



(1666-1734) - (1734-1734)

LIFE  
OF  
EBENEZER ERSKINE.

BY  
JEAN L. WATSON.



EDINBURGH:  
JAMES GEMMELL, GEORGE IV. BRIDGE.  
1881.

210. f. 4

## CONTENTS.

---

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
Parentage and Youth, . . . . .	5
CHAPTER II.	
Labours in the Vineyard, . . . . .	15
CHAPTER III.	
His Faithfulness in the Ministry, . . . . .	22
CHAPTER IV.	
The Teacher Taught, . . . . .	33
CHAPTER V.	
Church matters, . . . . .	48
CHAPTER VI.	
Church Controversies— <i>continued</i> , . . . . .	59
CHAPTER VII.	
Secession, . . . . .	76
CHAPTER VIII.	
The Associate Synod—Burghers and Anti-Burghers, . . . . .	86
CHAPTER IX.	
His Last Days and Death, . . . . .	97

# LIFE OF EBENEZER ERSKINE.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### PARENTAGE AND YOUTH.

“ Many shall rejoice at his birth ; for he shall be great in the sight of the Lord.”—LUKE i. 13, 14.

**I**N recalling the history of the Secession Church, one figure rises up distinctly before us—the princely figure of Ebenezer Erskine. Though others soon joined with him in his attempts to preserve the Presbyterian Church pure and free, it was he who struck the first blow against ecclesiastical despotism, and that blow resounded throughout the utmost borders of Scotland.

When he and his associates commenced to

lift up their voices in Church Courts, they never dreamt of forming a new religious denomination. They only sought to free the people from the yoke of patronage, and to rectify other abuses in the Church of Scotland, which were threatening her liberties and dragging in the dust the crown rights of her Redeemer.

Years before, when chased upon the mountains, where the heather was stained with the life-blood of her children, that Church had preserved her independence unscathed, and kept her garments undefiled; but now, under the smile of royalty, she was selling her principles, and, like a fawning spaniel, seemed ready to lick the hand and to lie at the foot of the State.

The later Stuarts, with their boisterous irreligion, had been succeeded by a cold, dead flippancy, which had stolen the soul out of the land. There was no freshness in the past, and no promise in the future. Confessions of sin and national covenants were things to be sneered at. The world had an idle, unsatisfied look; for the reign of buffoonery was at an end, but nothing

had succeeded it, and the heart that sought for spiritual life could not find it.

But Erskine and his friends, moved by the Spirit of God, began to cry against the corruptions that were creeping into their Zion, to weaken her; and if they had been allowed to go on, they would have proved to her a tower of strength. This however, was not permitted them; the Moderates, having a sweeping majority of votes on their side, quashed every remonstrance, and the Assembly rebuked them with authority for daring to protest against the most tyrannical of her acts. Still they clung to the Church of Scotland, which, by sometimes coaxing and sometimes threatening, made many efforts to retain them. At length, God sent the angel of His presence, to burst their fetters and bring them forth from the land of Egypt and the house of bondage, and the whole country rose up *en masse* to receive them into its bosom. Before them, where their influence extended, ignorance and apathy gave way, and the inhabitants of Scotland felt anew all the goodness and grandeur of

the ancient message. Not only this, but an element was infused into the popular mind, which has never been lost, and now that years have elapsed, may still be detected in the national character. Long-lasting and deep-thinking theology became the thing of most moment; it was the talk and business of the people. Never, perhaps, was there a time when believers lived more by faith and less by sight, and in every incident of their lives recognised Him in whom we move and have our being. Indeed, the religion of the period on which we are to glance in our biography was, under the influence of Erskine and his friends, made full of reverence, devotion, and self-denial. Its subjects were Bible-readers and Bible-singers, richly imbued with its deep harmonies and high devotion, and hid from earthly toil and distraction under the shadow of the Almighty.

Ebenezer Erskine was son of the Rev. Henry Erskine, minister at Cornhill, in Northumberland, about the year 1649. The Erskines were of the ancient family of Shielfield, in the Merse, de-

scended from the House of Mar, and nearly related to the Earls of Buchan; and the mother of Ebenezer was Margaret Halcro, a native of Orkney. The founder of this family was Halcro, Prince of Denmark, and her great-grandmother was the Lady Barbara Stuart, daughter of Robert, Earl of Orkney, son of James V. Thus, by both parents, the subject of our memoir could claim to be of gentle blood; but no doubt he would rather say with the poet,

“ But higher far my proud pretensions rise—  
The child of parents passed into the skies.”

The ministry of Mr Erskine in Cornhill, was of brief duration, for he was ejected from that place, as were the other Puritan Divines, by the Act of Uniformity, in the year 1662. Short, however, as his ministry there was, it was not without proofs that God had blessed his unwearied labours to the good of never-dying souls.

Mr Erskine, upon leaving Northumberland, retired to Dryburgh, near the seat of his relative, the Earl of Buchan; and, while in that place, he



was repeatedly called before the Scottish Council, to answer charges of sedition and disobedience. On one occasion he was heavily fined and committed to the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, to be afterwards sent to "the Bass;" but this sentence was commuted into one of exile from the kingdom; and he again retired into obscurity, in Northumberland, where, as before, he was called to suffer for Christ's sake.

On the Indulgence of 1687, Mr Erskine took charge of a small Presbyterian congregation near Berwick, and under his ministry in that place Thomas Boston first received religious impressions. After the Revolution he was called to the parish of Chirnside, where he continued minister till his death, in 1696.

The death of the father seems to have been blessed to the deepening of religious impressions on the young hearts of his two sons, Ebenezer and Ralph. "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 death-bed, and did cast me upon the providence of his God." Ralph also, thirty years after, said, "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 of a lingering illness in 1670: She was the mother of eight children. The second wife, Margaret Halcro, before mentioned, was the mother of seven, two of whom lived to be the instruments of a great work in the land—a work for which they will be remembered and honoured as long as Scotland is a country.

Ebenezer was born on the 22nd of June, 1680, and the place of his birth is now ascertained to have been Dryburgh, instead of the prison of the Bass, as was once thought. A small MS. volume of Mr Henry Erskine's has been recently brought to light, in which he has recorded the names of his children, with the dates of their birth, and of his son Ebenezer he records—

"Ebenezer was born June 22nd, being Tuesday, at one o'clock in the morning, and was baptised

by Mr Gab. Semple, July 24th, being Saturday, in my dwelling-house in Dryburgh, 1680."

Dryburgh, though locally in Berwickshire, stands on the borders of Roxburghshire, on a richly-wooded peninsula formed by a bend of the Tweed. It owes its interest mainly to the beautiful view of its Abbey, profusely over-grown with foliage; and now, since the Great Minstrel has been buried within its shadow, that interest has deepened and widened, and, as has been well said, "There, amidst the dust of the powerful De Morvilles, and many a holy abbot and monk of old, and surrounded by the ashes of his own 'rough clan,' under walls scorched in many a border foray, in the heart of the valley he loved so well, and of scenes he sang, lie the mortal remains of that mighty master who has thrown a charm over the country, its history, and its traditions, that will live as long as themselves."

The house which his father occupied in the village of Dryburgh has been carefully preserved as a relic of the family, and it is still

pointed out to strangers. The name Ebenezer, "a stone of assistance," was given him by his most excellent parents, as a testimony to the goodness and mercy of God, who had preserved them amidst all their trials and persecutions.

