

James Drummond Esq
Sept. 3. 1857

PERSECUTION SANCTIONED BY THE WESTMINSTER
CONFESSION:

A LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO THE

CLERGY, ELDERSHIP, AND LAITY,

OF THE

SYNOD OF ULSTER;

SHEWING, FROM THE

HISTORY AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE WESTMINSTER DIVINES,

AND THE

Public Records of the Church of Scotland,

THE

DOCTRINES OF INTOLERANCE TO WHICH THE LATE VOTE OF UNQUALIFIED
SUBSCRIPTION HAS COMMITTED THE GENERAL SYNOD OF ULSTER.

WITH AN HUMBLE

DEDICATION TO THE REV. DR. COOKE.

BY A

MEMBER OF THE SYNOD OF ULSTER.

"In the whole proceedings of the Assembly (1638) there was a rapid approach to that *Intolerance* which makes *its own principles* the INFALLIBLE criterion of TRUTH, and despises or persecutes all who cannot embrace these principles..... and we shall soon still more distinctly trace the *increasing energy* of the BIGOTRY which looks upon PERSECUTION ALMOST AS A SACRED DUTY."—*Dr. Cook's History of the Church of Scotland*, vol. ii., page 471.

BELFAST:

JOHN TATE, 13, HIGH-STREET;

SAMUEL ARCHER, CASTLE-PLACE; GEORGE PHILLIPS, 1, COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS; AND JOHN MAGILL, ANN-STREET.

MDCCCXXXVI.

RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE WESTMINSTER
COMMISSION.

A LETTER

ADDRESSED TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

BY THE REV. JOHN WILSON, M.A.,

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

IN ANSWER TO A RESOLUTION PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

ON THE 17TH OF MARCH 1840, RELATIVE TO THE

PROVISIONS OF THE ACT RELATIVE TO THE

REGISTRATION OF DEEDS IN IRELAND.

BY THE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

AND THE HOUSE OF LORDS.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WILSON AND GARDNER, 70, HIGH-STREET, BELLFAST.

1840.

WILSON, PRINTER, 70, HIGH-STREET, BELLFAST.

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Houses of the Oireachtas

DEDICATION.

TO THE REV. HENRY COOKE, D.D., MINISTER OF MAY-STREET CONGREGATION, BELFAST, GREETING.

DEARLY BELOVED BROTHER,—

I DEDICATE to you this little work for the following reasons :—

1. Because you strongly advocated not long ago the very principle to which it is designed to be ancillary, namely, *qualified*, as distinguished from *unqualified* subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. In the Synod of Ulster, in Cookstown, July 2, 1828, you uttered these memorable words—
“I would *not wish to bind any man to express his faith in any particular uninspired phraseology whatever*. I would leave him to the *free and unrestricted selection of his own words where he could not adopt mine* ; but I would beg him to *furnish me with such words as would clearly enable me to comprehend his MEANING.*”—(*Belfast News-Letter, of July 15, 1828.*) This was a perfectly *reasonable* demand, to which no orthodox man could object ; and in consequence of its reasonableness you then triumphed over your opponents ; but now you turn round, and will force the whole Presbyterian community, not only to swallow what in these pages is proved to be a *most obnoxious sentiment*, but you will compel them actually to gulp it down in the “*uninspired phraseology*” of its authors, without exception or explanation.

2. As you have become a *convert* from what were formerly our common principles on this subject, it is necessary that there should be no *mistake* on your part, or on ours, about the principles to which you are now committed, if you rightly understand your own position. I am not without hopes that the historical documents which I have cited will startle the Presbyterian public in regard to this matter.

3. At the Voluntary Church Meeting in this town, (night the second), you avowed yourself a *Covenanter*; and the following pages will show you the principles to which, as a *Covenanter*, you are *solemnly bound*. On that occasion you did more than this—you actually spoke in commendation of the periodical called the "*Covenanter*," edited by the Rev. Thomas Houston of Knockbracken, in which the most *intolerant* and most *persecuting* principles of former ages are broadly avowed in the present, as *duties* which Christians, when placed in the office of the civil magistracy, *owe to God*. It is therefore *my* duty to point out to you *your* duties as a *Covenanter*, and

First.—You are to consider yourself as solemnly *sworn* to the principles which I have pointed out, (pages 25, 26, 27,) as being avowed in the "*National Covenant*" of Scotland, in "*the great name of the Lord our God*," and as you shall ANSWER to JESUS CHRIST at the GREAT DAY, and under the pain of GOD'S EVERLASTING WRATH, and of INFAMY, and LOSS OF ALL HONOUR and RESPECT in this world." This curse is not to be understood in relation to Dr. Paul's Covenanters, who have "explained" the sense in which they understand it, but of Thomas Houston's Covenanters, with whom you openly identified yourself on the occasion to which I refer, and which identification you have since renewed in your "*authorized report*" of the Voluntary Church Discussion, and in your subsequent answer to Dr. Ritchie.

Secondly.—As a "*Covenanter*" you are sworn, in terms of the "*Solemn League and Covenant*," to endeavour the "*extirpation of Prelacy*" as well as "*Popery*;" and, in addition to this, you are bound to "*bring to condign punishment*" all

“*malignants*,” by which term our forefathers understood all adherents of “*Prelacy*.” The Bishop of Down and Connor has publicly repudiated, as a piece of sectarian insolence, your Hillsborough attempt to get up a “*marriage*” between the Presbyterian Synod of Ulster and the Prelatic Establishment of this country; and hence I have a supplementary reason for laying before you your duties as a “*Covenanter*.”

Thirdly.—And which ought to have been *foremost*, you have been called by your followers “*A Second Edition of John Knox* ;” you have yourself rejoiced in the appellation, and on this account it is *trebly* necessary for me to lay before you John Knox’s *sentiments* on the question of religious liberty; for, my beloved Brother, it is absurd for you to assume John Knox’s *name* if you do *not* hold John Knox’s *sentiments*. For an “*explanation*” of this matter I must await your *ultimate* avowal, since you have publicly told us that your statements of “*yesterday*,” in relation to particular opinions, even though they may have been made upon *oath*, are not to be adduced in *contradiction* of your *opinions of the present moment*.

Fourthly.—As a “*Covenanter*” of Thomas Houston’s school, you are bound by *all the Acts of Assembly which passed between the years 1638 and 1660*, and by all the reforming *testimonies* of the same period; for Mr. Houston tells you, (*Christian Magistrate, page 79, note*,) that these “*form a part of the solemn vow*” of every Covenanting minister. It is true that only a small fragment of these Acts has ever been published, and this small fragment itself cannot be procured without the utmost difficulty, while not one individual in 500,000 *knows* the contents of the unpublished remainder to which *all* are *implicitly bound*. In these circumstances you cannot but feel obliged to me for the glimpse I have given you of your Covenanted duties. My limits, it is true, have compelled me to omit a number of enactments of various Assemblies respecting the “*extirpation*” of *witches*, and other incarnations of Satan, but this omission your own ingenuity will supply.

Fifthly.—Being, as I have said, a “*Covenanter*” enlisted

under the "blue banner," and bound to the Acts and Testimonies above mentioned, one of your imperative duties is to avoid all "*association with malignants.*" On this point the declaration of the General Assembly, Sess. 21, July 31, 1648, is most express. You must not "join with *malignants* (Prelatists) to suppress *sectaries,*" (in other words *Voluntary Churchmen*) as this, according to the Assembly, would be "joining hands with a *black devil* to beat a *white one*;" and, mark this, my beloved brother, the *second article* of the Solemn "*League and Covenant*" is declared by the Assembly to be violated if there be so much as "a tacit *condescending to the TOLERATION* of superstition, and the *BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* in his Majesty's family." Indeed, how could it be otherwise, when, as I said before, your engagement as a "*Covenanter*" obliges you to bring all Prelatical "*malignants*" to "*condign punishment,*" instead of "*joining hands with them?*" For future violations of this part of your Covenanted Testimony, now that you *know* your duty, I hope you will not give Thomas Houston occasion to proceed against you by the "*censures of the church,*" or the "*power of the civil magistrate.*"

Sixthly.—Lest it should be supposed, beloved brother, that I wish to press too hard upon your responsibility as an avowed "*Covenanter,*" I now take you in your character of an *unlimited subscriber* to the Westminster Confession; and in this character you are bound, by an Act of that very Assembly of the Scottish Kirk which ratified the Confession, to "show no *toleration* to those *cursed things,* which, by the *Covenant,* ought to be *extirpate,*" one of which "*cursed things*" is expressly declared to be that "*Liberty of Conscience*" for which the Independents then pleaded, and which the Assembly alleged would imply the continuance of "*bishops or prelates*" in the country, as well as the "*toleration of Popery, heresy, schism,*" &c. (Act of Assembly, Aug. 20, 1647.) So far were the Westminster Divines themselves from admitting the slightest fellowship with Prelatical "*malignants,*" which term, in the dialect of that age, simply

meant professors of the *Episcopal form of religion now established in England and Ireland*, that in their final answer to the "Dissenting brethren" (the Independents) they indignantly ask, "Must *Episcopall men* be indulged *separate dioceses* wherein to worship God, and enjoy ordinances suitably to such principles as they hold, distinctly from the churches under another rule?" "If," say they, "our brethren's principles extend to such a latitude for other men's judgments, as well as their own, they put them in a fitter temper to Covenant *multiformity* than *uniformity*."—(*Final Answer of the Westminster Divines*, page 114.) From this passage you perceive, brother, that as a disciple of the Westminster Divines, you are solemnly pledged to oppose the mere *civil permission* of such a thing as an *Episcopalian house of worship* in these Covenanted lands, just as much as you would the erection of a *Popish chapel*. When you next associate with the Rev. Hugh M'Neile, it is to be hoped that you will not forget your "true blue" Covenanterism by omitting to testify against his "*Prelacy*," as well as against other people's *Popery*; or to honestly inform him of the "*extirpating*" process to which you must resort, in the event of his not bringing forth "*fruits meet for repentance*," on account of his "*Pre-laticall errors*," as the Assembly of 1647 have expressed it in the authoritative document above quoted.

Finally, brother, farewell for the present. If you dislike the doctrines to which your adhesion to the "*Covenants*," and your advocacy of *unqualified subscription to the Westminster Confession* have committed you, my brethren and I will hail your re-conversion with warmer feelings than those which accompany mere "*toleration*." Dr. Murray and the Irish Roman Catholics have lately renewed their former expressions of detestation in regard to the persecuting doctrines at one time exemplified, if they were not maintained, by their church; the intolerance of Dens has been cast to the "moles and to the bats," while his doctrinal propositions alone have been officially acknowledged, and we are ready to receive, with thankfulness, your assistance in freeing our own Presbyterian Church from the stigma which

has been cast upon it by the proceedings at Cookstown. Our Presbyterian name has hitherto been looked upon as synonymous with all that is *liberal* in politics and *tolerant* in religion, and we neither *can* nor *will* endure to be made a laughing-stock to Papists on the one hand, or to Arians and Socinians on the other; as if, in an age of general enlightenment, we had reverted back to a system of darkness, whose very existence charity would willingly blot with a tear from the page of our ecclesiastical history. I am not without hopes of your assistance in this good work of self-vindication, and in the mean time I remain, my dearly beloved brother, in the bonds of a "*Covenanted uniformity*" of Christian good-will and civil forbearance towards all classes of my fellow-beings,

Yours faithfully,

A MEMBER OF THE SYNOD OF ULSTER.

October 28, 1836.

A LETTER,

&c.

DEARLY BELOVED FATHERS AND BRETHREN,

You are aware that at the meeting of the General Synod of Ulster, held by adjournment in Cookstown, on the second Tuesday of August last, the question of unlimited Subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith was brought forward, and after several days having been spent in public as well as secret discussion, the affirmative was carried by the enormous majority of 125 to 28. Some circumstances connected with this discussion were of a most anomalous nature in the history of Irish Presbyterianism—the public were strictly excluded during a considerable portion of two days, lest, as it was openly avowed by Dr. Cooke, they should hear *heresy* and error brought forward in the shape of objections to the Confession. The laity certainly owe a debt of deep gratitude to Dr. Cooke, for his anxiety to save them on this occasion from the chances of spiritual contamination; but it is doubtful whether he ought to be equally praised for having, at the same time, deprived them of the benefit of those "*explanations*" which were given by himself and Dr. Stewart, and were so triumphantly referred to afterwards in open Synod, but of whose merits the world has hitherto been left in pitiable ignorance. It is to be hoped that they were more satisfactory than the kindred explanations, relative to the authority of the civil magistrate to punish the propagators of heretical and other erroneous opinions, which were attempted by Mr. Barnett, and the special pleading on the same subject which was, strangely enough, resorted to by Dr. Reid. My object in address-

ing you, fathers and brethren, is not to discuss the objections which may be started against the Westminster Confession on the ground of general doctrine, but to confine my attention to the single point of the magistrate's coercive authority in matters of religion. It is ground for special astonishment, not to speak of humiliation, that Drs. Cooke and Stewart, who have signalized themselves in opposition to the persecuting tenets embodied in the Popish theology of Dens, should have laboured so zealously in order to force precisely similar tenets down the throats of their brethren, in the shape of an unlimited signature to the Confession of Faith; but then, my brethren, there is no accounting for human inconsistencies.

I know it will be stoutly denied that the propositions in question sanction the doctrine of persecution on account of religion, and it will be asserted, for the hundredth time, that, whatever their words might seem to imply, our reforming ancestors did *not* persecute their opponents on religious grounds. All this was stated by Mr. Barnett and by Dr. Reid at the Synod. The best way is to set down the propositions of the Westminster Divines in their own words; then to compare these propositions with the passages of Scripture by which they are ostensibly supported in the Confession, so as to discover, if possible, whether the Scriptures quoted do not bear the *meaning* of coercion in matters of religion; and, having done this, we shall be prepared to invite Dr. Reid, who is a first-rate authority on subjects of this kind, to accompany us on a little antiquarian excursion, in order to discover the light which *history* throws upon the point in dispute.

The first proposition of the Divines, respecting the suppression of erroneous opinions by the civil power, is expressed in the following terms:—"They who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And for their *publishing* of such *opinions*, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the *light of nature*, or to the *known principles of Christianity*, whether concerning *faith*, *worship*, or *conversation*, or to the *power of godliness*, or such *erroneous opinions* or *practices*, as either in their own nature, or in the *manner* of publishing or *maintaining* them, are destructive to the external *peace* and *order* which Christ hath established in his *church*, they may lawfully be called

to account, and proceeded against by the *censures of the church*, and by the *power of the civil magistrate*."—WEST. CONFESSION, Chap. xx. Sec. 4.

Now, dearly beloved fathers and brethren, let me invite you to open your Bibles, and to read with me the Old Testament Scriptures which the Divines have quoted, in order to prove that the heretical or erroneous characters described in the above proposition may be punished by the civil authorities. And, first, we have Deut. xiii. 6—12, "If thy *brother*, the son of thy mother, or thy *son*, or thy *daughter*, or the *wife of thy bosom*, or thy *friend*, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods." Verse 8—"Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him, neither shall thine eye *pity* him, neither shalt thou *spare*, neither shalt thou *conceal* him." Verse 9—"But thou shalt surely **KILL** him; thine hand shall be first upon him *to put him to death*, and afterwards the hand of all the people." Verse 10—"And *thou shalt stone him with stones that he DIE*." Another passage quoted, is Ezra vii. 26,—"And whosoever will not do the law of thy God, and the law of the king, let judgment be executed speedily upon him, whether it be unto *death*, or to *banishment*, or to *confiscation of goods*, or to *imprisonment*." Nehemiah xiii. 25, is also quoted—"And I contended with them and *cursed* them, and *smote* certain of them, and *plucked off their hair*, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons," &c. In the farther list of references by the Divines, we find the following:—2 Chron. xv. 12—"And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers," &c. Verse 13—"That whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to **DEATH**, whether *small* or *great*, whether *man* or *woman*." Dan. iii. 29—"Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, *shall be cut in pieces*, and their *houses* shall be made a *dunghill*." Zech. xiii. 3—"And it shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, *Thou shalt not live*, for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord; and his father and his mother that begat him shall **THRUST HIM THROUGH** when he prophesieth."

Now, my dearly beloved, one or other of two things is clear as

noon-day—either that the Westminster Divines *intended*, in the articles above quoted, to sanction the doctrine that *heretics* and *false teachers*, as such, may be forcibly put down by the sword of the civil authority, or they have misapplied the Jewish Scriptures, since it is evident to the meanest understanding, that the passages adduced go to sanction punishment on religious grounds, even to the utmost limits of human severity. If the latter supposition be adopted, and it is the only possible way of getting rid of the doctrine of persecution, then it is demonstrably proved that the Divines have in this instance *erred*, and so have failed of attaining their own defined rank of “*helps*,” much more that of “*standards*” of our faith, so far as the present question is concerned. It will surely not be pretended, that Scriptures which, under the Jewish economy, sanctioned the employment of force for the extirpation of *religious* delinquents, give any authority for the punishment of *non-religious* delinquents; and this latter is the constrained sense which our modern “*explainers*” are fain to put upon the words of the Confession.

Another kindred article of the Confession is the following, viz.: The civil magistrate “*hath authority*, and it is his duty to take order that *unity* and *peace* be preserved in the *church*, that the truth of God be kept *pure* and *entire*, that all *blasphemies* and *heresies* be *suppressed*, all *corruptions* and *abuses* in *worship* and *discipline* be prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and *observed*. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that *whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.*” Confess. Chap. xxiii. Sect. 3.

This proposition, my beloved, consists of two parts—First, the *authority* and *duty*—mark the word *duty*—of the civil magistrate to suppress *blasphemies* and *heresies*; and, secondly, his right of watching over the proceedings of the church. In regard to the first, most of the passages of Scripture, already recited, have been quoted as proofs by the Divines, and, in addition to them, we find such texts as the following:—Levit. xxiv. 16, “*And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death; and all the congregation shall certainly stone him; as well the stranger as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death.*” Deut. xiii. 5, “*And that prophet, or*

that dreamer of dreams, shall be *put to death*, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God," &c. So much for the first division of this proposition. The second shall receive its share of notice afterwards.

