

but in a sublimer sense than he intended, "Hail holy light." Once more, while we judge it reasonable, and therefore imperative, humbly and reverentially to bow to whatever reason leads us to believe is divine authority, we altogether abjure the dictation of human masters—Fathers, Councils, Synods, or Assemblies. Adoption of their Confessions and Formulas is justifiable only so far as our judgment and conscience tell us that these are founded on, and agreeable to, the word of God. We desire to imitate the dignified example of a Prelate of the Church of England, (who was no Puritan) of whom it is related, that, when presiding as Professor of Divinity in the Schools at Cambridge, during the Theological Disputations, as often as any appeal was made on either side, to tradition or to any uninspired author, however ancient or admired, he was wont to lay his hand on the Bible, and emphatically say, "Ecce liber!"

(To be continued.)

## Original Articles.

[FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.]

### UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY.

BY THE REV. DR. FERRIER, CALEDONIA.

It cannot be expected, in the sketch of history which we have been endeavouring to prosecute, regarding the rise and progress of our Church, that every thing of importance and interest can be noticed. We refer to the excellent history of Dr. McKerraw, for minute and accurate details on almost every occurrence connected with the Secession; and to the valuable history of the Relief Church, by Dr. Struthers. We contemplate only an outline of proceedings and events, which may be considered as more prominent. We omit referring to the intercourse which was held with the celebrated Mr. Whitefield, on his visits to Scotland in 1741 and 1742, and to the extraordinary effects of his ministrations, especially in the Parish of Cambuslang, because, although the views of some of the Associate brethren were rather uncharitable, yet they afterwards expressed regret at having cherished them. We may safely say that whatever they said or did in that matter, arose from the peculiarity of the times, and from the corruptions against which they were called to testify, which made them jealous of all who could not exactly see as they did, and not from any bitterness of spirit, or want of Christian forbearance with faithful ministers of other denominations.

Yet it must be acknowledged, that the Associate Presbytery were disposed to be exclusive, and that they carried some of their peculiar views to an unnecessary extent. They were sufficiently severe on godly ministers who remained in the Established Church, not considering but this might be wisely permitted by God to serve important purposes; they were rather rigid in enacting, what could never be practised, that joining in the Bond for renewing the Covenants, should be a term not only of ministerial, but of Christian communion; and they were, perhaps, lifted up with something of spiritual pride at the great success which had attended their movement, and the prospects of growing extent and influence. They were not all at one on every matter of ecclesiastical procedure, and from the beginning, there were shades of difference among them, and especially a party in the Association who would have been satisfied to stand on the Revolution settlement, and another party who were desirous to make advances in reformation. All of them were good men, and willing to see every abuse rectified, and their Church reduced to the perfect model of the word of God. But some conceived that this might be attained by gentler and less sweeping means, whilst others were bold and uncompromising, and felt it their duty to persist in diligent and unceasing effort to conform, in everything, to the apostolic model. It was at first more the difference of natural temperament and disposition, than the actual difference in deliberate sentiment that, in this manner, led on to a two-fold party in the Associate Presbytery.—Slight alienation of feeling, arising from unimportant incidents, is said to have made this almost invisible line of demarcation still more apparent. But it was years before the elements, which were already working, burst forth, as they at length did, into open strife and division.

These are things which, to do justice to our narrative, cannot be passed over in silence; and they will fall to be noticed, although we must avoid everything like detail, as we proceed.

When the Act concerning the doctrine of Grace, was finally passed, in October, 1742, an Overture was introduced into the Associate Presbytery, for taking steps to renew the solemn Covenants of the nation. For at that time these Covenants were considered as binding on posterity, and the renewal of them as a duty to be practised "in a way and manner agreeable to the situation and circumstances of the period."

This Overture met with the approbation of all the brethren present, with the exception of Mr. Thomas Nairn, of Abbotshall, who dissented from certain expressions employed in it, declaring that his sentiments were the same as those of the old dissenters, or Covenanters. The expressions to which he objected, were the following:—

"We desire to be humbled for the dangerous extreme that some have gone into of impugning the present civil authority over these nations, and subjection thereto in lawful commands, on account of the want of those qualifications which magistrates ought to have, according to the word of God and our Covenants, even though they allow us in the free exercise of religion, and are not manifestly unbinding the liberties of the kingdom,—an opinion and practice contrary to the plain tenor of Scripture and to the known principles of this Church, in her Confession and Covenants, and of all other Reformed Churches; and that some few carry their zeal against the defections and evils of the times to the dangerous extreme of espousing principles in favour of propagating religion by offensive arms, quite contrary to that disposition which ought to be in all the professed followers of Christ, who came not to destroy men's lives but to save them."

Mr. Nairn's dissent from this paragraph, and the consequent proceedings of the Presbytery in regard to it, occasioned a delay in advancing to the solemn work of renewing the Covenants, which was contemplated. When his declaration of dissent was first made, the Presbytery persuaded him to delay entering it till next meeting, when, if his sentiments remained unchanged, he would have an opportunity of doing so. At next meeting, in December following, Mr. Nairn again brought his dissent before the Court, and, after endeavouring in vain to remove his objections, it was received. But the consideration thereof was deferred till a subsequent meeting at Edinburgh, in February, 1743. Here the matter was again introduced, by other two members, namely, Messrs. Moncrieff and Campbell, who objected, although on different grounds, to the same paragraph being retained in the acknowledgment of sins, as to them it appeared that the cognizance of civil affairs did not belong to a Church Court, and as the Presbytery had already declared, that it was not proper to swear civil allegiance in an oath, imposed only by the Church: besides as the sinfulness of opposing the civil magistrate in his just rights, was confessed in the acknowledgment of sins upon which the Bond reduplicated, this would be equivalent to a blending of civil and ecclesiastical matters in the oath of God.

In compliance with the suggestion of these brethren, the paragraph was withdrawn from the acknowledgment of sins; to be the subject of a separate Act. The views of these two last named brethren seem to have involved the acknowledged principles of our own times, on the power of the civil magistrate—entire separation of civil and ecclesiastical matters—disunion of Church and State.

But notwithstanding the change in the position of the sentiments expressed in the paragraph, Mr. Nairn persisted in his dissent; and, therefore, as in the opinion of the Presbytery, he held views subversive of civil magistracy, they felt themselves shut up to proceed against him according to the rules of the Church, unless he were prepared to retract.

When this was stated to him, he desired it to be noted that his opinions, on the points at issue, as he had before intimated, were the same as those of the old dissenters or Covenanters, and that he disclaimed those of the Presbytery; and when, on this statement being still made, he found that his brethren were resolved that he should either retract his anti-government principles, or be subjected to the censures of the Church, he dissented from the Presbytery in a written document and withdrew.—The Presbytery immediately appointed answers to be drawn up to Mr. Nairn's Reasons of Dissent.

Now, as these answers have ever been regarded as forming a valuable document, and as their value has been much enhanced in our own day, as they are sufficient to silence the calumny of those officious opponents of our Church, who would wish the public to believe that we have