

MEMOIRS
OF THE
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MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT PERTH,
ONE OF THE FOUR BRETHREN—THE FOUNDERS OF THE SECESSION CHURCH,
AND PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY TO THE ASSOCIATE PRESBYTERY:
WITH
BRIEF SKETCHES
OF THE
STATE OF RELIGION IN SCOTLAND,
FOR FIFTY YEARS IMMEDIATELY POSTERIOR TO THE REVOLUTION;
INCLUDING
A Circumstantial Account of the Origin of the Secession.

BY THE REV. ANDREW FERRIER.

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AND MAURICE OGLE; WILLIAM OLIPHANT, EDINBURGH;
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## PREFACE.

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THE general character of the subject of the following Memoirs is well known, and justly venerated in the Secession Church. But except among his own descendants, few particulars of his life are now preserved. The information respecting him, which the following sheets present, will, it is humbly conceived, gratify many; because it will not only justify all the favourable ideas they have entertained of his worth, but raise him still higher in public estimation. The more his character is known, there will be found in it the more to be admired and imitated.

Of the sources of the information contained in the following pages, some account may reasonably be expected. The most of the anecdotes related, are selected from those which have been transmitted in the family of Mr. Wilson, and have been so often told as to be perfectly familiar in that branch of it to which the writer belongs. He is the great-grandson of Mr. Wilson. For much of the information, he is indebted to his uncle and father-in-law, the late Rev. James Muckersie of Alloa,—a grand-son of Mr. Wilson's, by the eldest of his daughters who survived him; and for much of it, to his highly respected relative, the Rev. John Jameson of Methven,—a grandson of Mr. Wilson's by his youngest daughter. Through his father's family, also, he has been enabled to add to the facts related. His grandfather, by the father's side, was an intimate friend of Mr. Wilson's, and a leading member in his congregation. He survived him more than

thirty years; and his father's mother survived her husband forty years, and, retaining her faculties to the last, often communicated to the writer, with distinctness, many notices of Mr. Wilson, which she had heard from her husband, and other persons of veracity in Perth, with whom she was intimately acquainted.

The writer has been in the practice of jotting down such information when it was communicated, and it has turned to some account. It has enabled him to give publicity to what in a few years might have been irrecoverably lost in oblivion, by writing the life of one, to whom, perhaps, our country is, in several important considerations, as much indebted as to any one who has lived in it for these hundred years.

He now feels much satisfaction in having been, in some measure, careful to record those valuable communications when they were made, because in the course of Providence the sources of them have diminished by the death of different relatives and others, who knew and reported the facts.

Having thus collected much floating information, it occurred to him that it might be of advantage to methodize it. But this was with no other view than to preserve the facts in his own family. It was suggested, however, that he had materials for forming a valuable work, which might be of public benefit, especially in the Secession Church; and he was advised to write them over for publication.

When, in consequence of advice, I contemplated the idea of publishing, it occurred to me that I might greatly enrich the work, were it possible to introduce Mr. Wilson's private short-hand diary; and, therefore, though the system is totally different in its characters and principles from my own, I set myself, very assiduously, to decipher it. I had, years before, tried differ-

ent alphabets which I found inapplicable. I had, more recently, been favoured, by my friend Mr. Jameson, with the alphabet which Mr. Wilson's son (the Rev. Mr. Wilson of Methven) used, and which I was told was the same with his father's. I made repeated attempts without much success, till last autumn, when, by determined application, I succeeded in making out the whole diary,—much of which I have exhibited. This was, indeed, a very irksome task,—such as I could scarcely undertake again, and for which, had I anticipated all its difficulties, I could scarcely have had fortitude. But I will never regret my labour: for I feel that by far the most valuable parts of the work consist in the extracts from the diary; and, from what I have presented, and what I have suppressed, I find all my previous information confirmed and authenticated. It contains an exuberance of holy exercise, which must elevate the subject of these Memoirs higher than ever in the estimation of the Christian public. To all but to himself, and that from his humility of character, the devotional parts of the work would, to a demonstration, point out one of the greatest and best of the servants of Christ. Serious persons, both ministers and private Christians, will value the specimens I have given, of vowing and self-examination, as models for themselves. The directions for preaching will be found highly valuable to all ministers.

In writing these Memoirs, I had no idea, at first, of being able to make a volume; but, in proceeding, I found that materials were swelling so much that it was necessary to retrench, lest the expense of the work should make it inaccessible to many to whom it might be useful. Having done all this, I have, in bringing the whole into a more finished shape, been indebted to several friends whom I highly respect, and from whom I have received many valuable hints.

Those who belong to the Secession Church will find their principles vindicated, and, perhaps somewhat elucidated, in the following Memoirs; and both they, and Christians of other denominations, will have a better idea of what the Secession is, and of its importance and necessity.

To prevent misrepresentation from any who belong to that large denomination from which Mr. Wilson and his three Brethren were injuriously expelled, I cannot do better than adopt the words of my highly talented co-presbyter, Mr. Marshall, in his letter to Dr. Thomson,—“ I am anxious to avow, what some, perhaps, among the less enlightened and less liberal-minded of my readers may be backward enough to give me credit for, namely, that opposed as I am in principle to the National Church, I am far from being opposed to the Christian people or Christian ministers who are found within its pale. It is an easy thing, surely, to distinguish between the system and the men, and an easy thing to like the one without liking the other. The worthier the men the more dangerous their errors,—the greater the mischief likely to result from the evils they patronise.”

I throw myself on the candour of the Christian public. Whilst I could wish that the writing of the following Memoirs had fallen into abler hands, yet, since, in Providence, it has fallen into mine, I trust that the imperfect performance of it will no way injure the excellent character which it exhibits.

“ Let truth have the victory, and let God have all the glory.”\*

A. F.

NEWART-HILL MANSE, 3d April, 1830.

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\* Wilson's Defence, p. 569, and quoted in the Memoirs, p. 350.

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#### ERRATA.

In page 197, line 5, for "were" read "are."

Page 314, line 20, between "inspection" and "from", supply "on producing recommendations."

Page 353, line 15, for "with" read "unto."

Page 377, line 16, between "*mount*" and "*with*," supply "*up*."

# MEMOIRS

OF THE

## REVEREND WILLIAM WILSON.

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### INTRODUCTION.

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A LAMENTABLE tendency has prevailed, in every age, to corrupt the purity of religion. Through this tendency, which seems to be a constitutional element of our fallen nature, divine truth has often been greatly perverted from its meaning and design, and the duties of God's worship have been strangely mingled with the empty forms and superstitious ceremonies of men:—so that religion itself, though communicated by God, and possessing all the perfection of its heavenly origin, has often been deteriorated, in its practical exhibition, into little else than a shadow or a name. The visible Church has often declined so far from its true character, as to be more like a synagogue of Satan, than a society

of the peculiar people of God. To what depth of corruption it might sink, were it left entirely to itself, it is impossible for us to conceive; yet, there is little doubt that it would soon lose or renounce its intrinsic and essential holiness.

But in the good providence of God, instruments, wisely fitted for the age and circumstances in which they lived, have, from time to time, been raised up to make strenuous resistance to error and impurity, and to restore the exhibition and practice of truth to some portion of its native beauty.

In this light we might view many of the patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament Church. It appears from the epistle of Jude, that in the antediluvian world, when the wickedness of men was great and almost universal, *Enoch, the seventh from Adam*, bare testimony to the truth, and did his utmost to counteract the rapid progress of error and corruption. Noah, also, who *found grace in the eyes of the LORD*, gave, in that early period, faithful warning of the danger of sin, and made unwearied and zealous resistance to its progress,—and he is expressly styled *a preacher of righteousness*. Abraham, “the father of the faithful,” and *the friend of God*, was called and separated from his kindred, to be the instrument of checking the vigorous growth of

error, of recovering religion from the corruptions of idolatrous worship, and of preparing for its pure transmission to future ages. Jacob was a faithful instrument of reformation from the corruption which religion had suffered even in Abraham's family and his own, when he urged his *household to put away the strange gods which were among them, and to arise and go up to Bethel, where, said he, I will make an altar unto God.* Moses, also, who *was faithful in all his house*, may be viewed as an eminent reformer. Though he *was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth*, yet, on every occasion where the honour of the God of Israel and the vindication and purity of true religion were concerned, he proved himself bold and zealous. In the presence of the king of Egypt, overcoming his natural diffidence, he resolutely pleaded the cause of Israel. And when, in the wilderness, the Israelites departed from God, and worshipped the golden calf, he gave proof of his courage and zeal,—by casting down the idol, and commanding that the idolaters should be destroyed, and that the people should return to God. At a period of deep apostacy, the venerable Elijah appeared in the character of a reformer, and was *very jealous for the LORD God of hosts.*

In this catalogue of zealous reformers, we might number many of the kings of Judah, and especially the honourable names of Hezekiah and Josiah. We might also include Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezra, and Nehemiah, and Daniel, and others, whom the God of Israel honoured with the gifts of inspiration and prophecy, and who, thereby, in various circumstances, were more or less the instruments in preserving, and restoring, and promoting the interests of divine truth.

In this introductory reference to the venerable *cloud of witnesses* for the truth, in the days of old, the name of John the Baptist, the immediate forerunner of Christ, should not be omitted. Many an error had crept into the Jewish profession of religion by the time of his appearing. Views, the most perverted, were very generally entertained, by God's ancient people, about the expected Messiah, and the nature and designs of his kingdom; and only a few of them *waited*, in the exercise of holy faith, *for the consolation of Israel*. Corruption had taken a fatal hold of the Church. The law was made void by the traditions of men. The profession of religion had lost nearly all its spirituality; and the symbolical rites, with which God was pleased to burden the Mosaic dispensation,

were perverted from their true design, and mingled with many unmeaning ceremonies and sinful customs of men. The Jews were now divided into sects, which maintained, each its peculiar tenets, with all the blind zeal and violent prejudices, which are the usual attendants on systems of false religion, and on the distorted and superstitious exhibitions of the true.

In these circumstances, John the Baptist, the illustrious harbinger of Christ, interposed with his bold and determined opposition to existing and growing corruption, and was, by the blessing of God, a powerful instrument of reformation. He called on his countrymen to *repent, for, said he, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the regions round about Jordan, confessing their sins.*

In this situation of things, THE SON OF GOD himself appeared. Gloriously superior as he is to all the others, and in many respects differing from them, yet, as the reformer of religion, he coincided in character and conduct with his faithful servants. He came to restore, maintain, and advance the truth. He came to recover the Church from the corruptions into which it had degenerated; and to

raise the true religion, which had been so often injured or renounced, to *the perfection of beauty*. He came, as he himself declared, *not to destroy, but to fulfil the law*. From his sermon on the Mount, to his last public address, in which he still more pointedly condemned the errors of the Scribes and Pharisees, almost all his discourses were leveled against corruptions; and his whole life was a disinterested struggle for reformation. In this important view he himself represents his ministry. *The world cannot hate you, but me it hateth, because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil*. Christ's life on earth, was thus a continued opposition to iniquity, in every shape; and a laborious and unceasing effort to defend and advance the truth, in all its celestial purity. *To this end, says he, was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth*. And in the epistles to the seven churches of Asia, which, in a certain view, may be considered as the most direct addresses from himself after his ascension, he most distinctly and discriminately condemns degeneracies which had appeared in almost the whole of those churches.

The high example of the Son of God is greatly calculated to satisfy the consciences, and to en-

courage the activity and perseverance, of all who are employed in honest and honourable opposition to departures from the truth, and to practices inconsistent with the spirit of religion.

In the grand design of reforming the Church, the apostles and first ministers of Christianity followed the footsteps of their heavenly Lord. *Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, testifying against the awful sin of the Jews, in crucifying the Lord of glory.* On another occasion, Peter and John, not intimidated by imprisonment, made a noble defence of the cause of Christ before the scribes and rulers. And all the disciples, instead of speaking no more in the name of Jesus, as their enemies enjoined, avowed, before the Sanhedrim, and before all the people, their determination to persist in the exhibition of the truth, *as it is in Jesus, and to obey God rather than men.*

We may notice also the example of Stephen, who, during his brief but magnanimous career, manifested, in opposition to the violence of his enemies, an almost unparalleled zeal and vigour, in defending and advancing the truth. *They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.*

It may be added, that the Epistles of Paul are a standing proof, that, wherever errors, in principle or practice, insinuated themselves into the Church, he met them with faithful and earnest opposition. From the records of his ministry, in the Acts of the Apostles, it appears, that, on every occasion, he opposed himself to the ignorancé, prejudices, and superstitions of his Jewish brethren; and, amidst all the threats, reproaches, and persecutions of his enemies, withstood corruption, and promoted the progress of Christ's kingdom. Though the last in being called, he was *not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles*.

Thus, it is evident, that, in all ages, till the canon of Scripture was completed, instruments were raised up, and were graciously, and even miraculously qualified, to vindicate the truth.

The primitive Church, as *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, is Christianity in pure exhibition and operation. The preparatory types and ceremonies of the former dispensation being fulfilled and superseded, the Church seems now to have reached, as far as it could reach, in an imperfect world, that excellence in constitution and spirit, which was to afford a model to all future ages:—a

model according to which, in opposition to the tendencies of human corruption, it ought always to be adjusted; but from which, however, it has often materially deviated, and, speaking generally, is still far removed. Toward an accordance with this model, every divinely-prompted effort, and every holy attainment, tend to carry the Church: and the utmost practicable accordance with it, will, we have every reason to believe, constitute the glory of the Church in the latter day.

The Church on earth, indeed, can never be perfectly free from corruption, and must always, more or less, be militant,—having a constant struggle to carry on for the defence and progress of the truth:—which circumstance is doubtless intended as a trial of the fidelity of men. The same God, however, who, from the beginning to the apostolic age, raised up instruments for defending and purging the Church, continued, after inspiration had ceased, to raise them up in its successive generations, and fitted them, by his grace, for the particular work to which they were called.

At the commencement of the Christian Church, the faithful servants of Christ had to contend chiefly with Judaism. The unbelieving Jews were blindly attached to the law of Moses, which was now no

longer in force, and to their own corrupt notions of which, they adhered with a jealousy, awakened and inflamed by opposition, and a keenness similar to the grasp of those who are afraid that the favoured object they cling to is about to leave them.\* Instigated by hereditary prejudice, instead of examining the scope and design of the ancient system, that they might perceive its fulfilment in Christ, they maliciously opposed the gospel. After the destruction of Jerusalem, however, and their own dispersion, they were no longer in a capacity to make formidable opposition.

But now when Christianity was published through the wide territories of the Roman empire, it had other enemies to encounter. Till the time of Constantine the Great, who began to reign soon after the commencement of the fourth century, the Church, in a variety of circumstances, was met by a succession of dreadful persecutions from the emperors of heathen Rome. During this long period, therefore, the servants of Christ may be contemplated as struggling, on the one hand, against distorted exhibitions of the true religion,

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\* They were attached to the law, not as it was given by Moses, but as it was perverted by the Scribes and Pharisees, who taught, that salvation would be secured by a scrupulous observance of ritual institutions.

and on the other, for its truth, against the complicated system, and varied exhibitions of heathen mythology.

Idolatry, in innumerable shapes, had hitherto prevailed among all nations. The civil rulers, from political views, were all attached to idolatrous worship; and, of course, exerted all their ingenuity and influence to oppress the followers of Christ, and to extirpate his religion. But, by the vigorous struggles of many contenders for the truth, the Church was preserved in a high degree of scriptural simplicity.

It is unnecessary to particularize the horrible cruelties which were inflicted on the Christians during those ages. But, what is much to our purpose, it cannot be too attentively noticed, that Christianity was never maintained in greater purity, nor propagated with greater success, than now, when it was not only unprotected by the state, but resisted by all in civil authority, as well as by the great proportion of the learned and the wealthy. Though opposition was made to the true religion, both by art and violence, though allurements and threatenings were employed, often with success, to induce the Christians to join in idolatrous practices, yet, true believers chose rather to endure

every species of insult and severity, and to meet death in the most appalling forms, than to deny their Saviour. The gospel prospered, in spite of all opposition; and, as it was in Egypt of old, so it was now,—the more the people of God were afflicted, *the more they multiplied and grew*. Let it suffice to remark, that, during this long series of bloody persecutions, when innumerable multitudes were tortured and slain, *the faithful in Christ Jesus* gave the most signal proofs of their heroic patience and fortitude:—insomuch that it became a common saying, the truth of which has been confirmed by the history of all succeeding persecutions, “that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.”

When Constantine began to reign, every thing regarding Christianity assumed a new aspect. The Christians were no longer persecuted. Their religion was established as the religion of the empire; and it received all those honours and emoluments which had formerly been given to heathenism. This might be done with a good design; but its effects were most pernicious. It gave, indeed, worldly splendour to the religion of Jesus, which it never formerly had, and which does not belong to its nature; but it took away, in a far greater degree,

from its real glory. From this period, the Church, which had lost much of its purity, declined more rapidly, and into grosser corruptions. Now, a secular character was enstamped on every thing Christian; and the honours of the state were confined to those who professed the faith of Jesus: of course, formality and hypocrisy in religion became common and formidable; and the distinction of character between Christians and others, was greatly lost.

This union between Church and State, marks the era of sad apostacy. It is true, that before this event, the seeds of corruption had been sown, and had begun to grow; but almost every check to their growth was removed, by the human device of an establishment, which has often proved a blind to conscience, and a bribe to corrupt affections, and been found inimical to free discussion (the birth-right privilege of rational beings), and incompatible with purity of communion. "The Pagans perceiving that Christianity was become the road to preferment, and finding themselves first subjected to disabilities, and afterwards to penalties, for continuing to worship the gods of their ancestors, abandoned their professions, and flocked into the Church by hundreds and by thousands. Their conversion was nominal, and was not founded on conviction; they

retained the prejudices of their superstition unsubdued, instead of throwing them down at the foot of the cross. They could not see the kingdom of God in its proper character, for they were not born again in the spirit of truth; they came not as little children under the tuition of Christ; they introduced into the Church itself the essential principles of Paganism; by their numbers they gave to those principles a footing which was permanent, and which a great part of Christendom has not even yet been able to remove.”\* It thus appears, that when the Church was incorporated with the State, *the mystery of iniquity*, which had long before begun to work, at once presented a prominent shape, and exhibited the visible openings of that system of superstition, which, in the seventh century, was more fully developed, and which at length involved the nations of Europe in darkness and wickedness. Gradually, throughout successive ages, the Church, or rather what was so called, became more and more erroneous in its doctrines, superstitious in its worship, lax in its discipline, and secular in its spirit and government. The office-bearers, in the mean time,

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\* See the *Scottish Pulpit*; a collection of Sermons by eminent Clergymen of the Church of Scotland—p. 290.

so far from escaping the contamination, were its cherishers and promoters. They were proud, and covetous of worldly rank and influence; and they gradually arrogated titles and authority, which are foreign to their sacred calling. The successive Bishops of Rome, in particular, claimed a superiority to all the rest. Their usurpation was gradual. It was, however, most artfully and steadily pursued, till they claimed a jurisdiction, both in things sacred and civil, over the whole of the Christian world.

It is not our intention to enter into the particulars of the rise and progress of antichristian superstition, nor to exhibit, in detail, the increasingly bold and daring encroachments of its promoters. Suffice it to say, that excepting the separation made by the Greek Church, which, retaining much of the superstition, discarded some of the errors of Popery, this system of iniquity was attended with lamentable, and almost unbroken success, till the Protestant Reformation; and that the nations of Europe, by its vile and crafty influence, were sunk into the most pitiable degradation.

But, even from the period when civil and religious matters were unhappily blended, till Papal usurpation was at its utmost height, there were faithful

advocates for the truth, who were, like glimmering tapers, interspersed amidst the overspreading obscurities of that moral darkness. These bore testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the antichristian Church, and handed down the truth, in a high degree of scriptural purity, from generation to generation,—so that, though often in reduced numbers, and in great obscurity, there was a succession of true witnesses for God, in different parts of Europe, now here, and now there, throughout even the darkest periods of antichristian usurpation.

It would be tedious, and it is unnecessary, to go over this long period; and to speak—of the illustrious contenders for the truth,—of the times and circumstances in which they lived,—of the manner in which they acted,—of the sufferings which they endured,—and of the success with which their activity and zeal were attended. From many valuable historical works, having these objects more immediately in view, we may obtain such information:—information which all must acknowledge to be deeply interesting; as these champions in the cause of Christ, and their faithful adherents, were *the excellent ones of the earth*,—were those *of whom the world was not worthy*. A history of these is a history of the Church:—for that is not The Church,

though it may arrogate the name, in which the features of Christianity are distorted, and its spirit, tendency, and ends, are destroyed. It must be acknowledged, that, in general, the true Church has been found subjected to tyranny and oppression, in one shape or other, and has required, more or less, the vigorous and unwearied efforts of bold and enterprising leaders to preserve its existence, and to promote its progress. It must, indeed, be confessed, that whilst superstition was so deeply rooted, and had so widely extended its baneful influence, these leaders, contending for the truth, could do little to stem the course of that corruption, which almost deluged Europe. They succeeded, however, in preserving, to some extent, evangelical religion among themselves, and in transmitting it to their successors; though, to escape the tyranny of Rome, and shelter themselves from other enemies who submitted to the Papal yoke, or had adopted other systems of delusion or superstition, they were often obliged, like their suffering predecessors of old, *to wander in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*

But as, in the natural world, the thickest gloom of night is said immediately to precede the dawn, so the grossest darkness of antichristian abomina-

tion, was the prelude to the dawn of that pure and benign light, which shone forth in the Reformation. Now, more strenuous efforts than ever were made, and more adventurous champions were raised up by God. In various places, illustrious characters were induced to take the field, in the honourable struggle for the interests of true religion. Huss on the Continent, Wickliff in England, and Hamilton and Wishart in Scotland, were instruments, under God, in preparing the way for actual reformation. These excellent individuals all exerted themselves in detecting and exposing the absurdities and impositions of Popery, and in exhibiting divine truth in its native beauty. With the exception of Wickliff, who died in peace, they all perished in the flames, through the cruel jealousy and rage of their enemies. The doctrines, however, of these eminent witnesses for truth did not die with them, but were as spiritual seed, which, in the course of time, sprung up with astonishing strength, and produced abundant and prosperous fruit.

In proportion to the extent of reformation, which God wills to effect, have been the strength, efficiency, and triumph of the agents, who have been called into activity. Now, therefore, that he in-

tended a great and general revival, after so much darkness, corruption, and iniquity, an host of able and faithful instruments was called forth, to expose the errors of the antichristian system, and to restore, defend, and circulate the truth.

The name of Martin Luther is familiar to every enlightened Protestant. This celebrated Reformer, possessed of distinguished talents and extensive learning, employed all his energies in rescuing the truth from the impositions of Popery. He began his attacks on the system of error, superstition, and wickedness, soon after the commencement of the sixteenth century; and, from one step to another, he pushed his oppositions till the very basis on which it had rested for ages began to shake, and to exhibit symptoms of weakness. Though many difficulties opposed themselves to this zealous and resolute advocate for *pure and undefiled religion*, he was not deterred nor disconcerted. With zeal, which seemed to be more and more awakened and animated in proportion to the multitude and strength of obstacles, he pursued the great work of reformation which he was honoured to begin. By his exertions, and those of Melancthon, Zuinglius, Calvin, and other eminent men, the interesting work of reformation made successful and extensive progress,

insomuch that, at length, a destruction of the influence of Popery was accomplished in several nations of Europe.

It was by such agents, under God, that the Reformation was effected. It was evidently a great, though not a complete, spiritual revolution. It laid the foundation for all those advances which have been since made by many portions of the Church, and which shall hereafter be made, till *the heathen be given to Christ for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.*

The reformation of religion in Scotland, was as much needed, and, through the divine blessing, was as thoroughly accomplished, as in any country. Scotland, which had been among the first, in the primitive ages, to embrace the truth in its purity, had also early submitted to the yoke of antichrist. Prelacy had been introduced into it, in the fifth century; and, in the course of the next two centuries, Popery had succeeded. A long period of darkness had followed, during which, however, the light of religion had been preserved by the Culdees, in a higher degree of purity than had been done any where else in the north of Europe. Yet, prior to the Reformation, even this light seems to have been almost, if not wholly, extinguished.

When, however, the blessed era of Reformation arrived, John Knox, at the head of the friends of pure religion, acted an able and honourable part, in the keen struggle between truth and error. *He set his face like a flint*; and both encouraged his coadjutors to persevere, and contended, with his opponents, in powerful and unanswerable argument. Through these unwearied efforts, the Reformation was carried to greater perfection in this than in other countries.

In organizing the Protestant Church in Scotland, the illustrious champions of Reformation followed no existing system, not even the Genevan model, but endeavoured to form their plan directly from the Holy Scriptures. Knox was indeed partial to the model which Calvin had adopted. This, however, was because it accorded most with his own ideas respecting the constitution of a Scriptural Church. But, "he did not indiscriminately approve, nor servilely imitate, either that or any other existing establishment."\*

The reformation of religion, whether viewed in its progress on the Continent at large, or in our

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\* Dr. McCrie's *Life of Knox*, vol. ii. page 2.

own country in particular, may be considered as an effort, divinely excited, to restore to the primitive standard, the Christian Church, almost the whole of which had been brought under the corrupting yoke of antichrist. The success was great, but not complete. The end is not yet reached by the Reformed Church in general, and will not be reached by it, till every trace of antichristian superstition, and of a secular character, be removed.

It was not, indeed, to be expected, that Luther, and Calvin, and others in foreign countries, and Knox and his coadjutors at home,—could emerge, all at once, from the darkness of Popery,—could free themselves from all the prejudices of their education,—and could acquire clear views of divine truth on every point. These illustrious individuals only commenced the great work of reformation, in which their followers were to make further progress, and advances in which should be uninterruptedly made, till the Church be restored to the primitive standard of scriptural simplicity.

The Reformation in Scotland had indeed advanced with success equal to the most sanguine expectations. But, though in 1560, it might be considered as confirmed, it was still exposed to considerable danger. The Popish party was nu-

merous and powerful, and waited only for an opportunity to attempt a restoration of their ancient worship. In this they were encouraged by many circumstances, which it is not necessary to enumerate.

Their attempts were never successful; and, indeed, from the extent to which reformation had been carried, there could be little hope of their success. But the Presbyterians had other opponents, who were more successful. For, during more than a hundred years, they had to maintain, with little interruption, the most resolute struggles with the Episcopalians. Though the attempts to introduce Episcopacy were, for a season, vigorously resisted, yet, with every favourable opportunity, endeavours were again and again made, and were repeatedly triumphant.

The true friends of reformation uniformly refused submission to the intolerant impositions of their adversaries; and often, at the risk of their lives, gave publicity to their sentiments.

Though the Reformation in Scotland was carried to great perfection, yet, from the number and determined spirit of its opponents, in successive generations, the calling forth of instruments, to preserve and carry forward this great work, was particularly necessary. There is even reason to

suppose, that the ends of Reformation would have been entirely defeated in our land, had not the Gracious Head of the Church thus interposed for her protection and progress.

Among the divinely-excited movements for securing and promoting the designs of the first Reformers from Popery in our land,—the vigorous efforts of the faithful, between 1638 and 1650,—the unwearied struggles of the generation of heroes, between the Restoration and the Revolution,—the honest and zealous contendings of the marrow-men, and others, in the Revolution-Church,—and the determined stand, and honourable exertions of the Four Brethren, in whom the Secession Church originated, may be considered as the most remarkable and efficient. These instruments, acting in different circumstances, and with varied success, were among the genuine followers of those early Reformers, and endeavoured, through God, to follow up their design, in the defence and progress of true religion.

We beg leave to call the attention of our readers to two things which were ever kept in view, by all who deserve to be ranked among the friends of Reformation. They first determined, through grace, to hold fast what they had already attained;

and, secondly, they resolved to go forward in the great work, by availing themselves of every favourable opportunity for this purpose, till the Church had attained complete scriptural simplicity and purity. These two ends were never lost sight of, by any in the line of faithful witnesses, who followed Knox and his coadjutors; and, even after the Revolution, when the Church obtained a glorious rest from her *tossings to and fro*, having not even then *attained*, neither being then *perfect*, the faithful, zealous, and enlightened servants of Christ, still sought, not only to keep what they had reached, but to *press* forward to higher degrees of consistency and purity in religion.

This has been the general tendency and endeavour of the lives of all true Reformers, as is abundantly clear, from the examples to which we have summarily referred. And were we to analyze their characters and actions, we would find, that, as far as they were influenced by divine grace, this one grand aim was kept in view, in all that they sought, and in all that they did. Nay, could we look into their souls, and trace out their personal experience as Christians, we would find that the same solitudes were felt, and the same efforts made, for their

own growth in grace, as for the prosperity of the Church at large.

The above rapid sketch, of contentings for the truth from the beginning, is intended as introductory to the more full account we propose to give, of the able, unwearied, faithful, and successful witnessings of ONE, who, in conjunction with others, was sincerely seeking the purity and progress of religion, and whose character requires no vindication, but needs only to be faithfully exhibited, in order to be venerated by every enlightened and genuine Christian. And the chief reason why we have presented the preceding notices, is to show that, in all right exertions for the interests of religion, the same holy principles are found characteristic of the sincere advocates for truth.

Nay, from the cursory illustrations already given, and from the details on which we are about to enter, it will appear that the honest and conscientious profession, and practice of religion, have been almost always found amongst men who were opposed by human craft and policy, and, of course, subjected to many worldly inconveniences.

The subject of our narrative, is the late Reverend WILLIAM WILSON, of Perth;—one of the Four

Brethren who founded the Secession Church. In exhibiting his character and conduct, we shall be led to ascertain the general state of religion in Scotland, at the time of his birth, immediately after the Revolution, and be enabled, from his own statements, to mark the course of events, chiefly ecclesiastical, from that period to the close of his life, when the Secession Church was fully organized.

As he was an advocate for the truth, not more prominent than many others before the Secession, and but one of the four with whom it originated, it may, by some, be considered unwarrantable and presumptuous, to blend with his life alone, illustrations of events in which so many were equally concerned. But the plan is adopted under all the weight of this objection, from a conviction that no justice can be done to the subject of the narrative, as none could be done to the characters of any of his coadjutors, without referring to the ecclesiastical occurrences of the times, and from a conviction that brief illustrations of these events may be useful, independently of the life, and that the incidents of the life may give them more variety and interest.

For the sake of perspicuity, we shall divide the Memoirs of Mr. Wilson's life, and the historical sketches to be introduced in connection with them,

into three Periods, each of which shall be subdivided into several Chapters. The first Period, is from his Birth to his Ordination to the Holy Ministry; the second, is from his Ordination to the rise of the Secession Church; and the third, is from the origin of the Secession to his Death. The whole embraces a duration of fully fifty years, (from 1690 to 1741,) and relates to very important and interesting events in the history of religion in our native country.

## PERIOD I.

FROM HIS BIRTH TO HIS ORDINATION.

1690—1716.

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### CHAPTER I.

*From his Birth to his entrance on the Study of Divinity.*

1690—1708.

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THE REVEREND WILLIAM WILSON was born in Glasgow, on Sabbath the 9th of November, 1690. His father was Mr. Gilbert Wilson, a respectable proprietor of a small estate, near East Kilbride, in Lanarkshire, who, during the reign of Charles the Second, being zealously attached to the Presbyterian religion, was persecuted for conscience' sake; and, like many others, in the course of that period of tyranny and oppression, deprived, by the civil authorities, of his property,\* and obliged to conceal himself, that he might escape the sword of his per-

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\* Besides forfeiting his heritable property, his moveables were escheated, and sold at the Cross of Glasgow.

secutors. Among other hardships, he was under the necessity of living a whole winter in that extensive moorland, commonly called Mearns-Muir. Here he lived unsheltered and alone, that he might evade the eager search of his enemies. His place of concealment was known only to a faithful female servant, who brought daily what nourishment he required, acquainting him with the movements of his enemies, as far as she could trace them, and giving him such information as might be useful in preserving his concealment, or facilitating his escape. From this place he retreated, like many, to Holland, where he remained till the memorable Revolution, in 1688, when he came over with the Prince of Orange. On his return, however, his forfeited lands were not restored. He, therefore, took up a temporary residence in Glasgow, till some situation should occur, by the emolument of which he might support his family. After remaining in Glasgow, for two or three years, he obtained from government, through the influence of his friends, as some compensation for his losses, the situation of Comptroller of the Customs in Greenock, whither he immediately went.

This gentleman, probably about the time of his return from Holland, had married Isabella Ramsay,

a lady of kindred spirit, who like himself had been a sufferer in the cause of religion, and who was every way suited to be his partner in life. Her history also is interesting. She was a daughter of Mr. Ramsay's, of Shielhill, a gentleman of property, near Kerrymuir, in Forfarshire, who was a rigid adherent to the Episcopalian interests in Scotland; and, with the other branches of his family, was a keen and bigoted Jacobite. In very early life, while on a visit to her aunt, Mrs. Guthrie, wife to Mr. James Guthrie, of Stirling, that eminently godly minister, who died a martyr in the cause of Christ, her religious views were changed, and she became pious, and embraced the Presbyterian religion. After her return home, she succeeded, for a time, in concealing from her father the result of her visit to Mr. Guthrie's family; but he soon discovered the revolution of her religious sentiments, and, with severe threatenings, insisted on a renunciation of her new profession. She, however, remained firm, and expressed her resolution to abide by what her conscience convinced her was agreeable to the Word of God. Her proud and inflexible parent immediately disowned and disinherited her; on which, being thrown on the world destitute, she returned to Stirling, and put herself under the

protection of Mr. and Mrs. Guthrie, who, having no children, adopted her as their own.

These were the parents of Mr. Wilson, the subject of these Memoirs. He inherited all their excellences; and, though he lived in somewhat better times, yet, in the course of providence, he was subjected to trials in the cause of pure religion, for enduring which, the early instructions and example of these, his worthy parents, were blessed to prepare him. He was born in the Gallowgate of Glasgow, during the temporary residence of his parents in that city. Like a true Christian patriot, his father named him WILLIAM, after the Prince of Orange, the honoured instrument, under whom God, in his gracious providence, brought about the glorious Revolution.

It was the earnest desire, both of the father and mother of Mr. Wilson, that if it were the will of God, their dear and only son should serve him in the gospel of Christ. To the sacred office of the ministry, they had, therefore, early and often, devoted him; and, from the indications of youthful talent and piety which he exhibited, they were encouraged to hope, that, if spared, he might become a blessing to the Church.

When he was about twelve years of age, his mother took him to Shielhill, on a visit to her brother, who, by this time, their father being dead, was the proprietor of the estate. This gentleman was unmarried, and Mr. Wilson was his nearest heir. He asked his sister what she meant to make of her boy. When she said, that her highest ambition was, that her son should be a minister of Christ, in connection with the Church of Scotland, he showed himself to be of the same disposition with his late father, before referred to, by affirming, with imprecations, that no Presbyterian should ever heir his lands. But, notwithstanding this declaration, she was firm to her purpose, and determined, that, if God were willing, it would be her endeavour to educate him for the holy ministry.

As, in the case before us, "It will be the first concern of religious parents to surrender their children to the Lord. And may they not, in submission to God, dedicate them to his special service, and, by continued prayer, instruction, and encouragement, foster the desire of a good work? Although we sometimes observe a sovereignty in these things, commanding our silent awe, who knows in how many instances the Church of God may have received her ministers, in connection with the secret

pious dedication of parents? Some parents may aspire at this office for their sons, from the respectability or emolument connected with it; and others may, in both of these views, look down upon it with contempt, as befitting only the mean and the poor; but the Christian, judging rightly, will magnify this office, as investing him who discharges it faithfully, with the highest honours, and imparting to him the richest rewards. Hannah is not the only parent in Israel whose man-child has been lent unto the Lord all the days of his life, and who has considered the special service of God on earth, in connection with the enjoyment of him in heaven, as the highest consummation for which children could be wished, or which could be wished for children.”\*

Mr. Wilson, according to the wishes of his parents, and his own inclinations, entered the University of Glasgow, probably towards the end of the year 1704, with a view to study for the Church.

His excellent mother died on the 24th of January, 1705, when he was but fourteen years of age. Though he seems to have been seriously disposed, from his

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\* Memoir of the late Reverend Thomas Halliday of Airdrie, by the Reverend Andrew Symington of Paisley.—p. 9, 10.

earliest youth,\* yet this bereavement appears to have been so sanctified, as to prove the means of very much deepening his religious impressions. We are led to make this inference from two very interesting facts. First, it was in the early part of this year that he publicly joined in fellowship with the Church; and, in consequence, during the summer of 1705, as well as afterwards, he was very much in the habit of frequenting sacramental occasions throughout the surrounding neighbourhood, especially in those places where the ministers were evangelical, and had evangelical assistants. And, secondly, he began, from this early period, to record more regularly and particularly† his spiritual exercise on these occasions, or the impressions left by them. His youthful Christian experience, like that probably of all real believers, even the most matured in gracious exercise, seems to have been varied, sometimes by comforting, and sometimes by disquieting feelings. Part of his diary, near the commencement, is lost. What remains, in reference to this early period of his life, touches very

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\* He had, on the 2d of August, 1704, solemnly devoted himself, by covenant to God, in secret.

† He had kept some general records of religious experience previous to this, which are referred to, but not in preservation.

summarily on events, which he seems to have recorded more largely in some other volume. This summary consists chiefly in abrupt and unconnected expressions of gratitude to God for mercies received, and in confessions of his sins, on some occasions alluded to. He particularly refers to his mother's death, and expresses his earnest desire, that the bereavement might be sanctified for his spiritual good. We find him, at this early season, employing this solemn address,—“O my soul, never forget the goodness of God to thee, in bringing thee *out of darkness into his marvellous light* ;” and recounting, with gratitude and delight, the steps of God's providential goodness. Even at this youthful stage of life, it appears that he was in the practice of keeping secret fasts, to confess his sins, and to devote himself anew to the service of God. In the records of his experience as a young Christian, there is much humility,—much of *the meekness and gentleness of Christ*. He laments, that, in some places, where he attended at the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, he felt “much deadness of soul,”—“much coldness and languor of spiritual exercise.” He modestly allows, that, in others, he experienced “something of the Lord's goodness,” which he calls on himself to “remember.” On one occasion, he

gratefully acknowledges, that "he got some little reviving," and expresses himself "desirous not to despise *the day of small things*." We never find any thing of that ecstasy or enthusiasm in his exercise, to which youthful fancy and inexperience have sometimes unwarrantably led:—all is calm, and rational, and scriptural: the self-abasement of the believer, and the exalting of Christ are ever prominent: and the highest feeling of spiritual enjoyment is described as only "some sparks of communion with God." But the concern itself, which he so early manifested, to record his feelings of deadness and revivings, may be considered, surely, as a presumptive evidence of his being under the influence of grace. From the time of his mother's death, he kept a regular diary for twenty-eight years, by far the greater part of which is written, in his own short hand, in two small bound volumes, to which we shall have frequent occasion to refer, and from which we shall make copious extracts.

With respect to these two facts, we may remark, that they present a fine specimen of the spirit and training of a youth intended for the holy ministry. We may observe, with regard to the first, that the practice of joining early in fellowship with the Church, is now, in many places, lamentably rare.

Of the young generation of our day, many do not think of it till they are settled in life; and thus seem to make a public profession, when they do it at all, more as a matter of course or of necessity, than of principle and choice. Even many of the youth, who look forward to the ministry as their future employment, are, we suspect, in this view, far behind some of their predecessors in Mr. Wilson's time. It is to be feared that this profession is often chosen, not from love to Christ, and zeal for his glory and the good of souls, which would likely lead young men, looking forward to it, to dedicate themselves early and explicitly to the Lord, in the ordinance of the Supper; but as a respectable line of life, and from a presumption that they possess, or may acquire, the talents requisite for its functions.

With respect to the keeping of a religious diary, and of beginning to do it, like Mr. Wilson, in early life, we would remark, that though it may not be always practicable, and though, when followed, it may sometimes not have all the good effects which may be expected, yet, with proper caution, experienced Christians, in general, have found it productive of many advantages. To a minister of the gospel, this practice may have effects peculiarly

beneficial. It keeps distinct his personal religion from those official duties which may often exclude direct attention to it, or be mistaken for it: by habituating him to attend to his own spiritual condition, it is a means of cautioning him against sin, of stimulating him to duty, of making him acquainted with his own defects, and thus of being subservient to his usefulness. For, the great traits of human nature being the same in all, he will thus be enabled to speak more to the hearts and consciences of his hearers, by bringing home to them, from his own experience, the truths of the gospel, and by making all Scripture, *given by inspiration of God*, be felt *profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*. It has been said of a venerable father of the Secession Church,\* that, when he heard that wonder was expressed by some of his people at his knowing so well the state of their hearts, as his minute and accurate descriptions indicated, he replied, that if he were at all enabled to speak to the hearts of his hearers, it was because he endeavoured to study his own.

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\* The Rev. Matthew Moncrieff of Abernethy.

Mr. Wilson went through the usual branches of a college education, and pursuing his studies with earnestness and success, soon distinguished himself, both as a scholar and as a Christian. As an evidence of his proficiency, for so we understand it was scrupulously considered at that period, it may be mentioned, that, when he had finished his literary and philosophical studies, he took out his degree of Master of Arts.

As the progress of his education advanced, and especially from this period when he was about to commence the study of Divinity, we find him very often privately devoting himself in solemn covenant to God; and generally doing it with a particular reference to the work of the ministry, the dignified duties of which he anticipated with great delight, and with solemn impressions of their importance. Several examples of self-dedication to God's service are presented in his diary, and though some of them, from the state of the manuscripts, cannot be fully deciphered, yet others are perfectly legible, and strikingly indicate, that, with him, religion was heart-work, and that it was his desire and endeavour to have his whole conduct under its benign and quickening influence: to these, in the fervour of his devotion, his signature is put, as if to intimate

the entireness and sincerity, as well as the irrevocableness of the surrender. The two following specimens belong to this period of his life. The first, is a general profession of his faith, and acceptance of God in Christ as his God,—with desires and resolutions to live to his glory. The last, is a special surrender of himself to Christ, for the services of the gospel ministry, on his entrance on the study of Theology, under Professor Simpson of Glasgow, which took place at this time.

“Covenant entered into on the 30th day of October, 1708, being a secret Fast.

“I, WILLIAM WILSON, do this day, in the presence of the Almighty, Gracious, and Blessed God, declare my faith in Christ Jesus who was crucified, and who is now at the Father’s right hand, and my acceptance of him as the only Saviour. And as, in baptism, I was dedicated and given away to God, and have in the present form given away myself to God,—especially on the 2d of August, 1704, so now, though I have departed from God since that period, yet having some weak sense (for which I thank him) of my backsliding, I this day desire to return; and I do declare that I am pleased with the glorious device of salvation through Christ, and I do close with God in Christ as my God. I desire to receive

the Redeemer, as he is freely offered in the Gospel, to be my Prophet, Priest, and King,—to receive him as my all in all: and, that I may follow him, I do here consent to part with all my lusts and idols, and I protest against that part of my soul that is unwilling to be obedient unto him. And here, declaring that I have chosen God in Christ to be my God, for now and for ever, through this life and through death, and throughout eternity, I take him for the only witness of my covenant, and I praise him for his goodness in determining me thus to surrender myself wholly to himself. *O remember not against me former iniquities, let thy tender mercies speedily prevent me, for I am brought very low.* I desire quickening and reviving. I desire that God may help me to keep this covenant, for without him I can do nothing. And I promise, in his strength, to endeavour against all things that would dishonour him, and to act in every thing for his glory.

“In witness whereof, I subscribe with my own hand, this 30th day of October, 1708,—

WILLIAM WILSON.”

“Also, a solemn dedication of myself, to God’s service, in my day and generation, on the same Fast-day, viz. the 30th day of October, 1708.

“I, also, have given myself to God in a special

covenant, to be for him, soul and body, in the great work that I have set myself upon, and that I have before mine eye. I have thought fit, through God's strength, to dedicate myself to him in this work, in the manner following:—

“I, WILLIAM WILSON, do declare that my coming and now entering on the study of Theology, is (or, at least, the desire of my soul is that it should be) for God's glory, and the good of souls; and that I now, in his name and strength, desire to be-take myself to that study (unless, in some manner, he thinks fit to call me otherwise). And, therefore, I do beg that he may be pleased to give me capacity, memory, and other qualifications, for this end; and make good his promises of assisting me by his grace. I pray that God may, out of the depths of his goodness, give me prudence and resolution to apply my mind to my study, that I may not linger, but come through with credit and success; and, for his name's sake, that he may honour me to be an instrument of glory to him in my body and soul. And I do promise, in his strength, to spend my time better than hitherto, and not to trifle the same away, but to lay it out for God, in my day and generation, improving it for his glory. And, I do bless him who hath, in any manner, determined my mind to

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

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

WILLIAM WILSON.”

“ Though the Fast was kept on Saturday, yet I did not subscribe till Monday the 1st of November, when formally I did dedicate myself.”

The delay in subscribing, which Mr. Wilson here notices, shows that this was no rash vow, but a step taken after deliberate reflection. It is probable that this covenant was subscribed on the day he enrolled himself as a student of Theology.

Besides devoting himself in this solemn manner in covenant to God, it was common with him, in

the prospect of observing the ordinance of the Supper, to examine himself very particularly, and to enumerate, as reasons for coming to Christ in this ordinance, the desires of his heart,—as also his sins, and his spiritual necessities, to the end that he might approach the table of the Lord with a holy excitement, and be prepared with appropriate materials for confession and prayer. These he calls his errands to Christ; and he accustomed himself to write them down, previous to the communion, in those places he visited, that he might ponder them beforehand, and have them full in his soul when he was at the communion table. The following is a specimen of this, immediately after he had entered into the afore-mentioned engagements in secret.

“ In the view of observing the communion of the Lord’s Supper, I desire to have the following things before me:—

1. To seek brokenness of heart for sin and iniquity.
2. To get a solid pardon of sin.
3. To get clear evidence of an interest in Christ.
4. To receive grace to serve God, and to delight in his way.
5. To get corruption mortified.
6. To obtain qualification to serve God more and more, as long as I live.

7. To get pride, formality in prayer, self-conceit, hypocrisy, deadness, subdued, and taken away; and likewise, to get love, self-denial, hope, faith, humility, and all the graces of the Spirit, strengthened and advanced.

