obstinacy in thy heart. O, then, come, come to the worthy Lamb, and follow the worthy Lamb whithersoever he goeth! O that the Spirit of God may be sent forth into thy heart! O that he may be sent forth as a Spirit of faith, as a Spirit of love! O that he may be sent to take the face of covering from every one in all this company, and manifest the glory of the worthy Lamb unto us all!—The Lord bless his word."

But Wilson's principal work, which was also called for by the exigency of the times, is his "Defence." * The

* A DEFENCE OF THE REFORMATION PRINCIPLES OF THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND; with a continuation of the same. Wherein the exceptions that are laid against the conduct of the ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY, as also against their Judicial Act and Testimony, by the REV. MR. CURRIE in his Essay on Separation, are examined; and the injurious reflections cast upon our reforming period from 1638 to 1650 in the aforesaid Essay are discovered. BY WILLIAM WILSON, A.M., Minister of the Gospel at *Perth*.

REVELATION ii. 25.—"But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come."

JUDE 3.—"Earnestly contend for the faith once delivered unto the saints."

The other mottos on the title page of the "Defence" are the following:—

"When the greatest part of a church maketh defection from the truth the lesser part remaining sound, the greatest part is the church of Separatists: though the manifest and greatest part in the actual exercise of

Seceders at first seem to have been contemned by their opponents. They were too weak and too few to excite any other feeling than pity. Their gathering strength, however, soon created alarm, and they were not long in meeting with a literary antagonist,—a man of some penetration and energy,—whose lack of argument was compensated by a bitter hostility. Their conduct was fiercely attacked, and themselves maligned. They were held up as demagogues and apostates, as turbulent and impracticable fools. Their papers and memorials were analysed with the impassioned acuteness of a little mind, which occupied itself so keenly in the detection of minor errors of reference and language, as to overlook the leading truths and principles for which Wilson and his brethren contended. Mr. Currie did his work with peculiar zest, for he had once warmly sympathised with the Seceders, and now sought to cover his apostacy by a bold attempt to crush and extinguish the infant cause. He had kissed, and he now betrayed. The sophistries of his Essay could scarce have imposed upon himself, and he vindicated the Acts of Assembly with an effrontery from which even their prime originators would have shrunk. Accordingly he laboured to show that there were no grounds for Secession,—that the whole movement was an ultroneous and unnecessary innovation, the work of zealots who were so weak as to expect the formation of

discipline be the church, yet in the case of right discipline the best, though fewest, is the church.—*Rutherford's Due Right*, p. 255.

“Plausibile quidem nomen pacis; sed maledicta est pax quæ tanta jactura redimitur, ut nobis pereat Christi doctrina, qua sola, in piam et sanctam unitatem coalescimus.”—*Calvin in Acta Apost.*, p. 200.

The mottos on the title page of the “Continuation” are—

“Zion thy God confess,” Psalm cxlvii. 12.

“Your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified,” Isaiah lxvi. 5.

How many editions the book went through has not been stated. The edition we possess is dated 1769. The first edition is dated,—Edinburgh, printed by T. Lumsden and J. Robertson for J. Jaffray, Bookseller in Stirling, 1739. The first edition of the “Continuation” is dated 1741. On the inside of the title page of the “Defence” is the following caveat:—“The author expects that no person will presume to print this ‘Defence’ without special license from himself.”

a perfect church, or so fanatical as to make no allowance for such as held not their peculiar opinions,—or so soured by repeated failures in attempting to enforce their views that they proudly revolted from a party whom they could neither convince nor control. He attempts farther to prove that their reasoning was futile and their spirit sectarian,—that all history was against them from the Acts of the Apostles down to the period of the Covenant,—that they were guilty of schism without precedent or apology, as their departure sprung not from misunderstanding but deep and sinful alienation of feeling. It is thus very plain that Mr. Currie could not comprehend what is meant by integrity, nor feel the sovereign homage which should be paid to principle. The value of a good conscience, he was not qualified to estimate. But if he possessed not the requisite faith and heroism to become a Seceder, he needed not have attacked so rabidly the men whom he once professed to admire and applaud. His cowardice might have been buried under a pall of silence. The General Assembly of 1741, however, were so satisfied with the work of their unscrupulous partisan, that they sanctioned a grant to him of £60. In truth the insinuations and calumnies of Mr. Currie's assault are authorised and repeated in the minutes of the General Assembly, on which his Essay is only a lengthened commentary. They had a fellow-feeling with their champion. In an act of May 17th, 1738, the Assembly denounces "the unwarrantable Secession" gone into by men, "notwithstanding their own solemn engagements to the contrary at their ordination and admission." The Assembly virtually affirms in such a condemnation, that if a man has once been ordained a minister in a church, he can never leave it without being guilty of perjury. Is not this dictum as tyrannous as the odious canon law of the English Church? The Assembly then condemns the "Act, Declaration, and Testimony;" adding,—"and that nothing may be wanting to promote their end, they appoint and keep fasts in different corners of the country, to which there is a resort of several thou-

sand persons of both sexes, and *too many of them, as there is good ground to think, come there with other views than to promote religion,**—and, moreover, that their schism may not die with them, they have authorised one of their number to teach divinity.” . . . “And in the meantime, the General Assembly earnestly recommends to all the ministers, elders, and members of the Church to endeavour in their respective stations, and by all means proper for them, to reclaim those POOR DELUDED PEOPLE who have been carried away by this division, and to prevent the seducing of others.†

Mr. Currie met in Mr. Wilson with an opponent more than a match for him. Wilson was admirably qualified to do battle for the good cause. It was so thoroughly his own that he needed no prompting to the combat, while his identification with all the seceding movements gave him a complete mastery over the subject. Calm, shrewd, and energetic, he easily defeated the libeller. From one proposition to another he chases him with manly argument and refutation. He leaves the flying foe no refuge. Every accusation is met with dignity and truth, and his conscious rectitude of purpose preserves him from the employment of fallacy and vituperation. Wilson needed not to resort to the common artifices of controversy. His aim was not victory, but right; and he was as superior to Currie in temper as in reasoning. Throughout his book he shows

* Whether the Assembly meant to insinuate against the morality or the politics of those great crowds that attended Seceder preaching on week days, we know not,—perhaps both are included in the inuendo. About the same period, the Duke of Argyle broadly hinted in the House of Lords during a debate on the Porteous riots, that the “few fanatical preachers lately started up” in Scotland had some concern in raising those mobs and defying the law. Dr. M’Kerrow tells us how these vast concourses of worshippers were sometimes treated,—that fire was set to the heath or furze round about them, or that on pretence of being engaged in the chase, an incessant discharge of muskets was kept up in their vicinity by a number of their persecutors.

† Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland from M.DC.XXXVIII. to M.DCCC.XLII., by the Church Law Society, vol. ii. p. 647.

that he has no relish for hard names and opprobrious epithets. He breathed no vengeance against his persecutors, and recounted not his wrongs with laborious minuteness. He felt his power over Mr. Currie, and now and then shows his consciousness of it by the occasional raillery in which he indulges. Wilson proves that the man whom the Assembly delighted to honour understood not the principles of church government and communion, points out how Mr. Currie misstates the question at issue,—how he diminishes and palliates the amount of corruption in the Establishment,—how his “exceptions” prove too much, and tell as forcibly against the Protestant Reformation as the present Secession, would condemn the one as well as the other, and vindicate adherence to the Church of Rome, as well as to the Church of Scotland,—how he confounds illustration with evidence,—how he signally and ludicrously fails in his references to Scripture,—how even the “human authorities” adduced by him are either misquoted or misconstrued,—how he refuses the evidence of the most palpable facts and most unexceptionable testimony,—how the parallels he draws between the circumstances of faithful ministers in former times and the Seceders of that day form no truthful or appropriate analogy,—how he maligns the best Assemblies of the best period of the Scottish Church,—and how his Essay, failing altogether in its aim, should lead its author to serious reconsideration, under the impression of that answer which Jerome is said to have given to Rufinus—“Never blush to change thy opinions, for neither you nor I, nor any person alive are of so great authority, as to be ashamed to confess we have erred.”* Currie makes in his Essay too many solemn protestations of his integrity, and their very number throws suspicion upon them. Wilson blandly says, “Though I have given several particular instances of things which are neither truth nor fact, yet I shall charitably judge. Only I wish he had been more tender in making such solemn appeals and attestations,

* Defence, p. 330.

which appear to me to be equivalent to a solemn oath; or I wish that at least he had better advised what he has written, before he had ushered in his Essay to the world with such weighty and awful attestations."* Currie was adventurous enough to publish a "Vindication" in answer to Wilson's "Defence." Wilson again replied to him in his "Continuation," and fairly annihilated him, by convincing him of the grossest obliquity of judgment, in misrepresenting the point of debate and shunning to discuss it, in justifying procedure which he could not but in his own heart condemn, in clothing silly sophisms with deceitful verbiage, and in proving traitor to the cause of God and truth. This "Defence" and its "Continuation" were Wilson's great contribution to the cause of liberty and religion, and they form a masterly vindication of the principles and procedure of the Secession. The style of these two works is as admirable as their spirit. It is dignified and vigorous, few Scotticisms are to be found in it, and it is equal in classic purity to the best writers of that period. As a specimen of luminous and dispassionate controversy, it is a marvel among the remains of ecclesiastical disputation. The volume has of course lost much of its interest now, for opponents like Mr. Currie have disappeared. Yet it must have been a useful publication in its time, full of encouragement to the new church, as it enabled them to meet the every-day objections of their adversaries. The Seceders of a past age studied Wilson's work,—and with the "Marrow" as the index to their theology, and the "Defence" as the palladium of their Church, they feared no assailant. Mr. Wilson also published a Tract on the grounds of the Secession in the form of a "Letter from a Member of the Associate Presbytery to a Minister in the Presbytery of Dunfermline," with a postscript on Mr. Currie's Essay. Again in this brochure does he maintain his ground against corruption and tyranny, using the awful appeal of the prophet Jeremiah: "Why

* Defence, Preface, p. xiii.

then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit and refuse to return," Jer. viii. 4, 5.

In fine, the candour and equanimity of Mr. Wilson in those publications are ever to be admired. The "rude dialect" of Mr. Currie he would not imitate, nor yet his "misapplied quotations, with his reported private stories and hearsays." Currie had said with great asperity of the Seceders—"Have they not whet their tongue like a sword, and bent their bows to shoot their arrows—even bitter words? and have they not drawn their pen and dipt it in gall, publishing to the world that their mother at this day has gone off from the foundation?" Wilson notices such charges calmly and firmly, but offers no retaliation. Nay, though Currie calls the "'Defence' a common enemy to the success of the glorious gospel of Christ," Wilson is content not to avenge himself by a similar charge.—"It is alleviating," he gently says, "to me that the Lord and Master of the house was treated after the same manner." Wilson was filled with the proper spirit, and provocation was lost upon him. While Currie's pages, amid sharp retorts and acrimonious personalities, were "full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," Wilson's serenity of nature was unruffled, and looking down with composure upon the spiteful efforts of his adversary, he could write in these strains of noble eloquence:—

"I am heartily sorry for that bitterness of spirit that I see breathing throughout the whole of this essay. Whatever contempt Mr. Currie may pour upon the Seceding brethren, and whatever hard names he may think fit to bestow upon them, I wish he had treated the cause and testimony they hold with more of meekness and fear. He seems to be confident (preface, p. 12) that, upon reading his book, his readers may see that there is a good deal more to be said in vindication of the Church of Scotland, and against separation from her, than some of them imagined, namely, such as are much disobliged already at some

for not joining the Seceding brethren ; yet I doubt not but the Seceding brethren have very much likewise to say for themselves, and I am sorry they have so much to say : I sincerely wish that matters were otherwise stated in the present judicatories of this national church, and that there were no such grounds of secession from them. Our reverend brother has given sufficient ground and matter of irritation from the way and manner whereby he has managed the argument. Every one of us have much reason to be jealous over our own spirits : therefore, I pray, that our contendings upon this subject may be only and singly for truth, and that they may be governed with a disposition and temper of spirit becoming the gospel of Christ ; and LET TRUTH HAVE THE VICTORY, AND LET GOD HAVE ALL THE GLORY." *

The man who can feel and write in this spirit, possesses the real secret of success,—he conquers by his tranquillity. Mr. Currie's Essay would long ago have sunk into obscurity, had not Wilson's reply given it an unenviable immortality.

Mr. Wilson's general character may be easily gathered from the preceding pages. He was a man fitted and prepared for his time. The youthful training he had enjoyed, from parents who had both been persecuted for their attachment to the cause of truth and country, the wrongs inflicted on himself by his maternal relations, the enmity which Professor Simson had manifested towards him, the deep piety of his own spirit, his large intelligence, his thorough education, his honest and incorruptible heart, were so many pre-arranged gifts and circumstances, by which he was disciplined for the combat he was to sustain with reigning profligacy and corruption. The foundation was laid in his early piety. This holy element guided and strengthened all his purposes. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." Rescued in his youth by the influence of religion from turbulent emotions and distracting vanities,

* Defence, p. 569.

his mind rose freely and easily into the regions of truth. Many principles which others have to reason out by a laborious process were at once apparent to him by a species of sanctified intuition. He truly realised the deep truth that is hidden under the seeming paradox of Anselm,—*Neque enim quæro intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam qui non crediderit non experietur, et qui expertus non fuerit, non intelliget*,—"I seek not to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand. For he that is without faith is without experience, and he who is without experience is without understanding."* Piety brightened his intellectual vision, and the discovery of truth was ever associated with the advancement of purity. His intellectual refinement was robed "in the beauties of holiness." All his varied acquirements were brought to bear with undeviating aim on the promotion of God's glory and the best interests of his fellowmen. His mental treasures were humbly laid at the foot of the cross. He was "a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." He felt prayer to be the breath of the spiritual life, and always recognised the hallowed connexion between the closet and the pulpit. His greatness sprung from his goodness, for he acknowledged the Lord in all his ways. Nay, he delighted himself in God, and so felt God's light on his mind, and the love of God shed abroad in his heart. The instincts of the "new creature" always led him to covet a sense of the Divine favour. High raptures he does not seem to have enjoyed. He might not mount up with wings as eagles,—yet he ran and was not weary, he walked and was not faint. He was but a young man when he gave himself to God,—“subscribing with his hand unto the Lord,”—and his last public service was the writing out of the first bond to be used as the basis of a public covenant in the Secession churches,—so similar were the beginning and the termination of his career in spirit,—both of them an act of unreserved consecration to

* Anselmi Prosol. 1 De fide Trinitatis.

Jehovah. In his entire life he realised the cheering truth, and felt,—

“ God always, everywhere, and all in all.”

The character of Wilson's mind may be ascertained from his writings. He made no pretensions to originality, or uncommon penetration and refinement. He thought clearly, soberly, forcibly, and to the point. He could not boast of a lively imagination. Striking and profound thoughts like those of Foster seldom occur in his work. His reasoning is distinguished not by its brilliancy, but by its acuteness and manly tone, and by a resolute grasp of the argument which it never forgoes. His motto is, ‘ Onward, and by the straightest path.’ He had little time for abstruse speculation, but was usually engrossed with matters of popular interest and practical moment. His ideas are in general lucidly and succinctly arranged. We are never at a loss as to his meaning. His style is both nervous and perspicuous. His thoughts are not overlaid with tawdry verbiage or contorted with harsh unnatural circumlocutions. His apprehension was quick and his memory tenacious. The greatness of his mind lay in the balance and harmony of all its powers, and not in the predominance of any one of them, though we might say that he was distinguished especially by the possession and exercise of a sound, vigorous, and discriminating judgment. He was endowed with no little of that precious faculty which Scottish philosophers have named *common sense*, and which even the German metaphysicians have recognised and pointed out by a loftier appellation. We are sorry that we are not able to verify these criticisms by any extended illustrations taken from his Lectures on Divinity. Many of these were written on an interleaved copy of the *MEDULLA*. This favourite volume was recently possessed by the late Prof. Bruce of Whitburn, but after some inquiry we are unable to find where it now reposes. It would have given us pleasure if we could have selected a few paragraphs from his academical prelections and given them as specimens

both of his teaching and his Latinity. We would not (for we have not the means of judging) pronounce him equal in metaphysical shrewdness to Ralph Erskine, for the germs and leading principles of what was afterwards termed the Scottish school of philosophy are to be found in the writings of that accurate and popular theologian.

The intellectual attainments of Mr. Wilson were superior and extensive. He laid a good foundation in youth, and the superstructure was compact and well-proportioned. His acquaintance with the various systems of philosophy, his knowledge of Church history, his multiplied references to the best books on the subjects which he discusses, are the evidence and fruit of continued study and application. He had a special antipathy to the logic and theology of Professor Campbell,*—which were truly eccentric and contradictory, flimsy in substance, and arrogant in spirit, the product of an ill-balanced mind that deemed originality to consist in extreme opinions. Professor Campbell, in his *Oratio de vanitate luminis nature*, had by the excess of a juvenile logic so exaggerated his theme, as to affirm that the light of nature cannot enable men to discover the existence of a God,—a statement in utter opposition to the Apostle's argument in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, when he affirms that the Gentile world is without excuse in refusing to recognise and worship the one Supreme Creator. Again in another publication, where he attempts to prove that "the apostles were no enthusiasts," Campbell carries his argument to the absurd length of maintaining that they were so ignorant of their Master's character and claims as between his death and resurrection to deem him an impostor, and thus in maintaining that they were not visionaries, he thought it requisite to make them fools and sceptics. He missed the mark by the boyish feat of overleaping it. The mind of Mr. Wilson could not bear

* Campbell was Professor of Divinity and Church History in the University of St. Andrews, and was acquitted by the Assembly of 1736, of certain charges of heresy which had previously been brought against him. His acquittal was no credit to the Assembly.

this imbecile rashness, this proneness to doat upon an argument and push it to unwarrantable excess. He was himself distinguished by a judicious moderation—and by an anxiety never to overstrain a principle, or carry a deduction beyond its legitimate boundary. Not less did he feel an invincible repugnancy to the Ethics of Prof. Campbell, and he seems to have thought that the system of Aristotle was superior to that which was taught in some of the Scottish Universities.*

Wilson seems to have been at home in the writings of the best divines, such as Calvin, Turretine, and Owen, and to have been familiarly acquainted with the synodical deeds of the Protestant churches of France and Holland. His own theology was of that type of Calvinism which is to be found in the "Marrow of Modern Divinity,"—in which the two cardinal truths are so fully exhibited—that every sinner is welcomed—and that no one trusting in Jesus can be lost; and that while the Saviour has a "seed secured," no sinner is beyond the pale of invitation. In short, he understood well the nature of the universal applicability and limited application of the work of Christ. He was keenly hostile to every form of error which robbed the gospel of its peculiar characteristics as a system of remedy and restoration. What his own system was, may be learned in part by the testimony he bears against opposing errors,—to wit, the errors which were so prevalent in the national church—and which were so leniently dealt with by the venerable Assembly. They are thus characterised:—"Doctrines, whereby the federal headship of the first Adam was impugned and denied, and consequently the true and proper imputation of his first sin to his posterity is overthrown; doctrines, whereby the heinous desert of original sin imputed and inherent is diminished; as also doctrines, whereby universal grace is established, in so far as it has been asserted at the bar of our Assemblies, that there is an implicit offer of grace, and an obscure revelation of

* Defence, p. 316.

the remedy provided for sin, made to those that live without the church, by the works of creation and providence including tradition; as likewise, in so far as a connection is established, either from the gracious nature, or from the promise of God, betwixt the serious endeavours of the heathen and a fuller and clearer revelation of the remedy unto them; and betwixt the serious endeavours of those that are within the church, and special and saving grace;—doctrines also whereby the absolute dominion of God over the free actions of the rational creature, and the creature's absolute dependence upon him in working, as well as in being, are subverted, and consequently a special part and branch of divine providence impugned; doctrines likewise, whereby our faith of the truth of divine revelation is, according to Mr. Locke's scheme, ultimately resolved into a series and train of moral arguments and reasonings."* Thus was he orthodox in opinion, and the "form of sound words" was precious also in his estimation.

He seems not only to have possessed considerable powers of extemporaneous address, so as to be named the "tongue of the Associate Presbytery," but also to have had a talent for business. He was shrewd without being subtile, and prudent without the employment of plot or stratagem. He not merely spoke and planned, but he also acted. Labour indeed was the sphere of his being. According to an anecdote which has been often rehearsed, he on one occasion, and in a vein of pleasantry, happily pictured out his relation to his colleagues. "Our brother Mr. Erskine," said he, "has the face of a man; our friend, Mr. Moncrieff, has the face of a lion; our neighbour, Mr. Fisher, has the face of an eagle; and as for myself, I think you will all own, that I may claim to be the ox: for as you know, the laborious part of the business falls to my share."† He was always "abounding in the work of the Lord."—He lived to labour, and he felt his strength to be in Je-

* Defence, 77.

† Ferrier, 357.

hovah. He might truly have adopted the sentiment of Augustine—*da quod jubes—et jube quod vis, Deus meus*—“give, O my God, what thou commandest, and then command what thou wilt.” It was with His own that he served God.