There is a third proposition laid down by the Westminster Assembly, which also deserves to be particularly stated. This proposition is contained in the answer to the 109th question of the "*Larger Catechism*," in which "TOLERATING A FALSE RELIGION" is made to be one of the *sins* forbidden in the second commandment; and, in proof of this doctrine, all the foregoing passages of Scripture are quoted for the third time, from the stoning of the enticer to idolatry, enjoined by Moses in Deuteronomy, to the "*thrusting through*" of the false prophet, predicted by Zechariah, as an accompaniment of the Reformation to which his prophecy alludes. If a doubt could possibly be entertained as to the meaning of the words used by the Divines, there can be none as to that of the texts which they have brought forward as their proofs; and it shall be my business to show you, from the history of the times in which the Westminster Divines lived, from the state of parties in that Assembly itself, from its official acts, as well as from the individual opinions of its leading members, but especially from the acts, declarations, and other public proceedings of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, that a more gross, or more barefaced imposition upon the public was never attempted, than the pretence that the authors of the Westminster Confession did not mean that which their language naturally implies. I shall show you, beyond the possibility of contradiction, that the Presbyterian party, who constituted the majority of the Westminster Assembly, did not only hold doctrines of intolerance and persecution, but that in conjunction with their brethren in Scotland, they were ready to hazard a civil war, in order to force the consciences of their Independent brethren; that to the extent of their power they *acted* upon their principles in this respect, even so far as to decree the *hanging* of individuals for heretical opinions; and that Cromwell, with his army of sectaries, who were all clamorous for freedom of conscience, were the parties who prevented the Westminster Assembly, and their parliamentary friends, from imitating the cruelties of the Prelatists. If I shall be able, fathers and brethren, to make good these statements, I submit to you whether

there ought to be any more special pleadings and distortions of plain language, in order to avoid the honest alternative of boldly removing this blot of intolerance from the standards of our church.

Before proceeding farther, it is worth notice, that amongst the *duties* required in the second commandment, the Divines (Larger Cat. ques. 108), make to be the "disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship, and, according to each one's *place* and *calling*, removing it and all *monuments of idolatry*." One of the Scriptures cited is Deut. vii. 5, "Ye shall *destroy their altars*, and break down their *images*, and cut down their *groves*, and *burn their graven images with fire*." Now, as Papists, at the time of the Westminster Divines, were held by the laws both of Church and State to be *idolaters*, and were universally described as such, the meaning of the text and its commentary can hardly admit of a second interpretation. The man, therefore, who, without qualification, subscribes the doctrine laid down in the sense of its authors, is bound, "according to his *place* and *calling*," (supposing him to be vested with civil power), to pull down and destroy every Popish Mass-house in the kingdom. There's Christian forbearance for you, my beloved !

In the proposition first quoted, there are several remarkable particulars which ought to be carefully noted.

1. The publication of *opinions*, or the maintenance of *practices* "contrary to the *light of nature*," is the first condition of the magistrate's interference ; but does not every one see that before this rule can be applied, the precise extent of the "*light of nature*" must be fixed? There are Orthodox clergymen, who, in their zeal for "*Christian Ethics*," in opposition to what they call heathenish philosophy, do not scruple to maintain that the "*light of nature*" is so utterly dark, as to be unfit for conducting us to the discovery of any moral duty whatever, or even for leading us to a knowledge of the primary truth of all religion, the existence of a supreme Being. Some years ago this doctrine was extremely popular amongst the "leaders" of the Synod of Ulster ; it was thundered from the pulpit, and circulated from the press, against the supposed Neologism of "Scotch Metaphysics." Now, if this doctrine be still maintained, it is very evident that neither Atheism nor immorality can be touched by the civil authority, in consequence of the native darkness of fallen humanity ; and, therefore, to talk of punishing

men for transgressions against a law which is on all hands admitted to be totally indefinite, and which the anti-“Scotch Metaphysics” Doctors scarcely allow to have any statutory existence at all, is the height of absurdity. On a similar indefiniteness, in regard to the *means* whereby the magistrate is to carry into effect the suppression of erroneous opinions, something like an argument was founded by Dr. Reid at the late meeting of Synod, as if the proposition in question affirmed a mere abstraction to which no tangible effect was ever intended to be given. In a subsequent division of this letter, I hope to enlighten the Doctor on the historical part of the case; and, in the mean time, I observe, that an indefinite law, involving pains and penalties, is one of the greatest curses to which any society could be exposed, because its application must depend entirely upon the private interpretation of those employed to administer it, so that every element of bigotry, ignorance, fanaticism, and malice, has unrestrained room for its mischievous operation. Indefiniteness, therefore, in a matter of this kind, so far from being a recommendation, is one of the very strongest grounds of objection. Let us be clearly told what are the doctrines revealed by the light of nature, and of what character are the practices which it condemns, so that offenders may be forewarned as to their responsibility, if they oppose the one or assert the other. The church is surely a fitter tribunal for determining the extent of the law of nature, than the civil magistrate can possibly be.

2. The prohibited opinions must also be contrary to the “*known principles of Christianity.*” But what are the “*known principles of Christianity?*” Is there a single principle of Christianity that has not, in some shape or other, been disputed? and who then is to be the infallible *judge* between the parties? The appointment of some such judge is absolutely necessary, else there must be perpetual uncertainty, and, consequently, perpetual danger of punishing the innocent instead of the guilty. To make the *church* that judge, is Popery; to make the civil magistrate that judge, is still worse; and yet, fathers and brethren, we must have him in some quarter or other, to discriminate for us, with unerring certainty, between the “*known*” and the *unknown* “*principles of Christianity,*” before we can venture to fine, or banish, or “*thrust through*” our neighbours as “*false prophets,*” however widely they may differ from ourselves

in matters of religion. The maxim of every constitutional government is, that ten guilty persons had better escape unpunished than that one innocent person should suffer; and the touching a hair of the head of one of Christ's disciples, even through a mistaken zeal for supposed truth, brings down the guilt of persecution upon the soul of the offender. Saul was not innocent merely because he thought he was "doing God service" in breathing out "threatenings and slaughter" against the disciples. You must, therefore, above all things, provide yourselves with the infallible judge before you sanction this doctrine of the Confession. You may comfort yourselves with the thought that you will never have occasion to apply that doctrine to practice, and that it can do no harm as a mere theory, since you would not persecute if you had the power. But do you mean to tell me, that a doctrine which is useless for practice is proper to be retained in a creed? It must in that case be very unlike every other doctrine of the Bible.

3. These "*known principles of Christianity*" may relate to *faith*, or matters of mere *opinion*, to *worship*, to *conversation*, or to the "*power of godliness*," meaning the influence of religion upon the character—a tolerably wide range, truly! The Council of Trent specifically *names* the doctrinal errors which it anathematizes, so that heretics can make no mistake as to their own duty or danger; but in the case before us we are required to sanction a wholly indefinite rule, which no two clergymen, however orthodox, will interpret alike; and this indefinite rule is to apply to general *opinions*, to divine *worship*, to religious and moral *conduct*, and to the influence of the Gospel upon the heart! Here a whole series of infallible judgments is necessary. First, the "*known principles of Christianity*" in general must be determined; secondly, the "*known principles of Christianity*" in reference to "*worship*" must be determined; thirdly, in reference to "*conversation*;" and, fourthly, in regard to the "*power of godliness*." If this doctrine, when reduced to practice, would not cut out work for as insufferable a despotism as Pope or Prelate ever attempted to establish, it is difficult to imagine a system that would. Give the civil power a discretionary right of judging whether individuals have fallen from truth in all the multitudinous respects mentioned, and of awarding to them suitable punishments, and all liberty will be quickly annihilated. I shall after-

wards show, that the meaning of the Divines was, that the heretic should first be denounced by the *church*, according to the Popish fashion; but, in the mean time, I argue on the assumption fallaciously put forward in the Synod, that the mode of procedure had been left undetermined, in which case the law must for ever remain a dead letter, or the civil authorities must in future be invested with the right of deciding on the truth or falsehood of particular religious doctrines.

4. Another ground for the interference of the State is, when the opinions maintained are, *in their own nature*, destructive to the “*external peace and order*” of the church, or when they become so by the *manner* in which they are promulgated or defended. If I recollect rightly, there seemed to be some difficulty felt in the Synod about the meaning of this reference to the “*external peace and order*” of the church; but when we come to the historical portion of our inquiry, its meaning will be amply illustrated. At present it is sufficient to mention, that the maintenance of *Independency*, in opposition to *Presbyterianism*, as a form of church government, would have been destructive to the external “*order*” of the church, and, perhaps, also to its external “*peace*.” The maintenance of *lay-preaching*, or of the doctrines of *Quakerism*, in regard to a distinct body of clergy, would have set aside that “*order*” which the Assembly conceived that “*Christ had established in his church;*” and, consequently, such characters might lawfully be censured ecclesiastically, and then handed over to the civil power to be dealt with according to the laws which then existed. This is no imaginary illustration—it is a historical fact; and the length to which the principle in question was carried may be guessed, when it is recollected that such men as Mr. Goodwin, Mr. Burroughs, Philip Nye, &c., laboured incessantly, with the Westminster Assembly, to obtain for themselves a bare permission to worship in congregations distinct from the Presbyterians, from whose views of church-government they dissented; and not only did the Assembly steadily refuse them this miserable privilege, but the whole Presbyterian party exerted all their influence with Parliament in order to prevent the required toleration.*

* Neal's Hist. of the Puritans, vol. III. page 261, *et seq.*

I cannot here avoid noticing a disingenuous argument employed by Dr. Reid at the Synod, when replying to Counsellor Gibson's statement, relative to the affinity existing between the doctrines of our Reformers and those of Roman Catholics, in respect to the punishment of heretics. The Divines, Dr. Reid observed, had merely said that the civil magistrate *might* punish heretics, not that he *must* do it; and the latter he represented as being the doctrine of Roman Catholics. Now, I entertain the highest respect for Dr. Reid, as well as the most unfeigned admiration of his learning and abilities, but he surely could not have been serious in this mode of reasoning. Papists allege that heretics *must* be persecuted, and the Westminster Divines say that they *may* be persecuted—that is, there is *no harm* in doing it! What a strange compliment to the Divines! But is it true that Papists say that the state *must* persecute those who are denounced as heretics? Did Dr. Reid never hear that even the Spanish Inquisition, when handing a poor wretch over to the secular authority, was so far from *saying* he *must* be punished, that a recommendation to mercy was uniformly added? The Romish Church merely taught that it was the *duty* of the state to enact vigorous penal laws for the enforcement of its doctrines, and the maintenance of its “*external peace and order*,” and the church, no doubt, exerted itself occasionally, for the purpose of making the state do its appointed office. Now what have the Westminster Divines taught? Have they also not taught that it is the “*duty*” of the civil magistrate to take order for the suppression of heresies? And did Dr. Reid ever in his life suppose that a magistrate, or any other character, public or private, *might* or *might not* fulfil his *duty*? If the Divines had taught such a doctrine as that, it would have been more dangerous, because more extensively operative, than the doctrine of Papal dispensations. Oh, no, Doctor, there are no dead letter *duties* in the Bible; if the suppression of heresies be a *duty* it *must* be done.

On the occasion to which I refer, both Dr. Reid and Mr. Barnett affected to make it a consideration of mighty importance, that no *means* had been pointed out by the Divines by which the suppression of heresies should be carried into effect—that they had contented themselves with affirming the general proposition, without hinting at any specific procedure whereby it should be brought into practical

operation. Now, were this assertion true, the matter would only be made worse ; for, as I have before argued, an undefined law is one of the most terrible engines of cruelty of which civil or ecclesiastical tyranny could be put in possession, since under the form of legal right it may be made to serve the basest purposes of persecution. It is, however, passing strange, that any admirer of the Westminster Divines should pay them the sarcastic compliment of pretending that they have thus left an important article of doctrine in perpetual doubt, when they have themselves ranked the speaking of the truth "*in doubtful or equivocal expressions*" amongst the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment.* It is therefore certain, that at the time of the Divines there was nothing doubtful or equivocal about the language they used. Its meaning was then well enough understood ; and when it is recollected that at the very time when the articles in question were penned, the writ *de heretico comburendo* was an unrepealed law of the land, which had been twice enforced only a few years before, and which the Westminster Assembly were far enough from wishing to remove from the statute book, the meaning of proceeding against heretics by the "censures of the church," and by "the power of the civil magistrate," can hardly need illustration.

It was added by Dr. Reid, in a deprecating tone, that it was a sort of sacrilege to "expose the nakedness of those men," meaning our Reformers ; and the tacit inference was, that we ought to cloak their faults at all hazards, merely because they happened to be fathers of our church. I would admit this charitable appeal, were it not employed to force a quantity of nauseous error down the throats of the Presbyterian community, and to place us in a situation still more degrading than that occupied by the disciples of Peter Dens, who are not obliged to subscribe to *his* tenets of persecution, as *we* are to the persecution sanctioned by the Standards of Westminster. Our fathers themselves dealt fearlessly with the errors of their predecessors. They were not deterred from the bold assertion and vindication of truth by any mawkish apprehension about "uncovering the nakedness" of those who had gone before them. They thought for themselves, and we should be unworthy

* Larger Cat., Ques. 145.

to bear their names, if we did not as honestly reject *their* errors as they would have rejected *ours*, had we lived before them. It may be all very well to hide the failings of our Reformers when no urgent occasion exists for their exposure; but when the interests of religion and the happiness of society are at stake, we must recollect that the claims of divine truth are paramount to those of the Reformers; and that neither the name of John Knox nor John Calvin, any more than the name of Tertullian or Augustine, or any other father of the church, can be suffered to bolster up a system of error. Our Reformers were not infallible, and to bind posterity down to the exact measure of their attainments, as if, in point of fact, they had been miraculously preserved from error, is practical Popery, disguise it as you may.

Before proceeding farther, dearly beloved, there are two questions which we must settle. The first is, whether, in an unlimited subscription of the Westminster Confession, you must take it in the sense in which its authors and the Church of Scotland understood it at the time of its composition; or, secondly, whether you are at liberty to put your own private interpretation upon particular passages, though that interpretation may be very opposite to the original meaning and intention of those passages. I consider subscription to be equivalent to an oath; and if it be, you have no right to take it otherwise than in the sense of the party who imposes that oath, unless you intend to sanction the Jesuitical doctrine of "mental reservation." The object of unlimited subscription in the present instance, is avowedly the establishment of a union between the Church of Scotland and the Synod of Ulster. It is, therefore, the Church of Scotland that is the party who imposes this virtual oath; and to her archives you must look for an explanation of the meaning affixed to the language in which this portion of it is drawn up. Your "Leaders," my beloved, would not suffer you to give any public statement of the sense in which you received these dogmas about the punishment of heretics, lest this should mar the holy "Alliance" into which they were about to enter on your behalf; and hence, as I said before, you must look chiefly to Scottish ecclesiastical history, for an exposition of the doctrine to which the decision of the Synod at Cookstown has publicly committed you. It must be recollected, that the Act of Assembly, of August 27, 1647, ratifies the entire Confession, and

qualifies only "some parts of the second article of the thirty-one chapter," in which an Erastian supremacy over the church seemed to have been granted to the civil magistrate; but the twentieth and twenty-third chapters, in every thing that relates to the punishment of heretics, and the establishment of a system of Presbyterian intolerance, have NEVER been qualified or explained by any act of the Scottish Church up to the present moment: they have been received in all their wide latitude of undisguised persecution. And is it, my beloved, in the nineteenth century, that the Synod of Ulster is to make itself a laughing-stock to the community, by affirming, for the first time, principles which even Irish Popery itself has indignantly repudiated? How had Dr. Cooke the face to stand up before the public, and to urge the enforcement of such principles upon the consciences of his brethren in the Synod, after his pious Exeter-Hall denunciations of Irish Papists and Peter Dens, for their supposed adhesion to principles identically the same as those contained in the Westminster Confession? By the way, we hear not a syllable now about Peter Dens. If he be not "dead," he "sleepeth" most profoundly; and it is to be hoped the reason is not because Dr. Cooke's conscience tells him that in the guise of unlimited subscription he has himself gulped down Peter's whole system of religious intolerance. I may be reminded of the famous "explanations" which were given by the Doctor, with closed doors, to the ministers, elders, and students, who alone were found worthy of initiation into the secrets of this spiritual freemasonry, but from which the ignoble laity were forcibly excluded. Did Dr. Cooke fear that these "explanations" of his would not stand examination, or was it thought prudent not to let the Church of Scotland know the secret exceptions that were to be made from her established doctrines; or, rather, was it to keep the laity in Popish ignorance of the arguments adduced in opposition to the tenets about to be thrust down their throats, that they were expelled the house, and left to the single alternative of believing what the church commands—not what their own judgment, if fairly dealt with, might have dictated? Matters have come to a wretched pass with Presbyterians, when their ministers attempt to hide an important doctrinal discussion in the privacy of a Popish conclave, and, by their conduct, sanction the reprobate maxim, that on the part of the laity "*ignorance is the mother of*

devotion." It is not thus that our fathers would have dealt with a subject so mighty, they freely canvassed the opinions of their predecessors, and had they not done so, we had still been under the chains of Popery. Even the Westminster Divines did not regard the decisions of those Protestant Reformers who had gone before them, but searched the Word of God for themselves; and why should we be bound by their mere authority to nullify one of our essential rights as Protestants—the independent right of judging in matters of religion? The spirit of our forefathers would have spurned alike the dictatorship of Dr. Cooke, and the degrading ascendancy of his "tail;" and I ask you, fathers and brethren, are we to be dragooned into the acknowledgment of persecuting principles—are we to have ourselves stigmatized before the world as fools or fanatics, or laughed at even by Papists as the veriest tools of spiritual despotism, in order that we may gratify the changeable ambition of an overbearing individual? If you are reduced to such a state of degradation as this, I can only with sorrow acknowledge the justice of Milton's celebrated taunt, that "new Presbyter is but old Priest writ large;" and worse than this, "new Presbyter" will be submitting to a tyranny from his equals, which "old Priest" was wont to inflict only upon the unconsecrated mobility.