8. To get communion with Jesus Christ, and all the benefits of the new covenant made over to me.

9. To pray for friends and relations.

10. To get a sight of the glory of Christ in his beauty and excellency, such as may make me loathe and abhor myself.

11. To get sanctification of heart, and a sweet sense of Christ's love.

12. To get bonds loosed, dead weights taken off my spirit, and especially the dead lump of corruption removed, and to obtain grace to serve God in spirit and in truth.

13. To get clearness whether I am called to the study of Theology."

The preceding enumeration shows that he made religion his business; and that he sought to be influenced by it in all his concerns. This practice he seems to have continued as long as he lived.

In the life of a student at the College, and at the Divinity Hall, there is seldom much incident. Mr.

Wilson's manuscript, at this period, consists chiefly of such solemn exercises as those we have mentioned, and occasional interspersions of his spiritual exercise on ordinary Sabbaths, and in common life. In these he sometimes seems to enjoy a sense of God's gracious presence, and to be growing in grace. But, from his deep hatred of sin in the slightest degree,—from his constant fear of offending God by acting even in thought unworthy of the exalted study in which he was engaged, or by losing a relish for spiritual exercises, and the benefits they were the means of affording, he seems often to be much dissatisfied with his own religious frame and experience, and anxious for more grace to subdue those corruptions which he felt so burdensome.

## CHAPTER II.

*From his Entrance on the Study of Divinity, to his  
License to Preach the Gospel.*

1708—1713.

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It may be thought by some, that such solemn engagements as those we have presented, were likely to cherish a pharisaical reliance on his own strength and resolution, to the exclusion of humble and entire dependance on God, for grace to live a life of holiness. But this is the abuse of religious vowing. When it is performed in a proper frame, it may be a means of strengthening the believer's faith, of guarding him against sin, and of stimulating him in the Christian course. It is, besides, a duty enjoined and exemplified in the Word of God. It appears, from the whole of his recorded exercise, that Mr. Wilson never lost sight of the necessity of trusting to divine grace for ability to proceed, according to the tenor of his vows, in the duties of the Christian life.

The two following examples, in the year 1709, may be given in this place, and may be regarded as sufficient to show the serious character, views,

desires, and endeavours of their framer; and also as illustrative, like the preceding ones, of his distrust of himself, and his dependance on God alone.

“ I, WILLIAM WILSON, do, from a sense of mine own unworthiness and sinfulness, betake myself to Christ, for pardon of all my sins; and having set this day apart for fasting and prayer, do confess that I am entirely indebted to thy grace, and that I am without righteousness to justify me: and I do desire to come to Christ for the bright robe of his righteousness to cover me, and pray to be kept in thy fear, and enabled to take Christ for my all,—for my portion and Saviour,—for my all in all. And, relying on his strength and promises, I take him for my God, in the hope that he may yet call me to his service in the gospel.

WILLIAM WILSON.”

“ 7th February, 1709.”

“ Personal Covenant entered into, 18th June, 1709.

“ Glorious Lord, I, having deeply backsliden from thee, do come this day for forgiveness of sin through Christ. *Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.* May I be sanctified by the Spirit of my God. I do this day confess my own unrighteousness, and

come to God in Christ for pardon; and I desire to be clothed with the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ,—choosing him for my all, and surrendering my all to him,—soul and body, as *a living sacrifice*, which is my *reasonable service*. I desire that every thing in me may be for him,—all the powers of my body, and all the faculties of my mind. I do this day choose Christ; and I would give to him my time, talents, and every thing that is mine. I would join myself to him in covenant, and enlist myself in his service. I would take him for my prophet, priest, and king,—for my all-sufficient and everlasting portion. May he rule in my soul,—extending his sceptre over me, and subduing all my corruptions; and, especially, may my pride and self-conceit be brought down, and rooted out, and may I be wholly for his glory.

“Glorious God, I surrender my soul to thee. Be thou my portion, as this day I take Thee—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for my portion. In his name and strength, and with uplifted hand, I swear before God this day. Glorious God, do thou subdue sin in my soul, and enable me to grow in holiness. I confess my sins of pride and vanity, of mis-spending time, and slighting the means of grace. I bless thee for Christ; and I desire to be washed

in his blood. O Lord, let me be for thee, and be thou mine only God. Break down all my lusts and all my idols; and enable me to live, not for myself, but for thy praise, and honour, and glory, in my day and generation.

WILLIAM WILSON."

It was by such exercises as these that Mr. Wilson went forward in a course of training for the holy ministry; and, we conceive, that they must have greatly contributed to mature his mind for the solemn duties he had in contemplation.

But whilst he thus spent much of his time in these devotional exercises, he was also diligent, and even laborious, in studying Divinity as a system, and as a fundamental branch of education, that he might appear in public with credit to himself and advantage to others. Nor did he even now overlook, or but superficially review, the preparatory studies in science and literature, in which he had been occupied before he ranked as a student of Theology.

As a proof of his diligence and piety in the course of his present studies, we present the following arrangement he made of his time, to which we have no doubt he as faithfully adhered as circumstances permitted. It is taken from one of his manuscripts;

and though it may be observed, that he allows no time for his meals, yet this may be accounted for from his solitary situation, and his entire devotedness to his study, which would make him, no doubt, quickly dispatch them.

“ Rise at 6 in the morning: in summer at 5.

“ TIME DIVIDED.

“ From rising till 9, ..... Prayer & Scripture reading.

From 9 to 11, ..... Natural Philosophy & Biblical Criticism.

From 11 to 12, ..... Latin.

From 12 to 2, ..... Hebrew and Greek.

From 2 to 5 or 6, ..... Systematic Theology.

From 6 to 7, ..... History.

From 7 to 9, ..... Common-place Book.

The rest in Prayer.

“ Prayer also at 10, at 2, and at 6, at lying down and rising up: read three chapters of the Bible every day: read through the Hebrew Scriptures, three chapters a-day.”\*

“ *Glasgow, 2d June, 1710.*”

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\* By persevering in this exercise, he very soon became a first-rate Hebrew scholar. His proficiency in other languages, as well as the various departments of learning, was also remarkable, especially in the Latin, which he could speak with ease and fluency.

This document shows, that, when he had entered on the important study of Theology, he did not allow himself to forget his former acquirements, but endeavoured systematically to appropriate portions of time for all branches of useful learning.

On the 1st of June, 1711, Mr. Gilbert Wilson, his father, died. To this trying dispensation, he refers particularly in his diary.

“My father,” says he, “was taken from me on the 1st of June, 1711. On the back\* of my father’s death, I would take notice of the following signal mercies of God:—

1. God’s goodness in providing for my father and mother, when they were destitute.

2. God’s goodness in casting their lot in a place where I had the opportunity of a good education.

And, 3. God’s gracious goodness in restoring to my father, before his death, that comfort of mind which had been, for a time, interrupted.”

“Greenock, 10th June, 1711.

“I communicated here to-day. I weary to get a solid pardon of sin; but, alas! I am never winning\*.

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\* These, and similar modes of expression, are now nearly antiquated, but it has been judged proper scrupulously to preserve them in our extracts. They may be readily excused in a diary, which was never intended

to brokenness of mind, and contrition of spirit, for my sins; especially my sins against a kind father, by grieving and vexing him."

Towards the end of this month, he went to attend the communion at Kilbride, the place of his father's nativity and early life. From the frequent visits he paid to this part of the country, we are inclined to suppose, that he had relatives or intimate connexions living here. At any rate, there was something natural and interesting in visiting it, amidst the grief produced by his late bereavement. There is also something very natural in the outset, and interesting in the whole, of his exercise here. The following extracts from the diary, relate to this visit:—

*"Kilbride, Fast-day before the Communion.*

"I have ground of humiliation this day, on the following accounts:—

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to meet the public eye, and is in these instances expressed in the terms which were most familiar, or which at the moment presented themselves to the mind of the writer. But it deserves to be noticed, that, although Scotticisms sometimes occur in the diary, yet comparatively few are to be found in his writings for the public. And, on the whole, the style of his publications will not suffer by a comparison with that of almost any Scottish writer of that period. Even in the diary, Scotticisms are surprisingly rare, and the style in general (which, in these particular instances, is the conversational dialect of the period) will be seen to be very superior, and especially the language in which the covenants are expressed, is admirably suited to their nature.

1. My sinful carriages to my relations, and especially towards my father, who is now gone.

2. My breach of solemn communion engagements.

3. My lightness, instability of spirit, unconcernedness, hardness of heart, slighting the reading of the Scriptures, formality in prayer, dullness and deadness in duties.

4. My pride, self-seeking, hypocrisy, carnality, and not laying myself out for the glory of God."

" *Kilbride, 24th June, 1711.*

" At the communion I desire to pray for—

1. A concern for the glory of God.

2. A loosing of bonds; *a broken heart and a contrite spirit.*

3. A greater inclination to surrender myself wholly to God, *to be for him and not for another.*

4. To seek qualifications for serving God in the work I have before me.

5. To get a soul-strengthening and quickening meal, and a desire for spiritual things wrought upon my soul.

6. To put my unstable lot, empty vain mind, in the Lord's hand, that I may be brought into a proper frame."

Now, that he was a solitary wanderer, bereaved of both his parents, he proposed to take a journey to Forfarshire, on a visit to his mother's friends. Having few relatives, he seems even to have looked in this direction as to his home, and to have had thoughts of remaining for a considerable period. With this purpose, it is evident, from the following extracts, that he sought the Lord's direction in this, as in all his ways.

“Mearns\* Communion, which was on the 1st of July, 1711.

I desire, in commemorating the death of Christ,

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

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

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

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

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

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\* Renfrewshire.

6. To get sin pardoned and subdued.
7. To get clearness about going to the North.
8. To get more concern for the glory of Christ.

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

Also all the errands drawn up for Mearns Communion, on the 26th of June, 1709.”\*

“Errands of humiliation on Thursday the 12th

\* These are as follow:—“Errands to the Communion of Mearns, drawn up on the Fast-day. Mearns Communion is to be on the 26th of June, 1709.

1. To keep up the memory of Christ’s death till he come.
2. To seek to have all the benefits of the covenant of grace made over to me.

3. To draw strength from a slain Christ; to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof; to die to sin, and live more to righteousness; for the mortification of heart-wickedness, lightness, self-conceit, vanity, and to draw virtue from a broken Christ; to bring my heart to live more to his promise; to live more with a stayed mind on him; and to walk in his ways and keep his commandments.

4. To get a clear discovery of Christ, and more assurance of his love.

5. To surrender soul, body, and all to him, and to choose him for my all in all; to enlist myself under his banner, and to fight under him as the great Captain of salvation.

And, 6. To offer up the sacrifice of praise for the new covenant of my redemption through Christ, and to praise him for his love.”

N. B.—The reference to this, two years afterwards, proves that he was accustomed to review his diary, that he might profit by past experience. The first of these six particulars, as may be supposed, occurs invariably, in one form or another, in his exercises of this kind; but to prevent repetition, has been generally omitted in the examples produced by us.

of July, being the Fast-day before the Barony Communion.—I confess,

1. My wanderings and imperfections in duty.

2. My great sin the last Sabbath, in exercising a spirit not like the spirit of the gospel—even in my careless hearing the Word of God, and indulging in sinful thoughts.

3. My wearying in sacred services, and my little concern to lay myself out for God.

4. My misimproving the gospel: my mis-spending time which might be occupied in a concern for God's glory, and the revival of his work in Scotland."

"May God give me qualifications for serving him. If he pleaseth, let him further my North-country journey. May he bless me with his presence at all times, and in all places."

"Errands to Barony Communion, on the 15th of July, 1711. In commemorating the Lord's death—I desire,

1. To return to the Lord, *from whom I have deeply revolted.*

2. To get the hardness, unconcernedness, and little spirituality of my heart taken away; to get the carnality of my mind removed; and to get a holy and deep impression of the importance of divine things on my soul.

3. To seek a solid pardon of sin, and to make application to Christ for pardon, for life, for light, for strength.

4. To seek the Lord's presence with me in the North, that he may be with me, and direct me in my way, and order my steps aright.

5. To receive grace from Christ's fulness; that he may be known in the breaking of bread; and that I may, by faith, see Jesus at his own table."

"Monday, 16th July, 1711.

"I fear the Lord was not known to me in the breaking of bread yesterday; but when I went home from that Church, I was helped, in some manner, to surrender myself to God in covenant,—the tenor whereof follows:—

"I, WILLIAM WILSON, dedicate and consecrate myself to be the Lord's,—to be wholly for him in my day and generation. And I take Christ for my all,—for *wisdom, righteousness, sanctification*, and complete *redemption*. And I adhere to all the solemn engagements I have formerly come under. This, in the strength of the Lord, I subscribe with my own hand, day and date above stated.

WILLIAM WILSON."

On the 24th of July, 1711, he set out from

Glasgow for Angus, where he arrived on the 27th. He stayed with his friends till the month of April, 1712.

During his stay here, a circumstance occurred, which very remarkably shows him to have been a young man of most scrupulous honour and integrity, —decidedly and steadily conscientious in following that line of conduct which he conceived to be agreeable to the Word of God, even where strong temptations to act otherwise were presented. When he declared his intention of entering the ministry, his uncle, whom we before referred to, and who was rich, informed him that he was his lawful heir, and that if he would take orders in the Episcopal Church, he would leave him his whole property; but, if not, he would leave it to some other branch of the family. He was not, however, to be bribed to a renunciation of his principles. He unhesitatingly refused compliance with the proposed condition of his bigoted relative,—who immediately declared, that he would never leave his lands to a Whig minister.

Having returned from the North early in the spring, and finished his course of Divinity, he spent the summer and autumn months of 1712, in Glasgow and its neighbourhood, expecting to be taken on

trials for license to preach the gospel. Owing to the particular state of the Church, however, to which he makes pointed references in his diary, his expectations were, for a time, disappointed. No opportunity was afforded him for getting forward in Glasgow Presbytery. Here, rather, there were obstacles thrown in his way. At length, he had an invitation to enter on trials, from a quarter whence he did not expect it. For, towards the end of this year, having occasion to be in the bounds of Dunfermline Presbytery, with the ministers of which, attracted by their highly evangelical character,\* he was on terms of intimacy and friendship, they proposed that he should bring his testimonials from Glasgow Presbytery, and go through the usual trials with them. With this invitation he complied, regarding it as providential. Our information on these matters is taken from two sections in his manuscripts: the first of which is entitled, "Remarks on my spiritual condition, in January, 1713;" and, the second, "Remarks upon some occurrences, especially

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\* At this period, "the Presbytery of Dunfermline was distinguished for able, holy, and zealous ministers,—Messrs. Cuthbert and Mair, at Culross; Plenderleith, at Saline; Hog, at Carnock; Logan, at Torryburn; Charteris, at Inverkeithing; Bathgate, at Orwell; Gib, at Cleish." —*Brown's Gospel Truth, Memoir of the Rev. Ralph Erskine*, p. 71.

since the beginning of November, 1712." Our extracts from these sections, will illustrate this part of his life, and afford some important notices respecting the state of religion in Scotland at that period.

"In the latter end of the year, 1708," says he, "the Lord had given me a sweet reviving, had loosed my bonds, and blessed me with something of nearness to himself. For a short time I was helped to live near the Lord, and to consider with gratitude the manifestations of his goodness to my soul. But after that, I went backward, and grew worse and worse. This backsliding was increased by my stay at Angus, where I grew careless and formal like the world. Many a time I scarcely kept up the form of secret prayer. For my sins there, I have great reason to mourn."

"At the beginning of November, 1712, I went to Airth, and from that to Culross and Dunfermline, where it was proposed to me (not thinking on any such thing) to enter on trials before the Presbytery there. The Presbytery advised me to go home, and bring my testimonials. Accordingly I went and procured them, and sent them in a letter to that country, about the beginning of December. I expected to receive an answer, and was greatly

perplexed at not hearing, and thought the Lord had put some stop in my way to punish me for my sins."

Whilst he was thus agitated, the arrival of the expected letter from the Presbytery of Dunfermline, afforded much relief to his mind.

"About the latter end of January," says he, "I received a letter, wherein I was informed that my testimonials were approved of, and this afforded me great satisfaction.

"There are two things in my eye, which moved me to think of entering upon trials at this time, and in this Presbytery.

1. The gloomy and ruining-like dispensations of the day and time wherein we live. I do not know how soon I might be deprived of an opportunity of coming forward, were I to enter upon trials in some of the Presbyteries I have been in.

And, 2. The Presbytery of Dunfermline is an honest\* Presbytery,—not one of its members have taken the oath of abjuration,—and very few have behaved so honestly since the Revolution, as that Presbytery.

"Upon the back of all, I think, that, after a serious search, I am able to say, that the glory of the

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\* A faithful.

Lord is in my eye in entering upon trials; and that, if I come to pass trials, I desire to speak of Christ's righteousness, and to show forth his praise. I desire to proclaim the gospel of salvation by free grace, and to hold it up purely according to the Word of God."

These extracts exhibit to us, in some measure, the state of religion at this period. The Church in Scotland seems to have been rapidly losing its evangelical character, and to have been already in a state of great and alarming corruption. It may appear extraordinary, and almost incredible, that so soon after the Revolution, it should have thus degenerated. But a little attention to what was the real constitution of the Revolution-Church, and a brief retrospect of the occurrences of the times, will solve this difficulty.

From the dreadful and almost unequalled severity of the persecution, for a period of twenty-eight years, even the advantages secured by the Revolution, great and many as they were, might be over-rated.

In the course of this period of tyranny and cruelty, nearly four hundred\* faithful ministers, in Scotland

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\* Wodrow.

alone, were ejected from their charges, for their conscientious refusal to comply with the enactments by which Episcopacy was enforced. The churches of these ministers were immediately filled by a set of men, who, with but few exceptions, were the most dissolute and unprincipled, being destitute not only of the power, but even of the appearance of godliness.

Throughout this disastrous period, the ministers and people of Christ were literally *persecuted from city to city*, and *hunted like partridges on the mountains*. Some, whose alleged criminality was of less magnitude, were banished from the kingdom. Many were publicly executed for their conscientious resistance to these desolating invasions on the Lord's heritage. Not a few were put to death, even in cold blood, without the form of trial.

It was amidst these outrages on justice and humanity, that the father of Mr. Wilson, as we have noticed, after suffering many privations, was obliged to flee from his native country, and he was but one of many who were reduced to the same necessity.

By such severe and arbitrary measures, it was thought that the faithful ministers would be intimidated, and their followers diminished. But these measures were the very means of leading to revivals.

For, by the dispersion of the godly throughout the country, as of the disciples from Jerusalem by the first persecution, the seeds of sound doctrine were widely sown, or where sown already, were watered and made to grow up and flourish; and thus an host of witnesses was preserved, whose names and whose deeds deserve to be remembered, and to whom Scotland is indebted, both for the defence of religion during the persecuting reigns, and for its being at length rescued, in a great degree, from the corruptions by which it had been debased. Through their unwearied exertions, to use the language of a pious writer of that period, "The word of God grew exceedingly, and went through at least the southern borders of the kingdom like lightning, or like the sun in its meridian beauty, discovering so the wonders of God's law, the mysteries of his gospel, and the secrets of his covenant, and the sins and duties of that day, that a numerous issue was begotten to Christ, and his conquest was glorious."\*

After a series of such trials and dangers, it may easily be conceived, that the Revolution would appear, as doubtless it was, a singular interposition of Providence to restore the peace, liberties, and privi-

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\* Hind let Loose, p. 131.

leges of the Church and Nation. Now, Episcopacy was abolished, and the Presbyterian religion re-established as it had existed a century before.

The openings of Providence, however, are sometimes not followed as they ought; and it was much regretted, that, on King William's ascension to the throne, a greater determination was not manifested in Scotland, to secure the rights of conscience in the settlement of religion, according to the Scriptural principles for which the early Reformers had so honourably contended. From the many and long continued infringements which had been made on the liberties of the Church, it might have been expected that measures would have been proposed, and insisted on, for protecting religion against Erastian and despotic influence,—especially, as an opportunity was now afforded, more favourable than had yet occurred, for advancing the work of Reformation to a degree of perfection which had not been attained.

Yet, on this occasion, there was, on the part of the Church, a lamentable want of decision, of magnanimity, and of zeal, in asserting their rights, and in promoting the purity and progress of the Redeemer's kingdom. Though Providence gave them the best opportunity of obtaining all that

could have been wished, they made no effort of any importance, to adopt such measures as would have harmonised and consolidated the Presbyterian religion. Presbyterians were pitifully timid, faint-hearted, and dilatory, in their opposition to error and iniquity, and in their witnessings for the truth. We are far from meaning, that the weapons of violence should have been employed; but the gentle, though powerfully efficient weapons of spiritual warfare, ought surely to have been used, in a resolute witnessing against existing errors, and in a zealous assertion of the pure truths of the gospel, and of the privileges which the Church has received from Christ, and consequently ought to retain and vindicate. But so far from acting thus, at least in the degree which might have been expected, the Church in our land, at the memorable Revolution, when it had rest from its enemies, and the means of confirming itself in the possession of invaluable religious privileges, did not, for these high ends, take advantage of this opportunity.

When we consider, indeed, of what elements the Revolution-Church consisted, the want of firmness and zeal in defending and advancing the interests of religion, will appear less surprising.

The first General Assembly, after the signal deliverance, was composed, indiscriminately,—of those who had been persecuted,—of those who had accepted indulgences during the persecuting reigns,—and even of those who had themselves been persecutors.

It is well known that, though, at the Revolution, there was an honourable settlement of religion according to the Presbyterian form, yet, many of the ministers complied with the measures adopted, not from choice, but in submission to the prevailing opinion, and because the possession of their livings might otherwise have been endangered or lost. A considerable proportion of these ministers had a deeply-rooted dislike, not only to Presbytery, but to the doctrine of grace; and they cherished a hope, that their party would increase, and that the system and opinions now recognised, would soon give place to a scheme more congenial to their views and predilections. As such men could not but rejoice to perceive any backsliding from evangelical truth and order, since it encouraged their expectations of more speedily gaining their ends; so they could not but fear and resist any effort to prevent such encroachments, and to raise the present constitution of the Church to what was justly reckoned,

by its more enlightened and faithful members, a greater purity of attainment.

A goodly number of the ministers of the Revolution-Church, it is understood, were evangelical in their doctrine; and the worship in God's house among these, was conducted in some measure of scriptural purity. But the constitutional defects of the settlement of the Church at the Revolution, proved the leaven of corruption, which fast leavened the whole lump: for the reins of government were increasingly relaxed, and in proportion to this did errors in sentiment and practice insinuate themselves and prevail.

Besides the relaxation in ecclesiastical administration, which, in the ordinary course of things, must have led to the growth of error and corruption, there were subsidiary causes by which that growth was accelerated.

From the too close alliance between ecclesiastical and civil matters, the Union of the two Kingdoms in 1707, was, in no small degree, injurious to the interests of the Presbyterian religion. For the Sacramental Test was extended to the subjects of Scotland, as a qualification for office in England and Ireland; by which many persons, in places of civil and military trust and honour, were obliged,

either to relinquish their prospects, or to make a practical renunciation of their religious principles. The Oath of Abjuration, and other restraints and inconveniences, were also introduced, which operated in a similar manner.

The imposition of the yoke of Patronage in 1712, had also a powerful tendency to diminish the purity of the Church.

But what tended, probably more than any thing, to injure the interests of religion, was the propagation of many dangerous sentiments by Professor Simpson and others. The indifference manifested by the Church-courts respecting such sentiments, operated as an encouragement and sanction to their propagation, and led to the more rapid contamination of the minds of young men. Those who were thus trained, soon occupied prominent stations in the ministry, and hence the evil spread more widely and successfully, till the great majority of ministers in the Church of Scotland, it is to be feared, became either greatly indifferent about the interests of religion, or bitter enemies of evangelical truth.

It thus appears that, though, in consequence of the Revolution, the encroachments on the Church during former periods had been in a great measure

repelled, and liberty restored, yet, there existed causes sufficient to account for the decay of evangelical purity and vital godliness, which had taken place at the time of Mr. Wilson's entrance on trials, and in particular for the want of fidelity in Presbyteries, which he so feelingly laments, and "the gloomy and ruining-like dispensations of the day and time."\*

\* That Mr. Wilson gives no exaggerated representation, will appear by the following extracts from Halyburton's Memoirs. They are some of his last words on his death-bed, in the month of September 1712.

"As to the work of the ministry," said he to two ministers who had come to see him, "it was my deliberate choice; were my days lengthened out much more, and days as troublesome as they are like to be, I would rather be a contemned minister of God, than the greatest prince on earth. I preached the gospel of Christ with pleasure, and I loved it; for my own soul's salvation depended upon it; and since I lay down, I have not changed my thoughts about it. I commend it to you all, to make it your business to double your diligence; there may be hard conflicts. You have a prospect of difficulties between you and the grave; we are all good untried: but we have need to have 'on the whole armour of God, to watch and be sober.'"—p. 298.

"I think myself bound to declare my sentiments and sense as to religion. And this I am the rather inclined to do, as a testimony against the growing apostacy of the day we live in, and in expression of my earnest concern to have all with whom I have any influence or interest, to adhere to the truth and way of God, in opposition to that general inclination to apostacy in principle and practice that prevails this day."—p. 312.

"The operations of the Spirit of God are ridiculed in this day: but if we take away the operations and influences of the Spirit of God in religion, I know not what is left. He promised the Spirit to lead us into all truth. Oh, that this generation would awaken, to seek after the

Here, before proceeding to other extracts, illustrative of this portion of his life, it may be proper to remark, that he exceedingly disapproved of taking the oath of abjuration; and that, although some good men were of a different opinion, yet he had, at times, expressed his conviction, that no Presbyterian could consistently submit to it. It appears, that on account of his views on this subject, his own Presbytery at Glasgow, would not enter him

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quickenings influences of the Spirit! Oh, for a day of the down-pouring of the Spirit from on high, in a work of conversion! for such a day as that, when the Spirit of God effectually reached our fathers, and brought forth great men, and made others to be conquered by them! The residue of the Spirit is with Him.”—p. 320.

“I think we shall lose the very semblance of religion. Our gentry and nobility, if the Lord do not reclaim them, I think, are all like to turn heathens, drunkards, swearers, &c. Among other things, I rejoice in it, that the Lord is taking me away in my younger years, that I will be free of the transgression of the wicked; and it has many a year grieved my soul to see it.”—p. 321.

To some present he said, “O Sirs, I dread mightily, that a rational sort of religion is coming in among us:—I mean by it, a religion that consists in a bare attendance on outward duties and ordinances, without the power of godliness; and by this means, people shall fall into a way of serving God, which is mere Deism, having no relation to Christ Jesus and the Spirit of God.”—p. 325, 326.

“Oh, that the ministry of Scotland may be kept from destroying the Kirk of Scotland! Oh, that I could obtain it of them with tears of blood, to be concerned for the Church! Shall we draw away from the precious gospel, and from Christ?”—p. 339.

“It is not for pain I am groaning, but for the poor Kirk of Scotland, and for the cup of indignation in the Lord’s hand that is going about.”  
p. 344.

on trials, so that he had no immediate prospect of obtaining license to preach. He, therefore, gladly embraced the seasonable and unexpected invitation from the Dunfermline Presbytery (the ministers of which were of the same sentiments with himself), to go through the usual examinations and exercises, in order to be licensed by them.

The following short paragraphs from his diary, show the perplexity of mind which he felt on account of this oath, and the opposition, which, in consequence of his sentiments respecting it, was made to his advancement to preach the gospel in public:—

“Since the beginning of November, 1712, the oath of abjuration has been taken by many ministers—yea, by the greatest part in Scotland. I have been greatly troubled about it, and concerned that many godly men should have taken it.”\*

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\* Though many godly men, as Mr. Wilson says, took the oath of abjuration, yet many others, at least equally eminent for talent and piety, were of his own sentiments respecting it.

“In the Assembly,” says the Rev. Thomas Boston, “the lawfulness of the oath of abjuration was debated, *pro* and *con*, in a committee of the whole house, betwixt the scruplers and the clear brethren. All I had thereby, was, that the principles on which the answers to the objections were founded, seemed to me of such latitude, that by them almost any oath might pass. \* \* \* For all that I heard advanced to clear the difficulties about it, I still continued a scrupler; and, therefore, a

“The Presbytery of Glasgow were dissatisfied with my conduct about the Oath, and I had not the prospect then of entering on trials any where else, and did not know what Presbytery would receive me.”

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little before I came away home, the Act imposing the oath being printed, and offered to me at the door of the Assembly-house, I bought it, on purpose to know exactly the penalty I was like to underlie.

Being come home, I did this day (May 27th, 1712), spend some time in prayer for light from the Lord about that oath. And, thereafter, entering on to read the prints I had on it, in order to form a judgment about it, I immediately fell on the Act, whereby it was first of all framed and imposed; and finding thereby the declared intent of the oath to be to preserve the Act inviolable, on which the security of the Church of England depends, I was surprised and astonished; and, upon that shocking discovery, my heart was turned to loathe that oath, which I had before scrupled.”—*Boston's Memoirs*, p. 274, 275.

“Being resolved not to take the oath, I took advice at Edinburgh, when I was at the Commission, how to dispose of my effects, if by any means I might keep them from becoming a prey to the government—rigid execution of the law being expected by both parties, clear and unclear.”—*Boston's Memoirs*, p. 277.

“By all parties, nothing was expected but a rigid execution of a very severe law, laying non-compliers with it, besides other incapacities, under an exorbitant fine of £500 sterling, which was more than all the stipend that had, ever since I was a minister, come into my hand by that time, did amount to. However, I found myself obliged to go on in preaching the gospel at my peril, to fulfil the ministry I had received of the Lord. Herein I was confirmed and encouraged, by a declared resolution to that purpose, of a meeting of several brethren at Edinburgh, in the time, I think, of the Commission in August. These straitening circumstances obliged me to denude myself of all my worldly goods, that they might not fall into the hands of the government, when I should fall under the lash of the law.”—*Boston's Memoirs*, p. 278, 279.

But when, by the invitation which we have mentioned, the way was providentially opened for his progress, he solemnly appropriated a portion of his time for the purpose of seeking the Divine direction and blessing, in the immediate prospect of his trials for license to preach the gospel. On this subject we present the following interesting document:—

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“Tuesday the 28th, being the last day, according to the law, for taking of the oath, I spent some part of it in secret with the Lord.”—*Boston's Memoirs*, p. 279.

Even many of those who took the oath of abjuration, seemed to indicate, by their hesitation and shuffling, a consciousness of inconsistency.

“The following account of the matter,” says Mr. Struthers (quoting from Lockhart's papers), “by Lockhart of Carnwath, has a good deal of bitterness, but, we are afraid, at the same time, a great deal of truth.

“It is also well worth remarking, that such of the Presbyterian brethren, as, in compliance with this law, became jurors, acted as odd a part, in the way and manner of their taking; as Mr. Carstares did in obtaining the oath of abjuration, for, as a great many, especially in and near to Edinburgh, would not, by non-compliance, run the hazard of incurring the penalties in the Act contained; they were at the same time very solicitous to retain their reputation with the populace, and, in order thereto, framed an explanation, containing the sense in which they took the said oath, viz. in so far as it was consistent with their known principles, and no further. After the brethren of the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and I was told they followed the same method in most other places, had sworn and signed the oath, which to them was administered by a full meeting of the Justices of Peace, they retired to a corner of the Court, where Mr. Carstares repeated, or rather whispered, over the aforesaid explanation, in his own and his brethren's names, and thereupon he took instruments in the hands of a public notary, brought thither by him for that effect. This Jesuitical way of doing business, though it served as a pretext to justify them to some poor silly people, exposed them much to the censure of all sober-thinking persons; it being evident

"On the 18th of February, I set apart some time in the forenoons, to think upon my soul's case; and also concerning my trials for the work of preaching the gospel, that I had in view. On this, I set myself to inquire about my call to this

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from hence, that, though they roared out against the mental reservations of the Church of Rome, they could do the very same things themselves, when it served their turn. It proved that either they were scrub theologians, or men of no conscience; for, seeing all divines and lawyers agree in maintaining that all oaths are taken and binding in the sense and terms of the lawgiver imposing the same, any explanation contrary to the plain literal meaning of the words, and without the approbation of the lawgiver, hath no manner of import whatever. And, moreover, the explanation was not made publicly, and adhered to in the face of the Court, and at the time of swearing the oath, so as to stand on record, though, by the by, the Justices had no power to consent to and receive the same, being no further authorised and required, than to put the laws in execution, by administering the oath in the terms of the Act imposing the same. It is, therefore, evident, I say, that this explanation was altogether illegal and unwarrantable, a downright juggling with God and man, and a precedent for admitting the greatest cheats, and performing the greatest villanies; for, by the same rule, why might they not abjure Christianity, and profess Mahometism, provided they secretly declared to be so only so far as consistent with their principles? And why might they not falsely swear away any man's life and fortune, provided they privately declared that their oath was to be understood as probative, in so far only as it consisted with truth? But the baseness and bad consequences of such principles and practices are so conspicuous, and so detested by all men of honour and conscience, there is no need of enlarging further, the bare recital of the fact, to which I was an eye-witness, being more than enough to create in such, a just abhorrence of it, and all who act after that manner.—*Lockhart's Papers*, vol. i. p. 384, 385, quoted by Mr. Struthers in his *History of Scotland*; vol. i. p. 160, 161.

great work of preaching the gospel of Christ. On inquiry, I found the following things:—

1. That from my very infancy I had an eye to this work; and was set apart and consecrated by my parents to this work.

2. That I have of late frequently devoted and consecrated myself to this work,—giving up myself to the service of the Lord in this work. I am thus bound to it by the most solemn ties and engagements.

3. That doubting much my own fitness for this work, and finding I have not improved my time at the University, as I should have done, in order to qualify myself for it, yet I think I am not altogether void of a talent, though it is little that I know, and little that I can do.

And, 4. That I desire in the Lord's name and strength to venture forth, remembering his promise, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*"

"Concerning my entering on trials at present, I make the following remarks:—

1. That at several times, before I dedicated myself to this study, I sought of the Lord that if he had any service for me, he would bring me forth to his work.

2. The Lord opened a door for me at Dunfermline, when it was shut upon me from all other airths.\*

3. It was opened at a time when I was in a weary and languishing state and condition, fainting because I was not entered on trials.

4. There was a great and longing desire upon my spirit to preach Christ.

5. I thought the Lord had brought me in providence to meet with an honest Presbytery. By conversation with some of them, I was much satisfied and encouraged; especially about the condition of the covenant of grace.

And, 6. I thought that since I had the offer, I ought to embrace it, because if I did not, I knew not how, or when, or where, it might be got. Times were gloomy, and so I did not know how soon I might be deprived of an honest Presbytery."

In the mean time, whilst he was called to enter on trials for license, and was much exercised on what was before him, a new cause of perplexity occurred in the death of his uncle, to whom we have already referred.

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\* Quarters.

“On the 1st of February 1713,” says he, “I communicated at Kilmarnock. My soul was in a very unconcerned state, my faith was weak, and I had little spiritual life. Oh, to win out of this heavy languishing case and condition, and to be *filled with all joy, and peace in believing.*”

“I returned home on the 3d. I was not well come home, when I received a letter informing me of my uncle’s death in Angus. I was advised to go thither to see how he had ordered his affairs. On the 10th of February, therefore, I went to that place. I found that he had disposed all that belonged to him (heritable and moveable) to my aunt. The most of my friends were convinced of the injustice of this settlement, and advised me to institute a law process, but to this I was very averse. My relations would give me nothing, and therefore I returned home to take advice.

“On my way home, I came through Fife, and there Mr. Plenderleith told me, that the Presbytery of Dunfermline, at their last meeting, had appointed me a discourse on Genesis xlix. 18.\* I was much troubled about the meaning of the dispensation, that, when I was to be taken on trials, I should be so much plunged in worldly matters.

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\* *I have waited for thy salvation, O God.*

“ My friends at home advised me to go to Edinburgh, to take legal advice about my uncle’s settlement.

“ I am perplexed about this Angus business. Oh, that the Lord would be pleased to rid me out of it, and to give me a way of escape from trouble and anxiety of this kind.

“ Before going to Edinburgh, I prayed for the following things:—

1. That the Lord would give me strength of body for the journey.

2. That he would find out a way for me in Edinburgh, and give me direction there.

And, 3. That on my journey, the Lord might give me a sight of himself, to make the way easy and pleasant.

“ The Lord provided me with a friend in Edinburgh, and I was very kindly entertained.

Amidst these troubles my spiritual frame was very low. I felt great dulness, deadness, worldly-mindedness, carnality, and was not so much taken up about the great work and service I had before me, as I should have been. Sometimes, indeed, I had small revivings, was enabled to take hold of Christ by faith, and to *rejoice in the Lord*, and *joy in the God of my salvation*. But, on the whole,

my spiritual condition was trying and perplexing. I felt much unconcernedness, lifelessness, and security. I had little sense of God's presence upon my spirit, and seldom met with any thing of which I could say that it was from the Lord. *Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: O save me for thy mercies' sake. My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according to thy word.*

*O when, in kindness unto me,  
Wilt thou be pleased to come?"*

Mr. Wilson did not determine on arrangements respecting his interest in his uncle's property, nor disembarass himself from the perplexities which it occasioned, till after his license to preach the gospel. We shall, therefore, waive for the present, all further references to it, and follow him through the various stages of his trials, presenting, by extracts from his diary, his views and exercises regarding the solemn work, in which he had the near prospect of engaging.

"April 1713. I went to Dunfermline, and there I delivered my discourse. It was approved of, and another appointed me, concerning the condition of the covenant of works. The question was thus stated,—What kind of covenant was it, that God made with Adam in a state of innocence?"

“ Before returning to Dunfermline, I engaged in earnest prayer to God for the things following:—

1. That the Lord would be with me on the way, and give me a prosperous journey.

2. That he would help me to deliver my discourse.

3. That he would sanctify all his providences towards me, and enable me to grow in grace, and in experimental knowledge, before I appear in public.

4. That the Lord would make me a diligent, holy, and faithful preacher of the gospel.

5. That the Lord may *pour out his Spirit upon me*, and may make me powerful in the Scriptures, that I may be fitted for his service in the Church.

And, 6. That I may be made honest in searching the public cause of God.

Amen. So let it be.”

“ At Dunfermline, the Lord helped me to deliver my discourse. It was received off my hand as part of my trials. Another was prescribed, on Hebrews *iii.* 14, 15.\* May the Lord help me to compose this discourse.

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\* *For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end. While it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.*

“ May 1713. I returned to Dunfermline, and delivered my discourse. Another was prescribed, on Ephesians iii. 16.\* After this I went to Glasgow.

“ 24th June, 1713. Having come again to Dunfermline, I delivered my discourse. There was a great terror upon me and confusion, yet none perceived it. The Lord carried me through in the delivery, and the discourse was approved. Another was appointed. O Lord, give light; fit and qualify me for public work and service. Oh that I may have enlightening and awakening grace; that Christ may be made sweet and precious to my soul; and that I may be enabled to flee *to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

“ 22d July, 1713. I delivered another discourse at Dunfermline. It was approved of, and a new subject was appointed, on Genesis vi. 6.† Oh may the Lord give me light upon this text.

“ 29th July. I set this day apart for self-examination and prayer. I desire to humble myself in the sight of the Lord; and to mourn on account of my manifold sins and provocations. I desire also

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\* *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*

† *And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.*

that the Lord may open up to me the covenant of his grace, and apply it to my mind and soul; that the Lord may make a discovery to me of the way in which he brings in souls to himself; and that the Lord may give distinct uptaking how matters stand between God and my soul, and that He may fit me for public work.

“ In the forenoon, I began to think of the sadness of my case, by reason of the natural enmity of the heart to God. By Adam’s fall, I am guilty before God. I thought of the curse that the fall had brought down upon man. I thought also of my actual transgressions and their aggravations.

“ Secondly, I thought of that help which is revealed in the Gospel; and of the promises of life, in, through, and by, the Lord Jesus. After meditation, I went to prayer. I told over my sad case with some stayedness; but could not, with that steadfast faith which I wished to exercise, flee to the blood of sprinkling. I began to fear I might be overwhelmed with judicial strokes and judgments, and this made some impression on me. Then I prayed to have these removed; and I sought that the Lord might heal my soul, and enlighten my path.

“ Further, I set myself seriously to inquire if I had any grace in my soul. Here I could not deny

that the Lord had done good to my soul; and that though by nature I had been *far off*, yet *now*, I had been *made nigh by the blood of Christ*. I could not but admit that God had discovered himself to my soul—had *called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me*—and had often disposed and enabled me to surrender myself unto him. But, in the mean time, I felt grace out of exercise. I found my vineyard like the sluggard's, all grown over with weeds; and, therefore, I saw the great need I stood in of quickening grace. Upon this I went again to prayer, and confessing, as I could, that my case was such, I sought that the Lord might restore my soul, and might revive his work in me; and that, if he is pleased to call me to serve him, in the gospel of his Son, he might give me all needful qualification for this great office, and make me the means of good to the souls of his people, and of opening the eyes of sinners, *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit. Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.*

Mr. Wilson was ever anxious to profit by the experience of others, and especially of ministers. At present, in particular, when he was proceeding with his trials for license, and had the hope of being in a very short time engaged in the honourable work of preaching the gospel, he sought, obtained, and improved, the friendly instructions of the faithful ministers of religion. Of this, the following is an important specimen.

“12th August, 1713. This day I saw Mr. H., and conversed with him about my views and prospects. I told him I had little or no experience, and that I desired his advice in regard to the work in which I might soon be engaged. He gave me the following advices:—

1. He told me I must lay my account with difficulty, and great difficulty, because of the great work, and weight, of preaching the gospel. I behoved to lay my account with other difficulties besides those which belong more immediately to the work itself:—difficulties from all hands, and from all quarters and corners, would be upon me.

2. He advised me to be very humble, and never to go to a pulpit without a dread lest God should be provoked to leave me; and never to depend upon God more than when I thought myself surest,

for if I lippined\* to myself, and thought myself sure in public, and all right by preparation, I might provoke God to leave me, and to let me fall.

3. He advised me, when I am called to preach the gospel, to make preparation needful for preaching; to be diligent in preparing by studying and prayer: but if in providence, it should ever fall out that I should be called unexpectedly to preach, and that the Lord's work would be laid aside if I did not preach:—if providence thus ordered and called me, then, he told me, never to mind† preaching, though I had not studied, for the Lord who thus called in providence, would also be forthcoming to help and assist me.”

During the last two weeks of August, and the first three of September, he was mostly in the west country, diligently preparing for giving in the remaining parts of his trials. His unwearied attention to his studies never prevented him from attending to the duties of personal religion. Of this, the following extract is a sufficient proof:—

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\* To lippin, to put confidence in, to trust to, to have dependence on.  
—See *Dr. Jamieson's Dictionary*.

† Never to mind, that is, not to be afraid of.

“August, 1713. This month I went to Eastwood to the communion; and in the view of commemorating the death of Christ, had chiefly the two following desires upon my heart:—

1. That the Lord would revive his work in my mind and soul, that I may see sin, and see the remedy; and that I may win to lay faith's grip upon the Lord Jesus, and to cleave to him by faith.

And, 2. That the Lord may give a discovery to me, of the covenant of salvation by free grace, that so I may know how to preach Christ, and the gospel of Christ; and that the Lord may fit and furnish me for his own work, worship, and service.”

“I was not in right exercise in hearing sermon on Saturday. At night, I set about the work of meditation, prayer, and self-examination: but neither did I find the Lord in these. I went out next day with my errands, and laid them before the Lord. I heard sermon upon Isaiah liii. 7, *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted; yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth*; and I afterwards went to the table of Christ. But in communicating, I was not enabled clearly to discern the Lord's body, nor to exercise a lively faith in him for salvation.

“ On Monday morning, I was helped in private prayer. I had been reading that passage, *Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?* I saw from this Scripture, that it is the Christian’s duty to turn his back upon the world, to have his face towards the heavenly country; and also that he should be continually leaning upon Christ Jesus, and depending wholly on him for salvation.

Of his last appearance before the Presbytery for trials, and of the result of all his trials, in his being licensed to preach the gospel, he gives us the following account:—

“ Dunfermline, 23d Sept. 1713. I delivered a popular sermon, and was carried through the rest of my trials; and, after an exhortation by Mr. Erskine, minister at Dunfermline, to depend upon the Lord, and to seek his glory, he said, that the Presbytery having now tried me, they judged me fitted for preaching the gospel of Christ; and so, as the mouth of the Presbytery, he licensed me, in the name of the Lord Jesus, to preach the gospel, either in this Presbytery, or wheresoever I should be lawfully called. And another minister said—  
‘ Look to the Lord, who says, *my grace is sufficient*

*for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.* O Lord, enable me to look to thyself by faith, to depend wholly on thy grace, and *to go in the strength of the Lord God, and to make mention of his righteousness, even of his only.*”

Such are the particulars respecting Mr. Wilson’s trials and license, and such is a view of his exercises at this period.

The following is a copy of the original minute and extract of his license, which is written on parchment, and is still in careful preservation:—

“At Dunfermline, the twenty-third day of September, one thousand seven hundred and thirteen years,

“The which day the Presbytery of Dunfermline being met, and considering, that Mr. William Wilson, student, hath now expd all the ordinary pieces of his trials, in order to license, and is therein approved; and he being this day inquired anent his sentiments of church government, if he was content to subscribe the Confession of Faith, as the confession of his faith, if he would give obedience to this and other church judicatories in the Lord, and shun all divisive courses; to all which he gave satisfying answers; and having subscribed the Confession of Faith coram, the Presbyterie did, and hereby doe

license, the said Mr. William Wilson, to preach the gospel in their bounds, and wherever he shall be orderly called.

“ Extracted furth of the Records of the Presby-  
terie of Dunfermline, and signed in their name, by

GEO. MAIR, Moderator.

JO. GIB, Presbytery Clerk.”

## CHAPTER III.

*From his License to his Ordination.*

1713—1716.