Yet though he was “in labours more abundant,” he was never “exalted above measure.” His humility was conspicuous. “Less than the least of all saints,” is the spirit of the records found in his Diary. Eminence was forced upon him, he never courted it. At an early period when the Brethren proceeded in a meeting of presbytery to a “voluntary humiliation,” and each confessed his guilt in not exhibiting more courage and fidelity during the process against Prof. Simson and was solemnly admonished at the bar, Mr. Wilson, though he had not been a member of Assembly nor even present in the court, yet sought the infliction of a similar censure, because when the decision absolving the arch-heretic was reported to the presbytery of Perth, he had not in any way signified his non-concurrence. The three Brethren, however, refused to censure him, as they thought him less culpable than themselves in the circumstances. Mr. Wilson was at the same time of a mild nature and playful temperament. He had much of the “gentleness of Christ.” No vindictive emotion ever crossed his spirit or shaded his countenance. He loved his enemies—he prayed for his persecutors. Referring in the “Defence” to the memorable scene of his expulsion, there is no self-gloriation on the one hand, nor the indulgence of a vengeful spirit on the other. The doors being shut upon himself, he quietly adds—“Whereupon one Mr. John Haly, then a probationer, being employed by Mr. David Black to preach that day, being attended by the said Mr. Black, was with the assistance of the magistrates thrust into his pulpit. I pray the Lord may give them repentance for and the forgiveness of their iniquity, and that it may not be laid to their charge, nor to the charge of that place.”*

* Defence, 419.

Mr. Wilson and his coadjutors had many warm sympathisers at the commencement of the struggle, but their zeal soon evaporated; and though he was no doubt disappointed at their shortcoming, yet nowhere do we find him employing the language of censorious denunciation against them or their cowardice. His intimate friend Mr. Palmer, minister of Forgandenny, was among those that stood aloof when the hour of trial came. Not long after, Mr. Palmer was seized with severe affliction, and Wilson, without any feeling of prejudice or estrangement, was his frequent visitor and showed him unremitting kindness. During one visit, and when the conversation had become close and confidential, Wilson said to the sufferer, "Brother, I think you should have stood forth with me and some others, and borne an open testimony against those indignities which you have often lamented and which are so injurious to your Master's cause and interest at this day." The dying minister replied, "Yes, brother, I have always been deficient in courage and zeal for my Lord and Master, but I hope, by the riches of his mercy, that this sin and all my other sins shall be as the iniquities of Israel, which shall be sought for and there shall be none, and as the sins of Judah which shall not be found."* Such a scene of frank and brotherly intercourse did honour to both.—It proved the warmth and cordiality of Wilson's nature—to maintain a tender friendship after the controversy had been opened, and expected allies had withdrawn from his support. He could not pass a severe and sweeping judgment on the whole of those who remained in the Establishment, though he condemned their errors. And all the while there was no little firmness manifested by himself, when decision was required. He had nerve to be a martyr, for his meek and affable spirit could not be moved from truth and principle. There was at the same time no moroseness about him. He was happy and mirthful. His wit and conversational talent made

* Fraser's life of R. Erskine, 204.

him a delightful companion, and his gentlemanly manners as well as his Christian attainments made his society prized by such men as Colonel Gardiner.

Measured by the times in which he lived, Wilson was also a man of liberal and catholic spirit.

———Like his shadow
His kindness lengthened, as his sun declined.”

Along with the best men of his day, he held indeed very strict terms of communion, and reckoned acquiescence in numerous denominational peculiarities quite essential to church fellowship,—as indispensable as faith in the leading truths of the gospel. If there was bigotry in this opinion, it belonged to his creed, not to his heart. His views of the magistrate’s authority in sacred things were in advance of the age, only in so far as they related to patronage and the tyranny of heritors. Patronage and the power of heritors in obtruding ministers on reclaiming congregations he heartily reprobated. But he did not feel that the Secession Church sustained any loss in not being joined to the State. No doubt he must have seen that its very liberty consisted in the absence of state control or protection. Yet, like his contemporaries in Scotland, he held that the magistrate should punish the violation of the first as well as the second table of the law. In this notion Wilson was not singular,—it was held by the majority of the early Reformers. The general principle of the Scottish Reformers was that the judicial law of Moses was of perpetual authority. John Knox and Peter Dens use the same argument for punishing heretics with death. They should die because they are like those who falsify the “coin of a king,” says the First Book of Discipline, while Dens, by a marvellous coincidence in the employment of the same figure, affirms that they resemble *falsarii pecuniæ*, and should be extirpated. The good Samuel Rutherford, all but canonised among us, held that “punishment even to blood and death” stands yet against idolaters and apostates “in the plenitude of moral obligation.” In that once popular book, the “Hind let Loose,” assassination as a means of “taking off principal

instruments and promoters of war" in support of error is vindicated with no little dialectic ingenuity. Similar opinions were not confined to Scotland. Calvin did not condemn the burning of Servetus,*—nay, Servetus himself maintained that blasphemy was a crime worthy of death. Beza justified at full length the penalty inflicted on Servetus, and the gentle Melanchthon wondered that any should disapprove of it. Bucer maintained that the Spanish fanatic should be torn in pieces, and Turretine avowed that capital punishment should fall without mercy "on all such pests and human monsters." About the same period in England, and at Cranmer's solicitation, Joan of Kent and George van Pere were consumed to ashes; and a few years afterwards the archbishop himself was led out to the stake. The smoke that arose from the pile of Servetus mingled in the air with that which was ascending from those blazing fires in France where five Genevan disciples of Calvin were expiating the crime of heresy. By the General Assembly of 1647, "Liberty of conscience" is held to be synonymous with "liberty of error, scandall, schism, heresie," &c. The principles of religious liberty were not clearly comprehended,—good men had been trained in a bad school. Wilson had quite a horror at the views of "one Roger Williams † who disturbed the churches in New England"

* Calvin,—Spero capitale saltem fore judicium,—letter to Farel during the trial of Servetus, August 20th, 1553.

Hoc crimen (blasphemia), est *morte* simpliciter dignum et apud Deum et APUD HOMINES,—Servetus, in his work called *Restitutio*, published in January 1553. That is to say in January 1553 Servetus wrote that men should punish blasphemy with death, and when that same year the magistrates of Geneva brought him to trial for the very crime he had so denounced, Calvin hoped that sentence of death would be pronounced upon him.

† And yet Roger Williams was one of Nature's noblemen,—a man far in advance of his age. He was educated for the English bar as a protégé of Sir Edward Coke, but afterwards took orders,—became a Puritan, landed in Boston in 1631, maintained at all hazards the rights of conscience, and wisely and resolutely opposed the establishment of a Theocracy in New England. The worthy men whom he opposed imitated Archbishop Laud, by whom themselves had been exiled, and banished Roger Williams from the colony. Williams took refuge among the Indians for a season, and ultimately founded the state of Rhode Island.

by his "violent urging" against Mr. Mather and others "that the civil magistrate might not punish breaches of the first table in the laws of the ten commandments." Wilson did not see that the state-connection was the principal source of those ecclesiastical evils his resistance to which had led to his ejection from the national Church. But he could still say,—“grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.” Concerning a man whose opinions were creating no little stir in Scotland, he writes,—“Mr. Whitefield gives satisfaction to the churches that he lies open to light and is pointing toward reformation, and may the Lord, who I hope has shined into his soul and given him some clear discoveries of justification and salvation by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus,—enlighten him more and more, and particularly with respect to the worship, order, and government of the House of God.” * Mr. Currie seems to have said that George Whitefield, not having been called by a congregation and ordained by a presbytery, could not, according to Wilson’s arguments, be recognised as a lawful minister, but Wilson could by no means assent to such a doctrine in all its stringency and without any exception, and his reply is worthy of him,—“There is a vast difference between ordinary cases and extraordinary, such as Mr. Whitefield appears to be.” An extraordinary case like Whitefield’s, in which there was such marked peculiarity, he admitted did not come under ordinary rule, and he was willing to salute the English apostle as one of “the messengers of the churches and the glory of Christ.”

In fine, amidst all the trials and commotion which beset Mr. Wilson, he had yet hope in God that the issue would be for His glory. His faith enabled him—

“ To see
 Death still producing life, and Evil still
 Working its own destruction. He could behold
 The strife and tumults of this troubled world
 With the strong eye that sees the promised day

* Defence, p. 435.

Dawn through the night of tempest. Thus his heart
Was healed and harmonised."

His faith has been rewarded. He saw the "day" afar off, though his death did not permit him to enjoy the early fruits of his toil and prayer. He had preached but a few months in the sanctuary which his people had erected for him, when death released him; but we have entered into his labours, and now we revere him one of the honoured founders of the United Presbyterian Church. He had no feeling of jealous rivalry with his three fellow-labourers when he was alive, and we will not now enter into any minute or invidious comparison of their respective merits. Only we think that from various circumstances his just fame has been somewhat overshadowed by the merited eminence of the Erskines. He was a younger man than either of them, but the one of them survived him eleven and the other thirteen years. He had not the popular talent and commanding oratory of Ebenezer Erskine, nor the fervid and glowing eloquence of Ralph, but with a power of mind equal to either, and an influence in matters of consultation superior to both, he was not less useful to the infant church. We conclude with merely repeating what has been said of him, that "he was at once the master spring of the whole brethren and the regulator which kept them together."

Thus lived and died the REV. WILLIAM WILSON,—lived in usefulness and died in honour and peace. To commemorate the worth and virtues of his deceased friend, Ralph Erskine composed an epitaph both in Latin pentameters and English couplets; the homely sculpture of which, on the tombstone that covers Mr. Wilson's grave in the Greyfriars' burying-ground, is given in reduced but accurate fac-simile on the following page. The tablet contains also a brief inscription for one of his grand-sons. The names of his wife and children are carved on the margin,—and the last text from which he preached is appropriately engraven on this humble memorial.

ALSO LYES HERE MARGRET ALEXANDER.



HIS SPOUSE LINDWAYS MACKAHRINE THOMAS. GEORGE. GILBERT. ELIZABETH. AND JAMES WILSON

MONUMENTUM M^{RI} GUL^{MI} WILS
ON PASTORIS PERTHENSIS. qui in d^{uo};
suo JESU CHRISTO OBIIT ANNO 1741
ÆTATIS 51

NUPER ERAS PASTOR DIVUS DOCTOR QUE DISERTUS.
NUNC SUPER ASTRO VOLAS, HIC LICET OSSA CURANT.
MAGNUM EDUNT NOMEN TUA DICTA DIDACTICA
MAJUS CÆLICA VITA COMES MAXIMUM ET UBERIUS

MORE BRAVE THEN DAVIDS MIGHTY MEN
THIS CHAMPION FOUGHT IT FAIR.
IN TRUTHS DEFENCE, BOTH BY THE PEN
THE PULPIT. AND THE CHAIR.
HE STOOD WITH HIS ASSOCIATES TRUE
TO SCOTLANDS SOLEMN OATH.
AND TAUGHT TO RENDER HOMAGE DUE
TO GOD AND CESAR BOTH.
EARTH RAGING FROM HIS SACRED POST
DEBARR'D THE WORTHY SAGE;
HEAV'N FROWN'D SENT A FURIOUS HOST
TO VENGE THE SACRILEDE.
MOURN ZION YOUR ELIJAH'S GONE
AND WAFTED TO THE SKIES.
MOURN TILL HIS FIRY CAR BRING DOWN
A SOUL OF FEUAL SIEZE

*In hoc etiam conditur
Gulielmus Wilson. Nepos:
Parentum unica proles:
Adolescens multum desideratus.
Obiit 9 Junii 1779;
Ætatis 16.
Sic Deus voluit.*

THEIR CHILDREN

LIFE AND TIMES

OF

THE REV. THOMAS GILLESPIE,

FATHER AND FOUNDER OF THE RELIEF CHURCH.

BY WILLIAM LINDSAY, D.D.

P R E F A C E.

IN preparing the following Memoir, the Author has consulted all the sources of information that were accessible to him, and he has spared no pains to procure as many as possible. There are various parts of the Life of Gillespie, respecting which it would be very desirable to have fuller information; but it is questionable whether it can now be obtained. In the belief that Mr. Gillespie's numerous letters to Dr. Doddridge might disclose some new facts in his life or feelings that were cherished by him, the Author applied, through a friend in London, to the Trustees of the Library where he understood Dr. Doddridge's manuscripts to be preserved; but on account of certain changes and removals that have taken place, the object of his search could not be found. The Author would take this opportunity of expressing his weighty obligations to Dr. Struthers, whose History of the Relief Church he has constantly consulted. And having had occasion to compare the various representations of facts there given, with the original documents upon which they are grounded, he cannot refrain from expressing his sense of its singular fidelity and accuracy. In not one single instance did he alight upon a place where any representation was given, not perfectly warranted by the documents. His estimate of the value of Dr. Struthers' history, always high, has been raised by the enquiries he has had occasion to make in writing this brief Memoir.

W. L.

GLASGOW, *March*, 1849.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

Importance of Christian Biography—Eminent worth of the Founders of the Secession and Relief Churches—Their memory to be cherished by the whole United Presbyterian Church.—Pp. 217—219.

CHAPTER II.

Gillespie's Parentage—Character in youth—Concern of his Mother about his soul—Interview with Boston—Blessed effects of it—Influence of Boston's views on those of Gillespie—Dedication of himself to the Ministry—Preparatory studies at Edinburgh, Perth, and Northampton—Influence of Doddridge upon his mind—Licence and Ordination in England.—Pp. 220—226.

CHAPTER III.

Presentation and Call to Carnock—Probable reasons of his renewed connexion with the Church of Scotland—Fidelity of his ministry—Character of his preaching—Inward conflicts—Effects of them upon his labours—Popularity and success—Careful preparation for the pulpit—Structure of his discourses—Constant desire to see fruit of his ministry.—Pp. 227—238.

CHAPTER IV.

Revival at Kilsyth—Gillespie's connexion with it—His view of its character—Treatise on Temptation composed—Analysis of the work—Style and execution of it—Specimens—Strong views which it embodies of Satanic agency—Robert Hall's view of the same subject—Essay on Immediate Revelations composed—Plan of the work—Sound principles advanced in it—Specimens—Duration and success of Gillespie's ministry at Carnock.—Pp. 239—257.

CHAPTER V.

Law of patronage—Strong opposition to it—Violent settlements—Refusal of some Presbyteries to effect them—Assembly's determination to

compel their submission—Mr. Richardson presented to Inverkeithing—Dunfermline Presbytery repeatedly refuses to settle him—Case brought before the Assembly—Assembly's peremptory injunction to the Presbytery—Continued refusal of the Presbytery—Representation given in by six members of the Presbytery—Second representation by Gillespie alone—Effect of it upon the court—Sentence of deposition—Demeanour of Gillespie while receiving it—Views that have been taken of this sentence.—Pp. 258—281.

CHAPTER VI.

Gillespie preaches during the summer under the open sky—Attended by vast multitudes—Removes to a church in Dunfermline at the approach of winter—Enjoys the sympathy of his own people—Receives the countenance of Christian friends at a distance—Letter from President Edwards—Effort made in the succeeding Assembly to repon Gillespie—Complete failure of it—Formal constitution of the Church at Dunfermline—Principles of it—Labours of Gillespie as a Dissenting Minister—Isolated position—Interchange of services with Boston of Jedburgh—Formation of the first Relief Presbytery.—Pp. 282—297.

CHAPTER VII.

Gillespie's labours after the institution of the Relief Presbytery—Respect that was paid to him by the rest of the body—Gradual decline of his vigour—Last illness—Peace of mind he enjoyed—Death—Character—Alleged desire on his part that his church should return to the Establishment.—Concluding remarks.—Pp. 298—306.

LIFE OF
THE
REV. THOMAS GILLESPIE.

CHAPTER I.

Importance of Christian Biography—Eminent worth of the Founders of the Secession and Relief Churches—Their memory to be cherished by the whole United Presbyterian Church.

BIOGRAPHY is a branch of History, and in some respects it is more interesting and instructive. In History you are presented with the movements and sentiments of masses of mankind, which form a subject of great complexity; but Biography sets before you the course of an individual, which you can follow with ease. The study of history gives scope for the exercise of the higher faculties of the mind, and in order to form a just conception of its multifarious objects and their connexions, you must possess the power of extensive combination and generalization; but the records of an individual life come more within the limits of individual experience, the facts and the lessons suggested by them are more easily apprehended, and the interest excited is stronger because more concentrated. You feel therefore a much greater sympathy with an individual, while you are tracing his progress step by step through life, than you can possibly do with the fortunes of a multitude of men; just as one case of violent death minutely described will produce a deeper impression upon the heart, than an account of thousands who have fallen in some fierce and fatal struggle.

The interest too of biography is greatly increased, when the individuals whose career is considered have given an impulse to society which has continued down to our own times, and their names and influence still survive in institutions with which we ourselves are connected. In this case they are viewed by us with a feeling akin to filial reverence. Every step in their progress is followed with interest. The smallest circumstances which can be discovered respecting them appear important. Perceiving in our own situation the effect of influences which have been transmitted from them, perhaps through several generations, we feel the same interest in the study of their history, which leads families of note to preserve the genealogical tree of their descent, and to trace its branches with unceasing pleasure. They are our forefathers, and they may perhaps have exercised a greater influence over our thoughts and feelings, than those from whom we are descended according to the flesh.

There are no biographies which should have greater charms for the followers of Christ, than those which record the experience of eminent Christians and describe the sufferings and struggles of men, who have laboured to uphold the interests of religion and to throw back the flowing tide of corruption. Ever as man's depravity perverts the truths of the gospel, and deforms the church with base and earthly accompaniments adverse to the growth of Christian character, God raises up men of distinguished ability and goodness, who feel that it is a duty specially devolving upon them, to defend the faith once delivered to the saints, and to maintain the freedom with which Christ hath blessed his people. These men, better entitled to be accounted the successors of the apostles, if any with propriety could be so styled, than some others who have arrogated to themselves the designation, deserve our highest reverence; and their memory should be affectionately cherished, both out of gratitude for the services they have rendered to religion, and as the means of stimulating succeeding generations to the imitation of their example.

The founders of the Secession and Relief Churches, now happily united into one body, were men of distinguished attainments and of high Christian principle; and they are justly entitled to the admiration of the whole community, for the eminent services which they rendered to the cause of religion in our native land. They stood in very similar positions. They opposed at periods not far asunder the corruption which was fast overspreading the Church of Scotland; and because they would not violate their consciences, and join in trampling upon the rights of the Christian people, they were expelled from her pale. They did not spontaneously retire, which might have exposed them to the charge of a schismatic spirit; but they were driven out, because they refused to obey injunctions which they believed to be sinful. They would have been satisfied with the right of protesting against prevailing errors and unchristian impositions; but when they were not only prevented from exonerating their consciences, but even required to be active in carrying out measures which they believed to be dishonouring to Christ and injurious to the church, disobedience was their only alternative, and disobedience was followed by expulsion.

To the members of the whole United Presbyterian Church the biographies of these men, whether they belonged to the one section of the church or to the other, are now possessed of equal interest; for, with slight modifications, it was the same great cause of Christian truth and liberty in which they toiled and suffered, and the union of their descendants brings them all now into a similar relation to the whole body.

In the foregoing part of this volume the lives of two of the distinguished men who were instrumental in founding the Secession Church are embraced; and here there is to follow an account of the good and upright Mr. Gillespie, whose deposition at a somewhat later period gave rise to the Relief denomination. The lives of these fathers are united in one volume, because the churches which they founded now compose one body.

CHAPTER II.

Gillespie's Parentage—Character in youth—Concern of his Mother about his soul—Interview with Boston—Blessed effects of it—Influence of Boston's views on those of Gillespie—Dedication of himself to the Ministry—Preparatory studies at Edinburgh, Perth, and Northampton—Influence of Doddridge upon his mind—Licence and Ordination in England.

THOMAS GILLESPIE, who was born in 1708 at Clearburn in the parish of Duddingstone, was the son of parents who were eminently distinguished by religious principle. His father died when he was very young; but his mother, who was a woman of singular energy and discretion, was equal to the augmented responsibilities of her new situation, and strove to act the part at once of father and mother, both to him and to the children of her husband by his first marriage. She provided for the temporal wants of her family by carrying on the business of their departed father, which was that of a farmer and brewer; and God, who filled of old the widow's cruse with oil and enlarged unseen her store of meal, abundantly prospered her endeavours. And while she was diligent in business, she was also fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. The religious improvement of her household engaged her continual attention, and alike by her example and her counsels she laboured to guide them in wisdom's ways, and to strengthen the bonds of affection by which they were knit together. Nor were her efforts unsuccessful. She secured the lasting esteem and affection even of her step-children, who were fully sensible of their obligations to her; and her own son owed his conversion under God to her maternal solicitude. What a blessing to a family is a pious and prudent mother, and when that mother is a widow, how often does Provi-

dence most strikingly bless and prosper her efforts! It is surprising what a number of the best and greatest men that have lived, have ascribed their advancement and steadfastness to the early instructions of an affectionate and faithful mother. It is recorded of the illustrious Washington that through life he cherished the profoundest respect for his mother, whose widowhood commencing at an early period had been devoted most assiduously to the training of her family; and Mrs. Sigourney describes her as having possessed the lofty character of a Roman matron, with a heart of deep and purified affections and a majesty that commanded the reverence of all. At the head of a large household, whose charge devolved solely upon her, the energy and dignity of her character preserved subordination and harmony. To the inquiry what was the course pursued in the early education of her illustrious son, she replied, "the lesson to obey."* Let mothers be strenuous in exerting for God the influence which their finer sense of propriety, their more affectionate disposition, and their almost uninterrupted presence amongst their children give them over the young and tender heart.

