

THE REV. JAMES SMELLIE,  
Late Free Church Minister in St. Andrews,  
Orkney.

To the Editor of the Record.

DEAR SIR,—

If my memory do not deceive me, one of your correspondents, some time since, offered to furnish you with occasional notices of the more eminent fathers of the Disruption. The idea has often occurred to me, that the high-toned principle which actuated that movement, and the trials which accompanied it, were more palpable in the case of some less known to fame, who laboured in the remoter parishes of Scotland, than even in that of the distinguished men who had the honour of standing forth in the front of the battle. And it is with the view of lending my feeble effort to do justice to such, as well as of paying a tribute of filial respect to the memory of one "unknown and yet known," lately deceased, that I would beg your attention and that of your readers, to the following notice as an illustration of the preceding remark:—

The late Rev. James Smellie was, in 1805, ordained to the ministry in the united parishes St. Andrews and Dearness, Orkney. He was among the first evangelical ministers settled in that part of the country, after a long and dreary reign of Moderatism. He commenced his pulpit ministrations by preaching from the text—"Woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel." His preaching was characterised by soundness, plainness, and faithfulness, and he was acceptable as a minister of the Lord as long as he was able to officiate. He continued to preach in St. Andrews and in Dearness alternately, until the year 1830, when, by a participation in the benefits of the Parliamentary grant of George the Fourth, for building additional churches and manse in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, he was relieved of the more remote parish of Dearness, and had his labours confined to the parish of St. Andrews, in which he resided, and of which he remained minister until the memorable year of 1843.

Though he seldom took a public part in ecclesiastical business, beyond his own Presbytery and Synod, in both of which courts he acted as clerk for many years, he sympathised warmly with the evangelical party, and took a lively interest in the struggle which agitated the Church of Scotland for ten years prior to the Disruption. At that period he had well nigh reached the age of "threescore years and ten;" physical energy was fast abating; the power of adaptation to circumstances was almost gone, and he could no longer rely upon the amount of popularity which he had once enjoyed. His remaining congregation, too, was small and poor, yet in the face of every difficulty he was resolute to abide by the path of duty. And when the crisis came, his language was, "If I should beg my bread from door to door, I will not remain in the Church, constituted as the legal authorities have declared it to be." Accordingly, in due time, his name was added to the roll of dissenting ministers.

To one in his situation the sacrifice made must have been peculiarly trying. Not only was the place in which he had been settled early in life, and where he had spent the best of his days, naturally dear to him—not only were all his family of eighteen children born in the manse, and more than one half of these, many of them arrived at manhood and womanhood, together with their mother, carried thence to be laid in the parish church-yard; but, like most of his brethren, he was professionally attached to the Establishment. He had, no doubt, calculated on living and dying in her service, and in the prospect of renouncing her emoluments he had nothing to trust to for temporal support but the promise, "The Lord will provide." Now, Mr. Editor, if we take into account all the circumstances—the tender associations connected with the manse—one of

these peculiar dwellings which the eloquent historian of the Reformation describes as calculated to arrest the eye of the traveller in any parish of Scotland—the no less touching circumstance of taking farewell of the Church in which the subject of our notice had, for nearly forty years, proclaimed the gospel of salvation—ecclesiastical separation from many with whom he had long held ministerial fellowship, as with brethren—the professional sacrifice implied in breaking connection with the National Establishment—and withal, nothing before him, to human view, but uncertainty, want, and trial in the decline of life; against which there was no such set-off as youthful enthusiasm, the sympathies of approving crowds, or the engrossing activities of a very public sphere—is there not here an example of christian principle worthy of being held up for imitation? Is there not an illustration of Abrahamic faith, which lends its possessor to go out, at the call of God, although he knows not whither he goes?

Mr. Smellie's congregation, almost to a man, followed him out of the Church, and his remaining energies were spent in ministering to their edification. Although they were not able to contribute more than a small portion of what was necessary, yet, in the good providence of God, a Free Church and a Free Manse were, in course of time, erected for him in the parish, and the dividend of the Sustentation Fund supplied his support. Seeing, at first, nothing but poverty and distress, he doubtless received such provision with gratitude, as coming from the bountiful hand of God; and though far inferior to what he had relinquished, it was regarded as ample. Since the summer of 1843, his health, which was never robust, gave way. Interdicted by his medical adviser, he never afterwards attempted to preach, except once, when a Presbyterial appointment of supply failing, he stepped forward to fill up the vacancy, but this effort cost him six months' confinement to his bed. He had subsequently a stroke of paralysis which impaired his faculties, especially his memory. From this he partially recovered, but since last September he gradually declined, until the 22nd December, when a period was put by death to his trials and sufferings in the 79th year of his age and 48th of his ministry. The dispensation of the Lord's Supper had been fixed for the following Sabbath, and after abandoning all hopes of being out on the occasion, he gave directions to his son, who acted as his assistant, as to what he wished done, saying "whether I be on the earth not." On the evening of the 21st, his voice was heard joining in singing the praise of God at family worship, and next morning giving symptoms of more than usual ease, he was left apparently enjoying refreshing sleep after breakfast, while the family were at their morning devotions, in an adjoining apartment, but on the return of some of them to his room, it was found that he had fallen asleep in Jesus.

