

in opposition to Popery, Prelacy, and Erastianism.

In fine, looking upon society as possessed of a permanent identity in the sight of God, and on each succeeding age as bound to implement the unexhausted obligations contracted by national oaths, we believe that the covenants of our ancestors—viz., the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant of the three kingdoms—are still binding, and that by them we, as a nation, are laid under an additional obligation to maintain the principles and cause of the Reformation.

Holding such principles, and anxiously cherishing the hope of a return to the fellowship of the Church of Scotland as the enviable termination of all our separate contentings, it may be easily conceived that we watched, with no ordinary interest, the struggles of the reforming party in the National Church during the whole of their progress, and more especially those of the Church herself which issued in her memorable Disruption from the State of 1843. While unsatisfied with the "Act and Calls," viewed as a settlement of the ecclesiastical question, we made all allowance for the difficulties which stood in the way of its right adjustment, so long as the law of patronage remained in force. With the "Claim, Declaration, and Protest against the encroachments of the Court of Session," emitted in 1842, we cordially acquiesced; and when, in the May of next year, the Moderator and Commissioners of the Church of Scotland met at Canonmills, under their unanswerable protest, and signed their self-denying demission, our Synod, carried forward by deep-felt sympathy with this noble appearance in behalf of the crown rights of our common Lord and Redeemer, were prepared to welcome you as brethren, and by a deputation of their number to recognise in you the genuine representatives of the Church of our fathers. To have recognised that portion of the Church which remained in the legal Establishment as the true Church of Scotland, merely because the courts of law recognised it as such, we felt then, as we feel still, would have been virtually to homologate the Erastianism which ignored the Church of Scotland in her lawfully constituted Assembly, and would have been inconsistent with the whole spirit and principles of our fathers in former days, who always looked to the spiritual element of the truth, and not to the mere legal sanction of the State, as deciding the true character of the Church.

The essential identity of our sentiments on all the leading principles of our profession with those of the evangelical party in the National Church, developed during the struggles preceding the Disruption, was attested by that event in a manner so unequivocal that even then an honourable union was supposed to be practicable, and negoti-

ations for that purpose were attempted by the mutual appointment of committees. As it was understood, however, that overtures were to be brought before the Assembly of the Free Church, urging the propriety of her identifying herself, by some formal declaration, with the Church of the First and Second Reformation, these negotiations were discontinued; and thus, instead of discussing terms of union, which are apt to involve one or other of the parties in ambiguous statements, or in avowed concessions of truth for the sake of peace, time was allowed to the Free Church of Scotland to mature and put on record her convictions as to present truth and duty, leaving it to us to judge when we could consistently accede to her communion. Meanwhile, on every public question connected with the cause of the Reformation, the harmony of our views became more and more apparent. The "Pastoral Address" issued by the General Assembly in 1845, breathed a spirit entirely in unison with our own, and in point of public profession expressed in substance almost everything that we could desire. Many laudable Acts of Assembly have been passed, indicating at once faithful adherence to former attainments, and a desire for further reformation. The missionary efforts and other schemes of the Church, so vigorously sustained, argued her vitality, and pointed her out as "a field which the Lord had blessed." And if any doubt remained as to the principles of the Free Church, these have been removed by the late "Act and Declaration" passed by the last General Assembly, and prefixed to their authorised edition of the standards, the appearance of which we hail chiefly as serving to identify the Free Church with the Church of the First and Second Reformation; on account of its distinct avowal of all the Westminster standards as the standards of the Free Church, and its receiving these, not as done by the old formula of the Established Church, which merely recognised the Confession of Faith, and that as "ratified by law in the year 1690,"—but fully and unreservedly, as they were received by the Church of Scotland in her best and purest times, by virtue of her own authority; and on account of the explicit pledge which it contains, "to prosecute the ends contemplated from the beginning in all the acts and deeds of her reforming fathers, until the errors which they renounced shall have disappeared from the land, and the true system which they upheld shall be universally received."

This, and other Acts of the Free Church, we regard, not as grounds of union, but simply as data, from which we may judge whether the time has come when we may, with honour and consistency, drop our position of secession, and maintain our principles in communion with the Church of Scotland.

After serious and prayerful consideration, we have been led to the conclusion, that