

and they had only intended to avail themselves, as conscientious men, of the liberty for which they had protested—not 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 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.

The language of this document, all things considered, especially that characters so distinguished for learning, piety, and influence, as Mr. Erskine 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 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.”

It appears from this extraordinary document, that the Commission were invested with unlimited powers, and left to follow up this process to the very last extremity.

But the four brethren, who had been all along actuated by enlightened rectitude, were not to be intimidated into implicit submission, or a dereliction of duty, by such overbearing procedure, for soon after this sentence was enacted, they offered to read the following complaint and declaration which they had prepared as their joint speech:—

“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 *arbitrium*.” (“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)

The Assembly, however, instead of affording a patient and respectful hearing to these conscientious advocates of truth and righteousness, who were the pillars and the ornaments of their Church, were exasperated in the highest degree; and, forgetful alike of justice and decorum, degraded themselves by issuing orders to their officer to take them to the door.—But “the wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.”

On the whole, we apprehend that all who impartially estimate this undignified and domineering conduct of the General Assembly, will regret that it should have occurred in a Court of Christ. Persons unacquainted with facts, will be quite unable to conjecture what manner of men they were who were thus treated. We may afterwards have opportunity of

presenting a sketch of their characters, and to show that for learning, piety, and ministerial religious dignity, usefulness, and fidelity, they had few equals. Let it suffice, in the mean time, to say, that they were an honor 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.

“This Assembly,” says an eminent historian, “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.)

On the prosecution of this cause by the Assembly’s Commission, we shall not enter at present. It will form the subject of a future communication.

[FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.]

APOSTOLIC FATHERS.

III. POLYCARP. Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John, and was ordained by him bishop, or minister of Smyrna, a city in lesser Asia. It is generally thought that the Saviour addresses him in Revelation, as the angel of the church of Smyrna; and this opinion is rendered exceedingly probable by the fact, that Polycarp is known, on the best authorities, to have exercised his ministry in this city a few years afterwards. Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, a disciple of Polycarp’s, informs us, that his venerated instructor gave an account of the miracles which Christ had wrought, and the doctrines he had taught, as he had received them from those who had themselves seen the Word of Life, and that his account agreed in every thing with the Sacred Scriptures. Irenæus, therefore, writes *quæritur etiam* supplies us, on the same authority, with some interesting anecdotes of the apostle John, which are not elsewhere recorded. Thus, when the apostle went one day to the bath at Ephesus, and when he saw Cerinthus, the enemy of the truth, within, he leaped out of the bath unwashed, saying, that he was afraid the bath would fall when Cerinthus was there. Polycarp himself manifested the same spirit; for meeting one day Marcion, the heretic, who said, “Dost thou mean I?” he said, “I acknowledge thee to be the first begotten of Satan.” This language may be thought harsh in an age where indifference passes for rational religion, and enthusiasm is styled self-sufficient bigotry; but it is language exactly similar to that employed by John himself: “If there come any unto you, and loving not this doctrine”—the doctrine of Christ’s divine and human nature—“receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed.” Polycarp also told his disciple Irenæus a remarkable anecdote of the apostle John—one of the finest that christian antiquity presents. When the apostle was so old and infirm that he could not preach, he was carried into the church by young men, when he always said, “Little children love one another.” When asked why he always said the same thing, he replied, “This is the commandment of the Lord, and enough is done if it is done;” thus affording an admirable commentary on the Saviour’s words: “A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another.”

We know nothing of Polycarp’s country, descent, time and place of birth. One of the best authenticated incidents in his life is the account of a mission to Rome, about the year 153, to settle the controversy respecting the paschal festival. This festival was kept by the Asiatic churches on the 14th day of the first month of the apostolic month, from that date they kept the festival of the resurrection, whether it was a Sabbath day or not. The western churches, on the contrary, always kept the anniversary of the resurrection on a Sabbath, and on the day before they observed the paschal feast. The eastern churches pled the authority of John and Philip; while the western churches asserted that Peter and Paul had sanctioned their custom—a sufficient proof of the unsatisfactoriness of tradition, even in an age bordering on the apostolic in matters of faith and practice. As might have been expected, Polycarp completely failed to convince Anicetus, bishop of Rome, that his practice was erroneous; but instead of anathematizing each other, as a pledge of their unity and mutual love, they observed the Lord’s Supper together; and through Polycarp’s instrumentality many of the Gnostics were restored to the fellowship of the church.

Polycarp suffered martyrdom under the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius; and the account of his death is contained in a circular letter, written by his disciple Irenæus, in the name of the church of Smyrna. He was persuaded by his friends to retire to a distant villa, till the storm of persecution had spent its fury, as Christians did not then deliver themselves up to their enemies from a false desire for the honour of martyr-