

The Reformation in Scotland

Period I: The First Reformation, 1526-1596

Scotland received at an early date, and widely welcomed, the great truths and principles of the Reformation. In the providence of God several circumstances had contributed to this happy result.

There was, first of all, the encouragement given both by King and Bishops to the best Scottish students to visit Paris, Cambridge and Oxford, and that, too, at a time when Wycliffe was teaching, and Lollardy was triumphant, in the last-named University. Those students, in many instances, came back to Scotland enthusiastic advocates of the new doctrines, and Lollardy in consequence spread fast throughout the country.

There was, in the second place, the fruitful work constantly carried on by godly merchants and travellers, who, at the gravest personal risk, brought into Scotland the writings not only of Wycliffe but of Huss and Jerome as well.

There was, further, the deplorable condition of the Romish Church itself which by its sanguinary spirit and the shameless profligacy of its clergy had largely forfeited the people's confidence and inclined men's hearts to those who were proclaiming the way of salvation.

Of those who at this period were called on to suffer in the cause of Christ, the first recorded name is that of James Resby, an Englishman, who laid down his life in 1407. In 1433, Paul Craw, a Bohemian, was convicted of heresy, 'for denying any

change to be made in the substance of bread and wine at the Lord's Supper, auricular confession to priests, and prayer to saints departed'. As he stood at the stake, 'they put a ball of brass in his mouth that the people might not understand his just defence against their unjust condemnation'. Again, in 1494, at the instance of the Archbishop of Glasgow, a number of persons from Ayrshire were brought before King James IV, and his Council because they condemned and rejected some of the main errors of the Church of Rome. These Ayrshire witnesses are known to the earlier historians as the Lollards or Bible-men of Kyle.

But the first of the Scottish Reformers to win the nation's ear and to make on the popular mind a widespread and enduring impression, was undoubtedly Patrick Hamilton. He was a youth of noble rank, being a cousin of the reigning sovereign. In 1526, with a view to obtaining a fuller knowledge of the doctrines of the Reformation, he had visited Wittenberg, where he was honoured with the friendship of Luther and Melancthon. His heart now aflame with zeal for God and love for his fellow-countrymen, he soon returned to Scotland. At once all eyes were turned on him. The boldness and success with which he defended the truth, exposed the errors of the Romish Church, attacked the scandalous lives of the clergy, and denounced the Pope as Anti-Christ, excited immediate and general astonishment. His high rank, his noble

character, his engaging manners added weight to his words. Rome became alarmed.

On the last day of February, 1528, by order of Archbishop Beaton, the fearless youth, now only in his twenty-fourth year, was brought to trial on a charge of heresy, hastily condemned, and on the same day hurried off to the stake. But his death at St. Andrews was not in vain. His reek was said to have infected all it blew upon. And the banner which he had so bravely unfurled in Scotland, was never again suffered to fall.

Next in the glorious succession of Christ's faithful witnesses stands the name of George Wishart. He was a man whom learning, piety and devoted zeal had specially qualified for prosecuting successfully the work of the Reformation. His labours throughout a great part of Scotland were singularly acknowledged by God in bringing light and salvation to multitudes. Through his instrumentality several persons of rank and influence came openly to espouse the Protestant cause. But his ministry in Scotland was tragically brief. He had returned from his English banishment in 1544. On the 1st March, 1546, through the treachery and cruelty of Cardinal Beaton, nephew of Archbishop Beaton, he, too, went to the stake and passed on to glory in a chariot of fire.

By this time the doctrines of the

Reformation had spread widely on the Continent, and increasing numbers of Scotchmen, going there in the interests of learning or trade, came to realise the true character of the Romish superstition, and returned to Scotland bringing with them numerous copies of Tyndale's New Testament as well as the writings of the Reformers. In this way the truth began rapidly to advance amongst the people. The state of religion in Scotland was also greatly influenced by the partial Reformation effected in England under Henry VIII. Then, again, the state of political parties in Scotland at this time was over-ruled by God for the protection and promotion of the Reformation. It had been the policy of James V. to restrain and degrade the nobility of Scotland, and to lean for support on the wealth and influence of the Romish clergy. The highest offices of State were frequently filled by Churchmen. The jealousy and resentment of the nobles were in consequence strongly excited against a body of men whose greedy and grasping ambition was the more detestable for being clothed in the garb of religion. Thus was averted the most formidable danger to which the Reformation in Scotland could have been exposed, namely, a cordial understanding between the King, the nobility and the clergy.

The year 1542 is for ever memorable in the history of Scotland. It was then that the Scottish Parliament, at the instance of Robert, Lord Maxwell, and in opposition to

the Cardinal and Bishops, enacted that 'it is lawful for the lieges to read the Bible in the vulgar tongue'. The effect was marvellous. Copies of the Scriptures, hitherto kept concealed and read in secret places, were now, as Knox says, to be seen lying on every gentleman's table; and the New Testament was borne about in almost every person's hands.