Thomas Gillespie, the only son of his mother, and the youngest of all his father's family, was naturally an object of interest to the whole household, and no efforts were spared to promote his improvement. But though he conducted himself with propriety, and was chargeable with nothing openly vicious or immoral, yet he did not feel in early youth any deep concern for the state of his soul. He was upright and sober and dutiful, but the pious heart of his mother was not to be satisfied with any thing, short of a thorough surrender of himself to God. Not only, therefore, did she herself endeavour with all the earnestness of maternal affection to awaken him to a sense of the infinite value of his soul, and pray for the blessing of heaven upon her efforts; but she took every opportunity of bringing him

* Sigourney's Letters. Hartford: 1835. Page 53.

under the influence of pious and experienced men. It is mentioned by Dr. Stewart, son-in-law of Dr. Erskine,* that on one occasion when they had gone together to a sacramental-solemnity at some distance from home, she introduced him to Mr. Boston of Ettrick with an account of her anxieties in reference to him, being desirous that the counsels and prayers of that eminent servant of God might be brought to bear upon his mind. And there is reason to believe that it was at this time his conversion took place. Mr. Boston, whose experience admirably fitted him for such a task, entered into close conversation with him respecting his prospects for eternity; and the solemn and affectionate appeals which he made to his conscience were so blessed by the Spirit of God, that they effected a complete revolution in his views and feelings. From that day it was apparent that his soul had turned unto the Lord, and his whole subsequent demeanour attested the reality and extent of the change which he had undergone. Perhaps even pious parents are too ready to content themselves with the simple communication of religious instruction to their children, satisfied if they are free from any flagrant immorality, and hoping that the grace of God may gradually work its way into their hearts. The example of Gillespie's mother, and the success which attended her efforts, show that besides mere instruction, there ought to be pointed and cogent and varied dealings with the conscience of each individual child, directed to the special purpose of effecting conversion; and where such efforts are made with unwearied diligence, and with an earnestness of prayer similar to that which made Jacob say, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me," there is every ground for expecting that God will bestow the indispensable help of his grace. There is something of promise, as well as of precept, in the words of Solomon, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."

As there is good ground for believing, that it was through

* Quarterly Magazine, 1798, p. 13.

Boston's instrumentality Gillespie was brought to the saving knowledge of the truth, it is reasonable to suppose that the views of the tried veteran would have great influence in moulding the theological sentiments of the young disciple. Boston was no common man. Thoroughly imbued with evangelical principles, intrepid in defence of the right, the foe of all arbitrary proceedings, he was one of the lights of his age, a truly great divine as Jonathan Edwards styles him, and at the same time a man of prompt and vigorous action. His *Fourfold State*, not to mention his other works, has been to Scotland, something like what the *Pilgrim's Progress* has been to the empire. He made a bold stand along with the Erskines and the other Marrowmen, in defence of the doctrines of grace and the free unrestricted preaching of the Word; and he was greatly instrumental in checking the progress of those unsound notions about works being necessary to guide the sinner to Christ, which were threatening to overspread the land. His views too respecting the constitution of Christ's kingdom, and the liberties and privileges of Christ's people, were far in advance of his times. The divine right of churches to choose their own office-bearers was maintained by him; he felt the evil of that commixture of the church with the world, which appears to be inseparable from a national establishment of religion; he seems even to have anticipated the time when the church would be wholly disconnected from the state; and he was ready to hold communion with all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, though they might differ from him in smaller matters.* It is impossible to glance at these views, and not to feel persuaded, that the influence of Boston must have given a colouring to the whole stream of Gillespie's thoughts: the sentiments of the spiritual father already pointed to the result, which his son in the faith was ultimately guided to. The doctrinal system of Gillespie and his views of church order bore the same stamp as those of Boston; and

* Sermons on Communion Edinburgh, 1752. Page 157.

it is an interesting fact that the son of Boston was the earliest associate of Gillespie in his state of separation from the Established Church. The influence of the elder Boston had moulded them both, and prepared them unconsciously for mutual co-operation on a field which as yet was unknown to them.

The change which had taken place in Gillespie's religious condition, after his first interview with Boston, led him very speedily to think of devoting himself to the work of the ministry; and with this view he became a student in the university of Edinburgh, where he pursued his studies for a number of years. He does not seem even then to have been altogether satisfied with the state of the Church of Scotland, for when his course of theological study was nearly completed, he proceeded to Perth, it is said in compliance with the wishes of his mother who had joined the Secession, and placed himself under the care of the Rev. Mr. Wilson, Professor of Theology to the Associate Synod, whose life is recorded in a preceding portion of this volume. His stay in Perth, however, was exceedingly short, amounting only to about ten days. His reasons for leaving the Associate Hall are not very clearly known; but there is some ground for supposing, that his dissatisfaction arose from the views he found prevailing there, respecting the terms of Christian communion, and the obligation of the covenants. From Perth he proceeded to Northampton to the Academy superintended by Dr. Doddridge, and he took with him letters of recommendation from distinguished ministers of the Church of Scotland, who all bore testimony to his piety, integrity, and proficiency in learning. His time at the university had been faithfully devoted, alike to the cultivation of his intellectual powers, and to the advancement of his soul in spiritual gifts. Dr. Erskine mentions the names of the ministers who supplied him with testimonials, and states that he had lived with them on terms of intimacy; and their well-known eminence, as well as their faithful advocacy of sound doctrine, and their liberal views of church government, supply an evidence of

the habitual bent of his mind and strain of his feelings. His friendships lay among the most pious and faithful ministers of the church. It was the uncorrupted gospel of Christ in which he delighted, and the sympathies of his mind and heart were all in favour of the spiritual rights of congregations. The changes he made resulted not from changeableness of disposition, but from the earnest longing of his soul for the enjoyment of sound doctrine, in connexion with liberal principles of church government and communion. These steps of his student life exhibited the germ of principles, which afterwards expanded into firm resistance of ecclesiastical oppression ; and they also gave an indication of what was a marked feature of his character all his days, a complete indifference to consequences, so far as they affected himself personally, when principles were concerned. Certainly the changes which he made were all such as must have seemed adverse to his worldly interests.

At Northampton Gillespie became a great favourite with Doddridge. There was a strong congeniality of sentiment between them, and there can be no doubt that the influence of the English nonconformist, confirmed Gillespie in his views of Christian communion and of the rights of congregations. Doddridge was now in the full zenith of his usefulness, a man of consummate ability and of great influence, faithful in supporting the standard of a pure Christianity amid abounding defections, and at the same time singularly free from a sectarian spirit ; dispassionate, cool, and forbearing ; disposed to love the image of Christ wherever it appeared, and looking for the defence of the truth, not to the sword of the magistrate, but to moral and spiritual weapons. Sympathy of feeling and similarity of views were the motives which brought Gillespie to Northampton, and the result of his sojourn there was to impart to his principles a strength and consistency, which carried him triumphantly through great trials at a subsequent period of his life. When Providence has work for men to perform, they are often prepared for it, long before

the time, by influences and events whose special purpose they do not at first perceive.

Having completed his course of study, Gillespie was licensed to preach the gospel on the 30th October, 1740, and ordained to the work of the ministry on the 22d January 1741, by a respectable class, says Dr. Erskine, of dissenting ministers, Dr. Doddridge acting as moderator. The mature age of thirty-two, which he had now reached, viewed in connexion with the fact that he was under twenty when he turned his attention to preparatory studies for the ministry, shows the thorough discipline through which he passed before he ventured to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. And not only was the time ample, but it is well known that he was a singularly hard student, and continued so all his days. Immediately after his ordination he returned to Scotland, and brought with him very strong recommendations from Dr. Doddridge, Job Orton, and others, who describe him "as a deeply-experienced Christian, well qualified for the important work of the ministry, and one who bade fair to prove an ornament to his holy profession, and an instrument of considerable usefulness to the souls of men."* If the correspondence which it is known was regularly carried on between Doddridge and Gillespie from this period, and which there is reason to believe still survives, were accessible, much light might be thrown upon Gillespie's views at this time, and some facts recovered respecting his earlier years.

* Preface to Treatise on Temptation, p. iii.

CHAPTER III.

Presentation and Call to Carnock—Probable reasons of his renewed connexion with the Church of Scotland—Fidelity of his ministry—Character of his preaching—Inward conflicts—Effects of them upon his labours—Popularity and success—Careful preparation for the pulpit—Structure of his discourses—Constant desire to see fruit of his ministry.

SHORTLY after his return to Scotland, Gillespie received from Colonel Erskine of Carnock a presentation to the parish of Carnock, and also in due course a regular call from the congregation. The deed of his ordination in England was laid by him upon the table of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, in whose bounds Carnock lay, and on the 19th August, 1741, his admission to Carnock was appointed to take place. It is mentioned both by Dr. Erskine and Dr. Stewart in their short memoirs of Gillespie, that when he was required to sign the Confession of Faith at the table of the presbytery, he objected to its doctrine “respecting the power of the civil magistrate in religion, but was permitted to sign with an explanation of his meaning.” The precise nature of this explanation has not been recorded; but there can be little doubt, when his own views and those of Doddridge are considered, that its object must have been to claim for the church the power of regulating her own affairs independently of the magistrate. Dr. Stewart’s remark on the modified subscription of Gillespie is this,—“It is not to be doubted but that like many other excellent men he acted in this subscription with conscious uprightness; for the tenor of his conduct through life, both as a man and a minister, showed inflexible sincerity and readiness to sacrifice his worldly

interest to the dictates of conscience."* And Dr. Erskine seems only to attach the more weight to his subscription, on account of the single exception which he felt himself called upon to make. "This, to all acquainted with his disinterested integrity and aversion to every thing of artifice and disguise, must be a sufficient confutation of the accusations raised against him, as secretly of Congregational principles and an enemy to Presbyterian church government." †

Here the question naturally presents itself, Why did Gillespie return to the Established Church after having once left it? The fact of his making objection to the doctrine of the Confession of Faith respecting the civil magistrate's power in religious matters, shows that his mind was somewhat loosened from the principles upon which religious establishments rest. Yet the probability is that he did not see all the consequences of the views he had adopted, but allowed the propriety of a civil establishment of religion, while at the same time he objected to the employment of the magistrate's power, in regulating the affairs of the church and opposing erroneous doctrines. If we are to suppose that the views of Doddridge throw any light upon the reasons of Gillespie's conduct, it will appear that the fact of the Church of Scotland's being an established church was of comparatively small importance in his eyes, and that he joined her rather as a body of whose ecclesiastical constitution and doctrines he approved, than for the sake of the civil sanctions which these had received. Having breathed the free air of Northampton, and having firmly embraced the comprehensive principle of the communion of all saints, he was ready to join the Church of Scotland, provided only he were not held bound by what seemed to him the sense of certain clauses in the Confession; and his explanation being admitted, he imagined that he

* Quarterly Magazine, vol. i., p. 14.

† Preface to Treatise on Temptation, p. iv.

would be free to prosecute the great ends of his ministry, without having his conscience trammelled by unscriptural exactions. Whether he regarded the intrusion of ministers into congregations as coming under the head of the exercise of civil power in the church, and therefore considered his exception to the magistrate's power in religion as formally exonerating him from the approbation of such intrusion; or whether, without adverting to the connexion which undoubtedly exists between intrusion and the exercise of civil power in the church, he satisfied himself like the great body of the popular party with the purpose of doing all in his power to oppose intrusion, may perhaps admit of some doubt. Yet there is a passage in his *Treatise on Temptation*,* where he describes the thrusting in of a man upon an unwilling and reclaiming congregation, as taking place in legal establishments; and then makes mention of a different evil in connexion with the settlement of ministers, which congregations voluntarily associated and dissenting from establishments require to guard against: which seems to intimate that he considered intrusion as having its root in the exercise of civil power in the church, and that probably therefore he viewed the exception which he had made in presence of the Presbytery to the magistrate's power, as freeing him, though belonging to the establishment, from the responsibility of violent settlements. At all events it is certain that from the very first he considered the free call of a church as indispensable to the formation of the pastoral relation.

Admitted to Carnock, Mr. Gillespie devoted himself with singular fidelity and zeal to the discharge of his pastoral duties. Having himself deeply felt the power of the gospel, he was indefatigable in his endeavours to bring others to the knowledge and belief of the truth. The discourses which he delivered to his people were prepared with the utmost care, as the manuscripts of them still existing abundantly testify, for he counted it criminal to serve the Lord with

* Pp. 145-147.

that which cost him nothing. They were also eminently evangelical. A crucified Saviour was the great theme of his preaching, and all the doctrines and duties of religion were exhibited in the light which streams from this central principle. By the preaching of the cross some persons understand little more than the simple exhibition of Christ's blood as the source of pardon and acceptance with God. Mr. Gillespie took a far more comprehensive view of the subject. He handled all the different doctrines of Scripture according to the measure of their importance: he minutely described and faithfully enforced all the duties of morality: it was his object to traverse with his hearers the whole field of divine truth. But whatever doctrines he might treat, or whatever duties he might enforce, they were always presented in connexion with the cross, and the evangelical element, thoroughly pervading the exhibition given of them, constituted their life and power. Of moral duties enforced simply as such, and irrespectively of gospel sanctions and motives, Mr. Gillespie knew nothing. Dr. Stewart mentions* that he had in his possession many volumes of Mr. Gillespie's manuscripts, containing about 800 discourses,† from an examination of which he says, he can testify that, while Mr. Gillespie was particularly noted as a preacher of free and sovereign grace, yet he neglected no part of divine revelation, but was most faithful in laying before his hearers the whole counsel of God, according to his understanding of it, both respecting doctrine and duty.

From his letters to President Edwards it appears that, while Mr. Gillespie looked to the Spirit of God for the only power which could awaken and convert the soul, he yet prominently held it forth as the duty of every sinner instantly to repent and believe the gospel. He had a strong faith in the efficacy of the Word, as the Spirit's instrument applied to the conscience, which made him expect immediate results from the exhibition of the truth to the souls

* Quarterly Magazine 1798, p. 20.

† Preface to Treatise on Temptation, p. vii., note.

of men; and he preached therefore with a fervour corresponding to the magnitude of the changes, which he hoped and trusted he might be the means of producing. In addressing sinners his grand object was, not to make them hope for converting grace in waiting upon God at the pool of ordinances, but to prevail upon them instantly to renounce their opposition to God, and as perishing sinners to accept his proffered mercy. He reasoned with them as rational and immortal beings who had an interest of infinite value at stake, which might in a moment, if God so willed it, elude their grasp for ever; and while he urged and entreated them to be reconciled upon the spot to God, he prayed that the Holy Ghost might carry home the truth with heavenly power to their consciences. "Though," says he, in one of the letters referred to, "the sinner never will believe on the Lord Jesus, till he has received a saving manifestation of his glory by the work of the Spirit; yet every sinner, we know, is indispensably bound at all seasons by the divine authority to believe instantly in the Lord Jesus. Also, as it may be the last call the sinner is to receive in the dispensation of the Word, we are bound to require him instantly to believe, whatever he does or does not feel in himself."*

There was another element in Mr. Gillespie's preaching which imparted to it a peculiar power. Few Christians have been more tried than he was by painful conflicts in his own bosom respecting his spiritual state, and few have made more strenuous efforts to maintain unbroken communion with God. He had a very tender conscience. He was always jealous of himself, and watched his heart with peculiar vigilance. In his letters to President Edwards he gives a very affecting account of the deep despondency which often seized him, and mentions that he sometimes feared he should be quite borne down, and carried away by the deluge of the foe. He had a strong sense of the realities of the invisible world. He felt himself painfully beset with

* Works of President Edwards, Lond. 1840, Vol. i. page cxxvii.

temptations of the devil, which harassed his mind, sometimes with vain, sometimes with vile thoughts, sometimes with thoughts of a duty neglected at the proper time, and sometimes even with the words of Scripture, and in a variety of other methods; and though he strove earnestly by prayer and meditation on heavenly things to gain the victory over the enemy, his heart would remain a stranger to peace. In dependence upon the Lord he endeavoured by medical, moral, and religious means, which he believed to be all advantageous and expedient in their place, to procure deliverance from his despondency or to alleviate its anguish, but it was all in vain. There was no relief for him, comfort was a stranger to his bosom; his mind was distressed by the thought of his diminished relish for divine things; his heart was rendered callous by cruel constant buffetings, and when he cried, the Lord heard him not. And the grand question with him under all these sore temptations was, how he should recover the savour of spiritual truths and objects. There was in fact no inconsiderable resemblance between his experience and that of Luther; but as in the case of the great Reformer his conflicts only gave vigour to his efforts, so in the case of Gillespie the more he was tried, the more earnestly he laboured in the discharge of his official duties. Indeed it cannot be doubted that his inward conflicts were an important part of the training by which God prepared him, not only for the stand he afterwards made in defence of the liberties of the church, but also for the efficient discharge of his duties as a minister of the gospel. In a letter to a friend in Edinburgh, Mr. Davidson of Galashiels, one of the twelve Marrowmen who had signed the famous representation to the General Assembly in 1721, says: "I notice with pleasure in yours the success of Thomas's ministry, even in the midst of his sore conflicts; the latter certainly are necessary for him, and kindly and wisely designed by a Father's love."* He was intimately acquainted with the

* Davidson's Letters, page 89.

workings of the human soul, under the influence of temptations and doubts and fears, and all his discourses were largely imbued with the element of feeling and experience. He spoke from the heart to the heart; and having felt the pangs of internal disquiet, he could always address a word in season to those who were in distress and anguish of mind.*

And not only were his discourses generally instinct with experimental feeling, but at particular times he preached discourses of a very peculiar cast, which, though they appeared strange to persons who had little experience of inward conflicts, and were even censured by some as improper or unnecessary, were yet singularly blessed to others who were deeply sunk in sorrow and on the brink of despair. At communions he often entered deeply into the consideration of certain exercises and conflicts of the soul, which are seldom minutely handled from the pulpit, but which, having had experience of all their anguish himself, and having considered them with peculiar care, he was enabled to treat to the singular benefit of many. Yet like a wise steward who rightly divideth the word of God, Mr. Gillespie, who knew that it was by far the smaller part of his hearers who needed such discourses, or could profit by them, gave to the bulk of his preaching quite a different colouring. "Instead of confining himself," says Dr. Erskine, who was a stated hearer of his for a considerable time, "as many do, to subjects suited to his peculiar genius, he considered what was most needful for the bulk of his hearers, keeping back from them nothing profitable, but declaring to them the whole counsel of God, giving law and gospel, comfort and terror, privileges and duties, their proper place. I never sat under a ministry better calculated to awaken the thoughtless and secure, to caution convinced sinners against what would stifle convictions or prevent their issuing in conversion, and to point out differences between vital Christianity and specious counterfeit ap-

* Edwards' Works, London, vol. iii. page cxi.

pearances of it. If I have wandered from the original design of this preface by enlarging on these matters, and if I have expressed myself with some degree of warmth, is there not a cause? When under a load of unjust abuse and ridicule, Mr. Gillespie's meekness has kept him silent as a deaf man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs; that surely is no reason why his friends, and the friends of the cause in which he has suffered, should be silent too. The benevolent will not severely censure my stepping a little out of my road, to defend a worthy character insidiously and cruelly attacked." *

When Mr. Gillespie's careful preparation for the pulpit is considered, the variety of the subjects which he handled, the evangelical complexion of all his discourses, and his deep acquaintance with the workings of the human heart, it will readily be conceived that he must have been a highly acceptable preacher. And it is known that he was so. His popularity was great, not only in his own parish, but also in all the places which were favoured with his occasional ministrations. And this was the more remarkable, as his delivery was singularly uncouth: but the genuine excellence of his discourses and the fervour with which they were delivered overcame the obstacle of a deficient manner, and gathered multitudes around him to hear the truth from his lips. And God was pleased to bless his ministry with remarkable success. His sermons were admirably adapted for awakening and converting sinners, for comforting and establishing the minds of believers, and for delivering those who were agitated and depressed by the art and violence of the tempter, and the gloomy workings of their own minds. The careless were arrested by the heart-searching appeals which he addressed to them; the hypocritical were startled by the delineations he presented of the form as contrasted with the power of godliness; and the downcast were raised, and guided by

* Essay on the Continuance of Immediate Revelations of Facts and Future Events in the Christian Church, Preface, pp. vii. viii.

him to the fountain of heavenly joy and peace. On Sacramental occasions especially, as all accounts agree, he was singularly felicitous in adapting his addresses to the different workings of the human mind, and his presence at such times was hailed in the various places which he was in the habit of visiting as a signal blessing.*

It appears from Mr. Gillespie's manuscripts, of which the writer of this memoir has had the opportunity of examining a few volumes, that his method of preaching was highly textual. It was his object in every discourse to bring out fully the precise truths contained in the particular passage under consideration, and to enforce the warnings and lessons which it might appear to suggest. He follows the stream of thought indicated by his text, passing for the most part from clause to clause, and pointing out the connexion between the various members of the verse. In a discourse, for example, upon Matt. iii. 10, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire," he first considers the import of the statement that the axe is laid to the root of the trees, then points out the persons who are indicated by the trees that bring not forth good fruit, and finally describes their doom as set forth in the words "hewn down and cast into the fire." The following are a few extracts from what is said respecting the import of laying the axe to the root of the trees:—

"The Lord's patience towards a generation who enjoy the dispensation of the gospel, or a sinner who sits under the dropping of it, knows bounds, however long it may be continued, and will at length come to a period. The Lord pronounced concerning the generation before the flood, whose wickedness was great, and every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts only evil continually, who, it is to be presumed from Gen. ix. 5, 6, had filled the earth with cruel murders, that his Spirit would not always strive

* Quarterly Magazine, vol. i. p. 21. Pref. Gillespie on Temptation, p. v.

with man, for that he also was flesh, wholly carnal, a very mass of sin, and that his days or time of trial should be an hundred and twenty years. And that was a type and evidence of the manner in which the Lord would act towards churches and generations in after ages.