Presbyterians of the Synod of Ulster, how can you look your Roman Catholic countrymen in the face, after the envenomed abuse which your ultra Tory clergymen, with Dr. Cooke at their head, have been pouring upon the Romish church for its antiquated doctrines of persecution, while your own church, in this present year of grace, 1836, has given its formal sanction to doctrines of intolerance as bad as ever Pope or Prelate ventured to accredit? For my own part, I blush for the temporary disgrace to which, as a Presbyterian, I have been subjected, and I look forward to the next meeting of Synod for your efficient vindication as well as my own. It is not to be imagined, that in the absence of a public explanatory declaration, on the part of the *church*, as distinguished from *individual members* of the church, the intolerant propositions to which I object can be understood in any sense different from that naturally suggested by the words which have been used, since this liberty of private interpretation would destroy the very end and object of all public Confessions of Faith. If a liberty of disagreement is

allowed in regard to the meaning of one article, a like liberty may be extended to every article, and hence subscription must produce only a unity of *words*, not of *opinions*, and the words of Scripture might therefore as well be taken as the words of a convention of uninspired men meeting together in Westminster Abbey. If, then, you do not subscribe the articles mentioned in the sense of their authors, and especially in the declared sense of the Church of Scotland, of which, by the act of unqualified subscription you wish to constitute yourselves a branch, you altogether destroy the utility of Confessions in general, by leaving it to private individuals to put their own, not the church's meaning upon her articles, and you thus deceive the public and the body with which a junction is sought to be effected. If you act in this way, your boasted unity is all a delusion, and you might as well have no authorized standards of belief at all. Assuming, therefore, that you understand the propositions which I have quoted from the Confession, in the sense of their authors, and in the sense of the Church of Scotland, I now proceed to lay before you a series of historical evidence, for the purpose of proving, to the utter confusion of the sophistical "explainers" at Cookstown, that *the Westminster Divines did intend to inculcate, as a religious doctrine, the right and duty of the civil magistrate to visit, with pains and penalties, the professors of all opinions declared by the Presbyterian church to be heretical or erroneous*; aye, and so far was this doctrine carried, that matters so trifling as external forms of Church Government were placed outside the pale of civil forbearance.

At Cookstown, Dr. Reid said that the opinions of John Knox were adverse to the concession of liberty of conscience, and, of this fact, the Doctor was forced to admit "there could be no doubt." Indeed, the fact has been so triumphantly established, by the author of a letter on the "*Dens' Theology Humbug*," about which Dr. Cooke appears to be peculiarly sensitive, that no man in his senses would now venture to call it in question. It is necessary, however, to begin with the Reformation itself, in order to show how complete is the chain of evidence, as to the intolerant meaning to be attached to the propositions of the Westminster Divines.

The general doctrine of John Knox was that what is called the Judicial Law of Moses, is of *perpetual obligation*, in reference to

the putting to death of idolaters and false prophets, by which terms he meant Papists and heretical teachers; and he even went so far as to say, that if the king himself should apostatize to idolatry, meaning Popery, his subjects might warrantably rise in rebellion, and bring him to execution for his sin!* In the "*First Book of Discipline*," (chap. 16), Knox and the Reformers address the following argument to the estates of Scotland:—"We dare not," say they, in relation to certain heretical characters, "prescribe unto you what penalties shall be required of such; but this we fear not to affirm, that the one and the other deserve *death*; for if he who doth falsify the seal, subscription, or coin of a king, is judged worthy of *death*, what shall we think of him who plainly doth falsify the seals of Christ Jesus, Prince of the kings of the earth?" Now, my beloved, where do you think did John Knox and our Scottish Reformers find this notable argument about "falsifiers" of Christ's spiritual coin? If you will open your Dens' "Theologies," Tom. ii. page 89, and will read with me the following passage, extracted from St. Thomas Aquinas, you will have some idea of the extent to which our Reformers adopted the intolerance of Popery. In answer to the question "*An hæretici rectè puniuntur morte*," Dens quotes St. Thomas as answering affirmatively "*Quia falsarii pecunie, vel alii rempublicam turbantes justè morte puniuntur; ergo etiam hæretici, qui sunt falsarii fidei, et, experientia teste, rempublicam graviter perturbant*"—"Because *falsifiers of coin*, or others who disturb the state, are justly punished with *death*; therefore, so ought heretics, who are *falsifiers of the faith*, and, experience being witness, grievous disturbers of the state." Here, in Dens' Theology, do we find the very sentiments, and almost the language of the authors of the "*First Book of Discipline*," while the intolerance laid down is moderate, when compared with that of the Westminster Divines, because St. Thomas, as quoted by Dens, makes the second ground of the punishment of heretics to be their disturbance of the *state*, while with the Divines, it is enough if the "external peace of the *church*" be affected—a result which must uniformly follow whenever a reform is attempted in a church that has been extensively corrupted! I am sorry, my beloved, to think that Dens is, in this instance, the less exceptionable of the two.

* See the passages quoted in the *Dens' Theology Humbug*, page 12—13.

The following is a verbatim extract from one of the first Acts of Parliament that were passed by Knox and the Scottish Reformers, immediately after they had gotten political power into their hands. In the preamble they recite, that, notwithstanding the reformation already effected, “there are some of the same Pope’s Kirk that stubbornly persevere in their wicked idolatry, *saying mass* and *baptizing* according to the Papist Kirk, profaning therethrough the sacraments foresaid, in *quiet* and in *secret places*, regarding therethrough neither God nor his word.”

“Therefore it is statute and ordained in this present Parliament, that no manner of person or persons, at any time coming, administer any of the sacraments *secretly*, or any other manner of way, but they that are admitted and have power to that effect; nor *say mass*, nor yet *hear mass*, nor *be present* thereat, under the pain of *confiscation of all their goods*, and *punishing of their bodies* at the discretion of the magistrate within whose jurisdiction such persons happen to be apprehended, for the first fault; *banishing* of the realm, for the second fault; and justifying to the *death*, for the third fault. And ordains all sheriffs, stewarts, bailies, and their deputies, provosts and bailies of burghs, and other judges whatsoever within this realm, to take diligent suit and inquisition within their bounds, where any such usurped ministry is used; mass saying, or they that be present at the doing thereof, ratifying or approving the same, and to *take* and *apprehend* them, to the effect, that *the pains above written may be executed upon them.*”*

You see here, my beloved, that there is no room for the foolish allegation that has been sometimes made, as if our Reformers had refused only an *authoritative* toleration to the professors of Popery; for, in the above Act, the most “*quiet* and *secret places*” are ordered to be searched, in order to discover and bring to punishment the celebrators of mass, and their congregations; and all “*sheriffs, bailies,*” &c., are ordained to make diligent inquisition after offenders.

It is also to be observed, that all this was enjoined by our Reformers under the notion of a *religious duty*, to whose observance they were bound by the word of God itself; for according to Knox, “the

* M’Gavin’s edition of Knox’s History, page 221.

commandment that *the idolater shall die the death is PERPETUAL*—in other words, is a part of the unchangeable moral law which Christian magistrates and Christian communities are under a perpetual obligation to observe. It is on precisely similar grounds that Papists rest their doctrine of heretical suppression. Hear Dens—“Confirmatur ex eo quod Deus in veteri lege jusserit occidi falsos prophetas, et Deut. cap. xvii. ver. 12, statuatur ut ‘qui superbierit nolens obedire sacerdotis imperio,’ moriatur, vide etiam cap. 18.”* The opinion that heretics ought to be punished is “confirmed from this, that, in the ancient law, *God commanded false prophets to be killed*, and in Deut. xvii. ver. 12, it is enacted that he who acts presumptuously, and will not obey the priest, shall die. See also chap. xviii.” The sentiments of the Scottish Church, in the days of Knox, and the sentiments advocated by Peter Dens, on this subject, are not only identical, but are supported by precisely the same arguments on both sides.

It has been foolishly pretended that the Reformers did not execute the many sanguinary laws which they passed against Popish idolaters; but they who put forward this shallow pretence, appear to be ignorant that, in proportion to their power, the Reformers did execute the laws in question, and when, through the apathy of the court and the Popish favouritism of the Queen, who had no cordial wish to promote the infliction of severities upon the professors of her own faith, the penal laws were suffered to fall into abeyance, Knox and the Reformers denounced this neglect as a sin, calculated to bring down the vengeance of heaven upon the whole nation. The tumults excited by the permission granted to the Scottish queen to have mass privately celebrated in her own chapel, are minutely recorded by Knox himself, as well as the attempts of the “godly” to cause the “idolater Priest to die the death according to God’s law.”† The exploits of the Earls of Arran, Argyle, and Glencairn, in destroying “all places and monuments of idolatry” in the West, and of Lord James in the North of Scotland, are not forgotten, (page 238), while the zealous Reformer closes the narrative of destruction with this pious ejaculation—“O that we could rightly consider the wondrous work of the Lord

* Tom. ii. page 89.

† M’Gavin’s Edition of Knox, page 247.

our God!" When the Queen's declaration of the 25th of August, 1561, was published, confirming the establishment of the Protestant Reformation, and forbidding, under severe penalties, all attempts to disturb it, but reserving to herself and her French domestics the privilege of remaining unmolested on account of their religion, the Earl of Arran entered a public protest, containing the following, amongst other sentiments which are highly applauded by Knox, viz., "That he dissented that any protection or defence should be made to the Queen's domestics, or to any that came from France, to offend God's Majesty, and to violate the laws of the realm more than any other subject; for God's law had pronounced *death* to the idolater, and the laws of the realm had appointed punishment to the *sayers* and *hearers* of mass, which I here protest is *universally observed*, and that none be exempted until such time as a law as publicly made, and as consonant to the law of God, have disannulled the former." The Earl here asserts the fact, that the law before recited had been universally enforced up to the date of his protest. He goes on.—"Since God has said that "the idolater shall die the death," we protest solemnly in the presence of God, and in the ears of the whole people, &c., that if any of her servants shall commit idolatry, specially say mass, participate therewith, or take the defence thereof—which we were loath should be in her Grace's company—in that case that this proclamation be not extended to them in that behalf, nor be a safeguard nor girth to them in that behalf, no more than if they commit *slaughter* or *murder*, seeing the one is *much more abominable and odious in the sight of God than is the other*. But that it may be lawful to inflict upon them the *pains contained in God's Word against idolaters*, wherever they may be apprehended, without favour."*

In the following page, our Reformer bitterly laments that the Queen's cry of "Conscience, conscience! it is a sore thing to contain the conscience!" had so affected the leaders of the Protestant interest, that though at first every man's cry had been, "Let us hang the Priest," yet after a short interval "all that fervency passed." The Reformer then proceeds—"The next Sunday, John Knox, inveighing against idolatry, showed what terrible plagues

* Knox, page 249.

God had taken upon realms and nations for the same ; and added, that one mass—there were no more suffered at the first—was more fearful to him than if 10,000 armed enemies were landed in any part of the realm.” And in reference to his having prevented individuals from attacking the “idol” by physical force, he has the following melancholy reflections:—“In secret conference with earnest and zealous men, I travailed rather to mitigate, yea, to slacken that fervency that God had kindled in others, than to animate and encourage them *to put their hands to the Lord's work* ; whereunto I unfeignedly acknowledge myself to have done MOST WICKEDLY, and, from the bottom of my heart, I do ask of my God *grace and pardon*, for that I did not what in me lay *to have suppressed that idol in the beginning!*”* This wickedness, it will be observed, consisted in restraining a furious multitude from taking the law into their own hands, and executing summary vengeance upon all whom they might deem enemies of God.

When the Papists, in the year 1563, had begun openly to have mass in some places, the historian tells us, that “The brethren universally offended, and espying that the Queen, by her proclamation, did but mock them, determined to put to their own hands, and to punish for example of others ; and so some priests in the Westland were apprehended. Intimation was made unto others, as unto the Abbot of Crossraguel, the parson of Sanquhar, and such, that they (the brethren) should neither complain to Queen nor council, but should execute the punishment that God has appointed to idolaters in his law, by such means as they might, wherever they should be apprehended.” This conduct of the brethren, Knox, in his subsequent interview with the Queen at Lochleven, justifies in the following terms:—“The sword of justice,” says he, “is God's, and is given to princes and rulers for an end, which if they transgress, sparing the wicked and oppressing the innocents, *they that in the fear of God execute judgment, where God has commanded, offend not God*, though kings do it not ; neither yet sin they that bridle kings to strike innocent men in their rage. The examples are evident ; for *Samuel feared not to slay Agag*, the fat and delicate king of Amalek, whom king Saul had saved ; neither spared Elias

* Knox, page 250.

Jezebel's false prophets, and Baal's priests, albeit king Ahab was present. Phineas was no magistrate, and yet feared he not to strike Cosbi and Zimri in the very act of filthy fornication. And so, madam, your Grace may see that others than chief magistrates may lawfully punish, and have punished the vices and crimes that God commands to be punished; and, in this case, I would earnestly pray your Majesty to take good advisement, and that your Grace should let the Papists understand that their attempts will not be suffered unpunished. For power, by Act of Parliament, is given to all judges, within their own bounds, to search for mass-mongers, or the hearers of the same, and to punish them,"* &c.

Passing over a number of instances which even Knox himself has recorded, of the execution of these laws, such as the *roasting* of the Abbot of Crossraguel, by the Earl of Cassilis, in order to force him to surrender the revenues of his Abbacy, &c. I come now, my beloved, to call your attention to the National Covenant, which was drawn up in the year 1580, by Mr. John Craig, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, and was subscribed next year by all classes of persons, having been first deliberately sanctioned both by church and state. This Covenant was also renewed in 1590, at the instance of the General Assembly, and as it is usually printed along with the Westminster Confession, you have only, my brethren, to pull out your Confessions, and mark with me the following propositions, which our Presbyterian ancestors swore inviolably to maintain. You will begin at the words "Likeas many Acts of Parliament," &c. and you will find

1. That in order to the suppression of "Papistry," our fathers swore to maintain a number of Acts of Parliament, "ordaining all Papists and priests to be punished with manifold civil and ecclesiastical pains, "as adversaries to God's true religion"—as "common enemies of all Christian government," and as "idolaters."

2. That "the spreaders or makers of (Popish) books or libels, or letters or writs of that nature, be punished," and "all sayers, wilful hearers, and *concealers* of the mass, the maintainers and re-setters of the priests, Jesuits, trafficking Papists, to be punished without any exception or restriction."

* Knox, page 284, 285.

3. The "home bringers of erroneous books, containing erroneous doctrine against the religion presently professed," were "to be punished."

4. The users of festival days or ceremonies of Popish origin, were to be "punished for the second fault as *idolaters*"—that is, should be put to death.

5. That there is no other face of kirk, nor other face of religion, than was presently, at that time, by the favour of God, established within this realm, (Scotland), which, therefore, is ever styled God's *true* religion, Christ's *true* religion, &c. which, by manifold Acts of Parliament, "all within this realm are bound to profess, to subscribe the articles thereof, the Confession of Faith, and to recant all doctrines and errors repugnant to any of the said articles," &c. Here, my beloved, it is proper to observe, we have an authoritative *definition* of what our Reformers meant by the phrase "*true* religion," when it occurs in their public standards. We have also their idea of the obligation under which all subjects were laid to believe this "*true* religion," namely, the authority of an Act of the Scotch Parliament ordaining them to believe!!

6. "His Majesty's licenses" (in other words a license of toleration), were to be "of no force, in so far as they might tend to *hinder* the *execution* of the Acts of Parliament *against Papists and adversaries of true religion.*"

7. "None shall be reputed as *loyal* and *faithful* subjects to our sovereign lord or his *authority*, but *be punishable* as *rebellers* and *gainstanders of the same*, who shall *not* give their confession, and make their profession of the said *true* religion!" So you see, my beloved, that if a man did not think proper to change his religion and become a Presbyterian, when the King's majesty commanded him to do so, our pious ancestors bound themselves by a national curse to make that man punishable as a *rebel*. A *refusal* to obey the King's *authority*, in matters of *religion*, was tantamount to *disloyalty*!!

8. Our Reformers also bound themselves to the principle of the Scottish coronation oath, in the following terms:—"That all kings and princes, at their coronation, shall make their faithful promise by their solemn oath, in the presence of the eternal God, that * * * they shall maintain the *true religion* of Christ Jesus, the preaching

of his holy word, the due and right ministration of the sacraments now received and preached within this realm, (according to the Confession of Faith immediately preceding), and shall *abolish* and *gainstand* all *false* religion contrary to the same; and shall rule the people committed to their charge according to the will and command of God revealed in his word, and according to the laudable *laws* and *constitutions* received in this realm, nowise repugnant to the said will of the eternal God; and shall procure, to the uttermost of their power, to the Kirk of God, and whole Christian people, true and perfect peace in all time coming; and that they shall BE CAREFUL TO ROOT OUT OF THEIR EMPIRE ALL HERETICS AND ENEMIES TO THE TRUE WORSHIP OF GOD, WHO SHALL BE CONVICTED BY THE TRUE KIRK OF GOD OF THE FORESAID CRIMES."

This, my beloved, is a faithful analysis of the "National Covenant," as you are no doubt satisfied, if you have been attentively reading your Confessions along with me; and now, let me ask you, does it not contain edifying doctrine indeed? First, Presbyterianism is defined to be the "*true* religion;" secondly, the Presbyterian church is declared to be Christ's *true* church; thirdly, the king swore, and, fourthly, the Church and State of Scotland swore to make the king swear, in all time coming, to root out of his empire all heretics and enemies to Presbyterianism, who should be convicted as such by the Presbyterian church; for this, we have seen from the National Covenant itself, is the declared meaning of the terms employed.

