

LECTURE XIII.

CONCLUSION AND RESULTS OF THE ASSEMBLY.

WITH the completion of the Catechisms, the work of the Westminster Assembly may be said to have come to an end. Even before they were finished, the attendance had fallen off considerably, and it dwindled still further after they were out of hand, till there was often difficulty in obtaining the attendance of the forty members required to change a committee into a formal meeting of the Assembly. Rutherford, the last of the original Scottish Commissioners, had taken his departure in November 1647, and it is more than doubtful whether Blair, who came up the following autumn, was ever admitted to take his seat. The Assembly after 1647 seems to have occupied itself chiefly in getting ready for publication its answers to the reasons of the dissenting brethren, in vindication of their dissents from the decisions of the Assembly on the subject of the presbyterial government of the church, and the ordination of its ministers, as well as to certain papers they had given in to the

committee on accommodation.¹ The divines also resumed consideration of the Queries of the House of Commons regarding the *jus divinum* of church-government, and made further progress in putting into shape their answers to them, but they do not appear to have completed their labours or to have presented the results of them to the House. Their sessions continue to be numbered till 22d February 1648-9, which is marked as Session 1163. After that date they met chiefly as a committee for the examination of presentees to benefices and of candidates for licence till 25th March 1652. Whether their meetings ceased at that date, or whether, though no record of them is now extant, they were continued till the dismissal of the Long Parliament by Cromwell in the following year, has not been positively ascertained. Before their sessions ceased to be numbered, the Parliament had been 'purged' of a large proportion of its members, and the ancient constitution of the kingdom virtually set aside. The king had been tried, condemned, and executed by authority of a Commission or Court improvised by the 'Rump' of the House of Commons. Whatever doubt may exist as to the action or inaction of the Assembly in the case of Laud, there can be no doubt as to the courage and promptitude with which its leaders

¹ These, as stated on p. 200, were published in 1648, and with a new title-page in 1652.

and the Presbyterian ministers of London protested against the judicial murder of the king, nor as to the earnest anxiety they showed to the last to help forward any settlement of out-standing differences which would have saved the monarchy, and afforded reasonable security for civil liberty. But their fast friends and allies, the Scotch, had now returned to their own homes, and, when too late, the Presbyterians in the south learned the value of their faithful warnings, and found they were indeed at the mercy of that sectarian army who were bent on securing their own ends, though these should be gained by overturning the ancient constitution of the kingdom, and setting up in its room a commonwealth in name, an oligarchy or military despotism in fact. The committee of the Scottish Estates had instructed their Commissioners to protest against the trial of the king, and the Commissioners of the Scottish Assembly, concurring in the protest, expressed their utter detestation of 'so horrid a design against his Majesty's person,' and disclaimed all responsibility for 'the miseries, confusions, and calamities that might follow.' Their deputy, Blair, expressed himself as strongly on the enormity of this act as the most ardent Royalist could desire, and never ceased to speak of the unfortunate monarch in terms of warm affection and regard.¹ His early

¹ Blair's *Autobiography*, pp. 214, 261—'a good king evil-used.'

interviews with Cromwell, on the other hand, seem to have left on his mind impressions¹ even less favourable than those which Baxter and Ussher formed from their intercourse with him. Immediately on learning that the 'horrid design' had actually been carried out, the Committee of the Scottish Estates caused Charles II. to be proclaimed king, and 'sent to their Commissioners in London a copy of the proclamation, with a remonstrance to the House of Commons, which gave so great offence to the regicides, that they first imprisoned the Commissioners,' and soon after ignominiously dismissed them from the kingdom under the escort of a troop of horse. The Scotch invited the young king to come among them and take possession of his throne, and with much persuasion they at last prevailed on him to accept their invitation. But he was far from hearty in the matter, and an extreme party had sprung up among themselves who were too much in sympathy with the sectaries of the south, and too distrustful of their old Royalist countrymen. In their earnest desire to satisfy the scruples and disarm the hostility of these men, the more moderate party consented to measures which were harsh towards their sovereign and towards many who were eager to forget past differences and do their utmost to defend their native country against the formidable invader who now ventured

