

The erroneous were retained and protected, even while an act was passed which recommended an evangelical strain of preaching; and persecutors, though rejected by the people to whom they were to minister, were zealously supported. While such were the proceedings of the Assembly, of what avail was an enactment 'against the intrusion of ministers into vacant Congregations, and recommendations to Presbyteries concerning settlements, in which it is admitted that such intrusions are in direct opposition to what has been the principle of the Scotch Church since the Reformation,—except to involve that Court deeper in inconsistency and guilt.' (Testimony of the United Secession Church.)

In the mean time, a draught of a Judicial Testimony was prepared, in which the Four Brethren gave a more extended exhibition than formerly of their various grounds of complaint; and of their views, feelings, and designs, in the prosecution of their ministerial labours. The Secession having, originally in testifying against existing and prevailing evils, it was highly proper, that the reasons for this testifying should be exhibited,—that by embodying, in their public documents, the grounds of their past and present conduct, they might stamp upon the very constitution of their Association, the character of a Church witnessing for the truth in opposition to error.

"Having continued waiting, and finding from the conduct of the Assemblies of 1735, and 1736, that instead of reforming, they were going on in their backsliding course, and that truth had gotten a new and deep wound, particularly by the conduct of the said Assembly of 1736, they found themselves at last obliged to emit their Act, Declaration, and Testimony, which bears date at Perth, December 3d, 1736, and which was published in the beginning of the year 1737." (Wilson's Defence.)

In reference to this and similar publications, we have only to remark, in general, that it is in itself most reasonable, and much sanctioned in scripture, that the faithful few should, in times of apostasy, recur, both in their private exercise, and in their exhortations, to periods when religion was more purely professed and practiced. Retrospects of this kind are familiar to the prophets and disciples. In the course of their administrations we find them sometimes taking a view of the history of God's dispensations, which they publicly declared for the benefit of the Church. This has likewise been the practice of reforming churches in all ages posterior to the close of the times of inspiration, and the practice of the Church of Scotland in particular. The fathers of the Secession had therefore precedents the propriety and importance of which will not be called in question, for reviewing the state and progress of religion in their native country.

From the time that the Four Brethren resolved to enter on judicial procedure, they felt themselves at liberty to do what they could for the relief of persons bearing their own stated spheres of labour; and therefore to visit distant parts of the country themselves, as well as to adopt measures for training young men for the holy ministry. With a view to this last object, the Associate Presbytery made choice of Mr. Wilson to be professor of Theology to their infant Church. He, accepting of this office with much christian hesitation, yet with humble dependence on Divine grace, made immediate arrangements for entering on its solemn duties, and signified his intention to give attendance during the months of March, April, and May, 1737, as the first Session, when he should admit students properly attested, and endeavour to conduct their studies by Lectures, Examinations, and the other usual exercises of a Theological course.

Although, as may well be supposed, Mr. Wilson undertook this important charge full of humility, yet he performed its duties with much credit to himself, and with much advantage to the Secession Church. He took for his Text-Book, the well known valuable *Medulla* of Professor Mark of Leyden: and, as was then common, read his lectures, and conducted the whole business of his Class, in the Latin language. Under him, the first preachers licensed by the Associate Presbytery were educated, as Messrs. Gib, Swanston, and others, who all spoke of him with great regard. The Divinity Hall, under Mr. Wilson, was in a short time more numerous attended than any of those conducted by the Professors of Theology in the Scottish Universities, with the exception of Edinburgh.

The conduct of the Four Brethren, in providing the means of Theological, education, and in all the former steps to which we have referred, was prudent and honourable. It was, from first to last, dictated by a conscientious desire for the best interests of religion; and was wisely adapted to the circumstances of their own situation, and of the times. Yet, as might

naturally be expected, their proceedings excited not a little jealousy and opposition,—especially from the National Jurisconsults. These Brethren, and their adherents, were more and more branded as schismatics,—as the instruments of disturbing the harmony of the Church, and exciting divisions and animosities. That they should be thus reproached by their opponents whose unfulfillment they contended, was to be expected from human nature. But it was far easier to make round assertions of such charges, than to give proofs of their truth, and these violent and feeble attempts were soon repelled by Mr. Wilson in his able Defence of Reformation Principles.

In 1737 the Associate Presbytery received the accession of three members, namely, the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Dunfermline, the Rev. Thomas Muir of Orwell, who joined the Four Brethren in February, and the Rev. Thomas Nairne of Abbotshall, who joined them in September following; and in the month of June, 1738, the Rev. James Thomson of Burntisland, also acceded to the Presbytery. The conduct of the Jurisconsults towards men so eminently useful, and so blameless and exemplary as the Four Brethren, and the ultimate progress of the Assembly in their sinful measures, account for these accessions to the Associate Presbytery, and for the increasing strength of the Secession.

"When the Jurisconsults of a Church," said one of these brethren, on acceding to the Presbytery, "are so far infatuated as to thrust out from Church communion both faithful watchmen, because of their faithfulness, and the prater part of her members who cannot go along with the courses of defection, but desire to keep their garments clean, and when the Jurisconsults continue thus to treat multitudes of the Lord's people, who, according to the rules of the Church, stand debarred from Church communion for their non-submission to intrusions, &c.,—as this may be compared to the case of a city or nation thrusting out their chariots and horsemen from among them, even at a time when the enemy is not only entered their borders, but is wasting the country, which is the present case, and as thus sudden ruin and destruction is loudly threatened,—so I reckon it both duty and interest for me to adhere to, and embark with, those who are in this manner thrust out, especially, when they are essaying, under the conduct and influence of the Spirit of the Lord, to lift up a standard for the Lord's cause and truth, and against the enemy that is come in like a flood."

The Assembly of 1738, jealous, probably, of the increase and success of the Secession, passed an Act, condemnatory of the Seceding ministers, and empowering the Commission to serve each of them with a Libel.

In consequence, the Commission, which met in March 1739, put a Libel into the hand of each of the eight brethren of which the Associate Presbytery by this time consisted, "charging their Secession, their publication of the Testimony, their administration of Divine ordinances to people in different parts of the country, without the knowledge or consent of the ministers to whom they belonged, and their licensing one or more to preach the gospel, as high crimes, and citing them to appear before the General Assembly at its ensuing meeting, to answer for their conduct." (Testimony of the United Secession Church.) In the month of May, 1739, therefore, when the Assembly met, they all appeared as a constituted Presbytery at her Bar, and gave in their Declination, in which, exhibiting their grounds of Secession, they disclaim the Assembly's authority over them, and maintain their own independent right, liberty, and determination, in the name of Christ,—to watch over the interests of religion in the land, and to preserve, through Divine aid, the scriptural simplicity, purity, and order of God's House—in defending the doctrine, worship, government, and discipline of the Church of Scotland.

It thus appears, that, for a very considerable time, the cause of the Secession was pending, and the ultimate issue of the process unknown. During the whole of this period, the Brethren felt and recognized their connection with the Assembly. They watched her movements, waited upon her deliberations with the deepest interests, and they were at length summoned to her Bar.

Though the Assembly did not proceed to Depose the ministers of the Associate Presbytery, immediately after the Declination in 1739, yet they expressed their conviction that they merited deposition, and strongly enjoined the next General Assembly to proceed to it, unless the eight brethren should retract, which they declared they scarcely expected. The cause of their delay seems to have been the strong leaning towards the Secession among many of their own members, which, probably, produced