We are told little or nothing of the early years of Ebenezer's life; his education seems to have been conducted under the eye of his father at Chirnside, whither, as we have seen, the persecuted minister was called after the Revolution. A short sketch of his father's life, written by himself, hints that his youth was not devoid of gracious influences. "Sometime prior to his death, his father was heard to say, that he would desire to live no longer than to see his son Ebenezer, then in the sixteenth year of his age, succeed him in the work of the ministry." Leaving the maternal roof, Ebenezer went to Edinburgh University, where, from the records of the Town Council of that city, it appears that, in 1699, he held a bursary on the presentation of Pringle of Torwoodlee. From all we can learn, while at the University

must have been a busy student, and made good progress, both in literature and theology.

After leaving College he acted as tutor and chaplain to the Earl of Rothes, at Leslie House. In this truly Christian household he remained for some time, to the mutual advantage of all parties; and this residence being within the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, he was taken upon trial by that court, and licensed to preach the Gospel in the year 1702.

The excellent character of Mr Erskine, as well as his remarkable abilities, soon brought him into notice, and in May 1703 he received a unanimous call to the parish of Portmoak, in Kinross-shire, to the pastoral care of which he was ordained in September following.

## CHAPTER II.

## LABOURS IN THE VINEYARD.

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.—PSALM CXXVI. 6.

THE rural parish of Portmoak stretches down to the margin of the beautiful Loch Leven, famous for its historical associations. It was within the ancient castle on the chief island of this loch, that the unfortunate Queen Mary was imprisoned, after her surrender at Carberry Hill (1567). Within its walls she was made to sign the deed “that snatched the crown from her ancestral line,” and from thence she escaped, after a captivity of eleven months.

From another island on the lake, St. Serf, rise the ruins of the Priory of Portmoak mentioned as the first place in Scotland where the

Culdees formed a settlement. The chronicler Wyntoun was a prior of this monastery, at the close of the fourteenth century, and it was here his interesting book was written.

Another fact connected with this parish may yet be noticed. In the small village of Kinnesswood, on the shore of the lake, was born Michael Bruce, the poet, whose ode on "The Cuckoo" must be familiar to most readers. A neat monument is erected to his memory in the Parish Church.

And so, in this quiet retreat, beneath the shadow of the Lomond hills, Mr Erskine devoted himself, with untiring zeal, to the duties of his sacred office; and here he laid the foundations of that excellence and learning which fitted him for the important part which he was afterwards to act in the Church.

Though Mr Erskine gave the most exemplary attention to the outward services of his profession, there is every reason to believe, that at first there was something defective in his views of divine truth. Indeed, he dates his

experience of a thorough and saving change to a later time, and describes minutely the circumstance which proved the occasion of this important work. Six months after his ordination at Portmoak, he had married, Alison Turpie, daughter of a writer in the town of Leslie. She was a young woman of more than ordinary talents, and of undoubted piety, and had been trained for long in the school of temptation and spiritual conflict,—so much so, that at times she had been plunged into almost uncontrollable despondency. One day he chanced to hear a confidential conversation, on the subject of their religious experiences, between her and his brother Ralph, when the two were seated in the “bower of the garden,” near the open window of his study, when he immediately thought, “They have ideas and feelings to which I am yet a stranger,—they possess a valuable *something* which I have not;” and so, struck with the simplicity of their views and the extent of their knowledge of divine things, he was led to a more close examination of the vital principles of



Christianity, which issued in a degree of light and peace, to which he had before been a stranger. The conversations which followed between him and his wife gave him much of that accuracy of view by which he was so greatly distinguished, and to which may be ascribed a large part of that success which attended his ministry.

Nearly half a century after, when his diary was brought to light, traces of his wife's influence were discovered through all his career of usefulness, in a ministry most exemplary and successful. An extract from this diary may not be out of place here. In speaking of her trouble of mind and her deliverance from it, he says :—

“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 under 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 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 together 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."

From this time his pulpit discourses breathed

an unction, and took a high tone of spirituality, which contributed to the improvement of the hearers. Christ and Him crucified now became his unwearied theme. One other extract from his diary may be here given. "Once" he says, "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 might 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."

Even in his external appearance and manners there was, from this time, a marked improvement. He had been often so embarrassed in public speaking, that he durst not change his

attitude for fear of losing his ideas ; but now he was complete master of himself, and his manner became calm and composed ; as it was said, " He could look round on his audience with a dignified, 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." His pulpit ministrations could not fail to be a source of blessing to his people, when we see how he set about the preparation for it.

"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."

## CHAPTER III.

## HIS FAITHFULNESS IN THE MINISTRY.

“Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears and temptations.”—Acts xx. 18-19.

**W**E have seen Mr Erskine in the pulpit, and, in like manner, devout and earnest was his frame of mind when he engaged in other duties of his pastoral office. “I was made,” he says, “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 my ministerial work that I was going about,—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.

He abounded in secret prayer; it was his resource in every undertaking. His sermons were begun and ended with it, and his journeys commenced with it; and so his diary is full of gracious recognitions of God's superintending care, and kind interposing hand. Gratitude for mercies received was constantly sweetening his path, and making him exclaim, "O magnify the Lord with me; let us exalt His name together."

The effect of this was, that multitudes came to the Church, whether on Sabbaths or on week days when he kept service. The "Thursday Lecture," which he commenced in the early years of his ministry, attracted many hearers, not any secular business preventing masters and servants from so arranging their work before hand, that they had leisure to attend. Diets of examination, in like manner, had also their crowds of people.

In these duties of public catechising and exhorting from house to house, he generally brought forward the subject of his last Sabbath's discourse, that, by the repetition of it, he might

make a more lasting impression on the manners and hearts of his people.

Erskine was in the habit, when taking his necessary recreation within the bounds of his parish, to partake with his parishioners of their homely meal, at the same time talking over their every-day affairs, thus becoming intimately acquainted with them, and able to address, or encourage, or warn, as the case might require. But though thus free and familiar, he was careful to preserve a serious and Christian demeanour. When visiting ministerially, it was his custom to enter every house with the words upon his lips, "Peace be to this house," and after examining all the members of the family, he would conclude with fervent, particular, and affectionate prayer. Few had the gift of more effectually speaking to the comfort of the dejected Christian, or to the sinner burdened with a sense of guilt: to each and all his sole remedy was the cross of Christ.

The children of the congregation, in particular, were his charge. Remembering the Master's

words to Peter, "Feed my lambs," he not only frequently addressed them from the pulpit, but every Saturday he would visit some of them in their homes, to hear them repeat the Catechism and pray with them. Then he watched over the teachers, and saw that they were fitted to guide the young in the paths of truth and soberness. Prayer meetings were established in every corner of his parish, for the management of which he drew up a set of rules; and these meetings were superintended by elders, men of divine appointment, diligent and faithful. The effect of this diligence in the discharge of his pastoral duties, we may easily believe, would be soon manifested in the growing interest of the people in spiritual things. His biographer relates, as one significant sign of attention, the practice prevalent among his people of taking notes. This class became so numerous, that Mr Erskine sometimes referred to them from the pulpit, and gave them hints for their direction. The gleanings thus carefully gathered were gone over in many a quiet home, both on



Sabbath evenings and during the week, when neighbours would gather in. Specimens of these notes, which were sometimes full and accurate, may even yet be met with, and have been handed down in families from father to son.

One great secret of his spirituality was his devout and delightful observance of the Lord's day. It was to him like an ever-fresh fountain; and if that day were filled with heavenly things, he was sure it would send down bright and refreshing streams through all the week. And so what the Sabbath services were may well be imagined. They were frequently brought to a conclusion by singing the last verses of the seventy-second Psalm. An eye-witness used to say, "With what rapture was it sung! Never can I hear such delightful melody till I get to heaven."