It is worth mentioning, as an example of the scanty liberty conceded to individuals by our ancestors, that "immediately after the Reformation, the General Assembly took particular notice of the four printing presses then in Scotland, and they were careful that *nothing should be published, at least by ministers, till it was communicated to the brethren, and revised by persons appointed by them.* Knowing well what influence either good or bad productions of the press have upon morals and religion, the Assembly ordered *manuscripts* to be laid before them. A committee was appointed, and they, after perusal, reported *whether the work should be printed or not.*"* The author from whom I quote, and who is himself a zealous

* Life and Times of Alexander Henderson, by the Rev. John Aiton, Introduction, page 15—16.

minister of the present Scottish Establishment, has given a curious illustration of the powers assumed by Presbyteries in early times. He says,* “These Presbyteries, about this time, embraced, almost exclusively, *the execution of the criminal laws*. They were almost the only criminal courts in the kingdom. They then not only repaired and built churches, but, as courts of police, they tried murderers and criminals of every sort; they imposed *finer, required bonds of security under high penalties*, and, by their *excommunication*, they not only excluded from society, but brought the most ruinous consequences on the temporal interests of delinquents.” This certainly forms a curious contrast to the zeal sometimes manifested by our Reformers, against the “*civil places and power of kirkmen*,” in their struggles with the Prelatists.

And here, my beloved, it may be useful for us to bear in mind the *civil effects of excommunication* under the law of Scotland, as we shall thus be enabled to understand the import of such phrases as “*excommunicated Papists*,” &c., which occur so frequently in the public acts of our Reformers. By an Act passed in the reign of James VI., Anno 1585, *excommunicated* persons who should presume to enter church during prayers or the administration of the sacraments, were to be *apprehended* and committed to prison until they should “*find caution under such sums as the minister should modify*.” Again, by an Act passed under the same monarch, Anno 1609, it was decreed, that “no persons who are, or shall be *excommunicated*, shall be allowed, *directly or indirectly*, to enjoy the possession of their *lands, rents, or revenues*, but the same shall be *intromitted with, and uplifted for his Majesty's use*.”† These, and other similar Acts, continued in force in Scotland till after the Revolution, when they were rescinded by William and Mary, Anno 1690, and again by the 10th Anne, chap. 7. In the days of the “Solemn League and Covenant,” therefore, all that the kirk had to do, in order to hand over to the “saints” the “inheritance of the earth,” was to issue its sentence of excommunication against every obnoxious dissentient from its communion; and thus it could, at any moment, beggar the wealthiest of its adversaries by merely

* Page 41.

† Compendium of the Laws of the Church of Scotland, page 338.

speaking the word. Proceeding against men in this fashion, “*by the censures of the church,*” was no joke, my beloved.

Here, also, it may not be improper to remark, that according to one of the first authorities on Scottish law, the ancient “*Letters of Cursing*” which had been usual under Popery, were, after the Reformation, when the Commissary Courts were established, supplied by “*letters of caption and horning,* which the Court of Session was directed by Queen Mary to award on the decrees of the Commissioners.”* It may also be added, that, by the Act of Assembly, Anno 1569, all who, after due admonition, would not forbear the company of excommunicated persons, should themselves be excommunicated. This Act was *revived and confirmed* by the celebrated Assembly of 1638,† (Sess. 23, 24, Art. 16,) by which the Presbyterian Church was finally settled in regard to its external government and order. By the Assembly’s Act, (Sess. ult. Aug. 19, 1643,) the Act of Assembly of Aug. 1573, is repeated and confirmed; viz. that after the space of *forty days*, executions of the sentences against excommunicated persons should be presented to the Lord Treasurer or his Clerk, “who thereupon shall raise letters by deliverance of the Lords of Session, to charge the persons excommunicate to satisfie the Kirk, and obtain themselves absolved *under pain of rebellion*: And in case they passe to the *Horne*, to cause their *escheats* (forfeitures) to be taken up; and also to raise and execute letters of *caption* against them; And these to be done at the King’s Majesty’s charges.”‡ In order to ensure the execution of this edict, the Assembly added an injunction to this effect, that certified notices of all excommunications should be sent forward to his Majesty’s chief officers from each Presbytery, in order that “letters of *horning* and *caption*” should “be raised and *execute,*” and that “all other civil *action* and diligence may be used against them, warranted and provided by Acts of Parliament or secret council made thereanent: And that *particular account be craved hereof in every General Assembly.*” Such, my brethren, was the

* Bell’s Law Dictionary, Vol. I. pages 350—351.

† Acts of the General Assemblies, page 51, (printed anno 1683.) Gillan’s Abridgment, page 107. Steuart’s (Pardovan) Collections, page 199.

‡ Acts Ass. pages 192, 193.

ecclesiastical law of *excommunication*, and such were its *civil effects*, as ordained and understood by the parties who, in originally adopting the Westminster Confession, decreed, that heretics might be "proceeded against by the *censures of the Church* and the *power of the civil magistrate*." It is of vital importance that this fact should be kept in mind, and it ought also to be recollected, that by the Act of the Kirk, art. 6, 1648, a list of all excommunicated persons was to be annually laid before the General Assembly for the purposes aforesaid.*

We are now, my beloved, prepared to enter upon a review of the history of the "*second Reformation*", which was commenced with a renewed swearing of the "*National Covenant*" or "*Confession of Faith*," of whose contents I have already laid before you an analysis, so as to enable you to perceive that this "*second Reformation*" was begun upon principles of religious intolerance, exactly identical with those which I have already shewn were held by John Knox and his ministerial successors in the Church of Scotland, as fundamental parts of the testimony and the *truth of God*. If these intolerant principles had been maintained, as matters of *political necessity* or *expediency*, an excuse might have been readily found for their renunciation in modern times, on the ground of their avowedly temporary character; but, when we find them asserted as duties of *perpetual moral obligation*, the case is altered, especially when we are called upon to subscribe, *without qualification*, the absolute principles laid down in the Standards agreed upon by our forefathers. If we do *not* hold the *sense* attached by our forefathers to the propositions in question, we are a set of hypocritical impostors, whose vaunted *unity* is entirely *verbal*; and if we *do* hold that sense, it is impossible to clear us from the charge of *persecution*. That this is not a random statement, you will please, my beloved, to take as proof the following abstract of some of the public Acts of the Kirk of Scotland, at the very period when the Confession of Westminster was made to be the doctrinal standard of Presbyterian faith:—

1. By the Act of Assembly, Sess. 16, Dec. 8, 1638, the Act of

* Acts, ut ante, page 431.

Assembly 1581, Sess. 10, is *approved*, condemning Mr. R. Montgomery for having maintained that church *discipline* "is a thing *indifferent*."* This is going the full length of Prelatists and Papists, who maintain, that things *indifferent* in themselves become *imperative* when enjoined by the authority of the *church*.

2. By the Act, Sess. 23, 24, Dec. 17, 18, 1638, the names of all Papists in the kingdom were to be taken up, and all persons, of whatsoever condition, were to be obliged to swear to the National Covenant. Non-observers of the sacraments were to be proceeded against "*with the censures of the Kirk*," and no children were "to be sent out of the country," for education or otherwise, "without *license* of the Presbyteries or Provincial Synods of the bounds where they dwell."†

3. By the Act of Session 26, Dec. 20, 1638, it was provided, that in consequence of the "infecting and disquieting of the mindes of God's people, and *disturbance of the peace of the Kirk*," by the printing of "pamphlets and polemicks," nothing "should be printed concerning the Kirk and religion, *except it be allowed by those whom the Kirk entrusts with that charge*;" and that it should not be lawful to print "any Confession of Faith, any protestation, any reasons pro or contra, anent the present divisions and controversies of the time, or *any other treatise whatsoever* which may concern the Kirk of Scotland, or God's cause in hand, without *warrant* subscribed by Mr. Archibald Johnston, Clerk of the Assembly;" and all this under the pain of "ecclesiastical censures against transgressors," to the enforcement of which the Assembly felt "confident," that the "honourable Judges of the land would contribute their civill authority."‡

4. *Ass.* 1639, *Sep.* 22. *Aug.* 29. "All former Acts of Assembly against Papists, and excommunicated persons, and against haunTERS with them," are revived and renewed.

5. *Anno* 1640. The National Covenant is required to be subscribed by all teachers in Universities, &c. and by "all persons suspected of Papistry," and this under "all ecclesiastical censure;" while the Estates are supplicated to enjoin the same "under all *civil paines*, which will tend to the *glory of God*, the preservation

* Acts, *ut ante*, page 31.

† Page 49—50.

‡ Acts, page 59—60.

of religion, and perfect peace of this kirk and kingdom."* Punishing our neighbours for *the glory of God!!*

6. That Presbyteries and "Provincial Assemblies" shall take care to destroy "idolatrous monuments;" such as "crucifixes, images of Christ, Mary, and saints departed;" that the laws against witches (!) shall be executed; and that "speakers against the Covenant," if ministers, shall be deprived; if they continue obstinate shall be excommunicated; and in the case of laymen, they shall be dealt with as perjured persons, it being understood that the several parties referred to had previously subscribed the Covenant.

7. In the Assembly, 1642, it was overtured and agreed to, that the Assembly should supplicate the "Councill at their first meeting for the due execution of the Acts of Parliament and Councill against Papists," and "that the Exchequer should be the *intromitters* with the *rents* of those who are excommunicate, and that from the Exchequer the Presbyterie (of Edinburgh) may receive that portion of the confiscate goods, which the law appoints to be employed *ad pios usus*." Secondly, that every Presbytery should at its first meeting convene all Papists within their bounds, and require them to put away all Popish friends and servants within a month—to give up all their children above seven years of age to be educated in the Protestant faith, and to find security, that they should not only bring home such of their children as were abroad, in order that they might be educated under the inspection of the Presbytery; but that they would themselves abstain from "masse, and the company of all Jesuits and Priests." Thirdly, that "all of whatsoever rank or degree who refuse to give satisfaction in every one of the foresaid articles, shall be processed without delay." Fourthly, that lists of all excommunicate Papists who were known, and of all who had children educated abroad, should be handed in to the Council, together with the Assembly's supplication; and lastly, the Assembly enjoined "every Presbyterie to proceed against non-communicants, whether Papists or others, according to the Act of Parliament made thereanent."†

8. By the Act of Aug. 9, 1643, ministers are enjoined to search for "all books tending to separation;" and "if any be found, to

* Page 89.

† Acts of Assembly, pages 119, 120.

present the samine to *Presbyteries* that some course may be taken to hinder the *dispersing* thereof, and earnestly recommend to the civil magistrates to *concurr* with their authority in *all things* for effectual execution hereof."

9. In the Assembly, 1644, an Act was passed against persons who should be found to be *secretly* disaffected to the Covenant; and the Commissioners were authorized to proceed to censure such disaffected persons, and to take a special account of the *diligence* of ministers, elders, and presbyteries in this respect.

10. The Assembly of 1645 passed the following Act, viz. "The Assembly understanding that some *laudable* Acts of Parliament made against *non-communicants* and *excommunicate* persons, and of divers other Acts, containing *pecuniall pains*, for restraining of vice and advancing piety, is much neglected by the slowness of presbyteries and ministers in seeking *execution* thereof; therefore, ordains presbyteries and ministers to be diligent hereafter, by all means, in prosecuting *full and exact execution* of all such Acts of Parliament, for lifting the said penalties, &c. and that every presbytery report their diligence herein yearly to General Assemblies."* From this Act, you perceive, my beloved, that the *non-execution* of the penal laws, for which Dr. Reid and others affect to claim so much merit for our Reformers, was viewed in a very different light by the parties themselves: it was a *grievance* to be remedied, instead of a *virtue* to be commended.

11. By an Act of Assembly, Anno 1646, no children were to be sent out of the realm for education without a *license* from the Presbytery, and if any had gone to Popish schools or colleges, their names were to be given in to the Lords of Secret Council, in order to their immediate recal.†

12. The Assembly of 1647, the same which ratified the Confession of Faith, in their letter of August 20, to their brethren in England, speak in the following terms respecting the *toleration* which the Independents at that time began to claim, when they found that they could not bring the Presbyterian majority of the Westminster Assembly to make their church establishment so comprehensive that Independents might be included in it without a violation of

* Acts of Assembly, page 244.

† Ibid, page 314.

their consciences. The Scottish Assembly say, "We are very sensible of the great and imminent dangers, into which this common cause of religion is now brought by the growing and spreading of most dangerous errors in England, as namely, beside many others, Socinianisme, Arminianisme, Anabaptisme, Antinomianisme, Brownisme, Independency, and that which is called, by abuse of the word, LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE, being indeed liberty of error, scandall, schisme, heresie, &c.; yea, the unclean spirit which was cast out is about to enter again, with seven other spirits worse than himself, and so the latter end is like to be worse than the beginning." In the sequel of this letter, the Assembly repeatedly denounce the *toleration* claimed by Cromwell and the army, as a *violation* of the Solemn League, whereby these nations were bound to "extirpate," not to tolerate, "*those cursed things heresie and schisme,*" and the Assembly add, that the toleration proposed would tend only to the encouragement of "*superstition, heresie, schisme, profanenesse,* or whatsoever works of darknesse shall be practised by such as despise the publike worship of God in the CHURCH, (*viz.* the Presbyterian,) and have the most unlawful and wicked meetings elsewhere under a profession of religious duties, exercises, or ordinances."* Here, my beloved, is a declaration of the sentiments entertained by the very Assembly which first ratified the Westminster Confession, which declaration was issued just *seven days* before the ratification alluded to; and from this document it appears, that the Assembly regarded it as a heinous transgression against God, to *permit* men who differed from them to worship God according to their own consciences!

I have now, my beloved, brought this historical synopsis of Scottish Presbyterian intolerance down to the ratification of the Westminster Confession by the General Assembly, in the year 1647, and my illustrations have been uniformly taken from documents of acknowledged authenticity. I shall now present you with a succinct history of the proceedings of the Presbyterian party in England, in reference to the question of religious liberty, with the subsequent acts and declarations of the Church and Parliament of Scotland on the subject. You will thus perceive that not a shadow

* Acts, *ut supra*, pages 329. 332. 334. 337, &c.

of excuse exists for the modern pretence, that the anti-toleration propositions of the Westminster Divines are not to be understood agreeably to the ordinary signification of the language employed.

In answer to the allegation that our Reformers did not actually persecute, I would invite your attention, my beloved, to the following passage from Dr. Cook's "*History of the Church of Scotland*," and Dr. Cook will hardly be accused of indifference to the cause of Presbyterianism. Speaking of the conduct of the Covenanters after the battle of Philliphaugh, he says—"It is *shocking* to think that they displayed a *savage violence* which justly deserves the *reprobation of posterity*. Not only were those who fled from the battle *inhumanly massacred*, but, *after all danger was past*, many of the *prisoners* were put to DEATH. Sir R. Spottiswoode was condemned and *executed*, merely on the ground that he had conveyed to Montrose the commission of that Sovereign whom all professed to serve and to defend. Some of the nobles recommended milder proceedings, but the CLERGY insisted that God required the blood of his enemies, and their influence, for some time, could not be resisted. At length, however, the COMMITTEE OF THE CHURCH was obliged to yield to the abhorrence of shedding blood, which was prevalent even amongst their own adherents, and they satisfied themselves by recommending, that *the rest of the prisoners should, by immoderate fines, be reduced to poverty !!*"* Attempts have been made, by some apologists of the Covenanters, to throw discredit upon this story respecting the massacre, though Dr. Cook believes it, but no doubt can exist as to the other parts of the narrative. In relation to this very affair, the Assembly of 1645, in their "*Seasonable Warning*" addressed to the estates of Scotland, and to the army, after pathetically lamenting it as a grievous instance of *defection that more blood had not been shed*, proceed to say, in reference to those whom they style malignants—"These horns push the sides of Judah and Jerusalem, because the carpenters, when they *ought and might, did not cut them off*. And yet to this day the cause of justice is obstructed; the LORD himself will *execute justice* if MEN will NOT."† In answer to the sham excuse that Presbyterians never *persecuted*, I need only

* Cook's History, vol. III., page 113. Edin. 1815.

† Acts, p. 277, et seq. Testimony Bearing Exemplified, p. 383—384.

in this place recite a single fact. At the very commencement of the Covenanted Reformation, in the year 1641, the Lady Dowager of Huntley, an *old infirm woman*, was *commanded* by the *Kirk* to renounce her religion, and to *conform* to the Presbyterian establishment; and though the highest interest was exerted in her behalf, it was of no avail. She ultimately preferred the alternative of voluntary banishment, and accordingly, in a most inclement season, she set out for France. "A strange thing," says the historian, "to see a worthy lady of *seventy years of age* put to such travail and trouble, being a *widow*; her eldest son, the Lord Marquis, being out of the kingdom, her other children dispersed and spread, and, albeit nobly born, yet left helpless and comfortless, and *so put at by the Kirk* that she behoved to go or else abide *excommunication*, and thereby *lose her estate and living*, whilk was she loath to do."* This is merely a *sample*, and if any one refuse to call it *persecution*, I cannot envy either his taste or his Christian feeling, my beloved. A poor old woman of *seventy years of age* to be harassed in this manner for non-conformity to opinions newly sanctioned by the Kirk of Scotland, and *her compliance to be demanded under pain of losing her estates!* I could give you dozens of similar instances, but I must return from this digression.