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THERE is something truly interesting and sublime in those secret exercises of the soul before God, to which Mr. Wilson so much habituated himself—exercises which, from the manner in which they are recorded, were evidently never intended to be known by any human being, but which, it is not to be doubted, *came up for a memorial before God*. The disclosure of these communings sooner than the *great day, when the secrets of every heart shall be made manifest*, may, in some measure, be considered accidental, for the manuscripts containing them, have never been looked into for a hundred years, and have now, with no small labour, been deciphered. But the disclosure may be considered as happy, if it become the means of exciting any to imitate the laudable example of meek and elevated piety which it presents.

The anxiety felt, and the diligence bestowed by Mr. Wilson, for attaining personal holiness, and

having his *heart right in the sight of the Lord*, during the course of his studies, in addition to his proficiency in science and literature, mark him out to us as a youth well qualified for the important work of preaching the gospel, in which he was now to engage. The deep impressions which he had all along felt of the solemnity of this work, when its duties were only in prospect, we might reasonably expect, would continue with increasing force, when he was called to appear in public to preach the gospel. His concern for the salvation of others, might be naturally inferred from his concern for his own. The same solicitude to come forward, that, through divine aid, he might publish evangelical truth, with diligence and faithfulness, will be found at least unabated, in the views and exercises which we shall now proceed to delineate.

On the 24th of September, the day after he was licensed, Mr. Wilson went to Saline, deeply impressed with a sense of the importance of the work in which he was now to engage.

On the following day, Mr. Plenderleith, minister of that parish, insisted that he should preach the week-day sermon, to which, after retiring for divine direction, he agreed.

“I did not well know,” says he, in his diary, “what to do. I had no clearness to refuse the call, and in prayer I met with some enlargement on that text in the sixty-eighth Psalm,—*Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.* The Lord brought to my mind nine observations from it which I had written; and then I went to the pulpit, and delivered them with great freedom.”

This was his first appearance in public as a preacher of the gospel. It will appear, by the extracts from his diary, that during the time he was a probationer, he was seldom unemployed on the Sabbaths, and that he often officiated at week-day services.

“On Sabbath the 27th, being the first Sabbath-day I preached in public, I discoursed on these words in the sixty-first Psalm: *From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the Rock that is higher than I.* I was straitened in the morning, but met with some enlargement in the afternoon. O Lord, save me from seeking my own glory, or being lifted up with *pride, lest I fall into the condemnation of the Devil.*”

Even at the outset of his course, he was under the deepest impressions of the magnitude and honourable nature of the work of preaching the gospel; and these impressions continued with him all his life. In his diary, at this period, we find an interesting section illustrative of this, which he entitles "Remarks concerning preaching the gospel, and directions in order to my right management of that great and weighty work." As he seems to have endeavoured to act up to the spirit and tenor of what this includes, and as the directions and remarks themselves may afford useful hints, or even a complete pattern for imitation to the ministers of religion still; we cannot do better than present the section fully. It is as follows:—

"Remarks concerning preaching the gospel.

1. The work of a preacher of the gospel of Christ is a great and weighty work. It is being the mouth of the great God to a people, and their mouth to God. It is to stand for God, and to speak for God, even in the meanest preacher of the gospel of peace.

2. He, then, that would warrantably discharge this duty, must be clear, in some measure, that he has the call of the Lord to undertake that work; *for how shall they preach except they be sent?* Without this, there can be little countenance of God in

preaching—little comfort can be felt—little success can be expected.

3. He that preaches, must seriously consider, that the great design of preaching is to gather in souls to the Saviour of sinners—is to promote the edification of the body of Christ—to bring up souls in the faith, and to nourish them for heaven.

4. He that engages in this work, must be well instructed in the mysteries of Christ: in some manner *apt to teach*, having qualification to venture upon that great work, knowing the offer of grace, and anxious to recommend Christ and salvation to perishing sinners.

5. He who would act properly in this work, must have a weight upon his spirit, impressing him with the importance of the gospel he is called to preach, a conviction of sin, a sense of the value of souls, and a concern to be the instrument of spiritual good in preaching the gospel of Christ.

And, 6. The preacher of the glorious gospel of Christ, should be much occupied in meditation and prayer, much employed in studying the Scriptures, and much concerned about living near God, and drawing nearer God,—in standing in the council of God, in dwelling *in the secret place of the Most High*, and abiding *under the shadow of the Almighty*.

“Directions in order to my right management of the great and weighty work of preaching the gospel of Christ; containing some particular directions concerning what I should do before preaching, in the time of preaching, and after preaching:—

“I. What I should do before preaching.

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

2. When time is allowed to prepare for preaching, never neglect preparation-work, but be diligent in meditation and prayer—seeking a word from the Lord.

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

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

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\* It is evident, from some of the expressions in the directions here, that he had profited by Mr. H.’s valuable instructions recently given him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Regard not men, nor the presence of men.

This is a snare in itself, and is very unbecoming a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let there be an awe and dread of God upon thy spirit, swallowing up the fear of man.

5. Seek not self: fight against self: beware lest this *root of bitterness springing up trouble you*,—provoke the Lord to desert you, and to withdraw his countenance. This is the thing I have most reason to fight against. It is that which may do much harm, if it prevaieth; and it is that which besets me most.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Be thankful for what you have gotten in public, and mourn for short-comings.

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

These directions and remarks, framed by Mr. Wilson, when he had preached only one Sabbath in public, besides showing with what seriousness

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\* Depending on thy being helped, that is, indulging in carelessness, on the presumption of being helped.

and interest he set forth in his Master's work, and how much he was impressed with its vast importance, exhibit a degree of experience in the Christian life, and an acquaintance with the true nature and design of gospel ministration, and the proper spirit and manner of pursuing it, which we could scarcely have expected at this early stage. These observations and rules, framed to guide him as a young preacher, when the necessity of diligence in study would be most indispensable, have so much suitableness to the character and circumstances of experienced ministration, that they may be useful to the servants of God, at all stages of their ministry: and they clearly show how much his early education and religious habits had matured him for the work on which he had now entered.

When we think of the excellent spirit and tendency of these rules for preaching, we might perhaps expect to find this preacher of the gospel greatly superior to depressions and inward entanglements, and almost always rejoicing in the experience of Divine aid in the prosecution of his great calling. But the ways of God with his servants, do not always accord with our fond, or even our most devout anticipations. *God's ways are not as our ways.* The Apostle Paul makes such acknowledg-

ments of his own unworthiness and depravity,\* that some theologians, whose views, generally, are Scriptural, have, unawares, and, we believe, through inattention both to the spirit of the passage and to Christian experience, been led to conclude that his words are the confessions of an unregenerate sinner. But it is always found, that the farther grace has advanced in any soul, the more is its remaining corruption the occasion of contrition and mourning; and that the greatest saint is always the most humble. Mr. Wilson, from this time, for many years, often complains, in his diary, of his case being sad and sorrowful, and, like the Apostle of the Gentiles, confesses that he is *carnal, sold under sin*.

“October, 1713. On the first of this month,” says he, “I preached at Culross, a week-day sermon, on the second verse of the fifty-seventh Psalm, *I will cry unto God most high, unto God that performeth all things for me*. The night before, I was straitened greatly, and much perplexed. But I had a call from the Lord to preach on this text. I went damped and weighted to the pulpit; yet the Lord came and gave clearness and liberty. But I had not that savour which I sought, nor that solid

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\* Romans, chapter vii.

frame which I desired. Oh, to be kept near the Lord. *They that are far from thee shall perish; but it is good for me that I draw near to God.*"

"2d October. I found this day a decay in my spiritual condition: few serious impressions, and little concern upon my spirit. I found little faith, and much unbelief. Oh, for concern and spiritual mindedness! I found also much self-seeking, and much spiritual pride. Oh, to be kept humble, and to have my whole dependance on God! O Lord, may I have a text from thyself, to preach from on the next Sabbath.

"3d October. Having to preach to-morrow at Culross, I was long employed in searching for a text, but could find none. At last I fell upon Isaiah xlii. 16: *I will lead the blind by a way that they know not.* I began to think upon it, and to draw up a scheme. At first I was straitened, but afterwards I became more enlarged, so that things came thick into my mind. But I wanted a savour and sense of them upon my own spirit.

"4th October. This being the Lord's day, and having to preach in the afternoon, I was weighted and damped in the forenoon, and felt little spiritual life, yet, praying that the Lord would come forth with me, I preached in the afternoon. But the Lord did hide his face. He withheld his spirit. I

got the preaching through, indeed, to an end; but it was a dead, flat, lifeless, sapless preaching.

“5th October. At present, I feel too little concern and spirituality. My mind is dull and lifeless, and I feel as if I could do nothing at all. Oh, for power and for life. Let me never go to a pulpit without God’s presence, and without seeking his glory. Alas! in yesterday’s preaching, I had too much regard to men; and, not studying that close application of the subject to my own case, I could not preach home to the consciences of others. Oh, let me never preach without endeavouring to preach home to folk’s consciences.

“On the 6th of October, my case continued much the same; yet I had some breathing, and some outgait\* in prayer.”

In these last extracts, there are several things which are deeply interesting. In particular, there are two things which must strike every minister as worthy of imitation:—

First, in the choice and illustration of his subject, Mr. Wilson endeavoured to take advantage of his own frame and experience; and thus, from the state of his own mind, to obtain for himself, and to communicate to others, some spiritual benefit.

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\* *i. e.* Liberty and relief.

And, Secondly, he habituated himself to look up to God for guidance, both in the choice and in the illustration of his subjects.

These things must be, at least substantially, the practice of all faithful ministers. But, in those days, they seem to have been more formally observed by them; as, on the other hand, there seems to have been among the people, a more extensive recognition that the passage which was read, and the discussion which was grounded on it, were a message to them from God.

Mr. Wilson seems to have been very careful in reviewing in secret the frame in which he had felt his soul during the time of conducting public service, that he might look up to God for grace to enable him to guard against what had been amiss in his exercise. The following is a proof of this from his diary:—

“On Sabbath the 18th of October,” says he, “Mr. Plenderleith having previously engaged me to preach for him, I lectured on the first five verses of the thirty-fourth Psalm\* in the forenoon, and

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\* *I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD; the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let*

discoursed from the fifth verse in the afternoon. I felt straitened,—not that I wanted matter, but I wanted the Spirit of God. From my exercise in public this day, I may learn the following things:—

1. That there is with me too much of a desire to please rather than to edify those that hear me, and thus I provoke the Lord to withdraw. *Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

2. I have not such a sense of the thoughts delivered upon my own spirit, as I ought to have. O Lord, give me this spiritual sense; discover the way of truth to me. Teach me the duties of the day, that I may practise and recommend them; and the sins of the day, that I may shun them myself, and warn others against them.

3. I want much of that dependence upon God that I should have. I am dead, flat, dull, and formal in preaching. I want that lively faith in Christ, which would interest me in Divine truth, and enable me to deliver it, so as to impress and interest others. *O when wilt thou come unto me?*

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*us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked unto him, and were lightened; and their faces were not ashamed.*

*Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me; O Lord, make haste to help me.* I fear lest my delight in preaching should abate. O my God, give me enlargement of heart to speak for thee, to deliver thy mind, and to hold up thy truth. Give furniture for this great work. May I have light and strength, be borne up, and carried through; and have all needed grace to fit me for serving thee in my day and generation."

The devotional character of Mr. Wilson's mind is often strikingly evinced, by the subjects he selected for public discussion. The accordance of his expositions with his own spiritual frame, seems to have led him often to meet the cases of others, and to be the honoured instrument of instruction and comfort to many. During his stay in Dunfermline Presbytery, he preached in various places, with more or less comfort to himself, and always with pleasure; sometimes with acknowledged benefit to his hearers. The following records of his experience will serve to illustrate these remarks:—

"I went," says he, "from Torryburn to Queensferry, and preached there on the 27th of October, being the Tuesday after their communion. The Lord was present with me, and enlarged me very

much in preaching on these sweet words, in 'the Song of Solomon,—*Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?*

“I came to Culross, on Monday the 10th of November. The Communion is to be here on the 22d, and I have engaged to give some assistance. To-day, being the 18th, in the view of observing a day of humiliation and fasting to-morrow, I desire to set myself to search for my sin, and to seek that the Lord may turn me again, and give me his Spirit, that I may be enabled to preach, that I may be carried through, and that I may win to live near him, and may get a meeting with him next Sabbath.

“I may remark the following things in my case, for which I have cause to be humble:—

1. I find I have been unthankful when the Lord has given me any blink of himself.

2. I find pride: I am proud of gifts and attainments, though I have little to be proud of.

3. I find instability of spirit: my mind is unstable as water. If it be fixed on God at one moment, the next it returns to vanity.

4. I find that my mind wavers in time of prayer with others; and when I am alone I slight prayer, and waiting upon the Lord in that duty.

“For these things especially, I have reason to

fear, and to mourn; and to-morrow being a Fast-day before a Communion in this place, I desire to pray that the Lord may be pleased to subdue these corruptions in me, and on this Communion occasion, let him give a death's stroke to them all.

“At this Communion also, I desire to exercise lively faith in the Lord Jesus, and to take hold of his covenant of grace. Likewise, my desire is to get fuller and clearer views of this covenant of grace, that I may be enabled to see it more clearly and more distinctly, and that I may be enlarged and elevated, so that I may preach the gospel of Christ in meekness and humility, with dependance on the Lord Jesus for all needful grace.

“19th November. Being the Fast-day, I preached, but was dead and dull, and had little of exercise suiting that day. At night, I lectured on the eightieth Psalm, from the first to the fifth verse,\* and was something enlarged.

“20th November. I spent this day I do not

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\* *Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, thou that leadest Joseph like a flock; thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth. Before Ephraim, and Benjamin, and Manasseh, stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved. O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people? Thou feedest them with the bread of tears; and givest them tears to drink in great measure.*

know how, but was very little in the exercise of preparation for such solemn Communion-work.

“21st November. I heard sermon, but with too little life, and very little concern. At night, I exercised\* upon that passage in the hundred and sixth Psalm—*O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen.*

“22d November. After the action-sermon, I went to the table, but, alas! found little or nothing of affiance of faith in Jesus. I was a very unfit guest for such solemn work. After I came from the table, I went to the tent and preached. Here I was much enlarged: the Lord pitied and helped me: I was greatly refreshed in my own soul, and, to my satisfaction, I heard that some had been edified by my sermon on John vi. 44, *No man can come to me, except the Father, which hath sent me, draw him.* At night, I exercised upon these words in the Song of Solomon, *Draw me, we will run after thee.* I found the Lord sensibly present with me in that exercise. I have reason to mourn, and be humble, for great short-comings; yet I have also reason to bless the Lord for his goodness to me. I have

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\* In Scotland it was common at this period, and, indeed, till very lately, to call an evening sermon the Exercise. When Mr. Wilson says he exercised, he means simply that he conducted the evening service.

heard that some derived benefit from sermons preached by me: and I have discovered that things which I had not studied, but which were suggested to me at the time of preaching, have been made most useful."

Mr. Ramsay, his uncle, as we have already noticed, had died, about the beginning of this year (1713). He had bequeathed his property to Mrs. Watson, a sister, who was younger than Mr. Wilson's mother, and whose eldest son was to succeed to it by changing his name to Ramsay. Mr. Wilson, indeed, had been advised to enter a process to recover his rights, by doing which he might have succeeded. He so far took this advice, as that, when in Edinburgh, he went to consult with Mr. Alexander, advocate there. But so it happened, that on calling for this gentleman to request his legal opinion, he was informed by the servant, that Mr. Alexander, who had been ailing, had just that moment expired. This striking coincidence seems to have led, in some degree, to two important results. First, by impressing his mind with the vanity of the world, it tended to lead him to give up thoughts in future on this subject. And, secondly, it was probably this circumstance that induced him

to visit the family of Mr. Alexander,—one of whose daughters he afterwards married.

But the chief causes which made him averse to a prosecution, for his uncle's property, and anxious to avoid one, were his own generous and peaceful disposition, and a persuasion that it would be, in some respect, unsuitable to his character, as a servant of Christ.

From these considerations, he determined, if possible, to come to some amicable arrangement in private, with his relations. With this view, he was, at the beginning of December, 1713, about to return to Edinburgh. The following extract refers to this matter:—

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

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

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

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

With these views, when he was in Edinburgh, he relinquished all thoughts of litigation. Terms of adjustment were proposed between himself and the other party. The matter was submitted to arbiters, mutually chosen; and an agreement was at length completed, whereby though the property was continued with the family to whom his uncle bequeathed it, yet certain claims of his own were recognised and secured.

After this negotiation was completed, he returned to Fife; but now he was not to remain here, but had the view of visiting different parts of the country, and especially the west; and as he had been employed nearly three months as a Probationer in the Presbytery of Dunfermline, he received, on leaving its bounds, a certificate of character and qualifications, of which the following is a copy:—

"These testify that the Bearer, Mr. William Wilson, preacher of the gospel, has, since he was

licensed, for the most part resided in the bounds of this Presbytery, frequently preached at the desire, and in the hearing, of several of the brethren thereof, to our great satisfaction, and edification of his hearers; and, so far as we know, has behaved himself gravely, religiously, and becoming his station. Wherefore, we hereby earnestly recommend him to Presbyteries and other Church Judicatories, where Providence may order his lot, as a person whom we judge, through the Lord's blessing, may be very useful in his vineyard. In testimony whereof, these presents are given by appointment of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, the ninth day of December, one thousand seven hundred and thirteen years, and signed in their name by

GEO. MAIR, Moderator.

JO. GIB, Presbytery Clerk.”\*

About the beginning of the year 1714, Mr. Wilson went to the west country; and, except when called to a distance, he was there throughout the whole of this, and of the following year. During all this time, he was, for the most part, employed

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\* This document was found by accident in a confused collection of family papers, and has come down to the fourth generation, without any apparent design of preservation.

in preaching in various places. Besides officiating very frequently in Glasgow, which seems to have been his most usual residence, he preached occasionally at places in the neighbourhood, as Rutherglen, Govan, Cathcart, Renfrew, Eastwood, Kilbride; and at distant places, as Falkirk, Larbert, Airth, and also Edinburgh, Dunfermline and its neighbourhood, where he had been before, and many other places.

During all this time, he recorded his spiritual exercise, and though he often gratefully acknowledges that he was helped, enlarged, encouraged, and comforted, both in secret and in public duties, he still oftener confesses, and mourns over his want of life, light, and comfort. But there is no foundation, from such experience, to doubt the reality of grace in the soul.\* This experience is often, and we have no doubt was in the case before us, the evidence of vigorous growth in grace. It is their exalted view of the glories of Christ, and of the perfection of the Christian character, that leads

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\* A great proportion of the recorded experience of this excellent man, seems to be much opposed to the doctrine respecting the assurance of faith, or a confident persuasion that we are in a state of pardon and acceptance, as essential to the existence of religion in the soul, which has of late been so earnestly advanced by some estimable persons.

eminent believers to the exercise of deep humility,\*—of humility which sometimes, from a consciousness of many defects, makes them not only weep and mourn, but even in the infirmity of their jealousy over themselves, give way to doubts and fears. “If God had determined to have left you to yourself, to have abandoned you to wretchedness, he would not have penetrated your heart, convinced you of your depravity, wrought concern in your breast, and filled you with such anxious desire to glorify him. That deep humiliation—that strong conviction—that pungent distress you feel on account of your sin, is not the work of nature, nor the production of Satan, but of God, who wounds that he may heal; who kills that he may make alive.”†

Mr. Wilson, at all times, seems to have been very anxious to preserve alive on his soul the sense of the Divine presence, and a deep impression of the solemnity of his calling; and, therefore, he was, in the most sincere and becoming manner, making it his habitual practice to examine himself, especially before and after engaging in public work; and he was always candid and scrupulous with himself, and

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\* See Job xlii. 5, 6.—Isaiah vi. 1–5.

† Buck on Religious Experience.

faithful in searching after every real or supposed defect in his frame and exercise, that he might resort to God for grace to guard against it, and labour in the use of means for deliverance from it. Whilst he was, through this, often led to *write bitter things against himself*, he was, at the same time, excited to *give all diligence, to make his calling and election sure*.

During the years 1714 and 1715, there are, in his diary, many examples of this varied exercise. We shall content ourselves with a few specimens.

“7th February, 1714. I preached all day upon Ezekiel xxxiii. 11,—*Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?* The Lord helped me very much, and enlarged me very much in that place. I got something of the Lord’s presence and help in speaking.

“14th February. I preached in the afternoon in the Outer Kirk of Glasgow, on the fourth verse of the hundred and thirtieth Psalm,—*There is forgiveness with thee that thou mayest be feared*. I was helped in speaking, but I must acknowledge, that I feel too little anxiety upon the back of preaching, too little concern to practise what I preach, and too little solicitude for the benefit of the hearers.

“21st February. I preached in the Barony.

I could get but little studied. I scarcely had as much as would have served the fourth part of an hour; but I preached both forenoon and afternoon with much enlargement. The Lord pitied and helped me in his work and service, for which I have reason to bless his name.

“Also, at night, I was helped in exercising upon these words,—*I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich.*”

“12th July. I left Glasgow, and went to Airth, to attend at the Communion there.

“16th July. The Communion is to be on the 18th. Let me inquire into my views and ends in proposing to communicate on this occasion.

1. To remember the Lord's death till he come.\*
2. To get myself bound over to the Lord's work, in my day and generation, and my dedication covenants renewed.
3. To get new concern for the Lord's public glory upon my spirit, and true concern for the salvation of souls.† And now, O my soul, say what

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\* This, of course, he considered as the prominent end of communicating, in which all others were included, or to which they were referable and subordinate.

† Here he presents himself as seeking what he laments the want of in the preceding exercise.

concern you have for your own salvation. Oh, to get a sight of Christ, and him crucified; and to see his glory, beauty, and excellency.”\*

“18th July. I did communicate at Airth; but, alas! I met with no enlargement. My sins do take such hold upon me that I cannot lift mine eyes.

“Yesterday I exercised on these words in the fifth verse of the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew, —*Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.* I had some enlargement; and a woman came and told me that she blessed the Lord for that exercise, and I desire to bless the Lord that she got good. Lord keep upon her spirit what was given her.”

Mr. Wilson was in Glasgow in September, and confined to his room by indisposition. On this occasion, his exercise is recorded, and especially his exercise on the Lord’s day, when he was detained from public ordinances. It follows:—

“19th September, 1714. This day being Sabbath, I kept my room. And, now, I desire to set

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\* Some of the particulars in this, and in other exercises, are omitted, owing to their necessary similarity with those we have already given. But the diversity of view and feeling, on Sacramental occasions, which these exercises present, cannot fail to strike every intelligent serious person.

myself seriously to search and try my own ways, and to inquire how matters stand betwixt the Lord and my soul. I propose the following questions to myself:—

1. Whether am I in Christ or not?

2. When was I brought to Christ?

3. What state is my soul now in?

4. What has been my carriage since I began to preach the gospel of Christ?

“O Lord give me now light and direction in these inquiries.

“I would fain think, in answer to these questions, that the Lord Jesus has been revealed in me, and that he has discovered his love to me; and though I cannot tell the particular and precise time when his grace shone in upon my mind and soul, yet he has sometimes humbled me, and emptied me of self, and made me to say, from a sight of his glorious grace and fulness,—*I count all things but loss, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, but that which is by the faith of Christ.* The first most distinct time, was on the 4th, or the 25th, of September 1705; but which of the days I do not now remember. But I remember that I had much of soul-melting for sin, and that Christ was made precious to me.

“After this I was left to decay, and continued on a decay, till November and December, 1708, when the Lord was pleased to give some confirming visits, and by a particular affiance of faith, I was made to see Christ as mine, for wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

“At present I am employed in preaching the gospel, and feel anxious to deal faithfully with the hearts and consciences of sinners, to awaken them from their spiritual slumbers, and to recommend Christ and salvation to their souls. But I have often backslidden from God, and, at present, I feel myself in a state of spiritual decay, and my carriage as a preacher is not such as it ought. Oh that the Lord may come and pity: may come, convince, and convert me. Turn me, and I shall be turned: humble me, and I shall be humbled: heal me, and I shall be healed. This day I think I am called to pray for a discovery of the Lord Jesus; and that his word may come to me with power, and his grace draw me to himself. O come, Lord Jesus, come quickly. How little do I often feel, on my own spirit, the weight of what I deliver! I am not so diligent as I ought. Oh that the Lord may come and shine in upon my soul. *Quicken me that I may call upon thy name.* Give life, strength, and power.

*O send out thy light and thy truth. Let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles."*

Throughout the whole course of his life, Mr. Wilson seems to have carefully observed and improved all events and movements of a public and general nature, whether political or ecclesiastical, in subserviency to his spiritual exercise before God, and, of course, to have availed himself of them in his public ministrations. His deep interest and successful activity, in ecclesiastical matters, will abundantly appear in the course of our narrative. It may not, then, be improper, in this place, to give a specimen of his feelings and exercise, in regard to the political commotions of his day. As early as during the rebellion in 1715, when there was real cause of alarm from party divisions, and from the exertions of the Stuart family to regain the throne, he seems to have felt a deep concern for the safety of the nation. Accordingly, from the beginning of the alarm, to the defeat of the Pretender's army, there are several notices on this subject, in the diary,—as those which follow:—

“Glasgow, Sept. 1715. This month we had very alarming accounts of the gathering on the Brae of

Mar, and of the Pretender being proclaimed in various places on the north side of the Tay. Now, there was nothing but confusion, and the alarm of war. But though the safety of the country was preserved, by remarkable providences, yet there was little mourning for sin, or inquiring into the grounds of the Lord's controversy. There was no returning to the Lord, as there ought to have been, but rather a tendency to grow worse and worse."

This consternation in the country continued for several months, and is, afterwards, still more particularly alluded to in the diary. In the meantime, however, it is proper to mention, that the parish of Dalry, in the Presbytery of Irvine, was, at this time, vacant; and that the parishoners, being well informed of Mr. Wilson's acceptability and usefulness, were earnestly desirous of hearing him preach, with the view of calling him to labour among them. The state of this Presbytery, was then very different from that of Dunfermline. Few, or none, of the ministers belonging to it, were evangelical. The idea of calling a person to Dalry, of Mr. Wilson's sentiments, or even of bringing him into the bounds of the Presbytery, produced no little uneasiness among the ministers, and made them present obstacles and opposition.

♦ On this movement, for calling him to Dalry, Professor Simpson, under whom he had studied Divinity, having full knowledge of his sentiments, as contrary to his own, and those of the members of the Presbytery of Irvine, remarked, in a letter to that Presbytery, that if the people of Dalry got Mr. Wilson to be their minister, there would be such a run after him, from the surrounding parishes, that the ministers might, from that period, shut their church doors.

It might be mentioned here, that Mr. Wilson was cited, along with the students who were examined in the first process against the said Professor Simpson, for the doctrinal errors which he had taught from the Divinity chair. Of this there are some notices in the diary. There are likewise repeated references to the case of Dalry.

“Glasgow, Oct. 1715. The Synod of Glasgow and Ayr met; and, according to a desire expressed in a letter, sent by the Patron of the parish of Dalry, to the Synod, the Presbytery did appoint me to come to their bounds, and to preach two Sabbaths with them.

“The people of the parish of Dalry are very much knit to me, and very fain would have me to be their minister. The Presbytery care not much for it, fearing I may be of different principles.”

In the course of the following month, he proceeds to give a very particular account of the civil commotions, which were continuing to agitate the country; and seems deeply interested in the success of the King's troops, in opposition to the Pretender, and his adherents.

“ November, 1715. This month the confusion seemed to be increased, and it was feared that the rebel army would gather strength. On the 10th of this month, the Earl of Mar, at the head of the rebels, made a march, with his whole army, from Perth, where were his head-quarters. On the 12th, the Duke of Argyle, having called together his forces, moved from Stirling to Dunblane. On Sabbath, being the 13th day, both armies engaged, within a mile of Dunblane. Mar had about ten thousand men. The King's army, under the Duke, was not above three thousand five hundred strong. Mar's right wing attacked the Duke's left, killed numbers of men, and took also many prisoners. The Duke's right engaged Mar's left wing, pursued them to a considerable distance, broke them entirely, killed several hundreds, and took many prisoners. In the meantime, however, the other divisions of the rebel army had got advantages over the royal troops. On the Duke's return, the engagement was not

renewed. Victory was claimed by both armies; but the losses were soon seen to be on the side of the rebels. The hand of Providence was remarkably seen in the action of this day, in that the Duke, with so small a party, broke such a considerable troop of rebels. The Lord was letting us see what he could do for us, and what he was willing to do for us, and that he was loath to lay on the stroke. Judgment is *His strange act*; and also, in this Providence, the hand of the Lord was seen. It was not our sword, or bow, but the Lord's right hand that gave the deliverance; and yet any deliverance that was given this day, was given with a frown,—the greatest part of the army being put to the flight. By this the Lord declared to us, that yet he had a controversy against us, and calls us loudly to repent and turn. But, alas! we regard not the doings of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands.

“This has been a time of wonderful appearances of God, for this Church and Land. But the following things must be confessed:—

1. That we are not laying to mind the ground of the controversy, nor searching into the cause of this fire that is kindled in the midst of this poor land.
2. That the ministers of this neighbourhood\*

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\* He was now in the bounds of Irvine Presbytery.

preach *peace, peace*. There is no searching nor upstirring preaching among them; and, hitherto, there has been no fasting, nor mourning, and no humiliation days appointed.

3. That we are growing very secure. The gathering of the forces to the Duke of Argyle, makes us think there will be no danger, and that all is to be well with us, and so we trust to the arm of flesh.

“February, 1716. The Pretender and his army left Perth on the last day of January; and on the 3d of this month the Pretender, with Mar and some others, went over in a vessel to France. Thus the Lord dispelled this alarm.”

In the meantime, the people of Dalry parish, having heard Mr. Wilson preach, were very anxious to have him settled among them. The necessary steps were taken. The Presbytery, however, opposed themselves to Mr. Wilson, and the parish appealed their cause to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr. To this matter, the following extract alludes.

“30th March, 1716. This day, the case of the parish of Dalry gave me much concern. The people have appealed from the Presbytery to the Synod. The Presbytery continue their opposition

to me. The cause is, their fears that I be of different principles from themselves. The opposition I have made to Professor Simpson is at the bottom of all. But I look to an higher hand; and I may find that this trying providence comes from the Lord. It speaks out my unfaithfulness in preaching the gospel of Christ, my little concern for the good of souls, my selfishness in preaching, and my unfruitfulness in the work. The Lord hath permitted this opposition to me from the Presbytery. But in this matter I endeavour, notwithstanding, to put a blank in the Lord's hand, to submit to his will and way, and to surrender myself to his service, whether in the present situation of preaching from place to place, or in a fixed charge; and I desire that the Lord may direct the Synod to what is for his glory and the good of the Church. If it be not for his glory, let it be fairly broken. If it be for his glory, he will make mountains plain."

"April. This month, the Committee met about that weighty affair of the Professor's. I was in Edinburgh all the time of their meeting. I remark the two following things respecting this business:—

1. The greatest part of the Committee laboured to bring the Professor off, by palliating his errors, and

coining senses upon his erroneous propositions. Oh, how distressing was it to see men act in this manner!

Yet, 2. *The Lord left not himself without a witness.* He helped six members of the Committee to give faithful witness for truth, against these errors, and to do their utmost to reason against them; and, when they were not condemned, they immediately entered their dissent."

It was not the design of the Great Head of the Church, that Mr. Wilson should be settled to labour statedly at Dalry. Another sphere of labour was marked out for him; for, in the course of this year, whilst in the bounds of Dunblane Presbytery, being at Pitcaithly Wells, for the benefit of his health, he had occasion to preach in Perth; and he proved so acceptable to the people, that they expressed a strong wish for his settlement among them, for their third minister. They had never had more than two ministers before. This movement was successful; for the necessary arrangements were speedily made: a call was moderated, he was unanimously chosen to be one of the ministers of that city, and his Ordination by the Presbytery of Perth, took place after the usual trials. In reference to this important event, we have the following notices in the diary:—

“July, 1716. I went to Perth, and stayed at Pitcaithly Wells. I came to the town on the 28th, and preached there on the 29th, with very much enlargement; and also on the 31st, I delivered a week-day sermon.”

“August. I came to Edinburgh on the 13th. Here I was a witness to that melancholy business of Mr. Webster and Professor Simpson. The greatest part of the Committee were set on bringing off the Professor; and, in the end, came to this conclusion, that he was free of the errors charged against him by Mr. Webster. The Professor excepted against me, and I was rejected from being a witness in this business. I heard at Edinburgh, that there was a unanimous call moderated for me at Perth; and I got a letter from the Moderator to wait upon their Presbytery at their next meeting.”

“September. I came to Perth on the 5th, and when I was in the Presbytery, the Moderator told me there was a unanimous call, signed by the Town and Session of Perth, to take part in the ministry there. I presented my testimonials, and they were satisfied. The call was put into my hand, and I delivered it into the clerk’s hand, and

told I had need of sympathy, that the Lord might make plain his way before me. They prescribed a thesis to me, upon the reason of faith.

“I went to Glasgow on the 7th, and preached there on the 9th, upon these words, *As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

“I returned to Perth on the 18th, and here delivered my thesis on the 19th with approbation. I preached on the 23d. I had an exercise and addition prescribed me upon 1 Thessalonians ii. 3.\* A lecture and popular sermon were also assigned.

“I preached at Perth on the 30th.

“I delivered the popular sermon on the 3d day of October.

“I preached in Perth on the 7th, and on the 14th, of October.

“On the 17th, I delivered my lecture and my other trial discourses, and was subjected to the ordinary examinations. I was, in all, safely carried through.

“I was approved of in all my trials. The Lord carried me through them, blessed be his name. The day of my ordination was set on the 1st of November, and Mr. Black was appointed to preach the sermon.

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\* *For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile.*

“30th October. The day of my Ordination is drawing near. I have great and weighty work before me. I desire to put the following questions to myself:—Have I an interest in Christ? and, have I a call to Perth? Let me consider these things to-morrow, which day I set apart for secret prayer and humiliation, before that great and weighty work.

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

“Question 1. Am I interested in Christ?

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

“Question 2. Have I a call to Perth?

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

1. That the door was shut upon me in Dalry.

Though the people were for it, yet the Presbytery opposed it. I cannot take the language of this Providence, to be any other than this,—that the Lord has no service for me there.

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

3. I have had no hand in this call. I have been most passive in it. It has pursued me, when I fled from it.

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

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

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

7. I must remark, that my education and turn of mind, seem to be fitted for a public place, such

as Perth. I was brought up in a public place. I cannot live in a solitary place without prejudice to my health: and my temper and habits require a public place to *stir up the gift* that is in me. O Lord, give me wisdom from above, furniture for the great work before me, and enable me to be diligent and faithful in discharging the solemn duties of the ministry."

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

"1st November, 1716. This day being my Ordination day, Mr. Black, my colleague, preached upon Gal. i. 15, 16, insisting chiefly on the first part of the 16th verse,—*It pleased God to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.* The Lord gave his countenance and presence to his servant, in the whole of the work. He was enlarged in preaching; and when he came to the solemn action, he was much enlarged in praying. I was this day solemnly set apart for the work of the ministry, by prayer and the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery. Oh for grace from above, that, miserably qualified and unworthy as I am, I may serve the Lord in this great and weighty work of the gospel of his Son."

The Rev. Thomas Black, who presided at the Ordination, was the senior minister of Perth at this time. He had been formerly minister at Strathmiglo, in the Presbytery of Couper, and afterwards minister at Weems, in the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy, and he had been admitted at Perth in the year 1698. The second minister at this time, was the Rev. John Fleming, who had been formerly minister at the Castle of Edinburgh, and had been admitted at Perth in the year 1713.

As to the state of religion in Perth, at the period now referred to, we have been informed that it appeared exemplary and prosperous. Here, in the sixteenth century, John Knox had preached against the corruptions of Popery, and had made very successful efforts in the work of reformation. In this city and neighbourhood, the Protestant doctrines had been effectually published, and the Reformation heartily embraced. From that period, religion had been, on the whole, professed and practised in this district of our country, with considerable consistency and purity.

This religious character of Perth seems to have been preserved and to have been honourably distinguishing to the place about the time of Mr. Wilson's

**Ordination.** Family worship appears to have been almost universal among the inhabitants. The external observance of the Lord's day was remarkable and exemplary. On one occasion, it happened that, either through inadvertency or design, an English regiment, which was quartered at Perth, paraded the streets playing on their musical instruments, on the Sabbath day. The Provost wrote immediately to the Secretary of War, inquiring if this conduct on the Sabbath, to which they were quite unaccustomed, was authorised by his Majesty. He soon received a letter expressing extreme sorrow that such a thing had taken place, empowering him to put an immediate stop to it; and intimating, that the officers would be deprived of their commissions, if his orders were not strictly observed.



## PERIOD II.

FROM HIS SETTLEMENT IN PERTH TILL THE  
RISE OF THE SECESSION.

1716—1733.

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### CHAPTER I.

*From his Settlement to the time of his Preaching at the  
Opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling.*

1716—1727.

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THE Reformers in our own, and in other countries, made great and successful efforts in the cause of religion. Through the grace of God, they went forward with wisdom and intrepidity, and were the honoured instruments of rescuing Christianity from many of the degrading corruptions and oppressions of antichristian tyranny.

But when the grosser errors of Popery were discovered and discarded, the work was not completed. Great as its progress was, there were still advances to be made. Several of the Reformed

Churches, retaining much of the spirit of antichrist, either stopped short in their course of purification, or declined from what they had attained. Continued struggles in behalf of religion, for the purpose of preserving, or restoring, or advancing Reformation, were, therefore, necessary.

The want of enterprising zeal to further the interests of religion in our land, at the time of the Revolution, was a matter of regret and humiliation to many; and to this defect, we must impute the progressive degeneracy in the Church of Scotland, which we have already remarked.

But never were there wanting some worthies, who, however unsuccessfully, opposed themselves to the prevailing defections, and who, by various exertions, were honourably faithful to Christ.

From what we have seen of the principles and spirit of the subject of these Memoirs, it may be inferred that he would be found among this number. From the faithfulness and zeal which his whole conduct as a preacher of the gospel seems plainly to indicate, we may presume, that, as a minister, he would be second to none in his heart-felt anxieties, and in his unwearied efforts, not only for the good of immortal souls, but for the public interests of religion.

He was now comfortably settled in Perth, and felt himself happy with his colleagues in the ministry, with the rest of his brethren in the Presbytery, and with the people of his charge. All this must have been very grateful to him, as he had, both in reference to his license, and to his first prospects of settlement, met with so much unmerited opposition from a party in the Church, who, on some material points, differed from him in sentiment.

On the Sabbath after his ordination, he preached on that verse, in the Epistle to the Colossians,\* where the Apostle says, in reference to Christ,—*Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* In his diary, he complains of being “bound up, and of wanting that enlargement which was necessary,” and he earnestly prays for “the presence of God in preaching.”

Young ministers are sometimes ready to trust too much to their own talents and diligence; and, at the beginning of their public life, finding that very close application to study is indispensable, and that, with the attention necessary in preparing discourses, and in discharging their other official duties, their

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\* Chapter i. verse 28.

time is much occupied, they are sometimes apt to be deficient in the duties of personal religion,—forgetting that these, instead of retarding, advance their progress in their important ministerial functions.

We doubt not, that Mr. Wilson made conscience of secret duties, and especially that he continued instant in prayer. But, from that humility and that insight into the springs of corruption, which marked his character, and from that elevated idea which he entertained of the extent and spirituality of the Divine law, we find him, at the outset of his ministerial career, mourning, with much frequency, over his omissions and imperfections.

“10th November, 1716. This day,” says he, “my case is sad. Oh, what deadness and flatness do I feel! *Have mercy upon me, O Lord. Tomorrow I am called to preach, and I have been thinking upon that interesting passage,—This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.* But, alas! I have no frame for preaching. I cannot apply my mind to preach. O Lord, come; make me to live before thee; let me not have the curse and woe of an unfaithful shepherd.”

Not long after his settlement in Perth, an event

took place, which gave a new and very interesting illustration of the prominent traits of his character, and made it evident, that he could trust to God for the consequences of his conduct, if that conduct were obvious duty; and that he was above looking to his own ease and comfort, when his conscience dictated any line of procedure by which these might seem to be exposed to danger. In determining to have a third minister, a difficulty had occurred about the manner in which an adequate stipend might be raised. It happened, however, that a sum of money had been entrusted to the Town Council, for some benevolent objects. For the purpose of enabling them, in whole or in part, to pay the stipend of the proposed third minister, the Magistrates, from no intentional breach of trust, but certainly from that want of a strict principle of honour, which too many manifest, who are characters otherwise unexceptionable, had agreed to resort to this fund, for the application of which to its proper object, it had been thought, there was no immediate call. All this was unknown to Mr. Wilson, till some time after his ordination. Having suspected nothing of the kind, he felt so indignant when he heard of it, that he absolutely refused to receive as stipend, what had been taken from this fund. This led to

an inquiry, in a court of law, whether the Town Council had the power of applying the fund to any but its proper purpose. When the case was settled, as might be supposed, against the Magistrates, the Judge inquired particularly into the occasion of the question; and, when told that it was a singular proof of integrity and disinterestedness, as it had been first agitated by the very person who was to have derived benefit from the fund, he remarked, that certainly he must be a noble character, and that he ought to be well provided for. Before rising from Court, he proposed that the City of Perth should be assessed, to raise an adequate sum. This course was forthwith taken, and the stipend was made one of the best in the Church of Scotland at that period.

After he was ordained to the holy ministry, when, of course, his manner of life became more uniform, Mr. Wilson did not discontinue his old practice of self-examination: and, especially, when he had the prospect of observing, either at home or abroad, the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, he still habituated himself to inquire seriously into his views and desires, in reference to the solemn work of communicating. Of this, many examples are to be found

in his manuscripts. But, as they are necessarily much similar to those we have already presented, it would be superfluous to introduce them at length. In these he often expresses his sense of imperfection in the discharge of his ministerial duties, his anxiety to increase in diligence and zeal, and his great concern for the salvation of immortal souls.

The following additional specimens of his secret exercise, may be presented, before we proceed to exhibit him in his activities for the public and general interests of religion:—

“10th August, 1717. The Communion being at Kinnoul to-morrow, the following things are earnestly desired by me, in the view of sitting down at the Lord’s table:—

1. I desire grace to improve myself by meditation and prayer, both that my own soul may be enlarged, and that I may be more and more useful in the service of Christ.

2. I desire to be kept from formality and indifference in the discharge of my work, and to be enabled to lean upon Christ for all necessary and promised aid.

3. I desire to have pardon of sin, and spiritual reviving and growth.

4. I desire to wait upon God, that he may come with power, light, life, and liberty.

5. I desire to take a greater hold of Christ by faith, to get a greater concern for souls, and a greater weight of them upon my spirit."

"Perth, 10th May, 1718. To-morrow is the Sacrament Sabbath in this place. This night I find myself—

1. Under great concern about the growth of grace in my own soul.

2. Under many perplexing feelings about my ministerial work, having reason to be humble, for not preaching Christ so plainly and earnestly as I should do, for not singly aiming at the glory of God, and for not being sufficiently concerned for souls.

3. Desirous to mourn for sin, and to obtain pardon and sanctification. Oh for a believing look at a pierced Christ.

4. Anxious to receive Christ by faith. Oh that I may get a meeting with him, and may be enabled to cast the stress of my soul for eternity upon him.

5. Standing in need of more grace. Give me more faith in Christ, and more earnest desires after him. Take away my vain thoughts, and fix my mind and heart wholly on thyself."

“Perth, 22d July, 1719. The Communion in this place is to be on the 26th, and I am to conduct the principal part of the great and solemn work. I find the following things in my case and condition:—

1. That I am very unfit for such weighty work. May the Lord strengthen and support me.

2. That I have been, in many things, unfaithful in my ministerial calling and work. I have not spoken the great truths of religion as they should be spoken. I have been often negligent in preparation for public work, dull and formal in delivering God’s message, and unconcerned after I have delivered it.

3. That my faith is weak, and my love cold; and that I am not sufficiently thankful for God’s mercies, and active in improving the means and opportunities of usefulness which he affords.

“Oh that the Lord may turn me more to himself, and may make this communion the beginning of better days to my soul. Let me not forsake the God of my youth. Enable me to *grow in grace: to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness*. Oh that, on this solemn occasion, the Lord may give me some *token for good*, some sense of his presence and blessing in public work, and some gracious help in going forward in it. Give thy Holy Spirit to me,

O Lord, and in me come to thy people. *Stir up thy strength, and come and save us. Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.*

“ My errand for myself, at this Communion, is to get pardon and sanctification; a broken heart for sin; and my soul brought up to close fully with Christ.

“ Perth, 26th July. The Sacrament of the Supper was dispensed to-day. I preached on ii. Corinthians, verse 20,—*We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* I had some enlargement in preaching, and in the whole of the work. But my own soul is not sufficiently melted for sin, nor brought completely to close with Christ. *I have not yet attained, neither am I already perfect.*

“ Press, O my soul,—

1. To get application made to the blood of Christ for the pardon of sin, to have the strength of it broken, and to be enabled to live entirely to the glory of God.

2. To get more true concern about my people's spiritual state, and the thriving of the Lord's work among them.

3. To be kept by the Lord in the way of duty, and to be waiting at the footstool of grace for more reviving.”

By the death of Mr. Fleming, in the beginning of 1721, the second charge of the parish of Perth became vacant, and Mr. Stewart of Blairgowrie, was chosen to succeed. To this change Mr. Wilson, in his diary, briefly alludes, with an expression of earnest desire for the Divine blessing on it.

“ Mr. William Stewart,” says he, “ is to be settled here shortly. Oh that he may *come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ*, and that he may be an instrument of much good in this place.”

It may here be observed, that Mr. Stewart was of that party in the Church, of whose sentiments Mr. Wilson did not approve, on which account he had opposed his introduction into Perth. But when his coming was fixed, Mr. Wilson, in the true spirit of Christian love, both to Mr. Stewart and to the people of Perth, uttered the above earnest prayer.

On the 20th of June, this year, Mr. Wilson married Miss Margaret Alexander,—a young lady of most respectable connexions, who, by her piety and worth, was very much fitted to be the companion of his life. Her father, who, as has been mentioned, was an advocate in Edinburgh, had a numerous family of daughters, most of whom were

married, and have respectable descendants. Her mother, whose name was Campbell, was nearly related both to the Earl of Stair, and to the illustrious house of Argyle.