“The Lord makes solemn trial of persons and societies during a particular season limited and fixed by himself, and that is their day, given to them for attaining the saving knowledge of the things that concern their peace and everlasting happiness. And if during that season they do not know them, prize and embrace them, for the ends of God’s appointment, then in his righteous judgment they shall be hid from their eyes, so as never to be savingly perceived by them. The Lord will take away the means of grace from such persons, or them from the means of grace, or will not bless them for their conversion and salvation.

“When the Lord makes such trial of persons, as he made of the Jews by the ministry of John the Baptist, as he made of the people in Judea and the dwellers in Galilee by Christ’s personal ministry, and as he does by the dispensation of the gospel and particular messages sent to persons and societies by his servants in after ages; it is with the utmost danger, if they are careless, of their being given up to their own hearts’ lust, and suffered to walk on in their own foolish and sinful counsels to their everlasting destruction. The time at length comes when the Lord, who will not be mocked, gives a solemn efficacious commission to his gospel to seal the salvation or damnation of hearers, to become to them the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.

“The Lord’s work and that of the Spirit becomes so critical in the case of sinners, who have enjoyed a day of grace and merciful visitation perhaps long, that a very little time is to fix their state for eternity. The voice of the Lord to them is, ‘behold now is the accepted time,’ if you will not now accept the Saviour, you never shall have another offer of him: ‘behold now is the day of salvation,’ if you receive

not the right to salvation by faith acted on the Saviour this day, it may be out of time for you to think of it to-morrow. There may be no possibility of your then attaining it. God may this day swear in his wrath that you shall not enter into his rest, if you do not this day submit to the righteousness of God the Redeemer.

“When the axe is laid to the root of the tree, it is immediately, it may be said instantly, to be cut down. This consideration suggests the awful idea, that perhaps some sinner in this worshipping assembly is never to rise from the spot where he now sits, or to depart from the place where he now stands, but is in a few moments to be dealt with according to the following part of the verse, that is, ‘cut down and cast into the fire.’ When others return to their homes, he shall have gone to his long home, and shall have entered into the eternal world, without the possibility of alteration in his state for ever, a most striking and awful consideration!”

In his preaching and in all his ministerial duties Mr. Gillespie kept constantly in view the conversion of sinners and the edification of saints. He sought by exhibiting the terrors of the law and the saving mercy of the gospel, to awaken men to a sense of their danger, and to persuade them to lay hold of Christ; and he watched over his flock with paternal solicitude as one who must give account, rejoicing when he saw them walking worthily of the gospel, and grieving when they appeared to decline. What he wanted to see was fruit of his ministry, an increase of faith and love and new obedience among his people; and his eye was perpetually searching for some manifestation of the grace of the Spirit. He was in the habit of corresponding with the Rev. Mr. Davidson of Galashiels, and it would appear that he sometimes unfolded to him, in the confidence of Christian friendship, the hopes and fears he felt in reference to the success of his ministry: for we find Mr. Davidson, in a letter dated 16th March, 1744, comforting Mr. Gillespie under some disappointments he had met with: “I do notice in yours some uneasiness on account

of some disappointments you have met with from some persons in the parish, of whom you had formerly conceived a favourable opinion, and had hopes of a good work begun, and matters have turned out quite contrary to expectations."* Of Mr. Gillespie it might truly be said that he had no greater joy than to see the people of his charge walking in the truth. It was his constant desire that Christ might be formed in them, the hope of glory, and that he might be instrumental in preparing them for an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus.

* Letters to Christian Friends by the Rev. Henry Davidson, Minister of Galashiels, p. 70.

CHAPTER IV.

Revival at Kilsyth—Gillespie's connexion with it—His view of its character—Treatise on Temptation composed—Analysis of the work—Style and execution of it—Specimens—Strong views which it embodies of Satanic agency—Robert Hall's view of the same subject—Essay on Immediate Revelations composed—Plan of the work—Sound principles advanced in it—Specimens—Duration and success of Gillespie's ministry at Carnock.

It was near the commencement of Mr. Gillespie's ministry at Carnock that the famous revivals of religion took place at Cambuslang and Kilsyth ; and as might be expected both from his peculiar temperament of mind, and from his habit of looking constantly for the Spirit's help, he took a deep interest in them. Being an intimate friend of Mr. Robe, the minister of Kilsyth, he went there repeatedly to witness the effects produced by the ordinances of religion, and to aid in proclaiming the gospel and guiding awakened souls to the only source of peace and comfort. And his labours were remarkably blessed. Mr. Robe mentions that of all who visited him and lent him assistance, Mr. Gillespie was the one who most signally appeared as the instrument of God. During one visit of ten days, he laboured constantly from morning to night along with Mr. Robe ; and it was his conviction that many of those with whom he conversed exhibited all the signs of a real operation of the Spirit upon their hearts. They had strong views of the evil of sin,—they seemed vile in their own eyes,—they felt their need of an interest in the redemption of Christ, and so far were they from being carried away by enthusiastic persuasions of their own conversion, that they were generally jealous of themselves, and afraid of prematurely taking the consolations of the gospel. And they also gave evidence of cherishing love to

those in whom the image of Christ appeared; and they felt a desire, so soon as any measure of peace was infused into their own minds, of seeing others brought to the knowledge of the truth, that they too might receive the precious mercy of the gospel and share the joys of salvation. All these marks, which certainly are very far from savouring of a fanatical spirit, are described by Mr. Gillespie, in the attestation he wrote after returning from Kilsyth, as having fallen under his own observation; and they show that whatever irregularities and excesses might appear in the conduct of some at that time, undoubtedly there was a real work of the Spirit in the revival at Kilsyth. It is testified too that many of the parties who were awakened during that period of excitement, continued, after it had passed away, steadfast in the faith, and maintained a consistent deportment till their dying day.

It was during the first years of Mr. Gillespie's ministry at Carnock that his "Treatise on Temptation" was written, though it was not published till after his death. The subject was one that had occupied much of his thoughts; and having himself for many a year endured sore conflicts in his own mind, and been borne down by a load which threatened to overwhelm him, he was well qualified by experience to write profitably on the subject. It is probable that the plan of the treatise was formed, and some part of it composed before his ministry commenced at all; for he was urged by Dr. Doddridge so early as the year 1743 to complete it for publication, and it is known that all of it that has been published was written before 1744. Mr. Gillespie's modesty however prevented him from appearing spontaneously before the world as an author; and it was not till after he had gone down to the grave that the "Treatise on Temptation" was published. His faithful friend, Dr. Erskine of Old Greyfriars' Church, Edinburgh, into whose hands his manuscripts came, considered it his duty to publish it; and he has prefixed to it a preface in which he speaks very highly both of the work and of the author.

He mentions that Mr. Gillespie reviewed the work towards the close of his ministry at Carnock, but was prevented from completing it "by the hurry and fatigue of body and mind to which his peculiar circumstances after his deposition subjected him. In consequence of this, not one-third of his plan is executed, and the church is deprived of his remarks on those branches of it which his genius, train of thought, experience, opportunities of observation, and course of study most qualified him to have handled to advantage; and which if so handled bade fairest to be greatly and extensively useful. That one in Mr. Gillespie's retired situation could not give a full delineation of the rocks on which the wisdom, virtue, and happiness of mankind suffer shipwreck is not surprising: but that with few helps and advantages, and numerous discouragements, he could plan such a work, and execute it so far as he has done, must give the candid and impartial reader a high idea of the extent of his genius and the solidity of his judgment. What is published is complete of itself, and independent of what was further intended."* In another preface prefixed to the "Essay on the Continuance of Immediate Revelations," Dr. Erskine takes occasion to speak of the "Treatise on Temptation," and says, "that Mr. Gillespie's modesty had in a great measure concealed from the public his abilities, and prevented his appearing as an author;" and he characterises the work as an excellent treatise, composed in a sententious style, much resembling that of Lord Bacon, and well suited to point out the rocks on which the virtue, happiness, and usefulness of mankind have in all ages so often suffered shipwreck. †

The plan of Mr. Gillespie's work on temptation is a very comprehensive one. The object of it is to exhibit the various sources of temptation to which men are exposed in life, and the watchful care which is necessary in order to maintain a conscience void of offence towards God and

* Treatise on Temptation, Preface, pp. ix. x.

† Essay on the Continuance of Immediate Revelations, Preface, p. vii.

towards men. And it is truly astonishing what an endless variety of dangers are pointed out by the author: not a rock or quicksand in the ocean of life seems to have escaped his observant eye: all are carefully marked in the valuable chart which he has constructed for the Christian voyager. The work comprehends twelve sections, which are devoted to the consideration of different temptations assailing men in different circumstances and situations. You have the temptations described which are adapted to the different ages of life, to different natural constitutions, to different natural tempers, to different positions in society, to different relationships, to different employments, to different abilities natural and acquired, to different inclinations and views, to different characters of men, to different ages of the world, to different nations and places, to the different situations of men in respect of the things of God as ignorant, erroneous, sceptical, profligate, self-righteous, secure, &c. And under each of these general divisions you have a minute analysis of all the different cases which come under it, and of all the different temptations which are adapted to each particular case. In reference, for example, to the different ages of life, you have the temptations described to which children are liable, those past childhood, those in the vigour of youth, those in their prime, those in the decline of life. In reference, again, to different relationships, the temptations of parents and of children are pointed out, of husbands and of wives, of masters and of servants, of magistrates and of subjects, of ministers and of congregations, of teachers and of persons under instruction, &c. And under the head of different conditions, the temptations of the rich and of the poor, of persons in prosperous and in adverse circumstances, of persons who are their own masters, and of those who are dependent upon others, are all made to pass in review before the reader.

And as the plan of Mr. Gillespie's Treatise on Temptation is a most comprehensive one, so it has been executed, so far as the author has gone, with much judgment, and

the work displays a deep acquaintance with human nature and with the feelings and tendencies of the human heart. It is not possible for any one to read it without finding a variety of passages under the different heads, which will point out dangers to which he himself is exposed, and suggest the means which ought to be employed for guarding against them. Among the innumerable positions, situations, and states of mind which are described, every person will find some, probably a considerable number, which his own heart must tell him correspond exactly to his own case. As in a faithful mirror, each may see in Mr. Gillespie's pages a representation of his own feelings, temptations, and dangers, delineated as accurately as if his own heart were the reflected object.

The work too is written in a very forcible and compact style, though somewhat rugged and occasionally obscure. Every sentence is full of thought. You feel that you are reading the pages of a man who was most thoroughly in earnest, and whose one object was to warn men of dangers lying in their path. With great terseness of language, and with a singular freedom from the peculiarities of diction which are to be found in many preachers of his day, he enforces his weighty counsels; and strives to awaken the consciences of men, and to stir them up to a sense of their danger, and to strenuous resistance of the temptations which beset them.

As the Treatise on Temptation is now seldom to be met with, the following paragraphs are presented as specimens of it. In the Introduction some general remarks are made upon the nature of temptation.

“ All temptations may be reduced to two kinds; *those* of allurement, where the object or contrivance by which the devil leads to sin, is in order to attain, increase, secure, what is pleasant or profitable, really or in appearance; and *those* that are terrifying, where his engine is to keep from obedience, or engage in transgression, from fear of prejudice or ruin, in person, reputation, estate, friends, advantages possessed or expected, present or future, real or imaginary.

“He inverts the order that God and nature have fixed in the operations of the soul of man, if there is a distinction of faculties in it, which has been doubted. However that matter be, it is certain, to act rationally and religiously is to judge of a thing as directed, whether it is lawful or unlawful, true or false; then having judged, to choose it or refuse it, as good or evil; next to have the desire going out towards it as beneficial in any respect, or to make it, as hurtful, the object of one’s aversion. He makes one go the contrary way; to apprehend the thing of advantage, as such to choose it as good, then to believe it lawful and true. Thus he makes the affections sway the will, and that to determine the understanding, which should lead all. This appears from his procedure with our first parents. He represented the beauty of the fruit, the happy effects of eating it, denied the threatening, and questioned the command.

“He proceeds by degrees. He well understands that if what he points to, were at first laid open, the soul would be apt to reject the suggestion with abhorrence. Thus he tempts, first to presume upon duty, or in its performance; then to remissness in it, afterwards to indifference about it; next to neglect it; then to nibble and tamper with smaller sins; upon that, to excuse them in others; this done, to commit them one’s self; which makes way for a sin or evils of a deeper dye; and in this course he advances, till the soul becomes drenched in evil, if the Lord by common restraining grace, or that which is saving and special, prevents it not.”*

Speaking of the temptations to which the prosperous are exposed, Mr. Gillespie says: “Those in prosperous circumstances in any kind, Satan tempts to think all is secured to them: they shall continue so, and die in their nest, as Job expresses it. When healthful, he suggests to them they are in no danger of the diseases under which others groan, and in that way makes them forget their

* Pages 4, 5.

latter end, as if it never would happen. He represents it a thing certain, their life shall yet be of long continuance, and that, therefore, they may form and execute plans respecting their outward condition, yet a long while; and there will be time enough to be more serious, and taken up about their eternal state, a great many years after. He represents misfortunes and calamities as what they are in no danger of, and by such means effectually keeps them from either praying against them or preparing for them. He tempts to carnal security, thinking they shall have peace, though they go on in the way of their own hearts, disregarding the Lord, and the operation of his hands; not trembling because of him nor being afraid of his judgments; to pride, overweening conceit of themselves, unsubmitiveness of spirit, rebellion against the Lord; to unaffectedness with the misery of others. He tempts believers in prosperity to fail of self-examination; to conclude because all goes well with them outwardly, there is no need to accomplish a diligent search, and to commune with their own heart; to hurry over, if not to neglect, spiritual exercises; to flatter themselves they are so the favourites of heaven, that the Lord will bestow needful covenant blessings upon them, though they do not labour for them in the way of duty as others do; to despise the afflicted, and to conclude they are worse than others, and that the Lord contends with them for some singular provocation.*

“He disposes subjects to listen to the suggestions and surmises of evil and designing men, giving bad impressions of magistrates, supreme or subordinate, in order to impose on them and lead them into practices tending to their own ruin as well as the hurt of the public; to neglect to pray for magistrates, though such prayer is prescribed by the Lord’s authority, 1 Tim. ii. 2, and is a means of procuring from him national blessings; to desire a change not only in the administration, but the form of

* Pages 71, 73.

the government, from a fickle perverse humour and expectation of some advantage to result from such change, that thus guilt may be contracted and a disposition cherished, which he may improve for cursed purposes if a meet opportunity shall be presented; to seek when under embarrassments or poverty, to better their condition by public disturbances and confusions, and for that end to embark in any desperate attempt that may be set on foot, the teeming womb of inexpressibly greater misery than that they proposed to free themselves from, or perhaps of utter ruin to themselves and others; to unthankfulness to the Lord for the blessing of lawful authority under which they may live peaceable lives; to disregard the mercy of the civil sword protecting them from violence, insult, or injustice, in possession of liberty and property, that thus they may provoke the Lord to take away the hedge, and to show them the worth of the despised mercy of government by being deprived of it. He produces in the minds of some, indifference about, and contempt of all religion, that they may compliment the prince with their conscience, and in order to obtain his favour, embrace any scheme of principles, however absurd and impious, which he is disposed to introduce and propagate. For he knows that they who have done violence to conscience, and to whom all religions are alike, easily will be prevailed upon to embrace the religion, be it what it may, that is most suited to promote their outward interest.”*

“Satan tempts the supreme magistrate to aspire after an arbitrary power, paramount to all law,—a power to dispose of all things in the commonwealth, and to determine concerning them by his mere will and pleasure. If he gains this favourite point, he well knows how to turn the idolized power into a dismal calamity to its possessor, as well as to millions of others. That this may be brought about, he does all he can to render magistrates impatient of the just restraints and limitations they are under by

* Pages 124, 128.

the laws and constitution of the commonwealth. He excites them to listen to courtiers and flatterers, who give a false representation of things for their own ends, and to use no proper methods to see things with their own eyes, a course in many instances pernicious to them as well as to their subjects; to enact things hurtful and oppressive to those under them; to refuse access to the injured to apply for redress, and to deny redress when application is actually made; to persecute for conscience' sake, and to make their conscience the standard, their belief the rule, to all their subjects.*

“He leads them, through the solicitation of courtiers, or to promote ends foreign to the advantage of the public, to neglect persons well qualified to discharge a trust, and to bestow places of power, and offices of importance in the commonwealth, on men not duly fitted in respect of capacity or integrity. That active spirit, who interferes in human affairs, in a manner to be known and believed only by diligent observation and experience, plies this engine in all lesser societies, as well as in kingdoms and states. He excites rulers to oppress subjects in their different interests and concerns, that thus he may rob them of their affections and diminish their influence; to be wedded to their own opinion and neglect to advise with wise and faithful counsellors, that he may hurry them into dangerous or destructive designs; to rashness and unreasonable boldness in conduct, by which he engages them in projects and attempts fatal to themselves and the body-politic; or to the opposite extreme of pusillanimity and dastardliness of spirit, by which they are led to suffer evil practices in the subjects, without calling them to proper account, and to receive insults from foreign princes and states derogatory to their honour and ruining to their interests, without using the means Providence has furnished them with for obtaining redress, reparation, and proper security against anything of such kind in time to come. He in-

* Pages 114, 115.

fluences the prince to make, in the management of affairs, his own supposed interest and advantage the alone rule of his conduct; and, regardless of the treasure and blood of his subjects, to involve himself and them in hazardous wars, in order to acquire that to which he has not the least shadow of right; to exact repetition of the same oath from a person, to the dishonour of the Lord, debauching of conscience, and rendering the solemnity of an oath, and so its weight and influence, still less. He tempts magistrates, supreme and subordinate, to abuse the power they are vested with; to partiality in the administration of justice, a regarding of the persons of men, poor or rich, being moved by pity to wrest judgment in the case of the one, by fear or reward to do it in that of the other; and to respect friends, and determine in their favour, right or wrong. By this engine the grand deceiver debauches the conscience of the judge, wounds the spirits of the injured, and introduces and promotes the practice of injustice.”*

“That cruel malicious spirit has a peculiar ascendant over men in adversity. He forms the conclusion in their minds, ‘the Lord is partial in his distributions;’ and suggests they have as good right to health, ease, honour, riches, or whatever else they want or are deprived of, as others who enjoy them. He brings them to aggravate their miseries and distresses, that they may become insupportable, or the afflicted persons may break out in such tragical complaints as shall be unworthy of their profession and privileges if they are saints, and bring reflection on the Lord’s way, or will tend to sour more their own spirits, or to sadden the hearts of them with whom they reside and are conversant, or to whom they stand related. He pushes the afflicted who are of resolute spirits, and some others of the distressed, to the extreme of despising the chastening of the Lord, and disregarding and overlooking his hand. He makes them refuse to comply with the call of Heaven in the dispensation, and to practise stoutness and stubborn-

* Pages 116, 118.

ness of spirit, a frame of mind which, especially in such circumstances, the Lord abhors. That course he follows with persons of natural courage and firmness of mind. He pushes persons of weak spirits, under distresses, diseases, or other miseries, to the opposite extreme, of fainting under Divine rebukes, losing hope, sinking under discouragement, and into it; limiting the Lord; apprehending the worst in every case; racking, harassing, and tormenting themselves by brooding over their fears. His method with them under maladies is to excite them to make an idol of means, put them in the place of the Lord, and expect all from them; or to slight and neglect them, and thus to tempt the Lord by not using his appointment, and expecting, what is almost equal to a miracle, that he should work relief for them not in his stated and ordinary way. Sometimes he makes afflicted saints backward to take the comfort the Lord allows and to which they have the best right; and influences them to place a part of their religion in sadness and a morose behaviour, and to think it would be presumption, or at least unsafe, to rejoice in the Lord at such a season.”*

The foregoing extracts supply a specimen of what largely pervades the whole of Mr. Gillespie's work on Temptation, viz., the strong views which he entertained respecting the perpetual agency of the prince of darkness in human affairs. That such agency exists, and produces results of very great magnitude, no one who regulates his faith by the Scriptures can possibly doubt. Does not our Lord say to Peter,—“Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat?” Luke xxii. 31. Does not Peter say to Ananias,—“Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” Acts v. 5. And are we not assured that Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, immediately before his betrayal of Christ? John xiii. 27. How numerous are the references in Scripture to the works of the devil, to the resistance which he is constantly offering

* Pages 74, 75.

to the kingdom of Christ, and to the snares which he spreads to entangle the feet of unwary sinners! The personality, indeed, of Satan and his concern in human affairs are taught, not in one or a few passages of Scripture, but throughout the Sacred volume. But perhaps Mr. Gillespie's "Treatise on Temptation" loses somewhat of its power, in consequence of the unusual frequency with which he refers to Satanic agency as prompting men to sinful conduct. There is some justice in the remark which was made, in a letter to Gillespie himself from a friend, the Rev. Henry Davidson of Galashiels, whom he had allowed to read the manuscript, who, after stating that the treatise contains a most comprehensive account of the artful management of the deceitful heart in conjunction with the wicked one, adds,—“his agency in the matter of sin is (no manner of doubt) of vast extent; and yet it is possible that many things sinful in our frame and conduct may be unjustly fathered on him, which are really the pure production of that powerful and deceitful devil within, viz. the old man.”*

Still Mr. Gillespie, in all the descriptions which he gives of the temptations of the devil, has the single object in view of warning his readers against them, and his language never once suggests the idea that they extenuate in the smallest degree the guilt of those who yield to them. His principle is, Satan may tempt, and in God's providence he is permitted to do so; but it is our part to resist his allurements, and he has no power to compel us to sin against our own will. Temptations may abound from without, but sin can only be our own act. The whole treatise in fact is written in the spirit of the very striking words of Peter,—“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith,” 1 Pet. v. 8, 9. And perhaps it is because in the present day we too little realise, what is an undoubted scriptural truth, that Satan does tempt mankind, that we are apt to regard

* Davidson's Letters, p. 148.