¹ Blair's *Autobiography*, p. 210—'an egregious dissembler.'

to assail it. All that the caution and skill of experienced generals could in the circumstances effect was done by the Leslies. But, through the interference and dictation of fanatical busybodies, it is said, their plans were thwarted, the triumph which seemed almost within grasp was snatched from them, and a disaster was inflicted on the nation which was great in its immediate, and still greater in its remoter consequences. Cromwell's army, after its victory at Dunbar, returned, and for months occupied the very heart of the kingdom. Nothing remained for the young monarch after his coronation at Scone in 1651, but, as soon as he could gather together even a less disciplined army, to summon to his aid the Royalists of the south, and to try the fortune of war in England. Few of them obeyed his hurried call, and at Worcester, on 3d September 1651 (the anniversary of the battle of Dunbar), after an obstinately-contested engagement, his army was finally defeated, the supporters of the ancient constitution were crushed, 'Cromwell obtained his crowning mercy,' and the sectaries for a time became masters throughout the three kingdoms. Many fancy pictures have been drawn of the glories of that period in Scotland as well as in England, of the tranquillity of the country, the purity of the administration, and the comparative freedom and contentedness of the people. These pictures still require to be greatly toned down

to bring them into fair accordance with known facts, which only the greater severities of the later Stuart *régime* could have cast so much into shade.

There can be no question of the military genius or personal prowess or piety of Cromwell, nor of the high-toned morality of most of his *entourage*, nor of the worthiness of the ends aimed at in much of his foreign and domestic policy. But the circumstances which brought him to the front, and which first tempted or shut him up to the course he thenceforth resolutely pursued, the expedients to which he had recourse on various occasions when he could not attain his ends by strictly constitutional means, made it from the first all but impossible that he should be honoured to 'bring health and cure' to the distempered nation, or should ever come to trust and be trusted by the great majority who had been seeking, through all these commotions, not a new form of government or a new ruling dynasty, but the purification and continuance of the old. Neither the noble qualities and aims of the man, nor the brilliancy of his military successes, nor the greatness of his influence for much immediate good at home and abroad, ought to be allowed to blind us to the falseness of the position in which he put himself toward the legitimate aspirations of the nation, nor to the unworthy trickeries¹ and cruelties to which at times,

¹ Even Neal says of his policy towards the Cavaliers, the

in maintaining his position, he condescended to have recourse, nor to the sad consequences to Puritanism at home and to Protestantism abroad that ultimately came of his usurpation, and the measures by which its success was insured. Much of the hero-worship latterly paid at his shrine has been the glorification of force; and, if ever there was a case in which it might be truly said that force was no remedy, it was for that in which the nation and its Parliament found themselves in 1648. He did not attempt to loose, but only cut the knot, overpowering by the force of the army the legitimate authorities of the nation when the prospect of agreement between them was not yet abandoned,—perhaps had begun to be somewhat more hopeful. By the judicial murder of the king, he outraged the feelings of the vast majority of the people, and by his whole policy he provoked and intensified that reaction which came to a head so soon after his death. His government was personal government almost as undisguisedly as ever that of Charles had been, and it was more unblushingly based on the supremacy of the army as ‘a providential power,’ entitled to overrule or supersede every other. It was a despotism to the core even when it was most a paternal and religious Presbyterian, and the Republicans: ‘Cromwell had the skill not only to keep them divided, but to increase their jealousies of each other, and by that means to disconcert all their measures against himself.’—Vol. iv. p. 90. See also Beattie’s *History*, p. 261.