Having, from Mr. Wilson's diary, been led to trace, in some measure, the state of religion in Scotland, immediately before this period, we may now proceed to notice the share he had in ecclesiastical affairs at this early stage of his ministry, when the evils already referred to, were rapidly multiplying.

From what we have seen, it is evident that the Church of Scotland, though, at some periods in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it could rival any Church in Europe in the advancements of Reformation, was by no means thoroughly emancipated from the darkness and corruptions of the *mystery of iniquity*. Like many other portions of the Church, it had been blessed with Reformation, but with Reformation only partial, and of which the progress was both desired and contemplated.

The Revolution, too, though it effected a great deliverance, for which much gratitude and praise are due to the Disposer of all events, left many imperfections. Hence, there was much scope and necessity for faithful witnessings for God.

In the honourable work of resisting error, and of vindicating and defending the truth, Mr. Wilson, and others, were now called forth, by Divine Providence, to exert their talents and influence.

The history of the Marrow controversy, as it has been called, is a proof of the low ebb to which the pure exhibition of the gospel had now fallen in the Church of Scotland. The agitation of this controversy gave an opportunity to these faithful ministers to contend for the purity of religion.

“ Proceeding on the report which their Commission laid before them, the Assembly condemned several positions selected from a book, entitled, ‘ The Marrow of Modern Divinity,’ which, though not expressed in the most luminous and unexceptionable language, yet exhibited precious evangelical truths, essentially connected with the freeness of the gospel, and with the divinely-appointed way by which a sinner obtains peace, and is disposed and enabled to walk with God in newness of life. The doctrines of the Marrow were industriously represented as inconsistent with the obligations to obedience, which the law of God imposes; as annulling the most powerful motives to diligence in duty; and, therefore, as inimical to true holiness. Several ex-

cellent ministers, alarmed by these representations, startled by the phraseology which was selected from the Marrow, less intimately acquainted with the doctrines of the gospel, as they were taught by the first Reformers, and laudably zealous to discountenance every approach to antinomianism, concurred in this condemnation with those who were the known enemies, or the lukewarm friends of evangelical truth. A representation, faithful, yet breathing much meekness of spirit, was presented to the next Assembly, by twelve ministers,\* craving the repeal of the offensive Act. This petition was refused; and, in the progress of the discussion, twelve queries were put to these ministers, respecting the doctrines in question, whose answers to them contain an able exposition and vindication of the principles which the Assembly had condemned. On reconsidering the cause, the Assembly not only passed a new Act, explaining and confirming the former, which they would not repeal, but even called those ministers, who had made so faithful an appearance for the truth, to their bar, and rebuked

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\* The following are their names:—The Rev. Messrs. James Hogg, Thomas Boston, John Bonar, James Kid, Gabriel Wilson, Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, James Wardlaw, James Bathgate, Henry Davidson, William Hunter, and John Williamson.

them. Though the said Act gave such explanations as neutralized some of the unscriptural assertions in the former, yet, it not only failed to vindicate the truth, but maintained several erroneous sentiments, which obscured and misrepresented the true nature of the gospel, and the place which the law and obedience to it hold, in the method of salvation by Jesus Christ.”\*

When this Marrow controversy commenced, Mr. Wilson was but comparatively at the outset of his ministry, and could not be expected to stand forward in the first ranks, or even, where so many were his seniors, to feel himself called on to take any prominent place. He was, however, present at some of the meetings, and he refers to this subject in his diary.

“6th March, 1721. I went to Edinburgh to meet with some ministers† who were to consider about some grievances,—particularly the affair of the last Assembly, condemning the Marrow. We met, and discoursed, and prayed together. Our meetings continued for several days. We had

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\* Testimony of the United Secession Church,—page 32.

† The ministers he met with on this occasion, were the Rev. Messrs. John Kid, Ebenezer Erskine, Ralph Erskine, James Wardlaw, James Bathgate, Thomas Boston, Henry Davidson, and Gabriel Wilson.

much sweet satisfaction in so meeting, and in our praying and conversing together. At length it was agreed, that a representation to the Assembly should be drawn up and signed, complaining of their condemnation of several precious doctrines contained in the book, ‘entitled the Marrow of Modern Divinity.’”\*

But some circumstances, which were unavoidable, prevented him from afterwards taking an active part with his fathers and brethren, in their management of this controversy. Yet, so far from relinquishing, he always defended the sound principles of these contenders for the truth, and long afterwards we find him saying,—“If the Acts and Deeds of the several Assemblies, 1720 and 1722, with respect to some propositions contained in the book,

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\* Mr. Wilson’s account of these meetings agrees with what Mr. Boston remarks in his diary. “The first meeting was spent mostly in prayer; and the Lord was with us at that and other following ones. We went through the Act of Assembly in order, showing what was in it stumbling to us, and conferring thereon. In these meetings, two things were observable. One was, that no debate was kept upon selfish motives, but each one was ready to yield to Scripture and reason, by whomsoever advanced. Another, that when we stuck, and could not get forward, but were in hazard of falling asunder, Providence still interposed seasonably, causing something to be cast up, which cleared our way, and joined us. And it was agreed, that there should be a representation to the Assembly about it, the forming whereof was committed to Mr. Ebenezer Erskine.”—*Boston’s Memoirs*, p. 369.

called 'the Marrow of Modern Divinity,' as also with respect to the representation of twelve ministers, are duly and seriously considered, it may be found that a deep wound has been given, by the present Judicatories, to the Reformation-Testimony, as it has been stated against the Church of Rome, for the doctrine of justification and eternal salvation, by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus."\*

At this period of declension, the faithful ministers of Christ, who, like Eli, trembled for the ark, united their influence, with uncommon anxiety and zeal, to stem the torrent of corruption. They laboured diligently in their respective spheres, and likewise co-operated for the general good of the Church. The prevalence of error brought the friends of evangelical truth, both among the clergy and laity, into closer contact. Evangelical ministers confined their correspondence, on Sacramental occasions, almost exclusively to each other, and the Christian people, by whom evangelical truth was most valued and relished, and, by whom, from their intimate acquaintance with Scripture, it could be very generally distinguished from error, crowded

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\* See his *Defence of Reformation-Principles*,—p. 461.

to hear them. As they came from distant parts of the country, this encouraged the practice, less necessary now, of a multiplicity of week-day preachings,—it being considered an hardship to the people to bring them so far without gratifying their anxiety to hear the gospel as fully as possible, especially as many of them might not enjoy its pure dispensation at home. By such frequent intercourse, the distinction of party, which had long existed in the Church of Scotland, was more confirmed, and became more visible. So much was this the case, that the evangelical party, both of ministers and people, though in outward fellowship with the National Church, seemed to be but nominally united to her, and almost presented the anomalous appearance of a prospering evangelical church amidst surrounding error and declension.

But this state of things could not long continue without generating feelings of bitter animosity, and exciting all the emotions of pride, and envy, and jealousy, towards the advocates for the purity of religion, from those who were opposed to them in their sentiments and practice, and who were thus in popular estimation, which, however, as has been common with those of the same description, they affected to despise, in some measure thrown into

the shade. The consequence was, that the parties stood more aloof, and the line of demarcation between them became more defined; and although, through abounding iniquity, *the love of many*, it is to be feared, *waxed cold*, yet the faithful ministers of Christ, seemed to feel it their duty to increase their diligence, and their zealous co-operation.

These ministers were not only orthodox in their creed, and men of known piety and worth, but, in most cases, distinguished for eminent talents and powerful eloquence. They thus formed a class by themselves, and their adherents were, in general, the truly godly in the land.

To this distinguished phalanx, if we may so call it, Mr. Wilson belonged. *His praise was in the churches*. His ministrations were eminently blessed in the wide sphere of his stated labours; and, wherever he occasionally ministered, he was venerated by the friends of Christ, as an honourable and successful instrument in the cause of religion.

In his stated sphere, he laboured not only *in season, but out of season*; and, by his zeal for God, he was made the instrument of great spiritual good, not only in his ordinary public and private ministrations, but even on occasions of an incidental kind. In opposing vice, where he might unexpectedly

witness it, there was something awfully commanding, and at the same time affectionately winning, in the manner of his reproof. Of this the following anecdote will afford a sufficient and striking illustration:—One evening, as he was passing along the streets of Perth, three of the soldiers, who were at that time quartered in the City, and who happened to be walking behind him, were indulging in the utterance of most profane and blasphemous language. One of them, on some frivolous account, declared it to be his wish, that God Almighty might damn his soul in hell to all eternity. Mr. Wilson immediately turned round, and with a look of dignity and compassion, said,—“Poor man, and what if God should say Amen, and answer that prayer!” Mr. Wilson forthwith passed on. The man seemed to stand petrified, and, on going home to his quarters, was in such distraction of mind and feeling, that he knew not whither to turn for relief. He was soon afterwards seized with fever, under which he continued to suffer the most awful awakenings of conscience, and forebodings of eternal misery. His case was so singular, that many Christians went to visit him, to whom he invariably said he was sure of being beyond the reach of mercy, and that God had sent

his angel to tell him so. One of them asked him to describe the appearance of the person who had pronounced this doom on him. He did so, and the visitant at once perceiving that it must have been Mr. Wilson, inquired if he would wish again to see him. "Oh," said he, "I would wish above every thing to see him, but he will not come near a wretch like me." Mr. Wilson was soon brought, and, of course, told him of the way of salvation, through *Christ crucified*, and encouraged him to *flee for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope set before him*. His words being accompanied by Divine power, the poor soldier was enabled to believe in Christ, and thus found peace and comfort to his troubled soul. He soon afterwards recovered, and became a very exemplary Christian: and, as he felt the army unfavourable to a religious life, Mr. Wilson, at his request, used influence, and procured his discharge. On this he settled in Perth, became a member of the Church, attached himself steadily to Mr. Wilson, and was, through life, a comfort to him, and an ornament to the Christian profession.

As Mr. Wilson advanced in age and experience, his activity and zeal for the interests of religion became more and more prominent. In a sermon preached by him in the year 1727, at the opening

of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, which is printed, we find him pointing out, with faithful freedom, those indications of backsliding which then prevailed, and mourning over them with affectionate solicitude.

“The spiritual beauty,” says he, “is very much departed from the Reformed Churches, and there are many symptoms and evidences of a departure of the spiritual beauty from us. If we look abroad to the Reformed Churches, have not the most part of them lost much of the beauty of purity and power too? Error in doctrine, and corruption in practice, seem to prevail every-where. The ordinances of worship are corrupted. The spiritual worship and government of Christ’s House are quite marred in many of them. As, for instance, in our neighbouring Churches of England and Ireland, though their doctrinal articles bear some measure of conformity to the Word of God, yet, through a lordly prelacy, a carnal discipline, and human ordinances of worship, the beauty of Christ’s House is very much defaced among them, and gross ignorance, immorality, and profanity, are the fruits of this amongst their people. Again, with respect to ourselves, our standards of doctrine are pure, our ordinances of worship, our rules for discipline and government,

we hope, bear a conformity to the Divine pattern. Thus far we enjoy, as yet, some measure of the beauty of purity. Yet, alas! we may say, our spiritual beauty is very much departed from us. What heart-breaking divisions, animosities, and differences have been amongst us? *The staves of beauty and bands have been broken asunder. For the divisions of our Reuben, there may be great searchings of heart.* Again, how little of the power of religion is to be found amongst us? Our exercise bears not a proportion to our profession. The life of religion lies a-bleeding, ready to expire in our streets. That vigour of faith and love, that sometimes has appeared, is very much abated. It was a seasonable warning given us from this place, on an occasion of the like nature, not long ago, from Revelation ii. 4,—*Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* Ah! where is that lustre and splendour of holiness that should be, and sometimes has been, the distinguishing glory of ministers and people? Nay, may we not, in the words of the Spirit of God by the Prophet, bewail (Lam. iv. 7, 8),—*Her Nazarites were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk, they were more ruddy in their body than rubies, their polishing was of sapphire: Their visage is blacker*

*than a coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick?"*\*

Such is a general view (in which he was far from being singular) of what was the state of religion in Scotland, in the estimation of a calm, candid, conscientious, and godly observer, whose talents and opportunities enabled him to take an accurate survey, who, so far from viewing the Church of Scotland with prejudice, was greatly attached to her constitution and principles, and who, grieved at the decay of vital godliness, was ever active and zealous to quicken and promote its growth.

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\* Sermon, entitled, "The Watchman's Duty and Desire," by the late Reverend and Learned William Wilson.

## CHAPTER II.

*From the time of his Preaching at the Opening of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, till his Appearances for the Purity and Liberties of the Church, when the same Synod had been opened by the Reverend Ebenezer Erskine.*

1727—1732.

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Not only did Mr. Wilson, in his individual capacity, labour in the Lord's vineyard; but also in the united exertions of the few faithful contenders for the interests of religion, he was ever ready to lend his aid. At this period of widely spreading corruption, he was of considerable standing in the Church; and he both felt himself called on, and willingly, endeavoured, to make every scriptural exertion for checking the progress of declension, and restoring beauty and vigour to the tarnished and decaying glory of the Church. Of this we shall have abundant proof, as we prosecute the course of our narrative.

In the meantime, it may be proper to take a view of this servant of God in his domestic circle, and to notice some family trials with which, at this period, he was visited.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilson had twelve children, of whom only three,—namely, Isabella, John, and Mary,—reached the years of maturity. These three had, each, families, and lived to old age. With an exception or two, the names of his children, and the dates of their birth, are distinctly recorded in the diary. We shall, afterwards, have occasion to speak of the three who lived to advanced age, and likewise of Gilbert, a fourth, who, though he died in youth, survived his father. At present we have to remark, that amidst the numerous bereavements in his family, Mr. Wilson appears to have been wonderfully supported by grace, and suitably exercised; and to have always manifested much of the meekness and resignation of the experienced Christian. As an illustration of this, we quote the following interesting record from his diary:—

“In the month of August 1729, there was great distress in my family. Some time in July, Mr. Ebenezer Erskine’s daughter came to my family sick. Her sickness proved to be the small-pox. She was very ill, but the Lord restored her. As she recovered, all my four children\* fell sick. My

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\* By this time he had had six children, but two had been removed by death.

daughter Isabella on the 11th, George and Marjory on the 12th, and William on the 14th. They were all very ill. I was in great distress about them. On the 22d, when the small-pox was about the height, they seemed to be all in danger. It was a very bad pox. The Lord was now threatening to bereave me of all my children at once. The 22d and 23d days of this month were very heavy days to me. I was helped to exercise some measure of concern about the souls of my children. The Lord, in his providence, seemed to be striving against me, and to say that I had sinned.

“On Sabbath morning about four o'clock, on the 24th of August, the Lord was pleased to remove by death my son George. The night before, I was helped to pray, with some earnestness, for his eternal salvation, and to part with him to the Lord. I was helped to be silent under this stroke, and to hope that the Lord had taken him to himself.

“This morning, my other children, especially Marjory and William, seemed to be in great danger. No hopeful symptoms of recovery appearing about them, I went alone, weighted and heavy, not knowing what to think of this speaking providence, the Lord threatening to bereave me of all my chil-

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

“It pleased the Lord that my three children recovered. Oh, that they may live before the Lord.

“Tuesday, 24th March, 1730. About half-past

one in the morning, my son Gilbert was born. He was baptized on the Thursday following, by my colleague, Mr. Thomas Black. The Lord has given me this son instead of George, whom he was pleased to take from me."

These extracts admit us completely into the family circle, and present it, at the time referred to, as a scene of alarming trouble. Mr. Wilson appears an amiable, anxious, loving father, who had much enjoyment in his children; but who, when reminded that they were only lent by God, was willing to give them up at his call. He was greatly earnest for their recovery, but more for the salvation of their souls. Solicitous as he was that they should be spared, yet, like his Divine Master, it was not his own, but God's will he wished to be done. It was his practice, as it should be that of all Christians, to go to the Lord with all his concerns; and his desire, as it should be theirs, to observe the events of Providence, and to discover and follow the instructions they are intended to afford. To him prayer was a delightful exercise, and was remarkably blessed for calming his mind, for reconciling him to the disposing will of God, and for inducing him, amidst changes and trials, to persevere, with steadfast fidelity, in the path of duty.

But it was not merely domestic occurrences that interested him, and filled him with concern. He was of a public spirit; and, as we have seen already, was anxiously observant of the movements of Providence, especially as they affected the Church; and he had, as will appear, a large and important share in the ecclesiastical affairs of his day.

His observations regarding the state of religion, were not general and vague, like those of a distant spectator. He was within the scene, and had constant opportunity of seeing, and hearing, and judging; and much of what he witnessed, which was never made the subject of public animadversion, was pondered in his heart, and became the occasion of secret lamentation and prayer.

“As to the present state and condition,” says he, in his diary (10th November, 1731), “of the Church of Scotland, matters look with a very dismal and threatening aspect. Ministers are thrust in upon vacant parishes, contrary to the wishes of elders and people, in all corners of the land. Disaffected heritors interest themselves every-where in the settlement of parishes, and they introduce such ministers as elders and people are averse to. Our congregations are thus planted with a set of corrupt ministers, who are strangers to the power of godli-

ness; and, therefore, neither in their doctrine nor walk, is there any savour of Christ about them. Yea, such are becoming the prevailing party among the ministry, and too many of these are mockers at the exercises and real experiences of the godly. At the opening of our Synodical meeting at Perth, Mr. Thomas F— — —, minister at Dumbarnie, preached a very loose general sermon, with a sneer, and some bitter invectives, against serious ministers. Some, said he, loved a popular cant, and affected to make grimaces in preaching. This same man, some short time after, when Mr. Moncrieff, of Abernethy, remarked, on a young man's discourse, before the Presbytery of Perth, that there was nothing of Christ in it, had the assurance to reply,—‘And must Christ still be the burden of the song?’ Yet, the Presbytery took no notice of the scandalous expression,—a sad swatch of the spirit that prevails amongst us.”

This last-mentioned fact, of itself, goes far to indicate the state of declension in religion at this period, and to evince how much the glory had departed from the Church in our land. It is not necessary to our purpose (though it would be easy) to adduce such facts. Many of them are elsewhere

sufficiently preserved and exhibited.\* But it is abundantly evident, from the extract we have just given, that the anti-evangelical party had by this time become very numerous and powerful. This increase of the opponents of pure religion, Mr. Wilson traces to some of its true causes,—the introduction of “corrupt ministers, who were strangers to the power of godliness,” and a prevailing laxity of discipline.

In this country, evangelical doctrine had been extensively propagated; and, by the serious and intelligent among the laity, it was much relished and valued. Arminianism, indeed, having been, at a period somewhat earlier, introduced into England, had now found its way into Scotland, and was maintained and taught by many with uncommon eagerness. But a great proportion of the people were so tenacious of the doctrines of grace, that the choice, at popular elections, almost necessarily fell on ministers known to be evangelical. On this account, the Arminian party, attached to patronage on secular grounds, seemed disposed to support it, as also subservient to the advancement of their favourite

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\* See Testimony of the United Secession Church, and other public documents of the Secession, at different stages of its progress. See also the writings of Boston, Willison, and others, who grant all that the Secession declares respecting the defections of this period.

tenets. When its yoke was imposed, the exertions of the faithful for reformation were still more counteracted, and a new inlet secured to corruption. The struggles against patronage, at the time referred to by Mr. Wilson, were, in a considerable degree, adventitious, as they were, primarily, struggles for the still greater objects of evangelical truth and order; the possession of which, already so much lost, was more endangered by wresting from the people the exercise of their right to choose their ministers.

Even considered in itself, though there were not greater evils to complain of, patronage is an unwarrantable imposition. Hereby congregations are insulted and oppressed. Those who support this antichristian measure, show an indifference to the liberties of the Christian people; and the people themselves who endure it, manifest a spirit of abject submission. It is evident that, in the present day, the sense of duty, and spirit of resistance, seem to be so much lost, that it is tamely submitted to without remonstrance, as a thing of course, and a matter established by the custom of ages. The evil is not diminished, nor its injustice removed, nor the outrage it offers to the good understanding of professing Christians, at all lessened, by its long

continuance. It involves all who submit to it, even in its mildest forms, in much sin, and in the deep charge of unfaithfulness to Christ. Were members of the Establishment possessed of the knowledge and spirit of many of their fathers, and of the principle of fidelity to Christ, they would not so simply submit to the incumbency of a minister whom they cannot esteem, or who, though worthy of esteem, was not the object of their choice; nay, they would not tacitly permit this invasion of right to take place any where in their Church. Would they not rather still resist every such impious and degrading encroachment on the *liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free*? The insult offered to common sense, not to speak of religion, by patronage alone, would, to persons of spirit, did they exercise their understandings at all on the subject, be utterly insufferable. The people of Scotland, we are persuaded, were they freed from early prejudice, were they properly enlightened, and were they as brave and resolute in supporting the honour of Christ, and advancing the glory of his Church, as they are noble and spirited in fighting the battles of their king and country, would, at every such insult, spurn with disdain, and here also *show themselves men*.

About this stage of his ministry, the people of Perth had an opportunity of manifesting their warm attachment to Mr. Wilson. For there was a motion among the parishioners, in the parish of Rhynd, to call him to be their minister, and they at length called him. In reference to this he says,—

“I was in great perplexity. The whole people of the town of Perth cleave to me with the utmost affection. All of them did, in the strongest manner, express their unwillingness to part with me. The serious people through the country are very anxious for my continuance in Perth.”

When this call came out, the Presbytery decided on his continuance; and though, on some accounts, he would have preferred being translated, yet he acquiesced in the judgment of the court, for the following reasons:—

“1. None of the godly in the town or country had freedom about my going away; and it would have been a hard matter to have put my thoughts against the general voice of serious people.

2. I never in the least gave any encouragement to the people of Perth, to expect my stay amongst them; but rather, on the contrary, I expressed my inclination to go away. Yet all this did not, for any thing I know, lessen their esteem and affection for me.

3. Though I devolved the matter wholly on the Presbytery, yet they had not freedom to loose me. I have found my mind more easy about staying since that time."

The practice of testifying from the pulpit against prevailing errors and corruptions, had now become common among the zealous evangelical ministers, and this increased the irritation and hatred of their opponents. The necessity for resorting to this mode of testifying, arose from the Act of the General Assembly, by which the marking of dissents and protestations was discountenanced. "This deed was highly unconstitutional, because it deprived members of a privilege, not only just and reasonable in itself, but to which they were entitled by former Acts of the Assembly, and by immemorial usage. It was oppressive and ensnaring, for it refused to those who might conscientiously disapprove of the proceedings of the Court, the most obvious and suitable means of expressing that disapprobation, of exonerating their own consciences, and of manifesting to future generations, by the records of the Court itself, that sinful measures had not been adopted without strenuous, but respectful opposition, the grounds of which all might examine. It seemed to indicate

a secret conviction in the prevailing party, that their procedure would not abide a fair trial by the Word of God and the standards of the Church; and was calculated to enable that party to pursue their iniquitous career, undisturbed by the plain and faithful testimonies against their measures, which reasons of dissent and protestation would exhibit.

“To those who venerated the standards of the Church as the law of their administration, and the bond of their fellowship—who were deeply afflicted by the departure from them in matters of the highest importance, which had long characterised the Assembly’s proceedings—who were anxious to repress the tide of defection—and who were determined to maintain a good conscience, no other method remained for securing these great and necessary objects, in communion with this degenerate Church, except that of testifying against her apostacies in their public ministrations.”\*

Amidst the circumstances of defection, to which we have in part referred, a few of the more faithful ministers were induced to associate, with the express design of consulting with each other, and asking counsel of God, about that course which it

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\* See Testimony of the United Secession Church, p. 35.

would be proper for them to pursue, respecting the best competent means which they should employ to stem the current of corruption, and effect some ecclesiastical reformation.

“About this time, November and December, 1731,” says Mr. Wilson, in his diary, “a few ministers met together to consider what might be proper for them to do in the present juncture. Those who first met, were Mr. Gillespie at Strathmiglo, Mr. Laing at Newburgh, Mr. Lachlan M‘Intosh at Errol, Mr. Fisher at Kinclaven, Mr. Moncrieff at Abernethy. I was with them at all their meetings. After prayer and conference, we agreed upon a representation and petition to the next General Assembly, relating to the grievances the Church is at present under. We thought, that if the Assembly should not regard it, it would be at least a standing testimony to future generations, against the present courses that have such a visible tendency to ruin the Church of Scotland.

“A draught of a representation was prepared, and it was agreed to write to some ministers to meet with us at Perth on the 21st day of February, 1732; and that copies of the representation should be sent them, that they might give their judgment upon it at meeting, and might be ready to sign it.

“February 1732. About eighteen ministers having met together from several places, the representation was read over and amended; and a fair copy being written, it was signed by us all who were present, and afterwards it was signed by several other ministers, together with a commission to some of our number, to present it to the ensuing General Assembly.”\*

Such was the origin of this representation. It was subscribed by forty-two ministers and three elders.† Its progress and result are also particularly men-

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\* This representation is long, otherwise we would have presented it. It has for its object, the statement of various grievances: “such as the growth and spreading of error, intrusions into the ministry, and the procedure of the commissions of the General Assemblies, assuming to themselves a power of appointing Committees for trying and ordaining ministers in vacant congregations, not only without the concurrence and consent of the Presbyteries and Synods immediately concerned, but also in direct opposition to their declared minds; craving likewise, that the Assembly might take proper measures for the redress of the above and other grievances particularly mentioned.” See *Defence of Reformation-Principles*, by the subject of these Memoirs.

† The following are the names of the subscribers:—Messrs. George Gillespie, George Freer, John Drummond, John Currie, Robert Laing, Robert Gray, George Meik, Lachlan M’Intosh, William Wilson, John Gibb, James Kerr, James Fisher, John Gow, Thomas Nairne, John Row, Alexander Moncrieff, Thomas Mair, Robert Coventrie, John M’Claren, John Bonar, Ralph Erskine, John Wardlaw, James Farquhar, Ebenezer Erskine, John Forbes, Gabriel Wilson, William Henderson, Thomas Thomson, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Moor, William Hally, David Stevenson, John Johnston, James Goodsir, Andrew Eliot, James Thomson, James Noble, George Mair, John Cranston, James Innes, Henry Davidson, and Walter Hart, ministers; and Alexander Swinton, Thomas Trotter, and William Walker, elders.

tioned in Mr. Wilson's manuscript. But as the representation itself has been printed, and as a particular account of its preparation and character and issue are to be found in publications relating to these times, we abstain from making further extracts from the diary, respecting it.

It is well known, that the Committee of Bills refused to transmit this representation, which was both faithful in its exhibitions of fact, and couched in the most respectful language; and it is also equally well known, that when a number of the representers themselves went to the bar of the Assembly, with a petition complaining of the Committee's refusal, they were peremptorily denied a hearing. Against this they all protested, though, according to the late Act of the Assembly, the protestation was not marked in the minutes of Court.

"The foresaid representation and petition," says Mr. Wilson in his able and well known Defence,\* "was given in, according to the usual order, to the Committee of Bills, to be by them transmitted to the Assembly; but after long attendance upon them, till near the close of the Assembly, they refused to transmit the same. This obliged such

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\* Page 27.

of the ministers as had a commission from their brethren, to present the said representation and petition, and to insist upon the same, to go to the bar of the Assembly with a complaint against their Committee, and to crave that the Assembly themselves might do them the justice, to give their representation and petition a reading in their presence; but this was stiffly refused: whereupon, the Reverend Mr. George Gillespie gave in a protestation against the deed of the Assembly refusing to read their representation. They expressed themselves in the following manner:—"We find ourselves obliged, much against our inclination, and with all due deference to this venerable Assembly, humbly to protest in our own name, and in name of all concurring in the said representation, or adhering, against the said deed; and for the preservation of the just rights belonging to us as men, Christians, and office-bearers in this Church (by the light of nature, Word of God, constitution of this Church, claim of right, laws of the land, and manifold approved precedents, since the Reformation to this day), to have representations and petitions anent grievances, which are, or may be offered by ourselves or others to the General Assembly, or other Judicatories of this Church, received,

openly read, and taken into serious consideration, by the said Courts, for redress, &c. But neither was this protestation, though given in under form of instrument, regarded, or allowed to be marked."

The representation to the same Assembly, of 1782, by upwards of fifteen hundred people throughout the country, members of the Church, and many of them office-bearers,—complaining of violent settlements, the propagation of dangerous errors, and other lamentable and growing evils, and which, it is well known, met with similar treatment, is also particularly noticed in the diary of Mr. Wilson, and is stated to have "consisted of considerable strength of argument," and to have been "penned with greater warmth of expression than that of the ministers."

Such contemptuous outrages against the privileges of a Church, and the fidelity of its best members, are scarcely to be paralleled in ecclesiastical administrations.

In the meantime (as might be expected) the tide of corruption was rolling on, and there occurred numerous examples of defection, respecting which, were it necessary, we might make ample extracts.

In particular, the violent settlement of ministers was persisted in. As these are somewhat circumstantially noticed in the diary, we give, respecting them, the two following quotations:—

“The violent settlement of ministers, was still carried on. In the month of March, Mr. Charles F—— was ordained in Kinfauns, upon a call signed by seven heritors and life-renters, one of them, *viz.* Mr. C—— of Glendoig, was an elder, and the only gentleman of our communion who signed the call. All the rest of the elders, being six, together with the whole congregation, were reclaiming against the settlement.”

From the deed appointing this settlement, Mr. Wilson felt it his duty to dissent in Presbytery, and in this he was joined by his brethren Messrs. George Meik, Alexander Moncrieff, Robert Coventry, and Lachlan M‘Intosh.

“The elders and people at Kinross,” says Mr. Wilson, “complained to the Assembly, at this time, against the proceedings of the last Commission in the settlement of Mr. S—— as their minister. He was ordained by a Committee of the Commission, appointed for that purpose. All the elders except one or two, and the most part of the people of that parish, as also the Presbytery, reclaiming. But the

Assembly dismissed their complaint, and appointed the Presbytery of Dunfermline to receive and enrol Mr. S—— as one of their number.

“This,” adds he, “was one of the violent intrusions too common at this time; but complaints to our Assemblies for redress, were all to no purpose.”

It is evident that violent settlements were much more frequent in these days, than they are now: if, indeed, in our times, any settlement can be thus stigmatized. Those members of the Establishment (and their number is very small) who will not submit to the oppressive impositions of patronage, can elsewhere enjoy all ecclesiastical privileges. From prudential reasons, therefore, patrons, in many places, show more respect to the wishes of the people. Yet settlements are, in general, as much by patronage as ever; but the spirit of the members being almost every-where subdued, the exercise of this unscriptural measure goes on quietly and without opposition: and in many congregations, when there is no incumbent, the people evince their interest in the future settlement, by vacantly expecting and wondering, and often repeating the pusillanimous inquiry,—“Who are we to get?” Instead of this,—were any man to attempt the usurpations of patronage on a society possessed of

any portion of Paul's zeal for Christian liberty, would not their unanimous and honourable conduct entitle them to declare,—*To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour?*

This Assembly of 1732, likewise passed an Act, by which it was provided, that where patrons declined, or neglected the exercise of their rights, the ministers should be chosen, not by the Christian people, but by the majority of elders, and of heritors, if Protestants. “This measure had been transmitted in the form of overture, by a preceding Assembly to Presbyteries, and though a great majority of the Presbyteries who gave their opinion, were decidedly hostile to the measure, yet the Assembly, in direct opposition to a fundamental and standing law (commonly called the Barrier Act), which prescribed that overtures in such cases should be rejected, not only converted it into an Act, but refused to restrict the right to vote to such heritors as were resident in the parish, and members of the Church of Scotland.”\*

This Act is particularly alluded to in Mr. Wilson's manuscript.

“This Assembly,” says he, “passed an Act

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\* Testimony of the United Secession Church,—page 34.

about the settlement of vacant churches, when the right fell into the Presbytery's hands. It was transmitted as an overture unto the several Presbyteries by the preceding Assembly; and though not above six Presbyteries did approve of it in the terms in which it was proposed, yet it passed by a considerable majority.

“This Act made much noise, and was justly reckoned a deep wound and thrust at our constitution, and the interests of religion amongst us. It contained in substance that the election of ministers should be in the hands of the conjunct meeting of heritors and elders. Nothing was left to the rest of the parish, but the liberty to object against the life or doctrine of the man who should be chosen. And according to the Act, if the heritors made the major part of the meeting, which frequently happens, and if they were all upon one side in the election, they might give a minister to the parish in opposition both to elders and people. Yea, though it was moved in open Assembly, that the elective power should be given only to heritors of our communion, yet this was refused, all heritors bearing the character of Protestants were allowed to vote in the election of ministers, whereby our most valuable interests were basely betrayed, and

the settlement of our congregations given up to men disaffected to our constitution, both civil and ecclesiastical,—to malignant enemies of religion and godliness. How deplorable and dangerous now was our situation, especially as our youth were generally corrupt both in principle and practice! Those who appeared to be serious among them, were discouraged and discountenanced: men of lax principles were chosen by the heritors, the Judicatories supported the choice, and thrust them in upon congregations. By this means, the godly through the land were wounded and grieved, congregations were rent and broken, the wicked were hardened, many were tempted to look upon religion as all a cheat, deistical principles prevailed, profanity and wickedness abounded through the land.”

Even without these mournful representations of the public defections in his day, which Mr. Wilson so feelingly makes, we might have concluded, from the arbitrary measures and violent procedure of the Church Courts, that the state of religion in Scotland would be deplorable.

This state of religion is still more particularly noticed by him, and is regarded as a ground of humiliation and mourning.

“Religion,” says he, “was at this time very low.

Our nobility and gentry, for the most part, had not even the form of godliness. Many of them had drunk in deistical principles. Through their frequent visits to London, and their conforming themselves there to the worship and ceremonies of the Church of England, they were altogether careless and indifferent about the worship and government of the Lord's House in Scotland. The most of our barons were corrupt and loose, both in principle and practice; and our commons were generally without that concern about the things of God, which has sometimes appeared amongst us. Few of the young men, who are entering the ministry, have any acquaintance with systematic Divinity: yea, they despise it; and what is worse, many of them appear to be strangers to the power of godliness. They are puffed up with airy speculations; and their heads are filled with new notions. This is the deplorable situation of the Church of Scotland at this time."

This is not the testimony of an enemy, or of *a troubler of Israel*, but of one of the most tried and devoted friends of the Presbyterian religion, as established in Scotland. Yet, even the best friends of the Church of Scotland, and the best friends of many of the Churches of the Reformation, did not

perceive the extent of imperfection by which these Churches were still marked, and the length of that course of improvement, through which, before they could completely realize the Scriptural model, it was necessary for them to advance.\* Thus the traveller,

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\* It appears, by his writings, that Mr. Wilson was by no means satisfied with the constitution of the Revolution-Church, but regarded it as requiring advances, in order to reach the Scriptural standard. Yet, neither he nor any of the friends of Reformation, in his time, fully perceived the extent to which many of the evils, of which they justly complained, might be traced to a civil establishment of religion; and, far less, did they perceive, that such establishment of religion is itself antichristian. They saw not its inconsistency with the Bible more than Luther did, at first, that of the supremacy of the Pope. But Mr. Wilson's efforts, in conjunction with those of some of his friends, have brought a large proportion of the Church, in our land, into circumstances favourable to more correct views on this subject,—views which are pervading the public mind, and which, we doubt not, will, at length, effectively prevail.

“The spirit of a religious establishment,” says an author on this subject, to whom the public is much indebted, “is a sectarian spirit,—it breaks, at the very outset, the bond of peace, and scatters through the land the seeds of discord—seeds which, of all others, require the smallest culture. Taking one form of Christianity, it separates it from the rest, and incorporates it with the State—pronounces it, when so incorporated, The Church,—constitutes it ‘part and parcel of the law’—stamps the doctrines and the institutions of it with the authority of the Sovereign, whether they have, or have not, the authority of God—clothes it with all sorts of exclusive privileges—enriches it with all sorts of liberal endowments—makes it, as nearly as possible, the very image of the political fabric with which it is connected—and then calls upon all good and loyal subjects to lend it their support. If any scruple about obeying the call, and plead the liberty of thinking for themselves, they are regarded with ‘jealous leer malign,’—are branded with the name of sectaries—are looked upon as disaffected persons, not fit to be trusted—and if they are permitted to follow their own way, it is only by sufferance—the boon

on prosecuting some path untrodden by him before, often thinks he sees the eminence which marks the end of his journey; but when he has climbed it, he perceives a new extent of country through which he has yet to pass, and, for aught he knows, there may be hills and dales beyond the boundary of his narrowly circumscribed horizon, through which he may be obliged successively to pursue his course.

There were, we believe, not a few faithful ministers in the Church of Scotland at this period of alarming declension,—who, according to their light, were determined, through grace, to maintain their fidelity. To suppose that all, or almost all, had gone in with prevailing iniquity, would be uncharitable and unjust. When a Church, indeed, has degenerated to a great degree, the prevailing corruptions seem to throw a darkness over her, which, like a foggy

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of toleration is extended to them, and they are taught to be thankful that they are dealt with so graciously—as if the rights of conscience were merely conventional rights—as if they were not rights natural and inalienable—rights over which society has no control, and which cannot be forfeited, even by a crime. Such is the nature of a religious establishment. Such is the method it employs for propagating the gospel. I leave you to judge how far it is likely to answer the end. Might not one say, prior to all experience, that whether it propagate the gospel or not, it is pretty sure to propagate something else—pride among some—discontent among others—animosity among all?”—*See Ecclesiastical Establishments Considered,—a Sermon by the Rev. Andrew Marshall, Kirkintilloch.*

atmosphere, obscuring our view, conceals much good that may remain. Hence, Elijah thought, that in his days, he was solitary in his fidelity to the God of Israel: and, though it is true that the ancient Church had mournfully declined, that the apostacy from the true God was almost universal, and that idolatry seemed to have gained the summit of its degrading influence, yet, we know that his fears had exaggerated the existent evils:—for, said God, *I have left me seven thousand in Israel, which have not bowed the knee unto Baal*. When, in any age, darkness and corruptions prevail, we are not to suppose that the more intrepid and zealous advocates of religion, are alone. In Scotland, at this period, there were many, both among ministers and people, who, through Divine aid, were determined to maintain their ground, and persevere in advancing the Reformation which their fathers had begun. There were many hidden Christians, and Christian ministers, who, being less on the centre of action, were not brought forward to the high honour of appearing decidedly and prominently for God.

But, from the character and situation of the Church of Scotland, according to the statements we have made, some movement towards Reformation might reasonably be expected, and, indeed, was

anticipated by many. It might be thought, that, through means of strenuous resistance, some check would be given, by the providence and grace of God, to the growth of corruption, or that his faithful servants and people, who were involved in a flood of threatening evils, would find some way to escape. The former, with the Divine blessing, might be accomplished by some bold internal effort: the latter, by some actual separation from a Church thus sinking under the weight of her growing corruptions. The former was attempted: yet, though the attempts were many, vigorous, and honourable, that was not the method which God had determined to employ; and, through his wise Providence, these attempts issued in the latter,—in the latter however, not by a voluntary withdrawal, but by a violent and unjustifiable expulsion.

It is pleasant and profitable to trace the origin of religious, as well as of civil associations; and, in proportion as that origin is honourable, is the association itself commended to our notice. If the association has acted a part unworthy of its origin and design, we are filled with disappointment and regret. If, however, our expectations are equalled, or exceeded, the circumstances in which the association arose, are reviewed with interest and gratitude.

Amidst those indications of declension and corruption in the Church of Scotland, at this period, which we have mentioned, and there were many others, it is very surprising, we think, that so few came forward *to the help of the Lord against the mighty*. It is lamentable to observe, how the prejudices of education, or the circumstances of life, influence the understandings and convictions of men. The dread of exposing themselves to the charge of schism, influenced many to be silent. The fear of losing their churches and emoluments, probably influenced more. And only four ministers, of whom Mr. Wilson was one, were, at first, found, who, in these circumstances of deep declension, not only stood fast to the cause of truth, but who, fearless of every consequence, put their trust in God, and went forward through all that course of difficulty and trial to which their faithfulness subjected them.

Such in general was the situation of the Church of Scotland, and such were the alarming occurrences, which were taking place, when in the year 1732, on the tenth of October, the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, minister of Stirling, as Moderator of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, opened the meeting of Synod in Perth, with a sermon on the twenty-

second verse of the hundred and eighteenth Psalm:  
*The stone which the builders refused, is become the head-stone of the corner.*

As between Mr. Erskine\* and Mr. Wilson the most intimate and confidential friendship subsisted, and as this sermon was the foundation of a most serious process, first in the Synod, and afterwards in the Assembly and its Commission,—a process in which not Mr. Erskine only, but Mr. Wilson and other two brethren, were soon equally involved, it is necessary for us here to enter somewhat into detail,—especially as Mr. Wilson's manuscript is very minute and interesting on this subject.

The manuscript, indeed, ceases about this time

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\* "It may be said of this good and great man, that with a clear head, and warm heart, he was possessed of strong natural powers of mind, and an healthy constitution of body, which rendered him capable of great application in the study of divine truth. With the whole system he was acquainted, but especially with the doctrines of grace, of faith, and the sinner's free and unlimited access to the Saviour as such. His sermons contain a clear, accurate, and animated exhibition of the Saviour, and his blessings to sinners, with the absolute necessity of holiness. He was a skilful textuary, entered deeply and regularly into his subject, and spake as one who felt the power and believed the truth of the gospel himself. Having once known the truth, he was steady in his attachment to it. And in Church-Courts he stood forth a champion for what he believed to be the cause of God, with a degree of fortitude which increased in proportion to the opposition that was raised against it."—*Brown's Gospel Truth, Memoir of the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine, p. 68.*

to be of the character of a diary, or journal of passing events, accompanied with statements of his correspondent devotional exercises; and nothing seems to have been inserted in it for more than three years afterwards. Whether he had made no record during this interval, we know not. Perhaps his customary practice might be interrupted by the excess of laborious occupations which now began, and increasingly continued, to crowd upon him.

The manuscript, however, is continued in a general narrative of ecclesiastical proceedings, written in the beginning of the year 1736, but relating chiefly to the commencement of the process against Mr. Erskine in the Synod of Perth and Stirling, in the year 1732. Probably, expecting a much earlier issue to this process, he had postponed any notation respecting it, till he might be able to give a finished account. But, at length, perceiving that the cause was not likely to be soon terminated, and that it was growing into vast magnitude, he seems to have applied himself to recollect the past, and to carry forward the account as new occurrences happened.

This narrative is in long hand. As far as it goes, it is deeply interesting; and the more so, that, probably, not thinking of publication on the subject, he intended the account immediately and princi-

pally for his family, who, he reasonably conceived, might feel a warm interest in transactions in which he had so great a concern.

“The Synod of Perth and Stirling,” says he, “met at Perth, on the tenth of October, 1732. And because something fell out at this Synod which occasioned many thoughts of heart to myself, and brought me into a situation I had not hitherto been in, and, for any thing I know, in all its circumstances, had not a precedent in this Church, and which, likewise, had no small influence on affairs through this whole Church and Land, I shall, for the sake of my children especially, if any of them survive me, give a short historical account of the same; and of the part that I judged it my duty to act, from time to time, wherein I had a remarkable series and train of trials and mercies, of difficulties and outgaits; and at the time when I write this (April 1736), I know not what the issue may be. I continue still in that situation into which, by adorable Providence, I have been brought, and that from one step to another; and I desire to wait for counsel, light, and direction, from him who is given to be *a leader and commander to the people*.”

Mr. Erskine's sermon, Mr. Wilson remarks, “galled many of his hearers. Though he made

no particular application, they considered what he said as applicable to themselves. The truth of what he observed concerning the Jewish builders, was so like the conduct of many ministers at this time, that the consciences of some of them could not but tell them, that they were pointed at, and all the hearers easily made the application."

Among the hearers of the gospel in general, and even among ministers when sitting as hearers, there is often much of a censorious spirit. Sometimes, if but a single sentence or word displeases the auditors, it is taken hold of, to the prejudice and injury of the preacher; and though all the other parts of the sermon be rich in valuable, useful, and interesting truths, they are unheeded, and this one unfortunate expression, or, it may be, seasonable and wholesome truth, not only prevents the discourse from producing its legitimate good effects, but makes it the occasion of much *bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking*. These consequences often follow extensively, in proportion as the real cause of offence is to be found in the ignorance, prejudices, and perverted feelings of the auditors: for then every one may have his own views and leanings; and the imagination, having full play, not only magnifies whatever occasions

the offence, but presents it in new shapes and aspects. This was very much the case with regard to the sermon of Mr. Erskine, of which Mr. Wilson speaks. It immediately led to a virulent discussion, of three days continuance, in which the prevailing party discovered an unhallowed determination to crush, if possible, every thing like faithfulness and zeal for the purity of religion.

“At the afternoon meeting,” says Mr. Wilson, “Mr. Adam F— — —, minister at Logierait, stated that Mr. Erskine, in his sermon in the forenoon, had uttered some things which gave offence, and moved for investigation. He was immediately joined by Mr. M— —, minister at Aberdalgie, a hot, violent man—a plague on the Presbytery of Perth, and most active always in a bad cause. He was also joined by Mr. M— —, then at Forteviot, now at St. Ninians, a man more smooth and subtile than his brother, but his hand still as deep in a course of defection. Mr. Robert C— — of Glendoig, advocate, elder, reasoned also very warmly, for censuring Mr. Erskine: he is a man that follows the fashion of the present time; his principles and conduct in the Judicatories appear to be of a piece.”

If just conclusions are drawn from the preceding specimens, which Mr. Wilson gives, of the character

of those who were strenuous for censuring Mr. Erskine, they cannot be favourable to the party to which these persons belonged. Mr. Erskine, in his sermon, asserted that God's people, as a Church, were—"The Freest Society in the World." But the conduct of the Synod in this cause, was like that of a company of slaves, who, instead of thanking the person who boldly and kindly maintains their right to be free, combine to insult him, and express their contentment and determination to remain in pitiable bondage.

It is well known, that, from the commencement of the attack, neither Mr. Erskine nor his discourse received justice. The different propositions objected to, Mr. Wilson informs us, "were jumbled together by a sub-committee, without noticing their connection with the other parts of his discourse, and not one of them in the shape in which it was laid before the Synod, so that they could not be justly reckoned his; and though Mr. Erskine replied, yet the Synod never noticed his answers. They were determined to proceed to censure, that he and others might be deterred from the like honest faithful freedom."

