

impiety, profanity, and blasphemy. It is also the duty of civil rulers, and must be their interest, to exert themselves to introduce the gospel into their dominions when it may be but partially enjoyed; and by salutary laws and encouragements to provide them with the means of instruction, and a settled dispensation of ordinances; especially in poor and desolate, or in ignorant and irreligious parts of the country;—all which they may do without propagating Christianity by the sword, or forcing a profession of religion on their subjects by penal laws. When religion has become corrupt, after it has been received and established in a nation, and has degenerated into a system of falsehood, superstition, idolatry, and tyranny, carried on by churchmen, aided by the civil powers; and where various abuses of this kind are interwoven with the civil constitution and administration, —an eminent exercise of civil authority is requisite for the reformation of these; not by the abolition of all laws respecting religion, as a matter which civil government has no concern with, and by leaving every thing to individual exertion or voluntary associations, which would breed anarchy and endless disorder; but by magistrates taking an active part in prosecuting a public reformation, removing external hindrances, correcting public and established abuses, allowing, and in some cases calling together and supporting ecclesiastical assemblies for settling the internal affairs of the church and of religion, ‘that unity and peace may be preserved,’ &c; as was done by the rulers of different countries at the period of the Reformation from Popery, and in Britain at the time of the Westminster Assembly. In an ordinary state of matters, they also judge, that it is the duty of civil rulers to maintain and support the interests of religion, and the Kingdom of Christ, by publicly recognizing and countenancing its institutions, giving the legal sanction to a public profession, or confession of its faith, a particular form of worship and ecclesiastical discipline, which are ratified as national; and by making public and permanent provision for the religious instruction of their subjects and the maintenance of divine ordinances among them. These, with other things of a similar kind, agreeable to the principles of presbyterianism, civil rulers may do in the exercise of their authority, without encroaching upon the office or business of the church and its officer-bearers, without compelling

their subjects to believe or practise what they do not believe or judge sinful, and without punishing persons who may conscientiously dissent from the authorised and established religion, or depriving them of their natural rights on this ground; while at the same time, by using their authority in this way, magistrates do act for the honour of him by whom they rule, for the promotion of religion, the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ, and the public good of their subjects.”

The doctrine which Dr. McCrie thus shortly expounded had been maintained by the Church of Scotland from the days of the Reformation, it formed a pervading element in the National Covenant, and in that Solemn League and Covenant under the obligation of which the Westminster Assembly of Divines carried on their deliberations, it is stated with much accuracy in the Confession of Faith which they agreed upon, and it is a doctrine not merely which the “fathers of the Secession” did not renounce on becoming Seceders, but to which they most stedfastly adhered; and to which they attached great importance. Let the following evidences of this be carefully considered.

1. In 1735, the four brethren who were the original Seceders emitted a statement of Reasons why, after some concessions had been made by the General Assembly 1734, they had not acceded to the judicatories of the established Church. After a full exposition of these reasons, which may be seen in the Re-exhibition of the Testimony, pp. 231-254, and in which there is no objection stated on the ground that the Church enjoyed the countenance of the State, they add, “And, as these are the reasons of our continuing still in Secession from the judicatories of the church; so if the following things were done, our difficulties would be removed out of the way.” Five of the particulars referred to may be considered as ecclesiastical. The sixth, which is the last, has a bearing upon the nation, and is stated in the following terms: 6 to, In regard the just grounds and causes of the Lord’s controversy with this land, have not been particularly acknowledged for many years past, and the lamentable steps of defection and backsliding, which have lately come to a great height, have not been confessed, to the glory of God, by the Commission of the last Assembly, in their grounds of fasting: That therefore, in the grounds of a national fast, for