

lacy as contrary to the word of God, and abjured by the National Covenants; and there was no approval of Presbytery, as agreeable to Scripture, but only as in accordance with the wishes of the people. Oaths unnecessary and oppressive were also imposed, and the freedom of the Church Courts was greatly circumscribed.

On these accounts, and others, the Revolution settlement was unsatisfactory to many; although, after a long season of oppression and suffering, it was felt to be a relief and a privilege. But, at this period, the Church wanted strength and courage, not to say fidelity and zeal, to insist, as might have been done with success, on arrangements more advantageous for the interests of Christianity.

These views of the defects of the Revolution settlement, were particularly understood and declared by the Associate Presbytery, when they engaged in the solemn work of renewing the Covenants; and by proceeding to this, they committed themselves, by their own act, to the rejection of the Revolution settlement as their standard, and to the adoption of the purest times of their fathers; and they committed themselves likewise, by the same act, to the work of progressive reformation.

Keeping these things in view, we shall be prepared to give our opinion, decidedly, and we hope satisfactorily, on the merits of the great controversy, which commenced in the Associate Synod, even at its first meeting in 1745, respecting the religious clause of some Burgess oaths.

An Overture was introduced on this subject by Mr. Moncrieff. It was reserved, however, for subsequent consideration. But afterwards the subject was found so difficult and perplexing, and such different views were entertained, that it took two years to bring about the crisis in which the controversy ended—a crisis which was seemingly disastrous to the Secession Church, for it divided it into two parts, which separated from each other, and continued separate, for more than seventy years.

We cannot enter into all the particulars of this controversy, nor is it necessary. We must content ourselves with a general view. The following is the tenor of the religious clause of the Burgess oath, which occasioned the dispute:—

“Here I protest before God, and your Lordships, that I profess and allow with my heart, the true religion presently professed within this realm, and authorised by the laws thereof: I shall abide thereat, and defend the same to my life's end, renouncing the Roman religion called Papistry.”

“The question,” says Dr. McKerrow, “What is meant by the true religion, presently professed within this realm, &c., gave rise to long and keen discussion. One party in the Synod interpreted those words to be of similar import with the true religion as presently professed and authorised, &c., and maintained that swearing this part of the oath was equivalent to giving a solemn approbation of those corruptions that prevailed in the Established Church, and against which the Secession had publicly testified. Another party maintained that this clause of the oath bound the individual who swore it, to approve of the true religion itself, as that which was settled and professed in this realm, but did not bind him to approve of the manner in which it might be settled and professed; and that, therefore, it did not require of him any approbation of the prevailing corruptions in either Church or State.”

Various meetings of Synod were occupied with this dispute, and various proposals made; and it must be confessed that the debates were conducted on both sides with too much acrimony, and that the keenness with which each party upheld its views, tended only to alienate and separate them from each other.

At the meeting of Synod in April, 1746, the following motion was carried by a majority of thirteen to nine:—

“The Synod find that a swearing the religious clause of some Burgess oaths by any under their inspection, as the said clause comes necessarily in this period to be used and applied, does not agree with the present state and circumstances of the testimony for religion and reformation which this Synod, with those under their inspection, are maintaining; particularly, that it does not agree unto, nor consist with, an entering into the bond for renewing our solemn covenants; and that, therefore, those of the Secession cannot further, with safety of conscience, and without sin, swear any Burgess oath with the said religious clause, while matters with reference to the profession and settlement of religion, continue in such circumstances as at present. Moreover, the Synod find,

that Burgesses of the Secession, who are already concerned in such oaths should be required, in order to their admission into the Bond for renewing our solemn covenants, to attend conference with their respective sessions, for signifying satisfaction with the present judgment of the Synod, and a sense of the mistake they have hitherto, through inadvertency, been under concerning such Burgess oaths.”

This determination, we think, was in consistency with the character which the Secession had taken to itself, by standing, not on the Revolution settlement, but on the earlier attainments of the Presbyterian Church, to which, in the National Covenant and Solemn League and Covenant which they had lately renewed, they expressed their adherence, and from which, as a foundation for further reformation, they expressed their resolution, through grace, to advance. Consistently with this view of the matter, we cannot see how they could come to another conclusion. For to have allowed the lawfulness of swearing these Burgess oaths, it appears to us, would have been a relinquishing of the earlier and higher attainments, and a resting on the Revolution settlement—would have been a virtual renouncing of their covenant engagements, and a giving of their sanction to the present legal Establishment, with all the corruptions and defects from which they had seceded.

But there were several ministers who thought otherwise, and to whom it appeared no way inconsistent with their testimony to take the oath.—Forgetting, we think, that every oath must be understood in the view of its administrator, and that in this view this oath could only be taken by members of the Established Church, these ministers reasoned that their secession, as was true, was not from the Standards of the Church of Scotland, but only from its Judicatories, and that, true to these Standards, theirs was the religion presently professed and authorised, and thus they considered that, in consistency with their testimony, against prevailing errors in the Establishment, they could, with a clear conscience, take the oath.

A strong protest being therefore taken against the decision of Synod by five ministers and two elders, a committee was appointed to prepare answers to the reasons of protest.

This decision of Synod, though lawful, was scarcely expedient. Even supposing those who considered it inconsistent with their testimony to take the religious clause of the oath were right, yet seeing that so respectable a minority were of a different opinion, they should have given in, at least for some time longer, to the sentiment of the other party for delay: and in the meantime all parties might have united in adopting means to get this religious clause altered or erased, which very probably might have been easily accomplished. But when it was carried by a fair majority, the other party were wrong in not quietly submitting.

The opposers of the oath were culpable, likewise, in not having their answers to the reasons of protest ready at the meeting of Synod in September, for this might have prevented the question which was then brought forward, and which at length divided the Church. At this meeting, after spending some time in conference and prayer, with a view to better understanding, and when the Synod refused to read the reasons of protest because the answers were not ready, the protesting party pushed another question, as to whether the taking of the oath should be a term of communion before it was considered by inferior Judicatories. This question was surely irregular, since it would have been a submitting to inferior Courts what had been substantially decided by the Supreme Court, and since a decision in favour of the Protesters would have been virtually to make the Synod stultify itself by reversing, in another form, their own decision. For what else could be meant by the deliverance of Synod than a prohibition to their members from taking this oath? It would have been wiser and better for the protesting party to have submitted to the decision, and for both parties, even at this stage, since they had not done it before, to have united in steps to have the religious clause of the oath abolished. But the protesters pushed this question, and even afterwards, when the answers to their reasons of protest were ready, they insisted too keenly to have it decided, instead of yielding to what was considered the proper order of business, which was, reading the reasons of protest, and the answers that had been prepared, with a view to terminate the cause.

The urgency of the protesters gave rise to wrangling discussion, and led to great disorder, in which the evil passions of members of Synod,