

hath power to call Synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." (Chap. XXIII., Sec. 3.)

It was thought that such language gave the magistrate a power in religious matters which did not belong to his office, which is purely of a civil nature. The subject occasioned general and daily discussion among ministers and people, and it became more and more necessary that it should be taken up by the Supreme Court of the Church.

In 1792 a Committee was appointed to prepare an Act in terms of the Overtures. It appears, however, that nothing was done definitely in this matter for some years afterwards. The Committee seem to have delayed giving in their report from a fear that there might be a great diversity of sentiment on the subject, and that the Synod would not be able, with safety, to bring this cause to a satisfactory issue.

But it happened that two preachers, Messrs. Thomas McCrie, and William McEwan were about to be ordained,—the first at Edinburgh, and the second at Howgate, about this time. Both of these entertained scruples respecting the assent required to the second question of the Formula. The Presbytery of Edinburgh, before which their trials were to be given, and by which they were to be ordained, could not modify the Formula, being a subordinate court; and, therefore, they referred the matter to the Synod, to meet in May, 1796.

It was in consequence of the scruples of the young men just named, that the subject of the magistrate's power in matters of religion was taken up by the Synod with a determination to bring it to some satisfactory bearing. They had already been employed for several years in re-modelling their Testimony to adapt it to the present times; and having spent much of their time on this subject they were led to examine it with new and accurate discrimination, and with the Divine light and blessing were brought to some satisfactory conclusions. This was an eventful period in the General Associate Synod. During eight long years they were occupied in preparing this new exhibition of their principles. The matter was thus conducted with the utmost deliberation, and every endeavour made to preserve peace and unity. The Synod, however, were not all agreed on the changes contemplated, nor did their opinions unanimously harmonize. This was scarcely to be expected. Yet it was wonderful that so much unanimity prevailed, that so very few, comparatively, seemed disposed to stand out for the antiquated sentiments, which had been virtually, and were now to be formally, repudiated. These few, however, were men of weight, and of high respectability. But their minds, it would seem, were misled by the prejudices of education, which, instead of being removed were rather strengthened by the Synodical discussions. Searching into the erudition of earlier times, and enthusiastically full of the doings of the Reformers, they appeared to forget that these great patterns had their infirmities, and were not to be taken in every thing as models for imitation, and that the Scriptures alone are to regulate the constitution and laws of the Christian Church. This was most remarkable in the case of the justly revered and celebrated Dr. McCrie, for whose benefit a modification had been made in the Formula for ordination, that his scruples on the subject of the magistrate's power might be removed. Labouring possibly, as he was in the meantime doing, in preparing his invaluable Life of John Knox, he became enamoured not only with his character and enterprises, but insensibly imbibed some of his intolerant principles. A few years after his ordination he reverted to the exploded ideas of the civil magistrate having power in reference to the church. In this we believe he was perfectly conscientious, and, with becoming candour, he publicly avowed his change of sentiment in a sermon preached by him in 1800, when, having been Moderator, he opened the Synod that year.

The official documents which the Synod were so long re-modelling, consisted of the Narrative and Testimony, with the acknowledgment of sins and duties.