one. And in Scotland as well as in Ireland, the paternal was ever the vanishing quantity, and the despotism pure and simple the constant one. He could confide only in his own small coterie ; his power of influencing individual men, even within the Puritan circle, was but limited ; he had no such gift of eloquence or electrical force as enabled him to move or control the hostile or indifferent masses, and mould them to his will. He was never content, with all the safeguards he devised, to be simply the first magistrate in a free state.¹ Even the Parliaments elected under the regulations drafted by him, or his Council, did not prove obsequious to his will, and were only a little less respectfully dismissed than the Long Parliament had been. Whatever he may have tolerated in religion, he did not tolerate freedom of church-government in England, still less in Scotland. Notwithstanding all his advances, that country continued in a state of sullen discontent, if not of veiled rebellion. Not only was the General Assembly dissolved in 1653, and prevented from meeting in 1654, but the synods and inferior courts

¹ ' He wished no doubt that England should be free and happy, but he wished too to be its greatest man, if not its sovereign. He had nothing of the magnanimity of Washington. To the last he was a slave to the vulgar lust of power ; and to this he sacrificed both his integrity and his country, his conscience, and his peace. . . . Of all usurpers, Cromwell was perhaps the best—the best of a race which merits the indignation of mankind.'—Marsden's *Later Puritans*, pp. 400, 403. See also Hallam, vol. ii. chap. x.

at times were vexatiously interfered with and dispersed, and the decisions of presbyteries in the settlement of ministers, even when based on the call of the people, were often overruled. I have recently had occasion to examine the records of the Synod of Perth and Stirling during the period, which show a state of repression in that central province more systematic than previous researches had prepared me to expect.¹ It was the temporary success of his repressive policy, I believe, which emboldened Clarendon in England, and Sharp in Scotland, to pursue their far more rigorous and cruel courses. After the death of Cromwell, the motley fabric he had reared fell of its own accord. His son Richard abdicated the office of Protector, as soon as he found he could not count on the support of those who had followed

¹ In October 1651, there was no meeting of Synod—'the English army having overspread the land, and garrisons being planted both in Perth and Stirling, and no safety for travelling, nor liberty for the brethren to convene.' The following year, the Synod met at Dunning, but were kept out of the Church by a popular tumult, apparently encouraged by those who favoured the English faction. In October 1653, the Synod met at Dunblane, and, 'considering the poverty of the number, and also the want of freedom, being interrupted by the soldiers of Captain Robertson's command,' then lying at Dunblane, they unanimously adjourned the Synod till the following spring, protesting on the interruption of the soldiers, 'that this interruption should be no prejudice to their liberty to meet again, according to the power given them by Jesus Christ to assemble as well as to preach, in regard the Word of God, the Solemn League and Covenant, the Acts of the General Assembly, and the laws of the land all allowed it.' They did not meet

the fortunes of his father. The officers of the army would have liked to retain the supreme control of affairs in their own hands, but, uncertain of the attitude of Monk, and the Scottish division of the army towards themselves or to the exiled prince, they consented to recall the 'Rump,' of the Long Parliament, which, in 1653, Cromwell had contemptuously dismissed, and it continued to direct the government of the kingdom for a time. After Monk came with his forces to London, and was welcomed by its citizens, the 'excluded members' were encouraged again to take their seats, and so the last legally elected Parliament, whose rights, Bradshaw had told Cromwell, were not invalidated by his act of dismissal, was peacefully reinstated at Westminster. Without delay it fell back on its old traditions, restored the Solemn League and Covenant to its place of again till October 1654, and, expecting to be again interrupted, before taking up any other business, they made arrangements for their next meeting, as well as for the change of the time and place for it, if these should prove unsuitable or unsafe. They met again in April 1655, and, hearing that a party of soldiers was coming to interrupt their meeting, they improved on the innovation of the preceding year, and resolved not only to fix time and place for their meeting, but to transact their business before the usual sermon and the arrival of the soldiers, who apparently had been timed not to arrive till after sermon. That was not interrupted by them, but, immediately after, an English officer commanded the Assembly to dissolve, and, being asked to show his warrant for what he did, he refused, and threatened, and actually did use, violence, whereupon the moderator, after the usual solemn protest, dissolved the meeting. See also Beattie, pp. 232-236.