A great work of revival was the consequence of the pastor's faithfulness. From all the country round, even from sixty miles distant, people flocked to Portmoak. Doubtless, Mr Erskine owed much to his fine manner and appearance,

and his dignified, yet easy bearing ; but the great charm lay in the earnestness and thorough evangelical matter of his discourses.

“Contemporary writers,” says the Rev. Dr Andrew Thomson, “describe him (Erskine) as a man who combined, in singular union, great suavity of manner with intrepidity of action, simplicity of aim with that profound knowledge of man which lies at the root of practical wisdom. His bitterest enemies have never been able to establish a charge against his sincerity or scrupulous conscientiousness. Possessed of a large degree of natural eloquence, this had all the advantage of a voice of great depth and compass, of a grave and simple delivery such as most beseems an ambassador of God, and of an outward appearance of such unusual nobility and majesty as was the theme of general remark, and commanded among his hearers universal awe.” “I never saw so much of the majesty of God,” said Mr Hutton of Dalkeith, “in any mortal man, as in Ebenezer Erskine.” Mr Adam Gib, of Edinburgh, having asked a friend if he

had ever heard Mr Erskine preach, was answered in the negative. "Well, then, Sir," rejoined Mr Gib, with emotion, "you never heard the gospel in its majesty." A more striking testimony still, perhaps, was given in the reproof which one hearer, who had travelled more than twenty miles to hear Mr Erskine preach, gave to another who complained of drowsiness, "O man! there is a savour coming out of that pulpit, which I think might keep any person awake." His was a rich and spontaneous mind, and from its affluent soil the crop came bountifully. His genial piety was full of fragrant warmth and ripening wisdom; but there was little singularity. No dazzling passages startled or amused the hearers; the love of God shed abroad in his heart shone in his face, and was itself a sermon; and so, his piety being of that type which it is not easy to record, the crowds who came to hear him were moved into feeling, and confessed that "surely God is in this place."

Above all seasons were the sacramental ones  
Portmoak. Feeling that they were fighting

together to uphold a good cause in the land, godly ministers in the Church were drawn together by no common tie ; and, when they met, their intercourse with one another was often strengthening and refreshing. One of the most delightful occasions of these reunions was, when the Lord's Supper was being celebrated in some of their churches, and above the most of the others were those times at Portmoak, when a goodly company of gifted ministers, anticipating the event for weeks before, would come together, and aid in conducting the hallowed solemnities. By this time the gospel, in many parts of the country, had become a dead and lifeless thing, and the godly prized such meetings more than we, in our privileged days, can easily realise. At many of these communions might be seen a young man, " who had risen before the morning sun and travelled often a distance of more than fifteen miles over the intervening mountains. He was wrapped in a shepherd's plaid, and listened, with intellectual countenance and delighted heart, to the gracious words which fell from the

speaker's lips. He was then an obscure teacher in a rustic day-school. Thirty years afterwards, he was known throughout the land, as the author of the Bible Dictionary and the Self-Interpreting Bible."

So great was the gathering of people in that quiet secluded parish, that it was found necessary to form two separate assemblies in the open air, on the sides of the neighbouring hill, independent of those in the church, and these assemblies were addressed by successive preachers, to whom they listened attentively for hours.

As to how the minister was exercised before he went forth to deliver his message, we again must have recourse to his diary. July 7th, 1714, he says:—

"I was under great fears as to my through bearing in the work of this day before I went 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 stop 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 converted, or confirmed and comforted. I preached on Isaiah xiii. 1, the second doctrine drawn from the connection being 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 H'


being with me on the great feast day." This was within a few days of the sacramental Sabbath.

Many on their death-beds remembered these Sabbaths on the hills of Portmoak, as Bethels where they had enjoyed renewed manifestations of God's love. "They say," writes Mr Erskine's sister, speaking of one of these Portmoak communions, "that to the comfortable felt experience of many, it was as great a day of the gospel as ever they witnessed."

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE TEACHER TAUGHT.

“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous : but nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.”—HEB. xii. 11.

 MR ERSKINE was too faithful a branch of the true vine to escape the husbandman's pruning-knife. “Every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit;” and so Mr Erskine, from time to time, was visited with successive and severe personal and domestic trials. The year 1713 was one of sorrow upon sorrow. Within the short space of a few months, three of his children, Ralph, Henry, and Alexander, aged respectively two, nine, and five years, were taken from him by death ; and the same year he lost his sister at Dunfermline. In his diary, with a breaking heart, he records his losses ; and yet



it is not the sorrow of the world, but of one who could see his Father's love in every blow.

“*April 27th, 1713.*—My dear, sweet, and pleasant child, Ralph, died on Tuesday, last week, about a quarter after seven in the morning. His death was very grievous and affecting 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 felt perfectly calm, and was relieved from the sore tossings he had; and being laid on his back in the cradle, his eye appeared quick and lively, and his countenance seemed to invite all that beheld him to follow him to glory, and to prepare for that inheritance to which he was going.”

“*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 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 smallpox 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 to be 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 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 perfectly calm and silent during the whole time of prayer. All these things I tak

as grounds of hope that my sweet Henry is now praising and triumphing with Christ in glory."

A third time death enters the pastor's dwelling, and on this occasion it is his son Alexander, a pleasant boy of five, who is taken home to his Father's house above; and then the poor, afflicted servant of God takes up his pen to notice yet another death, that of a well-beloved sister. Of this he writes—

"My brother Ralph and I were sent for, by express, on Wednesday, to see my dear sister. . . 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 Zion. . . . 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 fast approaching to myself."

Mr Erskine at this time, being in delicate

health, had an impression that his days on earth would be few ; but God had a great work for His servant to do in this world before he left it, and so He was only, by these afflictions, preparing him for it.

“ *January 10th, 1714,*” we have him writing, “ This morning my soul was exceedingly refreshed with the thought 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 Zion ; especially where I shall see Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, and God the Judge of all.”

Then, we have another entry of his diary this year, for his son Ebenezer has been laid down with fever, and the father’s heart is filled with anxiety, in case he too is wanted in heaven. But his mouth is filled with praise, for, beyond expectation, his child is restored, though he himself is next prostrated by the same disease. Amidst all his ravings and tossings, his mind at that time

was fixed on God. He says:—"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, and 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."

He recovered, but another of his family fell sick, and again the father's faith and patience was sorely tried; but he knew the hand that smote him, and bowed before it, and his little daughter was given back to her mother and himself, which filled their mouths with praise and thanksgiving.

Of the benefit of these afflictions to the personal improvement of the minister, his biographer says:—"His parishioners tenderly sympathised 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, which infused fresh energy into all his efforts on behalf of immortal souls."

Seldom has a scene of purer domestic happiness been witnessed, than that created by the love of God and of one another in the quiet manse at Portmoak. The pastor sat in his study, wisely improving his time in the acquisition of divine knowledge, or diligently engaged in writing his sermons; his beloved partner, true helpmeet as she was, zealously looked to the ways of her household, or attended to guests who had been invited to partake of their well-known hospitality, or were attracted to the manse by the learning and religious experience of the minister; while the children, obedient and helpful, growing up like olive plants, gave an air of cheerful liveliness to their much-loved home. But death again entered the house, in the midst of all this happiness, and the wife and mother was

called away to receive the reward of her labours and hear the "Well done" of her Lord. Of this sad event the bereaved husband writes to his sister, "It is a matter of praise that, though for a long while she was held in bondage through fear of death, yet about twenty days before her discease 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.' The Lord took her through Jordan, without letting her know when she was in the midst of it, till she was on the other side of Immanuel's land; for the fever carried her off both insensibly as to herself and easily, without the least pang or distortion of her countenance."

