

In the year 1714, the attention of the Assembly was directed to reports respecting Mr. Simson, Professor of Divinity in the University of Glasgow, as teaching erroneous doctrines to his students. The Assembly did not take up the matter with that promptitude which men of zeal for Divine truth would be expected to manifest. They rather disengaged enquiry in the face of universal report—leaving, as they did, the matter with Mr. Webster, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, who had introduced the subject, to be prosecuted by him, if he thought proper, at his own charge, and on his own responsibility—an evidence surely, that the leaven of corruption had widely spread among themselves. Mr Webster had the courage and faithfulness to label Mr. Simson. In consequence, it was undeniably found that the Professor had been propagating tenets among his pupils of a very dangerous kind—of which the following may be mentioned as examples:—

"That heathens have an obscure objective discovery of redemption through Christ; that the light of nature, including tradition, is sufficient to teach men the way of salvation; that the souls of children are as pure and holy as the soul of Adam was in his original condition, being superior to him only as to those qualifications and habits which he received as being created in a state of maturity; that no proper covenant of works was made with Adam, as the representative of his posterity, that our own happiness ought to be our chief end in the service of God; that there is no immediate precourse of God attending and influencing the acts of his reasonable creatures, and that there will be no sinning in hell after the last judgment."

The Assembly, in 1717, gave proof of the extent to which error prevailed among them, by not inflicting censure on the propagator of these errors, but allowing him to continue in his charge, and not even condemning his errors. With lenity, which betrayed unfaithfulness, they only declared "that he had vented some opinions not necessary to be taught in divinity, and that had given more occasion to strife than to the promoting education; and that he had used some expressions that bear, and are used by adversaries in an unsound sense; and that he had adopted some hypotheses, different from what are commonly used among orthodox divines, that are not evidently founded on scripture, and tend to attribute too much to natural reason, and the power of corrupt nature, which made advancement of reason and nature is always to the disparagement of revelation, and efficacious free grace"—therefore, they prohibit and discharge the said Mr. Simson to use such expressions or to teach, preach, or otherwise vent such opinions, propositions, or hypotheses, as aforesaid."

Such was the time, inadequate, and compromising deliverance of the Assembly on this critical conjuncture, when the purity of the Church, for the present and future generations, was so much impelled; and it was justly remarked, as further indicating the lamentable growth of corruption and error, that this same Assembly, which showed such sinful indifference respecting the dangerous principles taught to their students of Theology, manifested a very different disposition towards the Presbytery of Auchenrazer, which, with a view to arrest the progress of Arminianism, had drawn up certain propositions, to which they required assent from candidates for license. Of these the following may be mentioned as a specimen:—

"I believe that it is not sound and orthodox to teach that we must forsake sin, in order to our coming to Christ, and instating us in covenant with God." Mr. Craig, a preacher, being refused an extract of his license for not subscribing this proposition, brought the matter before the Assembly. The Supreme Court declared this abhorrence of the proposition as unsound, and ordered the Presbytery to give Mr. Craig the extract of license, and likewise prohibited the use of such expressions as those in what was scoldingly called "the Auchenrazer creed." By such procedure the Assembly sanctioned the doctrine that persons must save themselves from the love and power of sin before they come to Christ, which is equivalent to saying that a person must cure himself before applying to the physician.

It was now evident to the serious portion of the community, both ministers and people, that the Church of Scotland was fast declining from evangelical purity, and that the standards to which they professed to adhere, were believed and taught by the great majority of her ministers. Many of these were the avowed and determined advocates of Arminian, Arian, and Socinian principles, which they propagated with industry and

zeal, and thus the interests of pure and vital Christianity seemed mournfully on the decline. In this state of matters the genuine servants of Christ, reduced to a small remnant, trembled for the ark; but were not inactive. In particular, a few of those who were eminently distinguished for learning, piety, and zeal, drew closer to each other, with a view to devise measures for mutual defence and encouragement. Trusting in the Lord for help, they openly united their influence by every means to stem the torrent of corruption, and without ceasing, they prayed that when the enemy was coming in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord might lift up a standard against him. Many pamphlets were issued from the press at this period, and widely circulated among the people, and these, from their evangelical strain, and the lucid views of scripture doctrine which they presented, were the means of diffusing among the Christian laity an accurate and extensive knowledge of religious truth, and thus of enlisting the most intelligent and serious in the land, in the defence of those pure doctrines of grace, which are taught in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

Among the publications which now appeared, was a work called "the Marrow of Modern Divinity." The celebrated Mr. Boston, of Ettrick, accidentally met with a copy, and strongly recommended it as presenting, in a clear and satisfactory light, the difference between the law and the gospel. Mr. Ugg, of Carnock, published an edition of it, with a commendatory preface. The consequence was, that great offence was given to those ministers of the Church of Scotland, who had themselves departed from her standards, and who pretended to consider the sentiments contained in this work as of a dangerous tendency.

In consequence of the ferment thus excited, a complaint was made to the Assembly respecting the publication of "the Marrow of Modern Divinity." The Assembly referred the matter to their Commission. The Commission summoned several of the orthodox ministers before them, who approved of the Marrow, and especially Mr. Ugg, who declared that the reading of the book had been blessed to many excellent persons, and that, as for himself, he had received more light about some important concerns of the glorious gospel by perusing that book, than by any other human writing which Providence had brought into his hands."

The controversy arising out of this publication, had no small influence in organizing the United Presbyterian Church. It is therefore of some importance to take particular notice of this matter. The Assembly of 1720, condemned the book, and prohibited the reading and printing of it, and its recommendation from the pulpit. By this Act they greatly overrated their authority, and showed their ignorance of human nature, for the book was heily brought into greater notice, and sought after and read more generally, and with greater avidity.

The passing of this Act, however, occasioned alarm and distress to many excellent ministers, and threw the religious part of the laity into agitation. The friends of evangelical doctrine declared that the Assembly had condemned "a bundle of sweet and pleasant truths." Measures were therefore taken to bring the whole matter into review by the Assembly; and twelve ministers, all distinguished for orthodoxy, piety, and zeal, and who were afterwards honorably called "the Marrow-men," united in a representation to the Assembly, in which they express their grief at the condemnatory Act, and their desire that the subject be re-considered by the Supreme Court.

In this representation, it was stated that by their condemnatory Act, the Assembly had inflicted a severe wound on divine truth, by pronouncing the following scriptural doctrines to be unsound and dangerous, viz: "That in the gospel, the Father hath made a free, unthought offer of Christ, and of salvation to all men, by virtue of which every individual who hears the gospel has a warrant to take hold of said offer, and to apply salvation to his own soul, that an assured persuasion of the truth of God's promise in the gospel, with respect to one's self in particular, is included in the very nature of saving faith; that the believer's holiness is in no way the price nor condition of his salvation; that believers, in yielding obedience to the law as a rule of life, ought not to be influenced, either by *unbecoming hopes of heaven, or by slavish fears of hell*, that the believer is not, in any respect, under the law as a covenant of works; and that it is a just and scriptural distinction, which is made betwixt the law as a covenant of works, and the law as a rule of life in the hand of Christ."