Nor was the persecution in England during the five years' reign of Bloody Mary without beneficial influence on the Reformation in Scotland. Bloody Mary had made England Protestant. And now, by compelling large numbers of Protestants, and, among them, several devoted ministers, to flee for safety to Scotland, she gave an additional impulse to the spread of Gospel truth in that land. Thus the wrath of man was made to praise God.

But of all the agencies used by God in forwarding the Scottish Reformation, a foremost place must be given to the life and labours of John Knox. He was a burning and a shining light, whose extraordinary qualifications would have rendered him conspicuous in any age or country, but specially fitted him to meet the needs of the perilous days in which he lived.

Born near Haddington in 1505, ordained a priest of Rome in 1542, he first became known to the people of Scotland in 1547, when, girt with sword, he followed

everywhere the gentle Wishart as a faithful friend and protector. On Wishart's death, and after the assassination of Cardinal Beaton, he had joined the party that stormed and held the Castle of St. Andrews. Captured by the French, he had spent nineteen months a slave in the galleys. On his release at the request of Edward VI, he had gone straight to England, where his eloquence, zeal and matchless courage soon brought him to the front. On the accession of Bloody Mary, he was forced to retire to the Continent, where he remained till 1555.

His visit to Scotland in that year was most opportune. The cause of the Reformation had begun to languish. Arran, the Regent, for years a professing Protestant, had made defection to the side of Rome. Persecution against the friends of truth was proceeding vigorously. Many who were fully convinced of the horrible corruption of the Church of Rome were nevertheless afraid to forsake her fellowship. Then Knox's voice was heard. His powerful preaching awoke the multitude. His heroic spirit everywhere infused life and courage into the friends of the Reformation. His wisdom served to guide the counsels of the Protestants to measures the most suitable and important.

Despite the bitter opposition of the ruling powers the cause of truth now made marvellous progress. A great part of the nation, including many of the nobility,

openly embraced the Reformation. The friends of truth began to form themselves into fellowship societies for mutual edification. Soon congregations sprang up in various parts, making open profession of the Reformed religion, and having the Sacraments dispensed according to Scriptural order. Even some of the priests of Rome became obedient to the Faith, and were subsequently honoured to promote the cause they had previously sought to destroy.

Amongst this last named class, a special place belongs to the aged and venerable Walter Mill. He had been accused of heresy in the days of Cardinal Beaton, but, escaping at that time from the murderous persecutor's hands, he had continued preaching publicly and privately in different quarters of the Kingdom. On the 28th April, 1558, at the age of eighty-two, he was condemned to death at St. Andrews, and burnt to ashes at the stake.

The crime was a blunder on the part of Rome. The public conscience was horrified and shocked. Men turned away in disgust and detestation from the doctrines of Popery, and began to lend a willing ear to the teachings of Protestantism. Mary of Guise, the mother of Mary Queen of Scots, being now Queen-Regent, did her utmost to stem the flowing tide of the Reformation. Her sinister efforts were all in vain. And the unexpected return of Knox from Geneva, in 1559, greatly contributed to the success of the

Reformers and to the entire overthrow of the Papacy in Scotland.

Agreeably to the teaching of Scripture and to the practice of the ancient Waldenses and other Protestant Churches, the Scottish Reformers, even at this early period, frequently entered into religious covenants. This step they took as a means of defence against the Papacy, and in order to unite the Protestants in a firm and holy brotherhood.

The first of these is known as the Dun Covenant. It was sworn by Knox and the gentlemen of Mearns in the year 1556. There, in the house of John Erskine of Dun, they made profession of the Reformed religion by sitting down at the Lord's Table, and entered into a solemn Bond in which they 'refused all society with idolatry and bound themselves to the uttermost of their power to maintain the true preaching of the Evangel of Jesus Christ, as God should offer unto them preachers and opportunity'.

The Godly Band, the original of which is still preserved in the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities, was sworn at Edinburgh in 1557. Its avowed object was 'that everyone should be the more assured of other'. In it the Covenanters, for the first time, describe the Romish Church as the Synagogue of Satan, and the Reformed Church as the Congregation of Christ. The Perth Covenant was sworn on May 31st, 1559; the Stirling Covenant,

on 1st August, 1559; and the Leith Covenant, on 27th April, 1560. In all these Bonds or Covenants the Reformers promise that they will maintain and set forward 'with their bodies, goods and friends' the true liberty of Christ's Gospel.

The year 1560 is long to be remembered in Scotland. In that year the French Army, which had been brought into Scotland to crush the Reformation, was, with the help of England, driven out, and a free Parliament was called. By order of Parliament the authority of the Roman Pontiff was renounced, Popery was abolished, and the Scotch Confession of Faith, prepared by Knox, Spottiswood, Willock, Row, Douglas and Winram, was adopted and engrossed in the Acts of Parliament.