As Bunyan's Pilgrims, when they came to the river, found the much-dreaded enemy "as still as a stone," so experienced the good wife and mother when she too was called to pass over the Jordan of death, for "there was no other way to the gate" of the celestial city.

The brothers, especially his brother Ralph, and their surviving sister, Mrs Balderston, gathere



around the bereaved husband, and very tender and consoling was their sympathy ; for we know of nothing more beautiful in the history of these times, than the fraternal attachment of that family. They seemed to feel that each other's griefs were their own ; still it was the compassionate High Priest on whom the sorrowing heart depended, and from whom he received comfort, and so he writes, " O to be helped to honour and serve Him while in this 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 mercy."

A few months afterwards, on the occasion of his dear sister losing her husband, he writes—

" Dear afflicted sister,—I know, or at least I may know the heart of a stranger in losses of this kind with which you are now visited. 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 in which they are now employed, the heartsome company to which they are joined, 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 to 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 it is, 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 it is 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 on 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 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 not yet was his cup of suffering full, another of the lambs was taken to the fold, his "dear, sweet, and pleasant child, Isabel." In this sad event, we have again a glimpse of the suffering father's heart :—"I remember," he says, "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 therefore I began to commend Christ to her, and the Lord helped me

to do so 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* up into my face, as if she had been taken with the things. I bless the Lord who put it into 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 (of smallpox) without any pang or throe; her soul, I hope, being carried by angels into Abraham's bosom; and her body is 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 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 that 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 home which shall never have an end."

Six children were still spared to him. Of them he writes,—“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.”

Three years and a half after the death of his first wife, Mr Erskine married again. The lady was Miss Grace Webster, daughter of an eminently godly minister in Edinburgh. She seems to have been a worthy helpmeet to Mr Erskine, and a faithful mother to his little ones. The January following, his widowed mother died in his house. She had spent the thirty years of her widowhood between the manses of her two sons, Ebenezer and Ralph, and, according to their testimony, she died happily, resting in the Lord.

## CHAPTER V.

## CHURCH MATTERS.

“Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit ye like men, be strong.”—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

**I**T may not be thought out of place if we, before proceeding further with the life of Ebenezer Erskine, were to give a short account of the difficulties in Church matters with which he and his friends had to contend.

The union of the two kingdoms in 1707, though productive of much good to Scotland, was not without injurious influence upon her ecclesiastical liberties. The Parliament being abolished in that country, English statesmen regarded her Constitution with suspicion and dislike, and a few years later (1712) they passed two Acts tending to “distract the councils and

violate the liberties of the Church —the one imposed upon ministers the Abjuration Oath, a bill for the toleration of Episcopal worship in Scotland; the other wrested from the people the right of electing their own ministers.

The *Oath of Abjuration* was regarded by the godly in the Church as a snare to take from them their liberties, it was “so constructed as to involve the swearer in the approbation of an English Act of Parliament, which provided that the successor to the crown should always be of the Episcopal communion. In this way politics got mixed with the controversy. A Tory ministry being then in power, they bore no good will to the Presbyterian interest. The subject of toleration for Scottish Episcopacy became one of the questions of the day. With a view to nullify the toleration, a party in the Presbyterian church procured insertion of an oath abjuring the Pretender, which the court party succeeded in extending to all clergymen. The objections of the Presbyterians to this was that it turned upon the conditions of the Act of Succession.



But the restoration of the Law of Patronage struck a yet heavier blow at the liberty and purity of the Church. The passing of this Act was at complete variance with the Revolution Settlement and the Treaty of Union, which secured the Church against the burden of lay patronage. When proposed, it was pushed through both Houses of Parliament before the Church could offer almost any opposition. The news of this outrage, when it reached Scotland, roused the country to indignation, and the General Assembly sent a deputation of ministers to remonstrate against this shameful deed; but they were not permitted to speak, and so the right of the Christian people to elect their own pastors was wrested from them in an unlawful manner. Had men of the stamp of Knox, the Melvilles, and Henderson, been in the Church at that time, they would doubtless have stood upon their rights and refused to submit to such tyranny; but, unfortunately, Principal Carstares was at the helm of affairs, and, though few men had a more blameless career and died more lamented,

he was not made of the strong, resolute stuff of the old Reformers, for he yielded to what he thought was a stern necessity and sacrificed the liberties of the people.

At first the evils of patronage were not felt, because ministers would not accept of livings unaccompanied by the call of the people. But this delicacy was short lived. Within less than twenty years after the passing of the Act, the intrusion of unsuitable ministers into parishes, contrary to the wish of the people, was very common. The Moderate party had their ranks increased and strengthened by such means, but the godly in the land saw with sorrow that the Church had "left her first love," and that, under the blight of heresy, the bloom of her youth was fast departing.

The first who disturbed the doctrinal harmony of the Church was Mr John Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow (1714). Mr Simson was an ingenious sophist, who was able to puzzle his brethren by twisting and turning his statements, and at the same time by

arrogance and conceit. He betrayed his secret leanings to Arian sentiments. His opponent was Dr James Webster, a minister of Edinburgh, an old sufferer under the Covenant. For three years the zealous, devoted old man tracked his wary antagonist, and at last the Assembly of 1717 passed a lenient sentence on Simson, warning him to be careful how he gave forth such opinions.

In that same Assembly, "two members" says Dr M'Crie, "might have been seen engaged in earnest conversation." One of these was Mr Drummond of Crieff, and the other, "a man of middle stature and mild countenance, little more than forty years of age, but 'sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' This was Thomas Boston, author of the 'Fourfold State,' the 'Crook in the Lot,' and other productions long familiar as the Bible to the Scottish Peasantry."

Thomas was the son of an old Covenanter, "a miller and maltster withal," in the good old town of Dunse, and long remembered sleeping on his father's bosom, when that worthy was incarcerated, for his principles, in the Canongate

Tolbooth. After struggling with many difficulties, he was settled first at Simprin, then a separate parish from Swinton, and next in the moorish district of Ettrick. The deficiencies of early education were compensated by a youth of study, and by natural gifts, admirably qualifying him for impressing, as a preacher and writer, the minds of his countrymen; though, from constitutional timidity, he did not shine as a speaker in public debate. Imagining that we hear his conversation with Mr Drummond, we may hear him telling his friend, "When I was a student, I heard Mr Mair often speak of being divorced from the law, dead to it, and the like; but I understood very little of the matter. However, my thoughts being after my settlement at Limprin turned that way, as I was sitting one day in a house there, I espied above the window-head two old books, which, when I had taken down, I found entitled, the one "*The Marrow of Modern Divinity*" and the other "*Christ's Blood Flowing Freely to Sinners.*" These, I reckon, had been brought home from

England by the master of the house, a soldier in the time of the civil wars. The first I relished greatly. I found it came close to the point I was in quest of, and to show the consistency of those things which I could not reconcile before ; so that I rejoiced in it as a light which the Lord had seasonably struck in my darkness. By the end of 1700 I had digested the doctrine of the book, and had begun to preach it."

And so, this old little book brought home by the soldier of the commonwealth, and which Boston saw "above the window-head of his cottage at Simprin, was destined to do a great work in the Church and the world." From what small beginnings do mighty events flow. Let us trace further the history of this book. It was borrowed by Mr Drummond, and fell into the hands of James Hog of Carnock, who republished it in 1717, with a recommendatory preface. It had been like dew to the soul of the pious, tender-conscienced old man, and he longed to give others a share of the blessing ; but, "orthodoxy in high places was alarmed," and Principal

Hadow, of St Andrews, began to preach against it, denouncing it as fraught with Antinomian tendencies.

