

the History of the Secession Church by Dr. McKerrow, might make many elders, and some ministers, humble, under a consciousness of their own deficiencies.

About the middle of last century, the views of religious Presbyterians in all denominations, with regard to Prelacy, were very different from what they are now. They regarded the Prelatic or Episcopal Church as being much the same as the Popish. This arose from the fact, that the Episcopacy of Scotland was much more allied to the Church of Rome than English Episcopacy; or rather that, during the time of the persecution in the seventeenth century, it was nothing short of Popery under a prelatic name. Indeed, there never was persecution more cruel and savage than that which was conducted in Scotland for twenty-eight years before the revolution, with a view to support Prelacy and extirpate Presbyterianism. It is therefore not to be wondered at that, for a century afterwards, the Scottish repugnance to Episcopacy continued keen, and that the very idea of giving it the smallest countenance was considered inconsistent with a Christian profession. This was strikingly seen in a case of discipline which came to the Associate Synod in 1750. A member of Mr. Fisher's congregation, Glasgow, being a mason by trade, became the undertaker for erecting an Episcopal Church in that city. This gave great offence to his brethren of the congregation, as well as to serious Presbyterians in the Established Church; and it was considered an extraordinary thing that a member of the Secession Church should lend any hand in the building of an Episcopal Chapel. The mason was dealt with by the minister and session, and urged to renounce the undertaking; but he persisted in it, and at length declined the authority of the church. The case, however, was considered sufficiently important to warrant synodical consideration, and the Synod gave a deliverance, which, although it precisely accorded with the sentiments then entertained, would perhaps excite surprise, or even ridicule now. Instead of considering it a mere matter of secular business, in which the workman had no interest except to earn a subsistence for his family, it was viewed as giving countenance to superstition, as making innovations on God's worship prohibited in the second commandment, and even as equivalent to the erecting of high places for sacrifice under the Old Testament dispensation, which God condemned. They therefore considered the undertaker as highly censurable, and as inadmissible to sealing ordinances till he professed his sorrow for the offence and scandal of which he had been guilty.

We have adverted to the death of the Rev. Ralph Erskine, by which this denomination sustained a severe loss. After a short illness, this eminently talented and pious minister died at Dunfermline on the sixth of November, 1752, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. The memory of the just is blessed. This man of God was distinguished for the highly evangelical strain of his preaching. It was his great aim to magnify the grace of God in the salvation of sinners, and to honour Christ. His writings, both prose and verse, have been admired by the godly of all religious denominations. He mourned over the breach in the Secession, and it is said had more sympathy with those on the opposite side than any of his brethren. He lived respected and beloved by all, and his death was the cause of general lamentation wherever he was known. Among the last words he was heard to utter, he said, "I will be for ever a debtor to free grace." And he breathed out his immortal soul exclaiming, "Victory, victory, victory."

When his brother, the venerable father of the Secession, Ebenezer Erskine of Stirling, heard of his death, he said, "And is Ralph gone? He has twice got the start of me; he was first in Christ, and now he is first in glory."

In less than two years afterwards, the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine himself was also called into the joy of his Lord. This was an equally trying dispensation to the Church, reminding them that the Lord's work is not to depend on instruments, but on his own power and grace. The health of Ebenezer had been for some time on the decline; and his constitution, originally vigorous, had been gradually yielding to the infirmities of age. To relieve him in part from the arduous duties of his charge, his affectionate congregation had called and received his nephew, Mr. James Erskine, as his colleague in January 1752. Mr. Erskine himself preached one of the sermons on the occasion of the ordination, but after that he was seldom able to officiate. Having been for some time unable to preach through growing infirmity, his people expressed a desire to see

him once more in his pulpit. He accordingly went from his bed and addressed them for half an hour from that text, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The discourse had been prepared with a view to improve the death of his brother Ralph. His last sermon was preached from his bed, the company having assembled in his room, where he baptized a child, after having discoursed from Psalm xlviii. 11, "This God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death." With this appropriate subject he had previously expressed a wish to close his public ministrations.

The exercise of this eminent minister on his death-bed was deeply interesting.

"His private conversation," says Dr. Frazer, his biographer, "with relatives and other kind enquirers, during his last illness, was at once cheerful and edifying. He often expressed himself in language to this effect. 'I have always found my times of severe affliction my best times; many blasts I have endured through life; but I had this comfort under them, a good God, a good conscience, a good cause.' When one of his elders thus accosted him,—'Sir, you have given us many good advices, may I ask what are you now doing with your own soul?' 'I am just doing with it,' he replied, 'what I did forty years ago, I am resting on that word, 'I am the Lord thy God.' Another friend, surprised at the serenity and cheerfulness he possessed in the immediate view of death and eternity, put the question, 'Sir, are you not afraid of your sins?' 'Indeed, no,' was his answer, 'ever since I know Christ I have thought highly of my promises and duties, nor am I *slightly* afraid of my sins.'

"To several friends who were conversing with him one afternoon, he expressed his assurance of perfect bliss in the following memorable words:—'O, sirs, my body is now become a very disagreeable habitation for my soul, but when my soul goes out of my body, it will as naturally fly into the bosom of Jesus, as a stone will fall to the centre.' To his beloved children he unbosomed himself in the most endearing manner, mingling consolation with his dying counsels. 'Though I die, the Lord liveth; I have known more of my God since I came to this bed than through all my life.'

"During the night on which he finished his earthly career, Mrs. Fisher, having come from Glasgow to visit her dying father, was sitting in the apartment where he lay, and engaged in reading. Awakening from a slumber, he said, 'What book is that, my dear, you are reading?' 'It is your sermon, father,' she replied, 'on that text, 'I am the Lord thy God.' 'O woman,' said he then, 'that is the best sermon I ever preached.' The discourse had proved very refreshing to himself, as well as to many of his hearers. A few minutes after that expression had fallen from his lips, he requested his daughter to bring the table and candle near the bed; and having shut his eyes, and laid his hand under his cheek, he quietly breathed out his soul into the hands of his Redeemer, on the second of June, 1751. Had he lived twenty-four days longer he would have finished the seventy-fourth year of his age; and had he been spared three months more he would have completed the fifty-first year of his ministry, having resided twenty-eight years at Portmuck, and nearly twenty-three at Stirling.

"The death of Mr. Erskine was deeply lamented by the whole Church. They felt that they had lost their head and father, and one of their brightest ornaments. He was distinguished by a dignity of manner, a prepossessing appearance, and a ready eloquence, which, with his evangelical strain of doctrine, made him popular as a preacher with all classes. The Rev. Adam Gib of Edinburgh, having asked a brother in the ministry if he had ever heard Ebenezer Erskine preach, being answered in the negative said, 'Well then, sir, you never heard the gospel in its majesty.'

(To be continued.)

#### REVIEWS.

ON MIRACLES. BY RALPH WARDLAW, D.D. NEW YORK: ROBERT CARTER & BROTHER. TORONTO: A. H. ARMOUR & Co.

The substance of this important work was delivered from the pulpit by its venerated author, in seven monthly lectures, on the evenings of the Lord's day. Such a course of lectures was rendered necessary by the revival, especially in large cities, of some of the worst forms of the old infidelity, and by the importation from Germany of those neologies