SECEDERS, a numerous body of Presbyterians, who have withdrawn from the communion of the Established Church in Scotland.

In order that the causes from which the Secession origi­nated may be clearly understood, we shall introduce an account of that important event by a brief sketch of the previous history of the Scottish church.

James I. after his accession to the English throne, enter­tained an ardent desire to form the Church of Scotland as much as possible upon the model of that in England ; and his son Charles, with the assistance of Archbishop Laud, endeavoured to carry the design into execution, by esta­blishing canons for ecclesiastical discipline, and introducing a liturgy into the public service of the church. Great num­bers of the clergy and laity of all ranks took the alarm at what they justly considered as a bold and dangerous inno­vation ; and after frequent applications to the throne, they at last obtained the royal proclamation for a free parliament and General Assembly. The Assembly met in 1688, and began their labours with a repeal of all the acts of the six preceding parliaments, which had favoured the introduction of Episcopacy. They condemned the liturgy, together with every branch of the hierarchy. They cited all the Scottish bishops to their bar, and after having excommunicated nine of them, and deposed five from their episcopal office, they restored kirk-sessions, presbyteries, and synods, provincial as » ell as national. These proceedings were ratified by the parliament which met in 1640. The law of patronage, how­ever, was in full force for several years after this period ; but great care was taken that no minister should be obtruded on the people contrary to their inclination ; and in 1649 pa­tronage was abolished altogether, as an oppressive grievance.

The restoration of Charles II. in 1660, produced a total change in the state of ecclesiastical affairs in Scotland. All that the General Assembly had done from 1688 to 1650 was rendered null and void ; the covenants were pronounced to be unlawful, Episcopacy was restored, and the king was declared to be the supreme head of the church in all matters civil and ecclesiastical. During this period, under the sway of Lauderdale and his associates, the Presbyterians were not only subjected to tines, imprisonment, and exile, but num­bers of them were publicly executed, for their adherence

to their political and religious principles.

At the memorable era of the Revolution, the affairs of the church underwent a complete change. The first parlia­ment which met after that event abolished prelacy and the king’s supremacy in ecclesiastical affairs. They ratified the Westminster Confession of Faith, together with the Pres­byterian form of church government and discipline, “ as agreeable to the word of God, and most conducive to the advancement of true piety and godliness, and the establish­ment of peace and tranquillity within these realms.” That same parliament abolished patronage, and vested the elec­tion of ministers in the heritors and elders, with the con­sent of the congregation.

At the first General Assembly held after the Revolution, a most conciliatory spirit was manifested, and a wide door of admission into the national church was opened to the episcopal ministers, on the most lenient terms. Great mul­titudes of the conforming clergy were thus induced, for the sake of the benefice, to transfer their respect and obedience from the bishop to the presbytery, and were received into ministerial communion on merely acknowledging “ that the church government, as now settled by law, is the only government of this church.” The admission of these time­servers into the church laid the foundation of those mea­sures which ultimately led to the secession.@@1

In the reign of Queen Anne, the true Protestant religion was ratified and established, together with the Presbyterian

form of church government and discipline ; and the unalter­able continuance of both was declared to be an essential condition of the union of the two kingdoms in all time com­ing. In 1712, the law respecting patronage was revived, in resentment, it has been said, of that warm attachment which the Church of Scotland discovered to the family of Hanover ; and about the same period the imposition by the government, of the oath of abjuration, was a fertile source of discord and strife, both among ministers and people. This oath was regarded with great jealousy, and was peculiarly obnoxious to the Presbyterian clergy, both because its avowed design was the security of the Church of England, and because it seemed to imply an approbation of dio­cesan Episcopacy, with the ceremonies of that church, and a recognition of the queen’s supremacy in matters of reli­gion. About a third part of the clergy, including the foun­ders of the Secession Church, positively refused to swear this offensive oath ; though they were enjoined to do so on pain of ejection from their churches, and of paying an exor­bitant fine. A train of events which followed in rapid suc­cession soon made it manifest that the dominant party in the Scottish church were, if not hostile, at least indifferent, to the most important doctrines of religion, and ready to sacrifice the liberties of tire people at the shrine of civil au­thority. This charge was proved beyond the possibility of contradiction, by their conduct towards the presbytery of Auchterarder in the year 1717, with regard to what has since been denominated the Auchterarder Creed, by their vindictive proceedings against the twelve minsters known by the name of “ Marrow Men,” who endeavoured to check the progress of error by the diffusion of sound doctrine, along with their condemnation of the doctrines of the book entitled the Marrow of Modern Divinity, in the years 1720-21, and especially by the leniency of their dealings with Professor Simpson of Glasgow, who, though found guilty of teaching a system of deism rather than Christian theology, in his prelections to the students of divinity, re­ceived no higher censure than simple suspension.

For some time after the revival of patronage in 1712, the severity of the law was greatly mitigated by the general dis­inclination, on the part both of ministers and patrons, to avail themselves of its provisions in opposition to the feelings of the people ; but this state of things was speedily changed. After the lapse of a few years, patrons no longer hesitated to avail themselves of their legal rights, and ministers were no longer disinclined to accept of presentations when given contrary to the wishes of the congregation. But on the part of the people acts of resistance became more frequent and more obstinate, though they were almost uniformly unsuccessful ; for the ruling party among the clergy were firm in their resolution that the law of patronage should be carried into effect. They found themselves, however, placed in circumstances of peculiar difficulty ; for not only were the people loud in their remonstrances against violent settle­ments, but a considerable party of the ministers themselves espoused the popular side, and not only strenuously op­posed the intrusion of ministers upon congregations, but obstinately refused to carry into effect the decisions of the Assembly. To obviate this difficulty, in 1729 they ap­pointed a committee of their own number to meet and or­dain the obnoxious presentee ; and for a period of twenty years this expedient was resorted to in cases where the presbytery proved refractory. The excitement of the people, and their resistance to the yoke of patronage, continued to increase ; violent settlements prevailed in every part of the country ; and in some cases the popular feeling was so strong, that it was deemed necessary to employ an armed force to carry into effect the decisions of the church-courts. At the meeting of the Assembly in 1730, there were no

@@@1 For a description of their character, see Burnet, vol. i. p. 158, folio edition.