

seinded the Acts of 1730 and 1732, against which these ministers had been testifying; and, at the same time, passed an act empowering the Synod of Perth and Stirling "without further inquiring into the occasions or steps of proceeding, either on the part of the said Brethren, or by the several Judicatories, under whose consideration the case hath been," to restore these brethren to their respective charges, uniting them to the communion of the Established Church: "But with this express direction, that the Synod shall not take upon them to judge of the legality, or formality of the former proceedings of the Church Judicatories in relation to this affair, or either to approve of, or censure the same." But although these proceedings removed some of the grounds of their secession, they did not completely satisfy the four Brethren. In the course of 1737, and 1738, they were joined by Mr. Ralph Erskine, minister at Dumfermline, Mr. Thomas Mair, minister at Orwel, Mr. Thomas Nairn, minister at Abbotshall, and Mr. James Thomson, minister at Burntisland. The separation was at length completed by an act of deposition passed upon those eight ministers by the Assembly in 1740.

Happily for the object of securing a free, faithful, and reforming Assembly who might do justice to the Protest which was left with the Commission in 1733, there were many who, although they concurred with these ministers in condemning the proceedings, and seeking redress of the grievances, of which they complained, and longed for that extent of reformation which they desired, saw it, nevertheless to be their duty to remain in the Established Church. Notwithstanding defects in its civil establishment, its own constitution was sound, its principles were scriptural; and, however arbitrary the proceedings of those who were the prevailing party, they distinguished betwixt the mere majorities of the day, and the Church whose principles and liberties were trampled on by these majorities. They did what they could to stem the tide of evil. Although their hands were weakened by the secession of numbers who concurred with them in principle, they stood to their post, and did sometimes succeed in securing better decisions than would otherwise have been come to. When overborne, they kept their own conscience clear by a consistent protest against the injury which was inflicted on a Church

whose affairs were, so far, entrusted to their administration. A long and dreary period of despotism, it is true, followed the secession, during which many parishes were desolated in consequence of forcing ministers upon reclaiming congregations, vital religion was little cultivated, and the pulpits of the Establishment, in too many cases, seemed to be looked to not so much for the sacred services which should be conducted there, as for the stipends with which they were connected. During all this time, however, the spectacle presented was that of a church whose principles were scriptural, in the hands of a majority who abused their trust and mismanaged her affairs. Men of sound views could still, without inconsistency, and with a good conscience, remain in her communion, even become her ministers, and take part with those who were endeavouring to relieve her from oppression.

At length the dawn of a brighter day appeared. The unsettled state of society towards the close of last century made a heartless and selfish aristocracy tremble. Many of them came to see that it was not the kind of men whom they had hitherto delighted to patronise that could exert an influence for good, or could do much towards averting such horrors as had marked the progress of the French Revolution. In the early part of the present century, also, a more sacred influence seems to have impressed the minds of many of the higher classes in Scotland; so that, having been brought themselves to a relish for the truth as it is in Jesus, they were desirous of improving their influence for the purpose of securing its dispensation in greater purity throughout the parishes of the country. There had been all along a considerable amount of patronage wisely directed, and the Church of Scotland had never been without its witnesses for the truth; but now an improvement in this respect became very evident. The number of able, faithful, and zealous ministers was gradually increased. The Witherspoons, and the Erskines of an earlier period, having been succeeded by the Moncreiffs, the Thomsons, and the Chalmerses of a later day, under their instructions and animated by their example, a band was at length seen emerging, who, in the eventful year 1834, constituted the majority of the General Assembly. Being now the majority, they acted in perfect consistency with the principles which they had all along maintain-