Without troubling myself with a detail of historical circumstances, which would be inconsistent with the limits of this letter, I may remark shortly, that the Westminster Assembly consisted of three parties. First, the *Erastians*, who were by far the most learned persons of the age, and at whose head were such men as Dr. Lightfoot, Mr. Selden, Mr. Whitelocke, Mr. Fiennes, Mr. Coleman, &c. Secondly, the *Independents*, headed by Mr. Nye, Mr. Burroughs, Mr. Bridge, Mr. Simpson, Mr. T. Goodwin, &c.; and thirdly, the *Presbyterians*, who constituted the great majority of the Assembly. With their Erastian debates we have nothing at present to do, but it may be stated, that, after lengthened discussions on the subject of church government, the Independents, finding themselves in a minority, agreed to meet their opponents in what was called "*A Grand Committee of Accommodation*," where it was agreed that the Presbyterian form of church government should first pass into

* Spalding's History of the Troubles in Scotland, page 239—240.

a law before any exceptions against it could be considered.* To this the Independents, with great simplicity, agreed; but, becoming sensible of their mistake when it was too late for a remedy, they published a remonstrance against what they called the “*artful conduct*” of the Westminster Assembly. The House of Commons, by an order, dated Nov. 6, 1646, revived the Committee of Accommodation, at whose meeting, on the 17th Nov., the Independents moved for a simple *toleration*, that they should be *permitted* to join only such congregations belonging to the Presbyterian establishment as they should *prefer*; and if this were not allowed, that they might have liberty of privately meeting in congregations of their own as *Dissenters* from the Presbyterian church. To this request the Presbyterians answered,

1. That this implied a total separation from the established rule.
2. The lawfulness of gathering churches out of other *true* churches.

3. That the Parliament would then destroy what they had set up, viz.: *uniformity*; and 5 and 6, That this would introduce a perpetual *schism*, and would cause all manner of confusion in families. Although a total separation from the Presbyterian establishment was *disclaimed* by the Independents, and a relief for tender consciences, in regard to non-essential matters, was only required, the dominant party in the Westminster Assembly *refused* this slender concession, on the ground that “if a *pretence of conscience* be a sufficient ground of separation, men *may* gather *impure* and *corrupt* churches out of purer, because upon the dictate of an *erring conscience* they may *disallow* that which is *pure*, and set up that which is agreeable to their *erring consciences*.”† The abuse of a *right* was, therefore, according to the Westminster Divines, a good reason for its *absolute withdrawal*.

On the 2nd of February, offers were finally made to the Independents, which went to admit them as members of the *congregation*, but which *deprived* them of *sacramental communion*—a condition which they peremptorily refused; because, as they argued, the Apostolic rule was, that in so far as believers had “attained” they ought to “walk by the *same rule*,” and *no farther*. On the 9th of

* Neal, vol. III. page 256. London, 1822. † Neal, vol. III., page 259.

March, the Presbyterian Divines met, and, in the name of the Westminster Assembly, emitted the following declaration in answer to the Independents:—"Whereas their (Independent) brethren say, that *uniformity* ought to be urged no *farther* than is agreeable to all men's *consciencs*, and not to their edification, it seems to them (the Presbyterian Divines), as if their brethren (the Independents), not only desired liberty for *themselves*, but for *all* men; and would have us think that we are bound by our *covenant* to bring the churches in the three kingdoms to no nearer a conformity than *is consistent with all men's consciencs*, which, whether it be the *sense* of the covenant, we leave with the Honourable Committee.*

This, my beloved, was the dispute between the Independents, or "*Sectaries*" as they were called, and the majority of the Westminster Divines. But the matter did not rest here, as the City Divines met at Sion College every Monday morning, where they held a kind of Synod, and, according to Neal, determined "to support the Assembly at Westminster *in their opposition to the toleration of Sectaries*; and for this purpose they issued a letter, addressed to the Committee of the Assembly, dated Jan. 15, 1645, in which they besought the members of that Committee "to *oppose*, with *all their might*, the great *Diana* of the Independents, and not suffer their new establishment to be strangled in the birth by a *lawless toleration*."† The Sion College Divines, in other words, the "*London Ministers*," signalized themselves in opposition to toleration, in the following terms:—"We cannot," say they, addressing the Assembly of Divines at Westminster—"we cannot harbour the least jealousy of your zeal, fidelity, or industry, in the *opposing* and *extirpating* of such a root of *gall* and *bitterness* as *toleration* is, and will be to future ages." In these sentiments the Westminster Divines heartily concurred. At this time, says Neal, "most of the sermons before the House of Commons, at their monthly fasts, spoke the language of severity, and *called upon the magistrate to draw his sword against the Sectaries*,‡ namely, the Independents! This was quite in accordance with the declaration of Baillie, one of

* Neal, vol. III. page 260.

† Neal, *ut ante*, page 261—262.

‡ Idem, page 263.

the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, who, when he and his colleagues had logically failed to convince their adversaries on the point of *church government*, thus expressed himself—"We purpose not to meddle in haste with a point of so high consequence till it please God to advance our ARMY, which we expect will much assist our ARGUMENTS!"*

Such was the state of the question between the Independents and the Westminster Assembly. In point of religious *doctrine* the former were as *orthodox* as their opponents, but they differed from them solely in regard to *church government* and *discipline*; and yet they could not obtain permission to worship God according to their conscientious convictions—a fact which shews the *meaning* originally attached to the propositions of the Divines, as laid down in the Confession of Faith. The Scottish Commissioners, says Dr. Cook, "inveighed against *toleration* as *sapping the foundation of the Gospel*; and amidst *professions* of zeal for *liberty*, we trace the unceasing operation of *the most shocking intolerance*; all respect for the principles of men was lost in the zeal for *uniformity*; the ministers who should have laboured to strengthen *integrity*, were inculcating the necessity of taking oaths from which *conscience* revolted, and *were branding TOLERATION as the most detestable HERESY.*"† This, be it observed, is the testimony of a Presbyterian minister, as to the merits of the dispute then pending between the Westminster Assembly and the Independents, on the question of religious liberty.

Although the Independents were the first to assert the rights of conscience, in opposition to the Presbyterians in the Assembly of Westminster, it is not to be supposed that they were altogether faultless in this respect, or that they had, as a body, the enlarged notions on this subject which are current at the present day. Whatever may have been the sentiments of their individual leaders, I will not pay them, as a society, a compliment to which they are not entitled, for the entire sum of their toleration was limited to *orthodox Protestant Dissenters*; and in proof of this assertion, I may state a fact, that, when the Independents were in the fulness

* Vol. I., page 402.

† Dr. Cook's History of the Church of Scotland, vol. III. p. 81—162.

of their power, anno 1652, in their negotiations with the Irish Roman Catholics, they declared that they could not permit "the Popish religion in Ireland," nor allow "the least toleration in that particular."* In reference to Protestant sectaries, their views were, to some extent, contracted; for in the year 1649, John Fry, a member of the House of Commons, was accused of maintaining heterodox opinions in regard to certain articles of faith, when he was imprisoned, and escaped only by *denying* the truth of the charges against him. In the very midst of the Protectorate, anno 1655, the celebrated Quaker, James Naylor, was condemned as a blasphemer, branded in the forehead, exposed in the pillory, imprisoned at hard labour, and had his tongue bored through.† I mention these facts, my beloved, in order that you may see how *slender* was the religious freedom against which the authors of the Westminster Confession *contended*, and, consequently, how strict must have been their own notions of ecclesiastical obedience. In illustration of the same fact, I might instance the treatment which John Biddle, a conscientious Socinian, received at their hands, and whose final escape from capital punishment was owing to the opinion which Oliver Cromwell had conceived of his learning and integrity, and the excellence of his personal character. It is fair, however, to acknowledge that the prosecutions of Biddle, Fry, and Colonel Downes, for their heretical opinions, were originally suggested by the Presbyterians, in which the Independents concurred only with reluctance; and that, as soon as the latter party had obtained what Godwin calls "a complete victory," all proceedings of this sort were terminated by Cromwell's "Act of Oblivion," in the year 1652.‡

In order to show you, my beloved, that I am not misstating the controversy between the Independents and the Assembly of Divines, I think it necessary to quote the declarations of historians whose Presbyterian attachments are beyond the reach of suspicion; because so many falsehoods are deliberately put forth on this subject, that gainsayers must be silenced by historical statements which they dare not controvert, else they will persevere in keeping up popular delusion. In the first place, Andrew Stevenson, a standard authority

* Godwin, Vol. III., page 332.

† Neal, Vol. IV., pages 141, 142.

‡ Godwin, Vol. III., pages 509, 511, 513.

on the Presbyterian side, thus states the ground of the quarrel—“The army,” says he, “being Independents, Anabaptists, and men of unsettled principles in religion, would have consented to the *establishment* of Presbytery as the national profession, provided a toleration of all Christians in the enjoyment of their religious opinions were tolerated by Parliament; and till they had attained this toleration by a legal settlement, they agreed not to lay down their arms.....being apprehensive that the Presbyterians would make peace with the King upon the footing of the *Covenant*, and without a *toleration*, they resolved to secure this point in the first place.”*

“Toleration,” says Dr. Cook, “was demanded by the Independents, in the event of the Presbyterian discipline becoming that of the national church,” while the Scottish Commissioners in the Westminster Assembly “inveighed against toleration as sapping the foundation of the Gospel, and they complained to the General Assembly of the obstacles which had been thrown in the way of the great work.” Not content with the establishment of the “Directory for worship,” “they prevailed on the Common Council (of London) to petition Parliament, that the Presbyterian Discipline might be established as the discipline of Jesus Christ. This was resisted; but they made a new, though fruitless effort, to procure from the House of *Peers* a sanction to their intolerant requisition.”† The object of the “Independents,” says the Rev. John Aiton, “was to retard every thing till they could procure toleration of their separate congregations;” and when this was refused, “they cast off the mask, by becoming bent on a quarrel, insisted on having their separate churches, with a full toleration to all, talked of dissolving the Westminster Assembly, and laughed at the Solemn League and Covenant as an old almanack.”‡ Again he adds, “The Presbyterians were supported by the City Divines, who held a Synod every Monday at Sion College, to consult how they might aid in *opposing* the toleration of the sects. Henderson and his brethren were active in the cause, and prevailed on the Scots Parliament to demand of the English Houses, their civil sanction to the establish-

* Stevenson, Vol. III., pp. 1183, 1184. † Dr. Cook, Vol. III. pp. 81, 82.

‡ Life and Times of Alexander Henderson, pp. 523, 524, 525.

ment recommended by the Divines, and not to admit the toleration of sects, as being contrary to the Solemn League and Covenant.”* The sum of the requisitions made by the Independents is thus stated by Mr. Jeremiah Burroughs, a distinguished member of the Westminster Assembly—“If their congregations,” says he, “might not be exempted from the coercive power of the classes (Presbyteries); if they might not have liberty to govern themselves in their own way as long as they behaved peaceably towards the civil magistrate, they were resolved to *suffer*, or go to some other place of the world where they might enjoy their liberty. But while men think there is no way of peace but by *forcing* all to be of the same mind—while they think the civil sword is an ordinance of God to determine all controversies of divinity, and that it must needs be attended with fines and imprisonment to the disobedient; while they apprehend that there is no medium between uniformity and a general confusion of all things—while these sentiments prevail, there must be a base subjection of men’s consciences to slavery, a suppression of much truth, and great disturbances in the Christian world.”† Even Richard Baxter, who was no friend to the Independents, makes the following significant reflection upon the quarrel between the two parties—“The Presbyterian ministers,” says he, “were so little sensible of their own infirmities that they would not agree to tolerate those who were not only tolerable, but worthy instruments and members in the churches, prudent men, who were for union in things necessary, for liberty in things unnecessary, and for charity in all, but they could not be heard.”‡ This testimony of Mr. Baxter is the more important, as he was a determined opposer of the “Sectaries,” whom he elsewhere accuses of “tearing the garment of Christ all to pieces rather than it should want their lace.”||

On the 3d of February, 1646, the Scottish Parliament wrote to the two houses at Westminster, telling them “it was expected the honourable houses would add their civil sanction to what the pious and learned Assembly have advised; and I am commanded by the

* Life and Times of Alexander Henderson, page 570.

† Neal, Vol. III., page 260, 261.

‡ Life, page 103, as quoted by Neal, page 261.

|| Life and Times, abridged by Calamy, page 98. London, 1713.

Parliament (says the President), to DEMAND it, and I do IN THEIR NAMES DEMAND IT. And the Parliament of this kingdom is persuaded, that the piety and wisdom of the honourable houses will never admit TOLERATION OF ANY SECTS OR schisms contrary to our Solemn League and Covenant." The Scottish Parliament, Neal adds, published a declaration, addressed to the people, against "*toleration of Sectaries and liberty of conscience,*" which they represented as "THE NOURISHER OF ALL HERESIES AND SCHISMS;" and they add, that "however the Parliament of England may determine in point of *toleration and liberty of conscience,* THEY are resolved not to make the least start, but to *live and die for the glory of God, in the entire preservation of the TRUTH.*"* At this time, says the historian, "most of the sermons before the House of Commons spoke the language of *severity,* and called upon the magistrate to draw his sword against the Sectaries."

The principles maintained by the Assembly of Divines on the subject of religious liberty, will be conclusively illustrated by the following extracts from an official publication printed at London, in the year 1648, and issued under their own immediate authority. This volume is entitled, "*The Reasons presented by the Dissenting Brethren against certain Propositions concerning Presbyteriall Government, &c., voted by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, together with the Answers of the Assembly of Divines to those Reasons of Dissent.*" In this work the ideas of the Divines respecting freedom of conscience, under the new establishment which they contemplated, are developed with a fatal exactness which for ever blows into "thin air" the delusive "explanations" of Drs. Cooke, Stewart, and Co., respecting the power conferred upon the civil magistrate by the Confession.

In their answer to the reasons urged by the Independents against the subordination of Synods, the Assembly say—"If the *truth* of the Gospel, and the *purity* and *power* of religion be *contrary* to the principles of all *naturall* men, yea, and much *more* than the rights and liberties of a state, then is there *lesse* reason that every person, or combination of persons, should be permitted, under *pretence of conscience,* to *believe* and *practice what they please* in matters of reli-

* Neal, vol. III. page 262—263.

gion, than that they should be so *permitted* in matters of STATE ; for, if the generality of men be in matters of religion the *more corrupt*, (and the more apt to corrupt others,) they *have the more need of government.*"*

In the answer of the Sub-Committee of Divines to the request of the Independents, that they should not be *compelled* to worship in *Presbyterian churches*, but might have *liberty* to hold *separate meetings* of their own, the Sub-Committee of Divines say, that this "*forbearance*" cannot be granted for the following reason, namely, that "The indulgence they seek is a *greater privilege* than they shall enjoy who shall be under the *Rule*, (viz., the Covenanted uniformity,) as may appear in several particulars: 1st. *Such as own the Rule must live in the same parish with the other members of their church*: these (the tolerated) may *live* any where, and be of *any church they please*, yea, though a church of their own way were in the place where they live. 2. If such as live under the Rule would *better themselves in living under the pastoral charge of another minister* THEY MUST REMOVE THEIR DWELLING. These (the tolerated) need not."† This was liberty with a vengeance, and yet it is the identical liberty which the Assembly of Divines have officially declared to the world that it was their design to establish!

Again the Sub-Committee say, "We desire to know whether every person's bare *alleging* tenderness of conscience, shall be sufficient to warrant his *deserting* of our congregations? or if not, what shall be the *rule* of discerning, and who the *judges*?..... Because upon the dictate of an erring conscience (whereby multitudes may be infected) men may really disallow churches which are pure, in some particulars wherein they are pure, and set up others which are more suitable to their *erring* conscience; and, consequently, as many several sorts of churches may be set up in a state as the several dictates of erroneous consciences may suggest. If our brethren conceive this ought not to be done in different cases from theirs, they *must give us leave to judge that neither in theirs ought it to be done.*"‡ "That boundless *liberty* and *toleration* which they (the Independents) do too much favour, and some of their own way plead and

* Answer, page 184.

† Answer, page 20. Papers for Accommodation.

‡ Answer, pages 49, 50.

write for, *doth justly offend us ;*" (page 58,) and "such a toleration to be provided beforehand, not only for persons already separated from us, but for as many as art and industry, for all time to come, can be able to gain unto the same persuasion from the obedience of the Rule established, was, we believe, *never yet demanded of the Christian magistrate* by any in churches confessed by themselves to be *true*, especially considering that those who demand it have bound themselves by Covenant to endeavour to bring all the churches of God in these kingdoms to the nearest uniformity and conjunction, and to *extirpate schism.*"* "To judge aright of the *lawfulness* or *unlawfulness* of *forbearance*," the Sub-Committee proceed, "will necessarily lead us to consider the *lawfulness* or *unlawfulness* of the *thing in itself which is to be tolerated ;* there are great degrees of danger or mischief in things unlawful, some are more inconsistent with piety, truth, or peace in the church than others, and consequently *less tolerable* in their nature than others ;" and, accordingly, they challenge the Independents to shew either that the "gathering of churches out of *true* churches," or the "*tolerating* thereof is *lawful*," as they clearly maintain the negative.†

I might multiply similar quotations from the volume now under consideration, and it is important, my beloved, that you should bear in mind that it was drawn up and published under the sanction and authority of the Westminster Assembly itself, but I content myself with extracting one other passage, in order to shew that the Assembly held the doctrine, that even *capital punishment* might be inflicted upon *heretics* by the *civil authorities*. The Independents, assuming the then existing state of the law in reference to *excommunicated persons*, had argued against National Synods, and in favour of General Councils as *ultimate courts of appeal*, that it were a serious hardship upon an individual if, "upon sentence thereof, he comes to be *banished*, and have his *estate forfeited* to the *ruin of himself and family ;*" for "if the National Assembly be independent, and, upon sentence thereof, the extremest punishment but that of death be to be inflicted, it had need shew a warrant and designment from God to be the Supreme Court," &c. To this the

* Answer of the Sub-Committee, page 47.

† Page 59.

