

especially when it was likely to gain in public estimation, or to expose the defects of other Churches. The Established Church would not be silent when it saw multitudes in various places, withdrawing from its communion in consequence of the vigorous exercise of Patronage, against which this new denomination raised its testimony. Dissenting denominations were jealous of the Relief movement as a rival to themselves, not perceiving or allowing that there was a medium between the Establishment and themselves which this new denomination might supply. The peculiar principles of some of these dissenting denominations, as hinted before, were too stringent for many in the Established Church, who notwithstanding were opposed to the corruptions in that Church, and who, under any new burst of oppression, especially by the violent settlement of ministers, were ready to embrace the new opening which was presented. The binding obligation of the National covenant on posterity, was, at this period, especially by the Reformed Presbytery and the Antiburgher Synod, considered as an essential term of communion. This subject, indeed, was then a very common topic both of public and private discussion, and probably too much importance was attached to it. The anecdote has been told of a minister who, in examining a candidate for sealing ordinances, asked, among other questions, How many covenants are there? To this he received the answer, that there were three. The minister reproved the supposed ignorance of the man, informing him there were but two—the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace. The Churchman said he knew that, but that he referred, in addition, to the covenant that his minister so often preached about—the covenant of our ancestors, binding on their posterity. The Relief Church went to the other extreme, and did not trouble themselves about such peculiarities—attending, we trust, as they professed, to “the mightier matters of the law.” They entirely rejected the binding obligation of the National covenant and solemn league. This so directly aroused the prejudices of many Godly people, that it would scarcely be thought they would meet with no opposition. This question can now be discussed without angry words, and the true nature of these covenants determined. The United Secession came, we think, to a correct view, by considering themselves under high obligations to God for sustaining our reforming ancestors in their honorable, faithful, and efficient struggles for Christian liberty and Gospel truth. The covenants of our ancestors they considered as binding, so far as the doctrines and duties they contain are Scriptural; but binding not from the oaths of our ancestors, which, we think, could only bind themselves, but by the direct authority of God. Perhaps the Relief Church made rather light of the vows and exertions of the Reformers, and in some instances of which we have heard, were ready to expose them to ridicule. Still, we believe, they were not insensible of the vast benefits to evangelical religion resulting from both what are called the first and the second reformation in Scotland.

But it was chiefly the principle of Free Communion, avowed by the Relief Church, that alarmed some other denominations. This was considered a latitudinarian principle, the practice of which would destroy the line of demarcation between the Church and the world: and would set aside the pure and salutary discipline of the Christian Church. The decision of the Synod on this subject gave rise to much speculation, and to much ill-founded censure and misrepresentation. “This decision,” says Dr. Struthers, “unanimously and deliberately come to, and so entirely different from the modern principles of the Church of Scotland, the two branches of the Secession, and the Cameronians, was kindling the torch of war among all the religious professors of the land. By many of the adherents of the Relief it was gloried in as the dawning of a better day for the torn and bleeding Church of Christ; but by others, and particularly by other religious denominations, it was considered as subversive of all Church order, and as impiously relieving men from those sacred national vows and covenants which were binding upon them. Hold communion with Episcopalists and Independents! These were the very parties against.