For four years after this a host of pamphlets on both sides of the question appeared, amongst which may be mentioned "The Political Disputant," "The Snake in the Grass," etc. One book which then caused a sensation was published in 1648, by Mr Edward Fisher, the son of an English Knight and Master of Arts in the University of Oxford. It was a compilation from the writings of Reformers—Luther and Calvin; also some English Divines, such as Ainsworth, Ames, Bolton, Hall, and Hooker. It had passed the scrutiny of the Westminster Assembly, and bore the approval of its leading divines. It consists of a dialogue between *Evangelista*, a minister of the Gospel; *Nomista*, a legalist; *Antinomista*, an Antinomian; and *Neophytus*, a young Christian. Though written in an interesting and popular style, there are scattered through it expressions requiring to be explained. Boston's edition gave explanations largely; but

still there were in it unguarded though well-meant statements which it was difficult to vindicate, and its enemies misrepresented and twisted them to their own use. The various steps of the process taken against the "Marrow Men" is too long to be taken up in our limited space. It need only be said that the General Assembly gave instructions to their Commission to "inquire into the publishing and spreading of books and pamphlets." The Commission accordingly took up the work and appointed a committee for that purpose, under the name of "The Committee for Purity of Doctrine." The Assembly which met the year following (1720) condemned the "Marrow," and prohibited ministers from "either preaching, writing, or printing anything in favour of it."

This decision, entered upon hastily, without carefully examining the book, met with disapproval in many parts of the country, both amongst the clergy and laity; and at next Assembly a paper was drawn up by Ebenezer Erskine, minister of Portmoak, and signed by other twelve of

his brethren, remonstrating against the judgment, as injurious to evangelical truth.

This Assembly being suddenly dissolved, in consequence of the illness of the King's Commissioner, the Earl of Rothes, the case was again remitted to the Commission (1722). The Committee for Purity of Doctrine "turned the Commission against" Erskine and his friends, by preparing "twelve queries" directed against the "twelve Representers."

We need not enumerate the queries and answers of the "Representers;" it may only be stated that these held the doctrines of all evangelical Christians throughout the world. But the Moderate party were now the largest in the Church Courts, and consequently the next Assembly condemned the Representation, and ordered the Representers to be rebuked and admonished at the bar.

The admonition having been received with all gravity, Mr Kid of Queensferry stepped forward, and gave in a protest, subscribed by all the Representers. In this document, they



solemnly protested against the Act of the General Assembly condemning the "Marrow," and declaring, that "it shall be lawful for us to preach and bear testimony unto the truths condemned by the said Acts of the Assembly." For thus deciding to act in opposition to the supreme court of the Church, the parties would have been summarily deposed, and the secession, in that case, would have taken place ten years earlier than it happened; but government, dreading the effects of such a catastrophe when the country was threatened with invasion, exerted its influence, and so the protest was unheeded—it was not so much as read. And thus, by a sort of compromise, the case was hastily disposed of, both parties remaining of the same mind as before. The Assembly appearing to think her authority had been duly maintained by the infliction of the censure, and also being cautioned by the King's letter against unhappy divisions, took up the royal hint, and let matters alone.

## CHAPTER VI

## CHURCH CONTROVERSIES—CONTINUED.

“It were needful for me to write unto you and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”—JUDE, ver. 3.

WE must now turn back a few years, and see how Ebenezer Erskine conducted himself while the controversy we have referred to was raging in the Church. We saw that he drew up the document of dissent against the judgment of the Assembly of 1720, but before that he had taken an active part in ecclesiastical matters. “It is a matter of traditional remembrance in Portmoak,” says his biographer, “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, it was regarded as an unpatriotic and injurious measure."

Mr Erskine's views were decided against the inconsistency of the Abjuration Bill with the principles of the Church of Scotland; but he conducted himself wisely and moderately when opposed by those who differed from him. Having come into collision with another minister, Mr Anderson of Falkland, about the taking of the oath, Mr Anderson having done so, Mr Erskine hastened to make amends for his commencement of the disagreement, by asking his opponent to preach in his church on the next Fast-day, and adding, "It is making me uneasy 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  
      'ts 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 upon your labours, and particularly on the great work you have in hand."

Though Mr Erskine's voice was not heard lifted up against the Patronage Act in Parliament, his views were too well known to be misapprehended; and when, years after, he was called to the high places of the field to fight against its tendencies, he proved himself a good soldier of Jesus Christ. The first time he appears in opposition to this pernicious Act was, when, as a member of the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, he was chosen to preside at the moderating of "a call" to settle a minister in a parish against the wish of the people. After various contentions, the presentee's ordination was effected, but Mr Erskine dissented, and declined to take part in the settlement.

One day, during these debates, the patron, Sir John Malcolm of Ballingry, invited the Pres-

hytery to dinner ; but when giving his invitation to Mr Erskine, said, resenting his opposition, "Mr Erskine, you are none of us to-day." To this he answered, with spirit, "Sir John, you do me great honour. It gives me the truest pleasure that we are agreed in this ; for I scorn to be one of them who dare to oppress the Christian people, and to rob them of their just privileges."

In a letter to a sister, about this time, he says, "All the power and policy of hell is set to work for the ruin and overthrow of the Church of Scotland. The prospect of the sifting storm, that seems to be at hand, is like sometimes to stagger and shake me, and makes my spirit to shrink within me. I know not how I shall be able to stand the storm itself, or how I shall do in the swellings of Jordan. Being as yet entirely unacquainted as to my own experience with suffering for the truth and cause of Christ, I am afraid to say, with Peter, 'Though all men should forsake Thee, yet will not I.' But this I may say, if He needs my property, my family, my very heart's blood, to bear witness to His cause

and work, I am obliged, though they were ten thousand times more valuable than they are, to lay them all down at His feet, and follow Him to a Golgotha or a Calvary." And in 1714, after a sacrament at Orwell, he writes in his Diary—"I recognised in secret the solemn dedication I had made of myself in public, and avowed the Lord to be my God. I was made to say that through His grace I would die for Him; and would die on a gibbet for Him, if He would carry me through. O, my soul! thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my God."

The Lord was preparing His servant for the great work He wanted him to perform, and the better to prepare him for it, He was calling him to pass through many a sorely contested struggle, and to see where his strength lay, which would enable him, when the worst came, to look away from man and seek help and direction from Himself alone. When, by an Act of Assembly, 1720, the "Marrow" was condemned, his brethren assigned to him the task of vindicating the truth and drawing up the first draft of the "Repre

sentation," not to defend the book, so often referred to, but, as advocates of important principles and doctrines, and which they thought the Assembly had, through "oversight," condemned through the "Marrow." Mr Erskine, in referring afterwards to his share of the work said, "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 and to suffer reproach for His precious truths, which, I am convinced, suffered so much injury by the Act Condemnatory, 1720, and Act Explicatory, 1722."

Though the Assembly's decision in 1722 finished the controversies in the supreme court, Erskine and his brethren suffered no small annoyance for their principles in the presbyteries and synods. As a proof this, when the parish of Kirkcaldy, in 1725, called Mr Erskine, the Church Courts decided against his removal, dreading his influence in a situation of greater importance than was his small place. This was the third time he had been prevented accepting such calls for a similar reason.

Alluding to this pitiful piece of spite in regard to Kirkcaldy, which happened to fall in with entire concurrence of his own views, he gently said:—"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 this corner of His vineyard, where, I hope, I shall have my crown and rejoicing in that day. . . . , 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."