Assembly of Divines reply, by denying that National Synods have any power whatever to inflict the punishments mentioned, and they wonder that their brethren should throw out such "odious insinuations" against them without cause; but they add—"If it be because that, *after the church hath passed their censure, the MAGISTRATE doth sometimes, when he seeth cause, add his SENTENCE too, yea, DEATH ITSELF, IF HE SEE CAUSE, AND THE CRIME DESERVE IT, this doth no way concern the National Assembly at all, to which no more belongeth under a Christian than under a heathen magistrate.*"* The Assembly conclude, not by denying the doctrine as to the propriety of the magistrate's interference, but by telling the Independents that amongst their own friends in New England, "the *civil magistrate doth with as much, if not more rigour and severity, back their church censures, as in the Reformed Churches governed by Presbyteries and Synods.*"† Here the fact of the magistrate's coercive authority, in support of the censures of the church, is not by any means denied or even modified; the argument simply is, that the Independents had no right to complain, as their own community in another country were just as intolerant as the Presbyterian community were in Great Britain. Drs. Cooke and Stewart, will, I hope, keep in view these authoritative statements of the authors of the Westminster Confession the next time that the procedure against heretics, "by the *censures of the church and the power of the civil magistrate,*" comes to be "*explained.*"

The infliction of *death* itself, in consequence of *church censures*, is, by the Divines, expressly referred to the *discretion* of the civil magistrate—"if he see cause"—and is not this a pretty principle, my beloved, for the Synod of Ulster to avow, without qualification, in the nineteenth century?

I need only mention here that the "Committee of Accommodation" closed its fruitless labours on the 9th of March, 1646, with an ultimate refusal on the part of the Westminster Divines of the paltry indulgence which had been claimed by the Independents. The demands of the latter were limited to the following moderate proposition; viz. "As the Divines of the Reverend Assembly have said

* Answer of the Westminster Assembly, page 155.

† Answer of the Assembly, *ut ante*.

that they cannot, without sin, administer the ordinances to the parishes as they stand, so neither can we continue or become members or pastors, *according to our principles*; and we humbly desire that *our consciences* may be considered herein for *forbearance*, as our brethren desire that *theirs* may for *power by a law*.* The meaning of this proposition was that Presbyterianism should be the religion *established by law*, and that Independency should be merely *tolerated*—in other words, that its professors should not be exposed to the civil *penalties* ordained against *schismatics*, but should be permitted to worship God in peace, without external molestation; yet this was the proposition which the Westminster Divines perseveringly REJECTED; and after charging their opponents with “*presumption*” in having dared to “*practise contrary to ‘the rule,’ without the civil sanction or toleration,*”† they wind up the matter in the following terms: “This to us sounds as if they did not only desire *liberty of conscience for themselves, but for all others*;” and whether this were consistent with the “*Covenant*” they left to the decision of the hon. Committee, as has been already recited. Here a final rupture between the parties took place; but it is worthy of notice, that, during the pending negotiations, the Scottish Commissioners, and Mr. Alexander Henderson in particular, finding that Cromwell and the army secretly favoured the Independents and freedom of conscience, held a clandestine meeting at the house of the Earl of Essex, who was “Cromwell’s great rival in the command of the army,” for the purpose of *having Cromwell taken off as an incendiary*. At this meeting Henderson, Hollis, Stapleton, Meyrick, and others were present; and when they were on the point of coming to a final resolution on the subject, they were diverted from their purpose chiefly by the advice of Maynard, a celebrated lawyer, who, in company with Whitelocke, had been called in; and who reminded them that they must have *proofs* of Cromwell’s incendiarism, before they could safely venture to impeach him.‡ The consequence was, that the

* Reply of the Dissenting Brethren to the 2d part of the Answer of the Sub-Committee of Divines, page 88.

† Reply of the Sub-Committee of Divines, page 100.

‡ Life and Times of Alexander Henderson, pages 535, 536. Harris’s Life of Cromwell, page 90, note T, in which the details of this iniquitous plot are given at length from Whitelocke, who was one of the parties consulted.

scheme of getting Cromwell beheaded was dropt for the time, and he soon after made his escape to the army, who declared in favour of liberty of conscience, and finally overturned not only the Presbyterian Establishment in England, but the Presbyterian power itself.

Here I may properly introduce a practical exemplification which the Westminster Assembly gave, during their brief ascendancy in the Parliamentary counsels of England, of the sense in which they understood the authorized mode of proceeding against convicted heretics by "*the power of the civil magistrate.*" It is necessary for me to remind you, that at this time the old Popish writ "*de heretico comburendo*" was in full legal force; and in virtue of this writ, in the year 1612, Bartholomew Leggat, a person "exceedingly well-versed in the Scriptures, and of an unblameable conversation," who had been convicted of maintaining the Arian heresy by Dr. King, bishop of London, was publicly *burned* in Smithfield on the 18th of March. On the 11th of the following month (April), Edward Wightman, of Burton-upon-Trent, was burned at Litchfield for a similar heresy, after having been convicted by Dr. Neile, the bishop of Coventry and Litchfield; and a third person was condemned to the same fate, but on account of the sympathy which had been excited amongst the people by the constancy, firmness, and blameless character of the two previous sufferers, it was thought better that he should wear out a wretched existence in Newgate, than that popular sympathy should be too far awakened in his behalf.*

These facts being premised, we are now prepared to detail the case to which reference has been made. On the 10th of June, in the year 1645, an individual named Paul Best, who had been accused of holding a modified system of Arianism, was informed against to the House of Commons by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and the accused party was accordingly committed as a close prisoner to the Gatehouse of the College of Westminster. This occurrence, it will be observed, took place in the very midst of the disputes between the Assembly and the "Dissenting Brethren" about liberty of conscience, and clearly shows the *animus* of the former in their declarations respecting the extirpation of heresy.

* Neal, Vol. ii. pages 84, 85.

On the 7th of the following July, Paul Best was examined before a Committee of the Commons, who, on the 28th of Jan., 1647, presented a report on his case. This report referred to the proceedings against Leggat and the others, as well as to the punishments inflicted in former ages upon similar offenders; and accordingly a bill was brought in for the punishment of Best; and two months afterwards it was voted that he should be publicly HANGED for his ERRONEOUS OPINIONS!!* Such was the *tolerance* of the Westminster Divines and their Parliamentary friends! A day was fixed for the trial of Best, but it was ultimately put off, as he confessed in general terms, according to Neal, his belief in the Trinity to a committee of Divines who had been appointed to confer with him, and the disputes between the Independents and the Presbyterians, on the subject of toleration, were becoming too serious to allow minor interests to be very closely looked after.

“The Presbyterians, however,” says Godwin, “though they declined proceeding finally by ordinance against the life of an individual heretic, were well disposed to make a general law, awarding *capital punishment* for a terror to all *future* heretics. On the 29th of April, a bill was ordered for the prevention of heresies and blasphemies, but the subject was suffered to sleep during the ascendancy of the Independents.” This bill, which passed into a *law* on the 2nd of May, 1648, enacts that, for the maintenance of certain heretical opinions which are specified, such as Atheism, a denial of the *Deity* of any of the *three persons* in the *Godhead*, the proper *humanity* of Christ, his *freedom from original sin*, a denial of the *atonement*, &c., offenders shall, in each case, suffer *death as felons*, without *benefit of clergy*, unless they *recant*; and in the event of their *relapsing* after recantation, they shall be *executed without reserve*. Inferior heresies were also enumerated, for which persons were to be *imprisoned* till they should *retract*, when they were to be liberated only on finding *sureties* that *they would not repeat their offences*.†

The boast has been often made that our Presbyterian Reformers

* Godwin's History of the Commonwealth, Vol. ii. pages 252, 253. Neal, Vol. iii. page 266.

† Godwin, *ut ante*, page 254—255.

did not *persecute*; but, in addition to the above, I may mention, that on the 30th of June, Anno 1646, a *priest*, named Morgan, was *drawn, hanged, and quartered*, for the sole crime of *having gone out to Rome for orders, and returning again* at a time when the laws had rendered it *impossible* that he should receive orders at home!* Was not this a fine exemplification of religious liberty, my beloved?

Lest some ignorant person should imagine that the disclaimer made by the Divines, in the extract last quoted, of all coercive authority on the part of the *church* is of the slightest avail, I may mention that the very same ground is taken by Roman Catholics. Even the 4th Council of Lateran, which is usually adduced as one of the most furious instances of Popish intolerance, prefaced its enactments with the following declaration:—“*Licet ecclesiastica disciplina, ut ait Beatus Leo, sacerdotali contenta iudicio, cruentas non efficit ultiones, Catholicorum tamen principum constitutionibus adjuvatur, ut sæpe quærant homines salutare remedium, dum corporale super se metuunt evenire supplicium.*” “Although the church,” as blessed Leo saith, “being content with ecclesiastical judgment, enacts not sanguinary punishments, yet is it *assisted by the ordinances of Catholic princes*, in order that men may often seek a salutary remedy whilst they dread the infliction of corporal punishment upon themselves.” “*Nullibi declarant Patres,*” says Delahogue, late Professor of Dogmatic Theology in Maynooth, “*se aut vi clavium, aut ex Apostolica auctoritate has temporales pœnas decernere.*” “The fathers (of Lateran) no where declare, that they decreed these temporal punishments by the *power of the keys*, or from Apostolic authority,” but as he explains it, “*hæ duæ potestates, spiritualis et temporalis, quamvis a Deo institutæ ut quælibet in suo ordine foret independens, ex eodem divino consilio, AMICO FŒDERE simul conjungi debent, sibi que mutuo esse præsidio.*”† “These two powers, the spiritual and the temporal, although instituted by God that each should be *independent in its own order*, ought, nevertheless, to be joined together in a FRIENDLY COVENANT, and to be a mutual *protection* to each other.” I leave you to

* Neal, vol. III., page 314—315.

† Delahogue, de Ecclesia, cap v., quæst. 3, sec. 2, page 265—266.

judge, my beloved, whether this is not the identical doctrine of the Westminster Divines, as propounded by themselves in the foregoing quotation from their answer to the charge of persecution preferred against them by the Independents.

Dr. Reid, in his excellent history of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, has the following quotation from Baillie, relative to the enforcement of the Solemn League and Covenant upon all classes, in the year 1643, when Moderators of Presbyteries were ordered “to cause swear it by *men* and *women*, and all of understanding in *every church* of our land, and to be subscribed by the hand of all men who could write, and by the clerk of session in name of those who could *not* write, with *certification of the church censures*, and *confiscation of goods*, presently to be inflicted on all *refusers*.” On this passage the Doctor has the following naive reflection:—“The Covenant, *thus introduced*,” says he, “was *everywhere received* and *subscribed* with the greatest *enthusiasm* and DELIGHT.”* A truly apostolic race the men of those days must have been, when they *every where* received, with the “*greatest enthusiasm*” and “DELIGHT,” a measure enforced upon them under pain of the church’s *curse*, and the “*spoiling of their goods*” by the civil authorities !!

Dr. Reid excuses the reformers of that age for their intolerant proceedings, on the ground that those who refused the Covenant, “were viewed, and the result almost invariably proved the truth of the *surmise*, as hostile to the cause of *truth* and *freedom*”—in fact, that politics and religion were so mixed together from the peculiar circumstances of the times, that their separation was next to impossible.† The Doctor, however, admits that in the present state of society, the principles then acted upon would be utterly *unsuitable*; and if so, is it not monstrous to call upon the Church at the present day to subscribe, without *qualification* or authoritative *explanation*, a set of dogmas confessedly unfitted for the times we live in? The apology for our reformers above quoted was repeated by Dr. Reid at Cookstown, in answer to the arguments of Counsellor Gibson against the coercive power of the civil magistrate in religious matters; but I beg to remind him, that it is substantially borrowed

* Dr. Reid’s History, vol. I. page 409.

† Page 410.

from the Roman Catholics, who set up a defence precisely similar on behalf of their persecuting General Councils. In the first place, Delahogue alleges that the object of those Councils was to put a stop to the civil calamities of various states of Europe, in consequence of the outrageous proceedings of the Cathari, the Waldenses, &c. who "*more paganorum omnia perderent et vastarent*"—secondly, to determine the controversies which then existed relative to matters of faith. Politics and religion, he argues, were at that time so blended together, that they could not be separated, as the enemies of the church were also those of the state; but the penal enactments were the work of the secular princes and their deputies, while the proper functions of the spiritual authorities were limited to matters of religious belief, except in cases in which bishops exercised both a civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction within their respective territories—a circumstance by no means uncommon in that age.* If, therefore, the principle laid down will free our ancestors from the charge of intolerance, it will equally acquit Popery of the guilt of persecution, on Dr. Reid's own showing; so that, according to this ingenious "explanation," there has never been a particle of persecution in Christendom since the days of the Pagan Emperors of Rome!

Dr. Reid argued at Cookstown, that if the Romish Church had ever acknowledged the rights of "*conscience*" in the same extensive terms that the Westminster Divines have done, it would not be easy to justify some of their other declarations and proceedings. The statements which I have copied from their answers to the Independents ought to satisfy Dr. Reid, that when the Divines agreed that "*God alone is Lord of the conscience,*" they did not mean that individuals should be left at liberty to profess any doctrines of whose truth they might be conscientiously satisfied;—no, they specially excepted "*erring consciences*" from the benefit of "*forbearance*;" and as the previous quotations from their "Answers" show, they claimed for themselves the right of being *judges* in this matter. But Dr. Reid must have formed a strange notion of the doctrines of Popery on the subject of conscience, when he relied on an argument such as that which has been quoted. Why, Peter Dens himself has laid down on that very subject a principle as strong

* Delahogue, *ut supra*, page 264.

as any thing to be found in the Westminster Confession.—In answer to the question, “*An aliquando licitum est agere contra conscientiam?*” he says, “*Nunquam licet agere contra conscientiam prohibentem aut præcipientem, SIVE ILLA CONSCIENTIA SIT RECTA, SIVE ERRONEA; quia conscientia est regula actuum humanorum.*”* “It is never lawful to act against conscience forbidding or commanding, WHETHER THAT CONSCIENCE BE RIGHT OR WRONG, because conscience is the rule of human actions.” How then, you may ask, did Dens reconcile this doctrine with the persecution of heretics, which he has elsewhere defended? I shall tell you, my beloved. In reply to the question, “What are the *punishments* annexed to the crime of heresy?” he states, “*Hæresis mere interna in hoc sæculo pœnam non habet, neque constituit casum reservatum.*”—“Merely inward heresy has no punishment in this world, nor does it constitute a reserved case.”† The meaning is, if the heresy be confined to the heretic’s own breast, it is not punishable; but if it is expressed in words, or in actions, then he comes under the lash. The very same sentiment was expressed by our reforming ancestors. “We know,” say the Presbytery of Edinburgh, in their Testimony of the year 1659, against the toleration which had been granted by Cromwell—“We know that this truth of God (their Testimony) will be reckoned a persecuting of men for their conscience, &c.; but as we disclaim troubling men for the simple light of their conscience, if it break NOT forth in DOCTRINE and PRACTICE; so the Scripture has taught us, that persecution is only putting a man to suffer for righteousness’ sake, and not the restraining of damnable errors,” &c.‡

At an early period of the controversy, the Presbyterian party had applied to the churches abroad for aid against the Independents,§ and in the year 1647, to which our historical review has now been brought, they commenced a series of negotiations with the King, in order to induce him to accede to their demands, and to form with them a junction for the overthrow of the Toleration party. A treaty for this purpose was at length agreed to between his Majesty and the Scottish Commissioners, the most prominent condition of which was, that Arians, Anabaptists, and other Sect-

* Dens, Tom. i. page 391. Coyne’s Edition. † Dens, Tom. ii. page 88.

‡ Faithful Witness Bearing, Pref. page xii.

§ Life and Times of A. Henderson, page 550.

aries should be effectually suppressed, while only a temporary arrangement was made in favour of the Covenanted Uniformity. In consequence of this defect, the "engagement," as it was called, was most violently opposed by the ministers, headed by the celebrated George Gillespie; and it was required, in addition to the former stipulations, that all classes should be made to swear to the Covenant, that no communication should be had with malignants, that his Majesty himself should absolutely, and without reserve, swear both Covenants, and that all who refused these articles "should be *incapable of any office civil or ecclesiastical, and should forfeit their estates.*"* To a number of these demands the Commissioners reluctantly yielded, after a display of extreme violence on the part of the Church, the leading members of which still remained dissatisfied, and a manifesto was issued by the Estates, requiring the English Parliament forthwith to disband the "Sectarian army," to establish religion according to the Covenant, and that "no *toleration* should be given to Anabaptists, Independents, and Separatists."† The Church continued dissatisfied with the concessions made, but the subsequent defeat of Duke Hamilton and his army at Preston, completed the ascendancy of Cromwell and the Sectaries in England.

We shall now resume our notice of what the Church of Scotland, in the meantime, was doing in the way of farther illustrating its doctrines of religious *liberty*; and first, we have an Act of Assembly, Anno 1647, which was passed immediately after the ratification of the Westminster Confession, ordaining Presbyteries to see to the *due execution* of the Act of Parliament of 1645, concerning the "uplifting of *pecuniall paines* to be employed upon *pious uses*," and also that the Acts of Parliament against *excommunicate* persons be *carefully execute*, especially the 20th Act of the preceding March. The next Act of Assembly (Aug. ult. Sess. 26) discharged all members of the kirk and kingdom from "*conversing* with persons tainted with such errors" as then prevailed in England, and from importing, selling, or circulating *erroneous books or papers*. In particular they were to abstain from books "*maintaining Independencie or Separation;*" which books were to be handed in to presbyteries, who were to institute immediate pro-

* Dr. Cook, Vol. iii. page 153.

† Idem, page 157.

cesses against transgressors, and the Assembly did “seriously recommend to *civil magistrates* to be assisting to ministers and presbyteries in execution of this Act.”*

Another liberal Act which passed this year (1647) was that concerning the 111 propositions, in which Act the Assembly say, “It becometh us.....to give our public testimony against the *dangerous tenets* of Erastianism, Independencie, and what is falsely called *liberty of conscience*, which are not only *contrary to sound doctrine*, but more special lets and hinderance as well to the preservation of our own received doctrines, as to the work of reformation,” &c. They then add the following proposition:—“The civil magistrate *may*, and *ought* to suppress, by *corporal* or *civil punishments*, such as by spreading *error* and *heresy*, or by fomenting *schism*, greatly dishonour God, dangerously hurt religion, and disturb the *peace* of the *kirk*. Which heads of doctrine (however *opposed* by the authors and fomenters of the foresaid *errors*) the General Assembly doth *firmly believe, own, maintain, and commend* unto others, as *solid, true, orthodox, grounded upon the Word of God, consonant to the judgment both of the ancient and the best reformed kirks*.”† Here, my beloved, is an official declaration of the very Assembly which first sanctioned the Westminster Confession, and I leave you to digest it if you can. It is a declaration against the English Sectaries in *avowed opposition* to “*liberty of conscience*,” and in favour of the propositions of the Westminster Divines, a few of which have been already recited.