Mr. Wilson, in the course of this debate, was much impressed with the weight and importance

of the cause, as affecting the interests of religion, and regarded it as a matter of public concern. His natural calmness of temper, did not prevent him from standing at his post, and raising his voice in the defence of truth. He spoke repeatedly in the Synod, with judgment and eloquence, in vindication of his friend Mr. Erskine, and in opposition to the injurious censure which the prevailing party proposed to inflict.

At first he proposed and reasoned, that the Synod should drop the subject altogether. But, when this was objected to, and when much keenness was manifested by the opposite party, he again rose, and entered more directly into the merits of the cause.

“I argued,” says he, “that the propositions presented, bearing to be obnoxious clauses from Mr. Erskine’s sermon, were not relevant, so as to infer censure, as they were really not correct representations of the parts of the discourse to which they were alleged to refer. I likewise argued, that if Mr. Erskine were censured for preaching against the Act of the Assembly in 1732, regarding the settlement of ministers, the Synod thereby laid down a new term of ministerial communion, *viz.* that none of the Acts of our General Assemblies

should be preached against, though ministers should be convinced of their iniquity and sinfulness, and judged it their duty to give a doctrinal testimony against them. I alleged, further, that it was not competent to the Synod, to lay down terms of ministerial communion, as that belonged to the General Assembly, and no General Assembly of this Church had as yet bound up ministers from preaching against their public Acts and Constitutions."

The following is the substance of the answer given to this reasoning of Mr. Wilson:—

"The ministers of this Church having all subscribed to her formula, are thereby bound to submit to the public Acts of her General Assemblies; and if any of them are offensive, they ought not to preach against them, but should take the regular way of representations and instructions against them, from our Synods or Presbyteries, to an ensuing General Assembly."

To this, Mr. Wilson again replied, and the following is the substance of his answer:—

"I argued," says he, "that our formula bound us only to submit to such Acts as were agreeable to our Presbyterian government and discipline; but that, by the Act of 1732, a deep wound was given to our constitution, therefore, a doctrinal testimony

against it was no way contrary to the formula we had signed, but rather agreeable to the same, since, by our subscribing the formula, we obliged ourselves to maintain and support our Presbyterian constitution, and that a doctrinal testimony against such Acts as had a tendency to overthrow the same, was a proper means for the foresaid end. I also stated, that representations and instructions had been offered to some former Assemblies against the present violent methods of planting vacant congregations, but that they had not been regarded; and that, therefore, a doctrinal testimony against such courses was the more necessary. I insisted also on the dangerous effects it might produce, as a rent in the Church would inevitably follow, if the Judicatories should censure Mr. Erskine for the faithful freedom he had used in his sermon."

From all this, it appears that Mr. Wilson had taken a very prominent part in the discussion at this meeting of Synod; and it will be abundantly evident to all impartial, conscientious persons, that he had by far the best of the argument.

It was to be expected, that a man of Mr. Wilson's talents and fidelity, would readily embrace the opportunity, now providentially afforded him, for at once giving publicity to his own sentiments, on

matters of the highest importance, and defending the cause of a friend and brother, who had acted with seasonable and intrepid faithfulness. The evils complained of were not of a private, but of a public nature, not of local, but of general interest. The opening of a Synod, too, was one of the best, though one of the most hazardous opportunities of stating them. The Synod consisted of many members. They were about to meet in their judicial capacity, and would have an opportunity to do something for reforming abuses. With respect to the prevailing evils,—some members needed information regarding them,—others, encouragement to oppose them,—others, warning against indifference, or partiality to them,—and all, excitement to the discharge of present duty.

But the danger of publicly testifying against prevailing evils, on such an occasion, lay in the melancholy fact, that the great proportion of those who constituted this Synod, seemed to be the very instruments of promoting them. And it is well known, that men can seldom endure to have their faults set in order before them, how meekly soever, or benevolently the exposure may be made. But Mr. Erskine knew his duty; and it was right that no danger should deter him from performing it.

Had he entertained the Synod with groundless flatteries, these would have appeared seasonable truths to many, and would have gained their applause; but when the reverse was done (though with good reason, and without personal reference), not only did a great proportion of the members consider the court as insulted, but each of these seemed to feel, and to act, as if the blame of the evils complained of, had been thrown exclusively on himself.

It would be uncharitable not to suppose, that there were several members who, in Mr. Erskine's place, might have done nearly as he did; for such Testimony-bearing, as it was called, was the practice of the day: and some might, perhaps, have spoken in still plainer and more pointed language.

The history of this process, in its rise and progress and issue, is detailed in many ecclesiastical documents, to which all have access.\* It belongs to us to notice it, as it regarded Mr. Wilson, and to exhibit it so as to illustrate his character, and the views he entertained of those extraordinary ecclesiastical proceedings.

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\* See, especially, the Testimony of the United Secession Church, and the Testimony of the Associate Synod of Original Seceders.

The long debate, to which we have referred, ended in finding, by a majority of six votes, that Mr. Erskine was censurable. The Rev. Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, "Dissented from, and protested against, this sentence of the Synod," in which Mr. Wilson, and ten other ministers, joined him. Mr. Erskine himself, and the Rev. James Fisher of Kinclaven, did also protest against the sentence, and appealed to the ensuing General Assembly.

Many who have not seen Mr. Erskine's sermon, which was printed, and is still extant, may be apt to conceive unfavourably of it from its extraordinary results. They will, perhaps, suppose that it exhibits a spirit—unworthy of a minister of the gospel,—inconsistent with pulpit dignity,—and dishonouring to the King of the Church. It will, however, be found a faithful evangelical sermon, free from all heat and virulence, breathing much of the spirit of Christian love, and manifesting the most temperate zeal for the Redeemer's glory, and for the good of souls,—zeal which it would have been well for the accusers of this venerable minister to have imitated, and which every sincere servant of Christ must admire, and wish to cultivate.

The suitableness of the subject to the occasion, is well worthy of being remarked; for it is easy to

conceive, that had Mr. Erskine been setting himself maliciously to rail against the Church of Scotland, of which he was a minister, or to expose any real or supposed defection, he might have chosen one of many texts which would have better suited his purpose. His choice seems to have been made, not from any pre-conceived design, even to introduce the things which were so severely censured; but merely because it was a subject suited to the occasion.

In the whole body of the discourse, there is no straining to get at a favourite object. The method is natural, and the illustrations most serious and interesting. There is not even the smallest inexcusable digression from the strain of reasoning which the text itself naturally suggests. He keeps close to his point, and the five heads into which he divides his discussion, are judiciously, affectionately, and faithfully illustrated.

Strangers may imagine, that at least the passages which were objected to, and which led to such serious consequences, constituted the body and scope of the discourse. The very reverse is the case. The first of them is nearly as far on as the middle of the sermon, which is certainly no way indicative of anxiety to expose his brethren and his Church.

Had this feeling existed, it would unquestionably have induced him to proceed to something pointed at once. It is also to be remarked, that there is nothing arrogant or violent in the whole discourse. In the very clauses objected to, of which there are but six in number, there is the utmost modesty and diffidence:—there is nothing of violence,—nothing which any candid, enlightened, faithful, and zealous minister would blame, or would not himself have readily introduced, in similar circumstances. The whole was every way suited to the occasion. His main design was to seize the opportunity of preaching to his brethren an edifying, warning, seasonable, and affectionate gospel sermon. Even the parts alleged to be exceptionable, seem to come in naturally, and without the smallest effort. They are so faithful a preaching of Christ, that had his accusers, who so vehemently objected to them, been humble zealous ministers, and not as they seem to have been, actuated by pride, and opposition to evangelical truth and order, they could never have thought of resting any accusation on grounds so untenable. Instead of affording just cause of complaint, the passages objected to, cannot but be regarded, by every impartial person, as mild, yet manly state-

ments of truth, and witnessings for God, against evils, which had not an imaginary, but a real existence: and they appear to have given offence only because they were true.

We have been the more particular in our reference to this sermon, on account of its importance in relation both to the character of its author, and to the events which it occasioned; and, especially, for the purpose of justifying Mr. Wilson's conduct in Mr. Erskine's defence. By thus referring to the sermon, we clearly substantiate what, without that evidence, we had certainly presumed, that had there been any thing faulty in the discourse, the penetration of Mr. Wilson would have observed it, and his affectionate friendship for Mr. Erskine, would not have prevented him from admitting it, in his defences before the Court.

Though the result of the trial was unjust, yet it was certainly to the honour of the minority in this Synod, that the decision was not carried till after a prolonged discussion, in which the sentiments and violence of the anti-evangelical party were, by some members, steadily resisted. In particular, Mr. Wilson's appearances, in the cause of pure religion, and Scriptural order, which we have noticed, were honourable to him; and that they

afforded him much satisfaction in the retrospect, will be seen, from the following words with which he closes his narrative of these proceedings in Court:—

“ Upon after reflection, I had much peace in my behaviour in the above affair before the Synod, and also in dissenting from their unjust sentence. As yet, I knew not what the Lórd was about to bring out of this whole affair. I was much impressed with the importance of it, and with a view of its bringing forth some things of considerable consequence. If the brethren that were most warm for censuring, had foreseen what was to follow, they had never driven the matter so far. But He, on whose shoulders the government is laid, is *wonderful in counsel*.”

## CHAPTER III.

*From his Appearances for the Purity and Liberties of the Church, in the Synod of Perth and Stirling, till the Constitution of the Associate Presbytery.*

1732—1733.

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BEFORE he was licensed, Mr. Wilson, as we have seen,\* had been warned by his friend Mr. H. “to lay his account with difficulty, and great difficulty, because of the great work and weight of preaching the gospel,—to lay his account with other difficulties besides those which belonged more immediately to the work itself, with difficulties from all hands, and from all quarters and corners.” On many occasions, his experience verified what this minister had led him to expect; and we have little doubt that the warning was remembered and improved.

Mr. Wilson had trials, connected with his office, of a different kind from any we have mentioned,—which falling naturally to be noticed here, we shall, for the sake of variety, and of relieving our attention, briefly narrate, before we follow him into the

subsequent stages of the process begun against Mr. Erskine.

The Old Church of Perth was then divided into two places of worship,\* and the three ministers were accustomed to preach in rotation. The City being but one parish, the three ministers, in a collegiate capacity, had the whole under their pastoral inspection.

Among the servants of Christ, prudence and forbearance, indispensable in all situations, are eminently necessary, when they occupy the same sphere. Here they are in a situation the most delicate; and many persons whose dispositions and conduct make them fit for labouring alone in a congregation, want those nicer qualities which the delicacies of a collegiate charge require. In such a situation, much may occur to create or augment jealousy and strife, which are not only unseemly in all Christians, and especially in the ministers of the Gospel, but are invariably found greatly injurious to the interests of religion.

For a collegiate charge, Mr. Wilson's mild and forgiving temper made him completely qualified; and, had he been, in all respects, happily associated,

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\* It now consists of three.

he would have felt such a situation, in certain views, a privilege and a blessing. But, during part of his ministry, he had much vexation, from the temper and behaviour of one of his colleagues. To this the following extract from the manuscript relates:—

“17th January, 1733. Mr. William S— —, my colleague died. He was ordained to the ministry at Blairgowrie, where he continued, for many years, labouring, not without success, in the ministry of the Gospel; and, when he was there, he was beloved by his own people, and much esteemed by his brethren. He was transported to this place in July, 1721; and, though he had discovered too much eagerness for his transportation, being wearied and spent, as he alleged, with the fatigue and toil, the burden and weight, of such a numerous and extended country charge as Blair, yet he was not long here, when he showed as much keenness to return to his old charge; and the winter after his settlement here, the people of Blair agreed to recall him; but the Synod of Perth and Stirling having refused to transport him, the affair was not pushed farther.

“Immediately after his settlement here, he discovered that he was no way fitted for a collegiate life. Such was his natural temper, that he could not endure one to be equal in esteem with himself;

neither could he be pleased with any thing, unless he was the chief manager and doer himself. I could scarce preach, but he was either contradicting me from the pulpit, by tearing and misrepresenting my expressions, or some way or other discovering a dissatisfaction with me. I cannot express how heavy a trial this was to me. Religion thereby suffered, and the success of the Gospel was obstructed. I was, during his life, in continual uneasiness. Sometimes the trial was made more easy to me, but often I was as one in agony, and so burdened and pressed down, as to be weary of my life. I could often have wished, with the Prophet, *that I had, in the wilderness, a lodging-place of way-faring men.*"

Being a man of peace and humility, Mr. Wilson felt himself, in this instance, very unequally yoked; and the connection, which continued for somewhat more than eleven years, was very uncomfortable,—so much so, that when, during this period, he had, as has been already noticed, a call to Rhynd, a country parish in the vicinity, he would very willingly have retreated thither, notwithstanding the inferiority of stipend, and his predilection for a town life. "But," says he in his manuscript, "Infinite Wisdom determined otherwise. I behoved to stay in Perth,—a

new scene of difficulties and trials, and those of another kind, opens unto me, as I shall afterwards narrate.”

He seems to have borne this trial, throughout, with Christian meekness and resignation,—judging it his duty, to submit to whatever Providence might order. He endeavoured to improve it, in his spiritual exercise, as a dispensation which the Great Head of the Church had appointed for his good.

After noticing Mr. S— —’s death, and subjoining an account of his character and conduct, he makes the following observations on the trial to which he had been so long subjected:—

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

2. During the whole course of my conflict, I had frequent special support and countenance in

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\* Trysting me with, i. e. fixing me down to be tried with.

preaching. I was enabled to publish the doctrine of the free grace of God through Christ Jesus. I got some more confirming and more satisfying views of the mystery of grace, when I was withstood and opposed by a loose and very legal strain of preaching. I sometimes desired to pity and pray for my opponent.

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

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

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

“After Mr. S— —’s death, I went about all the parts of my ministerial work with much peace and

satisfaction. My outward peace, however, was very short. A new storm soon broke upon me. I loved peace and quiet, but the Lord saw meet to order quite the contrary lot for me."

He here refers to the continuance of the process against Mr. Erskine, by the General Assembly and its Commission.

A state of suspense, in reference to what is greatly interesting, is one in which the mind is deeply agitated and perplexed. Such, it is reasonable to conclude, must have been, in a great measure, the feelings of Mr. Wilson, between the meeting of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, referred to, and the meeting of the Assembly of 1733. Yet, being a man of prayer, we doubt not he was all the while suitably exercised in committing his way entirely to the Divine disposal. It is evident, from his manuscripts, that, after the death of his colleague, he experienced, even under this painful suspense, which continued for four months longer, more comfort in the prosecution of his official duties, than he had done for years before, or probably during the succeeding period of his life. It was a short interval of calm in his course of difficulty and trial. He had, indeed, serious apprehensions respecting the

pending process, yet these neither diminished his diligence and zeal in his Master's service, nor prevented him from enjoying the consolations of grace.

At the time of the meeting of the Assembly, in 1733, he hesitated a little about going to Edinburgh,—conceiving that he had discharged his duty by his dissent from the sentence of the Synod. We do not know what removed his scruples, and led him to decide on going, for here all our information from his manuscripts ceases, with the following abrupt conclusion, evidently unintended:—

“I return, then, to give an account of Mr. Erskine's appeal to the General Assembly. When the General Assembly met, on the 3d of May, I did hesitate a little about going to Edinburgh. I thought I had exonerated myself sufficiently by my dissent from the sentence of Synod, condemning Mr. Erskine's sermon, and appointing him to be rebuked.” \* \* \* \* \*

It is probable that, having sat down to write, he had been here unexpectedly interrupted; and that, before he had an opportunity of resuming his purpose, he had found it necessary to form the plan of writing more fully on the subject, and of giving publicity to his sentiments. The abrupt conclusion of his manuscript is the less to be regretted, as the

general facts have been published in various shapes; and are exhibited by Mr. Wilson himself, in his excellent Defence, to which we have already referred.

In pursuing the course of our narrative, unaided now by his manuscripts, it will be necessary, in reference to public matters, more frequently to present Mr. Wilson as speaking by his printed works; and, in particular, by this Defence of Reformation-principles. The Defence\* contains, not only his own views and conduct, but his public pleadings for those who associated with him. He repels the calumnies which were propagated against them, and explains and justifies their procedure.

Many in the Assembly either felt an indifference to the cause of Mr. Erskine, or treated it with contempt and ridicule. Without entering into its character, as the cause of enlightened and pure Christianity, and into the serious principles and consequences which it involved,—without giving any weight to Mr. Erskine's answers to the alleged expressions in his sermon, which had occa-

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\* Mr. Struthers, a living author, has pronounced this work to be "one of the most luminous and dispassionate controversial books in the English language."—See his *History of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 25.

sioned the process, nay, even condemning these answers,—without allowing Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff to state their reasons of dissent, or Mr. Fisher his grounds of appeal, and thus to defend their conduct in circumstances where it seemed most reasonable and necessary that they should have had an opportunity of doing so,—the Assembly precipitately affirmed the sentence of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, for rebuking Mr. Erskine, and appointed him to be rebuked at their own bar.

When this decision was passed, Mr. Wilson, with these other two brethren, adhered to a protestation, which Mr. Erskine immediately gave in against it;\*

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\* The following is a copy of this protestation and adherence:—

“ Although I have a very great and dutiful regard to the Judicatories of this Church, to whom I own my subjection in the Lord, yet, in respect, the Assembly have found me censurable, and have tendered a rebuke and admonition to me, for things I conceive agreeable unto, and founded on, the Word of God, and our approved standards, I find myself obliged to protest against the said censure, as importing that I have, in my doctrine, at the opening of the Synod of Perth, October last, departed from the Word of God, and the foresaid standards; and that I shall be at liberty to preach the same truths of God, and to testify against the same, or like defections of this Church, upon all proper occasions. And I do hereby adhere unto the testimonies I have formerly emitted against the Act of Assembly, 1732, whether, in the protest entered against it, in open Assembly, or yet in my Synodical sermon—craving this my protest and declaration to be inserted in the records of the Assembly, and that I may be allowed extracts thereof.

“ 14th May, 1733.

EBENEZER ERSKINE.”

“ We, the under-subscribing ministers, dissenters from the sentence

and, from this period, these four brethren, viz. the Reverend Ebenezer Erskine of Stirling, the Reverend William Wilson of Perth, the Reverend Alexander Moncrieff of Abernethy, and the Reverend James Fisher of Kinclaven, were all equally involved and interested in this great cause.

Of this protestation and adherence, however, though indicative of respect to the Court, as well as faithfulness to Christ, no notice was at first taken. The Assembly proceeded with other business; and the matter might have rested here for ever, but for an incident related by the late Reverend Adam Gib of Edinburgh, of which he was an eye-witness,—an incident which shows how minute the operations of Providence are, and on what slight, and apparently fortuitous circumstances, the most important events often depend. The paper happened to slide over the table, on which it had been

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of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, do hereby adhere to the above protestation and declaration, containing a testimony against the Act of Assembly, 1782, and asserting our privilege and duty to testify publicly against the same, or like defections, upon all proper occasions.

WILLIAM WILSON.

ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF."

"I, Mr. James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven, appellant against the sentence of the Synod of Perth in this question, although the Committee of Bills did not think fit to transmit my reasons of appeal, find myself obliged to adhere unto the foresaid protestation and declaration.

JAMES FISHER."

laid by the four brethren. "In this conjuncture, a minister, who was sitting beside the table, got up the paper; and having looked over it, with an evident kindling in his countenance, he passionately called out for the Assembly to stop, till they should consider the insufferable insult which he reckoned was committed upon them in that paper."\* On this representation, their curiosity and indignation were roused:—the paper was ordered to be read, and read accordingly.

Immediately a summons was issued, citing the brethren to appear next day. This was quite unexpected. They supposed the matter was over, and they had only intended to avail themselves, as conscientious men, of the liberty for which they had protested,—of testifying, as they saw cause, against the public evils which prevailed.

But the summons was duly obeyed, for the brethren were unwilling to omit any opportunity of obtaining satisfaction themselves, or of affording it to others.

When they appeared before the Assembly, no question was put to them. A Committee was appointed, with which they were directed to retire. After some conversation, in which the protesting

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\* See, *The Present Truth; A Display of the Secession Testimony.*

brethren stated their reasons for the resolution they had taken, the Committee made up their report,—which was, “that the four brethren continued fully resolved to adhere to their paper and protest.”

On receiving this report, the Assembly, without hearing the grounds on which it was founded, and without even permitting the brethren to utter a syllable in their own defence, or in explanation of the views and purposes they had formed, required them to withdraw and await their judgment. Every one must perceive that such conduct was consistent neither with justice nor with Christian feeling, but was in the highest degree arbitrary and tyrannical.

An overture on the whole affair, which had been prepared by a Committee appointed on the preceding day, was now read, considered, and passed into an Act and sentence\* against these four brethren.

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\* The language of this Act, all things considered, especially, that such characters as Mr. Wilson, and his brethren, were the objects against whom it militated, is almost of unparalleled severity. It is as follows:—

“The General Assembly ordains that the four brethren aforesaid, appear before the Commission in August next, and then show their sorrow for their conduct and behaviour in offering to protest, and in giving in to this Assembly the paper by them subscribed, and that they then retract the same. And in case they do not appear before the said Commission in August, and then show their sorrow, and retract, as said is, the Commission is hereby empowered and appointed to suspend the said brethren, or such of them as shall not obey, from the exercise of their ministry. And, further, in case the said brethren shall be suspended by the said Commission, and that they shall act contrary to the said sentence

In this Act, the Commission of the Assembly were appointed to follow up the process, and the brethren were cited to appear before them, either to profess their sorrow and retract, or to be subjected to some of the severer ecclesiastical censures.

But these men, who had been actuated by enlightened rectitude, were not to be intimidated into implicit submission, or a dereliction of duty, by such overbearing procedure. Soon after the sentence referred to was enacted, they offered to read a complaint and declaration, which they had prepared as their joint speech.† The Assembly, however, forgetful alike of justice and decorum, degraded itself by not only refusing to hear the brethren, but by issuing orders to their officer to take them to the door. *But the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.*

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of suspension, the Commission is hereby empowered and appointed, at their meeting in November, or any subsequent meeting, to proceed to a higher censure against the said four brethren, or such of them as shall continue to offend, by transgressing this Act. And the General Assembly do appoint the several Presbyteries, of which the said brethren are members, to report to the Commission in August, and subsequent meetings of it, their conduct and behaviour with respect to this Act."

† The following is a copy:—"In regard the venerable Assembly have come to a positive sentence, without hearing our defences, and have appointed their Commission to execute their sentence in August, in case we do not retract what we have done. We cannot but complain of this uncommon procedure, and declare that we are not at liberty to take this affair to an *avisandum*."—" (That is, to take a compliance with the Assembly's sentence under consideration, as to what they were thereby ordained to do.)"—*Gib's Display*.

On the whole, we apprehend that all who impartially estimate this undignified and domineering conduct, will regret that it should have occurred in any Court of Christ. Persons unacquainted with facts, will be quite unable to conjecture what manner of men they were who were thus treated. Let Mr. Wilson's character represent the rest: they were all of like spirit. They were an honour to the Court by which they were abused: they were among its best friends. Their only crime was, that they were true to the sound principles of their Church, and faithful to that Saviour to whom they had vowed obedience.\*

Sometimes parents, ill acquainted with the proper management and education of children, will endeavour to enforce their mandates by severe denunciations, which they have no intention to execute. Sometimes even the civil authorities threaten penal-

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\* "This Assembly, which was the same day dissolved with the usual forms, still stands distinguished for having, by rash and violent stretches of power, inflicted a wound upon the Church of Scotland, which no succeeding Assembly has had the wisdom or the will to heal, a wound which haughty churchmen have often affected to treat as insignificant, but which has been deepening and widening ever since, and a wound, the final issue of which, the most profound mind even yet dare scarcely venture to predict, though the probability is, that it will reduce her to the alternative, if she has an alternative left, of adopting plain and honest reform, or submitting to direct and remediless ruin."—*Struthers' History of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 637.

ties, when every one knows there is no probability of their infliction. But disorderly and violent as they were, and regardless of justice and liberty as they seemed to be, the General Assembly, in their instructions to their Commission, in reference to Mr. Wilson and his brethren, did not threaten merely to terrify into compliance. The Assembly threatened with a view to inflict; and the Commission, to whom the continuance of the process was entrusted, were ready to proceed to the utmost latitude of their delegated power.

Into all the subsequent particulars of this most extraordinary process, it is not necessary for us to enter. We shall exhibit only the chief circumstances, as far as Mr. Wilson was concerned in them, either equally with his three brethren, or more prominently by his writings.

When the Commission met in the month of August, a representation\* was offered by him, in conjunction with his friend Mr. Moncrieff†. Every

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\* A representation was also presented by Messrs. Erskine and Fisher.

† The Reverend Alexander Moncrieff, at Abernethy, was proprietor of the estate of Culfargie. "The most remarkable part of his character, and that which all who were acquainted with him, have taken particular notice of, was the frequent intercourse he held with God in prayer. *His conversation was in heaven.* He was distinguished as a man of

thing in this paper is firm, yet most mild and respectful; and we are bold to refer to any impartial judge, if a representation more noble, luminous, powerful, and faithful, and breathing more of a spirit of piety, can easily be conceived. It was well worthy of being heard and pondered. The following is the outline of this document:—

“Whereas we are cited, by the late General Assembly of this Church, to appear before this meeting of the Commission, because of our adherence to a protestation given in by Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, minister at Stirling, against a decision of the said Assembly, affirming a sentence of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, passed against him for some expressions emitted by him in his sermon

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prayer. It was his ordinary practice to engage in secret prayer three times a-day,—in the morning, at noon, and at night; but he also frequently retired to his closet, at other times,—for every thing furnished him with an errand to the throne of grace, and *in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, he made his requests known unto God.* He was singularly conscientious, and took no step, in any matter, without having his conscience satisfied about his duty therein. Accordingly, his applications to God for direction were frequent. He could not live without prayer. In his preachings, in his lectures to his students, and even when sitting at table, he was observed breathing up his silent prayer to God. Such eminent examples of godliness should not be concealed.”—*Christian Magazine* for 1804, p. 140.

We understand that a large and interesting diary of this excellent Father of the Secession, exists in manuscript, which would doubtless be a valuable acquisition were it given to the public.

preached at the opening of the said Synod in October last, and whereby the said Assembly did not only condemn the expressions alleged to be uttered by Mr. Erskine, as contained in the minutes of the foresaid Synod's proceedings, but also his answers thereto, and appointed him to be rebuked and admonished at their own bar.

“ We beg leave to lay open our case before the very reverend Commission; and, as we shall endeavour with all sincerity and freedom to declare the sentiments of our hearts, so we may reasonably hope and expect, that our reverend brethren, according to the laws of our common Lord and Master, will make the most favourable construction upon the same.

“ When the Synod, whereof we are members, did take the now condemned expressions under their consideration, we, and several others, of our brethren, did insist that this affair might be dropped. We represented the dangerous effects that a forward pushing of it might produce, and herein we have peace in our own minds. But when the Synod thought fit, by a small majority, to condemn some expressions emitted by Mr. Erskine in his sermon, we judged it our duty to dissent from the condemnatory sentence, and that because it appeared to

us to lay a restraint upon ministerial freedom and faithfulness.

“When the affair came before the late General Assembly, we insisted at the Assembly’s bar, that we might be heard upon our reasons of dissent from the sentence of our own Synod. This we judged to be our right and privilege, and what we do not know if ever it was denied to any; yet the General Assembly thought fit to refuse us a hearing. Therefore, when the Assembly affirmed the sentence of our Synod, we thought we had no way left us for our just exoneration, but to adhere to Mr. Erskine’s protestation.

“It was very heavy and afflictive to us, that we found ourselves obliged to protest against a decision of the supreme Judicatory of this Church. But the sentence of rebuke and admonition, at the Assembly’s bar, being passed for such things as we conceived to be a minister’s duty, agreeably to the Word of God, and the constitutions of this Church, we found ourselves obliged, for the exoneration of our consciences, to adhere to the protestation. And we beg leave to lay before the reverend Commission, some of the reasons that led us into this quarrelled and condemned step.

1. The decision of the late General Assembly,

appeared to us to be a plain inhibition upon the ministers of this Church, against declaring the evil and sinfulness that they evidently apprehend to be in the Act of Assembly 1732, and in the violent settlements of ministers, which are now so frequent.

2. We judged the decision of the late Assembly, in this affair, to be such as lays down a new term of ministerial communion amongst all the members of this Church, namely, that they should not open their mouths in the pulpit against this or any particular Act of Assembly, however sinful in its own nature, or against the proceedings of the Judicatories of this Church, however unlawful and unwarrantable.

3. We judged, that as there is no law restraining us from the exercise of this privilege and duty of testifying seasonably against such Acts of Assembly, as appear to us to be subversive of our constitution, so to impose a silence upon us from testifying on proper occasions against the Act, 1732, is to make it a part of our standards, to which we are bound at our ordination.

4. The sense and impression we have of our ordination-vows and engagements, moved us to take the step that is now so much condemned.

5. We came to the bar of the Assembly, 1732,

with several others of our brethren, with a representation and petition, when this Act was in the shape of an Overture, against turning it into a standing Act. We represented also many other grievances, that we have too just ground to complain of, as to some of which, it is in the power of the Church to apply effectual remedies unto them, and to do more for the redress of others than they seem to be disposed or inclined unto. And as to the Act complained of, the most part of Presbyteries having never agreed to it, in the terms in which it is passed, we must look upon it as enacted in opposition unto a standing rule of this Church, regulating the manner of passing Overtures into a standing law.

“These are some of the reasons that led us into an adherence to the protestation. And we beg leave to add, that if Mr. Erskine had only been quarrelled for some particular modes of expression which he thought fit to use, whatever our private sentiments had been about the lawfulness or warrantableness of them, yet, as we declared in our reasons of dissent given in to the Synod, we should never have differed from our brethren on that score, and far less would we have protested against the decision of the supreme Judicatory of the Church.

But it is not simply the manner of expression, but some truths of God seasonably delivered, that we judge to be condemned, first by the Synod, and then by the General Assembly.

“We stand now before the reverend Commission, condemned by the General Assembly for our conduct in offering to protest, and in giving in the paper subscribed by us; and we are ordained to compear before this meeting of Commission, to show our sorrow for our conduct and misbehaviour (as the Assembly are pleased to term it), in offering to protest, as said is, and in giving in the paper subscribed by us; and also, we are appointed to retract the same; and, if we do not show our sorrow, and retract our paper, the Commission is empowered and appointed to suspend us from the exercise of our ministry; and in case we act contrary to the sentence of suspension, the Commission is also empowered and appointed, at any subsequent meeting, to proceed to a higher censure against us.

“As the ministry which we have received of the Lord, ought to be dearer to us than the most valuable things in time, so a sentence, depriving us of the exercise of it, cannot but be heavy and afflicting unto us. We have ground to be sensible, that there are innumerable sins, failings, and short-

comings with us, for which a righteous and holy Lord may justly reject and cast us off; but we are not conscious to ourselves of any thing done against our brethren, that deserves such a severe censure from them. What trespass have we committed against any article of our Confession of Faith? Or, wherein have we transgressed against any of the received principles, or the approved rules of this Church, that our Mother's sons are so very angry with us, as to threaten to cast us out of the Lord's vineyard?

“ If the reverend Commission shall find themselves obliged, by the Act and sentence of the last General Assembly, to demand of us, that we show our sorrow for our conduct that gave the Assembly so much offence, and that we retract the paper that we gave in, then we must sincerely declare before the reverend Commission, that as we are not convinced, in our own consciences, of any just ground of offence that we have given, so we should be guilty of gross dissimulation, if we should express our sorrow for it; and, as we cannot find any thing contrary to the duty that we owe unto the supreme Judicatory of the Church, in the paper that we subscribed, so we dare not retract the same. And we beg leave to lay open before the reverend Com-

mission, what it is that sticks with us, why we cannot comply with their demand.

1. We cannot understand what there is in the subscribed paper we gave in, and which we protested might be read, and recorded in the minutes of the Assembly, that has given so much offence.

2. We want to know, if in no case the ministers and members of the Church may give in a protestation against a sentence, act, or decision, of the supreme Judicatory; and, if so, then an absolute irrefragable power and authority is set up in the supreme Judicatory, to which all ought to submit, without gainsaying or counteracting:—the very thing the Pope of Rome pleads for, unto the enslaving of the consciences of men, by requiring a blind subjection and obedience to his dictates, without examining the same, according to the light of God's Word.\*

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\* These particulars, and those immediately preceding, are all well illustrated. The illustration of this one is very striking. The following is part of it:—

“ If it be said that we may exercise the judgment of discretion, but that we must keep it within our own breasts, when it differs from the public judgment of the Church, we humbly conceive that the judgment of discretion must be exercised, both by ministers and private Christians, for more noble ends and purposes, and that they ought to make an open profession of what they are firmly persuaded is truth, especially, when it is opposed and borne down, or when they are called to it: and ministers of the gospel should freely and faithfully *declare the whole counsel of*

3. If we retract the paper we gave in, we thereby submit to a decision of the Assembly, bearing, that ministers are to be rebuked, if, upon some proper occasions, they testify against the Act of Assembly, 1732.

4. Protestations against the wrong and unjust decisions of ecclesiastical courts, have been one special means by which a testimony has been kept up for truth in the Church.

5. If we retract our paper, we give up with our just liberty and privilege of testifying publicly, not only against the Act of Assembly, but also against any other unwarrantable and sinful proceedings of this Church.”†

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*God, seeing they are expressly enjoined by the Lord and Master, to require of all their hearers, without distinction, that they observe all things whatsoever he has commanded them. To allow ministers only to think within their own breasts, that a Church-decision is wrong, is what no human society ever did, or could pretend to hinder them, or any man, from doing; but freedom and plainness of speech, in a consistency with the Word of God, is acknowledged, in all the Protestant Churches, to be the privilege and duty of ministers of the gospel. Had Luther, Calvin, and others, of our reforming predecessors, thought it sufficient to differ from the Church of Rome only in their private opinions, without speaking freely against the defections she had made from the primitive constitution of the Christian Church, the Reformation had never been heard of, and we would to this day have continued under anti-christian bondage and darkness.”*

† In the illustration of this, particular reference is made to the errors taught by Professor Simpson, and the lenity of the Courts in the different processes against him, and also to other defections.

“ Thus we have represented unto the reverend Commission some of the reasons that straiten us, why we cannot declare our sorrow for our conduct before the last Assembly, or retract the paper subscribed by us.”

“ As to the appointment of the late Assembly upon the reverend Commission, we own, that our mission to the work of the ministry is not immediate, but mediate; or, that we have received our ministry from the Lord Jesus by the hands of a Presbytery, who, according to the institution of Christ, have, after trial of our gifts and qualifications, set us apart for that sacred office by prayer and imposition of hands. But we must represent unto the reverend Commission, that we humbly think we cannot be deprived of our ministry, or the exercise of it, unless we are found guilty of such a transgression of the laws and institutions of Christ, either in doctrine or practice, as forfeits our commission, or renders us unworthy of this sacred character; and far less can we be deprived of our ministry for walking according to the institutions laid down by our Lord and Master in his Word, and for our strict adherence to our ordination vows and engagements, in refusing to submit to unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion, and which

were not in being when we were ordained to the holy ministry, and which we look upon to be contrary to the engagements we then came under; and if this sentence is executed against us, we must look upon it as done for the discharge of our duty; and, therefore, the superior power and authority of our Lord Jesus, commanding us to fulfil that ministry which we have received from him, and to preach *the Word out of season*, as well as *in season*, must, in such an event, cast the balance with us. And, though we cannot but look upon it as a snare laid for us, first to suspend us from the exercise of our ministry, and then to make our acting contrary to this sentence,—that is, our preaching the gospel of Christ after we are suspended, the foundation and ground of a higher censure; yet, whatever hardships we may be brought under for the discharge of our duty, we hope we shall have this to support us, that we are suffering for conscience' sake. And we are also encouraged to the practice we plead for, when we consider, that the Prophets under the Old, and the Apostles under the New Testament, have continued in the exercise of the ministry, even when prohibited and discharged to speak in the name of the Lord by the ecclesiastic

courts in their day.\* And, from all these, and the like Scripture patterns and examples, some eminent ministers of the primitive Church, and several in this Church and Land, have exercised their ministry with success, when suspended and deposed by Synods and General Assemblies.

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

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\* Jer. xxvi. 8, 11; Acts iv. 81, 19, 20, and v. 40.

late General Assembly, for protesting against a decision, whereby injury is done to some truths of God, which we are obliged to own and confess, and whereby we are brought under these new and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion, above mentioned, which we look upon as inconsistent with the Word of God, and our ordination vows and engagements; as also, for all the above reasons and causes why we cannot retract our paper given in to the late General Assembly. And, further, we do protest, that, if in consequence of any censure inflicted upon us, whether of suspension, or of a higher nature, any minister or probationer shall exercise any part of our ministerial work, in our respective congregations, the same shall be held and repute as an intrusion upon our ministerial labours. As also, we protest, that if any other minister shall be settled in our congregations, that the same shall be held and repute as an intrusion upon our pastoral charges; and that the people of our respective congregations shall not be obliged to own, acknowledge, or submit unto such as their lawful pastors, seeing we were ordained to take the oversight of them, with their own call and consent, and with consent of the Presbytery unto which we were received, and have not been convicted of re-

ceding from our ordination vows and engagements. And, lastly, we protest, that whatever bad effects may follow upon the course taken with us, we shall not be chargeable with them.

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

“ WILLIAM WILSON.\*

“ ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.”

When the foregoing representation was lodged, with instruments taken by Messrs. Wilson and Moncrieff, in the hands of the Clerk to the Commission, they insisted that it might be read, as containing a full and particular declaration of their mind, upon the Act and sentence of the late Assembly concerning them, and as necessary for setting their case in a just and true light, in an affair of so great importance. But, though these brethren

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\* See The True State of the Process.

conceived they had a right to choose their own mode of defence, the Commission thought fit to refuse their representation a reading.

Being denied their just privilege, they delivered *viva voce* before the Commission the substance of their representation, protesting, that any sentence of suspension, or of an higher nature, that should be inflicted, should be held null and void, that they would consider it lawful to exercise their ministry notwithstanding, for it had not been proved that they had departed from any of the principles of the Church of Scotland, or violated their ordination vows; on the contrary, they had been proceeding in the path of duty, and in accordance with their solemn engagements, in opposition to unscriptural terms of ministerial communion, which the Judicatories had been imposing. Hereupon they took instruments, to which Messrs. Erskine and Fisher adhered.

Several petitions and representations, by Sessions, and Presbyteries, and civil Courts, were laid on the table of the Commission, entreating a delay of procedure, in following up the instructions of the Assembly, against the four brethren.

The following petition from the Kirk-Session of the town and parish of Perth, was presented in behalf of their minister:—

*“ Perth, 3d August, 1733.*

“ Unto the Right Reverend, &c.

“ The Petition of the Kirk-Session of the  
Town and Parish of Perth,

“ Humbly Showeth,

“ That, whereas, we understand one of our ministers, Mr. William Wilson, is cited, by the late General Assembly of this National Church, to compear before this meeting of the Commission, on account of a protestation taken by him, and some others, against a decision of the said venerable Assembly, in the case of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, minister of the gospel at Stirling,—

“ We, in all humility, beg leave to represent, unto the very reverend Commission, the case and circumstances of this our town and parish; that we have two numerous Assemblies every Lord’s day,—the one of them so large, that scarce the strongest voice of a man can reach them all; that we have two week-days for sermons, to which the inhabitants of the town, and country-parts of the parish, give good attendance; that the good town, of late years, have supplied us with a third minister, the charge being found too great and weighty for two; that it has pleased the Lord to remove one of

our ministers by death, in the month of January last; that another of our ministers is of an advanced age, so that we cannot reasonably expect he shall be long continued with us, his health and strength daily decaying; that the said Mr. Wilson, so far as we can understand, has not as yet attained unto that light, as to come up to the obedience required of him by the Act of the late venerable Assembly; that if the reverend Commission should go to the rigour with him at this meeting, so that we be deprived of the exercise of his ministry, by suspension, or otherwise, it is easy to foresee how dismal the consequences are like to be, and what deplorable circumstances we, in all human probability, shall be reduced unto. Upon the whole, then, let us earnestly beseech the reverend Commission, that, in their great goodness, they may please to grant such delay in their procedure against our minister Mr. Wilson, as they in their wisdom shall think fit. And, as this would be a singular favour to us, so we are hopeful it would be no less to the Church, especially in our bounds; and that the reverend Commission shall have no cause to repent of their lenity in this matter.

“ May it, therefore, please the reverend Commission, to grant our humble and earnest request;

and your petitioners shall ever pray. This, in name, and by appointment of the foresaid Kirk-Session, is signed by

“THO. BLACK, Moderator.”

At the same time, and for the same purpose, the following representation and petition was presented by the Magistrates and Town-Council of Perth:—

“Unto the Right Reverend, &c.

“The Representation and Petition of the  
Magistrates and Town-Council of Perth,

“Humbly Showeth,

“That, whereas, on account of a protestation taken by Mr. William Wilson, one of the ministers of this Burgh, and some others, against a decision of the General Assembly of this National Church, in May last, in the case of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, minister of the gospel at Stirling, the Magistrates and Town-Council understand, that the said Mr. Wilson is cited by the said late General Assembly to compear before this meeting of their Commission, for the purposes mentioned in the Act of Assembly, relative to that affair; and as the Magistrates and Town-Council are heartily sorry Mr. Wilson is brought into such circumstances with the supreme Judicatory of this Church, so they are deeply

sensible how dismal the consequences may be, in case the reverend Commission shall, at this meeting, proceed to suspend him from the exercise of his ministry. We, therefore, beg leave to represent to the reverend Commission, that the two Churches of this Burgh are every Lord's day filled with numerous assemblies of our inhabitants; the two week-days sermons, in one of the Churches, are likewise attended by a pretty numerous audience; that, besides the said Mr. Wilson, we have only one other minister, the Rev. Mr. Thomas Black, who, by long-continued and indefatigable ministerial labours among us, and his advanced age, is now much decayed as to his bodily strength, so as he could not possibly subsist alone under such a weighty charge; and it would be a great hardship, by overburdening him in his old age, to deprive this place of the benefit of his ministry during the small remaining part of his life among us. That though Mr. Wilson may happen not to be as yet in case to yield the obedience required of him by the Act of the late General Assembly, we humbly conceive, that, if the reverend Commission shall be pleased so far to show lenity and sympathy to him, and us, in our, and his present situation, as to delay proceeding to the execution of the sentence against

him, no dangerous consequence could ensue to the Church or Judicatories thereof, and possibly such lenity may happily prevent the melancholy circumstances wherewith that affair threatens this place.

“ May it, therefore, please the very reverend Commission, in their clemency to Mr. Wilson, and sympathy to this Burgh, to agree to delay the affair concerning him. And your petitioners shall ever pray, &c. Signed this 6th August, 1733, in name and in presence of the said Magistrates and Town-Council, by “ PAT. CRIE, Provost.”

But, notwithstanding the representations and speeches of the brethren themselves, which breathed so much of the Christian spirit, and indicated such holy zeal and unshaken fortitude, such self-denying readiness to suffer opposition, reproach, and persecution, rather than that Christ should be dishonoured, or the interests of religion sacrificed; and, notwithstanding the respectful petitions in their favour from parties so deeply interested, the sentence of suspension was carried in the Commission. Protestations against it were immediately taken by the different Sessions of the four brethren. The following is a copy of the protest taken by members of the Kirk-Session of Perth:—

“ We, the under-subscribing members of the

Kirk-Session of Perth, do hereby, in our own name, and in the name of all that shall adhere to us in the said congregation, testify our adherence to Mr. William Wilson, one of our ministers, notwithstanding of this sentence inflicted upon him; and, in regard, some of us came with a petition from our Kirk-Session, which was presented to the reverend Commission, but was neither read nor regarded, we protest, we shall be at liberty to complain to the next General Assembly, and hereupon take instruments. Signed by us, at Edinburgh, 9th August, 1733.

WILLIAM FERGUSON.

COLIN BROWN.

DA. ROBERTSON.

JAMES DAVIDSON.

PAT. SCIOCH.

ALEXR. M'EUEEN."

Such, at its meeting held in August, was the spirit and conduct of the Commission, to parties of every description, who were interested in this great cause. If a decision so arbitrary and precipitate shall be excused by any, on the ground that the members of this Commission were but the instruments of carrying the Assembly's orders into effect,

they will only make the case worse, by transferring the odium of the measure to the whole Church.

From the time of this first meeting of the Commission, till its meeting in November, Mr. Wilson, in common with his brethren, and in terms of their protestation, exercised his office, and performed his sacred duties as before.

The interval between the meetings of the Commission was to him a season of deep concern. He saw with regret, that his judges were determined to push matters to an extremity. He could not conscientiously retract, nor enter into any unhal- lowed compromise; but resolved, that, whatever the results might be, he would through grace per- sist in the discharge of duty.

To all dispassionate persons, who investigate the circumstances of the whole case, the conduct of the four brethren will approve itself as the dictate of enlightened fidelity to the Head of the Church.

The following is part of an address by Mr. Wil- son, to the people of his charge, which was pub- lished after this meeting of the Commission. The parts omitted are equally suitable to the occasion, but have been anticipated in the progress of this narrative.

*“Unto the Inhabitants of the Burgh and  
Parish of PERTH,*

“GRACE and PEACE be multiplied,

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

“Mr. Erskine, minister at Stirling, did, in a sermon preached in your hearing at the opening of our Synod, October last, with some freedom and plainness of speech, declare the sinfulness and unwarrantableness of the Act of Assembly 1732, and of the present proceedings of our Church-Judicatories in the settlement of ministers over reclaiming and dissenting congregations. The freedom and faithfulness he used was so much resented, that three days were spent in warm reasonings upon the sermon; and then by a small majority, the preacher was condemned as censurable for some expressions emitted by him in his sermon, and appointed to be brought to the bar of the Synod to be rebuked and admonished. As he appealed from this sentence to the General Assembly, so I judged

it my duty, with some others of my brethren, to protest against, and dissent from the same.