Towards the close of the same year was held the first meeting of the General Assembly of the Reformed Church of Scotland. It consisted of forty-two members, of whom six were ministers. By it was approved that remarkable document which subsequently became known as the First Book of Discipline, and which contains the earliest Form of Church Government in Scotland. It provides for the government of the Church by Kirk-Sessions, Synods and General Assemblies. It recognises ministers, teachers, elders, deacons, superintendents and readers as the Church's proper office-bearers. From beginning to end it is inspired by the ideas of John Calvin. The First Book of Discipline

was subscribed by the majority of the Privy Council. It was signed by a large number of the nobles and burgesses. It met with the hearty approval of the great body of the people. And therefore, though it never obtained the sanction of Parliament, it is entitled to be regarded as the true expression of the national will.

The Reformed Church of 1560, while containing much that is admirable and in closest harmony with Scripture, was not wholly without defects. Some of these were due to the peculiar circumstances of the times. The use of superintendents and readers was avowedly a temporary expedient, and was discontinued when an adequate supply of qualified ministers was obtained. Patronage was not abolished, though, all along, the Scottish Reformers exerted themselves to escape that yoke, and boldly asserted the right of the Christian people to choose their own pastors. All through the reign of James VI, the Scottish Reformed Church had its free and Scriptural development powerfully opposed by the crooked policy of a wayward Monarch, who in his heart greatly preferred Episcopacy, as being more favourable to his own arbitrary and despotic claims.

Nevertheless the work of the Reformation still continued to make progress. The government and order of the Church was brought into still fuller conformity to Scripture, and that, too, at a time when the Reformers had to struggle against the

hostile designs of the King's Court. In 1578, the Second Book of Discipline, which had been prepared with great care, was ordered to be printed for criticism and correction, and, three years later, was accepted by the Assembly, and ordered to be engrossed among its Acts. In this Second Book of Discipline it is clearly laid down that God the Father hath appointed Christ to be the sole Head of the Church and of the State; that the Bible is the final Court of Appeal for the truth; that Presbyters are the only pastors divinely sanctioned; and that civil government is an authority founded on the law of God's Word. Strange to say, in this noble document mention is nowhere made of the Presbytery, a Church Court established and universally recognised the previous year.

In the year 1581 there was taken what may well be regarded as the most memorable step in the progress of the First Reformation. This was the adoption of the Covenant, variously known as 'The King's Confession', 'The Negative Confession', but more generally as 'The First National Covenant of Scotland'. It had been drawn up, at the King's desire, by John Craig, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. The strenuous efforts, made at this time to revive the cause of Popery and to restore to the Scottish throne the imprisoned Mary, Queen of Scots, furnished the occasion for this important measure. The First National Covenant was the nation's solemn protest against

Popery. Its aim was also to unite the people of Scotland in the maintenance and defence of the Reformed faith. All who subscribed it pledged themselves to 'continue in obedience to the doctrine and discipline of the Church, as now settled'.

On 28th January, 1581, the National Covenant was sworn and subscribed by King James and his household. It was subsequently ratified by the General Assembly. In the beginning of the following year it was taken and subscribed with great enthusiasm by persons of all ranks throughout the Kingdom. And in the year 1590, in grateful acknowledgment of the Divine protection so signally enjoyed, it was again, by a new ordinance of Council and at the desire of the General Assembly, sworn and subscribed by all sorts of persons within the Scottish realm.

But the battle for spiritual liberty in Scotland was not yet entirely won. King James VI, was at heart essentially a despot. He hated Presbyterianism, and endeavoured in various ways to undermine and destroy it. He frequently intruded in the exclusive domain of the Church. For a time he succeeded in foisting a mongrel species of Bishop on the Church. But his malign activities were met by the stout and unflinching opposition of bold and faithful servants of God, such as Andrew Melville. Nor was that opposition in vain. In the year 1592 the Church had its liberties, privileges and immunities guaranteed by the King and

Parliament. The leading provisions of The Second Book of Discipline were approved and sanctioned. The Church's right to hold its various Courts was solemnly ratified. This Act, which sanctioned the Church's independent jurisdiction, has been termed the Charter of Presbyterianism; and the period itself has usually been described as the 'Meridian of the First Reformation'. Not all the articles of this Act of 1592 comment themselves to us. Still the enactment of such a measure by men hitherto largely hostile to the Church, is evidence of the resolute spirit of the Scottish Reformers, and of God's blessing on their noble contendings.

The year 1596 deserves to be specially remembered in the history of the Reformed Church of Scotland. At the General Assembly, which met that year in Edinburgh, upwards of four hundred ministers, with elders and also a few eminent Scotsmen, devoted an entire day to prayer, to confession of sin, and to mutual exhortations. They concluded the solemn service by lifting up their right hands and renewing their Covenant with God, 'protesting to walk more warily in their ways, and to be more diligent in their charges'. By order of Assembly, this same work was repeated in the different Synods, Presbyteries and Congregations of the Church, with many marks of God's presence and blessing.