Mr. Gillespie's pictures of temptation as somewhat overcharged with the element of Satanic influence. Perhaps the safer course for us, since we possess no sure criterion for distinguishing those temptations which take their rise solely within ourselves, from those in which the enemy of souls has a hand, is, like Mr. Gillespie, to cherish a habitual conviction that we are exposed to the assaults of an unseen foe, and that we ought therefore constantly to dread his stratagems and to guard against his attacks. His devices are many. Paul makes mention of his wiles and fiery darts, and we probably suffer most from them, when we are least alive to the fact of their existence. Eph. vi. 11, 16. It was the opinion of Robert Hall, whose sobriety of judgment none will question, that the subject of Satanic influence was one of great moment, and that it was strangely neglected in our times; and for the purpose of drawing attention to it, he prepared three discourses for publication, but the manuscript by some singular accident was lost. In some fragments of other discourses upon the subject, he furnishes a very satisfactory answer to an objection which almost unavoidably strikes the mind in reading Mr. Gillespie's treatise, viz., that to ascribe to Satan such an interference in the moral concerns of the world, as is implied in his incessantly tempting men to sin, is to suppose him omnipresent, a supposition repugnant to the nature of a finite being. "It must be confessed the scriptures of the New Testament teach us to conceive of Satanic agency as concurring in almost every act of deliberate sin: he is said to have filled the heart of Ananias, to have entered into Judas after he had taken the sop, and to be the god of this world who worketh mightily in the children of disobedience. To infer from thence, however, that any proper omnipresence is attributed to this apostate spirit betrays inattention to the obvious meaning of the inspired writers. We are taught to conceive of Satan as the head of a spiritual empire of great extent, and comprehending within itself innumerable subordinate agents. What their number may be it is vain to conjecture; but when we reflect on the mag-

nitude of the universe, and the extensive and complicated agency in which they are affirmed to be engaged, we shall probably be inclined to conjecture that it far exceeds that of the human race. Conceiving Satan to be the chief, we easily account for the extent of the agency he is affirmed to exert in tempting and seducing the human race, not by supposing him to be personally present wherever such an operation is carrying on, but by referring it to his auspices and considering it as belonging to the history of his empire. As innumerable angels of light fight under the banners of the Redeemer, so there is every reason to conclude the devil also is assisted by an equally numerous host of his angels, composing those principalities and powers over which Jesus Christ triumphed in the making "a show of them openly."*

The only other work of Gillespie's which has been given to the public, is an essay on the continuance of immediate revelations of facts and future events in the Christian Church. It was published about three years before his death, in 1771, not however by himself but by his faithful friend Dr. Erskine, who writes a preface to it, in which he speaks in terms of the warmest approbation both of the author and of the essay. It would appear that it was Dr. Erskine's high estimate of the work which led him to urge upon Mr. Gillespie the duty of publishing it; for he describes it as judiciously and thoroughly canvassing the subject, and he adds, that hitherto Mr. Gillespie's modesty has in a great measure concealed from the public his abilities and has prevented his appearing as an author.† The time when this essay was written is not stated, though probably it was many years before its publication; for Mr. Gillespie was never disposed to transgress the Horatian rule of suppression till the ninth year, and it is plain too, that it took its rise from the extensive prevalence of certain visionary notions about impressions and impulses, which Whitefield's visit to Scotland had been

* Hall's works, vol. v. p. 58. Note.—P. 68-70. † Preface p. vii.

the means of leading many excellent people to adopt. Gillespie was a warm admirer of Whitefield, and considered him as specially designed in the providence of God to arouse the churches from the lethargy into which they had fallen; but he totally disapproved of the practice, too much countenanced by Whitefield of making impressions and impulses a rule of conduct, and of regarding them as immediate revelations from heaven. In a letter to President Edwards, dated 24th Nov. 1746, he laments that so many wise and good people should allow themselves to be drawn away by the notion, that the casual turning up of particular texts, and impressions suddenly made upon the mind, and other such things were employed by God for revealing facts and future events to his people; and he describes the hurtful consequences which he had known these ideas to be the means of producing in many cases. It is probable, therefore, that the essay was written shortly after the year 1746, though not published till 1771.*

Mr. Gillespie handles the subject of supposed immediate revelations with great propriety; and the calm and rational views which he advances will appear the more remarkable and the more creditable to the soundness of his judgment, when his strong constitutional tendency to melancholy is considered, and the sore internal conflicts with which he was tried, which might have predisposed him to the very notions he opposes. The plan of the essay is very simple. The arguments are first stated, by which it had been supposed that the continuance of immediate revelations from God to the church might be established; and then the arguments are presented, by which the author thinks the existence of any such revelations in our day may be disproved. The second part of the essay embraces answers in detail to the arguments advanced in favour of immediate revelations from heaven, and a consideration of the exceptions that might be made to the arguments directed against immediate revelations. And the conclu-

* President Edwards' Works, vol. i. p. cxxv.

sion is finally drawn that the written word is the only rule of faith and manners to the church.

As this essay is now seldom to be seen, a few extracts may not be unacceptable, as a specimen of Mr. Gillespie's method of handling the subject. It must have been very serviceable to the cause of truth, at a time when fanatical and enthusiastic notions were leading many to lay more stress upon vague impressions and suggestions than upon the oracles of the living God. Refuting arguments in favour of continued revelations; Mr. Gillespie says: "To the argument, that there have been innumerable instances of such immediate revelations as certain facts, it is answered,—No facts are of force in opposition to the express declarations of the Holy Ghost in Scripture, or the native result of such divine testimonies. Many, if not almost all, supposed predictions of future events, by holy and intelligent men, it is more than probable, were only applications of scripture prophecies and examples to nations, persons, circumstances, and events, declaring how it was to be expected the Lord would act toward them, leaving a latitude to his sovereignty, who will not be limited. It is affirmed, Archbishop Usher foretold things to come: but he only told what appeared to him likely to happen to the church of Christ, and in the world, in consequence of his carefully studying the book of Revelation. What is little attended to, the Bible is a history of Providence, as well as a rule of faith and practice: from it is to be learned how the Lord, keeping his ordinary course in providence, will deal with churches and nations of such disposition and practice, as those related in the Scripture; and by this rule, men mighty in the scriptures have told what events were to be expected in certain circumstances; which actually took place, and were counted predictions, when such persons were far from pretending or imagining that they had received immediate divine revelations. To this effect it is told, that Mr. Thomas Hogg, minister at Kiltarn, in Ross-shire, one of the most holy and wisest of ministers, was in prison at

London for nonconformity, in the reign of James II. of England; one Dr. Gordon, who wished to have him set at liberty, said to him, 'If you will tell whether the events of the King's reign are likely to be favourable or adverse, I will get you liberated.' Mr. Hogg answered, 'Doctor, I thought you knew me better, than to suppose that I believe there are now any immediate divine revelations.' He answered, 'Whether you believe so or not, do as I desire, and you shall be brought out of prison.' "On being allowed time as required, Mr. Hogg said to the Doctor, 'Tell the King, I have been reading the books of Kings and Chronicles, to see if I could find a king like his majesty, or subjects like his majesty's subjects; and I discern, that if God keeps his ordinary course of procedure in providence, the events of his majesty's reign are not like to be favourable but adverse.' Mr. Hogg was liberated; and every one knows King James was driven from his throne by the nation for invading their civil and religious rights, and died an exile in France." *

In illustrating the dangerous consequences of the views he is opposing, Mr. Gillespie says, "There is the utmost need of all caution and accuracy, in treating this argument, in writing, preaching, conversation, or practice; for Satan leads poor souls into ruining snares by mistakes in the matter. One who never was exercised to godliness (on the contrary is evidently immoral) shall have Is. liv. 5, or some such passage, warmly impressed on his mind, at a communion season or under affliction; the person concludes, this is the Lord telling him, he is his God and husband. All endeavours by Christians, during his life, or at death, to break the ruining snare, are ineffectual; the poor soul goes to the grave with a lie in the right hand, saying, when told 'their spots are not the spots of the Lord's children,'—'The Lord told me, going to such a communion, or in the time of it, he my Maker was my husband, and I believe him; he is my husband, after all

* Essay on Immediate Revelations, pages 13, 14.

you can say.' Others exercised about the salvation of their soul, and convinced of sin in some degree, but who never got a saving discovery of Christ, and of the way of salvation through him, and thus were never led to seek from the Lord saving faith in him, so as to attain and act it, shall have such texts as Is. xliii. 25; Matt. ix. 2, warmly, with continuance, impressed on their mind by the devil; they conclude, this certainly is the Spirit of the Lord, testifying that they are the children of God. Thus they fall short of real conversion; and if the Lord shall not mercifully break the dangerous snare, an unwise son or daughter not only stays long in the place of the breaking forth of children, Hos. xiii. 13, but perishes in it for eternity. Other well inclined or serious and pious persons, understanding that Christians who are of great character, are accustomed to get scriptures impressed on their minds, as discoveries of duty, or intimations of events to have place in their lives, shall choose their employment, relations, connections, or residences, in short, undertake nothing in life or business, but by scripture impressed on their minds, and think they are under the leading of the Spirit of Christ in the whole, when deceived by the devil, till the Lord breaks the snare, by making them attend to Prov. xix. 27; John x. 5, or some such passages, or by instrumentality of persons who had been thus ensnared, or by some other means."*

Mr. Gillespie's ministry at Carnock continued from 1741 till 1752, a period of eleven years, during which he laboured with unwearied diligence and with much success, taking an interest in every thing that related to the prosperity of the kingdom of Christ. His whole delight lay in the study of the Scriptures and in the discharge of his pastoral duties. The large number of sermons he composed, the interest he felt in such occurrences as the revival at Kilsyth, the minute attention he paid to the different situations of men and the different dangers to which they were

* Essay on Immediate Revelations, pages 20, 21.

liable, and the concern he experienced on account of the enthusiastic notions that were countenanced by one whom he admired, make it plain that to the full measure of his ability he was labouring to support and extend the cause of Christ, and to protect the truth of God from the admixture of human elements. The modesty of his nature, however, prevented him from taking much part in the public affairs of the church; and it seemed as if he were destined to pursue the even tenor of his way to the last, in the secluded sphere where providence had placed him. No one would have fancied that he was likely to become the founder of a religious party. But events over which he had no control summoned him into the arena of strife, and as he could not belie the dictates of his conscience, he was compelled to place himself in opposition to the ruling party within the church to which he belonged. The peaceful years he had spent at Carnock were now to end. A cloud is collecting around him, charged with elements which are soon to burst upon his head, and to drive him from the communion of the Church of Scotland, in which he has laboured with so much zeal. We must now view him as a sufferer for conscience' sake, not less certainly an object of interest than before, but rather deserving of our warmer admiration.

CHAPTER V.

Law of patronage—Strong opposition to it—Violent settlements—Refusal of some Presbyteries to effect them—Assembly's determination to compel their submission—Mr. Richardson presented to Inverkeithing—Dunfermline Presbytery repeatedly refuses to settle him—Case brought before the Assembly—Assembly's peremptory injunction to the Presbytery—Continued refusal of the Presbytery—Representation given in by six members of the Presbytery—Second representation by Gillespie alone—Effect of it upon the court—Sentence of deposition—Dememeanour of Gillespie while receiving it—Views that have been taken of this sentence.

THE comparative freedom of election, which had existed in the Church of Scotland from a period shortly posterior to the Revolution, was abolished by Act of Parliament in 1712, and the law of patronage was restored. This encroachment upon the liberties of the church was keenly resented at the time by the great body both of ministers and people, and strenuous efforts were made to procure a reversal of the obnoxious statute. The General Assembly repeatedly applied to the legislature on the subject, and represented the great evils which the appointment of ministers by patronage would necessarily produce in Scotland. The church courts even refused in most cases to proceed upon the presentation of the patron if there was not also a valid call from the people, and actually sometimes settled ministers without any presentation at all, on the simple ground of the people's invitation. Presentees forbore to avail themselves of their legal rights, unless they were confirmed by a proper call from the parish; and this rendered it easy for presbyteries to set the law of patronage at defiance.* But a very few years produced a total change of feeling in the

* Scots Magazine, 1751, p. 329, &c.

judicatories of the Church. The presentation of the patron gradually came to be regarded as constituting of itself a valid claim to the spiritual oversight of the parish ; and the call of the people, though still moderated, degenerated into an empty form, which could only serve as the memorial of liberties which had once been enjoyed. The call, where only one person could be called, and who, whether called by a majority or by a trifling fraction of the parish, was sure to be inducted, was like the privilege conceded to the Roman senate of choosing an emperor, when some conquering leader, the idol of the army, already had possession of the city, and surrounded the senate-house with his troops. The lion on one occasion gave free permission to the beasts of the forest assembled in public meeting, to choose any one of all their number for their king ; but when he adverted to his own claims, he very significantly showed his teeth and shook his paw, and none but himself was even proposed.

Still there was a large party among the office-bearers of the Church who retained their hostility to the settlement of ministers on the mere ground of a presentation ; and these were the men who at the same time were most evangelical in their sentiments, and most laborious in the discharge of their duties as ministers of the gospel. The majority of them would have preferred the complete abolition of patronage, and would have given the initiative in the appointment of ministers to the members of the church ; but they were all persuaded that, even with patronage continued as a legal right, the call of the people, freely given, was indispensable to the completion of any settlement. They held that the principle of non-intrusion, laid down in very express terms in the "Second Book of Discipline,"—"None might be intruded upon any congregation, either by prince or any inferior person, without lawful election and the assent of the people over whom the person is placed, as the practice of the apostolical and primitive kirk and good order craved,"—was a fundamental principle of the constitution of the Church of Scotland, and that whatever the

State might enact, it was the duty of the Church, at all hazards, to hold this principle fast. They were ready to concur in the settlement of any presentee, when the people over whom he was to be placed were satisfied, or even offered no resistance ; but they considered it a sinful act to force a minister upon any congregation, who were decidedly opposed to his settlement. It violated their consciences to be accessory to such proceedings ; for they did not see what benefit a people could derive from the labours of their minister, unless there was some cordiality of feeling between them, and they considered that the instruction and improvement of the people were the great ends which all the ordinances of religion were designed to serve. Let these ends be defeated, and churches might as well be abolished at once.

In all presbyteries there were some men who held these views, and in many the decided majority were of this mind. But the party, in whose view the presentation of the patron was the essential point, while the call of the people was but a form, were predominant in the General Assembly. Hence resulted the strange anomaly of enactments made by the supreme court, which it was found impracticable in many cases to carry into effect through the ordinary judicatories of the Church. The Assembly appointed settlements, but the presbytery on whom the completion of them devolved were unable with a good conscience to proceed : because the parish, whose spiritual interests were involved, refused their concurrence. For many years the practice was adopted of appointing in such cases committees of the Assembly to act along with the presbytery, which, outnumbering the ordinary members of the presbytery, or the members opposed to violent settlements, carried out the will of the Assembly ; and disregarding all opposition from the people, yea trampling their rights in the dust, consigned them to the spiritual superintendence of men who were the objects of their fixed dislike. Many a settlement was thus effected, which gave a sore wound to the interests of religion, by alienating the minds of the

people from religious ordinances, and by introducing men into the ministry who cared but little for the flock of God. And every settlement of this kind increased the power of the dominant party in the Church, and broke down the party who were the friends of evangelical religion and of the liberties of the Christian people. An intruded minister was not likely to join the ranks of those who had opposed his settlement.

At length the fatal seeds, which for many years the friends of arbitrary measures had been sowing, began to produce their appropriate and bitter fruits. The Assembly felt itself strong enough to dispense with the clumsy expedient through which it had hitherto controlled the refractory presbyteries, and a concurrence of circumstances, which it would be foreign to our present purpose to detail, led to the requirement that every presbytery should do its own work, in executing the decisions of the supreme court. At the meeting in 1750, it was agreed that the Commission of the Assembly should be empowered to call disobedient presbyteries before them, and to censure them as they should see cause. It was scarcely possible that this change of policy should fail to produce some great collision, for while the Assembly was determined to give effect to every presentation against which no legal objection could be made, there were still some presbyteries which, notwithstanding the Court of Session's decision that where a presentation was set aside on other than *legal* grounds, and the man of the people's choice inducted, the stipend should be disposed of as if the parish were still vacant, refused, on the plea of conscience, to take part in forcing a minister upon a reclaiming people. They would rather sacrifice the temporalities than the liberties of the church.

One of the first cases which sprang up under the new scheme of policy, was that which led to Mr. Gillespie's deposition. Mr. Andrew Richardson, already an ordained minister of the Church of Scotland, received a presentation in 1749 to the parish of Inverkeithing, within the bounds of the Dunfermline presbytery; but when the call was

moderated, only a few of the parishioners give it their support, and those mostly non-resident heritors. The great body of the people, and all the elders with the exception of one, were decidedly opposed to the reception of Mr. Richardson as their minister. In these circumstances, the presbytery, after sending a deputation to investigate the state of matters on the spot, and finding that nothing could abate the strong opposition of the parish to the presentee, felt themselves unable, with a good conscience, to proceed in the business, and refused to induct Mr. Richardson. When the case came by appeal before the Commission of the Assembly, the presbytery of Dunfermline were enjoined to proceed immediately with the settlement of Mr. Richardson ; but as they did not find, on making a further attempt to remove the opposition of the parish, that they were able to effect any change in their views, they persevered in their refusal, pleading that it was contrary to their consciences to take an active part in forcing a minister upon an unwilling people. Again the case was carried before the Commission, who renewed their former injunction to the presbytery, at the same time giving them to understand that a second refusal would bring down upon them a very severe censure: but as threatening cannot alter the consciences of honest men, nor make that right which was wrong before, the presbytery were unable to take any other view of the subject than they had formerly done, and the injunction of the Commission was not obeyed. Matters were now assuming a serious aspect, and when the case came before the Commission for the third time in March 1752, the presbytery pled their cause with so much power, and so forcibly represented the hardship of the position in which they were placed in being required to do what they believed to be sinful, that the Commission, with the view both of relieving them and of avoiding a collision, departed from the injunction which they had given, and appointed the Synod of Fife as a committee to complete the settlement of Mr. Richardson. And here the case might have ended, as many a similar one had done before, and the sole

effect of it have been to add a new link to the chain of spiritual despotism, which the rulers of the church were binding around her.

But the friends of absolute power were not to be satisfied with the mere settlement of Mr. Richardson: he must be settled by the very men who had repeatedly declared that it was contrary to their consciences, to intrude a minister upon a people who were opposed to his admission. And therefore the sentence of the Commission, releasing the presbytery of Dunfermline from the obnoxious duty and confiding it to the Synod of Fife, was protested against, and an appeal was made to the next meeting of the General Assembly itself.

The brief interval between the meeting of the Commission and the meeting of the Assembly was strenuously employed by both parties in preparing for the great contest, which was to decide whether presbyteries were to be forced to carry out the decisions of the supreme court, however much their own consciences might feel aggrieved by them, or whether the old method of appointing special committees in such cases should still be employed. The friends of absolute submission who were to appear as protesters against the lenient judgment of the Commission, were resolved to strain every nerve for subduing the refractory spirit of the inferior courts; and for this purpose they prepared their reasons of dissent with uncommon care, circulated them most widely before the Assembly met at all, and took measures to have a decided majority of their own friends returned as representatives. When the General Assembly met, the Royal Commissioner, who was certainly much more than what he has been styled in recent times, an onlooker of the proceedings, very plainly intimated the line of procedure which it was expected they should follow; and represented to them that "it was now more than high time to think of putting a stop to the growing evil of disobedience to the decisions of the superior court." And mention was even made by some of enlightening the consciences of certain ministers, through their stipends and

through their wives and children, which could only mean one or other of the two following things, either that it was expected the fear of want would make them belie their convictions, or that it was supposed their plea of conscientious scruples was mere hypocrisy.