“When this cause came before the late General Assembly, they thought fit to affirm the sentence of our Synod. Yet none of the expressions alleged to be emitted by Mr. Erskine, nor any thing given in by him in his answers unto the Synod, was found, either by the Synod or General Assembly, to be contrary to the Word of God, or the received and approved standards of this Church.

“If this cause had been Mr. Erskine’s personal cause, I should have judged my dissent from the sentence of our Synod sufficient to exonerate me in the present case; but when I considered, that it is a cause of very public concern, and wherein all the ministers and members of this Church are so nearly interested, I judged it my duty to own my dissent from the sentence of our Synod at the bar of the Assembly, who thought fit to refuse the dissenters a hearing on that subject; and when the General Assembly affirmed the said sentence, I durst not be silent, and, therefore, in conjunction with my brother, Mr. Moncrieff, I signed an adherence to Mr. Erskine’s protestation.

“The General Assembly was so much offended at our protestation, that they appointed their Com-

mission, at their August meeting thereafter, to suspend us every one from the exercise of our ministry, in case we should not declare our sorrow for our conduct, and retract the paper we gave in: as also to proceed to an higher censure against us at any subsequent meeting, if we should be found to act contrary to the foresaid sentence of suspension.

“The above decision appears to me to be such as gave sufficient foundation and ground for the testimony that is given against it, in regard that it carries in its own nature a material declaration, that all the ministers of this Church who shall, upon any proper occasion, regret, from the pulpit, the sinfulness and unwarrantableness of any proceedings of the Judicatories of this Church, must be brought to the bar of Church-Judicatories, and there be rebuked for the faithful discharge of their duty; therefore, I have peace in my own mind in declaring against this decision, and that with the solemnity of a protestation. Our representations given in to the Commission of the General Assembly at their meeting August last, and now published to the world, contain our reasons at large for refusing to retract our protestation, to which I refer.

“What is now passed against me I know, and what I am farther threatened with I may partly

know, yet I cannot see every thing that my above conduct may expose me unto. But whatever I may be called to endure or suffer, according to my present views, it is stated upon the three following points.

1. That any ecclesiastical ordinance or constitution, contrary to the laws and institutions of our Lord Jesus, is in itself sinful, and therefore can have no binding force nor authority over any of the office-bearers or members of the Church of Christ.

2. That the ministers of the Church of Scotland ought, upon all proper occasions, to declare the sinfulness that is in any ecclesiastical act and constitution, or the sinfulness and unwarrantableness of such proceedings of the Church-Judicatories, whereby the heritage and flock of God are oppressed, and whereby our constitution is wounded, by the opening of a wide door for the bringing in of a corrupt ministry into the Church of Christ;—especially when the ordinary means of representations and instructions unto our several General Assemblies have been tried, but without success.

3. That this freedom and liberty of testifying publicly, upon all proper occasions, against the public sins and defections of a Church, ought not to be suppressed or restrained; and if it be suppressed

or restrained by an ecclesiastical Act or decision, then it is the duty and privilege of the ministers and members of the Church, to testify against any such sentence and decision, as what fixeth the ministers of the Church under sinful and unwarrantable terms of ministerial communion.

“As these are the points upon which I am singled out, together with my three brethren, as the object of the heavy and severe censure contained in the Act and sentence of the late General Assembly against us, so I hope I have no ground to be afraid or ashamed to own them.

“The Church of Scotland has been honoured to bear witness in a special manner to the kingly office of Christ, and that unto him it belongs to give laws and ordinances unto his own house, and instructions unto his ministers who are obliged to *teach all things whatsoever he hath commanded them*. And the above points upon which our present testimony is stated, are the same, upon the matter, with that which a great cloud of witnesses in Scotland have borne testimony unto, since the dawning of reformation-light amongst us. And though I should be exposed to suffer trouble as an evil doer, even unto bonds, for the same, yet may I hope—*the Word of the Lord is not bound*.

“ Though our mission unto the work and office of the ministry is mediate, yet our commission and authority to discharge our ministry is from the Lord Jesus himself. Every minister of the gospel is honoured to be an *ambassador for Christ*, to act in the name of Christ, and to stand in his *stead*. They have both their commission and instructions from him alone. The Judicatories of his house are only the channel through which their commission flows: they are no more than the intervening means of the conveyance of that power and authority, which is derived from the Lord himself; and none can recal the commission given unto his ministers, but according unto the rules and directions that he has laid down in his own Word. There is, at least, some resemblance in it unto the present subject: When the Sovereign gives a commission to any to act in his name, the commission comes through the hands of the keeper of the King’s seal, and it is sealed by him; but neither the keeper of the seal, nor any of the ministers of state, can recal the commission, till the Sovereign declare his mind in this matter: Even so, though our commission to preach the word of the gospel comes to us through the hands of them who are entrusted with the keeping of the seal of the King of Zion, yet

no power nor authority upon earth can recal our commission, but according to the mind and will of the Head and King of the Church, declared in his Word unto his Church and people.

“I am not convicted of any thing before the Judicatories of this Church, either in doctrine or practice, contrary to the Word of God, our Confession of Faith, or Presbyterian principles; and, therefore, it is my duty to endeavour to fulfil that ministry among you, which I have received from the Lord: and all that I desire of you is, that you may pray for the supplies of the spirit of Jesus unto me, that I may be enabled unto the faithful discharge of my duty amongst you, as also that you may receive the word of reconciliation, which I am honoured to bear; and that, whatever I may be exposed unto in the discharge of my duty, you may not be ashamed of my bonds.

“The Burgh of Perth was honoured at the very dawning of Reformation light, first of all the burghs in Scotland, to make a noble stand for our Reformation rights and privileges, in opposition to the idolatry and ecclesiastical tyranny of the Church of Rome, under which the whole land groaned at that time; and ye have distinguished yourselves in a zealous concern for, and by a steady adherence

to our civil and religious liberties, particularly in the year 1715, when many of you suffered banishment from your habitations, and endured some other hardships, after you were overpowered by force and violence, and obliged to give way to the superior number of those who came against you, and made this place for some time the seat of their displayed banner against the Revolution interest, our late Sovereign King George, and the Protestant succession in his royal family.

“ But our good and gracious God did scatter these clouds; he restored you to your habitations; he preserved this place, when some neighbouring villages were laid in ashes; and he has followed you since that time with a series and train of remarkable blessings. All these lay you under so many obligations to a steadfast perseverance in the truths and ways of the Lord.

“ My present situation may, I hope, apologize for the length of this address. I intend not in it the irritation of any, but to discharge myself of what I judge to be a debt I owe to the people of my pastoral charge, in a particular manner, whatever the consequences of this whole affair towards myself may be.

“ That you may know the truth as it is in Christ,

and that you may be rooted and built up in him, and may be established in the faith, is the prayer of him

“Who is one of your Pastors, more willing than able to serve you in the work of the gospel,

“PERTH, 22d Sept. 1733.

WILLIAM WILSON.”

At the meeting of the Commission in November, the same measures of severity were pursued. The suspended brethren, when questioned about their submission to the sentence, frankly acknowledged, that as, both before and after it was passed, they had protested that they would consider it null and void, so they had been all along prosecuting their ministerial duties, as if no such censure had been inflicted.

The Commission were now ready to proceed to higher censure; and though letters and papers of remonstrance and petition were sent by seven Synods and two Presbyteries, entreating them to delay procedure, yet, when the vote was put,—“Proceed immediately to inflict an higher censure, or delay,” it carried, though only by the casting vote of the Moderator, to proceed. The decision, by a single vote, shows, as in the instance we re-

marked before, the minute workings of Providence, and on what apparent casualties the most important events often depend. The next step was to determine the censure. It was agreed that the question should be "Loose or Depose." By a great majority of those who voted, it was decided that the four brethren should be loosed from their respective charges, and declared no longer ministers of the Established Church, and that the ministers of that Church should be prohibited from employing them in any ministerial function.\*

Thus, although they had before them many written solicitations from the most respectable quarters, and although they well knew that the imperious

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\* On the intimation of this sentence, the four brethren stated their Secession, in the following protestation:—

*"Edinburgh, 16th November, 1733.*

"We hereby adhere to the protestation formerly entered before this Court, both at their last meeting in August, and when we appeared before this meeting. And, further, we do protest, in our own name, and in name of all, and every one, in our respective congregations, adhering to us, that, notwithstanding of this sentence passed against us, our pastoral relation shall be held and reputed firm and valid. And, likewise, we protest, that, notwithstanding of our being cast out from ministerial communion with the Established Church of Scotland, we still hold communion with all, and every one, who desire with us to adhere to the principles of the true Presbyterian Covenanted Church of Scotland, in her doctrine, worship, government, and discipline, and particularly with all who are groaning under the evils, and who are affected with the grievances we have been complaining of, and who are in their several

measures which they had been pursuing, were greatly offensive to numbers of ministers and private Christians, the Commission hesitated not to proceed to the utmost stretch of their authority,—seeming determined, if possible, to crush the honourable efforts of the four brethren for the purity of the Church. In this issue of the process, it is easy to determine whether there is most cause of regret for the Church by whom they were thus cast out, or for these her injured sons. A wise and faithful Church could never have parted with

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spheres wrestling against the same. But, in regard, the prevailing party in this Established Church, who have now cast us out from ministerial communion with them, are carrying on a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles, and, particularly, are suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness, in testifying against the present backslidings of the Church, and inflicting censures upon ministers for witnessing, by protestations, and otherwise, against the same: therefore, we do, for these, and other weighty reasons, to be laid open in due time, protest, that we are obliged to make a Secession from them, and that we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them; and, in like manner, we do protest, that it shall be lawful and warrantable for us to exercise the keys of doctrine, discipline, and government, according to the Word of God, and Confession of Faith, and the principles and constitutions of the covenanted Church of Scotland, as if no such censure had been passed upon us, upon all which we take instruments. And we hereby appeal to the first free, faithful, and reforming General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

EBENEZER ERSKINE.  
WILLIAM WILSON.  
ALEXANDER MONCRIEFF.  
JAMES FISHER."

them. Even a corrupt Church, had not corruption proceeded very far, would not, with unrelenting rigour, have expelled such men,—conscientiously and regularly contending for what appeared to them, and must appear to every enlightened person, its best interests.

Such haughty recklessness of procedure certainly warranted the following animadversions of Mr. Wilson.

“ This National Church, though she bears the Presbyterian name, and has the outward form and shadow of Presbyterian government, yet is exercising a lordly and magisterial power over the heritage of God, is ruling the flock of Christ with rigour, and perverting the keys of government and discipline.”\*

“ The present Judicatories of this National Church are guilty of an habitual track and series of tyranny in the administration. They are guilty of screening the erroneous, in dismissing them from their bar without any censure at all, or without such a censure as is proportioned to the scandal and offence they have given; and at the same time they have turned the edge of discipline against such as

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\* Defence,—p. 374.

endeavour a faithful and conscientious discharge of their duty. They are guilty of neglecting and despising the humble petitions and representations, and the just remonstrances of ministers and other church-members, against their unwarrantable proceedings. In all which instances, the laws and ordinances of the great Master of the House are counteracted, our Presbyterian form and model of government is undermined, and the bond of our ecclesiastical unity, in so far as it concerns the government and discipline of the *House of God*, is broken and dissolved.”\*

Much as he regretted and deplored the unreasonable measures which led to his expulsion, he must have felt it, in some respects, a happy deliverance. We can easily conceive him leaving the scene of oppression, deeply injured, yet with the consciousness of rectitude,—sorrowing, yet possessed of the most soothing satisfaction,—and somewhat in the situation of the mariner when the storm subsides into a calm. We can follow him, in thought, to his peaceful family, where he enjoyed a large share of domestic comfort; to his closet, where,

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\* Defence,—p. 118.

away from human observation, he had often much freedom and delight in pouring out his heart to God; and to his flock,—now, by ecclesiastical authority, no longer his, but his as much as ever by the consent and affections of all the godly, who made the cause of their minister their own, and his, with more interesting peculiarities, by the independent and holy authority of the Head of the Church. Though excluded from ministerial fellowship with the Church of his fathers, he was as much the servant of Christ as before, and, by his sufferings, only the more honourable. The sentences of the Commission, contrary as they were to the principles of religion, and to the Scriptural order of the Church, were violent measures without real force and effect,—like the spray dashing upon the immoveable rock, with frightful yet unavailing impetuosity.

Having no separate interests from the Church of Scotland, and having no plan arranged for acting apart from the National Judicatories, Mr. Wilson was now in a situation full of uncertainties,—not like that of the man who leaves his native country from choice, having in view some object on which he is earnestly bent, but like him who

has been driven from it by banishment. But what was now to be done? He had been contending for evangelical truth, and was he to leave it wounded on the field? Was he to discontinue his unwearied exertions, in resisting the force of error and corruption, as the sentence of the Commission enjoined? Was he to forsake his beloved people, to speak no more to them in the name of Christ, and to leave them to be addressed, perhaps by one of those whose tyrannical exercise of ecclesiastical power, had brought matters to this crisis, and who might *corrupt their minds from the simplicity that is in Christ*? This would certainly have been to withdraw ere the contest was decided. It would have been submission to authority evidently opposed to Christ's. It would have been an undutiful desertion of the scene of labour in which the Lord had placed him, and where Providence was able to continue and to prosper him.

After the issue of the November meeting of the Commission, the brethren parted without proceeding to any measure, only agreeing to meet in a few weeks for consultation. They separated from each other, now knit together more closely than ever in heart and interests. They resolved to prosecute,

as before, the duties of their sacred calling. In their faithfulness to Christ, they were encouraged by the approbation of serious Christians in many parts of the country, and, in particular, by the adherence of many enlightened and conscientious persons in their respective congregations.

“Mr. Adam Ferguson, minister at Killin, was appointed to intimate the sentence against Mr. William Wilson, from the pulpit of the Old Church of Perth, but was prevented, as he stated, in a letter to the Commission, by a tumultuous multitude, which met him at a distance from the city, and forcibly resisted his entrance.”\*

This multitude, however, which Mr. Ferguson termed tumultuous, and of which, it seems, he was sore afraid, were, in fact, the serious part of the community, who were honourably indignant at the injurious treatment their minister had received, and anxious to evince, though they were certainly somewhat disorderly in doing it, their warm attachment to him, and to the cause he had been advocating.

In the course of about three weeks afterwards,

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\* Struthers' History of Scotland.

the four brethren met in a house at Gairney-Bridge, in the neighbourhood of Kinross, and, having spent nearly two days in prayer and conference, did, solemnly, in the name of the Head of the Church, on the evening of Thursday the 6th of December, 1733, constitute themselves into a Presbytery, which was afterwards called "The Associate Presbytery." To this important step Mr. Wilson makes an interesting reference in the continuation of his Defence.\*

"The Seceding ministers met at the Bridge of Gairney, at the time agreed upon, and the 5th day of December was spent in prayer, humiliation, and conference, concerning the present providences of God towards them. They agreed to meet again the following day for prayer and conference, when the following question was proposed,—Whether or not it was their duty, in their present situation, when the present Judicatories had cast them out from communion with them, and when they had, upon just and necessary grounds, declared a Secession from them, to constitute themselves into a Presbytery. There was much and serious reasoning upon both sides of the question; they endeavoured, in their reasoning, to compare the Word of

God, and his providences towards them, together; and, after prayer, and reasoning upon the same, the question was put,—Constitute presently into a Presbytery, or not? And the four brethren did, all with one voice, give it as their judgment, that they should constitute presently into a Presbytery. And the Rev. Mr. Ebenezer Erskine was, by their unanimous consent, desired to be their mouth to the Lord in this solemn action; and he was enabled, with much enlargement of soul, to consecrate and dedicate them to the Lord, and to the service of his Church, particularly of his broken and oppressed heritage, in the present situation into which, by the holy and wise providence of God, they were brought.”

It was thus, that after all this violent agitation of human passions, all this tyrannical perversion of justice, on the part of the Courts of the Establishment, the Secession Church originated.

The causes of Secession had long existed, and had been gathering force.\* The process against

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\* “It was not violent intrusions—it was not the Act of 1732—neither was it any other particular step of defection, considered abstractly and by themselves, upon which the Secession was stated; but a complex course of defection, both in doctrine, government, and discipline, carried on with an high hand by the present Judicatories of this Church, justifying themselves in their procedure, and refusing to be reclaimed.”—*Defence*, p. 40.

the four brethren only fixed the date, and marked out the path for the important event. Their expulsion from the Establishment at once relieved their own minds from the fear of being guilty of schism, and rendered it impossible for others to charge them with it, without the grossest perversion of reason, or ignorance of the true meaning of the word.

During the course of these singular occurrences, Mr. Wilson, who was naturally diffident and retired, felt himself as in a storm, and often wished *that he had wings like a dove, that he might fly away and be at rest.* The deep impression which they made upon his mind, is evident from the following extract from a letter to one of his friends: "As to myself, the Lord pities, upholds, and supports, under the sore difficulties that you have seen me engaged in; but I have good reason, if I could, to commend the grace of the Lord Jesus: he is still the same,—*a help to the poor and needy*—a staff and a stay to the destitute. Oh, for grace to credit more his faithful promises, and to live upon the great security given in his Word, for grace and glory, and for every thing that is good for us. I am now a wonder to many, and my mother's sons

are angry with me, yet I have peace that I am in the way of duty. The providences of God have a dark and cloudy aspect, yet I hope there is a bow in the cloud. The government is upon His shoulder whose name is Wonderful.”\*

He had thus one consolation, which, in itself was sufficient to support him amidst the griefs and anxieties which these circumstances necessarily occasioned,—the approbation of his own conscience, regulated, we doubt not, by the Spirit of God. If such be the experience of the ministers of religion, they have enough to yield them adequate support and comfort amidst all the difficulties and dangers to which they may be exposed; and should they, through the whole of life, be disquieted and oppressed, and have no opportunity of appealing with safety and success to any human tribunal, yet, they can look forward, as Mr. Wilson did, to the great day of final retribution, when every thing that concerneth them shall be perfected, and when God himself shall justify and reward them in the presence of the assembled universe.

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\* This document, with a few others, was kindly communicated by the Rev. John Brown of Whitburn, who takes a lively interest in the memoirs of the Fathers of the Secession, and indeed of faithful evangelical ministers of every denomination. His justly celebrated father, the Rev. John Brown of Haddington, had the greatest veneration for Mr. Wilson.



## PERIOD III.

FROM THE ORIGIN OF THE SECESSION,  
TILL HIS DEATH.

1733—1741.

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### CHAPTER I.

*From the Origin of the Secession, till he was Chosen  
Professor of Divinity.*

1733—1736.

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It appears that the Secession was not voluntary, but arose from a most determined and disdainful opposition in the Judicatories of the Established Church to ministerial faithfulness. In its origin, it was not a Secession properly—it was not a deliberate and spontaneous, far less a rash and unreasonable withdrawalment;—it was an unmerited and cruel expulsion from that Church. “The case stands thus,” says Mr. Wilson,\* “with the Seceding ministers; they were formerly in ecclesiastical

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\* Defence, p. 362.

communion with the present Judicatories; and they found that a course of defection was carried on by the said Judicatories; and they tried all means that lay in their power, and which they thought proper, for stopping the current of defection; they joined in Presbyterial instructions to the several Assemblies; they tried petitions, representations, and doctrinal testimonies; they tried dissents and protestations for their exoneration; they continued testifying after this manner, till the Judicatories thrust some of them out from their communion."

This issue of the honourable struggles of the Four Brethren will not be wondered at by those who duly estimate the spirit of the times, the obnoxious Acts of the Church, and the arbitrary measures by which these Acts were framed and enforced. The deplorable state of religion, which we have exhibited from Mr. Wilson's manuscripts, made it, indeed, a merciful dispensation, that the iniquitous proceedings, to which we have referred, led on at length to the orderly and dutiful formation of a Church, which was free and independent, and in which, with the Divine blessing, the work of Reformation might be prosecuted with success.

The state to which these faithful ministers were the instruments of bringing a portion of the Church,

had been anticipated and desired by many. The cause they supported, was the cause of truth and Christian liberty, in opposition to a spirit of domination, of pertinacious adherence to flagrant corruption, and of vehement opposition to every kind of reform. "When the present state of this National Church," says Mr. Wilson, "is considered, I humbly judge that Mr. Nisbet had too much ground for an observation that he made in his latter days to some of his friends. When speaking of the degeneracy of this National Church in his time, he said,—‘That he apprehended matters would not be right, till the Lord should bring a Church out of the bowels of this Church.’ Though I am well assured, that it is fact, that the above observation was made, yet I do not bring it, neither will I bring such observations or sentiments of any, as an argument to support the cause I plead for. Yet I think it may be obvious to any, who duly considers the state of the Reformed Churches at this day, and how low the Reformation-testimony is amongst them, that either the Reformed Churches must return to the Reformation-standards, and lift up the Reformation-testimony against that lamentable degeneracy that has overspread them; or, in order to the carrying on of Reformation-work, Churches

must be brought out of the bowels of the present Churches.”\*

The Four Brethren, in the course of their zealous struggles, were placed in circumstances peculiarly trying; and, yet, they preserved a composure and consistency of conduct worthy of the prominent station which they now occupied, and of the honourable cause in which they were engaged. If they appeared rigidly tenacious of their views, and decidedly, though calmly, bent on following up their resolutions, it was not because their tempers were morose, or their minds illiberal, but, because, as candid, enlightened, and faithful ministers, they possessed the high consciousness that they were holding on in the path of duty.

It is, indeed, supposed by some, who take the assertions of interested parties on trust, and are at no pains to inquire into facts, that violent, headstrong men, entertaining gloomy, contracted, and preposterous notions on religious subjects, originated the Secession Church. There was never a slander more groundless, and yet it has been often industriously propagated. Such calumniators have

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\* Defence, p. 461.

only to look at the character before us to be undeceived. In it there is nothing of fire and rancour, of clamour and ostentation, of duplicity and cunning: no unhallowed principles are indulged: all is mildness, and candour, and humility. There is also the most substantial reason for declaring that the other brethren were men of the same spirit.

Mr. Wilson was about forty-three years of age, when the Commission passed their last sentence. He was thus not a young man, who might possibly have hurried into a new scene of things without consideration. He had reached that period of life, when the ardour of youth has abated, by giving place to the reflection of age. He was a man of prayer, and in all his ways consulted God. Throughout the process, he was serious, deliberate, and dignified. "When the Secession," says he,\* "was not declared, till some ministers were thrust out from communion, merely for contending against a course of defection, it is manifest evidence, that they have not been precipitate, nor rash in their Secession: they have not *gone out with haste*, neither have they *gone out by flight*."

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\* Defence, p. 32.

After the constitution of the Presbytery, and prior to the Assembly of 1734, the associated Brethren held several meetings: but these were chiefly for prayer and conference. They did nothing judicially, lest they might indicate an intention or desire to remain separate. For, notwithstanding the severe and arbitrary measures which were pursued against them, their hearts were not alienated from their original connections.

In anticipating the Assembly of 1734, these friends of the true Scriptural constitution of the Church of Scotland, were perplexed and agitated between hope and fear. Though they had no wish for a final separation, yet from the determined spirit which had been so recently manifested by the prevailing party, to put down every thing like faithful and conscientious resistance to growing evils, they had some reason to apprehend that their separation might be permanent. They were not without hopes, however, that the ensuing Assembly, perceiving the effects of the precipitancy of the last, and of its Commission, and also the danger of being more seriously rent, to which the Church was exposed, might be led to adopt such a course as would satisfy those who were aggrieved, and render the continuance of Secession unnecessary. The min-

isters also who viewed the conduct of the Assembly in the same light, but had not joined these four, used all their influence to endeavour to heal the division.

In the mean time, the Associate Presbytery proposed to prepare a draught of an extra-judicial testimony, which was intended to justify the course they had taken,—by exhibiting the state of the National Church, the circumstances in which they were themselves placed, and the necessity they were laid under, to act as they did. Mr. Wilson had the principal hand in preparing this document.\*

The constitution of the Associate Presbytery, and the preparation of the first testimony, were, however, contemplated as but temporary arrangements. The Brethren anxiously hoped for an honourable opening to return into fellowship with the Establishment; and it would have been to the credit of the National Judicatories, had these hopes, entertained by Mr. Wilson even with more confidence than by his brethren, been realized.

The Assembly of 1734 repealed a number of

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\* See Brown's History of the Secession.

offensive Acts which had been passed in former years. "The Acts respecting the planting of vacant Churches, and the Act which discharged the recording of reasons of dissent were repealed; a deed of the Commission, erecting a Sub-commission to receive the trials, and proceed to the ordination of a Presentee, while both the parish, and the Presbytery under whose jurisdiction the parish was situated, opposed the settlement—was reversed; and two Acts were passed, the one explanatory of the deed of last Assembly, in the case of Mr. Erskine, concerning ministerial freedom; and the other, empowering the Synod of Perth and Stirling to unite the Four Brethren to the communion of the Church, and to restore them to their respective charges."\*

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\* See Testimony of the United Secession Church, p. 45.

A judicious historian, to whom we have already referred, gives some of these Acts at large, with a just and luminous exposure of their inconsistent and puerile character. Though this point, in the history of the Secession, is as invulnerable as any, yet for the satisfaction of readers less acquainted with these subjects, we cannot do better than quote from this author. "An Act," says he, "declaring the seventh Act of Assembly, 1730, discharging the recording of dissents from the deeds of Church Courts, and the eighth Act of Assembly, 1732, concerning the planting of vacant Churches, to be no longer binding rules in this Church, was passed by this Assembly, and, on the last day of their sitting, the following, respecting the seceding brethren:—'The General

But as the Four Brethren had embarked in a great cause, which they were unwilling to defeat, they had good reason for caution notwithstanding these decisions. They were contending for the

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Assembly, considering the great hurt and prejudice that hath at all times arisen, and must yet arise, to the Church from divisions and animosities creeping in, and taking root among the members thereof, notwithstanding their unanimity in sentiments upon material and fundamental points,† which more nearly concern the promoting the interests of our blessed Lord and Saviour, the establishing the peace of the Church, and the advancement of practical godliness and true religion, within the bounds of it, and particularly the lamentable consequences that have followed, and may yet follow, upon the separation of Messrs. Ebenezer Erskine, William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher, from this Church and Judicatures thereof, and judging it their duty to endeavour, by all just and proper means, consistent with the honour and glory of God, and the maintaining the peace and authority of the Church, to restore harmony and brotherly love amongst all the members of it,—Therefore, the General Assembly, without farther inquiry into the occasions or steps of proceeding, either on the part of the said brethren, or by the several Judicatories, under whose consideration their case hath been, which may have produced that unhappy separation, but resolving that all questions on these heads shall for hereafter be comfortably removed, have empowered, and hereby do empower the Synod of Perth and Stirling, before whom the exceptions to some part of the conduct of two of these four reverend brethren were first taken and tried, upon such application made to them, as they shall judge proper, to take the case of the said four brethren, as it now stands, under their consideration, with full power to the said Synod to proceed, and do therein, as they shall find most justifiable and expedient for restoring the peace, and preserving the authority of this Church, and for promoting the edification of the members of the body of Christ, and particularly for uniting the

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† *This unanimity, however, was far from existing, and the want of it was one of the principal grounds of the Secession.*

interests of religion. They had been suspended from the exercise of their ministry, and loosed from their charges, for faithfulness to their sacred trust, and zeal for evangelical purity. The course

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said four brethren to the communion of this Church, and restoring them to their respective charges. But, with this express direction, that the Synod shall not take upon them to judge of the legality or formality of the former proceedings of the Church Judicatories in relation to this affair, or either to approve of, or censure the same, but shall only, in virtue of the power and authority now delegated to them by the Assembly, proceed to take such steps for attaining the above ends for the future, as they shall find just, and tending to edification. And the Assembly do hereby appoint the foresaid Synod to meet at Stirling, upon the first Tuesday of July next, and from time to time, to name and appoint the place and diets of their after meetings on the said affair, as they shall see cause, until the matter shall be ripened for a final conclusion, and recommend to them to use their utmost endeavours to bring the matter, as soon as reasonably can be, to a final and happy issue.'

"We have given," says the historian, "the above document entire, as we consider it one of the most important, and one of the strangest on record. The preceding Assembly had enjoined its Commission to do all that had been done with regard to the seceding brethren; this Assembly orders a Synod to reverse all that the Commission had done, but with this express proviso, that they should not take it upon them to judge either of the legality or the formality of the proceedings they were thus ordered blindly to reverse. Upon what principle was the Synod to proceed? If the sentence was pronounced upon proper grounds, and the subjects thereof had discovered no symptoms of repentance, the Assembly itself could not warrantably nor consistently take it off. This the leaders, the great men, the ruling elders, who had a strong party in the house to support them, were perfectly aware of; but there were a few men, such as Willison, Currie, M'Intosh, &c. still adhering to them, whom they wished to secure, and they secured them by an Act more absurd than any of those which had immediately occasioned the Secession,—an Act requiring a Synod to reverse a sentence that either was, or ought to have been, pronounced in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, without inquiring into its

they were now to adopt, involved matters of the last importance; and was felt to be attended with solemn responsibility. They had been advocating the cause of that Church, from whose Judicatories they had been expelled,—they had been firmly

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validity, or presuming to give an opinion respecting it! Closely connected with this Act, and of a similar character, was that concerning ministerial freedom in this Church, in which ‘the General Assembly considering that some are under apprehensions, that by the seventh Act of Assembly, 1733, concerning Mr. Ebenezer Erskine and others, ministers are laid under greater restraints as to their ministerial freedom, than they were by the rules of this Church before the said Act was passed. Therefore, they do, for the satisfaction of all, hereby declare, that due and regular ministerial freedom is still left entire to all ministers, and that the same was not, nor shall be, held or understood to be anywise impaired or restrained by the late Assembly’s decision in that particular process.’

“Every man of common understanding,” says the historian, “must be astonished at the trifling insignificance of these Acts, and the leading elders of the Assembly must have smiled at the simplicity of the reformers and friends of the seceding brethren, who agreed with so much self-complacency to statutes pretending to annul, but at the same time intended to confirm, if not the Acts themselves, all that was intended by them, and to leave them special precedents to be acted upon so soon as circumstances would permit. Though these performances, however, were greatly important in the estimation of the churchmen, who had been, as they supposed, the authors of them, and in the estimation of a great part of their followers, they had no soothing effect upon the seceding brethren, who had far too much penetration to be imposed upon by means so very superficial. At the same time, aware of the popularity of the scheme, and certain that though it should not bring back the seceders, which they in all probability never expected that it would, it would somewhat reduce the number of their followers, the leading party in the Church hastened to bring it to a conclusion.”—*See Struthers’ History of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 8–11.

and faithfully adhering to the doctrine, worship, discipline, and government of the Church of Scotland, as authorised in her standards. The Secession to which they had been compelled, and about the necessity of continuing which, they now intended deliberately and seriously to judge, was, as we formerly noticed, a struggle, chiefly against Arminianism, in behalf of evangelical truth.\* It became them, therefore, to lay all personal considerations aside, and to regulate their present and future conduct according to those Scriptural principles by which the cause of Christ would be most effectually promoted.

Immediately after the meeting of the Assembly in 1734, Mr. Wilson, in a letter to Mr. Erskine, expressed a hope that it might yet be practicable for them to return into the bosom of the Church. This shows how much he regretted the necessity

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\* “Violent intrusions were indeed one of the grounds of complaint, but many other steps of defection are likewise complained of, and amongst others, the injury that was done to many important doctrinal truths, by the conduct of the Judicatories, when gross errors were brought to their bar. And I humbly judge, the blow that was thereby given to the truths held forth from the Word of God in our Confession of Faith, deserves to be reckoned amongst the chief grounds of complaint.”—*Defence*, p. 39.

of Secession, and how favourably he was disposed to view every conciliatory appearance in the Judicatories. However far he had gone, he was too temperate and conscientious to pursue a line of conduct merely because he was committed. He took no step without conviction, and had he been satisfied that it was now his duty to return, he would have rejoiced at the opportunity. He possessed the utmost firmness, with the perhaps rare accompaniment of a disposition to take the most favourable view of every case. The hope he now expressed, arose from that candour and high integrity for which he was remarkable, and which made him as reluctant to suspect, as he was prompt to condemn the slightest approach to hypocrisy, or to the indications of a deceitful policy which has only a sinister end to accomplish. But, though he did not soon lose hopes of positive reformation in the Judicatories, he saw the utter insufficiency of all that they had yet done.

After different meetings of the Associate Presbytery to consider what, in present circumstances, was their duty, they were most reluctantly brought to declare their inability to return on the terms which were now proposed. Their reasons were given at large in a pamphlet, in which they recapitulate the

grounds of their Secession, as illustrated more fully in their Extra-judicial Testimony; and then they inquire, whether, by the Deeds of this Assembly, these grounds were so far removed as that they might, consistently with their duty to Christ, return to the Judicatories of the National Church.\*

This formal and serious deliberation shows their anxiety for re-union. There would have been no

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\* “ Upon the whole, they admitted, that by the repeal of the Acts 1790 and 1792, part of the grounds of their Secession was removed, but the principal grounds thereof they found to be still remaining. More particularly the Act 1792, they found was reversed, merely on account of its having been enacted without going through the appointed forms, without any regard to its inconsistency with the spirit and principles of the Scottish Church, or its contrariety to the Word of God; that though the Assembly 1794, did not countenance violent intrusions themselves, yet they gave no sufficient testimony against the many that had been already made; that the Act restoring them to the communion of the Church, and to their several charges, did not proceed upon the sinfulness and injustice of the sentences pronounced against them by the Assembly and Commission, but upon the lamentable consequences that had followed, or might follow, upon the separation of these Brethren, so that these sentences were left to be constructed as in themselves legal, formal, and valid—precedents that might be imitated where no such consequences were to be apprehended, thus leaving these Brethren still under the character of criminals, but criminals whose just sentences had been relaxed for the sake of peace; and they found, finally, that the Act of 1794, concerning ministerial freedom, so far from repealing the Act of 1793, was a vindication and confirmation of it; inasmuch, as the Act 1794 declares, that due and regular ministerial freedom was not anywise impaired or restrained by the said Act of Assembly 1793.”—*Struthers' History of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 19.

need for it had they viewed their return with aversion or indifference; for the Acts of the Assembly have enough in their character which would, at once, have been sufficiently repulsive, unless agreement had been earnestly desired. The following are the statements of Mr. Wilson respecting their character.

“By this Assembly,” says he, “the Synod of Perth are only empowered to relax the Four Brethren, upon some political considerations, from the sentences that were passed against them, *viz.* for preventing the ‘lamentable consequences that have followed, and may yet follow, upon their separation from this Church and the Judicatories thereof.’ And, in the mean time, the Act and deed of the Assembly of 1733 against them, is held and reputed to be legal and formal, and is nowise to be censured by the Synod. The Seceding ministers have always pled for the repeal of the deed against them, not as an act of favour or pity to them, as straying brethren who deserve such a sentence, but as an act of justice; and they have pled the repeal of the said deed, not merely as an act of justice to themselves, but as a piece of justice that should be done to injured truth, namely, that an Act and sentence condemning a faithful doctrinal testimony against

steps of defection, and likewise condemning a protestation against the unwarrantable exercise of discipline, might not remain to future generations as a standing Act and deed of this National Church.”\*

“It is evident that the Act of Assembly 1733, is a standing Act and deed of this National Church, never yet rescinded nor repealed. Some may judge that it is not of any great importance in the present question, whether the Act against the Four Brethren was rescinded or not, when the execution of the sentence against them was diverted. But it will be found to be of considerable moment and importance, when it is observed, that, by the Act and deed of the said Assembly, a doctrinal testimony against the sinful proceedings of the Judicatories is censured, and thereby faithful ministerial freedom against a course of defection, as also a protestation for exoneration against such a gross perverting of discipline, are both condemned; by which procedure I humbly judge, that not only our principles as Presbyterians, but also as Protestants, are attacked, and a blind submission and subjection unto Judicatories, even when walking contrary to our laudable Acts and constitutions, is established:

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\* Defence,—p. 112, 113.

and as this is a piece of manifest tyranny in the administration, so it has a native tendency to subvert our constitution.

“With respect to ministerial freedom in testifying doctrinally against the sinful proceedings of Church-judicatories, it is plainly condemned by the Act of Assembly 1733, appointing Mr. Erskine to be rebuked at their bar, for impugning, in his sermon, Acts of Assembly, and proceedings of Church-judicatories. And what were these Acts or deeds of Assembly and proceedings of the Judicatories which he impugned? Only such as concerned the violent settlements of ministers in vacant congregations, in direct opposition to our received and known principles. But it is alleged, that the Assembly 1734, have declared for ministerial freedom in the plainest terms, when, in their Act relative to the same, ‘they do, for the satisfaction of all, hereby declare, that due and regular ministerial freedom is still left entire to all ministers: and that the same was not, nor shall be held or understood to be, anywise impaired or restrained by the late Assembly’s decision in that particular process,’ viz. in the process against Mr. Erskine. Upon the above words of the Assembly, the Seceding Brethren justly observe in their reasons of not acceding,—

That they are conceived in very general terms, that they have not told us what they mean by due and regular ministerial freedom, and, that it is plain, that, according to the Act of Assembly 1733, the doctrinal freedom used by Mr. Erskine, and the freedom which the Four Brethren used in protesting for the faithful and free exercise of their ministry, was neither due nor regular ministerial freedom, in the plain sense and meaning of the foresaid Act of Assembly; and therefore they justly conclude, that the Assembly 1734, instead of taking off the restraint that was laid upon ministerial freedom, do rather approve and vindicate the Act and deed of Assembly 1733, when they expressly declare, ‘That due and regular ministerial freedom was not anywise impaired or restrained by the decision of the said Assembly in this particular process.’”\*

The historical part of the Testimony of the United Secession Church, recently enacted, contains a concentrated view of public circumstances, bearing upon this subject; and a conclusive vindication of the Four Brethren for not returning to the Judicatories of the Establishment, after the Assembly of 1734.

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\* Defence,—p. 114, 115.

“With every disposition to judge of the proceedings of the last Assembly in the most favourable light, they could not perceive it to be their duty to return in present circumstances. They frankly admitted that the first ground of their Secession as laid, was removed by the repeal of the two Acts already specified. But they justly observe, 1. That ‘their Secession was not founded on the passing of these Acts, for they continued in communion after these Acts had become binding rules,’ but, on the Assembly’s suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness, by appointing them to be censured because they had followed up their protestation against the Act concerning the planting of vacant Churches, with a suitable testimony in their public ministrations: and, 2. That the repeal of these Acts proceeded on reasons which left uncondemned the arbitrary principles which gave rise to them.

“They candidly acknowledge, that this Assembly did not directly countenance any violent settlements,\* and appointed their Commission to petition

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\* It did so, however, indirectly. “The Assembly of 1784, whose conduct and management was much better than that of several Assemblies before, or of any that have followed, yet, when the case of the parish of

his Majesty and Parliament for relief from the yoke of patronage; but when they recollected, that the very Assemblies, and their Commissions, who had zealously supported patronage in its most oppressive forms, still confessed it to be a grievance; and that this Assembly had given no testimony against former violent settlements, nor vindicated the principles of the Church on this subject, nor made any provision for exercising the powers which they possessed, for preventing the acceptance of presentations by those to whose ministry the people were unwilling to submit,—they could see no rational ground to believe that the system was abandoned.

“They had stated as a ground of their secession, that, the prevailing party pursued such measures as did actually corrupt, or, at least, had a direct tendency to corrupt, the doctrine contained in our ex-

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Cambusnethan was brought before them by an appeal from a sentence of the Presbytery of Hamilton, which had an evident tendency towards a violent settlement in the said parish, even the foresaid Assembly remit to the Presbytery of Hamilton, to proceed towards the settlement in the said parish, as they shall judge best for the edification of that congregation. This was a delivering up of the oppressed into their hands, who had given sentence against them; for, who could doubt but that Presbytery would think it necessary to see to the execution of their own sentence.”—*Defence*, p. 106.

cellent Confession of Faith.' Though this ground involved a subject of supreme importance, the Assembly had taken no step to remove it. No efficient measure was adopted for the suppression of error and the vindication of the truth,—or for securing that none but persons of decidedly evangelical principles, and of pious character, should be admitted into sacred office,—or for discouraging that kind of preaching, which of late years had become very common, and of which the best ministers of the Church had loudly complained, that excluded the supernatural mysteries of the gospel, and substituted, in their room, speculations and discussions which could not make men wise unto salvation. A Committee was appointed, indeed, to draw up an overture for an Act to warn against errors, and to give directions concerning the right preaching of the gospel. Such an overture was presented, and 'after long dependence was got enacted.' It clearly exhibited the doctrine of Scripture, in relation to our condition as fallen beings, and to the way of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ; and recommended to all the ministers an evangelical strain of preaching, and to Professors of Divinity, to use their best endeavours to have the students under their care, well acquainted with the true

method of preaching the gospel, as directed by this Act, appointing Presbyteries, at their privy censures, to inquire concerning its observation. But is there any evidence that this excellent Act was followed out?—that means were employed to ascertain if due attention was given to its recommendations? Is there no room to fear, that it was only a dead letter inserted in the statute-book, in compliance with the earnest solicitations of the orthodox? For, did not the Assembly which enacted this overture, dismiss a reverend Professor from its bar, who had been under process ‘for having vented several dangerous errors in his writings,’ without censure, by declaring, ‘that the examining and stating of the matter, as was done by the Committee for purity of doctrine, is sufficient for cautioning against the errors which some, at first, supposed the Professor was guilty of,’ and by recommending to him ‘not to use doubtful expressions or propositions which may lead his hearers or readers into error?’ In vain shall we search for proofs, in the Assembly’s proceedings, of a zeal against the erroneous, as active and efficient as that which they had displayed against the advocates of the doctrines of grace, and against the intrepid assertors of the rights of the ministry, and of the

privileges of the people. Purity of doctrine is of vital importance; and unquestionably, the Assembly was imperiously called, especially at this time, to take decisive steps to arrest the progress of error, and vindicate the truth; and if they declined to do so, how could the seceding Brethren return, in a consistency with a faithful keeping of the sacred trust committed to them?"\*

Such is part of a summary and masterly justification of these Brethren, for not closing their Secession, and returning to the Established Judicatories. That they were averse to return, will never be supposed by any who know their character;† and,

\* See Testimony of the United Secession Church, p. 46, 47, 48.

† Their willingness to return to the National Judicatories, is evident from the statement they added to their reasons for not acceding, of some things which would remove their difficulties, and give them liberty to return. The following is the substance of these:

"1. That a seasonable warning be emitted against the infidelity and gross errors prevailing among us at this day.

2. That the censures inflicted on the Four Brethren be rescinded, and all that has followed thereupon be declared null and void in itself; and that all ministers of this Church be enjoined to give faithful warning and testimony against the prevailing corruptions of the times.

3. That it be declared that ministers shall be allowed to dispense sealing ordinances to all such as have had ministers intruded upon them contrary to the Word of God, and the rules of this Church founded thereupon, and who have not freedom to submit to the ministry of such,

in the case of Mr. Wilson, is, indeed, abundantly evident from the statements we have made. To continue separated from the body of his ecclesiastical connections, was to him no trifling matter, but a last resort, and one to which he could be reconciled only by conviction of duty. He could have made sacrifice of his inclinations, of his ease, of his comfort, and, if circumstances required, as they afterwards did, of his worldly interests; but he could make no compromise where the interests of

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or to receive the ordinances of Christ from their hands, provided they be sufficiently attested, as to their Christian life and conversation.

4. That it be declared and enacted, that in all time coming, no minister shall be settled in any vacant congregation, without the call and consent of the majority of that congregation, who are admitted to full communion with the Church, in all her sealing ordinances; and that there be no preferences of voices in this matter, upon the account of any worldly consideration.

5. That in licensing and ordaining men to the holy ministry, all Presbyteries be strictly enjoined, not only to inquire into their literature, but also their acquaintance with the power of godliness, and the work of the Spirit upon their own souls; and that they admit none to trials but such as are known to be of sound principles, of good report, and of sober, grave, prudent, and pious behaviour.

And, 6. That there be an acknowledgement of the great guilt of this land in having gone on in such a course of backsliding, contrary to the Word of God, and the obligations these lands are under, to promote reformation."

"If these things are done," say they, "we might have the comfortable prospect of a pleasant and desirable unity and harmony with our brethren, in concurring with them, according to our weak measure, in all other necessary steps towards a further reformation."

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religion were at stake. *He could do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.* For healing the division, which on their part had been involuntary, his brethren and he were prepared to make every concession which was not injurious to truth, and to the purity and progress of religion. Their reasons for not returning, it is to be remembered, were not wrought up to justify them in a favourite course, which they were determined to pursue; but were conscientiously produced to vindicate a Secession, to which they had been compelled, and for the removal of the grounds of which, they were earnest in their prayers, and diligent and persevering in their varied labours.

It is abundantly evident, from the statements of Mr. Wilson, and from the other documents which we have quoted, and will be still more apparent by the subsequent occurrences in Courts and Churches of the Establishment, that what this Assembly did was totally insufficient and nugatory. It was wholly from fear and policy. There were no real concessions made. There was no sincerity even in the seemingly conciliatory deeds which they passed. There was no evidence of effective determination to check the current of corruption, and to address themselves to the work of substantial re-

formation. This was far, indeed, from being that faithful and reforming General Assembly to which the Four Brethren had appealed.\*

Had there been nothing to keep the ejected Brethren in a state of separation from the Establishment but the sentences of the Commission, it would have been their duty to return whenever these were reversed by the Synod of Perth and Stirling, which, invested with the Assembly's power, restored them to the exercise of their office, and to their respective ministerial charges. But the sentence loosing them, was no ground of their Secession. They were maintaining a Secession for certain great ends, and they were surely entitled to ascertain that these were gained before they discontinued it, otherwise they would have condemned their own contentings against the defections of the Church.

On the whole, it was most providential, that, seeing the snare, for such it may be called, which this Assembly laid for them, they did not fall into it, but, disinterestedly, rejected the insidious proposals. If they had returned to the Judicatories, all the blessed consequences of their honourable

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\* See page 256.

struggles would have been lost. They would have put themselves again in the power of the prevailing party, under whose rapidly increasing influence all the good effects of their endeavours to be faithful would have been soon defeated; and, in all probability, our land, though under a Protestant, and even a Presbyterian name, would, in the present day, have borne much resemblance to those unhappy countries, on the continent of Europe, where religious tyranny bears sway, and where almost all the grand essentials of our religion have disappeared. Many among the most candid of those who are opposed to the Secession, have not failed to acknowledge, that its influence has been variously and widely beneficial among themselves. It is undeniable, that, in the hand of Providence, it has been a grand instrument for preserving the incorrupt administration, and for extensively disseminating the knowledge of pure Christianity.