The Act of July 28, 1648, is a strong denunciation of an “Act of *Parliament* and *Committee of Estates*,” passed on the 10th of June. In this document the *Assembly* ordered their commission to proceed with *church censures* against all who should comply with the requirements of the *Parliament*!! After ratifying the “*Shorter Catechism*” this Assembly proceeded to emit “*A declaration concerning the present dangers of Religion*,” in which they denounce the *cursed opinions*, and ungodly practices of sectaries,” and then amidst a multiplicity of other matters, they lay down rules for the *discovery* of sectaries—one rule is, if any *commend* or *circulate*

* Acts of Assembly, pages 354, 355. Stevenson's History, vol. III. pages 1208—9.

† Printed Acts, pages 365—366.

sectarian books—another, if he *allow, avow, or use CONVENTICLES, OR PRIVATE MEETINGS*, forbidden by the Acts of Assembly, 1641, and 1647 !—and, thirdly, if he be *unwilling to reckon sectaries amongst the enemies of the Covenant*. To find the men, who themselves a few years after suffered so severely for holding “*CONVENTICLES*,” now legislating so fiercely, when they enjoyed power, in opposition to “*CONVENTICLES*” held by dissentients from their own communion, is a melancholy example of human inconsistency. The same Assembly (Sept. 23) issued a “*Declaration and Exhortation to their Brethren of England*,” against the Independents, Anabaptists, &c., in which they strongly testify against the “*wicked toleration*” contended for by these parties, and they complain of their English brethren’s neglect of the “*work of reformation, and connivance at, and complying with sectaries*,” since “*whatever is commanded by the God of heaven*” ought “*to be diligently done for the house of the God of heaven*.” They, however, specially exempt from this charge the “*cloud of witnesses of the ministry in several provinces and countries of that kingdom (England,) after the example of the worthy ministry of the City of London*.”* Now, it is worth recollecting that this testimony of the London ministers was directed against what they called the “*error of toleration*,” which is represented as “*promoting all other errors, heresies, and blasphemies whatsoever, under the grossly abused notion of liberty of conscience ;*” and they complain of it as a sad grievance, “*that men should have liberty to worship God in that way and manner as shall appear to them most agreeable to the word of God, and no man be punished or discountenanced by authority for the same*”† In referring to the provincial petitions, the Assembly had chiefly in view that from Lancashire, a copy of which, printed in the year 1646, is now before me with observations—a reply to the objections of some “*namelesse sectary*,” and a “*Parenetick to Lancashire*,” by John Tillsley, one of the leading petitioners. In this document it was made to be matter of special lamentation that “*separate congregations from the Presbyterian had been erected and multiplied, confidently expecting a Toleration*,” and the Parliament was called upon to listen to “*the advice of the Assembly of Divines*,” to the effect that “*some strict*

* Act of Assembly, pages 408.—409.

† Neal, vol. III. page 328.

and *speedy* course might be taken for the *suppression* of all separate congregations of *Anabaptists, Brownists, Heretiques*, and other sectaries, who should *refuse to submit* to the said *discipline and government*:" viz. the Presbyterian. This "*suppression*" is directly explained by the petitioners, to be by *civil penalties*, in accordance with the wishes of the City of London, the "endeavours and advice of the Assembly of Divines," and the "Orthodox Presbyterian noblemen and gentlemen, ministers and others well affected, whose prayers, endeavours, and examples, were from the first a *special means of engaging God and the kingdom*" to the Parliament. With this petition the lords were so delighted that they entered upon their journals a record, bearing date the 25th March, 1646, stating how well their lordships took the zeal of the petitioners for the "*suppression of schisme, heresy, &c.*" The House of Lords have uniformly been great sticklers for *professional* religion, whether Popery, Prelacy, or Presbytery, was to be maintained.

The Act of August 3, 1648, provides that ministers, for their *silence*, in regard to the *corruptions* of the *times*, shall be *censured*—an Act to which Dr. Cooke's special attention is invited, so far as the prelatival controversy is concerned. Passing over a number of minor things, I come to the "*overtures concernin J Papists, their children, and excommunicate persons*," which were agreed to by the Assembly of 1648.* By this Act the Assembly "*charge and require* all Presbyteries, **IN THE NAME OF GOD,**" to fulfil the provisions of the Acts of 1642 and 1646 against *Papists, non-communicants, &c.*, and that they use *all diligence* for *putting in execution* the Acts of Parliament against Papists and *excommunicate persons*, and that they *register* their *diligences* thereanent in their *Presbytery books*," &c. The Act then proceeds to ordain the giving in of district lists of Papists, the finding of security for the bringing home of children educated abroad, if their parents are suspected, the necessity of *Presbyterial licenses* in order to the foreign education of youth, the enactment of additional severities against excommunicated persons, and the establishment of espionage as to "what families put their sons or daughters to such families as are tainted with Popery within this land." In the conclusion of this

* Acts, page 429.

Act, Presbyteries are warned that they "shall be severely censured if they shall be found *remiss or negligent in any of these points.*"* I ought, perhaps, to have mentioned that the Act of Aug. 3, 1642, which is *confirmed* by that of the year under consideration, provided, that if Papists and other recusants should not, when called upon, be *willing to go to (the Presbyterian) church*, an indulgence of *five months* should be allowed them, during which time they were to attend all religious *conferences, &c.*; and if, at the end of that time they were not *converted*, they should be processed without delay as obstinate heretics! † Bearing in mind the *civil effects* of such obstinacy, and that these amounted to something like a modern "*writ of rebellion*," what think you of the liberality of our forefathers, my beloved?

July 7, 1649. The very first Act of this Assembly was to *ratify and approve* the proceedings of the commission of the former Assembly, and to return its members "heartly thanks for their great pains, travel, and *fidelity.*" Now, one of the most important Acts of this commission had been the issuing of an elaborate manifesto against toleration, drawn up in terms of the most fierce denunciation. You must always, my beloved, keep in mind that the toleration in question left Papists, Unitarians, and other gross heretics exposed to the unmitigated severity of the penal laws then in force, while its benefits were exclusively confined to a few classes of *orthodox Protestant religionists.* It was even expressly provided, that "the indulgence granted to tender consciences should not extend to *tolerate* the use of the COMMON PRAYER *in any part of the kingdom.*" ‡ This restriction upon Episcopalians was contrary to the wish of the Independents in the army, but it was nevertheless carried in order to conciliate the Presbyterians as far as possible. Let us now see the language applied by the Commission of the General Assembly to this mere shadow of religious freedom. It is described as a "THRONE SET UP FOR SATAN," "A MONSTROUS INIQUITY," since it "*cannot be shown that any part of that power which magistrates had under the OLD TESTAMENT is REPEALED under the NEW*; neither can any convincing reason be brought why it should be of *narrower extent* now nor then. Are not blasphemies,

* Acts, page 431.

† Pages 119—120.

‡ Neal, vol. III., page 349.

errors, and heresies, as dishonourable to God and destructive unto souls now as of old?" After quoting almost every text in the Old Testament about "*thrusting through*" false prophets, *stoning* enticers to idolatry, putting to *death* false worshippers, &c., they proceed— "Such a CURSED TOLERATION as this will not only make every thing in *religion* appear *uncertain*, *rend* the *churches*, and *disturb* the *state*, and trample all *ordinances*, *order*, and *government* under foot, and bring forth many *blasphemies* and *abominations*, but is like to BANISH RELIGION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS *quite out of the land*, and at last make a "HELL UPON EARTH!!"* The "*toleration of divers sects*" amongst the Jews, is described as having been "*the main cause of their ruin*," and an elaborate argument is entered upon, in order to show that Christian magistrates *may*, or rather *ought* to use the same remedies for the extirpation of error, which were enjoined under the Mosaic dispensation! All this is put forth by the commission in the "*name of the kirk of Scotland, whose servants we are*," and the very first Act of the kirk at the following Assembly (1649) was to affix its solemn seal of approval to the horrible declarations of which my limits permit me to transcribe only a fragment. The Estates of Scotland were not behind the Kirk in their zeal against freedom of Conscience, as they not only denounced it in their return to the Testimony of the Commission, but forwarded an energetic remonstrance to the English Parliament, in which they represented "*a toleration of all religions and forms of worship*" as tending to "*destroy the cause* wherein both nations have been engaged, and to *frustrate all the ends of the Solemn League and Covenant*, which both kingdoms have sworn with uplifted hands to Almighty God faithfully to observe."

The manifesto of the Commission contains one sentiment which I cannot avoid noticing, as it gives us an instructive commentary upon the meaning of the Westminster Divines in assigning to God alone a supremacy over conscience. "We know," say the Commission, "that no man hath *dominion* over the *conscience*; but the Lord who made it exercises his sovereignty therein; and he hath set a *law* to the spirits of men, after the *rule* whereof they are to *order* both their *judgments* and *affections*; and he hath given power

* See this extraordinary document at length in *Faithful Witness-Bearing Exemplified*, from page 71 to 82.

to those whom he clothes with AUTHORITY which they are to exercise in these things, so far as they are manifested in expressions and actions unto the dishonour of his name and prejudice of others."* Compare this, my beloved, with Peter Dens' inward and outward heresy already alluded to.

The Assembly of 1649, not content with ratifying the murderous tenets which had been put forth by the Commission, did in their own names, by their Act of July 27, Sess. 27, renew all their former protests against toleration. This Act is entitled, "*A seasonable and necessary warning and declaration,*" &c. and in it is embodied, with the Assembly's full sanction, a copy of the horrid coronation oath, already described in a former part of this letter, and which bound his Majesty to root out all heretics who should be convicted as such by the Presbyterian Kirk of Scotland!†

Still this was not enough for the Assembly; and, accordingly, on the 6th of Augt. 1649, they issued a "*Brotherly Exhortation to their Brethren in England,*" reiterating their abhorrence of toleration, which they characterized as a "*despising of the oath of God,*" and a *foul revolt* "against so many faire testimonies, which the Lord Christ hath entered as protestations to preserve his right in these ends of the earth long since given him for his possession, and of late confirmed by solemn covenant. Christ's right to these kingdoms is surer than that he should be pleaded out of it by a pretended liberty of conscience, and his begun possession is more pretious unto him than to be satisfied with a dishonorable toleration!" To describe the bigotted manifestoes, which have been recited as so many protestations entered by the Lord Jesus Christ in behalf of his right to an insignificant speck of earth, is an awful instance of that blindness and delusion to which the minds of the best of men may be left in the inscrutable dispensations of Providence! Two of the last Acts of this memorable Assembly were, first, the appointment of a commission to inquire into the punishment of *witches, charmners, &c.*, who about that time had begun to be nearly as troublesome as the sectaries; and secondly, in the Assembly's letter to the King, (Augt. 6, 1649) they reprimand his Majesty for having granted to

* Page 73.

† Acts, page 457. Testimony Bearing Exemplified, pages 437, 438.

the Papists of Ireland, "contrary to the *standing lawes of your royall progenitors*, contrary to the *commandment of the most High God*, and to the high *contempt and dishonour* of his majestie, a *full liberty* of their abominable idolatry, which *cannot be otherwise judged but a giving of your royall power and strength unto the Beast !!*"

It will be admitted, my beloved, that a good way of understanding the principles of our ancestors in regard to civil government, is to look at what they *did* when they enjoyed *power*, brief as that period was. In order to accomplish this good end, you will open with me a volume entitled, "*A Collection of several remarkable and valuable Sermons &c., at Renewing and Subscribing the National Covenant,*" &c. (Glasgow, 1799;) and, on turning to page 449, you will find, "*The Duty of King and People—A Sermon preached at Scoon, Jan. 1, 1651, at the Coronation of Charles II.,*" by the Rev. Robert Douglas, who had been appointed to that office by the church, and whose discourse is therefore official. In the preacher's exposition of the second article of the "*Solemn League,*" the King is told—"Popery is not to be *suffered* in the royal family, *nor within his dominions*; Prelacy, once plucked up by the root, is not to be *permitted* to take root again; all *heresy and error* whatsoever must be *opposed* by him to the *uttermost of his power*; and by the "*Covenant,*" the King must be FAR FROM TOLERATION OF ANY FALSE RELIGION WITHIN HIS DOMINIONS.* After the example of the Jewish kings, Mr. Douglas recommended his Majesty and his subjects to set about a thorough reformation, by going to "*the house of Baal*" and *breaking it down*; and *Papists, Prelatists, Sectaries, and Erastians*, are specially pointed out as objects of regal and popular animadversion.†

After sermon, his Majesty was made to solemnly swear and subscribe the "*National Covenant*" and the "*Solemn League*;" and then the Scottish Coronation Oath was administered, binding him to "*root out all heretics* who should be *convicted as such by the true Kirk of God.*"‡ This his Majesty, kneeling and holding up his right hand, engaged to do in the following terms:—"By the Eternal and Almighty God, who liveth and reigneth for ever, I shall *observe and keep all that is contained in this oath*"!!! This ceremony having been performed, his Majesty issued a long "*Declara-*

* Page 463. † Pages 488—489. ‡ Pages 503, 504—Form of the Coronation.

tion," to the effect, that as he did himself "*detest and abhor all Popery, superstition, and idolatry, together with Prelacy, and all errors, heresy, schism, and profaneness, and resolves not to tolerate, much less allow, any of these in any part of his Majesty's dominions, but to oppose himself thereto, and to endeavour the extirpation thereof to the utmost of his power, so doth he as a Christian expect, and as a King require, all such of his subjects who have stood in opposition to the Solemn League, &c. to lay down their enmity to the cause and people of God, and to cease to prefer the interest of man to the interest of God.*"* His Covenanted Majesty also confessed the "*exceeding sinfulness*" of his father's conduct, in having allowed unto his subjects in Ireland "*the liberty of the Popish religion; for the which he doth desire from his heart to be deeply humbled before the Lord!*"† Such, my beloved, was the fashion in which our forefathers, even when a *Sectarian army was ready to crush themselves*, were prepared to exemplify their maxim of proceeding against *idolaters and heretics "by the power of the civil magistrate;"* and such were the compulsory engagements of the only monarch who ever "*strutted his brief hour*" under the system of the Westminster Confession of Faith!

The ministers of Perth and Fife, headed by the celebrated Rutherford, one of the Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly, also published, Anno 1659, a strong denunciation of Cromwell's Toleration, which they represented as a gross violation of the "*Covenant*"—as involving its authors in the "*guilt of other mens' sins*"—in a consequent participation of their "*plagues,*" and as "*multiplying gods according to the number of our cities.*" "Our hearts," they add, "*tremble to think how the glory of God shall be trodden under foot; how the precious truths of the Gospel shall be corrupted how the power of godliness shall be eaten up with vain janglings;*" and again, "*as we do profess the sorrow of our hearts, so do we testify the abhorrence of our souls against all the affronts that have been or are offered and done to the National Covenant,*"‡ &c. A singular subject it was for all this godly sorrow and lamentation on the part of the church, when it is recollected that the sole amount of the evil was, that *orthodox Protestants were permitted by law to meet unmolested in Dissenting places of worship!* Is it then any wonder, my beloved, that Milton, whose eloquent de-

* Pages 548—549. † Page 550. ‡ Faithful Witness Bearing, pages 109—110.

fences of the rights of conscience and the freedom of the press, in opposition to the intolerance and censorship of our Reformers, and who had himself, for the maintenance of his opinions, been accused to Parliament by the Assembly of Divines, should have addressed to the latter the following severe reproof, under the name of "*The New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*:"—

"Because you have thrown off your Prelate Lord,
And with stiff vows renounced his Liturgy,
To seize the widowed whore Plurality
From them, whose *sin ye envied*, not *abhorred*,
Dare ye for this ADJURE THE CIVIL SWORD
To force our consciences that Christ set free?
* * * * *

Men, whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul,
Must now be named and printed *heretics*.
* * * * *

But we do hope to find out all your tricks,
Your plots and packing worse than those of Trent,
That so the Parliament
May, with their wholesome and preventive shears,
Clip your phylacteries, tho' baulk your ears.
And succour our just fears
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,
NEW PRESBYTER IS BUT OLD PRIEST WRIT LARGE."*

If it were expedient for me, my beloved, to enter upon a synopsis of the measures enacted by the *state*, in pursuance of the opinions avowed by the *church* during the period embraced in our review, I could present you with multitudinous examples of the most revolting exclusiveness. The whole system of our forefathers, and I regret that necessity compels me to state the painful truth—the whole system of our forefathers was one of sheer *force* from beginning to end. For instance, the "*National Covenant*" itself, by an ordinance of James VI., March 2, 1580, was to be administered by all clergymen to their parishioners, and the names of recusants were to be forwarded to the Council, under a penalty of £40 Scots, to be deducted from the stipend, that "*we may take order*," says his Majesty, "*with such proud contemners of God and his laws.*"† I have already shown you that a precisely similar course was followed at the time of the "*Second Reformation*," and that the Solemn League was imposed with even additional severity. In England,

* Milton's Occasional Poems, No. XIX. See also his "*Areopagitica*, or *Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*," and his observations on *Toleration*, both of which were directed against the Presbyterians. (PROSE WORKS, pages 103 and 562. London, 1833.)