honour in the House and in the churches, re-approved without qualification of all the chapters of the Confession of Faith save Chaps. xxx. and xxxi., and recognised the Presbyterian government of the Church, but with a toleration for tender consciences. And these, rather than the older arrangements of 1648, are those by which the spirit of English Presbyterianism ought in fairness to be judged. Having provided for the assembling of a Parliament more truly representative of the nation and more in the old form, this memorable House of Commons then agreed to its own dissolution. The new House was elected to a certain extent by a far wider constituency than Cromwell had ever intrusted with such powers, and a large number of old Cavaliers found places among its members. They were not so powerful in it, however, as they were soon to become, and it would probably have listened with favour to the suggestion of Sir Matthew Hale, that conditions should be arranged with the king, before his restoration, for securing the liberties of the nation and the reformation of the Church. But those in the immediate confidence of Monk, as well as those about the king, dreaded such a movement, and determined to hurry on the Restoration while the favourable impression produced by the royal Declaration from Breda was still at its height. Thus, in the exuberance of an

unsuspecting loyalty, all was confided to the honour of the king, and on the 29th of May he was welcomed to the capital with unbounded enthusiasm and joy. There is perhaps no reason to suppose that the king himself meant deliberately to amuse or mislead those who so implicitly confided in him. Indeed the Declaration he issued in October 1660, and the offers of promotion he made to leading Puritans seem to show the contrary, and that he would have been gratified to be the means of restoring a better understanding between those who had united in doing him so signal a service. But he was not thoroughly in earnest in the cause. It was good-nature, more than any deeper principle which actuated him, and he was not resolute in his course. While he had not gone quite far enough in his Declaration to satisfy Baxter, and some of his more scrupulous brethren, he had gone too far to please the old bishops, and they left no stone unturned to avert the threatened mischief. 'They worked upon Clarendon, they rallied the courtiers as one man round the banner of the High Church, they spirited away Sir Matthew Hale from the Lower House by having him appointed Chief Baron of the Exchequer. At length their efforts were crowned with success.'¹ On the 28th of November 1660, they saw this Declaration rejected in the

¹ Bayne's *English Puritanism*, p. 122.

House of Commons by a majority of 26. With this may be said to have perished all prospect of such a reconstruction of the Church as would have satisfied the reasonable desires and cherished hopes of the more moderate Nonconformists, and with that almost all prospect of any large or liberal toleration to them outside. It was now unmistakeably clear that whatever may have been the personal wishes of the king, and one or two of the noblemen in immediate attendance on him, his chief advisers, lay as well as clerical, were not in favour of any real or generous compromise. The Savoy Conference could hardly in such circumstances have been other than a failure, though every effort was made to load the Presbyterians with the odium of the failure. Their recent services to the royal cause, it was now evident, had not obliterated from the minds of their embittered opponents, the remembrance of the more ancient feud. Now that they thought they had them in their power, and a majority of the House of Commons at their back, they were determined to make their position as uncomfortable as they could. No real ground had been given for this. There was no inconsistency in contending, as these had done through all the preceding troubles, for a certain amount of liberty in the state, and of reformation in the Church, and yet standing by the ancient constitution and royal family. The

attempt to misrepresent them, and excite prejudice against them, and to revive the old doctrine of passive obedience, and the divine right of kings, was unworthy of those who prostituted their sacred office to assert it, and to prepare a fresh harvest of calamity for the nation. The issue of such a course could only be a great schism and a new struggle, which only truly Christian men could have continued to maintain so resolutely with no arms but those of prayer and patience. 'At length the storm burst.' The work of the Savoy Conference was transferred to the revived Convocation, and after the Book of Common Prayer had been revised by them, and many minor alterations made (but few making it more acceptable to the Puritans¹), it was transmitted to the king, and the Bill to compel uniformity was re-introduced into Parliament. The history of its progress there, of the changes made in its progress—tending to increase its harshness—and of the narrow majorities by which at last it was passed, has been often told, and recently it has been re-told with greater minuteness and accuracy by Canon Swainson. On the 14th January, it was read a first time in the House of Commons; on the 8th of May, it finally passed the House of

¹ Even the 'ridiculous story' of Bel and the Dragon, struck out of the table of lessons after the Hampton Court Conference, was now restored.