Reviewing the history of the First Reformation in Scotland, we gratefully

acknowledge the goodness of God in raising up so many eminent witnesses to the truth, in baffling and defeating the plots of cunning and unscrupulous enemies, and in delivering the Scottish nation, in so short a time, from Popish darkness and oppression. We gratefully acknowledge the high degree of Scriptural purity in doctrine, worship, and government, to which the Reformed Church of Scotland early attained. 'They took not their pattern', says Row, 'from any kirk in the world; no, not from Geneva itself: but, laying God's Word before them, made reformation according thereunto, both in doctrine and in discipline'. We gratefully acknowledge the special care taken by the Scottish Reformers to have settled in the Church a Scriptural system of discipline to be administered by the Courts of the Church, without the intrusive interference of the civil power. We gratefully acknowledge the wisdom of the Scottish Reformers in their binding up of Scriptural attainments in Church and State by means of solemn Covenants. Such covenanting has again and again proved an effective means of resisting the enemy and of transmitting the truth to future generations. And, finally, we acknowledge with gratitude the anxiety shown by the Reformed Church of Scotland for the godly upbringing of youth, for the efficient training of candidates for the ministry, and for the superintendence of all schools and colleges by the ministers and Courts of the Church. All this was productive of the

happiest effects. Agreeably to the exhortation of the prophet, the gates were opened, that the righteous nation that kept the truth might enter in. And thus were ministers and people the better prepared for the great work of advancing Christ's cause, and for the great trials and sufferings to be endured in its defence.

Period II: Between the First and Second Reformation, 1596-1638

The Reformation in Scotland, during its earlier stages, had been virulently opposed by the Popish Church, aided by a Popish government. In later years it had been forced to struggle against the subtle and ensnaring measures of a professedly Protestant King and government. Yet, thus far, the Reformed Church of Scotland had been, on the whole, singularly successful. By the blessing of God she had proved stronger than her enemies.

But from this point a change becomes observable. A period of progressive decline now sets in. And, for the next forty years, the Church of Scotland is seen to surrender more and more her spiritual independence before the ruthless menaces of a despotic Sovereign.

King James VI, while in Scotland, had frequently indicated his determination to rule as an absolute monarch. He held that it is the prerogative of kings to dictate to their subjects in matters of religion, and to mould the Church according to the

royal will and pleasure. He had given unequivocal proofs of his strong partiality for Episcopacy, as being much more agreeable to his own arbitrary maxims of civil government, as well as much more acceptable to the people of England, whose Sovereign he hoped soon to be. When, in 1603, he ascended the throne of England as James I, and became more intimately associated with the English Bishops, he avowed, as his belief, that Episcopacy was essential to the safety of Monarchy, and became more determined in his efforts to force it on the Church of Scotland.

Partly by craft, and partly by violence towards the faithful ministers of the Church, James attempted to overthrow Scottish Presbyterianism, and to fashion the Church of Scotland after the English model. The freedom of the General Assembly was invaded. Meetings of that Court were, in the most arbitrary manner, summoned, adjourned and dissolved, by royal proclamation. Several of its most distinguished members were imprisoned, and some were driven into banishment. And, when the Assembly was at length permitted to meet, the utmost care was taken that it should consist only of such members as were most likely to sanction the measures proposed by the King. Yet even in these circumstances, it was only with the greatest difficulty that the Assembly was induced to adopt the royal proposals.

Other measures of aggression speedily followed. High Commission Courts, with large, undefined and unconstitutional powers, were, in 1610, set up under the presidency of the Archbishops of St. Andrews and Glasgow. These Courts, though composed of clerical and lay members, soon developed into tribunals absolutely controlled by the Bishops. They were mainly employed in harassing, suspending, deposing and banishing those ministers whose zeal and faithfulness had incurred the displeasure of the Monarch. By such means, and by a lavish distribution of the 'King's gold angel-pieces' amongst its members, the General Assembly, which met in Glasgow in 1610, was brought to accept the authority of the Bishops and to admit them as constant Moderators in the Presbyteries and Synods of the Church.

At length, in 1618, at a meeting of the Assembly, held in Perth and consisting chiefly of members chosen at the dictation of the King, a number of measures, of the King's own devising, were forcibly carried - not, however, without the determined opposition of a considerable minority. These measures introduced a few of the English Church ceremonies, namely, (a) kneeling at the Lord's Supper; (b) private Baptism; (c) private Communion; (d) the observance of holy days; and (e) Confirmation.

The Perth Articles were afterwards ratified by Parliament, but not without a

formidable opposition. Though evidently intended to further the entire overthrow of the Presbyterian Church as established in Scotland, they were hurriedly adopted by men who had been solemnly pledged to maintain and defend the purity of that Church. The day on which these articles were approved by Parliament - Saturday, 4th August, 1621, a day sadly memorable, 'black with man's guilt and with the frowns of heaven' - has been commonly known as Black Saturday.

The Articles of Perth were, at the King's command, enforced with rigour. For refusing to comply with them, or for refusing to acknowledge the lawfulness of the Perth Assembly, several excellent ministers were subjected to great hardships, and not a few were driven into exile.