† Collection, page 545.

in the year 1645, an Act of Parliament was passed imposing a fine of not less than *five*, and not more than *fifty* pounds, upon all who should *preach* or *write* against the "Directory for Public Worship" which had been settled by the Westminster Divines (!) and one year's imprisonment in the case of any person who should be convicted of three times using the Episcopal "*Book of Common Prayer*," even in a private family!* In Scotland, the Parliament, by an Act, dated Feb. 17, and March 3, 1649, enacted that all deniers of the doctrine of the Trinity, and all "*worshippers of false gods*" (Papists), *should be punished with DEATH!*

It is of some importance, my beloved, that you should know the sentiments that were held on this subject by the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly; and here I may introduce to you those of Dr. Samuel Rutherford, who was one of the most distinguished men of his day. Rutherford expressly states it as his undoubted opinion, that "*whatever punishment, even to blood and death, was inflicted (under the Jewish Dispensation) upon seducing prophets, idolaters, apostates—these same stand yet in the PLENITUDE OF MORAL OBLIGATION AGAINST SUCH AS OFFEND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.*" Mr. Gillespie, another Commissioner, maintains that the civil magistrate is "*custos et vindex utriusque tabulæ*"—"he ought to preserve both the *first* and *second* table of the holy and good law of God, from being despised and violated, and *punish by corporal* or other *temporal* punishments, such (whether church-officers or church-members) as *openly dishonour God* by gross offences, either against the first or against the second table; and this he doth as God's *deputy* and *vicegerent*, subordinate and subservient to that *universal dominion which God Almighty exerciseth over the children of men.....*and this is done, not under the notion of *scandall*, but of *crime.*"† This proves that the coercive interference of the State was regarded by our ancestors as *a part of the law of nature*, and a thing in itself strictly "*equitable.*" Gillespie also adds, in one out of a hundred passages which might be cited, that "*the magistrate hath power and authority to make the ecclesiastical sentence to be obeyed and submitted unto by all whom it concerneth.*"‡ Lest some of you, my

* Brown's History of the British Churches, vol. I., page 214, as quoted by Begg in his letter to Dr. Symington, page 10. Glasgow, 1834.

† Aaron's Rod Blossoming, dedicated to the West. As. of Divines, and "*Published by Authority.*" 1646. Book II. c. viii. p. 263. ‡ Page 264.

beloved, should not understand the meaning of the terms “keeper” and “revenger” (*custos et vindex*) of *both* tables of the law, as applied to the civil magistrate, I beg to inform you, it means that the latter is bound, *by virtue of his office*, to inflict upon men *temporal punishments* for being *schismatics or heretics in religion*, as well as for being thieves, murderers, or other enemies to the well-being of civil society !!!

Let not our Reformers be *blamed* unworthily, as if their opinions had been in *contradiction* to those of the age in which they lived; but, at the same time, it is right that *falsehoods* should not be circulated respecting their opinions, as if they had been the friends of religious freedom in *our* sense of the word. Calvin himself justified the burning of Servetus for heresy; Beza wrote lengthened dissertations in its support; and even Melancthon himself expressed his *wonder* that any one should *disapprove* of it—“*miratus sum esse qui severitatem illam improbant.*”* The famous Turretine, who was contemporary with the Westminster Divines, and between these and the foreign churches a regular correspondence was kept up, not only defends the *principle* of executing *capital punishment* upon heretics, but justifies the *exercise* of that principle in the case of Servetus.† The opinions recited were those of the times—not of the individuals, my beloved. Archbishop Laud himself had the sense to admit that “’Tis ever a dangerous fire that begins in the bed-straw,” and that “all those domesticke evils, which threaten a rent in Church or State, are with far more safety *prevented by wisdom* than *punished by justice*,” and yet, like our Reformers, he could add in the very next page, “’Tis a great ease to let every thing be as it will, and every man *believe and doe as he list*. But whether *governors* in *State* or *Church* doe their duty therewhile is easily seene, since *this is an effect of no king in Israel, Jud. xvii.*”‡ The very same doctrine was unhappily held by our Presbyterian ancestors.§ Some little diversity may have existed between them and their opponents in regard to the *principle* of the thing, so far as the king’s ecclesiastical

* Hoornbeek, tom. i., page 16. *Apparatus ad Controversias et Disputationes Socinianas*. Ultrajecti 1651.

† Inst. Theol., pars III., pages 365—374. Genevæ, 1690.

‡ Controversy with Fisher the Jesuite—Dedication to the King (Charles I.)

§ For a parallel between the Papists, Prelatists, Presbyterians, and Independents on this subject, see GODWIN, Vol. i., pages 342, 343, 344, and 335, 336, 337.

supremacy was concerned, but their *practices*, when they respectively enjoyed power, had a melancholy coincidence, on which we cannot look back without humiliation.

The present Establishment of Scotland, my beloved, is founded on principles exactly the same as those which uniformly characterized the Presbyterian Church from the days of John Knox till the Revolution. The Coronation Oath for Scotland administered to King William after the Revolution of 1688, contained the odious clause to which reference has been so frequently made, but which he of "glorious memory" honestly refused to take, except under a protest against being bound by its persecuting meaning. The Acts of Assembly down to a late period continued to exhibit the same routine of exclusiveness, and the same hatred of toleration, which are so conspicuous in those of the seventeenth century, as we have already seen.* The Toleration Acts of William and Anne were protested against as loudly as that of Cromwell had been, although these Acts constituted the charter of Presbyterian liberty in this country, at a time when *conformity* to the Established Church was made to be synonymous with *loyalty* to the Throne, as Kirkpatrick complains; and when the Prelatists were ready, not only to blacken the character of Presbyterians, by the dissemination of the foulest slanders, in order to make them obnoxious to the State; but, on the fancied attainment of their object, to nail up the doors of their Meeting-houses,† in expectation of a second millenium of boots and thumb-screws. It is to the determined perseverance of the State in a tolerant policy, in opposition as well to the Presbyterian as to the Episcopal Establishment that our present religious freedom is owing. Neither Churches nor Churchmen have any merit in the matter.

A sort of adventitious sanctity has been attached to the Confession, my beloved, by persons who are ignorant of its history. It is right that you should know that the Westminster Divines had no ecclesiastical *authority whatever*—they were called together by the English Parliament for the purpose of giving mere *advice* when required to do so; and in one instance, by putting forward a re-

* For a Synopsis of the intolerant Acts of the Assembly since the Revolution, see the *Dens' Theology Humbug*, pages 28, 29, 30. Sold by John Tait, High-street, Belfast.

† The Meeting-houses of Antrim, Rathfriland, and another place, whose name I do not now recollect, were nailed up in the manner described.

monstrance when they were *not* required, they exposed themselves to a *premunire*, from the effects of which they were glad to escape. When the Confession, therefore, was completed by the Assembly, it was introduced into the House of Commons with all the forms of an ordinary Police Bill, and Wednesday in each week, after its introduction, was set apart for the consideration of at least one chapter. Each article was debated separately, and at length the parts agreed to, "*with some alterations*," were sent up to the Lords. The doctrinal parts were finally passed into a law; but the chapters relating to discipline were "*re-committed*," and at length laid aside altogether; for instance, the whole of the 30th chapter, the 31st chapter, a considerable part of the 23d chapter, and the 4th section of the 20th chapter.* Not one of these articles was ever sanctioned by the English Parliament which had called together the Assembly of Divines, though they were swallowed wholesale by the church and Parliament of Scotland on being sent down there. As the Westminster Divines had no *authority* as a body, and since the only Assembly which could give validity to their decisions declined to do so, in the case of the obnoxious articles mentioned, I submit to you whether *we* ought to be bound by them? The doctrinal parts of the Confession, as they stand, are really the work of the English House of Commons, who *altered* them as they would have done the clauses of a bill for the regulation of beer-shops—the Westminster Assembly were no more than a set of respectable agents for drawing up the Bill and putting it into proper form—and is it not monstrous to insist upon our subscribing, as absolutely as we would the book of God itself, a set of propositions suggested by a number of fallible Divines, but modified and altered to suit the taste of an assembly of intriguing statesmen, the great body of whom knew as much about systematic Divinity, as you and I, my beloved, know about the language of the Houynhnhnms?

Another historical fact, my beloved, deserves your serious consideration. After the Westminster Confession had been finally settled, with the concurrence of Parliament, it is stated, on the authority of Mr. Nye, a member of the Assembly, that "when the Scots Commissioners proposed that the answers to the Shorter Catechism should be subscribed by all the members, the *motion was REJECTED*, after a considerable number in the Assembly had shewn

* Neal, vol. III., page 230.

it was an *unwarrantable imposition* ;”* and, in point of fact, the Confession itself never was subscribed by the members of the Westminster Assembly, except by the Prolocutor, the Assessors, and the Clerks, for the purpose of *giving it authenticity as a public document* ! Notwithstanding the zeal of that Assembly against Toleration, its Confession was not formally made the test of “legal orthodoxy,” whatever might have been the consequence had the “Sectaries” not interfered with the establishment of the “Covenanted Uniformity.” In Scotland every burghess who then was, or who had been at any time a magistrate, was compelled to communicate in his own parish church, under a penalty of 200 merks for each violation of the law in this respect—other burghesses were liable to a penalty of £40 Scots for each offence, whether themselves or their *wives* were the transgressors ; and every child above 15 years of age was liable to one-fifth of “the said paines,” while *servants* were to be mulcted in “one year’s fee, as often as they should contravene the said Act.”† This Act against non-communicants extended to *Papists* as well as others ; and was it not, my beloved, a hopeful mode of crowding the sacramental tables with communicants ? Every Christian must shudder at the idea of driving men by pains and penalties to commemorate the dying love of their Redeemer, and yet this was the fashion in which our ancestors, who have transmitted to us the Westminster Confession as an ecclesiastical heir-loom, proceeded against recusants by “*the power of the civil magistrate ! ! !*”

The historical statements which I have laid before you, my beloved, abundantly prove, that the *meaning* attached by our forefathers to the propositions in the Confession, respecting the magistrate’s coercive authority in regard to heretics, was, that the *sword*, in a *literal sense*, ought to be drawn against them ; and in agreeing, as you have done, to subscribe these propositions without qualification, do you, or do you not subscribe them in the sense in which they were understood by their authors ? If you do *not* hold them in that sense, you are bound, *as a church*, to tell the world so in an *authoritative declaration* on the subject ; for how is it otherwise to be *known* that you do not give your sanction to the whole catalogue of intolerance which I have collected from the annals of that church with which you have publicly identified yourselves ? If you *persevere*, as some of your “leaders” are understood to have

* Neal, vol III., page 329, *note*. † Begg’s Pamphlet, Page 22.

intimated their intention of doing, in making *unqualified subscription to the Confession a term of admission to sacramental communion*, how are the laity to vindicate themselves against the charge universally flung in their faces, of affixing their *seal and signature to dogmas of persecution*? The Roman Catholics of this country have long since solemnly *abjured* the narrow tenets of their forefathers. Dr. Murray has lately repudiated, with *official solemnity* the intolerance of Dens, while he sanctions only those parts of his work which relate to matters of *religious doctrine*; and are members of the Synod of Ulster to be exposed to the taunts of Papists and the sneers of Unitarians, because, in this respect, they are behind the professors of Popery itself? There was a time when our name, as *Presbyterians*, was publicly associated with that of civil and religious freedom; and I feel convinced, that there is yet *spirit* enough in the Synod to cast off the stigma which an overbearing Dictatorship has, for a time, succeeded in fixing upon its character. I honour Dr. Cooke for the services which he rendered to the cause of true religion at an important era of our Synodical history; but, while I do justice to his merits on that occasion, I cannot overlook his subsequent errors, and especially his systematic attempts to carry his favourite measures by literally TRAMPLING upon *all* who venture to *oppose him in the slightest particular*. The scenes of violence of which our Synod has of late frequently been the arena, would hardly befit the character of a "TRADES' POLITICAL UNION," much less that of an Assembly of grave Divines constituted in the name of the Mediator; and, I ask you, my brethren, whether this is a state of things to be any longer endured? Papists are threatening us with a retaliatory crusade in return for the Exeter Hall and other similar exhibitions which have been got up for party purposes against themselves; and is this a time for the Synod of Ulster to expose itself to scornful animadversion, by even *seeming* to give its countenance to the antiquated intolerance of the 17th century? Other religious communities are going forward in the way of improvement, and is it not a deep disgrace to us to be found engaged in a *retrograde* reformation? I call upon you to rescue yourselves from this humbled condition—to come forward boldly, and like honest men to EXPUNGE from your standards doctrines of which modern Popery itself is ashamed. It will not do to blink the matter by private unauthorized "explanations," or by

ridiculous endeavours to *twist* the phraseology of the Divines into something like an inoffensive meaning; for no man, who knows the history of the Presbyterian Church, can do otherwise than smile with contempt at a perversion so manifest. Awake, arise then, my brethren, "or be for ever fallen!" If you do not *now* rescue yourselves from the shameful bondage in which you are held, Popery will mock you with retributive jeers—Unitarianism will exult in the fulfilment of its prophecies as to your prospective degradation—and Infidelity will pour on you its surcharged vials of pitying scorn, as being one year the passive tools of a "Leader" in "thrilling with horror" at the persecuting doctrines of Dens, and the next year, when an opposite political purpose was to be served, proving yourselves ready to swallow, without so much as a *proviso* in regard to their sanguinary meaning, the very same doctrines which you had individually condemned! This is your *present* state, my brethren, and whether the reproach belonging to it is to be perpetuated, must depend entirely upon your conduct at the next meeting of the General Synod. If you wish to be made a laughing-stock to intelligent men of all denominations—if you wish the respectable laity of your own flocks to desert you with indignant contempt, you will tamely place your necks beneath the yoke, and will forswear persecution this year when the name of Peter Dens is affixed to it; while, like unthinking automata, you will not scruple next year to sanction the very same principles under another designation! Beloved, I do "hope better things of you, though I thus speak."

It is necessary, my beloved, that I should remind you of the anomalous position which, as a church, you now occupy. Roman Catholics are anxious to disclaim the persecuting doctrines of their ancestors—they have it not in their power to convene a General Council for this purpose, but they have done all that a branch church, connected with a parent association, can accomplish, in order to free themselves from the odious charge brought against them—they have given you their solemn appeal to Almighty God on the subject, as well as their most energetic denunciation of the principles imputed to them. The Secession Church of Scotland have for many years past been in the habit of requiring from their ministers, at their ordination, subscription to the Westminster Confession, with the following qualification, viz. "It being always understood that you are not required to *approve* of any thing in these books, (the

Westminster Confession and the two Catechisms,) which *teaches* or may be *supposed* to teach, *compulsory* or *persecuting*, and *intolerant* principles in *religion*.* The Covenanters, who used to be looked down upon by the Synod of Ulster as a set of the most narrow-minded, intolerant bigots, have, in the "*Explanation and Defence*" of their "*Terms of Communion*,"† disclaimed the persecuting tenets embodied in the Confession; or have, at least, in that official document shown their *willingness* to put upon those tenets a *sense* as nearly as possible coincident with modern views of religious freedom. It may be fairly doubted whether the mitigated statements made by the Covenanters in this authoritative exposition of the standards of original Presbyterianism are strictly in accordance with historical facts, but no matter: if their fathers were wrong, they do not *adopt* the errors of their fathers, though they may have lacked the moral courage to put their disclaimer into a direct form; but here, my beloved, is the Synod of Ulster, which, while the Seceders of Scotland, the Covenanters, and even the much abused *Irish Papists* themselves, are all anxious to escape from the misdeeds of other times, deliberately passes a resolution forcing every ministerial candidate in its communion to record his adhesion to doctrines fit only for the middle ages, without so much as the liberty of protesting against a single doctrinal item, if it can only be shown to have been held by the Westminster Divines, although these very Divines themselves refused to subscribe their own work! Every other religious community is trying to disengage itself from the trammels of a bigotted *antiquity*, but here are you, my beloved, apparently made to leap back nearly *two centuries*, and like a parcel of wooden images in the hands of a puppet-master, to perform every variety of "fantastic tricks" in the sight of "high heaven" at the bidding of a politico-religious dictator, by committing yourselves, without limitation, to principles which that dictator himself lately denounced, with all the fury of zealotism, when party objects were to be attained by their exclusive ascription to the poor Papists of this country; but which principles that individual can not only digest, but thrust upon others as terms of ministerial fellowship, when they are warranted by the "*Imprimatur*" of the Westminster Divines! Submit, then,

* Testimony of the United Associate Synod, second Edition, pages 187, 199, 201. Edinburgh, 1828.

† See from page 161 to 179. Belfast Edition, 1834.

to your passive bondage, my beloved, if you will; but let me tell you, that the intelligent *Laity* will occupy that independent post which, like craven-hearted cowards, you have thus basely deserted.

In conclusion, my beloved, I know that attempts will be made to represent me as unfriendly to the holy religion which I profess, merely because I have given you a quantity of historic information not very complimentary to the liberality of our Presbyterian Reformers; but I can, with an honest conscience, put to you the interrogatory of the Apostle, "Am I become your *enemy* because I tell you the *truth*?" If the suppression of *recorded facts*, or the concealment of what is unfortunately preserved in the archives of the Church of Scotland, be an *offence*, I must yield to my fate, since I will neither *withhold the truth*, nor *suggest a direct falsehood*. In the foregoing letter, I have made it a matter of religious obligation to give my *authorities* with the most scrupulous exactness, so that every intelligent reader may detect me in all cases of *error* or *misrepresentation*; and therefore, in the most entire confidence that I have faithfully illustrated the *meaning* attached by the Westminster Divines to their dogmas respecting the *right* and *duty* of the State to put down *heretics* by the power of the civil *sword*, I demand of the Ministry—I ask the Eldership and *Laity* of the Synod of Ulster, are they *prepared* to sanction the doctrines which have been recited? If they dare not sanction these doctrines, let them unite at the next Synod in one mighty and justly indignant effort, to blot out for ever the worse than Popish stain, which the acts of a domineering fraction of the Synod have for a short time affixed to its character as a Church of Christ.

I am, my dearly beloved brethren, yours in a "Confession" of Universal Charity,

A MEMBER OF THE SYNOD OF ULSTER.

October 28th, 1836.