The parish of Kinross gave him a unanimous call in 1728, but Mr Erskine declined to leave his charge. However, a few years later, in May 1731, on again receiving another cordial and unanimous call to Stirling, and the Presbytery deciding in favour of the translation, he immediately acquiesced. Twenty-eight years he had been at Portmoak, and though the people mourned sorely, they felt that, having had the best of his days, they had no cause to murmur; b



several members of his flock removed with him to Stirling, that they might continue to enjoy his ministrations.

Mr Erskine was translated to Stirling in September 1731. This old town is one of the most interesting in Scottish history. It is situated on the southern bank of the Forth, on the sloping ridge of a hill crowned by the Castle; it was long considered the key of the Highlands—hence, the saying, “The Forth bridles the wild Highlander,” because Stirling commanded the passage of the river. The Castle was a favourite residence of the Stuart monarchs, and in consequence takes a prominent place in the history of Scotland. It was of old called Snowdown, giving rise to the name of the “Knight of Snowdown, James Fitz-James,” in Sir Walter Scott’s “Lady of the Lake.” The view from the Castle-hill is magnificent, to the north and east are the Ochil Hills, and the windings of the Forth through the Carse of Stirling, referred to in the song, “Are these the Links, of Forth she said?” To the west lies the vale of Monteith bounded by the High-

land mountains. The Campsie Hills close the horizon to the south, and in the foreground, to the east, are the town, the Abbey Craig, and the ruins of Cambuskenneth Abbey; and from it, in a clear day, the Castle of Edinburgh and Arthur's Seat are seen.

The Greyfriars, or Franciscan Church of Stirling, was erected in 1494, by James IV. It is a handsome Gothic building, now divided into two places of worship. In this church the Earl of Arran, Regent of the Kingdom, abjured Romanism, 1543. It was also the scene of the coronation of James VI., in 1567, then only thirteen months old, when the sermon was preached by John Knox. The church had not until this time been used as a Protestant place of worship, but, owing to the charge to which he was inducted having been lately erected, the ministers fell back on this old Popish building in which to hold their services.

At Stirling, as in Portmoak, Mr Erskine's labours were abundant. He was unwearied in the discharge of his duties, and his hand

were upheld by like faithful brethren in the town.

These ministers, in order to prevent the profanation of the table of the Lord, resolved to examine privately all that should seek admittance to this ordinance; and this involved no small amount of labour, for the examination embraced the whole body of communicants. In all other duties Mr Erskine was equally assiduous, as is seen from his different note-books and sermons, as well as several volumes of discourses.

At the time of Mr Erskine's translation to Stirling, matters in the Church were hastening to a crisis, while the state of religion in Scotland was gradually declining. The influence of the Union with England was telling on the social tastes of the people. Wodrow, the historian, now an old man, describes the change in the Church. Speaking of the Assembly of 1726, he says—"There was the greatest number of young faces ever I saw in an Assembly. Their very garb and habit were not what had been in

former meetings. And indeed the very decency and gravity proper for such as have their eye to divinity is not to be seen about them. And, I am told, several of them go openly to the dancing school at Edinburgh, and very nice and exact as to that. The Church of Scotland," he adds, "was never so low in point of principals and professors of divinity in colleges as at this day; and what influence this must have on learning and entrants to the ministry, I fear after ages will find." "This ominous prediction was speedily verified," says Dr M'Crie, "Whatever might be said of the progress of general literature, there can be no question that theological learning was sadly at a discount. Instead of the ponderous tomes of the preceding century, and the dingy productions of the covenant, youthful aspirants preferred the gay pages of Addison, the Tatler, Pope, Swift, and Shaftesbury. Our Scottish poet Allan Ramsay had just opened his circulating library in the High Street of the metropolis, from which emporium loose plays and trashy novels and romances, of

the worst London type, were scattered broadcast over the land; vitiating alike the morals and the tastes of the rising generation."

Ramsay's own poems and his "Gentle Shepherd" had certainly no such injurious effect.

In the Assembly of 1731, the overture was brought forward "concerning the method of planting vacant churches." This was "a kind of supplement to the law of Patronage," being intended to apply to those cases in which the patrons, through some cause or other, declined to exercise the right of presentation; and it was enacted "that the minister should be chosen by the majority of the elders and heritors, if Protestants." This Act ignored the voice of the Christian people, and therefore gave great dissatisfaction throughout the country. "Heritors being Protestants," included Prelatists and Jacobites. The measure was sent down to the presbyteries; but though the majority of these disapproved of it, the Assembly, breaking through the Barrier Act, passed it, and would not listen to the voice of the people, though

protests and petitions, signed by hundreds, were sent into that court. Mr Erskine, being that year a member of Assembly, demanded that his dissent, with the others, should be received and recorded. His speech on that occasion has been discovered, and may here be given as a proof of his bravery and consistency. He says—

“Moderator, I find by the reading of the minutes, that the dissent which was entered yesterday by some members 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 the 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 entrusted 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 founded on the Word, that I consider it dia-

metrically 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 management 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 branç"



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 entrusted. 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.”

This speech was of no avail, and the only course now open to Mr Erskine and his friends was, to testify from the pulpit against the backsliding of the times, and the growing corruptions of the Church, with the arbitrary conduct of the prevailing party in the Assembly. Having been chosen Moderator of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, it became his duty to preach at the opening of that court in October, 1732. Taking for his text Psalm cxviii. 22, “The stone which the builders refused is become the head

stone of the corner," he boldly denounced the leading rulers of the Church under the name of builders, asserted the supreme rights of the Lord Jesus as the Head of the Church; and, feeling that he stood as an "ambassador for Christ," declared that if the Lord were present He would say, in relation to that Act of the Assembly, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least these my brethren, ye did it unto Me," adding,—“I am firmly persuaded that, if a remedy is not provided, that Act will very soon terminate in the overthrow of the Church of Scotland, and of a faithful ministry therein, in regard that the power of electing ministers is thereby principally lodged in the hands of a set of men that are generally disaffected to the power of godliness, and to the doctrine, discipline, worship, and government of this Church.” This sermon gave deep offence to the greater part of the ministers who heard it in the Synod, and they voted that the preacher should be rebuked for his boldness, against which sentence he appealed to the next Assembly.

## CHAPTER VII.

“Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole earth!”—  
JER. xv. 10.

“**N**O meeting of Assembly since the Union,” says Dr Thomson, “had been anticipated with such proud and eager anxiety, as that which was convened at Edinburgh, May 3rd, 1733. When the case of Mr Erskine was called, he was ready at the bar, and three friends were by his side—William Wilson, minister of Perth, Alexander Moncrieff, minister of Abernethy, and James Fisher, minister of Kinclaven. There was no trembling of heart as he looked round on the darkening faces of his enemies or to an uncertain future, and he defended his cause without trepidation, in a document

which, "for pointed brevity of statement," we quote again from Dr Thomson, "triumphant argument, clear elucidation of great principles, respectful address, combined with independence of feeling, deserves to be ranked among the most valuable ecclesiastical documents of the age."

"A watchman," says Mr Erskine in one part, "must exoner himself, upon the peril of his soul. 'Tis true he ought not knowingly to sound a false alarm. But whether is it safer for the city to have a false alarm sounded upon an apprehended danger, or to have the mouth of the watchman stopt that he cannot sound an alarm, when the danger is real and the city falling into the hands of the enemy?"

By a majority of votes, the Assembly "approve of the proceedings of the Synod, and appoint the minister of Stirling to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar, in order to terminate the process." This sentence was accordingly carried out.

In this state of matters, Mr Erskine did not hesitate; but produced a paper in which

protested against the censure that had been passed upon him, and craved that it should be read and recorded in the minutes of Assembly. To this protest his own name and those of his three brethren were affixed. This request was refused, and the brethren left the paper on the table and withdrew.