Reviewing now the history of the Church of Scotland during these sad and testing years, we gratefully record that while many of her ministers from cowardly and interested motives at once assented to all the King's Prelatical innovations, not a few remained loyal to their Covenant engagements, and, in vindication of the great principles of the Scottish Reformation, cheerfully endured imprisonment, banishment and other penal inflictions. We gratefully record that amongst the people of Scotland were to be found large numbers willing and eager to support those faithful ministers in their Scriptural testimonies and earnest

contendings on behalf of the Church's rights and liberties. Meeting frequently for prayer, and oft times uniting in the observance of seasons of fasting and humiliation, those men and women of the Covenant cultivated a holy fellowship, and encouraged each other to hold fast by former Scriptural attainments and patiently wait for the expected deliverance.

Period III: The Second Reformation, 1638-1649

Section 1: Steps of Preparation in Scotland

The signal deliverance, obtained by the Church of Scotland at this memorable juncture, was brought about in a manner most unexpected and surprising.

Superstition and tyranny had seemed everywhere triumphant. The friends of truth had been sorely tried. Many had been driven almost to despair. Just then the great change appeared. The plots of enemies singularly miscarried. The power of the oppressor was broken. The night of anguish was ended. And throughout Scotland might be seen a great revival of pure and undefiled religion - a revival that speedily extended its benign influence to England and the North of Ireland.

In bringing about the Second Reformation in Scotland the Lord's faithful servants, even in the midst of intolerable sufferings, had been greatly used. For such work they

had been prepared both by the trials they had endured and by the habit they had been led to cultivate of prayerfully waiting on God.

Large numbers of godly people throughout the country had, all along, manifested the strongest aversion to the intolerance and the corrupt ministrations of the Prelates. They still adhered with intelligent conviction to the great principles so clearly laid down at the First Reformation. And when denied other means of redressing the evils inflicted by Prelacy and arbitrary power, they had recourse, all the more, to united fasting and prayer. To announce a public congregational fast, without the sanction of the Bishops, would have been punished as a crime. It was the practice, therefore, of a number of the ministers to give private intimation to those in their congregations most distinguished for piety and public spirit, requesting them to join in special seasons of fasting and prayer on behalf of the Church. Such seasons were observed once a quarter, or more frequently as occasion required; and, under the blessing of God, were used to sustain and strengthen the witnessing spirit of the Church.

There were also ministers who, like Blair, Livingstone and Samuel Rutherford, had been expelled from their pulpits and forcibly separated from their flocks. But though banished, they could not be silenced. Wherever they went, they prevailingly pleaded with men, and joined

importunately in the prayers which the afflicted Church was offering up for deliverance. The cry was heard; and 'by terrible things in righteousness' God gave answer.

Charles I and his counsellors had long cherished the design of destroying every vestige of Presbyterianism in Scotland, and of bringing the Scottish Church into the closest conformity with the Church of England. At the same time, the measures, pursued by Laud, seemed to indicate a no less vehement desire to bring both Churches into the closest conformity with Rome. The success which had attended the efforts of Laud and Strafford to crush the liberties of the Irish Protestant Church, greatly emboldened the King to adopt a similar line of policy towards the Church of Scotland. A Book of Ecclesiastical Canons was authorised for printing in May, 1635; and a Prayer Book, which had long been under consideration, was completed and received the royal sanction on 20th December, 1636, being published in April, 1637.

The Canons at once overturned the whole ecclesiastical structure of the Church of Scotland, classed Sessions and Presbyteries among unlawful conventicles, exalted to the highest pitch the royal supremacy, made the Bishops the sole judges in all ecclesiastic causes, and prescribed the severest penalties for all who should decline to use the Prayer Book, or allege that anything contained in

it was unscriptural, superstitious or unlawful. The Prayer Book which Charles now tried to force on Scotland, was, in general, an imitation of the English Prayer Book, save that in some important particulars, such as prayers for the dead, it came nearer the Roman Breviary.

The imposition of these innovations by royal proclamation, without reference either to Church or Parliament, speedily around the spirit of the nation. Those who had all along protested against the corruptions that had been brought in, were joined by many who had hitherto submitted to the yoke of a modified Episcopacy, but were now aroused from their apathy by measures plainly subversive of the religion and liberties of the Kingdom. At first, only a few ministers had openly complained of these outrageous Prelatical innovations and had requested the Privy Council to delay the introduction of the Liturgy. Their request went unheeded. The King and the Bishops were inexorable. Strict conformity was to be immediately enforced. The announcement sounded to Scotland like a trumpet-call to arms.

Sabbath, the 23rd July, 1637, is a day ever memorable in the history of Scotland. On that day, in the Church of St. Giles, Edinburgh, the new Liturgy was for the first time to be used. The Dean, attired in surplice, had ascended the pulpit, and had begun to read out of the Liturgy the service of the day. Suddenly

was heard the angry, strident voice of Jenny Geddes, 'Villain, dost thou say mass at my lug?' and seizing the stool on which she had been sitting, she flung it with bold determination at the Dean's head.

