

The Commission immediately appointed a Committee to converse with the brethren, with a view to induce them to retract. They knew that this was unnecessary, as the men they had dealt with were too conscientious to make any compromise, where the interests of truth and religion appeared to be so much at stake. But they adopted the proposal, probably, to shelter themselves, in some measure, from being accused of haste or harshness in the step to which they were now likely to proceed, or perhaps to satisfy a minority of their number who were friendly to the Four Brethren, and insisted on this course. When the Committee returned, the report, as was expected, was that they had not succeeded. The Four Brethren were then asked, *If they had obeyed the sentence of the Commission, in August last, suspending them from the exercise of their ministry?* To this they all replied that *They had not*, but had, in terms of their own protestation at the last meeting of the Commission, regarded the sentence of suspension as *null and void*, and had been all along exercising the various parts of their ministry as if no such sentence had been passed.

To this meeting of the Commission many communications, in the way of petition and remonstrance, in favour of the Four Brethren, were sent; and some of these were strongly condemnatory of the Commission's former proceedings. These communications were supported by a considerable minority in the Commission, who insisted for delay, and on the vote being put, *Proceed or Delay*, it was found that the same number voted on each side. This was another of those minute circumstances on which great events are often seen pending. The crisis was near. The casting vote of the Moderator, Mr. John Goudie, of Edinburgh, turned the scale. He took upon himself the serious responsibility of saying, "Proceed to the higher censure."

But now that the last step in this climax of ecclesiastical tyranny was about to be taken, even the head-strong members of the Commission seemed to stagger, and, as if to prevent a show of leniency before they proceeded, they appointed another Committee to retire with the Four Brethren, and, if possible, to persuade them to alter their course, and submit to the authority of the Church. But these brethren were not to be flattered or deceived by the most plausible representations, and thus induced to yield their consciences to the exercise of human authority, which they knew to be opposed to the glory of the Church's Head, and the purity and progress of evangelical truth. The Committee had to report, as on former occasions, that the brethren continued of the same mind: and the Commission were shut up by their own rash decision, to proceed with their higher censure. The vote was now put—*Loose these ministers from their charges, or Depose them simpliciter*. The former carried by a great majority, and, therefore, as the sentence runs—The "Commission did, and hereby do, loose the relation of Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, minister at Stirling, Mr. William Wilson, minister at Perth, Mr. Alexander Moncrieff, minister at Abernethy, and Mr. James Fisher, minister at Kinclaven, to their respective charges; and do hereby declare them no longer ministers of this Church; and do hereby prohibit all ministers of this Church to employ them, or any of them, in any ministerial function. And the Commission do hereby declare the Churches of the said Mr. Erskine, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Moncrieff, and Mr. Fisher, vacant from and after the date of this sentence; and appoint that letters from the Moderator, and extracts of this sentence, be sent to the several Presbyteries within whose bounds the said ministers have had their charges, appointing them as they are hereby appointed, to cause intimate this sentence in the foresaid several Churches, now declared vacant, any time betwixt the 1st of January next; and also that notice of this sentence be sent, by letters from the Moderator of this Commission, to the Magistrates of Perth and Stirling, to the Sheriff-Principal of Perth, and Bailie of the regality of Abernethy." And the Commission further agreed to declare that, "In case the said Mr. Ebenezer Erskine, Mr. Wilson, Mr. Moncrieff, and Mr. Fisher, shall behave themselves dutifully and submissively to this sentence, and shall make application to the meeting of the Commission, in March next, and give satisfaction to them, the Commission will then recommend them for favour to the next General Assembly."

"Such," says Dr. McKerrow, the Historian of the Secession, "was the sentence which the Commission recorded in their journal—a sentence which would not have disgraced the Star Chamber, or the High Court of Commission, when in the zenith of their power."

Against this sentence the worthy Mr. Gabriel Wilson, of Maxton, entered a Protest, to which Messrs. Ralph Erskine, Thomas Mair, John McLaren, John Currie, James Wardlaw, and Thomas Nairn, ministers, adhered. The following is its tenour:—

"EDINBURGH, November-16th, 1733.

"I, Mr. Gabriel Wilson, minister at Maxton, in mine own name, and in name of all those that shall adhere to me, protest against this sentence of the Commission, in the case of the Four Brethren, and that it may be lawful for me to complain of the said sentence, and of the several acts of Assembly that have occasioned the same, to any subsequent Assembly of the Church of Scotland. As also, that it may be lawful for me, in a becoming manner, on all proper occasions, to bear testimony against the same, with all other defections and severities of this Church in her sentences; and finally, that I may, in the mean time, as Providence I shall find opportunity, hold ministerial communion with my said dear brethren, as if no such sentence had been passed against them. Upon all which I take instruments in the Clerk's hands.

GABRIEL WILSON."

When, after this eventful decision, the Four Brethren were called in, that the sentence might be intimated to them, they read a Document, which they left in the Clerk's hands, that it might be engrossed in the minutes, which, however, was not done. But, as this Document is invaluable, as stating their formal Secession from the Church of Scotland, it is necessary to give it a place here. It is as follows:—

"EDINBURGH, November-16th, 1733.

"We do hereby adhere to the protestations formerly entered before this Court, both at their last meeting in August, and when we appeared first before this meeting. And further, we do protest, in our own name, and in the name of all and every one in our respective congregations adhering to us, that, notwithstanding of this sentence passed against us, our pastoral relation shall be held and reputed firm and valid. And likewise we do protest that, notwithstanding of our being cast out from ministerial communion with the Established Church of Scotland, we still hold communion with all and every one who desire, with us, to adhere to the principles of the true Presbyterian Covenanted Church of Scotland, in her doctrine, worship, government, and discipline; and particularly with every one who is groaning under the evils, and who are afflicted with the grievances we have been complaining of—who are, in their several spheres, wrestling against the same. But in regard the prevailing party in this Established Church, who have now cast us out from ministerial communion with them, are carrying on a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles, and, particularly, are suppressing ministerial freedom and faithfulness in testifying against the present backslidings of the Church, and inflicting censures upon ministers for witnessing, by protestations, and otherwise, against the same:—Therefore we do, for these and many other weighty reasons, to be laid open in due time, Protest that we are obliged to make a Secession from them, and that we can have no ministerial communion with them, till they see their sins and mistakes, and amend them. And, in like manner, we do protest, that it shall be lawful for us to exercise the Keys of Doctrine, Discipline, and Government, according to the Word of God, and Confession of Faith, and the principles and constitutions of the Church of Scotland, as if no such censure had been passed upon us: Upon all which we take instruments. And we hereby appeal unto the first free, faithful, and reforming General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.

Ebenezer Erskine,
William Wilson,
Alexander Moncrieff,
James Fisher."

(To be continued.)

[FOR THE CANADIAN PRESBYTERIAN MAGAZINE.]

CREDIBILITY OF THE GOSPEL HISTORY.

The sceptics of the present age are an entirely different race from the coarse-minded infidels of the preceding. One class maintains that the Bible is a Revelation from God, in the same sense that all intellectual proficiency and practical improvements, &c. gifts of divine providence; that Christ was one of the best and wisest of men, possessing peculiar genius, and an elevation of soul far above his age and nation. They