Even although this Assembly had done something substantial in reformation, it would have been a question of prudence, how far it would be proper to ascertain, by a little experience, whether, from the fluctuation of measures incident to a Court continually changing its members, any scriptural enactments would be practically pursued.

In the mean time, they resolved to limit their ministrations to their own spheres, and to associate chiefly for religious exercises. Their resolution will appear the more disinterested and honourable, when we mention, that they had many solicitations to extend their operations, and that from the state of religion in the country, no opportunity could have been better, had they been disposed to use it, for the speedy formation of a large and flourishing Church of their own. Indeed, in a far shorter time than they could have provided preachers and ministers, they might have spread their influence, as they have since done, over the whole land, and gained a sure footing in all its most populous and important districts.

Disappointed by the result of the Assembly of 1734, but still willing to encourage hope, the Associate Presbytery waited patiently till the Assembly of 1735. But this Assembly justified all their caution, discovered the inefficiency of the deeds of the former, and proved that the prevailing evils were overlooked or encouraged as before, and that there was no real tendency to reformation. Instead of even pretending to remove the obstacles to their return, this Assembly put new obstacles in their

way, and almost destroyed the expectation which had been before excited.

Before they would proceed to act judicially, the Associated Brethren even waited till after the meeting of 1736. The proceedings of this Assembly, however, were still worse than those of the former. It would have been unreasonable to expect them to wait longer. Thus, "there is abundant evidence that they were afraid of taking any precipitate step; that they abandoned, most reluctantly, the hope of exercising their ministry in that Church in which they had been educated and ordained—waiting patiently, for years, before they proceeded to act fully in a judicative capacity; and that they conducted themselves throughout, with a dignified consistency, and with a scrupulous regard to Presbyterian order."\*

These two Assemblies† confirmed the grounds of the Secession. "The erroneous were retained and

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\* Testimony of the United Secession Church.

† "The Assembly 1735, appointed a call to be moderated for the Presantee to the parish of Carriden, and they refer the case of the enrolment of the intruders into the parish of Muckhart and Troquire unto the respective Synods; as this was a plain authorising of the Synods to enrol these intruders, so the remit to the Synod of Perth bears an appointment unto them to continue their endeavours to obtain harmony in that corner. The obvious meaning of this appointment, is, that they should

protected, even while an Act was passed which recommended an evangelical strain of preaching; and presentees, though rejected by the people to whom they were to minister, were zealously supported. While such were the proceedings of the Assembly, of what avail was an enactment ‘against the intrusion of ministers into vacant congregations, and recommendations to Presbyteries concerning settlements,’ in which it is admitted that such intrusions are in direct opposition to what has been the principle of the Scottish Church since the Reformation,——except to involve that Court deeper in inconsistency and guilt?”†

Mr. Wilson’s scruples about the necessity of continued secession, were now, with good reason, thoroughly removed. “I own,” says he, “that after the meeting of the Assembly 1734, I was in much

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use their endeavours to bring the people in Muckhart to submit to the ministry of an intruder.”

“The Assembly 1736, appointed the Presbytery of Stirling to proceed to a violent settlement in the parish of Denny, and, at the same time, expressly enjoin the said Presbytery to be at pains to bring the people of the said parish to submit to the decisions of the Church, and to the ministry of the intruded Presentee. The same Assembly appoint the Presbytery of Dumfries, and Synod, to enrol the intruder into the parish of Troquire, as a member of their respective Judicatories, and to support him in his ministry, and to endeavour to bring the people in that parish to submit to it.”—*Wilson’s Defence*, p. 160.

† Testimony of the United Secession Church.

perplexity about our continuing in a state of secession; it occasioned many thoughts of heart unto me, to understand what was duty in the present case: but as I had no hesitation about my duty, when I did, together with my three Brethren, declare a Secession from the Judicatories of this Church, in our protestation before the Commission, November 1733; so, when I have observed the conduct of the said Judicatories since the year 1734, I have been gradually cleared, and more and more confirmed, that it is our duty to continue in a state of Secession.”\*

Much of the Associate Presbytery’s prudential delay was recommended and influenced by Mr. Wilson,—especially its continuance till the issue of the Assembly of 1736. For after the meeting of 1735, his three Brethren were convinced that they might warrantably proceed to acts of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He, however, was rather inclined to consider a further delay as the more prudent course; and he expressed his earnest wish that they should continue another year to meet as they had been doing. In deference to his opinion, this pro-

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\* Defence, p. 357.

posal was adopted. It was a counsel evidently wise: for had they acted otherwise, they might have betrayed, what they did not feel,—a desire to leave the Establishment finally, and a want of respect to those who had exerted themselves for reformation at the former Assembly, and who might at a future meeting have it in their power to renew their exertions. Their compliance with this recommendation was calculated to silence those who were disposed to speak against them; or, at least, to prevent any calumny from being propagated on a plausible foundation.\*

“This,” says Mr. Wilson, “was the only ma-

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\* This shows how uncharitable and unjust such insinuations of adversaries as the following were:—“If,” says Mr. Currie, “the Brethren make not greater haste than they have done, ’tis like that the oppressed heritage which they speak so much of will be long ere it be relieved, when in the space of six years, they have not ordained except one person for all the corners of Scotland.” But, says Mr. Wilson in reply,—“It is true that at that time when Mr. Currie wrote, the Associate Presbytery had only ordained one, *viz.* the late reverend Mr. John Hunter, minister at Morbattle, who laboured for a short time in the work of the gospel, to the very great comfort and edification of many of the Lord’s people through the land, and who was soon called home to the joy of his Lord. But, if in the space of time mentioned, the Associate Presbytery had only ordained one, it is an evidence that they have neither been sudden or forward in the steps that they have taken; again, if in the said space they have ordained one, it is more than Mr. Currie or any of his brethren have done, or can do, for the relief of the Lord’s oppressed heritage, while they continue in conjunction with the present Judicatories.—See *Defence*, p. 457.

terial difference that was amongst that little body, after their Secession from the Judicatories. But by the good hand of the Lord upon them, they were kept united among themselves; the other three Brethren, who were clear for the above procedure, did not proceed to any step of jurisdiction; and nothing of this nature was done till after the Assembly 1736, when all the Four Brethren were convinced, that not only it was duty, but also that it was high time, for them to proceed to the exercise of government and discipline.”\*

In the mean time, a draught of a judicial testimony was prepared, chiefly† by Mr. Wilson, in which a more extended view was given of their various grounds of complaint; and of their views, feelings, and designs, in the prosecution of their ministerial labours. The Secession having originated in testifying against existing and prevailing evils, it was highly proper, that the reasons for thus testifying should be exhibited—that by embodying, in their public documents, the grounds of their past and present conduct, they might stamp upon the very constitution of their Association,

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\* Defence, p. 481.

† See Brown's History of the Secession.

the character of a Church witnessing for the truth in opposition to error.

“Having continued waiting,” says Mr. Wilson,\* “and finding, from the conduct of the Assemblies 1735 and 1736, that, instead of reforming, they were going on in their backsliding course, and that truth had gotten a new and deep wound, particularly by the conduct of the said Assembly 1736, they found themselves at last obliged to emit their Act, Declaration, and Testimony, which bears date at Perth, December 3d, 1736, and which was published in the beginning of the year 1737.”

In reference to this and similar publications, we have only to remark, in general, that it is in itself most reasonable, and much sanctioned in Scripture, that the faithful few should, in times of apostacy, recur, both in their private exercise, and in their public expostulations, to periods when religion was more purely professed and practised. Retrospects of this kind are familiar to the prophets and apostles. In the course of their ministrations, we find them sometimes taking a view of the history of God's dispensations, which they publicly declared for the benefit of the Church. This has likewise been the

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\* Defence, p. 410.

practice of reforming Churches in all ages posterior to the close of the times of inspiration, and the practice of the Church of Scotland in particular. The fathers of the Secession had therefore precedents, the propriety and importance of which will not be called in question, for reviewing the state and progress of religion in their native country.

This procedure appeared to Mr. Wilson to be not only necessary, but highly advantageous. "A Judicial Testimony for truth," says he,\* "when opposed or controverted, is a debt that the office-bearers of the Church owe both to present and succeeding generations. But the present Judicatories of this National Church refuse to assert the truths of Christ, in opposition to the errors that have been vented in our day; they refuse to condemn several errors, by which many important truths, held forth from the Word of God in our Confession of Faith, are opposed and assaulted. How then shall the duty we owe to the Head of the Church, or the debt that we owe to present and succeeding generations, be discharged? If the minor part, who are sensible of their duty, continue in conjunction with

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\* Defence, p. 132, 133.

the Judicatories, they cannot lift up a Judicial Testimony for truth; they cannot by any judicial Act or deed condemn the particular errors that are vented, or testify particularly against former and present sins. The majority bear the keys of government and discipline, and the minority cannot exercise them while they remain in conjunction with them; and therefore, since the ordinary means have been used with the present Judicatories to engage them to their duty, but without any success, the minority, though few in number, who are sensible of their duty, ought to make a secession from them, and associate together, that they may endeavour to discharge that duty which their office and the present circumstances of the Church, threatened with an inundation of pernicious errors, does oblige them unto."

"Many congregations in Scotland are groaning under the load and weight of intrusions; they want faithful gospel ministers. But, how can such ministers as pity their case, take the proper steps towards their help and relief? How shall they license proper persons as probationers for the holy ministry? Or, how shall they ordain and appoint ministers over the oppressed heritage of God, to labour among them in the work of the gospel? There is

no doing of this while they continue in conjunction with the present Judicatories.”

“If we consider the primary end and design, next unto the glory of God and the honour of our exalted Redeemer, of all Church order, government, and discipline, which is the edification of the body of Christ; and if we likewise consider for what ends pastors or teachers are given unto the Church, namely, that they are set for the defence of the gospel of Christ;\* that they are particularly instructed to teach the observance of all things whatsoever Christ hath commanded;† that they are appointed to publish and declare, to uphold and maintain the truths of God, which are either controverted or opposed;‡ that they are commanded to feed the flock of God;|| and to commit the ministerial trust unto faithful men.§ When these things, I say, are duly considered, it appears to me to shine with bright evidence from the Holy Scriptures, that when the Judicatories of a particular visible Church (which I have proven is the case at this day,) do not stand for the defence of the gospel

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\* Phil. i. 7-17.    † Matt. xxviii. 20.    ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 15.  
 || 1 Pet. v. 2; Acts xx. 28.    § 2 Tim. ii. 2.

of Christ; or, when error is so far supported and countenanced, that it is dismissed from their bar, either with a slight censure, or with no censure at all; and likewise, when they exercise a lordly and magisterial power over the heritage of God; when they rule over them with rigour; and when the sword of discipline is turned against such as are cleaving to truth, and who endeavour to bear testimony against a course of defection; and when such Judicatories refuse to return to their duty,—then, and in this case, the minor part, though few in number, may and ought to leave the backsliding part, and have divine right and warrant to associate together for the exercise of government and discipline, in the defence of the gospel of Christ, and for the relief and support of his flock, and the sheep of his pasture.”\*

“If these culpable and dangerous omissions of the Judicatories are duly considered, how shall justice be done to truth? How shall the banner of a Judicial Testimony against error be displayed? How shall the Redeemer have that revenue of honour and glory which all the Churches owe unto him, namely, a public and judicial confession of his

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\* Defence, p. 135.

truths, in opposition to the injuries and indignities that are done them? How shall ministers fulfil their ministry, unless they depart from conjunction with such Judicatories as decline to discharge this duty, and associate together that they may make a joint, public, and judicial confession of the truth, in opposition unto dangerous and pernicious errors whereby the truth is opposed or subverted? If ministers would fulfil their ministry, they ought to set the trumpet to their mouths, and to show unto the Lord's professing people *their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin.*"\*

From this period (1736) Mr. Wilson felt himself at liberty to preach the gospel beyond his stated sphere of labour, and wherever providence opened the way.

About this time, along with Mr. Fisher,† he went

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\* Defence, p. 140.

† It is evident that Mr. Wilson lived on terms of the greatest friendship with all his three Brethren. We have not seen any memoir of Mr. Fisher; but the following respectful reference is made to him in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. "Mr. James Fisher was, by an unanimous call, in 1741, translated from Kinclaven to Glasgow, where he continued in the exercise of his ministry among a numerous congregation, respected by all ranks in that large city, and died in 1775, much regretted by his people and friends."—Vol. xvii. p. 227.

to the West of Scotland. They happened to visit the parish of Dalry, where Mr. Wilson had formerly the prospect of being settled.\* Already much interest had been excited about the Secession, throughout the whole country. This interest was felt particularly here, from the attachment which had been before expressed by the people, and which many of them still felt, for Mr. Wilson. A tent was erected, and a vast multitude assembled to hear him preach. Towards the conclusion of the sermon, the patron of the parish, riding homeward in that direction from his usual place of worship, came to the spot, and on seeing the crowd, inquired what it meant. Being informed that the people were listening to the ministers of the Secession who had come there to preach, he joined the assembly, and heard the remaining part of the sermon. When the worship was concluded, he introduced himself to the two ministers, and engaged them to breakfast with him next morning. This gentleman had a preacher of the Established Church residing in his family as tutor or chaplain. On returning home, he told him that he had been hearing the Seceder ministers, and had been vastly pleased

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\* See page 128.

with them, and that they were coming next morning to breakfast, when he wished to have all the points of difference between them and his Church fully discussed. The chaplain, however, left the house in the morning before Messrs. Wilson and Fisher arrived, and did not return till they were gone. The patron afterwards upbraided him for his cowardice, saying, that the Assembly had cast out these able and excellent men, and that he, convinced of their innocence, durst not venture to face them. According to the report of the gentleman's sister, who was present, every thing went on very well at the breakfast table; the clergymen were remarkably polite and agreeable; but as to ecclesiastical matters, she could say little, as she did not fully understand the subjects of dispute. Yet, she said, she had observed that any argument they had, was conducted chiefly between her brother and the little man (meaning Mr. Fisher), and that when they seemed to be at any loss about facts, or to have any difficulty to solve, or to be of different sentiments, the matter was referred to the big man (meaning Mr. Wilson), to whose judgment they paid the greatest deference, and who acted the part of an umpire between them, and that generally both acquiesced in his opinion.

At the meeting of their Presbytery, at Culfargie, on the 28th July, 1736, the Four Brethren took into consideration their own conduct, respectively, in the Established Judicatories, regarding the issue of the last process against Professor Simpson, inasmuch as that “no adequate censure was inflicted on the said Mr. Simpson, though it was found clearly proven against him that he had openly and wickedly blasphemed the Son of God, by impugning his Supreme Divinity, Independency, Necessary Existence, and Numerical Oneness with the Father; and by asserting that the title of the Only True God might be taken for the personal property of the Father, and so not belonging to the Son: and, therefore, the said Brethren desired that the sense they had of their sinful silence, in that matter, might be received by the Presbytery, and recorded on their minutes.”\*

All the Brethren, with exemplary candour, acknowledged each his own remissness; but the other three agreed that Mr. Wilson had not incurred the same blame, being in different circumstances from themselves, as he was not present at the Assembly (1729), when the decision was passed, and had

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\* Extracted from the original minutes of the Associate Presbytery.

afterwards, in his place, opposed himself to it, and urged measures of remedy.

Towards the close of this year, the Associate Presbytery proceeded to the important business of electing one of their number to be Professor of Divinity.

The following are extracts from the original minutes of the Associate Presbytery on this transaction.

*“Abernethy, 4th November, 1736.*

“Compeared the Commissioners from the United Societies in and about Edinburgh, insisting upon their former petition, namely, that fit persons be licensed to preach the gospel, and in the mean time, that the Presbytery would send one of their members, by turns, to preach, and dispense sealing ordinances among them.

“The Presbytery delayed considering the last part of this petition till next meeting, and entered upon the consideration of the first part thereof, anent licensing fit persons for the ministry; and, after some reasoning, a motion was made of appointing one of the Brethren of this Presbytery to take the inspection of the youth to be trained up for the holy ministry: whereupon the Presbytery

appointed Mr. Erskine and Mr. Moncrieff, as a Committee, to take the complex affair under their consideration, and to prepare proper overtures for regulating the Presbytery's procedure in this important matter, to be laid before them at their next meeting, and they appointed the said Committee to meet for the first time, at Culfargie, to-morrow, with power to adjourn themselves, from time to time, as they shall see cause; and further, it is recommended to the other two Brethren, also to have this affair under their consideration, and to meet with the said Committee, if occasion serves, and that they further recommend it, that upon the day of fasting at Kinross, there be a looking to the Lord for light and direction in this important step."

*"Eodem Loco, November 5th.*

"In consequence of yesterday's appointment, the Committee having met, brought in the following overture to the Presbytery, namely, that considering the lamentable and desolate condition of many parishes in Scotland, by reason of the violent intrusions that have been made upon them, and likewise, considering the frequent and repeated applications to this Presbytery, from several quarters of the land, for sending forth labourers into

the Lord's vineyard, that so they might have the benefit of the gospel and the ordinances thereof, therefore, the Committee were of opinion that this Presbytery should make some step towards the relief of the Lord's oppressed heritage, especially, considering the loud call in providence thereto, by nominating and appointing one of their number to take the inspection of the youth that should offer themselves to be trained up for the holy ministry, and also, that every one of the Brethren should carefully look out for faithful men, to whom the ministry should be committed.

“The Presbytery took this overture into their serious consideration. The question was put, proceed to determine in this matter just now, or delay till next meeting. It carried unanimously—proceed: then, after long reasoning upon this important subject, the question was put, which of the members of this Presbytery should take the inspection of the youth, to direct them in their theological studies. It carried unanimously, that this trust should be committed to Mr. Wilson, their present Moderator; and, therefore, the Presbytery did, and hereby do, make choice of, nominate, and appoint, their reverend Brother, Mr. William Wilson, minister of the gospel at Perth, to take the inspection,

and to be teacher of the youth who should offer themselves to be instructed, in order to their being licensed to preach the gospel, as they should be found qualified, with full power to him to direct them in their studies, in such manner as shall be most conducive to their being acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, and the reformed principles of this Church, founded thereon, contained in her Confession of Faith, and Catechisms, Larger and Shorter; and considering his parochial and other ministerial work in his present circumstances, the Presbytery leave it wholly to him to judge of what time he can most conveniently spare, for teaching and instructing those students, and the Presbytery recommend it to all the Brethren to make inquiry after fit persons to be licensed to preach the gospel, or to be trained up for the ministry, and to report their diligence in this matter, from time to time, to this Presbytery, and, therefore, they recommend it to their Committee above named, to prepare proper overtures to be laid before the Presbytery, at their next ordinary meeting, anent the admission of students, and the Presbytery's procedure in licensing them to preach the gospel."

## CHAPTER II.

*From his Appointment to the Professorship, to his  
Ejection from his Church.*

1736—1740.

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FOR the important office of Professor of Divinity, any of the Four Brethren was well qualified: and it is remarkable enough, that after Mr. Wilson's death, circumstances occurred in which each of the others held it. But without intending any comparison of the respective merits of the Brethren, it must be allowed that Mr. Wilson, on account of his well known amiability of character, his unusual fervency in devotional exercises, his accurate theological knowledge, and his profound and extensive erudition, was eminently fitted, through the blessing of God, to instruct and train young men, both by precept and example, for the sacred office of the ministry.

He made immediate arrangements for entering on the duties of his new charge. This appears from the following minute of the Associate Presbytery.

*Kinross, 5th January, 1737.*

“Mr. Wilson, the Moderator, having desired Mr. Moncrieff, the last Moderator, to take the chair, represented to the Presbytery, that since they had laid it on him to instruct the youth who should offer themselves to be trained up for the holy ministry, it would be expedient that intimation be made of the time they might expect he should attend upon them, and signified that he was willing to give attendance for this season, the months of March, April, and May next, and further desired, that the Presbytery would consider upon what testimonials the students should be admitted.

“The Presbytery taking this affair under their consideration, agreed that the Brethren should acquaint their correspondents in the several societies through the kingdom, that their reverend Brother was to give attendance this season the three months above mentioned, and that he should admit students under his inspection from praying societies, or other sufficient attestations.”\*

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\* This document, and the preceding regarding the election of Mr. Wilson to the Chair, were taken from the original minutes of the Associate Presbytery, lately recovered to the United Associate Synod, through the activity and kindness of Mr. Alexander Tillie, Probationer. See printed minutes of the United Associate Synod for September, 1829.

As may be well supposed, Mr. Wilson undertook this important charge full of humility: but he performed its duties with much credit to himself, and advantage to the infant Secession Church. He took for his text-book, the well known valuable *Medulla* of Professor Mark of Leyden:\* and, as was then common, read his lectures, and conducted the whole business of his class, in the Latin language. "Under him, the first preachers licensed by the Seceding Brethren were educated, as Messrs. Gib, Swanston, and others, who all spoke of him with great regard."†

The conduct of the Four Brethren, in providing the means of theological education, and in all the former steps to which we have referred, was prudent and honourable. It was, from first to last, dictated by a conscientious desire for the best interests of religion: and was wisely adapted to the circumstances of their own situation, and of the times. Yet, as might naturally be expected, their pro-

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\* The late Rev. Archibald Bruce of Whitburn, Professor of Theology, in connection with the General Associate Synod, possessed the *Compendium* of Mark that belonged to Mr. Wilson, bound up with blank paper, on which were written with his own hand a few of his prelections.—See *Bruce's Review*.

† Communicated by the Rev. John Brown of Whitburn.

ceedings excited not a little jealousy and opposition,—especially from the National Judicatories. These Brethren, and their adherents, were more and more branded as schismatics,—as the instruments of disturbing the harmony of the Church, and exciting divisions and animosities. That they should be thus reproached by those against whose unfaithfulness they contended, was to be expected from human nature. But it was far easier to make round assertions of such charges, than to give proofs of their truth; and these virulent and feeble attempts were soon repelled by Mr. Wilson. As a specimen on the point before us, we may insert the following from the preface to the Defence.

“What now,” says Mr. Wilson, “have the Associate Presbytery done, for which the charge of rending and ruining the Church is brought against them? They have even done what the Judicatories of the Church should have done; they have judicially condemned some steps of defection, and asserted the truths in opposition unto many particular errors of the present times, which they have in like manner particularly and expressly condemned. Are they, therefore, schismatics,—renders and ruiners of the Church? Can a judicial testimony for truth, and against a course of defection, be ob-

tained in a way of conjunction with the present Judicatories? The Judicatories decline to discharge this duty. Ought the duty therefore to be neglected by the few who are grieved with their management? Is it agreeable either to the Word of God, or sound reason, to say,—Because the majority of an ecclesiastic body carry on a course of defection, and, instead of doing justice to the truths of God, do manifest injury unto them, that, therefore, the minority, who are grieved with their proceedings, ought not judicially to witness against a course of defection, and in the same manner vindicate and assert injured truth? Or, must they be reckoned schismatics and renders of the Church if they do so? The injustice of the charge that is laid against the Seceding ministers, of ruining and rending the Church, will further appear, if we inquire into the reasons why the present Judicatories refuse to condemn such steps of defection, or to purge out such corruptions, whereby the whole lump is in danger to be leavened. Has not the wisdom of the Son of God, the glorious Head of the Church, provided sufficient remedies in the Church for all her internal necessities? Is not the discipline of Christ's appointment a sufficient means for the preservation and reformation of his own house? And, have not

the courts of Christ power and authority from the Lord Jesus to exercise the keys of government and discipline, for the edification of his body, and the advancement of his honour and glory? What reason then can be given, why the present Judicatories refuse to discharge their duty in lifting up a judicial testimony for truth, or why they refuse to set about reformation-work? There must be one of two, I cannot conceive a midst betwixt them; either they will not, or they are hindered to discharge their duty by some outward force and violence upon them. I hope the last cannot be alleged. This was, indeed, the case of this Church betwixt 1600 and 1638. The Judicatories were borne down by force and violence from the Court; king James VI. threatened and oppressed them; he confined, imprisoned, or banished many eminent ministers, when they were contending and wrestling for the rights and liberties of the kingdom of Christ. But it cannot be alleged, that any such violence has been offered in the least to the present Judicatories, or any of their members; therefore, no other reason can be given for the conduct of the Judicatories, but that they are obstinate in their course and way, and will not reform.”\*

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\* Defence, p. 6, 7.

So far from having any wish to rend and divide the Church, Mr. Wilson had thus the consciousness and belief that he and his Brethren, influenced by the best of motives, were humbly endeavouring to pursue the work of reformation, which their ancestors had so successfully begun, but from which many of their contemporaries had so much deviated.

In the year 1737, the Associate Presbytery received the accession of three members, *viz.* of the Rev. Thomas Mair of Orwell, of the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, who joined the Four Brethren in February, and of the Rev. Thomas Nairne, of Abbotshall, who joined them in September following; and in the month of June, 1738, the Rev. James Thomson of Burntisland, also acceded to the Presbytery. The conduct of the Judicatories towards men so eminently useful, and so blameless and exemplary as the Four Brethren, and the obstinate progress of the Assembly in their sinful measures, account for these accessions to the Associate Presbytery, and for the increasing strength of the Secession.

“When the Judicatories of a Church,” said Mr. Mair, on acceding to the Presbytery, “are so far infatuated as to thrust out from Church communion

both faithful watchmen, because of their faithfulness, and the purer part of her members who cannot go along with the courses of defection, but desire to keep their garments clean, and when the Judicatories continue thus to treat multitudes of the Lord's people, who, according to the rules of the Church, stand debarred from Church communion for their non-submission to intrusions, &c.—as this may be compared to the case of a city or nation thrusting out their chariots and horsemen from among them, even at a time when the enemy is not only entered their borders, but is wasting the country, which is the present case, and as thus sudden ruin and destruction is loudly threatened—so I reckon it both duty and interest for me to adhere to, and embark with, those who are in this manner thrust out, especially, when they are essaying, under the conduct and influence of the Spirit of the Lord, to lift up a standard for the Lord's cause and truth, and against the enemy that is come in like a flood.”\*

The current of corruption was gathering strength. “The Assembly 1737,” says Mr. Wilson, “declare their dissatisfaction with the conduct of the Pres-

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\* See Declaration of Secession, by the Rev. Thomas Mair, to which the Rev. Ralph Erskine, with additional reasons, adhered.

bytery of Stirling, in neglecting, or refusing to obey, the appointment of the Assembly 1736, with respect to the settlement of Mr. James Stirling, the Presentee to the parish of Denny; and they appoint the said Presbytery to proceed to the trials and settlement of the Presentee to the said parish, and to finish the same before the first of September that year; and, in case he is not actually settled before that time, the Synod of Perth and Stirling are appointed, at their October meeting, to proceed to his trials, and to finish his settlement before the month of March ensuing; and it is expressly declared, that it shall not be lawful for the Synod to put any question, whether they shall obey this appointment: but that any ten or more ministers thereof do proceed, as above directed, whether any others of the Synod concur with them or not, or notwithstanding that others, or even the greatest part then present, should oppose the execution of this Act; and in case the Synod, or such number of them as above mentioned, shall not, before the first of November, enter the Presentee upon trials, or before the first of March finish the same, the Assembly empower a special Commission of the said General Assembly, to convene at Edinburgh on the third Wednesday of November or March

respectively, with power to adjourn themselves as they shall think fit, in order to take trials, and ordain the Presentee as minister of Denny. Also, the same Assembly appoint a settlement in the town and parish of Perth, upon the footing of the Act 1732, even when the majority of the elders of the said parish were dissenting from the said settlement, and a constituted Session reclaiming against the same, before all the Judicatories of the Church. Likewise, the Assembly 1738, appointed a violent settlement in the parish of Dron, the call being only signed by the heritors, and one elder of the said parish, and the most part of the congregation by far, dissenting and reclaiming: as also, they sustained a call for Dr. Wisheart to be one of the ministers of Edinburgh, which proceeded purely upon the footing of the repealed Act, 1732.

“The above are some instances of violent settlements, amongst others that might be condescended upon, which have been either authorised or supported by the National Assemblies of late; besides instances of this kind, that might be offered from the procedure of the Commissions of the several General Assemblies, by virtue of their delegated power from them, since the Assembly 1734. Therefore, Mr. Currie must needs have very much

assurance, when he would have his reader to believe that some stop, yea, that a considerable stop, has been put to violent intrusions for some time by gone. Does he think, with his fair and smooth words, to put out the eyes of men? It is indeed to be regretted, that the most part are so obstinately blind, that they will not see the grounds and causes of the Lord's controversy against us; and our author's reasonings have a manifest tendency to cherish them in their wilful blindness and darkness. Likewise, from the above instances, we may plainly see, that the present Judicatories are worse, yea, vastly worse, than when the Secession was at first stated and declared. Was ever tyranny over the consciences of men screwed higher by the Church of Rome, than it is by the Assembly 1737, when they declare, that it shall not be lawful for the Synod of Perth to put any question, whether they should obey their appointment or not? Here is absolute and implicit obedience demanded with a witness. Besides, the Judicatories are vastly worse, in regard they continue in the practice of violent intrusions, in face of a more public and more open testimony against the same, and when the sinfulness of them is now become a point of confession amongst the members of this particular visible

Church. I humbly judge, that it is an aggravation of the sin of the Judicatories, when petitions, representations, and remonstrances, in a way of Church-communion, have not reclaimed them; and that it is yet a higher aggravation of their sin, when a testimony is lifted up against their procedure in a way of Secession from them, on account of their complex course of defection from the Lord, and, therefore, on account of violent intrusions, amongst many other things,\* that they should, notwithstanding of this, continue to oppress, break and scatter the sheep of the Lord's pasture."†

Such are Mr. Wilson's reflections on the mad oppressions of those irreclaimable Judicatories.

How different from this severity to their own insulted and reclaiming congregations, and their false and unmeasured criminations of the faithful ministers who formed the Secession, was their lenity

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\* Mr. Wilson refers to the lenity of the Assembly towards Mr. Campbell, who was prosecuted for error, as towards Mr. Simpson, on former occasions; he refers to the conduct of the Judicatories and of ministers about an Act of Parliament respecting Captain Porteous,—whereby the Sabbath was profaned, and the peculiar province of Christ, as the Head of the Church, invaded. These, and other instances of melancholy declension, are illustrated at large, in an instructive and luminous manner.—See *Defence*, p. 162, 163, &c.

† *Defence*, p. 160, 161, 162.

to Mr. Campbell, who, notwithstanding the dangerous errors he had taught and published, and which he had defended at the bar of the Assembly, was dismissed without censure.\* Such conduct fully vindicates the Secession, and verifies the assertion, that the Judicatories were still proceeding in a course of defection. Who can think of their conduct to their people without being reminded of the unfaithful shepherds, so strikingly described and reproved by the prophet Ezekiel: *Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.*

The Assembly of 1738, jealous probably of the increase and success of the Secession, passed an Act, condemnatory of the Seceding ministers, and empowering the Commission to serve each of them with a libel. To this procedure Mr. Wilson refers,

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\* Defence, p. 81.

in the following appropriate reasoning, which exhibits the spirit and substance of the Assembly's Act.

“This is an Act of a very extraordinary nature. It is an Act that loads the Seceding brethren in a very grievous manner, without any sufficient evidence brought against them; it is an Act that condemns their Judicial Act and Testimony; and yet there is not one particular in it, that is found or alleged to be contrary to the Word of God, or the received and acknowledged principles of the Church of Scotland. To condemn them in the manner foresaid, is a dealing with them by mere authority; it is a dealing with them in a manner that can neither convince nor persuade the consciences of men. The Council of Trent, before they condemned the Protestants as schismatics, excerpted out of their testimonies and writings several of their doctrinal propositions, and made some show of examining of them; but a National Assembly of the Church of Scotland, by a solemn Act and sentence, condemn eight ministers as dangerous schismatics, without condescending upon any erroneous principle maintained by them. They declare the grounds of their Secession to be unjustifiable; but what these grounds are, they have not told. They cannot allege, that they did not know the grounds upon

which the Secession is stated; for the Act of Assembly bears, that the Act, Declaration, and Testimony of the Seceding ministers, and their other papers, assign the grounds of their irregular conduct. And they further add, that the Seceding ministers, in their said Testimony and papers, do, ‘with the air of a paramount power and authority, condemn this Church and the Judicatories for their proceedings, and cast many groundless and calumnious reflections upon her and them.’ If a general council should let go a testimony for truth, why may not a Presbytery, constituted in the name of the Lord Jesus, judicially assert the truth, without assuming to themselves a paramount power and authority? The councils of Arminium and Constantinople, which comprehended both the Eastern and Western Churches, did, in the years 359 and 360, let slip the true faith concerning the Deity of Christ, as it was asserted and held forth by the Council of Nice. But, in the year 362, an Assembly of Confessors, being met at Alexandria, decreed, that the ringleaders of the apostacy, should be cut off from the Church; and that others, who renounced their error, and returned unto the faith, should be received again into the bosom of the Church. Did these few Confessors assume to

themselves a paramount power over all the Churches of the then known world? or, were they in the wrong in their honest and faithful judicial determination? If an œcumenic council should swerve from the faith, may not one minister bear doctrinal testimony to the truth? And, if one may do it doctrinally, why may not several ministers, associated together, emit a judicial testimony for truth, when the Judicatories of a particular visible Church either depart from the truth, or neglect a judicial testimony for the support of the same? I say, why may not this be done, without assuming a paramount power? It is no other power but what the Lord Jesus has given to the office-bearers of his house, and it is no other power but what they are warranted by him in the case mentioned, to exercise. If the Judicatories of this National Church had done their duty, the Seceding Brethren would not have had ground either for their association, or for such a procedure.

“The Assembly having declared the Seceding Brethren dangerous schismatics, &c. they conclude, ‘That they might proceed, upon these accounts, in the due exercise of discipline, to appoint these separating Brethren and their followers to be proceeded against, and censured according to the de-

merit of their faults; yet, choosing rather to treat them in the spirit of meekness, brotherly love, and forbearance, they enjoin all the ministers of this National Church, as they shall have access, and especially the ministers of the Synods and Presbyteries within which these Seceding Brethren reside, to be at all pains, by conference and other gentle means of persuasion, to reclaim and reduce them to their duty, and the communion of this Church, &c.' The Assembly think fit to speak of treating the Brethren in the spirit of meekness, brotherly love, &c. and yet at the same time they are condemned as dangerous schismatics, before the grounds of their Secession are either inquired into or examined; and therefore the conferences appointed with them, upon the specious pretexts of brotherly love, and gentle means of persuasion, must be to this effect,—The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland have found, that you are separatists from this Church; that your Secession is unwarrantable; that it is without any justifiable grounds; and that you have assumed a paramount power and authority to yourselves, and are promoting a dangerous schism; that you are seducing and deluding the people; therefore, they have appointed us to commune with you, in order to reclaim and reduce

you to your duty; and, if you will not be reclaimed and reduced to your duty, the Commission are empowered to take all proper steps and methods, for duly sisting you before the next Assembly, there to answer for your irregular conduct, and all the parts thereof.—Is this to treat them in the spirit of meekness? Are these the gentle means of persuasion? Who could expect, that the Seceding Brethren would enter into conferences with any, upon the above terms, whereby their testimony and the whole of their conduct is condemned as a dangerous schism, and that without any regard to what they might offer for their own vindication? I hope they are ready to give a reason of that hope that is in them, to any that ask it; but, in the mean time, it cannot be expected that they should act an inconsistent part with the Testimony which they are bound in duty to hold.”\*

In accordance with the Assembly's Act, the Commission which met in March, 1739, put a libel into the hand of each of the eight Brethren, of which the Associate Presbytery by this time consisted, “charging their Secession, their publication of the Testimony, their administration of Divine

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\* Defence, p. 169–172.

ordinances to people in different parts of the country; without the knowledge or consent of the ministers to whom they belonged, and their licensing one or more to preach the gospel, as high crimes, and citing them to appear before the General Assembly at its ensuing meeting, to answer for their conduct.”\* In the month of May, 1739, therefore, when the Assembly met, they all appeared as a constituted Presbytery at her bar, and gave in their declinature, in which, exhibiting their grounds of Secession, they disclaim the Assembly’s authority over them, and maintain their own independent right, liberty, and determination, in the name of Christ—to watch over the interests of religion in the land, and to preserve, through Divine aid, the scriptural simplicity, purity, and order of God’s House—in defending the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland.

In all this, they were doing only what the Scriptures warranted, what was reasonable and necessary, and what all preceding reformers, especially those of their own country, had sanctioned by their principles, and encouraged by their example. From among many instances we select but one. In de-

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\* Testimony of the United Secession Church, p. 53.

clining the authority of the Assembly, and asserting their own right to meet and judge in an ecclesiastical capacity, they adopted the measures of the Zealous and Faithful in the reign of Charles the First, when many ministers and laymen of piety and influence refused to submit to those corrupting innovations which had nearly destroyed the Presbyterian Church. We refer to the insulting and impolitic attempts to complete the scheme of Episcopacy in 1636, when a book of canons and a liturgy were imposed:—the former, intended to overturn all that remained of the government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland; the latter, substantially the English Prayer Book, though in some things more conformed to the Romish Breviary. But this bold invasion of the rights and privileges of the Church, defeated its own purpose, by exciting a general and determined opposition. And as by building too high on an insecure foundation, the whole superstructure may be made to totter and fall, so this attempt to place the coping-stone on the turret of prelatical superstition, levelled the whole fabric with the ground.

The leading opponents of the oppressive and tyrannical measures in the times to which we refer, among whom were about an hundred ministers,

and many noblemen, magistrates, and others of respectability and influence, supported by great multitudes of the people from different parts of the country, were indeed unsuccessful in their remonstrances and petitions. Their meetings were declared rebellious, and prohibited under the severest penalties. But, notwithstanding this proclamation, they asserted their right to deliberate and decide on their common concerns, maintained the lawfulness of their procedure, and disclaimed subjection to the judgment of the Bishops. In these measures, though every part of their conduct cannot be justified, they imitated the boldness and the zeal of the Reformers from Popery. They did this particularly in the strong expression of their resolution to be regulated in their religious polity and worship, only by the Word of God.

The course, then, which the Four Brethren pursued, was far from being singular and extraordinary. They had for its models, the most honourable precedents. Besides, in following it, having much farther emerged from the moral darkness in which the great proportion of Christendom had been so long involved, they were prepared—for more enlightened reformation,—for advancing the honourable work with greater facility and speed,—

and, through the divine blessing, for raising it to an higher standard of Scriptural purity and glory.

It thus appears, that, for a very considerable time, the cause of the Secession was pending, and the ultimate issue of the process unknown. During the whole of this period, the Brethren felt and recognized their connection with the Assembly. They watched her movements, waited upon her deliberations with the deepest interest, and they were at length summoned to her bar.

Though the Assembly did not proceed to depose the ministers of the Associate Presbytery, immediately after the Declinature in 1739, yet they expressed their conviction that they merited deposition, and strongly enjoined the next General Assembly to proceed to it, unless the eight Brethren should retract, which they declared they scarcely expected. The cause of their delay seems to have been the strong leaning towards the Secession among many of their own members, which, probably, produced an apprehension that to precipitate the extreme measures, would only tend to multiply desertions from among themselves.

The Assembly of 1740, did actually proceed to the deposition of the eight ministers,—declaring

them to be no longer ministers of the Church of Scotland, and enjoining the civil authorities of their respective places to exclude them forthwith from their churches.

The consequence of this decision of the Assembly, was, that the ministers of the Secession were all deprived, not of their people, but of their churches and emoluments. Some of them, indeed, to the honour of the local authorities, were allowed to retain their pulpits, till they could be otherwise accommodated. The Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, continued to preach in his Parish Church, till a new Church was built by the people who adhered to him.

But in several other places, though the Brethren there were no less respected and beloved, the civil authorities ventured not to grant indulgences, but acted up to the rigour of the ecclesiastical injunction. At Stirling, for instance, the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine was forcibly excluded from the place where he had been accustomed to officiate. On the Sabbath morning, when the Assembly's sentence was to be put in execution, he left his house at the usual hour, and proceeded towards the place of worship. But the magistrates of Stirling, having prohibited the ringing of the bells for convening the people,

and ordered the church and church-yard doors to be kept locked,—this faithful minister, who not many years before had been unanimously called to labour among them,\* found his entrance refused. It is said that, on this, in the presence of an immense multitude, who had collected on that interesting occasion, he lifted up the Bible,† and in a manner awfully impressive, and which had a powerful effect on those who witnessed it, took a solemn protest that he was in the way of his duty, and that not he, but those who opposed him were answerable at the Divine tribunal for the occurrences of that day.

But by far the most interesting and circumstantial detail which has come to our knowledge, of the issue of the Assembly's decisions, in the ejection of the Seceding Brethren from their churches, is the account of what took place at Perth, in reference to the venerable Mr. Wilson.

On the morning of the Lord's day, when the Assembly's instructions to the civil powers, just that morning received, were to be carried into effect,

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\* Mr. Erskine had been translated to Stirling in 1731.

† In those days, it was common for the minister to carry the pulpit Bible to the Church.

Mr. Wilson and his interesting family, who were very regular in their domestic habits, were observed by the servants to be in a state of uncommon concern. Though the cause was in a great measure unknown to the domestics, they perceived that something unusual had occurred. The breakfast table was laid at the usual hour; but Mr. and Mrs. Wilson continued closely shut up in their chamber, and seemed, in deep thoughtfulness, to forget their wonted habits, and to be so entirely engaged in intercourse with God, as to be above the cares of this life, and to forget, or not to feel, the common cravings of nature.

Mr. Wilson remained in his chamber till the hour of public worship. On leaving it, he went directly to the church. As he left the house to proceed, on this trying day, to the discharge of his ministerial duties, an aged domestic, long an inmate of the family,—the same who had served his father in earlier times, and supplied him with daily nourishment, when he was driven from his house and his property by the violence of the persecution,—\* ventured to accost him in the language of friendly caution, “Tak care what ye’re doin’, Mr. William,”

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\* See p. 30.

said she, for so from early habit she still sometimes called him, “tak care what ye’re doin’, for I fear if things gang on this way, I’ll get ye’re food to carry to the muir, as I did ye’re father’s before ye.”

Mr. Wilson, in the prospect of these movements, took along with him Mr. Andrew Ferrier, Writer in Perth, a gentleman of the highest respectability, and with whom he was in habits of friendship. In company with him, Mr. Wilson proceeded with his usual dignified composure and gravity, towards the House of God. An immense multitude had assembled on the streets around the building. An expectation that something more than common was to take place had been very generally excited. The doors were shut:—and the magistrates of the city, with their badges of authority and guards, were drawn up in front to obstruct Mr. Wilson’s entrance. In this they might pretend to be in the discharge of their duty: but doubtless, here, as in other places, magistrates had a discretionary power to decline exercising the rigour of their authority.

The following brief reference is made to this procedure, by Mr. Wilson himself.

“The magistrates of Perth, having received the Moderator’s letter upon the Sabbath morning, sustained themselves executioners of the Assembly’s

sentence against their minister, who, according to the measure of grace given him, had laboured near twenty-four years in the work of the ministry amongst them, and who was also unanimously called to that work by the people of that congregation:—the said magistrates themselves came to guard the church doors, and when they saw their minister coming, shut the doors upon him.”\*

Mr. Wilson, undaunted, advanced to the main entrance, and addressing those authorities who guarded it, demanded admission by an authority higher than theirs. “In the name of my Divine Master,” said the venerable pastor, “I demand admission into his temple.” The demand was thrice made in the same manner, and thrice met with a determined and stern refusal. On this there was a simultaneous stir in the crowd, and those who had seen or heard the repeated demands and refusals of entrance, became indignant and impatient, and were about to stone the civil authorities of the city, and to force an entrance for the minister they loved. But, perceiving their designs, Mr. Wilson, with affectionate and commanding dignity, turned to the crowd, and firmly forbade the execution of their

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\* Defence, p. 419.

purpose. "No violence," said he, "my friends;—the Master whom I serve is the *Prince of Peace*."

Mr. Ferrier, in the mean time, having endeavoured in vain to procure admission for his minister, solemnly protested against the conduct of the magistrates; and, on remarking, that they could justify themselves neither before God nor men for their proceedings that day,—was told in reply, that 'they would take men in their own hands, and would answer to God when they were called.'

At this interesting juncture, the Deacon of the Glovers' Corporation stepped forward, and said to Mr. Wilson, that if he would accept of the Glovers' Yard for the services of the day, he was most welcome to it. The kind and seasonable offer was most readily and thankfully accepted. Thither he immediately retired, followed by an immense concourse of people. An erection was soon obtained, where he might conveniently conduct the public worship of God.

In the mean time, "Mr. John Hally, then a Probationer, employed by Mr. David Black to preach that day, being attended by the said Mr. Black, was, with the assistance of the magistrates, thrust into the pulpit."\*

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\* Defence, p. 419.

During these procedures, Mr. Wilson was quite composed. The trying scene had not unfitted him for the discharge of those duties in which he delighted, and his sphere of usefulness was, by these events, much extended. Many more than the church could have contained, flocked to hear him. A considerable proportion of these were doubtless, prompted by curiosity alone; but by far the greater number were deeply interested in the occurrences of the times, and were determined to adhere to their godly minister.

There was something highly appropriate, and peculiarly expressive of the feelings of this excellent father of the Secession, in the Psalm with which he commenced, in the open air, the public solemnities of the Sabbath:—

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

But thou, man, who mine equal, guide,  
And mine acquaintance wast:

We join’d sweet counsels, to God’s house  
In company we pass’d.”\*

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\* Psalm lv. 12-14.

The prayer, we doubt not, accorded with the peculiar circumstances in which he and his fellow-worshippers were placed,—breathing the devout feelings of his heart,—showing how resigned he was to the disposing will of the God of providence,—and how anxious he was that the events of the day in particular, and of the times in general, might be rendered subservient to the Divine glory, and to the prosperity of the Church.