Instantly all was confusion. The mangled service was brought to a speedy end. The people felt it to be a solemn alternative - to resist their King, or to disobey their God. They believed themselves bound by duty to God, by love to the Church, and by their regard for posterity, to refuse to bow their necks to a yoke so grievous. And, when the attempt was made to drag some of the ministers into the High Commission Court for refusing to use the Liturgy in their churches, the spirit of the nation was at length aroused to stern and determined resistance.

The conduct of the Scottish people at this time deserves to be put on record. There was no resort to violence or bloodshed. There was no attempt to retaliate even on the Bishops who for years had oppressed the Church and banished her most distinguished ministers. All was done in a calm, and strictly constitutional way. Of the multitudes that had assembled in Edinburgh for the vindication of their liberties and Covenanted privileges, a Committee was formed, consisting of four noblemen, four gentlemen, four burgesses and four ministers, sitting respectively in four separate rooms in the Parliament House, and known in history as The Four Tables. By petition and remonstrance, sometimes addressed to the Government

at home, and sometimes transmitted to London, this Committee sought the removal of the many evils of which they complained. Their efforts in that direction were all in vain. Meetings to petition were prohibited as illegal, and declared to be conspiracies against the public peace. It was then The Tables resolved, after earnest prayer and deliberation, to follow in the steps of their fathers and renew the National Covenant.

Section 2: The National Covenant of 1638

This venerable Deed consists of three parts. The first is the original Covenant, just as it was framed and sworn in 1581. The second, prepared by Archibald Johnston, afterwards Lord Warriston, is a considerable section specifying the various Acts of Parliament made in favour of the Reformation, and proving conclusively that the measures adopted by the Covenanters in vindication of their religion and liberties were strictly legal and constitutional. The third part, which was drawn up by Alexander Henderson, is an additional Bond specially adapted to the circumstances of the time. In this part the Covenanters say, 'We promise and swear by the great Name of the Lord our God to continue in the profession and obedience of the true religion; and that we shall defend the same, and resist all those contrary errors and corruptions, according to our vocation, and to the uttermost of that power that God hath put in our hands, all the days of our life'. They

further declare, 'We shall, to the uttermost of our power, stand to the defence of our Sovereign, the King, in the defence and preservation of the foresaid true religion, liberties and laws of the Kingdom'. And with regard to the Covenant, now renewed, they solemnly avow, 'The present and succeeding generations in this land are bound to keep the foresaid national oath and subscription inviolate'.

The National Covenant, in this form, was read and sworn at Greyfriars' Church, Edinburgh, on the 28th February, 1638. On the next day, it was again publicly read, and was subscribed by thousands amid scenes of extraordinary joy and solemnity. Copies of it were soon afterwards sent into every part of Scotland. Almost everywhere it was received with feelings of reverence and joy. Before the end of April there were few parishes throughout the Kingdom, excepting some areas in the Highlands, where it had not been signed by nearly all of competent age and character. None by the Papists and a few adherents of the Bishops resisted. Thus, in the truest sense, the Covenant was National.

The renewal of the Covenant proved a great blessing to Scotland. The ministers were stirred up to an uncommon degree of faithfulness and earnestness in preaching the Gospel and in rebuking sin. A remarkable revival of religion became manifest throughout the Church. The

covenanters, feeling strong in their sacred union and in their firm conviction that the cause of the Covenant was the cause of God, successfully resisted every attempt made by the King to divide or intimidate them. With admirable decision and unanimity they persisted in their demands for a free and full General Assembly to redress the grievances of the Church, and for a meeting of Parliament to correct disorders in the State. To both these demands the King was eventually forced to yield but not till he had by a course of shuffling and deceitful negotiations forfeited the confidence of the nation.

The General Assembly which met in Glasgow on 21st November, 1638, was, on many accounts, one of the most memorable in the history of the Church of Scotland. The whole Kingdom awaited its decisions with intense anxiety. The abuses of forty years required to be swept away. Alexander Henderson was chosen Moderator. For several days the King's Commissioner, the Marquis of Hamilton, sat with the Assembly. His frequent efforts to embarrass its proceedings proving entirely futile, he attempted summarily to dissolve the Court just as it was about to enter on the trial of the Bishops. But, notwithstanding the departure of the Commissioner and a proclamation of the following day prohibiting all further proceedings under pain of treason, the Assembly, encouraged and animated by its Moderator, boldly set forward to the work on hand.

The Five Articles of Perth were condemned. So also were the Service Book, the Book of Canons and the Book of Ordination. The High Commission Court, the civil places and powers of Churchmen, and even Episcopacy itself were condemned and rejected as contrary to the Word of God and as renounced in the National Covenant. The Bishops were put on trial. They were all convicted of usurping an office which the Church of Scotland had utterly renounced as 'without warrant or foundation in the Word of God'. Against some of them charges of gross error in doctrine and of scandalous immorality were fully established. The greater part of them were deposed from the ministry; several were excommunicated; on others, censures were inflicted. The late renewal of the Covenant was approved of. The Presbyterian form of Church government was completely restored. The intrinsic right of the Church to meet in her General Assembly was asserted. Besides these measures, a number of valuable Acts were passed for securing the rights of Church Courts, preserving order and discipline, promoting education, preventing the intrusion of ministers on reluctant congregations, and carrying on the work of reformation so happily begun.