The first shape in which the case of the Dunfermline Presbytery appeared before the Assembly, was the protest against the decision of the Commission exonerating them from the duty of settling Mr. Richardson. The protesters triumphed, and the judgment of the Commission was set aside. It was decided that the Commission should have persisted in requiring the presbytery, without any regard to their scruples of conscience, to proceed with the settlement at Inverkeithing. Much ability was displayed on both sides of the question. For a full view of the arguments that were employed by both parties, the reader is referred to Dr. Struthers' admirable History of the Relief Church, where both in the text and in the appendix much valuable information is given on the subject, and the opposing views are weighed in the balance of a sound judgment. The necessary brevity of this narrative, and its exclusive concern with Mr. Gillespie, do not admit that more reference should be made to the details of the question, than is necessary to place his conduct in a clear light. Only it may be remarked, that taking the question as it then stood, there are weighty considerations on both sides, which must have occasioned mutual perplexity to thoughtful minds. Undoubtedly there was much force in the argument of the protesters, that in a presbyterian church the decisions of the supreme court must be held as final, and that inferior judicatories should consider themselves bound in conscience to give them effect, it being always in the option of any individual who cannot conscientiously do so, to retire from the body. And the claim which was made by some of the popular party, that every minister should be left to judge for himself, how far in consistency with the Word of God he could yield obedience to his ecclesiastical superiors, was one which, if fully allowed, would go far to disorganise any

society. There must always be a limit beyond which a church cannot tolerate difference of opinion among its members, otherwise it could have no fixed principles. On the other hand, the plea of the Presbytery of Dunfermline that, considering it sinful as they did, and ruinous to the interests of religion to obtrude a minister upon a reclaiming congregation, they could not in conscience take part in a violent settlement was most undoubtedly a valid plea; and it was impossible for them as honest men to act otherwise than they did: the sneers which their plea of conscience excited in some quarters were most unworthy of Christian ministers, and most insulting to that book which says we must obey God rather than man. The dominant party should have considered that, while undoubtedly their abstract principle was a sound one, that the supreme court of a Presbyterian Church was entitled to the obedience of the inferior courts, it was at the same time incumbent upon the supreme court to beware, that they did not elevate any merely human institutions to a level with the Word of God, and teach for doctrines the commandments of men. Now as they could not pretend that patronage was an institution of Christ, or had any other foundation than an Act of Parliament, they ought to have seen, if they were not themselves prepared as they should have been to attempt its extirpation, that at least it was one of those things in reference to which there was room for the exercise of great forbearance in dealing with brethren who could not concur in the unbending enforcement of it. The supreme court of a Presbyterian Church has a right certainly to claim the obedience of the inferior courts, but there is the corresponding duty of enforcing nothing that is doubtful, and of leaving room for a judgment of discretion in matters of smaller moment. The supreme court ought to beware what it claims; for it may err as egregiously in claiming too much, as any inferior court can err in yielding too little. It may adopt such unconstitutional procedure as to render resistance on the part both of presbyteries and of individuals a bounden duty.

The fact indeed seems to be, that the difference between the two parties in the Church of Scotland was too great at that time to permit them to live together consistently as one body. On the one hand subserviency to the state, a system of patronage which treated the communicants of the church as if they were children, the enforcement of that system with an insulting disregard of the judgment and feelings of those who were most concerned, together with an alarming indifference to the interests of vital godliness, and the substitution of a cold morality in the room of the life-giving doctrines of the gospel; on the other hand, a conviction that patronage, even when mildly administered, was in its own nature a great evil, that the stern enforcement of it was ruinous to the cause of religion, that the favour of the state was a small matter compared with the spiritual well-being of the community, coupled with an adherence to the grand principles of evangelical religion, and great fidelity in the discharge of ministerial duties: these were elements which could not coalesce, the natural tendency of things was to a separation, and the wonder is, not that some left the Established Church, but that so many of the popular party were able with a good conscience to remain in it. In judging of the difference between the Dunfermline presbytery and the General Assembly, we must not simply look to the fact, as the advocates of the Assembly did, that the one was the supreme court and the other the subordinate; but we must consider whether the requirement of the Assembly was consistent with the law of Christ, whether it was consistent even with standards which the Church of Scotland still professed to venerate. Was it right in an Assembly which but a few years before, viz. in 1736, had spontaneously declared patronage to be a grievance prejudicial to the security of the church, to threaten men with censure for still holding and acting upon the same opinion, not for being opposed to the mild administration of patronage, but for refusing to be the instruments of enforcing it to the spiritual ruin as they believed of a particular parish? Few we believe in the pre-

sent day will scruple to describe the conduct of the Assembly of 1752 as that of a tyrannical majority. Their dependence upon the secular power, and their desire of strengthening their relations in that direction, were producing the results to which the connexion of a church with the state seems to have a natural tendency to lead.

The sentence of the Commission, releasing the presbytery from a duty which bore so hard upon their consciences, being now overturned by the Assembly, the presbytery itself became the party with whom the supreme court had to deal directly. And the ordinary course of procedure would have been simply to ordain that the presbytery, without any unnecessary delay, should proceed to complete the settlement at Inverkeithing; the consequences being now plain which would follow any farther refusal. But the dominant party, flushed with the victory they had gained, were resolved to make short work of the whole business; and therefore they themselves fixed a day for the induction,—Thursday of the same week,—and appointed the presbytery to meet at Inverkeithing and admit Mr. Richardson. They carried, by a large majority, “that the Assembly now appoint the presbytery of Dunfermline to meet at Inverkeithing on Thursday next and admit Mr. Richardson; that all the members be ordained to attend; that there be at least five ministers as a quorum to execute this appointment, and that each minister of that presbytery be required to appear at the bar of the Assembly the day thereafter and give an account of his conduct.”* This appointment, from which however a great many members dissented, showed that the Assembly, while they were determined to have Mr. Richardson settled at Inverkeithing, were even more bent upon finding some victims in the Presbytery, on whom the weight of their displeasure might fall, that they might furnish the example of punishment which the Royal Commissioner had spoken of in his address. The enactment was

* A Letter from a Gentleman, May 22, 1752, page 3.

a net skilfully contrived to catch, in its multiplied meshes, all who had scruples of conscience on the subject of intrusion. It was known that three ministers, the number sufficient to constitute a quorum, were willing to induct Mr. Richardson, and therefore the simple command of the Assembly that the work should be, not deliberated upon, but done on a specified day, was sufficient to have ensured its completion. The unusual requirement therefore that every minister should be present at the induction, and that every minister should appear at the bar of the Assembly on Friday, to answer for his part in the proceedings, showed that nothing less than the complete subjugation of the Presbytery, and the violation of all their scruples, would satisfy the court. And the arbitrary extension of the usual number of a quorum from three to five was peculiarly disgraceful, because it rendered it impossible for the settlement to take place at all, unless at least two individuals did what they had repeatedly declared they believed to be sinful. Who would have expected such an appointment from a court, professing to honour that word which declares, that to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean ?

When Friday came, it was found that the induction at Inverkeithing had not taken place, only three members of Presbytery having attended, who were of course prevented from proceeding by the Assembly's change of the number of a quorum. Some members of Presbytery offered one excuse at the bar of the Assembly, and some another, but six of the brethren,—among whom was Mr. Gillespie,—gave in a written document explanatory of the difficulties in which they were placed, and of the reasons upon which they were acting. The paper, while it shows all due respect to the Assembly, firmly and fearlessly defends their principles. The following is a copy of it:—

“Unto the very Reverend, the Moderator, and the Reverend and Honourable Members of the Venerable Assembly of the Church of Scotland, met at Edinburgh, May 1752: The Humble Representation of the Members of the

Presbytery of Dunfermline, whose names are hereunto subjoined.

“ We cannot but be deeply affected with our present situation, in being obliged to stand at the bar of this venerable Assembly, to answer for non-compliance with any of their appointments.

“ But, as this venerable court is so good as to allow us to speak in our own behalf, we shall therefore beg leave humbly to represent some of those things which have all along straitened us in the execution of the orders we received, and which still lay such difficulties in our way, as we are not able to surmount,—and this we hope to do with that plainness and honesty, and at the same time with that decent and dutiful respect to the supreme judicatory of this church, which it is so justly entitled to expect from us.

“ We need scarce observe how unjustly we have been represented, as having no other difficulty but the unreasonable fear of opposing the ill-grounded prejudices of our people.

“ Nor need we inform this house that ever since the act restoring patronages, in the end of Queen Anne’s reign, there has been a vehement opposition to all settlements by presentations where there was but a small concurrence,* which settlements have already produced a train of the most unhappy consequences greatly affecting the interest of religion ; and, if turned into the stated and fixed rule of procedure, will in all probability be attended with every fatal effect. Now, under such a view and apprehension as this, was it any wonder, or was it inconsistent with that obedience which we owe to our earthly superiors in the Lord, that we should demur and stop short in carrying a settlement into execution, where, in our apprehension, there was by no means such a concurrence of persons residing in the parish as might give sufficient weight and influence for promoting the great ends of the ministry ?

* *i. e.* very few in the parish who could be brought to attend on the ministry of the presentee or to be willing to have him for their pastor.

“The Assembly know well, that it appears from their own acts and resolutions, entered into their records, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this church, not to say as inconsistent with our union settlement.

“And we find it declared, Act 25th of May 1736, ‘That it is, and has been since the Reformation, the principle of this church, that no minister shall be intruded into any parish contrary to the will of the congregation; and therefore it is seriously recommended by the said act to all judicatories of this church to have a due regard to the said principle in planting vacant congregations,—so as none be intruded into such parishes, as they regard the glory of God and the edification of the body of Christ:’ which recommendation we humbly apprehend to be strongly supported by the principles of reason and the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“And we must be permitted to say, that, after repeated endeavours used by the committees of the Presbytery, to lessen the opposition to Mr. Richardson in the parish of Inverkeithing, matters still remain in such a situation, that we are brought to this unhappy dilemma, either of coming under the imputation of disobedience to a particular order of our ecclesiastical superiors; or contributing our part to the establishment of measures, which we can neither reconcile with the declared principles nor with the true interest of this church.

“On the whole, we cannot help thinking that, by having an active hand in carrying Mr. Richardson’s settlement into execution, we should, as matters now stand, have been the unhappy instruments, to speak in the language of holy writ, of scattering the flock of Christ, not to mention what may be the fatal consequences of such settlements to our happy civil constitution.

“If the venerable Assembly shall, on this account, judge us guilty of such criminal disobedience as to deserve their censures; we trust they will at least allow that we have

acted as honest men, willing to forego every secular advantage for conscience' sake.

“ In such an event, this, through grace, shall be our support, that not being charged with any neglect of the duties of our ministry among those committed to our care ; we are to suffer for adhering to what we apprehend to be the will of our great Lord and Master, whose we are, whom we are bound to serve in all things, and on whom we cast all our care.

“ Signed by

“ ROBERT STARK,
 “ DAVID HUNTER,
 “ THOMAS GILLESPIE,
 “ ALEX. DARLING,
 “ THOS. FERNIE, and
 “ JOHN SPENCE.

“ *Dated Edinburgh, 22d May, 1752.*”

The representation of their case made in this paper by the six Brethren exhibits no symptom of a disposition to yield. They avow their conviction that patronage is a great evil, and that the intrusion of ministers into parishes is ruinous to the interests of religion ; and they fortify their views by quoting from the recorded acts of the Assembly itself a recommendation, in the very spirit of which they had acted. They contemplate the likelihood of their being called upon to suffer for conscience' sake ; and while they make no merit of their constancy, they yet declare that if the event should prove adverse to them, it will be their support through grace, that not being charged with any neglect of the duties of their ministry among those committed to their care, they suffer for adhering to what they apprehend to be the will of their Lord and Master. Such a paper should have made the Assembly pause, before censuring men for refusing to do what they declared they believed to be sinful, for following in fact a recommendation, which the Assembly itself had strongly enforced upon presbyteries. But times were sadly changed.

The document of the six brethren was regarded as an aggravation of their offence. And accordingly, after much discussion and the proposal of various measures, the older ministers pleading for moderation and the younger urging violent measures, it was at length agreed by a decided majority (93 to 65) that one of the six should be deposed from the office of the ministry: which was a most unreasonable decision, for if the fault laid to their charge really unfitted them for being ministers of the gospel, then the whole six should have been cast out from the sacred office. They all stood in precisely the same position, and not one of them had as yet taken a single step beyond the rest. In these circumstances to determine on the deposition of one, it might be any one of them, was a proof that expediency and not righteousness was the principle that regulated the whole proceedings. It was a mockery of discipline to decide on subjecting to deposition some one, of six who were all equally chargeable with the alleged offence. If any one of them had stood forth prominently as the ringleader, then there might have been something like consistency at least, in deciding that he should bear a heavier punishment than the rest; but in the absence of all difference between the parties, to decide that some one of them should be deposed, was a most anomalous procedure.

It was not agreed at the time who should be the individual subjected to deposition. It might be any one of the six. The selection was left to be made on the following day. Though there was but little of justice or morality in this proceeding, there was great skill; for the tendency of it, and probably the anticipated effect, was to make the six brethren vie with one another in stretching their consciences as far as possible. The victim would probably be the man who adhered most firmly to what they had all declared they regarded as a matter of conscience.

When the Assembly met next day, the six brethren were called in one by one, obviously with the view of overawing them, and they were asked whether they adhered to their

former representation, or whether they had any explanation of it to give. Five of them simply adhered, with more or less firmness, to what they had already stated; but Mr. Gillespie presented an additional paper, not modifying the original document, but strengthening its positions by a further appeal to the records of the Assembly itself. The approach of danger, instead of inspiring him with fear, augmented his firmness. Retiring and modest in ordinary circumstances, he was bold and fearless when principle was at stake. The following is the paper which Mr. Gillespie read:—

“Unto the Very Reverend, the Moderator, and the Reverend and Honourable Members of the Venerable Assembly of the Church of Scotland, met at Edinburgh, May 1752: The Humble Representation of Thomas Gillespie, Minister of the Gospel at Carnock:

“That whereas, in the Representation given in to the General Assembly yesterday, it was set forth amongst other things, ‘That it appears from their own Acts and Resolutions entered into their Records, ‘That the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this Church, not to say inconsistent with our Union settlement:’ And whereas this paragraph expressed, as it is apprehended, in the softest terms, was considered by some members as an aggravation of our non-compliance with their order: I humbly beg leave to lay before this house a paragraph or two taken from a paper entitled, The Grounds of the Claim of the Church of Scotland for the Redress of the Grievance of Patronage entered into the Records of the Assembly on the 22d of May, 1736. There, after representing the laws respecting our Church, the Assembly will find these remarkable words, ‘That notwithstanding the security of this our happy Establishment, in all its parts, was as great and solemn as it was possible for human laws and constitutions to devise or execute; yet in prejudice of that security, as we apprehend, the Act in the tenth year of Queen Anne was passed, restoring to patrons the power of presenting,’ &c.

“ And the said paper concludes with these words, ‘ That this grievance was brought upon us contrary to the Establishment of this Church made at the glorious Revolution, and solemnly confirmed and secured, as an essential condition of the Union of the two kingdoms.’ It is now submitted, if we have offended by saying as above, That the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to the Church, not to say inconsistent with our Union settlement.’ And I humbly crave that the whole of the fore-said grounds of claim may be read, and that this my representation may be entered into the Records of the Court, or kept, *in retentis*, with other papers.

(Signed) “ THOMAS GILLESPIE.”

So far from aiding his cause, this representation of Mr. Gillespie, though it certainly contained an *argumentum ad hominem*, which ought to have silenced his enemies, was regarded as a new offence. The statement of the first paper, “ That it appears from their own acts and resolutions entered into their records, that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to this Church, not to say as inconsistent with our Union settlement,” had been commented upon as an aggravation of the fault of the six brethren. Mr. Gillespie, though he must have keenly felt the unreasonableness of such comments, yet satisfies himself with simply quoting from the “ Grounds of Claim of the Church of Scotland, &c.,” two sentences, “ that notwithstanding the security of this our happy Establishment, in all its parts, was as great and solemn as it was possible for human laws and constitutions to devise or execute; yet, in prejudice of that security, as we apprehend, the act in the tenth year of Queen Anne was passed, restoring to patrons the power of presenting,” &c.; and “ that this grievance was brought upon us contrary to the establishment of this Church made at the glorious Revolution, and solemnly confirmed and secured as an essential condition of the union of the two kingdoms.” And then he submits whether, when the Assembly itself had placed

such sentiments upon its own records, it could with any propriety be regarded as an offence for him and his brethren to say "that the law of patronage has been considered as no small grievance to the Church, not to say inconsistent with our Union settlement." Nay, the General Assembly had expressed themselves far more strongly; for, as the author of a Letter to his Friend in the Country already referred to, remarks, there is another clause which Mr. Gillespie might have quoted from the same document, viz., "that it is well known, and has always been declared, that the foresaid act of Queen Anne, restoring patronages, was imposed upon this Church by means of persons of our own country who were enemies to the Protestant succession, as they soon afterwards discovered in the strongest manner; and enemies to this Church by reason of her inviolable adherence to that succession; and was by them intended to afflict and oppress this Church, and create discontents among the people therein, and to open a door for patrons arbitrarily to impose upon the people as ministers, persons proper for instilling into their minds principles of disloyalty and disaffection to our present happy constitution."* It could only, therefore, be the felt and undeniable truth of what Mr. Gillespie affirmed, which rendered his second paper more offensive still than the first. His request that the whole of the document from which he had quoted might be read from the records was not acceded to, for it would have exhibited a triumphant vindication of his conduct; and his own representation was so far from receiving any favourable consideration, that the very fact of offering it was regarded as a high presumption. The Assembly were not in a mood to brook any farther delay. Discussion was a waste of time. The victim for a sacrifice now stood plainly singled out. The chase was at an end, the object of pursuit was hunted down, and all was eagerness for the final consummation. After prayer to God for direction, which, considering the

* Letter, p. 9.

circumstances, one cannot help contemplating with rather painful emotions, the question was put which of the six brethren should be deposed, and it was carried by 52 to 4 that Mr. Gillespie should be the man, while 102 gave no vote at all.

The state of the vote on this occasion presents a very melancholy picture of the position of the General Assembly. The whole number that actually voted was 56, while 102 refrained from voting altogether. We must suppose, therefore, that about two-thirds of the whole members of court disapproved of the proceedings, or at least could not bring themselves to see that deposition was a deserved punishment, in the case before them. Why, then, did they allow a minority of the Assembly to perpetrate, in the Assembly's name, what the majority felt to be an unjustifiable severity? Must we suppose that the influence behind the Moderator's chair controlled the conscientious convictions of a majority of the court? If no royal commissioner had been there, or if no sound had gone forth from his seat, would the result have been the same? These are questions which have an intimate bearing upon the subject of the independence of Established churches, not theoretically but practically considered.

It is worthy of notice, that, of the 56 who voted, almost the whole, viz. 52, voted against Mr. Gillespie. Why was there so much unanimity here? Some have suggested one reason and some another, but Dr. Struthers has undoubtedly pointed out the true reason, when he exhibits the fact that the minutes of the Assembly describe the deposition of Mr. Gillespie as "a censure adequate to repeated acts of disobedience, adhered to tenaciously when at the bar."* With these words of the Assembly itself before us, we need search for no other reason, than the one which they suggest. It was Mr. Gillespie's second representation, in presenting which he stood alone, and the triumphant appeal which he made to the recorded proceed-

* Struthers' History of the Relief Church, p. 95.

ings of the very court that was trying him, which turned against him the whole force of the Assembly's indignation, and made them single him out as the individual, on whom the first and heaviest blow should fall.

Immediately after the vote the Presbytery were called in, and the sentence of deposition, in reference to Mr. Gillespie, was pronounced from the Moderator's chair in the following words: "The General Assembly did, and hereby do, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the sole King and Head of the Church, and by virtue of the power and authority committed by him to them, depose you, Mr. Thomas Gillespie, minister at Carnock, from the office of the holy ministry, prohibiting and discharging you to exercise the same, or any part thereof, within this church in all time coming: and the Assembly did, and hereby do, declare the church and parish of Carnock vacant, from and after the day and date of this sentence." While the Moderator was pronouncing this sentence, Mr. Gillespie, we are informed, stood the picture of dignified innocence and meekness. His calm and temperate bearing drew tears from the eyes of many who were present. He listened attentively and respectfully, and the reply which he made before retiring deserves to be written in letters of gold: "Moderator, I desire to receive this sentence of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland pronounced against me, with real concern, and awful impressions of the divine conduct in it; but I rejoice that to me it is given, in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." These words, together with the meekness and at the same time the dignity with which they were uttered, produced a powerful impression upon the court; and it is declared by one, who seems to have been an eye-witness, and who wrote a record of the transactions the following week, that his warmest opposers were greatly moved, and seemed to feel some relentings for what they had done. Dr. Erskine, too, says that the Christian meekness, and the dignity of conscious innocence, with which he received his sentence, were such as excited a high esteem

for him in not a few who had concurred in voting his deposition.* When a blow of unmerited severity is struck, it often wounds the perpetrator as sorely as the individual who receives it. Passion subsides when its victim is prostrate, and conscience and kindlier feelings make their voice again to be heard.

The conduct of Mr. Gillespie during the whole of this trying scene was worthy of the highest admiration. He stood alone when the storm reached its height, and as nothing but a sinful submission could save him from its fury, he braved it to the last. He had the consciousness that he was acting conformably to the dictates of his own conscience, and to what he believed to be the principles of Scripture, and the principles even of that Church which was casting him forth as unworthy of her communion; and the Master whom he served, the same Jesus who supported the soul of the first martyr under his sufferings with a vision of heavenly glory, stood by him in the hour of trial, and his inward ear was blessed with the consolatory words, "what I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." It was no immorality for which he was suffering,—it was no departure from the doctrinal principles of the Church of Scotland that was laid to his charge,—it was no remissness in the discharge of his duties as a minister of the gospel in his own parish of which he was accused: it was simply the refusal to do an act which he believed to be sinful, and which the very records of the Assembly itself reprobated in terms of condemnation quite as strong as those which he himself had employed. How could he feel, therefore, otherwise than fully satisfied with the part he was acting? The storm of persecution may rage around him, but he enjoys peace in his own bosom, and a soothing sense of the divine presence. Obloquy and reproach may be heaped upon his head, but he can say that he rejoices to be counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ.

* Preface to Treatise on Temptation, p. v.

