

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY.

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A new denomination springing up at any time would scarcely expect to escape the censorious remarks of officious individuals. In particular, the Relief Church, from its having collected large congregations, and drawn ministers from various denominations, was the occasion of exciting the hostile jealousy of the different bodies of professing Christians around them. The tongue of calumny was soon busy in its strictures on the character and actings of this new Synod. Both worldly men and professing Christians, without seeking proper information, were hasty in expressing their judgment. The adherents of the Establishment and of Dissenting denominations, from different causes, were jealous of this new movement. Many in the laity of the Establishment felt their pride hurt by seeing their ranks thinned, and a denomination formed by which the corruptions of their Church were practically condemned, and the people exercising their right to choose ministers for themselves. The ministers of the Establishment were differently affected, according to the views they held. Some of the evangelical party rejoiced that Providence thus opened a way for counteracting the injurious influence of Patronage. Others were mortified by seeing the new denomination, like the others that had preceded it, growing in popularity and influence; whilst some affected to be altogether indifferent about the matter. In illustration of this last feeling, the following anecdote may be told. When the Relief congregation of one of the villages in the west of Scotland was formed and their church built, the people resorted in a body to it, and none seemed to be proceeding to the Parish Church. The Parish minister's manse was situated so that observations could be taken as to the strength of the parties. His female servant was greatly distressed at the proceedings, and going to her master, said despairingly,—“Oh! Sir, the people are all going to the Relief Church!” The minister coolly replied,—“Janet, do you see any of the stipend going in that direction?”

Serious persons, belonging to different dissenting denominations, charged the Relief with being lax in their admissions, with the neglect of discipline, and with opposition to the principles of the Reformation.

Thus from all quarters the Relief Church met at first with opposition.—“The Establishment,” says Dr. Struthers, “began the party warfare by intercommuning those ministers and preachers who joined the Relief. Next the Rev. Mr. McMillan, Sandhills, of the Reformed Presbytery, attacked them from the Press—‘for their mixed communion with the Established Church,—for their relieving the consciences of men from the yoke of the sacred national moral vows and covenants,—and from the strictness of true Presbyterian discipline and government,—and for these latitudinarian unscriptural terms of communion, founded on a blind supposition of men’s goodness.’ The cry being once raised, it was speedily taken up by others. Cowan of Colingsburgh having factioused with Bennet, the Antiburgher minister of Cupar, the war between the Secession and Relief speedily began. The kindling of the first straw was sufficient. Pamphlet followed upon pamphlet, ably and acrimoniously written, in which the founders of the Relief were openly accused of schism, for having left the Establishment without protesting against its defections,—still holding communion with it,—issuing no testimony for the truth—throwing open this communion to all visible saints,—making a distinction between “essentials” and “non-essentials,”—breaking down the hedge of Presbyterian Church government, by denying the binding obligation of the National covenant and solemn league,—introducing a boundless toleration, and setting up a Church on the ruins of the grand distinguishing principles of the Reformation.’ In some quarters they were further accused of preaching legal doctrine, and with not being sufficiently attentive to the exercise of discipline.

Accusations like these have been brought against every new denomination,