The enemies of the Covenant were furious; but their power for mischief was small. On two occasions an army was brought down from England to crush the Covenanters and effect the restoration of

Prelacy and arbitrary power. These efforts ended in failure; and what had been done in the Assembly of 1638 was fully confirmed by subsequent Assemblies, subscribed by the King's Commissioner, and, in 1640, ratified by Parliament. In the following year, Parliament again met, and, in the King's presence and with his concurrence, approved of the National Covenant and of a bond of obedience to the Acts passed in 1640. Furthermore, an Oath embodying the substance of the Covenant was to be required of each Member before taking his seat in Parliament.

The King, as soon became apparent, acted throughout with duplicity and perfidy, and with an eye to his own political advantage. None the less, the Lord's hand was seen forwarding and guiding the great and blessed national revolution. The galling yoke of Prelacy and Erastian supremacy was broken. Arbitrary power was for the time being dethroned. Many exiled ministers were recalled. The ordinances of religion were faithfully and regularly dispensed. And, by the blessing of the Spirit, very many were awakened, converted and established in the truth. The Prelates and their supporters were struck with dismay. To those oppressors of the Church of Scotland so appalling did all this appear that Spottiswood, Archbishop of St. Andrews, exclaimed in despair, 'Now all that we have done these thirty years past is thrown down at once'.

Section 3: Troubles in England and Ireland - The Westminster Assembly

In England, meanwhile, things were hastening towards a crisis. The King's tyranny and misrule both in Church and State had at length grown intolerable. The dearest rights of Englishmen were being daily flouted and trampled on. Redress was nowhere to be found. The Courts of Justice had become the ready instrument of arbitrary power. Resistance to the Royal will was there regarded as the gravest of crimes. In the High Commission Court and in the Star Chamber - unconstitutional tribunals from which there was no appeal - men of the highest character and most ancient name were repeatedly sentenced to fines, imprisonment, maiming and mutilation. It was their offence, that they had listened to the voice of conscience, and had chosen to obey God rather than men.

Such was the position of public affairs when, in November, 1640, the Long Parliament met by royal summons at Westminster. It had been called by the King, as a last resort, to help him out of his sore difficulties with the Scots. But, from the outset, its mood was suspicious and angry. There were grievances to be redressed. There were criminals to be brought to justice. There was a Church that needed drastic purging. Straightway it set to work. The Star Chamber and the High Commission Court were swept away. Puritans, mutilated in body and confined

in remote dungeons, were at once released. Laud, the persecuting Primate, was flung into the Tower, Stafford, the ruthless oppressor of Presbyterian Ulster, at last abandoned by his Sovereign, was sent to the block. Bishops were expelled from the House of Lords, and their power to oppress the people was at once ended.

Whilst Parliament was thus splendidly vindicating the blood-bought rights of Englishmen, messages of the most disquieting and alarming character arrived from Ireland. The whole country was said to be in rebellion. Now Ireland, since the days of the Plantation, had been in a state of chronic insurrection. At the time of the Plantation the large estates of the Ulster Chieftains, convicted of treason, had been forfeited to the English Crown and put in the possession of thousands of English and Scottish immigrants. The new settlers were, in point of intelligence, thrift and industry, immensely superior to the native Irish. But, none the less, their occupation of the best lands constituted a grievance - the more so, as they were Protestants. Whilst the English arm was strong in Ireland, scarcely a murmur was to be heard. But, once that arm was withdrawn, and England was seen to be itself rent and distracted by the quarrel between King and Parliament, all of a sudden the smothered rage of the Irish broke forth in deeds of terrible vengeance. The natives rose against the colonists. To the war of race was added a war of religion. Scenes of savage ferocity and indescribable

brutality desolated Ulster, and spread to the neighbouring Provinces. And, as the war continued, the horror grew.

Protestants, in large numbers, without distinction of age or sex, were foully done to death, Romish priests taking a leading part in some of the worst atrocities.

In England, the effect was terrible beyond description. The bitterest invectives of the Puritans against the Papacy seemed now more than justified. At once the English Court became an object of suspicion. The Queen, a French Romanist, was known to wield a sinister ascendancy in the highest Council of the State. The King was therefore to be distrusted, and means were to be adopted to abridge his royal prerogative. War was now inevitable. In August, 1642, the sword was at length drawn by Charles against his Parliament.

During the course of the great Civil War, the Long Parliament, wherever its authority extended, introduced many wholesome and far-reaching reforms. Popish rites, recently obtruded on the Church, were henceforth forbidden. Immoral and scandalous ministers were ejected, and their pulpits, in some cases, assigned to ministers who had been silenced by the Bishops for non-conformity. Public observance of the Sabbath was strictly enforced. Prelacy was declared to be 'offensive and burdensome to the Kingdom, and a great impediment to reformation'. It was explicitly avowed to be Parliament's determination to

establish such a government in the Church as should be 'most agreeable to God's Holy Word', and best calculated to bring the Church of England into 'a nearer conformity with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed Churches abroad'.