When he opened the Sacred Volume the text he read produced a thrill in every heart, and, especially, among the more thoughtful part of the audience: “LET US GO FORTH THEREFORE UNTO HIM, WITHOUT THE CAMP, BEARING HIS REPROACH.”

The devotional exercises of this eventful Sabbath, were, throughout, solemn and interesting, and much calculated to make a deep and lasting impression on those who witnessed them. When the work of the day was over, Mr. Wilson, on returning home, went directly to his Study, tired and worn out with his anxieties and exertions. Isabella, his eldest daughter, then but twelve years of age, but who, attended by one of the servants, had witnessed the whole extraordinary scene,—a scene which she distinctly remembered as long as she lived, and often mentioned to her family with the

deepest interest,—felt very curious to understand from her father the meaning of what had taken place, but not liking to ask him, she hung about the door of his apartment, till he observed her, and perceived what were her feelings and wishes. He then called her, and said,—“Bell! this has been a day of trial, but we have reason to be thankful that it has not been a day of shame. If any one ask you, Bell! why your father lost his kirk, you may just say, as good Mr. Guthrie, before his death, directed my mother to say of him, if she were asked why he lost his head —‘ that it was in a good cause.’”

## CHAPTER III.

*From his Ejection to his Death.*

1740—1741.

MR. WILSON continued to preach in the Glovers' Yard, amidst the inclemencies of a season unusually severe, till a commodious and comfortable church was built for him,—the same that is now occupied by the South Associate Congregation of Perth. We ought not to omit mentioning, what has long been a current remark in Perth and its neighbourhood, that, ever since this attention and kindness to their injured minister, the Corporation of Glovers in that city has been greatly prosperous.

Neither the respectability of Mr. Wilson as a gentleman, nor his usefulness as a minister, was diminished by these occurrences in providence. His sphere of usefulness was rather enlarged; for many, who were lamenting the defection of the times, came to him from the surrounding parishes, and joined his congregation. This made up for the loss of those of his own parish who remained in the Establishment.

But a man of Mr. Wilson's delicacy of mind, could not be insensible to the insults and indignities to which he was subjected. Of this we have a proof in his continuation of the Defence,\* where, in reply to Mr. Currie's charge of his being an enemy to the success of the gospel, he says, "Am I, in my Defence, an enemy, yea, and a common enemy, to the success of the glorious gospel? This is, indeed, the peculiar character of the grand adversary of man's salvation. However, it is alleviating to me, under such a heavy charge, that the Lord and Master of the house was treated after the same manner; he was called a devil and Beelzebub. And whence was all this fury and rage against him? It was, namely, because in his doctrine he laid open the sins and corruptions of the Jewish teachers; and therefore they reckoned, that his doctrine had a tendency to weaken their authority, and to blast their reputation among the people."

We regret that it cannot be stated to the honour of congregations in every case, that they were careful to provide at once for those conscientious, godly ministers who had, for their sakes, and for

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\* Defence, p. 332.

the sake of truth, made very considerable sacrifices of their worldly interests.

The support of the gospel, by the voluntary contributions of the people, which is the New Testament plan, having been in many places suspended by the legal provision of the Establishment, it could scarcely be expected that the supplies for the gospel, disturbed by a secularized system, could proceed all at once from the long dried sources, and flow in their original channel. From this cause, some of the ministers were for a while subjected to temporal privations. Mr. Moncrieff of Culfargie, minister at Abernethy, was independent in his worldly circumstances, and declined to receive any thing from his people. But it would have been very unlike the spirit of Christianity, if such multitudes of people, who contended for the purity of the gospel, and the privileges of Christians, had long allowed ministers to labour among them without honourable support. The express provisions of the Scriptures, on this subject, must soon have met their attention:—*The Lord hath ordained that they who preach the gospel, should live of the gospel: and,—Let him that is taught in the Word, communicate to him that teacheth in all good things.* This arrangement, which no human authority can super-

sede, is exclusively ecclesiastical. The parties mentioned are in a state of immediate connection and intercourse, and the communication is of a voluntary character. If all who are invested with the sacred office are entitled to support and encouragement from their hearers, those who, like Mr. Wilson, suffer for their faithfulness in the cause of Christ, must certainly have an indisputable claim. But though, at first, there might be an instance or two of negligence, yet, upon reflection, the maintenance of ministers, was considered a sacred duty by the members of the Secession Church, and was made moderately sufficient by stipendary allowance from congregations, or voluntary donations from the individuals composing them. We are not certain that Mr. Wilson had a stipend fixed by his congregation: but, if he had not, the reason probably was that he did not long survive the period of complete disjunction from the Establishment. In either case, this subject could not affect the tranquillity of his mind. He had advanced in the path of duty, without ever taking the loss of stipend into account; and, for the support of his numerous family, had implicitly relied on Divine Providence.

At the period when the ministers were finally

ejected, the real strength of the Secession was better ascertained. Till then, the ministers of the Association laboured among all the people of their respective charges, indiscriminately,—whether they approved of the Secession, or were indifferent or opposed to it. But, from this time, the real friends of the cause in which they had embarked, formed a distinct Society. Their numbers were found to be very great, and to be so rapidly augmenting as to alarm those who were jealous of their success.

Having been subjected to this long train of unmerited opposition and insult, in his endeavours to advance the best of causes, and having been, at length, finally cast out from that Church, to whose original spirit and design he had been, and still was, so faithfully attached, Mr. Wilson felt his situation both new and perplexing. He must have been greatly agitated and wounded in spirit, by the reproach and persecution which he suffered. But it was reproach and persecution for the sake of Christ; and he could appeal to the Searcher of Hearts that his motives and his ends were pure. Serious and impartial persons, who rightly estimate that secret exercise to which he was habituated, and of which so much has been exhibited in the

preceding parts of these memoirs, thus knowing the man, must be disposed to judge favourably of his objects and efforts.

On the present occasion, we find him imitating his Master, in praying for his oppressors. "I pray the Lord may give them repentance for, and the forgiveness of their iniquity, and that it may not be laid to their charge, nor the charge of that place."\*

Indeed, in the whole affair, mildness and moderation marked the behaviour of this much injured faithful minister. Like Christ, *though reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to God, who judgeth righteously.* The whole of his controversial writings, so far from being acrimonious or severe, are managed in the spirit of a gentleman and a Christian. More for the injury it might do to religion, than for the disrespect it manifested to himself and his Brethren, he regrets the angry tone of discussion which his opponents had employed; and expresses his anxious desire, that the contest between the Judicatories of the Establishment, and the Seceding Brethren, might issue in the glory of God.

"I am heartily sorry," says he,† "for that bit-

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\* Defence, p. 410.

† Defence, p. 569.

terness of spirit that I see breathing throughout the whole of this Essay. Whatever contempt Mr. Currie may pour upon the Seceding Brethren, and whatever hard names he may think fit to bestow upon them, I wish he had treated the cause and testimony they hold, with more of meekness and fear. He seems to be confident that upon reading his book, his readers may see, that there is a good deal more to be said in vindication of the Church of Scotland, and against separation from her, than some of them imagined, namely, such as are much disobliged already at some for not joining the seceding Brethren, yet I doubt not but the seceding Brethren have very much likewise to say for themselves, and I am sorry they have so much to say: I sincerely wish that matters were otherwise in the present Judicatories of this National Church, and that there were no such grounds of Secession from them. Our reverend brother has given sufficient ground and matter of irritation. I pray, that our contentings upon this subject may be only and singly for truth, and that they may be governed with a disposition and temper of spirit becoming the gospel of Christ; and let truth have the victory, and let God have all the glory."

We have now followed Mr. Wilson through the whole process issuing in the Secession, and as he was not long spared after this period, we have little more of narrative to bring forward, and these memoirs having been extended beyond what was anticipated, it is necessary to hasten to a close.

It will not be wondered at, if after all these perplexing occurrences, and incessant exertions, his health was impaired, and his constitution broken down. Delighting, however, in his Master's work, he still prosecuted it with unwearied assiduity, and at once felt Divine support, and saw evidences of his own success.

Among the notices which now remain to be given, we shall intersperse a few anecdotes, some of which, more from their connection with Mr. Wilson than from their own importance, may be interesting to his friends; all of them tending somewhat to illustrate his character.

He readily and patiently listened to cases of conscience, and faithfully administered advice, or warning, or reproof, or consolation. From his intimate acquaintance with his Bible, and with the

human heart, he had much insight into character. This may be illustrated by the following anecdote.

A woman seemingly in great spiritual distress, having repeatedly come to converse with him respecting the state of her soul,—he said every thing he could to direct, comfort, and encourage her, but to no purpose. Nothing that he could think of, had the least effect. At last, after having conversed and reasoned often and long with her, his suspicions were roused, and, looking steadfastly in her face, he said with firmness,—“Woman! I am afraid you are in league with the enemy.” The woman was instantly confounded; and, eyeing him with a diabolical leer and giggle, hastily slunk away.

In his addresses to the young, he was very earnest and affectionate. He insisted on such subjects as the following.\*

1. That they should examine and try themselves whether the work of grace were real, and Christ indeed formed in them.
2. That they should bless the Lord for any gracious dealings with their souls.
3. That they should guard against the temptations of Satan.

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\* See his Sermons on Steadfastness.

4. That they should not stifle convictions.
5. That they should cherish and encourage the work of grace.
6. That they should seek to be rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith, as they had been taught.

And 7. That they should deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow Christ.

The following specimen of such solicitude for the spiritual benefit of the young, may be quoted from an address delivered after the Communion, a few weeks before his death.

“You who are young communicants,” says he, “and never were at a communion-table before, O my dear young ones, be concerned to cleave with and abide by Christ. It was with fear I gave some of you tokens; but I would desire to rejoice to see you coming to Christ. O have you given your hearts consent unto the offers of Christ? Would you desire that he should give you the Spirit of Faith, to enable you to believe? If so, it is an evidence that the Spirit of Christ hath been at work with your hearts, and he will not leave you; for he that hath begun the good work of grace in you, will perfect it unto the day of Jesus. O be on your guard. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into*

*temptation.* Be concerned to have the Spirit of Christ in your hearts. You have now given up your names unto Christ by profession, and said,—I am thine, and thou art mine. That was the language of your profession at the Lord's table. Say this day, and every day, thou art mine. *One shall say, I am the Lord's.* What is faith? It is a poor soul's saying,—*I am the Lord's.* It is subscribing with the heart and hand to the Lord."

He was eminently a man of prayer, as might be shown by different incidents, which, however, except the following one, we omit.

Being an intimate friend of the celebrated and pious Colonel Gardiner, the Colonel and his family repeatedly visited and stayed with him. On one of these occasions, a son of the Colonel's underwent a dangerous operation in Mr. Wilson's house. During the whole time occupied in this operation, the Minister and the Colonel were engaged in fervent prayer.

In his elucidations of Scripture, he was clear, profound, and accurate,—in his delivery, animated and impressive.

In reference to his gifts of prayer and preaching, we have the following testimony by the late Rev. and worthy Mr. Brown of Haddington. "Mr. Wilson," says he, "was a man of great fervour, and frequent in wrestling with God,—a man that, together with his learning, evidenced much prudence and moderation, and who, in preaching, evidenced the greatest concern, heavenliness, mildness, and majesty, that ever I heard. I can recollect, that when sitting on the Brae of Abernethy hearing him, I got more insight into that marrow of the gospel, *my God*, than ever I got before or since."\*

The last part of this honourable testimony of Mr. Brown, is the more valuable as it regards his own religious experience, of which he seldom spoke, and is addressed to his students, whom he seems desirous to interest in the memory of the first Professor in the Secession Church.†

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\* Brown's Gospel Truth.

† The following is prefixed to this part of the testimony of Mr. Brown, in his *Select Remains* (page 31). "The solemn addresses which he made to his students on certain occasions while with him, and especially when they parted, were affecting indeed, and remarkably calculated to make deep impressions. It is believed that many of his sayings at these times, will never be forgotten by those who heard them. On one of them it is remembered, that whilst exhorting his pupils not to rest satisfied with a mere speculative acquaintance with the truths in the system, or with treasuring them up in their memories, but to be concerned to have them engraven on their hearts, by the Spirit of God, he took occasion to mention something of his own experience, of which he was usually very sparing."

Mr. Wilson's moderation, to which Mr. Brown, in the body of this testimony, refers, was evident in his whole conduct, and strikingly pervades his writings. The whole of the Defence manifests this spirit. The following is a specimen of it, in reference to one whom some of the ministers of the Secession were thought to have treated with too much severity. "Mr. Whitefield," says he, "gives satisfying evidences to the Churches of Christ, that he lies open to light, and is pointing towards reformation: and may the Lord, who I hope has shined into his soul, and given him some clear discoveries of the doctrines of justification and salvation by the free grace of God, through the imputed righteousness of our Lord Jesus, enlighten him more and more."\*

It is with pleasure that another testimony from the same celebrated individual, and one very complimentary to Mr. Wilson, is added. Mr. Brown was accustomed to say of Mr. Wilson, that "he had all the excellencies of both the Erskines,† and excellencies peculiar to himself."‡

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\* Defence, p. 435.

† The Rev. Ebenezer Erskine of Stirling, and the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline.

‡ Communicated by the Rev. John Brown of Whitburn, and with pleasure introduced here in compliance with his wish.

Perhaps it may be thought from some of the illustrations we have given, that Mr. Wilson was a person of morose temper or monkish habits. The very reverse was the case. He greatly enjoyed society, was always cheerful, and often indulged in innocent mirth and sprightly humour. The following anecdote will serve to illustrate this.

On one occasion, he and his friends were enjoying themselves by proposing severally to what they might compare the Four Brethren. Different comparisons were suggested. When it came to him, he said, he did not see any thing they could be better compared to than the four living creatures in Ezekiel's vision. "Our brother, Mr. Erskine," said he, "has the face of a man. Our friend, Mr. Moncrieff, has the face of a lion. Our neighbour, Mr. Fisher, has the face of an eagle. And as for myself, I think you will all own that I may claim to be the ox, for, as you know, the laborious part of the business falls to my share.

He could preserve this good humour, and chastise impertinence with ready and shrewd retort.

As he was once riding to Abernethy sacrament, he was overtaken by two young gentlemen of his acquaintance from Perth. One of them pertly said,—"So, Mr. Wilson, you are going to bury the

Church of Scotland, to-day." "Ay, ay," said he, "and is she dead?"

In his public ministrations, Mr. Wilson availed himself much of his own exercise, necessities, and experience as a Christian. It was his earnest endeavour, that in all the duties of his sacred calling, he should be animated by his personal religion, and that both should be under the influence of the Spirit of God. As a minister, he was distinguished not only by talent and piety, but by great dignity of deportment, and earnestness of manner. The solemn gravity and tender seriousness which characterized his addresses from the pulpit, proceeding from his heartfelt conviction of the importance of his work, frequently brought tears from many of his audience. He was eminently beloved by the people of his charge, and by all who knew him. When he appeared in public to preach the everlasting gospel, such was the suavity of his manner, the richness of his matter, the easy fluency of his eloquence, and the affectionate and practical strain of his sentiments, that he rivetted the attention, convinced the understanding, and gained the hearts of his hearers. In illustration of this we present the following document.

"Monday, 25th June, 1733. This day," says

the Rev. Ralph Erskine in his diary, "I went from Kinross to Orwell, and heard my colleague and Mr. Wilson of Perth preach. I was quickened and refreshed in the time of Mr. Wilson's sermon. His text was,—*Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King*, and my heart was made joyful in King Jesus,—while he observed, that we are to rejoice in that he is a rich King, whereas other kings are enriched by their subjects, and exhaust their subjects to enrich themselves, he exhausts himself in a manner to enrich his subjects, a glorious King, a powerful, all-conquering King, to rejoice in what he hath done, in what he is doing, and what he will do;—and while he was exhorting to trust in him as the everlasting and the unchangeable King. We take the word of mortal princes, shall we not trust in the King immortal, our King, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? My heart was made to trust in him, and to rejoice in him. I heard with pleasure and joy, without weariness, and with much application."

We have been told, that on a sacramental occasion, which was on the 20th of September, 1741, within three weeks of his death, an eminently godly

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\* See Christian Monitor for 1824, p. 718.

individual, Mr. Colin Brown, who had been formerly Provost of Perth, having, from the deep interest he felt in the solemn introductory services of the day, which Mr. Wilson had been conducting, continued in the church beyond the ordinary time, without retiring for refreshment, when he was entreated by his friends to retire, excused himself by saying,—“Here I have been getting much of that meat to eat, which the world knoweth not of.”

His eloquence seems to have greatly impressed the public. Some idea of this impression may be conveyed by the following anecdote.

Many years after his death, his son (the Rev. John Wilson of Methven) was preaching in Aberdeenshire, when a person, accosting him after sermon, said, “I am happy to see you for your father’s sake: your father, Sir, was the tongue of the Associate Presbytery.”

Even the enemies of religion stood in awe of Mr. Wilson, and felt his activities and zeal an obstacle to the progress of their pernicious principles.

Towards the latter end of his ministry (in 1735), he received an anonymous communication, from a class of persons in Perth and its neighbourhood, who had imbibed Deistical principles, which they

soon after published and circulated, with a view to expose not only Mr. Wilson, but religion itself. In the mean time he had been preaching a course of sermons, showing, that it is only in Christ that sinful and miserable men can find spiritual and eternal happiness. The substance of these he published, prefixing to them an address to the advocates of infidelity. This address is characterised by affectionate concern for the conviction and salvation of those to whom he speaks, and firm zeal in the defence of the gospel. The following are extracts from it.

“If you have any conscience at all, I am persuaded I have a testimony in your own breasts, that there is no truth in any of your railing insinuations. Therefore I shall not take any further notice of them, than to tell you, I am not surprised with the treatment you give me. I am warned of it. I have the honour to be his servant by office, who has told me, that *the disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord; and, if they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, much more shall they call them of his household.*

“But it is not at me only, it is at revealed religion, it is at the gospel through me, that your envenomed arrows are directed.

“It was my design in preaching on this subject, to lead you to Christ for eternal blessedness, for I endeavoured to declare something concerning the fulness and glory of his person and mediation, and the necessity of faith in him for eternal salvation; as also of a vital union with him, that men may bring forth the fruits of holiness, and may yield acceptable obedience unto God. If these things are airy speculations, and mere phantoms in your eyes, you despise, and that to your own destruction, the wisdom, grace, and love of God, shining forth in gospel-revelation. I am satisfied, that when the several members of your Club were preparing their revilings and cursings against me, I was employed in bringing forth the blessing unto you. But if you continue to despise the blessing that was offered you, the word of the gospel which I have preached amongst you, will be witness through eternity against you.

“I sincerely wish you well, and it is my daily prayer for you, that you may be reclaimed from the error and wickedness of your way.

WILLIAM WILSON.”

Amidst all the difficulties he encountered, and injuries he sustained, he went on in his Master's

work with unwearied assiduity and undaunted courage. He delighted in preaching the gospel to sinners, and in addressing the consolations of religion to God's believing people; and in every service by which the glory of God and the salvation of men might be promoted. His whole heart was engaged, his whole life was spent in his Master's work, and though he lived not long in respect of years, yet as—

“That life is long which answers life's great end,”

his was not short; and if we measure it by its useful activities, *he came to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season.*

“For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years: but wisdom is the gray hairs unto men, and an unspotted life is old age.”\*

In the summer of 1741, his health was evidently declining, and there is little doubt that his constitution, which was naturally robust and vigorous, had been broken, and that premature old age had been induced, by extraordinary labours.

• This will not be surprising, when the nature, the

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\* Wisdom—chap. vi. verses 8, 9.

number, and the variety of his duties are considered. They were such as might have rapidly worn out the most healthy and vigorous person. He had, from the commencement of his ministry, occupied a sphere of very extensive labour. But, from the rise of the Secession, the duties which devolved on him had greatly multiplied. From this period, he was very much engaged in forming the public documents of the Secession, and in directing its movements: indeed, in a great measure, the whole machinery of the Association, in its operations and efficiency, devolved on him. It was remarked of Mr. Wilson, by a minister of the Secession, that—"He was at once the master-spring of the whole Brethren, and the regulator which kept them working together. All their public papers were of his concoction, and his able Defence laid the cope-stone on the building." Besides these labours for the press, he had to preach for the most part four times a-week, and to perform all other ministerial duties to a large congregation. In addition to all this, he had the charge of the young men who were in preparation for the ministry, to whom he read lectures in Latin, and over whom he exercised a constant and paternal inspection. Such a diversity of arduous labours, which it was not easy, or perhaps possible, for him to de-

cline, must have been almost overpowering.\* He prosecuted them, however, with assiduity, and rose more and more in the admiration of his pupils and of his flock. The people of his charge were enthusiastically attached to him; and such was the singular admiration in which he was held by his students, that all of them, and especially the more eminent of them, were accustomed to speak of him with the warmest commendation.

The Church owes much to his exertions. His last service to the Secession cause, was the writing out of the first bond to be used in the work of public covenanting. For such a service, his early habit of often devoting himself to God by solemn vows in secret, made him well qualified. It may, indeed, be remarked, that the secret devotional exercises of ministers, will be found, in various ways which they cannot anticipate, subservient to their usefulness in promoting, both statedly and occasionally, the public interests of religion.

The passage from which Mr. Wilson last preached, as is stated on the stone which covers his grave, was the ninth verse of the forty-eighth Psalm: *We*

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\* This diversity of labour accounts for the partial derangement of his regular plans, and was probably the cause of his dropping, first the diary, and afterwards the private narrative, as mentioned p. 139 and p. 215.

*have thought of thy loving kindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple.* This, we have reason to believe, was on the 27th September, 1741, the thanksgiving Sabbath.

From this period he was seriously indisposed. At the beginning of the week, his old and valuable friend, Mr. Moncrieff of Culfargie, hearing of his illness, paid him a visit, and urged him to go along with him into the country, for the benefit of his health. He complied, though with some reluctance, as he felt the journey too great for him. The change of air did not recruit his strength. He felt rather an increase of debility. This made him hasten home, after spending a week at Culfargie. His end was now fast approaching; and we doubt not, that had we been able to exhibit, in detail, his death-bed exercise, it would have been found that his *latter end was peace*. But of this solemn scene, nothing particular is known. At the Communion, already referred to,\* which immediately preceded his illness, much occurred that seems to evince the gracious and comfortable state of his mind at that time,—which state of mind we have no reason to doubt continued to the last.

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\* P. 359. His Action ~~Sermon~~, and several Addresses delivered on the different days of this occasion, are printed.

“The Physician,” says he, “is Christ himself, and it is his work only to revive the languishing soul. Our Lord Jesus is the *Resurrection and the Life*; and by the breath of his mouth he can make the dead and dry bones come together, and make skin and flesh enter upon them, and the Spirit of God enter into them, so that they shall live.

“To whom does the Lord Jesus bequeath all? It is to the poor and needy—the wretched and miserable. Christ is a Saviour to poor sinners, and to none else. He is a Physician to the sick and diseased. He seeks no money or price.

“*Behold we come unto thee, for thou art the Lord our God. Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains. Truly in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel. In vain is help looked for from the creature; in vain is it looked for from the pleasures of sin. In the Lord alone is rest,—true and substantial rest. Come unto me, says Christ, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

“The rest of faith is a sure and infallible pre-sage of the everlasting rest in glory hereafter.”

Mr. Wilson died on the 8th of October, 1741, when he was scarcely fifty-one years of age, and

was just completing the twenty-fifth of his ministry. Although in natural course his death might be considered as premature, yet he was mercifully spared by Providence, to see the Secession Church fully organized,—not only completely distinct in its judicative capacity from the National Church, but in possession of those deeds which he had eminently contributed to frame, and elevated to that footing which gave firmness, and seemed to promise stability to her constitution.

Though his illness was severe, yet hopes of recovery were entertained till the last day of his life. Hearing of his distress, his son Gilbert, who was but eleven years of age, hurried home from Abernethy, where he was attending the school. But all was over when he arrived at Perth. As he approached the house, he met those who had been waiting on his father, withdrawing; and from their appearance could easily perceive what had taken place. He rushed into the room, where he found his mother and the rest of the children in tears. “Mother,” said the interesting youth, grasping her hand, “we have a new claim on God to-day. You, my dear mother, have a claim on him for a husband, and my sisters, brother, and myself, have a claim on him for a father.”

His death was so severe a trial to his amiable consort, that she sunk under it, her health declined rapidly, and she died in child-bed of a still-born infant, in the course of six months.

By his loving congregation, now become as a *field which the Lord had blessed*, and, indeed, by the whole Secession Church,\* which had already considerably increased, Mr. Wilson, when he died, was much lamented.

It has been remarked, that eminent and useful ministers have often been taken away at the time when they seemed to be most needed. We are thus reminded by Christ, that they are but his instruments, and that the progress and perpetuity of the Church depend upon himself.

It has often been said and believed, by persons of all the denominations of the Secession, that had Mr. Wilson been spared, his wisdom and influence would most likely have prevented the unhappy division in 1747. Apprehending that certain topics

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\* "The Associate Presbytery suffered a severe loss in the death of Mr. William Wilson of Perth, a man of singular judgment and piety."—*Struthers' History of Scotland*.

would engender strife, he opposed their introduction into the Associate Presbytery. And now all parties of the Secession, whether the many already re-united in fellowship, or the others who are yet apart from this great body, will harmoniously concur, and equally rejoice, in honouring his memory as one of the fathers of their Church, and the only one on whom they all have an equal claim.

His memory was fondly cherished by all who knew him, and especially by his brethren, and the people of his charge. So much was he venerated by the celebrated Mr. Adam Gib, late minister of the gospel in Edinburgh, who had been his pupil, that he could never speak of him but in terms of enthusiastic admiration.

Though, among his connections, there exist family paintings for eight generations, no likeness of Mr. Wilson seems to have been taken. The want, which is to be regretted, might be owing to his early removal by death. But in appearance, features, and size, as well as in the mildness of his dispositions, and, probably, several other traits of character, he was resembled by his grandson, the late Rev. James Muckersie of Alloa, who is dis-

tinctly remembered by the majority of the ministers, and by many of the people of the Secession, and who was also well known in general society. As a proof of this resemblance, it may be mentioned, that when Mr. Muckersie was in London, in the year 1797, more than half a century after Mr. Wilson's death, an aged lady, whom he had never seen before, met him, and, asking his pardon, begged to know if he were any relation of Mr. Wilson's of Perth. Being told that he was his grandson, she said, she never saw a more exact likeness of her old beloved minister, under whom she had been brought up, whose ministrations had much benefited her, and whose memory she still revered.

Mr. Wilson may, with justice, be called a great as well as a good man. His mental powers were naturally sound and vigorous, and they had been assiduously cultivated. His literary acquirements were, of course, very considerable. His talents for business, and his practical wisdom were eminent, and were well proved in the new, perplexing, and hazardous circumstances, in which he was called to act. But, by the grace of God, on which he always relied, he honourably sustained the part which providence assigned to him, and for which

it seemed to have prepared him. He had much expansion of view. His apprehension was prompt and clear. His judgment was accurately discriminating, cool, and deliberate. He adopted measures with prudent circumspection, and prosecuted them with mild decision. Though considerate, he was not remiss,—though cautious, he was not timid. He was moderate, without lukewarmness; zealous, but not violent; firm, but not obstinate.

He made every reasonable allowance for those who differed from him, or opposed him; but, on the other hand, he was not afraid to make a reasonable estimate of them also, whether they were individuals, or parties, or ecclesiastical courts, subordinate or supreme, when they were chargeable with gross dereliction of duty. He exposed their unfaithfulness, but never degraded himself by illiberal abuse. Far less could he cherish any vindictive disposition on account of the insults and injuries which met him in his arduous contendings for the interests of true religion. No example of indifference to the truth, or of opposition to it, no worldly hopes or fears could seduce him from the course of duty. His integrity was incorruptible. It was founded on enlightened and ardent piety.

Devotedness to God seems to have been his predominant principle. It is evident from his diary, and from his whole conduct, that he *set the Lord always before him*; that he was ever solicitous to know what God required of him: and that, having ascertained his duty, he pursued it in humble dependance on Divine grace. In every important movement, his soul was lifted up to God for guidance, and strength, and courage. Such was his self-distrust, and *godly fear*, that he always felt a deep concern lest he should injure the cause of the Redeemer while he sought to advance it. And he practised *great searching of heart*, that he might *bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ*.

It must have been under the influence of those gracious assistances which God vouchsafes to such as truly seek him, that Mr. Wilson surmounted his natural reluctance to all contention; and, indeed, to every kind of publicity beyond what was unavoidable in the ordinary discharge of his ministerial duties. No secular interests, as we have seen, could engage him in litigation. He chose rather to suffer loss, than to embroil himself with the uncertainties and oppositions of legal prosecution. But, it was no time for him to be silent and retired,

and *at ease in Zion*, or to *confer with flesh and blood*, or to calculate on worldly hazards, when the glory of the Redeemer summoned him into the field of honourable and holy warfare.

He was not a man that would have taken an active and prominent part, as he did, in the measures leading to the Secession, from a spirit of adventure, from any ambition to head a party, or from that impatience of contradiction, which will drive some men, in despite of reason or principle, into improper conduct, and the most dangerous conjunctures of circumstances. Possessed of uncommon gentleness of mind, and delicacies of feeling, he would have shrunk from the situation which he occupied at the commencement of the Secession Church, unless an enlightened conscience, humbly and earnestly solicitous to know the will of God, had satisfied him that the path which he pursued was the path of duty; and unless great vigour of Christian principle had borne him forward against successive and accumulating difficulties. Without perhaps a degree of courage equal to that of some of his brethren, he had all their constancy; and, if his courage, which was not small, would have failed to maintain the protracted struggle, his earnest desire for the preservation and the progress of

Divine truth—his regard for the glory of his Lord—the zeal, in short, which he ever felt for the purity and order of God's house—were sufficient to carry him onward in that honourable and arduous conflict.

He knew what (at least as a practical principle) many have always been willingly ignorant of, that a Church is the Church of Christ, in proportion as it exhibits and defends his truths, and maintains the purity, and, as far as depends on man, the vigour of his institutions; or, in other words, that any society, whatever be its designation or pretensions, is a Church of Christ no further than it realizes the scriptural model, in its constitution, its profession, and all its administrations. He entered on the field of contest for injured Christianity, without calculating on the worldly disadvantages to which his fidelity might subject him; and his disinterestedness, being tried, was found not wanting. Unlike that zeal for God which evaporates in words, and proceeds only so far as costs nothing, his showed itself by effective measures, and by substantial sacrifices, and assisted eminently in producing events of great importance,—events whose salutary influence has hitherto been always extending and increasing, and will continue to operate more diffusively and more powerfully.

It appeared to neutral persons who knew him, and even to many of the prevailing party of the National Church, that Mr. Wilson's secession proceeded from pure principle. None ever could, with any plausibility, impute to him sinister designs, or deny him the honour of conscientious consistency. He has, indeed, a claim upon the candour of every man, because he himself was candid to all men. But his character has nothing to fear from the severest scrutiny of impartial justice. It will, however, be best appreciated by those who most resemble him in disinterested fidelity to Christ.

No enlightened person, who seriously considers the worth of all the Four Brethren, and the devotional spirit which prompted and pervaded all their faithful and orderly contendings for God, till the corrupt Judicatories of the Established Church ejected them, can doubt that they were led on to form the Secession Church, by conviction and not by pride or caprice, by reason and not by passion, by necessity of circumstances and not by choice. Among those Brethren, Mr. Wilson seems to have been an object of great confidence. His influence among them was always benign. He gave himself to support the common cause. Throughout

his whole appearances in Courts, and in his writings, he displayed powers of reasoning which, had they not been called forth by the events which we have surveyed, might never have been known.

As was already mentioned, four only of the numerous family of Mr. Wilson, survived him. He had a series of domestic trials between 1736 and 1740, in the death of several of his children. William, his eldest son, died at the age of eleven, whilst he was on a visit to his aunts, at Pepper Mill, near Edinburgh, which was the family estate of the Alexanders. Marjory, his eldest daughter, died at the age of sixteen. A sermon she had heard at Kinclaven sacrament, by the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, on that text, *They shall mount with wings as eagles*, had brought her mind under very serious impressions. During the remainder of her life, she often spoke of this sermon (which is printed), and on her death-bed the remembrance of it yielded her much comfort. His daughter, Elizabeth, died at the age of nine. She had an understanding far above her years, and exhibited every appearance of being under gracious influence. During her last illness, when little hope of recovery was entertained, she wished her father

to pray with her. He inquired what she would wish him to pray for. She replied,—“Pray, father, that I may be made sure of my interest in Christ, and may have a safe passage into glory.”

The four children who survived Mr. Wilson, were Isabella, Gilbert, John, and Mary. Gilbert did not arrive at manhood, nor long outlive\* his father. He was a most remarkable boy, both for solidity and piety. After his father's death he presided at family worship. On one occasion, whilst he was thus employed, a clerical friend happened to call, and having heard the prayer, he looked around in surprise, saying, “I have heard the voice and prayer of a man and an experienced Christian, but I see only a boy.”

Mr. Wilson's other three surviving children reached maturity, had families, and died in old age.

Isabella, the eldest daughter, who was in the fourteenth year of her age when her father died, was afterwards married to the Rev. John Muckersie, late minister of Kinkell, the well known author of an excellent Catechism which is still in use. Mrs. Muckersie died in 1798. She was an eminent Christian, possessed extensive information, and had great conversational talents, and much sprightliness

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\* He died of fever, and was buried at the same time with his mother.

of manner. She often entertained her family with anecdotes of her venerable father: and for many of the facts in these memoirs, we are indebted to her communications.

John, Mr. Wilson's only son that reached maturity, was the late Rev. Mr. Wilson of Methven, a man of great worth, of most dignified manners, and of very superior eminence, both as a scholar and as a minister. His father named him John, not after any relative, but after some friend whom he respected and loved, and when asked, by those present, for whom he named him, he put them off with an expression of his hope that he might be a minister of the gospel, and like the Baptist of that name, might cry in the wilderness. He was born during his father's absence, at the time the Four Brethren were suspended in 1733. On his return, he took him up in his arms, and called him the child of his suspension, and for the same reason, he was afterwards accustomed humorously to name him his little suspended man. This is a proof of that placidity of mind, and even cheerfulness, which Mr. Wilson preserved, amidst the injuries he sustained. If he had been irritated by the conduct of the Courts, he would never have felt and spoken in this manner in reference to their pro-

ceedings. Mr. John Wilson was licensed at the early age of nineteen, and ordained in less than a twelvemonth after. He lost his father when a child, and, therefore, had not the benefit of his instructions and example in his preparatory studies, but he inherited much of his spirit.\* He married Miss Barbara Campbell, a cousin of his own. They had but one son, William, who died at the age of sixteen,† to the inexpressible grief of

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\* The following anecdotes, respecting Mr. John Wilson, indicate much of his father's spirit. When he was studying Divinity, and near the time of his license to preach the gospel, his cousin Mr. Campbell, Banker in London, wrote to him, earnestly wishing him to come to London, and offering him a share in his business, as he was himself disposed in some measure to retire. Mr. W. thought, at first, that this was the voice of providence forbidding him to think further of the holy ministry, and opening a door to a respectable worldly calling. At length, however, after serious deliberation, he made up his mind to decline the offer, and wrote to his cousin expressing his gratitude for his kindness, but stating, at the same time, that he found himself obliged to decline his offer, as he had devoted himself to the ministry. Mr. W. had quite forgotten this occurrence, till, by accident, Mr. Campbell's letter was found among his papers.

Elphinston, the celebrated teacher (a companion and friend of Boswell's), having for some time successfully prosecuted his profession in London, invited Mr. Wilson, who had been his best scholar at French, to come thither to assist him in teaching; assuring him, that such, he was convinced, would be their success, that they would make their fortune in a very short time. But this offer he declined in the same manner.

† He attended the Academy at Perth. Returning, as it happened, from Methven, and when he was yet at some distance from Perth, he heard a bell ring, and knowing by it that the hour of entrance had struck, he anxiously ran forward, and by the exertion burst a blood vessel, which occasioned his death. He was interred in his grandfather's grave.

his parents, who, however, bore the bereavement with Christian fortitude. He was a most interesting youth, and possessed extraordinary activity of mind, and amiableness of disposition. He was prosecuting his studies with a view to the ministry, and had it pleased God to spare him, he might have been a useful member of society, and an ornament to the Christian Church. The Rev. John Wilson died at the beginning of the year 1803, in the seventieth year of his age.

Mary, Mr. Wilson's youngest daughter, was married to the late Rev. William Jameson of Kilwinning, who long faithfully laboured in that part of Christ's vineyard, and whose memory is still cherished by many with affectionate respect.\* Mrs. Jameson died in 1802. She was of a calm and reserved disposition; but possessed a cultivated mind, and was distinguished for piety, and all the amiable virtues of domestic life.

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\* In a work of this kind, so intimately connected with the progress of the Secession, it may be proper to mention, that Mr. Jameson's father lived at the time when the Secession first took place, and warmly espoused its interests. He was a sea-faring man; and in the course of his business, had occasion to touch at one of the sea-ports in the north of Ireland. From the well known sympathies of similar minds, the religious sailor soon found himself in intercourse with some of the religious people in the town. At that time, Arminianism seemed to be making similar progress among the Presbyterians in Ireland, as it

The printed works of Mr. Wilson are not numerous, but they are all worthy of their author; and, when we consider the multiplicity and variety of his labours, we may even wonder that he could find time to write so much, or any, for the press, and that he wrote so well, especially as his publications were prepared for the matter alone, without much apparent attention to manner. A few of his sermons were published by himself. Several others on various subjects, were published after his death; some from his manuscripts, which were either reckoned fit, or evidently intended for publication, and some, taken, we apprehend, very imperfectly by short-hand writers, in the delivery, when much, or the whole of what was spoken, could only be from jottings, if it was not extemporaneous. Almost all of them, however, are excellent and in-

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was making in Scotland. He reported to his friends in that country the determined stand which had been made in the General Assembly in Scotland, and the Secession which had, in consequence, taken place. The result of their intercourse and of his communications, was an agreement on the part of the Irish immediately to apply to the Associate Presbytery to *come over and help them*. It was by this apparently fortuitous occurrence—from this small and precious seed borne by the winds, that the Secession in Ireland has sprung up and branched out to its present magnitude.

Communicated, with many other valuable documents, by the Rev. John Jameson of Methven, son of the Rev. William Jameson of Kilwinning, and grandson of Mr. Wilson.

teresting, and manifest much acquaintance with the Scriptures, much doctrinal and experimental knowledge, and much faithfulness and prudence in his animadversions on classes of character, and on the public state of religion. Of his discourses at his last sacrament, formerly alluded to, there is also a posthumous publication, in which we have the action-sermon, and four addresses on the different days of the occasion. All these are exceedingly earnest and impressive, rich in gospel truth, and pervaded by a sweet savour, and a striking solemnity.\* A manuscript volume of sermons, distinctly

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\* The following is a list of the titles and texts of Mr. Wilson's printed sermons, as far as we know.

I. The Church's extremity, Christ's opportunity, on Micah iv. 10,—*And thou shalt go even to Babylon, there shalt thou be delivered.* This sermon was preached at Abernethy Sacrament, 17th July, 1738. It is a very striking discourse.

II. The Lamb's retinue attending him whithersoever he goeth, on Rev. xiv. 4,—*These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.* This is the substance of two sermons preached at Orwell, 6th August, 1738.

III. The Father's promise to the Son, a clear bow in the Church's darkest cloud; or, the spiritual seed of Christ preserved in all ages, and amidst all dangers. This is the substance of several sermons preached at Perth, in the years 1729 and 1730, on that text,—*His seed also will I make to endure for ever,* Ps. lxxxix. 29.

IV. The watchman's duty and desire (already referred to p. 162); or, the prayer of faithful ministers for the Lord's beauty on his Church, and success in their work, on Ps. xc. 17,—*And let the beauty of the Lord be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us, yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*

and pretty fully written, which seem to be of equal merit with some of his printed ones, is still in careful preservation.\*

His principal work, however, is his Defence of Reformation-Principles. It was chiefly in this publication that he stood forth as the champion of the Secession. It is somewhat prolix: but this was the common error of by far the greater number of

V. The blessedness lost in the first Adam, to be found in Christ the second Adam, being the substance of some sermons: Ps. lxxii. 17,—*His name shall endure for ever; his name shall be continued as long as the sun; and men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed.*

VI. Steadfastness in the faith recommended, in a sermon preached at Perth, 22d July, 1733, on 1 Cor. xvi. 13,—*Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.*

VII. The day of a sinner's believing in Christ, a most remarkable day, preached in the New Church of Perth, from Song iii. 11,—*Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.*

\* In a manuscript volume, entitled "Letters from Mr. James Hog, to his friends at Edinburgh," there is the concluding part of a sermon by Mr. Wilson, on Isaiah xxviii. 16,—*Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold I lay in Sion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation,*—preached in the kirk-yard of Gladsmuir, 26th Sept. 1720. This volume was the property of the late justly lamented Rev. Alexander Fisher of Dunfermline, and was sent by his father to the Rev. John Brown of Whitburn. This circumstance is noticed for the purpose of adding, that as valuable facts, relics, &c. respecting Mr. Wilson, may be in the possession of individuals who are unknown to his descendants, any such communications will be gratifying.

writers at the period. Comparatively speaking, its style is nervous and accurate. The arguments are well laid, and always ably, often elegantly, illustrated; and the conclusions are drawn with logical precision. The calm and conciliatory temper which it every where manifests, whilst it indicates the dignity of its author's mind, affords a perfect model for the spirit of controversy. It is a reply to another publication; and he seems at all times to have the mastery of his opponent, and, with perfect ease, yet without ostentation or vaunting, to preserve the superiority in the conflict. It evidently shows Mr. Wilson to have been a man of great learning and research.

This work consists of two parts, written successively in reply to Mr. Currie, minister at Kinglassie.\* The first, is the Defence of Reformation-Principles. Here, the exceptions brought against the Associate Presbytery, and their Judicial Act and Testimony,

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\* "Mr. Currie lived to be the most bitter enemy that has yet appeared against the Seceders,—wrote repeatedly against them, and was most learnedly and solidly answered by Mr. William Wilson of Perth." —*Struthers' History of Scotland*.

"The Assembly (1741) sanctioned a grant of £60 sterling, to Mr. John Currie, minister at Kinglassie, as a reward for his pamphlets written against the Seceding ministers, which but for this circumstance, and the masterly replications made to them by Mr. William Wilson of Perth, would long ago have been utterly forgotten." —*Struthers' History of Scotland*.

in Mr. Currie's Essay on Separation, are examined. The second part is a continuation of the subject. In this, Mr. Currie's subsequent vindication is reviewed, and several important questions regarding the Secession are considered. Appended, there is a letter, with a postscript, addressed to a minister of the Presbytery of Dunfermline, which contains a masterly and comprehensive justification of the Associate Presbytery.

The whole work, while it steadily and successfully pursues its object, is a rich treasure of practical wisdom in reference to duties connected with the public state of religion. It accurately distinguishes between the spirit and conduct of those churches and individuals who are faithful to Christ's interests, and of those who neglect or betray them.

There is often much ingenuity in the Defence. Sometimes there is an easy play with the objections,—equally remote, however, from levity, on the one hand, and from asperity, on the other.\* At other times, the language of serious expostulation and grave rebuke is appropriately employed.† Every where we discern an unreserved ingenuousness, a conscientious seriousness, and a profound regard for the glory of God, and the purity and prosperity of his Church.

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\* See p. 298, *Note*.

† p. 316, &c.

Mr. Wilson's remains, with those of the greater number of his family, are interred in the burying-ground of Perth. Since his death, there have also been buried beside him, the remains of his grandson, named after him, William Wilson, only son of the late Rev. John Wilson, whose early departure from life we have mentioned.

The Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, wrote an epitaph\* on his friend and brother, Mr. Wilson. It is printed in the tenth volume of his works, which volume contains what are called the Gospel Sonnets, which are well known, and admired in the Christian world. The epitaph is a very just description of his character. Part of it is in Latin, and part in English. It is as follows:—

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\* This epitaph is carved on the middle of a large table-stone. Around the edges, the names of those members of Mr. Wilson's family, who are buried beside him, are cut out, thus,—“Also here lies Margaret Alexander, his Spouse: likewise Marjory, Catherine, Thomas, George, Gilbert, Elizabeth, and James Wilson, their children.”

At the under part of the stone, the following Latin inscription commemorates the excellent youth, his grandson, the only son of the Rev. John Wilson of Methven. It was written by the young man's father. It is brief, and shows fine feeling, and simple elegance of taste.

“In hoc, etiam, conditur,  
Gulielmus Wilson, Nepos,  
Parentum unica proles,  
Adolescens multum desideratus.

OBIIT, 9 JUNII, 1779. ÆTATIS 16.  
Sic Deus voluit.”

MONUMENTUM MRL GULIELMI WILSON,  
 PASTORIS PERTHENSIS, QUI IN DOMINO SUO  
 JESU CHRISTO OBIIT, ANNO 1741.  
 ÆTATIS SUÆ 51.

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NUPER ERAS PASTOR DIVUS, DOCTORQUE DISERTUS:  
 NUNC SUPER ASTRA VOLAS, HIC LICET OSSA CUBANT:  
 MAGNUM EDUNT NOMEN TUA DICTA, DIDACTICA MAJUS,  
 CÆLICA VITA COMES MAXIMUM ET UBERIUS.

MORE BRAVE THAN DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN,  
 THIS CHAMPION FOUGHT IT FAIR  
 IN TRUTH'S DEFENCE, BOTH BY THE PEN,  
 THE PULPIT AND THE CHAIR.

HE STOOD WITH HIS ASSOCIATES, TRUE  
 TO SCOTLAND'S SOLEMN OATH,  
 AND TAUGHT TO RENDER HOMAGE DUE,  
 TO GOD AND CÆSAR BOTH.

EARTH RAGING, FROM HIS SACRED POST  
 DEBARR'D THE WORTHY SAGE;  
 HEAVEN FROWN'D, AND SENT A FURIOUS HOST,  
 TO 'VENGE THE SACRILEGE.

MOURN, ZION! YOUR ELIJAH'S GONE,  
 AND WAFTED TO THE SKIES;  
 MOURN! TILL HIS FIERY CAR BRING DOWN  
 A SOUL OF EQUAL SIZE.