The unprecedented rapidity with which this case—a case of deposition, one of the most solemn subjects a church court has to deal with, and involving consequences of the gravest character—was hurried on to its very last stage, is deserving of the severest condemnation. In the space of twenty-four hours, without a libel, without any formal process, Mr. Gillespie was arraigned, condemned, and deposed. The fault, such as it was, was committed on Thursday, the trial began on Friday, and Saturday witnessed the supposed offender thrown out as a vile thing from the communion of the Church of Scotland. It will be difficult to find a parallel to this in the proceedings of any church court in any age or country. Though the offence had been one of the most flagrant immorality or of the blackest heresy, still the common forms of justice would have required that the proceedings should be conducted in a more deliberate manner; how much more, then, was this necessary when the fault—if for the sake of argument we must call it so—sprang from the declared fear of doing a sinful action? Mr. Gillespie's support under the sudden blow which came down upon him, was found in the consciousness of innocence, and in the precious promises of his divine Master; and as Paul, in the hour of distress, felt a satisfaction in thinking that he was suffering like Christ,* so it might furnish some consolation to Mr. Gillespie to reflect that, if the revolution of a day had witnessed his case begun and carried to its final issue, the same thing had happened to the blessed Saviour in whom he trusted. The speed of the Assembly could plead as a precedent the speed of the Sanhedrim.

The conduct of Mr. Gillespie on the occasion of his deposition, has been defended by some of the most eminent ministers even of the Church of Scotland. Dr. Erskine describes his sentence as “a hard and unconstitutional one, passed upon him for refusing to bear part in a settlement, which he thought he could not be active in

* Colos. i. 24.

without violating his ordination-vows;" and this tried and faithful friend regards his conduct in the case as displaying both his integrity, and his forbearing and forgiving spirit.* And Sir Henry Moncrieff, in his *Life of Dr. Erskine*, expresses very similar sentiments. "Mr. Gillespie in particular, on whom the severest censure fell, was charged with nothing but his absence from Inverkeithing on the day appointed for the induction of the presentee; for, excepting his attendance, he had no official duty imposed on him, which could have been affected by his absence. It has always been admitted by those who had best access to know him, that nothing but what he considered as a sense of duty had prevented him from obeying the appointment of the Assembly. He was indeed one of the most inoffensive and upright men of his time. He was equally zealous and faithful in his pastoral duties, and his private life was irreproachable. His talents were certainly underrated by those who marked him out among his brethren as the most eligible victim of a disobedience in which so many were associated. But he had done nothing to distinguish him from the rest. He had never entered deeply into ecclesiastical business, and was at no time a political intriguer. And when all these circumstances are considered, there was at least great reason to have hesitated in pronouncing on him a sentence of deposition." And in reference to the "striking and impressive reply which Mr. Gillespie made to the Moderator," Sir Henry adds, "Whether he was well or ill informed, no man suspected that this scriptural expression of his feelings did not come from the sincerity and the fulness of his heart."†

It would be easy to multiply quotations from the writings of Churchmen, presenting similar views of the treatment which Mr. Gillespie received from the Church of

* Dr. Erskine's preface to *Essay on Continuance of Immediate Revelations*, p. vi.

† *Account of the Life and Writings of John Erskine, D.D.*, by Sir Henry Moncrieff Wellwood, Bart., D.D., p. 460.

Scotland, but it is altogether unnecessary. It is not likely there are many now, whether they be Churchmen or Dissenters, who will maintain the justice of the punishment which was inflicted upon him, or say that with the views he entertained he could have acted otherwise than he did. One would hardly think it credible, but for the historical evidence of the fact, that an individual of blameless reputation, and of distinguished ministerial fidelity, should ever have been expelled from a Christian church, for being restrained by scruples of conscience from actively concurring in particular measures, for which it was not even pretended any scriptural authority could be pled, and against which the expelling church herself had but shortly before made a solemn protest that stood unrepealed upon her records. Such an occurrence demonstrates that there were principles at work which made it absolutely necessary, for the sake of the true interests of religion, that extensive separations should take place.

CHAPTER VI.

Gillespie preaches during the summer under the open sky—Attended by vast multitudes—Removes to a church in Dunfermline at the approach of winter—Enjoys the sympathy of his own people—Receives the countenance of Christian friends at a distance—Letter from President Edwards—Effort made in the succeeding Assembly to repon Gillespie—Complete failure of it—Formal constitution of the Church at Dunfermline—Principles of it—Labours of Gillespie as a Dissenting Minister—Isolated position—Interchange of services with Boston of Jedburgh—Formation of the first Relief Presbytery.

On the very day when Mr. Gillespie ceased to be a minister of the Church of Scotland he returned to Carnock, and on the following day, which was Sabbath, an immense multitude assembled from all the surrounding country to hear the truth from his lips. He felt that, deposed as he had been for no immorality—for no violation of the law of Christ, but simply for refusing to violate his conscience—he could not refrain from preaching that gospel to which he had solemnly devoted himself; and the first text which he chose exhibits the principles by which he was actuated in continuing to discharge the duties of a minister—"For necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." He made no attempt, however, to evade the sentence which had been pronounced upon him. He would not allow the bell to be rung on the Sabbath morning. He would not enter the pulpit of the church, from which he had been excluded by the court which possessed the legal right to dispose of it. But he preached under the broad canopy of heaven, where no human power had a right to interfere with him. And it is mentioned by the gentleman whose letter has been repeatedly referred to, that his discourse turned upon the great and important truths of the gospel. He made no assault upon his enemies; he

dwelt not upon his own wrongs, but stated that, although he had been deposed from being a minister of the Established Church for not doing what he believed to be sinful, "yet he hoped, through grace, no public dispute should be his theme, but Jesus Christ and him crucified." He expressed the desire that he might be enabled always to remember, that the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God; and accordingly he uttered not one reflecting word upon the treatment he had received, but, suppressing the feelings that must have existed within him, he strove to enforce the truths of the gospel upon the hearts and consciences of his hearers. This was a singular triumph of meekness and moderation. Few in the circumstances could have altogether abstained from giving utterance to their feelings in reference to the Assembly's decision, nor could Mr. Gillespie have been greatly blamed, though he had denounced their injustice in very strong terms. But he preferred to be silent on his own personal wrongs. The sacrifice he had made for conscience' sake sufficiently attested his views of the great principles that were now at stake in the Church of Scotland; and being no longer connected with her, he felt that, having already given his testimony most emphatically against her growing degeneracy, his great business was to preach the truth as it is in Christ, and to labour for the conversion of sinners. And it was the prayer at the time of one who took a deep interest in his case, "that his great Lord and Master might continue to animate him with the same spirit of wisdom and meekness, that he might fulfil the ministry which he had received of the Lord Jesus, having a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man."*

Mr. Gillespie's first sermon after his deposition was preached in the church-yard of Carnock, beside the church which had so often echoed to his voice; but he was soon obliged to leave this spot and betake himself to another, from which however he was also speedily driven, and lat-

* Letter from a Gentleman, p. 11.

terly he was compelled to take up his position on the public highway, where, during the whole summer and autumn, he proclaimed the unsearchable riches of Christ to immense multitudes of people. The novelty of the circumstances, the earnest sincerity of the man, the suffering he was enduring for conscience' sake, and the general conviction that was felt of the righteousness of his cause, gave a new power to his preaching, and many hearts were impressed with the truth that never before had felt its divine influence. God abundantly blessed his labours; the very face of nature seemed to smile upon him; and it was remarked that there was scarcely an inclement Sabbath day during the whole of that season. There was no roof above his head, but the vault of heaven. What mattered it? The church could not have held the thronging crowds that gathered round the preacher, and the melody of their praise was not the less sweet, that it rose unobstructed to the skies, and echoed all around. It is not improbable that that summer's preaching was the most successful and the most signally blessed, of any similar amount of labour in Mr. Gillespie's career either before or after; and I doubt not that the man with the strait-laced conscience, scornfully so described, enjoyed a peace in his own bosom preaching beside a hedge, which looser consciences did not feel under the vaulted roof of the gorgeous cathedral.

Besides the parishioners of Carnock, a considerable body of people from the neighbouring town of Dunfermline now regularly attended the ministrations of Mr. Gillespie; and various reasons made it most suitable for all parties that, when the season changed and the covering of a roof became necessary, Dunfermline should be the place where their meetings should be held. Accordingly, a house was purchased there, and fitted up as a church, and the congregation began to assemble in it for worship in the month of September. The great body of Mr. Gillespie's former congregation followed him to Dunfermline; all the elders of the parish adhered to him, with the exception of one; and these old friends, together with the numbers that

joined him in Dunfermline and from the neighbourhood, formed a numerous and most respectable congregation. And there existed among them the warmest attachment to their minister. They felt that he was a man whose heart was in his work; he had given most unequivocal proofs of stern integrity and of conscientious regard to the Christian rights of congregations; and his ministrations were faithfully directed to the great end of making them wise unto salvation. Whatever reproaches, therefore, might be heaped upon him in some quarters, he was honoured among his own people, and their generous sympathy with him in his trials was a great support and comfort to his heart. Under his own roof, too, he found a hearty approbation of the course he was pursuing, for the partner of his days was a noble-minded woman, who was ready to encounter the greatest poverty with her husband, rather than enjoy wealth as the fruit of his abandonment of principle.

Nor did he fail to receive the approbation and countenance of Christian friends at a distance. Multitudes throughout Scotland regarded him as suffering in a most righteous cause, and he was honoured as a martyr to the liberties and independence of the church. Nay, beyond the limits of Scotland his opposition to tyranny and the suffering to which he was on that account subjected, drew forth the sympathy and admiration of some of the best Christians and ablest divines of the age. From England the pens of Doddridge and Hervey, and Whitefield and others, sent him assurances of their thorough conviction that he was in the path of duty, and expressions of the warmest esteem and friendship. And across the broad Atlantic there came to him from one, whom Robert Hall has described as the greatest of the sons of men, the most affectionate expressions of brotherly and Christian regard and hearty approbation. Only a short time before Mr. Gillespie had written to President Edwards, sympathising with him in the singular position in which he was placed at Northampton, in consequence of an effort to maintain

purity of communion in his church ; and now, when the cup of trial has been put into his own hands, he receives from the same quarter a reciprocation of sympathy. Loving the same Master, they loved one another, shared each other's griefs, and poured consolation into each other's hearts. The following is an extract from a letter, dated Stockbridge, 24th November, 1752, which must have been very sweet and soothing to Mr. Gillespie's feelings.

“ Thus far, perhaps, if the truth were known, it would appear that some of your most strenuous persecutors hate you much more for something else, than they do for your not obeying the orders of the General Assembly. I do not pretend to know how the case is ; I only speak from what I have seen and found here in America, in cases somewhat similar. However, it is beyond doubt that this proceeding will stand on the records of future time, for the lasting reproach of your persecutors ; and your conduct, for which you have suffered, will be to your lasting honour in the church of God. And what is much more, that which has been condemned in you by man, and for which you have suffered from him, is doubtless approved by God, and I trust you will have a glorious reward from him, for the cause you are in, is the cause of God ; and if God be for us, who can be against us ? If he justifies, what need we care who condemns ? Not only is the mercy of God, dear brother, manifested in its being granted you to suffer for his sake, but his mercy is to be taken notice of in many of the circumstances of this suffering ; particularly that he has excited so many to appear for you ; that you had the major part of the presbytery which you belong to with you in the affair, though God has honoured you above all the rest in calling you to suffer for his name ; that the major part of the Commission of the General Assembly did, in effect, approve of the conduct of the presbytery, judging it no censurable fault ; that no greater part of the Assembly had a hand in your deposition ; that so many of God's people have on this occasion very boldly appeared to befriend you as suffering in a righteous cause, openly condemning the

conduct of your most bitter persecutors, and testifying an abhorrence of their conduct; and that many have appeared liberally to contribute to your outward support; so that, by what I understand, you are likely to be no loser in that respect, by which your enemies will perhaps be entirely disappointed. And above all, that you have been enabled, through the whole of this affair, to conduct yourself with so much Christian meekness, decency, humility, proper deference to authority, and composure and fortitude of mind: which is an evident token that God will appear for you, and also that he will appear against your enemies. When I received your kind letter, soon after my dismissal from Northampton, so full of expressions of sympathy towards me under what I suffered, I little thought of your being so soon under sufferings so similar; but, seeing God has so ordered it in his providence, my prayer and hope is, that he would abundantly reward your sympathy in my case.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.’”*

The fact that but a third part of the General Assembly had voted for Mr. Gillespie’s deposition, and that it was very generally disapproved of throughout the country, gave rise to the hope that, at their succeeding meeting, the supreme court might be induced to reverse it. Very strenuous efforts were therefore made throughout the year, by those who were favourable to the independence of the church, and friendly to Mr. Gillespie, to secure this result. Meetings of ministers were held, pamphlets were published, plans of procedure were devised, and high hopes were entertained, of all which a full account is given by Dr. Struthers, in his “History of the Relief Church.”† But Mr. Gillespie himself remained a passive spectator. There is a probability indeed that he was present at two meetings of ministers, held the month after his deposition, and convened for the purpose of de-

* Edwards’ Works. London, vol. i. p. cxiv.

† Struthers’ History, p. 102, &c.

vising measures of reform; but he totally disapproved of their scheme, because he seems to have felt that the connexion of their measures with his case would make them fail of any good effect. At least this is the only interpretation I am able to put upon a somewhat obscure sentence in his letter to Mr. Laupsley,—“ I declared my absolute disapprobation of their scheme, because they were not to assist and employ me, as what would fail of any good effect for that reason.” What he desired was, that the friends of the independence of the church should make a vigorous and united effort, not for reponing him as its main design, but for throwing back the tide of arbitrary power that was threatening to overwhelm the church. It was the very general wish of those who were favourable to Mr. Gillespie, that he should himself present a petition to the Assembly, praying to be reponed; but this he absolutely refused to do. A petition indeed to this effect was transmitted from the heritors, elders, and heads of families in the parish of Carnock;* but Mr. Gillespie himself would do nothing of the kind, and his reason was, that he felt it would be sinful in him to take any step whatsoever towards re-union with the church, till the sinful term of communion which the Assembly had imposed upon him was removed out of the way by the reversal of the sentence of deposition passed against him.† And the result showed the wisdom of Mr. Gillespie’s conduct; for when the Assembly met, though those who were considered his friends were the majority, yet the principle laid down by the Royal Commissioner, and pretty generally acceded to by the court, was, that the acknowledgment and submission of the offending brother were necessary to pave his way for being again received into the bosom of the church. But this condition was a complete bar to Mr. Gillespie’s restoration. He did not feel that he had done wrong in refusing to take part in Mr. Richardson’s settlement. On the contrary, he was

* Smith’s Sketches, p. 6.

† Letter to Laupsley, quoted in Dr. Struthers’ History, p. 119.

persuaded that for him to have obeyed the Assembly's mandate would have been sin, and therefore it was impossible for him to make the acknowledgment and submission referred to. That Mr. Gillespie would have returned to the Church of Scotland if he had been simply reponed, and good reason had been given for believing that arbitrary rule was crushed, seems pretty clear from the fact, that during the interval between the two Assemblies, though he regularly preached to his people, he yet took no step towards the constitution of a session, but patiently waited the event of the Assembly's proceedings in 1753. At the same time it does not appear that he was very anxious about returning, or entertained any strong hope that such a thorough cure of the evils which afflicted the church, would be effected as would warrant his return. His refusal to make any application himself, though urged to this step by all his friends, pretty clearly indicates his views. And it is mentioned by Mr. Smith, who succeeded him in Dunfermline, that, besides patronage, there were other evils in the Church of Scotland which had weaned his affections from her. "The law of patronage,—unfriendly to presbytery, disagreeable to our countrymen, and, in our opinion, contrary to the word of God and sound reason,—is a yoke of bondage to which he never could submit, and the promiscuous admission of members to receive baptism and eat the Lord's supper, was a grievance which deeply affected his conscience.*

The result of the proceedings of the Assembly of 1753, so similar to those of 1752, and that too after all the efforts which had been made during the course of the year, made it plain to Mr. Gillespie and to his people, that he need not hope for restoration but on terms to which he could not submit; and therefore, with their concurrence, he proceeded immediately to constitute them into a church with regular office-bearers, that they might enjoy all the

* Smith's Sketches, p. 7.

ordinances of Christ's house. The principles upon which the society was based were the doctrinal principles of the Church of Scotland and her presbyterian form of government; for though nothing seems to have been said expressly of these points, yet neither Mr. Gillespie nor his people had any quarrel with them, but only with what they regarded as a departure from them. And what prevented Mr. Gillespie from seeking connexion with any other denomination was the views he entertained respecting Christian communion, which he considered ought to be maintained between all who love the Lord Jesus Christ, though they might differ from one another in smaller matters. This was not a notion hurriedly taken up by him when he found himself standing alone, to draw friends around him from various quarters. Reference has already been made to the influence, which his early connexion with the author of the "Fourfold State" and with Dr. Doddridge had in giving this turn to his sentiments, and he cherished the same principles through life, and considered that the churches of the Reformation were bound to love and acknowledge one another, and to reciprocate Christian intercourse. Mr. Gillespie's views on this point have often been misunderstood. But in fact, they are explained by himself with great clearness. The short announcement of them, which he made previous to the first dispensation of the Lord's supper in July 1753, is sufficiently explicit and well guarded: "I hold communion with all that visibly hold the head, and with such only." It was not promiscuous communion which Mr. Gillespie proclaimed, but the communion of saints, the free and unrestricted intercourse of those who gave evidence that they loved Christ. Any wider communion than this Mr. Gillespie abhorred. According to the quotation made above from Mr. Smith, the promiscuous admission of people to baptism and the Lord's supper was regarded by him as a very great grievance. And in his work on "Temptation" he describes laxness in the administration of discipline, and the suffering of persons

immoral and scandalous to live in the full communion of the church, as a means by which the inveterate enemy of the honour and interest of Christ attains the trampling under foot of his authority, which appoints the most careful separation in this matter of the precious from the vile. Among the evils of such lax communion, he describes a variety, such as wounding the tender Christian, hardening the wicked and profane, drawing down spiritual judgments upon the society, weakening discipline, and rendering it ineffectual when applied.* Mr. Gillespie had very high ideas of the importance of purity of communion to the spiritual well-being of the church; but at the same time he considered that, if it was wrong to admit to fellowship persons of doubtful Christian character, it was equally wrong on the other hand to exclude those who gave evidence of loving Christ. Churches might differ in some respects from one another, and yet their allegiance to one common Lord might require their mutual recognition, and lay a solid basis for mutual intercourse. "Communion with all who hold the head, and with such only," was Mr. Gillespie's motto.

Mr. Gillespie had always been a very laborious minister, but after his expulsion from the Established Church, he became more laborious than ever. He was instant in season and out of season. Especially on sacramental occasions an uncommon amount of labour devolved upon him. As his former friends, who had made common cause with him in the attempt to withstand the encroachments of arbitrary power, now declined to assist him when he was out of the church, which he felt to be a great grievance, he was under the necessity of performing all the work himself; and this he did without abridging any part of the numerous services. Thursday and Saturday, and Sabbath and Monday, had their full complement of work, and the nine sermons, and seven or eight table addresses, which he delivered, were fully and distinctly

* Treatise on Temptation, p. 136.

written out, because he counted it criminal to serve the Lord with that which cost him nothing.* And besides these labours on sacramental occasions, he held a meeting with his people every Wednesday evening for religious exercises, and expounded the Holy Scriptures to them. It is amazing that such excessive labour did not altogether destroy him. But he received strength proportioned to his necessities. In labours abundant, he was supported by the grace of God. He had the testimony of a good conscience, he enjoyed the smile of his Divine Master, and he laboured in the midst of a most attached and admiring people. His heart was in his work, the hearts of his people were engaged for him at a throne of grace; and he was enabled, though sometimes almost at the point of fainting, to accomplish, single-handed, for several years, the heavy labours of sacramental solemnities. If he was highly honoured as a consistent witness for the truth in a time of great declension, it was not an honour allied with ease which he enjoyed, but an honour that brought with it hard and exhausting toil. It was no common warfare which Providence assigned to him, but he was enabled to persevere to the end.

The ministrations of Mr. Gillespie were attended by many from considerable distances. His communions especially attracted great numbers of serious persons from Edinburgh, Glasgow, and other quarters; and they are described as having been peculiarly impressive and profitable—worthy of being called “times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.” In the interesting memoir which has been published of Mr. Alexander Clark of Broughton, it is mentioned that that excellent individual, when a young man, had often waited at Dunfermline on the ministry of Mr. Gillespie; and the labours of “this holy minister” are described as having been eminently blessed of God, and his exhortations as having been distinguished by warm piety, and as flowing from a heart that felt the influence of sacred

* Treatise on Temptation, preface, p. vii.

truth. In their passage across the ferry, Mr. Clark, and those who accompanied him, were accustomed to join in singing praise to God. Many of the people who were strangers were frequently engaged in prayer during the whole night previous to the Sabbath, and beheld on their knees the first dim approaches of the morning, which ushered in the day that commemorates the Saviour's resurrection. The sloping grounds were covered with persons who listened to the message of salvation with devout attention, and were really interested in the truths delivered.*

In a small manuscript volume containing notations made by Mr. Gillespie shortly after his deposition, there are a number of texts of Scripture marked, and described as suitable to the circumstances in which he was now placed. From the strain of these we may gather something of the feelings, with which he looked upon the state of the Church of Scotland, and upon the treatment which he himself had experienced. He seems to have been deeply persuaded that a time of great degeneracy had come upon the church,—that those who ought to have maintained her liberties had proved traitors to her best interests,—and as to himself, he felt painfully that he had been forsaken by men who professed to have the same object in view as himself, and to be actuated by the same principles. Yet he trusted that the Lord would bring good out of evil, and that right-hearted men would be raised up for doing the work of God. Among the passages noted are the following: Isa. xxxvii. 3; Matt. xxiv. 12; Jer. xxx. 17; Phil. ii. 21; Ps. xciv. 15; Ezek. xxviii. 24; Isa. lix. 15; 1 Tim. iv. 16. Reading over these passages, one is not surprised at the remark, which, though he seldom referred to his own case in the pulpit, he made on the occasion of being refused assistance by his former friends: "I think I can say at my leisure what David said in his haste—all men are liars."

