

people who had lost the knowledge of the true God, and in the blindness of their minds—the light that was in them being darkness—were wandering helplessly in the dark fields of religious fiction, and self-creating the more horrible and the deeper pitfalls into which they plunged.

(To be continued.)

[FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.]

UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY.

BY THE REV. DR. FERRIER, CALEDONIA.

We concluded our last paper by stating that thirteen ministers and two elders had protested against the Synod of Perth and Stirling, in finding, by a majority of six votes, that Mr. Erskine was censurable for expressions employed in his sermon.

We proceed to notice that only seven of these ministers appeared at the same Synod, when it met at Stirling, in April, 1733. Here they gave their reasons of dissent, which, although powerful and conclusive, did not, however, induce the Synod to depart from the course they had contemplated, which was, to insist, that unless Mr. Erskine made some acknowledgment of having expressed himself improperly in his sermon, he should be rebuked at their bar. To this Mr. Erskine could not submit; nor could he conscientiously retract any thing he had said; and when called by the Moderator to receive the rebuke, he declared his adherence to his protest, as he was unconscious of having done or said any thing which made him justly liable to censure.

When at length, in May, 1433, the General Assembly met, only three of the Protesters appeared, as adhering to Mr. Erskine, namely:—Messrs. William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff, and James Fisher. The others seem to have thought they had sufficiently exonerated themselves by simply protesting, without any particular anxiety or design to carry the matter farther. It was otherwise with the three who went forward. They considered Mr. Erskine's cause their own—or rather they considered it the cause of Christ—as it assuredly was—to which all the faithful should adhere; but to which so many of their brethren were indifferent or opposed. There were not a few in this Assembly, who were, so far left to themselves, as to treat this matter with contempt and ridicule—so deplorably corrupted and degraded was the Church of Scotland at this period.

Mr. Erskine appeared at the bar of this Assembly with two advocates. He alone of the four brethren was heard in support of his appeal; and he defended himself “in a document which, for pointed brevity of statement, triumphant argument, clear elucidation of great principles, respectful address, combined with independence of feeling, deserves to be ranked among the most valuable ecclesiastical documents of the age.” (Historical Sketch by Dr. Thomson.) His three friends insisted on being also heard by the Assembly. But for reasons not mentioned, this privilege, which equity and christian courtesy required, was refused.

It is said that, on this occasion, when these brethren were pleading in vain to be heard, by reading papers they had prepared in their own defence, a lay member, connected with the Argyle family, bluntly exclaimed—“Moderator, cannot these men who can thunder hell and damnation from the pulpit for an hour, tell us in a few words what they would be at.” On this, Mr. Wilson, ever bold, when necessary, in the defence of truth and piety, rose and declared that theirs was not the cause of Mr. Erskine merely, but of the whole Church,—that the Assembly, and not they, were subverting the Ecclesiastical constitution,—that the present aspect of the times, so threatening to the interests of christianity, should serve to rouse every minister to active zeal in checking error and corruption, and in seeking the purity, peace, and prosperity of the Church. In concluding, he turned to the last speaker and said—“He could not sit down without adverting to the profane language which had been rashly employed by the person of high rank—language which was not only unfit to be uttered any where, especially in this venerable Assembly, but which was quite unworthy of a descendant of that illustrious nobleman who died a martyr, seventy years ago, to the civil and religious liberties of his country, and in the defence of the very cause which Mr. Erskine and they were now supporting.” This remonstrance is said to have had a powerful effect on those who heard it, and in particular to have put the Argyle representative to the blush.

But how did the Assembly conduct and determine this great cause?—How did they proceed with these intrepid and faithful friends of the Lord Jesus, who were prepared to do or suffer any thing rather than that his glory should be stained, or that they should flinch from the discharge of their spiritual duties? Without at all entering into the merits of this cause, as that of enlightened and pure christianity, and into the various principles and consequences which it involved—without giving any weight to Mr. Erskine's answers to the alleged expressions in his sermon, which had occasioned 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 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 the decision was passed, Mr. Erskine gave in a protestation against it, to which his three brethren subscribed their adherence: and from this period these four brethren were all equally involved and interested in this great cause.

To render our narrative more intelligent to persons in this remote Province, it is proper to present a copy of this protestation and adherence.—The following is its tenor:—

“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 aforesaid 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 any 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 of the Synod of Perth and Stirling, do hereby adhere to the above protestation and declaration, containing a testimony against the Act of Assembly, 1732, 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 aforesaid protestation and declaration.

JAMES FISHER.”

Of this protestation and adherence, 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 Reverend Andrew 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 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.” (Gib's Display.) 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,