

"The London Tract Society," it is well known, have often manifested a deep interest in the religious welfare of the Colonies, and have repeatedly offered libraries at a greatly reduced price. They now, for instance, I am informed, offer for £9, books intrinsically worth £21. Mr. Melrose in Edinburgh, desirous of the welfare of our people here, offers to be one of three persons who will contribute £3 toward ten libraries, and thereby reduce the amount to be raised by the applicants to £6.

Mr. Sommerville writes to me Mr. Melrose's plan, and asks me to consider the matter, and if ten Churches or Stations are found, he "has no doubt," he says, but persons will be got to cooperate with Mr. Melrose. The number was promptly obtained and forwarded to Edinburgh.

I am, Sir,

R. H. THORNTON.

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## Original Articles.

[FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.]

### UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY.

BY THE REV. DR. FERRIER, CALEDONIA.

Having in former communications traced the origin of the Secession Church and its movements, till the time of its unhappy division in 1747; and having seen the two parties, respectively, constituted into distinct Synods: and having also traced the rise and progress of the Relief Church till its erection into a Synod,—we propose now to take a rapid sketch of the character and actings of each of these denominations during its separate existence. It is of little importance which of the Secession denominations is first considered, as they may be said to have had a simultaneous commencement. But whilst we have no intention to enter into all the details which might be thought necessary in a full narrative, and which have been so well brought out by Dr. McKerrow in his valuable history, we shall imitate the courtesy of that able and respected writer in first tracing the progress of the division opposite to that to which we belonged, but with which we had the happiness of forming a union: and as this is the contrary order to his, it may produce a little variety, and at all events will free us from so close a following of his footsteps, even although the substance of what we may bring forward on both denominations must be extracted chiefly from his pages.

After the unhappy rupture, the brethren who were willing to make the swearing of the Burgess Oath a matter of forbearance, remained for a little in the Church where the Court had assembled, but transacted no particular business. Next day they met for prayer and conference; and before they parted they agreed that a day of humiliation should be observed by all their Congregations, and that they should meet at Stirling, Synodically, in the month of June.

This Associate (or Burgher) Synod accordingly held its first meeting in its separate state on the 16th June, 1747. Mr. James Mair, who had been moderator before the division, opened the meeting with a sermon from Isaiah viii. 17, "I will wait upon the Lord that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him." There were thirteen ministers present; and Mr. Fisher of Glasgow was chosen moderator. Part of the business at this and some subsequent meetings, had a reference to the late division; and to the honour of this department of the Secession, it ought to be mentioned that they manifested an earnest desire for healing the breach that had taken place; and in consequence of a petition from Galloway, they agreed "to use all proper means for procuring peace upon the footing of truth among the Lord's ministers and people whom he had divided in his just displeasure." They also appointed a day of humiliation to be observed, on account of the mournful rupture which had taken place in the Associate Synod.

But the matter of chief importance was the renewal, and following out, now and at subsequent meetings, of an appointment to prepare a catechetical exposition of the Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism. A committee was appointed for this purpose, and the exposition of the whole Catechism was at length completed. But to give it harmony of style, and other finishing strokes, the whole was committed for revision to Mr. Fisher, who, indeed, had the principal hand in its composition, and by whom it was soon brought to that state in which it was published. Since that period it has been commonly designated Fisher's Catechism. It is a most valuable work—presenting to us ac-

curate scriptural illustrations of all the answers in that admirable epitome of divine truth, with which the distinguished Divines of the seventeenth century were enabled, through grace, to enrich the Presbyterian Church.

This part of the Secession being without a Professor of Theology, the Rev. Alexander Moncrieff having gone with the other party, devolved the charge of their students on the Rev. Ebenezer Erskine in the meantime. But as he was far advanced in life, it was considered only a temporary appointment, and the Synod requested his son-in-law, Mr. Fisher, to direct his attention to this subject, with the view of choosing him, in a short time, to undertake this office permanently.

As early as the year 1748, the Burgher Associate Synod had a movement among them to enlarge the Psalmody. We mention the fact as an evidence of their freedom, in some measure, even at this period, from that species of prejudice against singing any thing besides the Psalms of David, which prevailed in the other division of the Secession almost the whole time of its separate existence. It was long before the paraphrases, usually printed along with the metre Psalms in Scotch editions of the Scriptures, were sung in Secession Churches. For these being human composition, it was considered unwarrantable, if not sinful, to use them; and it was thought necessary to confine the exercise of praise to the metre version of the Psalms, which being perhaps as literal as the prose translation, was considered scriptural language. The proposal referred to proceeded indeed on the general principle, that the public praise should be conducted in scriptural expressions. Hence whilst the proposal of an enlargement of the Psalmody was made, it was not intended to introduce hymns and paraphrases, which although expressing nothing but scripture sentiments, were uninspired; but it was to select scripture songs, and set them to music in the same manner as the Psalms are employed.

We have always thought, that if we may pray in our own language, we may also praise God in words of our own, which though not the language of scripture, are found to coincide entirely in sentiment. But in Scotland, among serious persons, it was long and extensively thought that the Book of Psalms was intended by God to be used in the Church, for the exercise of praise, to the exclusion of every thing else. To some extent this opinion prevails still, both in Scotland and in the United States.

The proposal in the Associate Synod seems to have arisen from their knowledge of the poetical genius of the celebrated Ralph Erskine, one of their ministers, who has been extensively known from that period to this as the writer of the Gospel Sonnets. Accordingly, the instructions of Synod were given to this pious and distinguished minister to prepare a translation of scripture songs, exclusive of the Psalms, in the metre commonly used in praise. Mr. Erskine set himself to this work, and so far completed it as to have the whole written in short hand. But his death took place before his productions were transcribed, and although they were afterwards published as part of his works, they were never sanctioned by the Synod, or brought into use in the Church.

At this period, too, the Synod agreed to revive an old practice of what was called privy-censures, which consisted in a minute enquiry as to the manner in which the various religious duties were performed, in order to administer reproof and admonition for neglecting and encouragement to prosecute the path of duty. With this view the different Presbyteries were enjoined to prepare questions to be proposed on such occasions. The Synod at length agreed on fourteen questions to be put to elders, and on no less than twenty-seven to be put to ministers. It is unnecessary to introduce these here, as it would occupy too large a space. But it may be remarked that they are very particular and solemn, and bear directly on those duties, public, private, and secret, which are incumbent on all members of the Church, and especially on office-bearers; and that they were calculated to remind those to whom they were put of the responsibilities they were under to lay themselves out for the glory of God, and the prosperity of his Church. The questions are sufficiently minute and particular. But they serve to exhibit the high standard of christian attainment and practice which was expected in ministers and elders at that period, and which with little exception should be considered as applicable at all times; and they afford some satisfactory evidence of the scriptural purity of church membership in this denomination at this early period. The answer of these, for which we would refer to