Mr. Gillespie stood alone for a period of about six years

* Memoir of Alexander Clark of Broughton, Edinburgh, published by W. Oliphant, 1824, pp. 52—54.

laboriously discharging the duties of his office, and his church supported the ordinances of religion cheerfully and respectably. It is difficult for us in these days, when the problem of self-sustaining churches has been triumphantly solved, to form an idea of the faith and trust in Providence that were displayed by such men as Gillespie, when they relinquished, for conscience' sake, what were esteemed the advantages of the Establishment. Dissent was comparatively an untried field. It was like the wilderness of waters into which Columbus first directed his adventurous prow. If honour, then, be justly due to the compact body who, in our own times, have retired from the Establishment, because they felt themselves unable to assert her spiritual independence, and have resolved to maintain the unfettered gospel of Christ for themselves; how much greater admiration is due to the first Dissenters, who went forth, at the call of duty, in far more trying times, like Abraham of old literally not knowing whither they went! Mighty fleets have plowed the broad ocean since the days of Columbus, to which his tiny vessels were as nothing; but the moral heroism of the discoverer of America has never been approached by any subsequent navigator. The early Dissenters were few and despised: they had but little experience of what it was possible to do for religion apart from the state. They only felt that they could not submit to the unrighteous exactions which were made upon them; and, driven out for their non-compliance, they knew not what was to become of them. But, supported by the testimony of a good conscience, they trusted in God, and, like Paul, they found that his grace was sufficient for them. The shield of a kind Providence covered them in the day of trial, and they were enabled to fight the battles of truth and righteousness. Truly it might be said of them, that they bore the burden and heat of the day. When Mr. Gillespie retired from the bar of the Assembly, where the sentence of deposition had fallen so suddenly upon him, it was a very dark prospect that met his view; and yet never was he heard to utter a murmur about the sti-

pend and the position he had abandoned, or to express any fears about his future support. He obeyed the call of duty, and left the consequences to God. It is true that he was treated with great kindness by his people, who rallied round him as a distinguished confessor of the truth, and that his temporal circumstances, so far from being injured, by his expulsion from the Established Church, were rather improved after he began to preach the gospel untrammelled by state enactments. But of this he knew nothing when he sacrificed his all upon the altar of Christian duty. He must rather have supposed that he had reason to dread a very different result.

After Gillespie had stood alone for a period of six years without receiving ministerial assistance from any quarter, the first individual who applied to him for an interchange of services was Mr. Boston of Jedburgh. Of the reasons of his withdrawal from the Established Church, in which he had been a minister for upwards of twenty years, and of the auspicious circumstances in which he lifted up the standard of religious liberty in Jedburgh, a full and most interesting account is given by Dr. Struthers in his History of the Relief Church. Gillespie and Boston were placed in very similar positions, and there were many causes to draw them to one another. Their churches both existed in a state of separation from the Establishment: it was the same abuse of ecclesiastical power which had led to their institution. And there were also strong personal ties to bind the two men to one another. The author of the Four-fold State was the father of them both. The elder Boston, who brought up his own son most assiduously in the fear of God, and had the satisfaction of seeing him evince very early proofs of piety, was also, as we have seen, the instrument in providence of Gillespie's conversion, and his views had a great influence in moulding the sentiments of them both. From him sprang the comparatively loose hold which the principle of an Establishment had upon their minds, for even he had contemplated the advantages which a separation of the church from the state would confer

upon the cause of genuine religion;* and to him also may be traced up the views which they both entertained respecting the communion of saints; for while the elder Boston—as we learn from the son's preface to the father's sermon on Schism—was tenacious of what he judged truth, he could at the same time love, esteem, and honour brethren who differed from him, and very freely hold communion with them.† So that the author of the Fourfold State may, in some sense, be regarded as the founder of the Relief Church; for, if he did not actually lay the foundation of the building, he at least cleared and marked out the ground where it was to stand, and gave shape to the views of the two workmen who were to commence the structure.

Gillespie and Boston did not immediately proceed, when they began to assist one another, to associate themselves formally, along with their churches, into an ecclesiastical body. This important step was not taken till three years afterwards, when the people of Colingsburgh, disgusted with a violent settlement in the parish, applied to them for assistance; and then having duly inducted Mr. Colier, the man of the congregation's choice, they, along with him and representative elders from the three churches of Dunfermline, Jedburgh, and Colingsburgh, formed themselves into a presbytery for the relief of Christians oppressed in their Christian privileges. This took place at Colingsburgh, in the new church which the congregation had reared, on the 22d Oct., 1761; the whole proceedings were conducted in a very orderly manner; solemn prayer was offered up by Mr. Gillespie for the Divine direction and blessing; and the first act of the new presbytery was to appoint a day of thanksgiving to God for his goodness in the harvest just ended. The deed recording the constitution of the presbytery may be seen at length in Dr. Struthers' History.‡ The formation of a new religious

* Memoirs, p. 177.

† Preface to Sermon on Schism.

‡ History of the Relief Church, pp. 158—161.

body was one of the most important transactions in which Mr. Gillespie was ever engaged. It was the natural consequence of his deposition; for the same causes which had led to that result were still at work; and he felt, in common with Mr. Boston, that if they did not take some step towards the relief of oppressed congregations, their retirement from the Established Church would fail of producing any permanent good. At the same time it is obvious that Mr. Gillespie was not actuated by anything like ambition in becoming the founder of a new party; for more than nine years passed away after his deposition before he took any step towards that object, and even when he did move, it was only in consequence of what he esteemed a clear call in providence. He made no application to the people of Colingsburgh; but they applied to him, and they applied to him repeatedly, before he would consent to preach or baptize among them: and, in fact, it was not till every member of the Presbytery, under whose care they were placed, refused them religious privileges, that he considered it was incumbent upon him to aid them under their oppression. This was a very proper reserve on the part of Mr. Gillespie, and shows that, in founding a new body, he proceeded with the utmost caution, and waited till events made it appear to him an imperative duty to move. But both he, and the Fathers of the Relief Church generally, were undoubtedly wrong in continuing afterwards to act very much upon the same principle. There is a great difference between the first institution of a new denomination and the subsequent maintenance of it. The founding of a new religious party is a very grave question, and the utmost caution and deliberation are necessary before adopting such a strong measure; but when once it has been felt to be duty to set up a separate standard, then all the reasons which warrant this first step equally require that no effort be afterwards spared to maintain the cause in efficiency, and to extend its blessings wherever they are needed.

CHAPTER VII.

Gillespie's labours after the institution of the Relief Presbytery—Respect that was paid to him by the rest of the body—Gradual decline of his vigour—Last illness—Peace of mind he enjoyed—Death—Character—Alleged desire on his part that his church should return to the Establishment—Concluding remarks.

MR. GILLESPIE survived the institution of the Relief Presbytery for a period of twelve years. He continued to labour with earnestness and zeal in the cause of his Master; and was much honoured by the brethren who had gathered around him. It is understood, indeed, that towards the close of his life he was somewhat offended that his views, in some particular cases, were not adopted. At the first his influence in the body was naturally very great, both as being the founder of it, and as having suffered much in the cause of Christ; but when the number of the presbytery became considerably larger, and when increasing infirmities prevented him from being so regularly present, it could not but happen that his influence would be less felt. As one generation goeth and another cometh, so the influence of individuals in any society gives place, after a time, to the influence of others who are younger than themselves; and it is probable that Mr. Gillespie made too little allowance for this unavoidable tendency in human affairs. He was rather of a quick temper, and some of the proceedings of his brethren gave him considerable offence. He had no difference with them as to the constitution and principles of the Relief Church;* but he was much offended on account of the views taken by some of them, particularly in

* Smith's Sketches historical of the Relief Church, p. 27.

reference to Mr. Pirie's case. Yet, though the other members of the body exercised their own judgment on the merits of such questions as came before them, this did not interfere with the respect that was felt for him as a tried veteran in the cause of Christ: he was honoured by the whole body, and he was honoured by multitudes who were not connected with the body at all. Reverence was shown to him as a man who had suffered much for conscience's sake; and, though it was with him a light and little thing to be approved or condemned by man,* yet it must have gratified him to receive the respect of those who were concerned for the prosperity of Christ's cause. As he advanced into the vale of years the consequences of the extraordinary labours he had undergone began to appear, in the diminution both of his mental and bodily vigour; and yet, amid increasing infirmities, he was able to preach almost to the last. And he enjoyed in his own bosom those consolations which it was his delight to administer to others. It does not appear that he was now harassed with those sore conflicts which had agitated his bosom in the earlier period of his life: he had gained the victory over his great enemy through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: and it is testified by his friends that peace with God, and peace of conscience, afforded him a joy which the world can neither give nor take away. In his last sickness, which was not of long duration, his soul prospered and was in health. Nor was the peace he enjoyed shaken by the approach of the King of terrors. The Saviour, whom he had served in the days of his vigour, supported him in the hour of weakness and trouble; and when his bodily strength was wasting rapidly away, his faith continued firm, and he felt himself strong in the Lord. He was enabled to meet death with undiminished serenity of mind, and he enjoyed a good hope through grace of a blessed and glorious immortality. As he had lived by the faith of the Son of God, so he died confiding his soul to the merciful and faithful High Priest of the

* Dr. Erskine's Preface to Treatise on Temptation, p. ix.

Church. His earthly warfare was accomplished on the 19th January, 1774, and then a new stage of being began with him, which earthly pen may not describe. What we call the end of life, is to the believer but the end of sin and sorrow and pain; what we call death, is to the follower of Christ but the commencement of a life of holy and unclouded blessedness. Viewed from the land of eternal peace and joy, the death of time will appear not death, but the development of a new and higher life. The spirit returns to God who gave it, when the frail body is laid to commingle with the kindred earth. Lord, strengthen our faith, that we may be enabled to dedicate our earthly being wholly to thee, and so may exchange, when our eyes close upon this world, its conflicts and trials and labours, for the pleasures which are at thy right hand for evermore! May we die the death of the righteous, and may our latter end be like his!

The mortal remains of Mr. Gillespie lie in the Old Abbey church of Dunfermline, under the roof of that same building from which, as he retired on the day his name was taken from the roll of presbytery, the sneer followed him,—“Make way for the man with the strait-laced conscience.” Gillespie’s dust sleeps within the walls of the church which so often resounded with the impassioned eloquence of Ralph Erskine; and not far from the grave of Gillespie is the grave of Ralph Erskine. They loved and served and suffered for the same Master while they lived, and their ashes await together the glorious redemption of the resurrection day. Between the resting-place of Gillespie and that of Ralph Erskine, is the sepulchre of Robert the Bruce, who achieved the liberties of Scotland on the field of Bannockburn, truly the father of his country, and the source under God of no small portion of the blessings we enjoy at the present moment. How different might have been the destiny of Scotland if she had become by conquest a dependency of England! How different too might have been the position of Scotland, if no check had been given to ecclesiastical tyranny and corruption, by the proceedings of Gillespie and the Fathers of the Secession! National independence

is a great blessing, but religious liberty and the pure gospel of Christ are greater blessings still. The hero of civil freedom is worthy of all honour, and the world has not been backward to acknowledge the claim; but the day will declare whether the champions of a pure Christianity, wielding not carnal but spiritual weapons, have not occupied a loftier position, and better deserved to be enshrined in a nation's heart. Truly Dunfermline is an honoured place, having the ashes committed to her care of the heroes of the civil and religious emancipation of Scotland.

Mr. Gillespie was a man of truly apostolic excellence, and to him might the language of inspiration be applied, with the utmost sobriety of meaning: "He was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost." Conscience was the power that bore sway in his soul; and when he was persuaded that anything was duty, he took his course at once, with a noble indifference to the personal consequences that might be involved. This supremacy of conscience was the true source of Mr. Gillespie's greatness. He was not a man of commanding talents,—he was not a man ambitious of distinction,—he was not a man of large acquaintance with the world; but he was a man of singular uprightness and integrity of character,—of guileless simplicity,—of stern conscientiousness. His goodness was his greatness. His intellectual abilities, indeed, were of a very respectable order, and few men were more faithful in studying the word of God. He was thoroughly versed in the holy Scriptures, and in the leading works on theology, and the circle of his reading embraced also the most important works in morals and philosophy, such as Cudworth and Bacon. He was a well furnished divine, and the weight of his character, and the great spirituality of his mind, gave a singular power to his preaching, which has been uniformly described by all competent persons as possessed of a deep and searching character. There might be a want of polish about his thoughts; but the genuine earnestness with which they were enforced, made way for them into every heart. His style exhibits none of the minuter graces of diction; there is but little in

it of the play of fancy or imagination; his ideas are cast in a rough strong mould; and you feel that you have to do with a man who cares far more about what he is saying, than about the dress in which it is presented. And Mr. Gillespie's manner was conformable to his cast of thought,—uncouth and ungainly. Yet the little man, deeply interested himself, full of activity and life, nimble in all his movements, stirred up the consciences of his hearers, and secured the closest attention from all. He was a most impressive and successful preacher of the gospel.

Few men have been more free from the taint of a worldly spirit than Mr. Gillespie. The relinquishment of his position and means of support, when he was deposed by the General Assembly, seems scarcely to have cost him a thought: it does not appear from aught that can be discovered that he made it the subject of complaint at all. When he returned to Carnock he was offered the stipend for the current half year, but he refused it on the ground that he had not fully laboured for it. It is also related of him that on one occasion during his ministry in Dunfermline, when there was much distress and poverty in the town, the office-bearers of the church called upon him with his half-year's stipend, which he desired them to retain for distribution among the poor, saying that he had what would suffice him till the next term. The managers, who knew that Mr. Gillespie was unthoughtful about his worldly affairs, almost to the extent of being improvident,* with a

* That the expression employed in the text is not too strong appears from another incident of earlier date. When his young wife was brought home to the manse at Carnock, and after she had gone through the house with the interest of one whose home it was now to be, she said something about the sinews of war that would be needful for the summer campaign. Mr. Gillespie apparently had not thought much of this, nor been in the habit of troubling himself with money matters; for his reply was, that he would call John, the beadle, and see what remained on hand. John, the chancellor of the minister's exchequer, had not a more favourable report to give of the state of affairs than greater chancellors often have; and the young wife, who doubtless would thenceforth act the part of chancellor herself, was obliged to devise measures for battling through the half year. It was a singular blessing to Mr. Gillespie with such habits as these, that he became connected with a wife so prudent and

fatherly care of his interests, refused to take back the money, and left it lying on the table as they retired. Few ministers, with the numerous claims to which they are liable on all hands, could afford to make such an offer; but certainly the incident furnishes a striking proof of the benevolence and generosity of Mr. Gillespie's character, and doubtless he would not himself neglect in private the object to which he had shown himself so warmly alive.

In his manners Mr. Gillespie was somewhat rigid and austere. Naturally of a warm temper, and rather inflexible, he adhered very tenaciously to his own opinions. He had mixed but little with the world, and he had no taste nor aptitude for driving his ends by a subtle policy. Guileless himself, he was unsuspecting of others, and somewhat apt to be imposed upon. He felt in his soul that he had suffered for righteousness' sake, and he rather gloried in the persecutions he had endured than lamented them. The excellencies of his character were all of a solid rather than of a showy kind, and he was acknowledged, even by his enemies, to be eminently pious and thoroughly conscientious. Warm with zeal, and unwearied in labours, he was the instrument of accomplishing much good, and his memory deserves to be cherished with affectionate reverence. More accomplished, more learned, more talented champions of the cross there have been, but few have surpassed Thomas Gillespie in blamelessness of life, and devoted disinterested zeal for the cause of Christ.

It has often been said that Mr. Gillespie, before his death, became indifferent to the interests of the body which he had been the means of founding; and even advised that his congregation should go back after his decease to the Established Church. This appears an exceedingly unlikely story, though it is affirmed by Dr. Erskine in his preface to the *Treatise on Temptation*. But it is

active as Mrs. Gillespie was, whose affection and principle made her willing to encounter all the sacrifices connected with his deposition, while at the same time she was better able than he was to take the management of temporal matters.

certainly strange that nothing of the kind was ever heard of till the day of Mr. Gillespie's funeral, when his brother Robert, who, at one time, had been a warm friend of the Relief cause, but whose views were now completely changed, called a number of the original subscribers to the church together, and the heirs of some of those who were gone, that they might consider what should now be done with it. He proposed that they should seek admission to the Established Church as a Chapel of Ease; but the subscribers were not at all prepared for such a step, and therefore the meeting separated without coming to any decision. Efforts were then made in private to gain over individuals to the view which had been proposed; and a notice was even published in the newspapers "that Mr. Gillespie intended to have abandoned his former principles, by turning his meeting-house into a Chapel of Ease." The remark of Mr. Smith upon this alleged change is the following: "This, no doubt, would appear to the public a strange reverse of sentiment, and altogether unexpected: he once felt that yoke most grievous, he usually in public prayed for the people who supported him in that ministry which he received from the Lord, and uniformly disapproved of that church which unjustly endeavoured to take it from him."* It is obvious, therefore, that the immediate successor of Mr. Gillespie in Dunfermline, who had every opportunity of ascertaining the truth, had never been able to learn from any member or office-bearer of the church that Mr. Gillespie, during his lifetime, had ever directly or indirectly made such a proposal, and he treats the whole as a ridiculous story. Nay, he broadly affirms, "that the progress of the Relief in Scotland, on Presbyterian principles, gave him great joy. Though he differed with some of his brethren, yet he never discovered to his people any inclination to be connected again with the Establishment. His disapprobation of that church which deposed him continued to the end of his days, and he reprobated her conduct with a severity perhaps too great."†

* Historical Sketches of the Relief Church, page 29. † Ibid. p. 28.

How then are we to account for the statement of Dr. Erskine, who must be allowed to stand far above the suspicion of saying anything for which he did not suppose he had good grounds? Doubtless he received his information from Mr. Robert Gillespie, who was now his factor for the estate of Carnock; for it was subsequently to the death of Gillespie that the Treatise on Temptation was published, and it is in the preface to it that Dr. Erskine's statement first appears. With Mr. Robert Gillespie the story seems plainly to have originated; and how far the new situation which he occupied may have swayed him to be over-zealous in driving his purpose of securing the Dunfermline church to the Establishment, it is impossible to say; but it is certain that there is not a particle of evidence, that such a thing as the alleged intention of Mr. Gillespie was ever heard of before his death. And in fact the whole story seems as unlikely a thing as could well be imagined. Nothing had occurred in the proceedings of the Church of Scotland at all calculated even to modify Mr. Gillespie's sentiments, but quite the reverse. The rigorous measures under which he suffered had rather been on the increase. And as to himself personally, the same hostility which had led to his expulsion continued to pursue him all his days; for not long before his death it had been proposed in the Assembly, in the shape of an overture from the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr, when the rapid increase of Dissenting churches was exciting alarm, that the sentence of deposition against him should be commuted into a sentence of exclusion, but even this poor mitigation of the rigour with which he had been treated had been negatived by an overwhelming majority. What was there therefore to produce in Mr. Gillespie the idea, of either going himself to the Establishment, or of persuading his congregation to go? With Mr. Smith, therefore, we may regard it "as astonishing that Mr. Gillespie in the end of his life, in the full possession of all his ministerial and Christian privileges, and under no temptation whatsoever, should be represented by his friends as desirous to be stript of his judicial capacity,

and willing to give up his right to rule his own flock, in order that he might be honoured to come again under the yoke."*

On the ground of the facts embodied in the preceding narrative we may assert for Mr. Gillespie a title to the grateful remembrance of the religious public in Scotland. Very different views prevail now, from those that were current at the time, respecting the principles involved in his deposition; and it ought to be recollected that it was through his exertions and sufferings, and the exertions and sufferings of men similarly situated, that the change has been brought about. If self-denial and disinterested zeal, and laborious effort for the spread of the pure gospel of Christ constitute any claim to the respect of succeeding times, the name of Thomas Gillespie ought to be held in great and lasting veneration; and the tribute to his memory ought to be all the more cheerfully paid, on account of the obloquy that long was heaped upon his head. The church whose faithful pastor he was in Dunfermline, although but few survive who were even born in his day, are rearing a beautiful monument to his memory, in the shape of a new church, which is to bear his name: the most appropriate and best situated monument that could have been thought of, which, while it cherishes the remembrance of his zeal and piety, contributes directly to the support of the very principles that were dear to his heart and engaged the labour of his life. May that monument stand for generations yet to come! May the blessing of heaven come down upon those who are thus uniting to honour a faithful servant of Christ! And may the beautiful house which they are rearing continue, after the present generation is sleeping in the tomb, the happy seat of piety and truth and Christian love! Establish thou, O Lord, the work of their hands, yea the work of their hands establish thou it.

* Smith's Sketches, page 29.

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