Very probably, at this stage the matter might have ended, had it not been for one of those incidental circumstances on which often great and important events hang. The paper on which the protest was written having fallen from the table, was picked up by one of the members,—a wild, fiery man—who rose up in a heat of passion, and pronounced it treasonable to their court:

The Assembly was roused to a state of indignation, and ordered the ministers to answer for their protest before the ensuing Commission, or else they must cease to be ministers of the Church of Scotland.

On the day of Commission arrived, one who re-witness of the scene, a youth named

Adam Gib, afterwards well-known in the Secession Church, says of the appearance of Mr Erskine, "I saw him then standing at the bar, in a most easy and undaunted, yea, majestic appearance, amidst warm and brow-beating reasonings against the refusal which he then made, particularly by the Earl of Isla. Before the Commission found themselves obliged to reverse their forenoon resolution against receiving any written answers to their question, a proposal was agreed to 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 Erskine replied that these would come in due order." So he read on.

His paper was a "masterly production." It set forth, in a few sentences, the kingly office of Christ, with the spiritual nature of His kingdom, and the duty of its ministers to be faithful in '7

discharge of their high calling, to preserve purity in the Church, etc.

This fair and conclusive reasoning was of no avail; the minds of most of the ministers were wrapped and clouded in anger, and they set about "suspending the four brethren from the exercise of the ministerial function, and all the parts thereof."

To this sentence, Mr Erskine and his friends protested, declaring that it was *null and void*, and at once betook themselves to the discharge of all their pastoral duties. Mr Erskine, even on his road home from the Commission, assisted at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper at Queensferry, giving out in the opening of his address the following lines of the fifty-third Psalm, with some appropriate observations on them:—

*“ My closed lips, O Lord by Thee  
Let them be opened ;  
Then shall Thy praises by my mouth  
Abroad be published.*

It was three months until the the next meeting  
Commission before which the four brethren

were cited to appear, and public sympathy was rapidly extending in their favour. At the meeting a spirit of conciliation prevailed; many presbyteries implored that the four brethren might be treated with clemency and forbearance, and some had even the courage to say that the infliction of the sentence of suspension had been "a stretching of Church authority." As for the brethren, they gave no sign of compromise, but intimated, in calm language, their adherence to all their former representation and protest, and acknowledged frankly that, deterred by no voice, no censure, they had as before exercised all the parts of their sacred office.

The Commission was divided on the subject, many of the brethren insisting that the matter should be allowed to drop; while others wished it to be carried further. The question was put before the house, and only by the casting vote of the Moderator was it carried against the four brethren, and instructions given that they should proceed to give a higher censure to the offending parties.

There seemed now no manner of doubt that an



important crisis was at hand, and many were anxious to delay this crisis as long as they could. They appointed a Committee to meet with the suspended ministers, to smooth over difficulties, and persuade them to submit to the Church. But no proposal was made to them which did not involve a sacrifice of principle; and they, feeling that the cause of truth and liberty was at stake if they departed in the very least from the ground they had taken, declared themselves incapable of agreeing to the proposal.

The crisis had now come; the brethren would not retract, and the majority of the Commission, being determined to punish them, rose up and thrust them out of the Established Church, declaring their charges vacant after the date of the sentence. "Thus," says Dr Thomson, whom we have before quoted, "these holy men and faithful witnesses, who had vented no heresy, who stood unchallenged with any immoral act, who had done violence to no constitutional law, whose only fault had been their faithful testifying against repeated growing defections in doctrine

and government, their endeavouring to bring back the Church to that purer model to gain which her first martyr had burned and her last martyr had bled, and especially their continuing to protest and refusing to be silent against a measure which even the most unscrupulous partisan of modern times will admit to have been unconstitutionally passed and irregularly imposed, were driven from a Church whose doctrines they had loved, and whose order they venerated, denuded of their office, exposed to privacy, and branded with reproach."

"The reading of the sentence carried a pang of sorrow to the heart of some of the most faithful of those ministers who had sat in the Commission. They felt, with many of the rulers around them who had joined in passing the unrighteous decree, that their only bond of connection was ecclesiastical and external; while with those whom they now saw driven forth it was spiritual, enduring, and perpetual."

After the sentence of their expulsion was announced to them, they read a protest which

freely gave forth their opinions, and then handed it to the clerk. After so doing, they walked out of the Commission, with heavy hearts, but clear consciences, that they had only done their duty, when they sacrificed love and unfaithful silence to expulsion and a dark future, for which they knew not of any provision. They would have been willing to remain, had they been able to do so, and cultivate the vineyard to which they had been called; but a degenerate Church cast them forth, for they would not dishonour the crown rights of their Divine Lord.

We know what Secession is in our times. A man can be a Seceder and yet lose nothing of his prestige, but in these old days it was different. Secession was an untried thing, and they could not forecast the consequences of such an act. Besides a sort of halo hung around the National Church, which impressed the multitudes with a feeling of awe and respect. Notwithstanding all this, they felt that God had given them a commission to bear testimony for the truth; and so, like Abraham, they obeyed the call "not know-

ing whether they went." As I said at the beginning, they never thought, when they began the opposition, of forming a new sect; they were led on, step by step, by Him whose "way is in the sea and His path amidst great waters," and the Secession was the result of these measures, God intending, through these men and their successors, to keep the lamp of His Gospel burning in an otherwise darkened country; for soon the Established Church of the land was given up to a reign of dead Moderatism, and only, with a few exceptions, where the Seceders were placed was there light in the dwellings of the righteous.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the Gospel of God.”—  
1 THESS. ii. 2.



ON the 5th of December 1733, about three weeks after their Expulsion from the Established Church, the four brethren met at Gairney Bridge, a small village near Kinross, to consult with one another as to the steps it would be necessary for them to take in the circumstances. The four were joined by Messrs. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, and Thomas Mair of Orwell, who took no part in their proceedings. The first day was entirely occupied by prayer and devout exercise; but on the second they constituted themselves into a

Presbytery and Mr Ebenezer Erskine was chosen, Moderator, while Mr James Fisher was appointed clerk. They called themselves *The Associate Presbytery*.

As they had no intention, when they left the Establishment, to close the door for ever on their return to it, should the opportunity occur, and should it be reformed, they continued to maintain their testimony on the ground they first adopted; and before parting, they appointed Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff to prepare an extended statement of the reason of their protestation before the Commission.

This happened in 1733, but not until the Assembly of 1740 was the door closed effectually against the return of the seceding ministers, whose ranks, having been joined by other two, made eight in all. Between these times, fruitless attempts had been made to recall them to the Church; but as it would not abate one inch in its demands for implicit, unquestioning obedience to its rule, however unwarrantable, they would not submit to return; and so, in 1740

the Assembly proceeded to "depose" them from the office of the holy ministry. Before this they had only been "suspended."

Up till this date they had retained their places of worship and emoluments from the State, but now the civil authorities in their respective districts were instructed to deprive them of both.

At Stirling, on the first Sabbath after the sentence was passed, Mr Erskine found the doors of his church and the churchyard locked against him and his people. An immense multitude were gathered together, and were about to proceed to violence, when the venerable minister, taking the Bible in his hand, which had been brought from his house, in a majestic manner retired to a quiet place in the neighbourhood, the vast assembly following him in profound silence.

To this day, the spot he chose is pointed out to the stranger. It was on a green knoll, below the frowning ramparts of the castle, that he gathered together his congregation; and after protesting that, in doing what he did he was only

obeying the dictates of duty, he proceeded with the services of the day.

