

Asiatic origin, had risen and decayed; and no doubt, as in all other cases, by the fatal influence of a corrupting and destructive idolatry.—Certainly, there was once a great nation, extending, in that region, from the Pacific to the Atlantic, but it has dwindled down to the untutored red men who roam the forests and prairies, and who now know nothing more than to construct the lodge and frail wigwam. And the Aztec race, (of different) once so famous, with an idolatry that was costly in its service but barbarous in its sacrifices, with an amount of skill in architecture that was great, but, in point of civilisation, could lay no just claim, fell before Cortes, and was utterly grafted by Spanish rule, and destroyed by Spanish cruelty; and the heathen glories forever passed away, and left to conquerors and to ruin the royal palaces of the proud Montezumas. Of all ancient systems, Hinduism alone remains; and in its proud, solitary, idolatrous grandeur, gives its living testimony to the nature of ancient heathenism, and points out to us the very highest state at which mankind can arrive without divine revelation; and teaches us the lesson that human reason is, of itself, insufficient, and that it requires to be enlightened by celestial rays, and conscience and conduct corrected and directed by the teaching of God, before there can be truth in religion, soundness in philosophy, and virtue, happiness, prosperity, and stability in the social state.

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UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY.

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That the Four Brethren were unwilling to return to the *Judicatories* of the Establishment will never be supposed by persons acquainted with their character and the circumstances in which they were placed. One fact alone is sufficient to prove this. It is, that not only did they give their reasons why they would not accede on the terms proposed by the Assembly of 1731; but they added certain proposals, the adoption of which by the Supreme Court, would remove their difficulties, and give them freedom to return. Of these the following is the substance:—

1. "That a seasonable warning be emitted against the infidelity and gross errors prevailing among us at the present day.

2. That the censures inflicted on the Four Brethren be rescinded, and all that has followed thereupon be declared null and void in itself, and that all ministers of this Church be enjoined to give faithful warning and testimony against the prevailing corruptions of the times.

3. That it be declared that ministers shall be allowed to dispense sealing ordinances to all such as have had ministers intruded upon them contrary to the Word of God, and the rules of this Church founded thereupon, and who have not freedom to submit to the ministry of such, or to receive the ordinances of Christ from their hands, provided they be sufficiently attested, as to their Christian life and conversation.

4. That it be declared and enacted, that in all time coming, no minister shall be settled in any vacant congregation, without the call and consent of the majority of that Congregation, who are admitted to full communion with the Church, in all her sealing ordinances; and that there be no preferences of voices in this matter, upon the account of any worldly consideration.

5. That in the licensing and ordaining men to the holy ministry, all Presbyteries be strictly enjoined, not only to enquire into their literature, but also their acquaintance with the power of godliness, and the work of the Spirit upon their own souls; and that they admit none to trials but such as are known to be of sound principles, of good report, and of sober, grave, prudent, and pious behaviour.

And 6. That there be an acknowledgement of the great guilt of this land in having gone on in such a course of backsliding, contrary to the Word of God, and the obligations these lands are under to promote reformation."

"If these things are done," say they, "we might have the comfortable prospect of a pleasant and desirable unity and harmony with our brethren, in concurring with them, according to our weak measure, in all other necessary steps towards a further reformation."

What the Assembly had as yet done was utterly insufficient and nugatory, and seems to have been only the result of fear and policy. There

were no real concessions made, and there seemed to be no sincerity in the alleged conciliatory Acts which were passed. There was no evidence of effective determination to check the current of corruption, and to address themselves to the work of substantial reformation. This Assembly of 1731, was far indeed from being that free, faithful, and reforming General Assembly, to which the Four Brethren had appealed.

Had there been nothing to keep the ejected brethren in a state of separation from the Establishment but the sentences of the Commission, it would have been their duty to return wherever these were reversed by the Synod of Perth and Stirling, which, invested with the Assembly's power, restored them to the exercise of their office, and to their respective ministerial charges. But the sentence loosing them was no ground of their Secession. They were maintaining a Secession for certain great ends, and they were surely entitled to ascertain that their ends were gained before they discontinued it, otherwise they would have condemned their own contumacious conduct against the defections of the Church.

On the whole, it was most providential, that, seeing the snare, for such it may be called, which this Assembly laid for them, they did not fall into it, but, disinterestedly, rejected the insidious proposals. If they had returned to the *Judicatories*, all the blessed consequences of their honorable struggles would have been lost. They would have put themselves again in the power of the prevailing party, under whose rapidly increasing influence all the good effects of their endeavours to be faithful would have been soon defaced, and, in all probability, Scotland, though under a Protestant, and even a Presbyterian name, would, in the present day, have borne much resemblance to those unhappy countries, on the continent of Europe, where religious tyranny bears away, and where almost all the grand essentials of our religion have disappeared. Many among the most candid of those who were opposed to the Secession, have not failed to acknowledge, that its influence has been variously and widely beneficial among themselves. It is undeniable, that, in the hands of Providence, it has been a grand instrument for preserving the incorrupt administration, and for extensively disseminating the knowledge of pure christianity.

Even although this Assembly had done something substantial in reformation, it would have been a question of prudence, how far it would be proper to ascertain, by a little experience, whether, from the fluctuation of measures incident to a Court continually changing its members, any scriptural enactments would be practically pursued.

In the meantime the Four Brethren resolved to limit their ministrations to their own spheres, and to associate chiefly for religious exercises. Their resolution will appear the more disinterested and honorable, when we mention, that they had many solacements to extend their operations, and that from the state of religion in the country, no opportunity could have been better, had they been disposed to use it, for the speedy formation of a large and flourishing Church of their own. Indeed, in a far shorter time than they could have provided preachers and ministers, they might have spread their influence, as they have since done, over the whole land, and gained a sure footing in all its most populous and important districts.

Disappointed by the result of the Assembly of 1731, but still willing to encourage hope, the Associate Presbytery waited patiently till the Assembly of 1735. But this Assembly justified all their caution, discovered the insufficiency of the Deeds of the former, and proved that the prevailing evils were overlooked or encouraged as before, and that there was no real tendency to reformation. Instead of even pretending to remove the obstacles to their return, this Assembly put new obstacles in their way, and almost destroyed the expectation which had been before excited.

Before they would proceed to act judiciously, the Associated Brethren even waited till after the meeting of 1736. The proceedings of this Assembly, however, were still worse than those of the former. It would now have been unreasonable to expect the Brethren to wait longer.—Thus, as we read in the Testimony of the United Secession Church.—There is abundant evidence that they were afraid of taking any precipitate step; that they abandoned, most reluctantly the hope of exercising their ministry in that Church in which they had been educated and ordained—waiting patiently, for years, before they proceeded to act fully in a judicious capacity; and that they conducted themselves throughout, with a dignified consistency and with a scrupulous regard to Presbyterian order.

These two Assemblies confirmed all the grounds of the Secession.—