The subject of this notice was a man whose attainments were fitted to have made him shine in his profession, if his lot had been cast in a more public sphere. As a student he distinguished himself, according to the testimony of many of his contemporaries, in the literary classes in the University of Edinburgh; and in evidence of his taste and habits, it may be noted, that he continued, till an advanced age, to read a portion of the sacred Scriptures in the original language, either Hebrew or Greek; and Bagster's Polyglott Bible was the favourite companion of his studies. He was faithful in the discharge of his duties as a minister. During a quarter of a century he continued regularly every second Sabbath, in going to and returning from Church, to ride a distance of nearly twenty miles, through bad roads, and often up to the saddle in water when crossing small arms of the sea, by which he shortened the journey. As the entire light of a winter day in the latitude of Orkney, was not sufficient for the active duties

of the Sabbath, this required an amount of exertion not unworthy of the colonial field.

In him, uprightness of conduct adorned a religious profession. He would not brook anything like meanness or deceit, and against his integrity of purpose it may be asserted that the whisper of suspicion was never breathed. He was regarded as a pattern of punctuality and faithfulness in his pecuniary engagements—resolving, even by self-denial, to do justice to all men, and to "owe no man anything." With a numerous family and limited income he contrived, by strict economy, to educate three sons for the ministry, besides one for the medical profession. All the preparatory instruction which these enjoyed before commencing their academical career, as well as the entire education of the rest of his family, was imparted by himself personally, as leisure from other duties allowed. Though sometimes regarded as stern in manners, and though he was uncompromising wherever principle was concerned, nevertheless, he was a tender and affectionate parent, and his interest in his children was not confined to their individual or temporal welfare. Every step of life, every incident in the family circle, was viewed in reference to the will of God and futurity. He followed the deceased members of his household in thought to the eternal world; and in conversation respecting the interest which the departed may take in surviving friends, he is remembered to have given utterance with much pathos to the expression, "I often dwell in wondering contemplation on the condition of separate spirits." The patriarchal manner too, can never be forgotten, in which, when, on the eve of the writer's departure for Canada, after moving slowly together till they came to a solitary spot on a hill, the father bent over the son and poured out his blessing in these words, "I shall never see you again, but may God Almighty be with you and bless you." Indeed he lived by the faith which he preached. Amid an almost unprecedented series of family bereavements, for twelve of his children had gone before him, he not only maintained a subdued and meek acquiescence in the Divine will, but seemed to be the more drawn toward heaven. In reference to the present world, he could bear this testimony, "I sometimes think that I have almost reached the attainment of the Apostle, when he declared that he had learned, in whatever state he was, therewith to be content." And with respect to the world to come, it was evident, by his demeanour in public and private, long before his last illness, that he was much in anticipation of its glory. Without doubt, he has now obtained an entrance; and as one come out "of great tribulation." &c., he is before the throne, and will serve God day and night, for ever and ever.

We conclude this brief sketch, in his own words, containing, as they do, an admonition to ministerial faithfulness. In the last communication which the writer had from his own hand, having recounted the state of himself and of the family, he adds, "After the foregoing statement what can I say but that mercy and goodness have followed me all the days of my life hitherto, and that much favour has been shown me from above amidst my bodily and family afflictions; nay, I may say with the Psalmist, 'I may sing of judgment as well as of mercy.' May all the divine dealings with me be sanctified to my soul, and to the souls of the family. Oftentimes have I thought, since laid aside from public duty, how much more diligent I ought to have been when in the enjoyment of health and strength. And now I would lift up my voice like a trumpet in the great congregation, to warn sinners and to encourage saints. A bed of sickness, and especially a death-bed, brings many things to remembrance, which are overlooked and disregarded in time of health, and leads to the desire, if possible, to recall past opportunities; and with a measure of satisfaction suggests the idea that, if restored, we should act a very different part.—But, alas! such is the corruption of our nature,