For the better effecting of this design, Parliament resolved to convene 'an Assembly of learned, godly, and judicious Divines to consult and advise of such matters and things as should be proposed unto them by both or either of the Houses of Parliament, and to give their advice and counsel therein, when required'. It was provided that this Assembly should consist of one hundred and twenty-one Divines, with ten Lords and twenty Commoners who should act as assessors, and should have equal rights of debating and voting with the Divines. The Church of Scotland was invited to send Commissioners. It complied, and was represented in the Assembly by four ministers, namely Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie and George Gillespie, and by two Ruling Elders, namely, Maitland and Warriston.

The Assembly met at Westminster on July 1st, 1643, and continued its sessions till February 22nd, 1649. It was not a Church Court. It was invested with no ecclesiastic authority. It was simply a Council summoned by the English Parliament, at the express desire of many of God's people throughout the land, to give advice and guidance to the Civil Authorities in

promoting unity and uniformity in the great work of reformation.

Section 4: The Solemn League and Covenant, And the Westminster Confession

In the month of August, 1643, a Commission was sent into Scotland, consisting of members of the English Parliament and of the Westminster Assembly. These Commissioners were instructed to represent to the General Assembly and the Convention of Estates, both of which were at the time sitting in Edinburgh, all the various steps already taken by the English Parliament in the way of reformation, the earnest desire of Parliament to advance still farther in that work, the present grave plight of the Parliamentary forces in their struggle with the King, and the serious possibility that, unless help were immediately forthcoming from Scotland, the cause of civil and religious liberty would be defeated, and the full tide of Romish corruption and oppression would again roll over both Kingdoms. The mission to Scotland was successful. Committees were appointed by the General Assembly and the Convention of Estates to treat with the English Commissioners. The result of these deliberations was a unanimous agreement, that both nations should straightway enter into a civil and religious Bond, embracing the interests of the Three Kingdoms. This famous Bond is known to history as The Solemn League

and Covenant.

The draft of The Solemn League and Covenant was prepared by Alexander Henderson. It was submitted to, and unanimously passed by, the General Assembly on 17th August, 1643. On the afternoon of the same day, with the same cordial unanimity, it passed the Convention of Estates. It was immediately afterwards presented to the Westminster Assembly, carefully examined, and, with some slight alterations, cheerfully adopted.

In St Margaret's Church, Westminster, both Houses of Parliament being convened, along with the Westminster Assembly and the Commissioners from Scotland, the Covenant was read over, and each person standing, swore with uplifted hand, to the performance of it. It was afterwards subscribed by Lords and Commons, by the Westminster Assembly, and by persons of all ranks in the greater part of the Kingdom. In Scotland, it was received with every demonstration of joy, and subscribed by the great body of the people. In Ireland, too, notwithstanding the bloody scenes recently enacted there, and the fearful state of confusion that still existed, the Covenant was welcomed by many Protestants in the South, and by a large proportion of the Protestant population in the North.

The avowed object of the Solemn League and Covenant was to promote the closest

uniformity in the profession and practice of the true Reformed religion throughout England, Scotland and Ireland, and to unite the Kingdoms in the maintenance and defence of their civil and religious liberties. This object was in perfect harmony with the provisions of the treaty first negotiated on October 26, 1640, at Ripon, between Charles and the invading Scottish army, and ratified the following year by King and Parliament in London. The Treaty of Ripon expressly declared that its aim was 'unity' in religion and uniformity in Church government, as a special means for preserving of peace betwixt the two kingdoms'. And the Solemn League and Covenant must be considered a great and memorable step in this same direction.

Agreeably to the object contemplated in the Solemn League and Covenant, the Westminster Assembly laboured earnestly and prayerfully in promoting the cause of religious reformation and uniformity throughout the Three Kingdoms. They compiled the Confession of Faith, the Larger and the Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Church Government, and the Directory for Public Worship. In addition to these, Rouse's Metrical Psalter was, on the recommendation of the English Commons, considered by the Westminster Assembly, and, with some emendations, was approved for general use in the public worship of the Church. The Westminster Confession, with certain modifications, was approved and passed by the English

lords and Commons. The Westminster Standards were adopted by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. But, to guard against possible misconstruction of certain passages, which might seem to conflict with the Church's intrinsic power to manage her own affairs, the General Assembly, in their Act of 1647, approving of the Confession, explained in what sense those passages were understood and adopted.

In Ulster, the Westminster Standards, with the same explanations, were widely welcomed and accepted by the Protestant settlers as being founded on, and agreeable to, the Word of God.

We record our hearty approval of the Second Reformation, to the promotion of which the people of these Kingdoms pledged themselves in the Solemn League and Covenant.