flourishing condition that, in the year 1741, it was attended by a greater number of students than any of the Scottish universities except Edinburgh.@@1

The numbers of the seceding ministers continuing ra­pidly to increase, a new arrangement was adopted on the 11th of October 1744, by which they were formed into three presbyteries, under one synod. The first meeting of the Associate Synod was held at Stirling on the first Tues­day of March 1745, at which period it had under its inspec­tion about thirty settled congregations and sixteen vacan­cies in Scotland, besides several congregations in Ireland. The Seceders, in common with the great body of the reli­gious Presbyterians in Scotland, both clergy and laity, enter­tained great veneration for the national covenants ; and as the practice of public covenanting had, for a considerable period, been neglected in Scotland, they expected that the revival of it would have a powerful effect in advancing the work of reformation. An overture to this purpose had been deliberately prepared by a committee of presbytery, which, after various amendments and enlargements, was finally adopted by the presbytery at Stirling, on the 23d of De­cember 1743. And on the 28th of the same month, which was observed as a day of solemn fasting and humiliation, the confession of sins was read, and the engagement to duties subscribed by fifteen ministers, in the presence of a numerous assembly. And when the presbytery met at Edinburgh, on the 14th of February 1744, they enacted that the renewing of the covenant should be the term of ministerial and Christian communion. An unhappy con­troversy now, however, arose respecting the religious clause of some burgess-oaths, which, it was alleged, was utterly inconsistent with the oath of the covenants and with the Secession Testimony.@@2 One party insisted that no Seceder should be allowed to swear this oath, while the other urged the exercise of mutual forbearance. So sharp was the con­tention between them, that at the meeting of synod in April 1747, after several long and stormy discussions, an entire se­paration took place between the contending parties. Never, perhaps, was the truth of Father Paul’s remark more strik­ingly verified, “ In verbal contentions, the smallness of the difference often nourishes the obstinacy of the parties.” Those who condemned the swearing of the burgess oath as sinful, and inconsistent with the Secession Testimony, were called “ Antiburghers,” and the other party, who con­tended that it should be declared not to be a term of com­munion, were designated “ Burghers.” The latter made various attempts to bring about a reconciliation with the opposing party, by proposing a meeting for prayer and friendly conference, but without success. And the “ An­tiburghers” not only refused to agree to the proposal, but, after several previous steps, went the length of passing sentence ofdeposition and excommunication, with all due formality, on Messrs Ebenezer and Ralph Erskine, James Fisher, and the other ministers who had adopted the op­posite views respecting the swearing of the burgees oath. Each party claimed to itself the name and lawful constitu­tion of the Associate Synod; but, for the sake of distinc­tion. the Burghers were termed the Associate, and the An­tiburghers the General Associate Synod. A furious con­troversy raged between them for a number of years, and, both from the pulpit and the press, the one party indulged in invectives against the other. In the course of time, how­ever, this hostility subsided ; a feeling of cordiality gra­dually gained ground ; and, after a separation of nearly eighty years, the two bodies were again united into one.

These divisions among the Seceders afforded an excel­lent opportunity to the dominant party in the national church to have regained their lost influence with the people ; but, instead of availing themselves of it to check the progress of the Secession, they only became more re­solute in enforcing the law of patronage. The doctrine which they taught at this time in their pulpits, it has been said, “ could neither be called Christian nor heathen, but was a compound of both and all petitions for the re­dress of grievances, and all resistance to their arbitrary de­crees, were silenced by the strong arm of power. “ The language of the majority in Assemblies at this time,” says the late Sir Henry Moncrieff,@@3 “ universally was, that the secession from the church, instead of increasing, was on the decline, and that the superior character and talents of the established clergy were gradually weakening its re­sources, and would ultimately exhaust them. Experience has not verified these sanguine expectations. At the dis­tance of a few years after Dr Robertson retired, the people, disgusted with unsuccessful processes before the Assembly, relinquished the plan of their predecessors, and came seldom to the Assembly with appeals from the sen­tences of the inferior courts appointing the settlement of presentees whom they resisted. But they began to do more quietly, or with less observation than formerly, what was not less unfriendly to the establishment. In ordinary cases, they now leave the church-courts to execute their sentences without opposition, and set themselves imme­diately to rear a meeting-house, which very frequently carries off a large portion of the inhabitants of the parish.” This state of comparative quiescence was not, however, produced without long and severe struggles ; and for many years the disputes in the church-courts respecting the set­tlements of ministers were incessant. In the year 1751, an unpopular minister having been presented to the church and parish of Inverkeithing, the presbytery of Dunferm­line refused to proceed with his settlement, and the synod of Fife, who were next appointed to ordain him, proved equally refractory. The affair was brought before the As­sembly of 1752, and they peremptorily enjoined the presby­tery of Dunfermline to proceed with the ordination of the presentee, and ordered all the members of presbytery to attend on that occasion. Six ministers who absented them­selves from conscientious scruples were brought to the bar of the Assembly. One of their number, Mr Thomas Gil­lespie, minister of Carnock, was immediately deposed, and three others were afterwards suspended. Mr Gillespie, notwithstanding this sentence, continued to discharge his ministerial duties, and a few years afterwards he and Mr Thomas Boston of Oxnam and Mr Collier formed them­selves into a presbytery, and became the founders of that numerous and respectable body of dissenters entitled the Synod of Relief.

When such proceedings were systematically carried on in the courts of the Established Church, it is not to be wondered at that the spirit of disaffection should continue to spread among its members, and that the numbers of the Seceders rapidly increased, in spite of the strife that pre­vailed among themselves at this period. Not only did the Associate Synods steadily extend their influence in Scot­land by the accessions which they were constantly making to the number of their adherents, but they sent preachers to England, to Ireland, and even to America, and erected a considerable number of Secession congregations in these countries. The controversy respecting the burgess-oath

@@@, Letter from Mr R. Erskine to Mr Whitefield, dated the 10th of April 1741. .

@@@’ The following is the clause referred to: “I protest before God and your Lordships, that I profess and allow with my heart the true

religion presently professed within this realm, and authorized by the laws thereof; and I shall abide thereat, and defend the same, to my life's end, renouncing the Roman religion called papistry.”

@@@’ Appendix to Life of Dr Erskine, by Sir H. Moncrieff Wellwood, Bart., p. 464.