It was a grand and impressive scene, and we can imagine the feelings of the congregation, as the roll of the fine old psalm with which he commenced his service was borne away on the breeze, and wafted up to heaven. It was the first part of the sixtieth Psalm—

“ O Lord, Thou hast rejected us,  
And scattered us abroad ;  
Thou justly hast displeased been,  
Return to us, O God.  
The earth to tremble Thou hast made,  
Therein didst breaches make ;  
Do Thou thereof the breaches heal,  
Because the land doth shake.”

After a solemn prayer offered up to God, he read out for his text, Matt. viii. 27, “ But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him ? ” Dr M'Kerrow, in his “ History of the Secession Church,” says, “ many have been heard to speak of the discourses of that day with mingled emotions of vexation and delight,—vexation at



the unjust treatment which their minister received in being driven from his church, and delight at the recollection of the solemn truths which on that occasion were uttered by him with more than his ordinary earnestness."

The mental portraiture of the four fathers of the Secession was thus given by one of themselves, Mr Wilson, when asked by a friend, in a pleasant humour, to do so:—"Our brother, Mr Erskine, 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 I may claim to be the ox, for, as you know, the laborious part of the business falls to my share."

An unhappy difference arose, soon after the Secession, between the Erskines and one who was accomplishing much good for Britain, viz., George Whitefield. Hearing of Whitefield's extraordinary success, the Erskines wrote him, and informed him of their proceedings and trials, to which the English evangelist replied  
ms of high respect and affection, and

longed for personal intercourse with them. This was followed by an invitation for him to come and visit them, Ebenezer writing to him thus—“It would be unreasonable 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, but would not co-operate with the Church party in Edinburgh until he had conferred with the Seceders. Mr Ralph Erskine met him in Edinburgh, and went with

him to Dunfermline, where an interview took place. From the statements of the case, we can see that the Seceders expected more from Whitefield than was reasonable considering his views as an evangelist, and a rupture was the consequence. Paul and Barnabas differed and parted, and we know not if ever they met again ; and it is painful to think that, after this, all personal intercourse between Erskine and Whitefield seems to have ceased, though the latter retained a favourable impression of the father of Secession, as seen by a letter which he afterwards wrote to one of Mr Erskine's sons, in which he says, "I wish all were like-minded with your honoured father and uncle, matters then would not be carried on with so high a hand."

After this took place the Cambuslang Revival, under the preaching of Whitefield, from which the Seceders unhappily stood aloof, and many rash and bitter things were said on both sides, for which the authors, in a cooler moment, expressed sorrow ; and though Mr Erskine took no part in framing the Act of the Associate

Presbytery on the subject, he was the Moderator at the time.

One of the most valuable doctrines put forth by the Secession Church was drawn up at this period, namely, their famous Act concerning the doctrine of grace; and Mr Erskine, being the senior member was deputed to frame it. "This Act," says Dr Thomson, "is distinguished by those clear exhibitions of a free Gospel resting on the basis of an all-perfect atonement—those representations of 'grace reigning through righteousness,' and producing, in the reception of it, the spirit of an unconstrained and happy obedience, which gives strength to personal holiness, and its greatest power to a Christian ministry. It was well that such an Act should at once strike the key-note of Secession preaching."

When the Rebellion broke out, in 1745, Mr Erskine took an active part in support of the Government; and, animated by his example, the Seceders of Stirling flew to arms and were formed into a regiment for the defence of the town. In his life, by Fraser, we are told that "one night,

when the rebels were expected to make an attack on the town, Mr Erskine presented himself in the guard-room, fully accoutred in the military garb of the time. 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 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."

Shortly after this a question arose which rent the Secession into two bodies. An irritating matter was introduced into the Synod, respecting the taking of the burgess oath, which was required to be taken in some of the towns of Scotland — Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Perth. The clause was this, "Here I protest, before God and your Lordships, that I profess and allow with my

heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof; I shall abide therein and defend the same till my life's end, renouncing the Roman Catholic religion called Papistry." Some asserted that this oath could not and should not be taken by any consistent Seceder; while others insisted that it should be made a matter of mutual forbearance.

The debate on this matter grew so stormy, that, in 1747, the contending parties were split into two distinct bodies, Burghers and Anti-burghers. It was sad that those who had stood together, and nobly fought for the pure and true, should thus be separated; but it has ever been thus in the Church. Luther and Zwingli differed about the sacraments at the very time when the enemy was ready to fall upon them, and, in like manner, the Covenanters fought about trifles on the very battlefield. Well does the wise man say, "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city; and their contentions are like the bars of a castle." And thus, "The Lord had divided them in His anger, and covered the

daughter of Zion with a thick cloud, giving them also the wine of astonishment to drink."

After this the history of the Secession Church is divided into two different sections.

Mr Erskine's views were those of the Burgher party, regarding the lawfulness of taking the oath. He was more temperate than others of his brethren, and amidst the troubles and contentions stayed himself upon God, who had been his help from his youth till now. At this time and of this occasion, he writes, "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 Zion and Jerusalem, He will reign among His ancients gloriously."

## CHAPTER IX.

## HIS LAST DAYS AND DEATH.

“Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.”—Ps. xxxvii. 37.



R ERSKINE was now an old man, infirmities were increasing upon him, bereavements, too, were to be his lot ere he closed his wilderness journey.

On the 15th March 1751 he lost his second wife, and his dear brother Ralph the year following. When the intelligence of his brother's death reached him, he said, with 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.” In a letter to a friend about the same time, he writes, “Many of God's billows are going over me, yet still I hope the Lord will comman-



His loving-kindness in the day-time, and His song shall be with me in the night."

At the commencement of 1752 he had the happiness of seeing his nephew, Mr James Erskine, ordained as his colleague, and was able to preach on that occasion, though his strength was now giving way. The next year, at the earnest wish of his people, he rose from his bed and preached to them from Job xix. 23, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

About this time, he penned his last letter, to his daughter Alice, wife of the Rev. James Scott, Gateshall. In it he says, "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 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, 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 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.' '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 the 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.

His closing scene we give in the words of his biographer, Dr Fraser:—

"His last sermon was literally preached from his bed to a company assembled in his room, where he baptised a child, after discoursing on a text with which he had particularly wished to finish his ministry, viz., Psalm xliii. 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 sore 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 now what you are now doing with 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 relatives who came to see him, and began to comfort him thus: ‘I hope you get now and then a *blink* to bear up you

spirit under your affliction,' he promptly returned this spirited reply: "Oh, 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, on the text, "I am the Lord thy God."' 'O, woman,' he answered, 'That is the best sermon ever I preached!' The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as to many of his hearers. A few minutes after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his

daughter to bring the Bible and candle nearer the bed ; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, *he gently breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer*, on the 2nd of June 1754. Had he lived twenty days longer, he would have finished the seventy-fourth year of his age ; and had he lived three months more, he would have completed the fifty-first of his his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmoak and nearly twenty-three years at Stirling."

Mr Erskine was buried, by his own desire, in the middle of his meeting-house, where a large stone with a Latin inscription, recording the date of his death, his age, and the periods of his ministry at Portmoak and Stirling, marks the spot.

"It would be foolish," says Dr Harper, "to claim for Mr Ebenezer Erskine 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 movements; 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.”

“At night,” says Augustus Toplady, “I spent three or four hours reading Erskine’s Sermons, particularly the following ones:—‘The Rent Veil of the Temple,’ ‘The Harmony of the Divine Attributes,’ ‘The Believer Exalted in imputed Righteousness.’ The reading of these sweet discourses was wonderfully blessed to my soul.”