Lords, and on the 18th it received the royal assent. 'The fate of the Puritans was thus sealed. The contest of a hundred years was at an end,' and by St. Bartholomew's Day, 24th August 1662 (fixed by the Act), it is said that full two thousand of them had surrendered their benefices and left the Church. Their sorrows and sufferings were great and long-continued, but these at last came to an end. The consequences to the Church herself, immediate and more remote, as many of her truest friends have confessed, were more lasting, and even more deplorable.

Mr. Marsden, their most generous critic in recent times, in one of the most eloquent passages in his second volume,¹ calls in question the wisdom and expediency of the course they followed in refusing to accept the promotion offered them, and to take their place at once in the restored Church. 'They acted,' he says, 'with integrity, but they were not wise. . . . There seems to have been now, as there always was, a want of concert and of practical good sense amongst the Puritan leaders. . . . There are times when good men are imperiously called upon to accept preferment at the expense of reputation. Vulgar minds will find it impossible to respect or even to understand their motives. The race of ambition is a passion so universal, that the few who pursue it from disinterested motives are never appreciated. Yet Christian heroism calls,

¹ *Later Puritans*, pp. 427, 428, and other writers quoted there.

though rarely it must be allowed, for this species of self-immolation, and men, for their heavenly Master's sake, must even be content sometimes to have greatness thrust upon them. To accept the preferments was at least to gain more influence with the Court; to reject them was to abandon the little they possessed. They ought to have renounced the Covenant, they ought to have unsaid the former extravagancies of themselves or of their party: this indeed they did in private; and they should not have shrunk from doing it publicly and before the people. Nor had they in truth much cause for shame. Which of their opponents had not something to retract? Which of them, for instance, now ventured to maintain (whatever they might secretly wish) the canons of 1640 and the practices of Laud? . . . Had they accepted preferment it seems impossible that the calamities should have occurred which now immediately ensued. Could the Act of Uniformity have passed with Richard Baxter in the House of Lords? Would the most violent High Churchman have ventured to recommend the king to put his hand to a bill which must instantly create a new secession and place at its head a band of Non-conforming Bishops? . . . They did not perceive the importance of the crisis, and that this was their last opportunity. . . . Their motives were pure, but their decision was unfortunate.'

It may be granted to Mr. Marsden that there are times when such self-immolation as he describes may be Christian men's duty, but on the other hand it must be asserted that there are also times when the only effect of it would be to blot a good name, to mar the effect of a lifetime's labours, and grieve the hearts of the godly who must be parted from, without securing the confidence or gaining the kindly sympathies of those with whom they must associate themselves. There are times when all that is noblest and best in a man will rise in revolt against the thought of leaving those with whom he has been wont to take sweet counsel in matters of holiest concern, and going over to those who, he feels, do not understand him, cannot sympathise with him, will not heartily co-operate with him, but will do all they can to thwart him and make his new position irksome. And if ever there was a time when the spiritual instinct might be called in to aid in turning one way or another the balance of the judgment, it was surely at such a crisis as had then occurred. Would the adhesion of even a large proportion of the Puritan ministers to the national Church have sufficed to abash vice in high places, or to arrest the excess of riot by which the Cavaliers of that generation were determined to signalise their emancipation from former restraints, or to secure even the most necessary reforms in

the discipline and internal administration of the old Church? Would it not have been a life-long martyrdom far more painful than that they were called to bear, to be cut off from those whose sympathy had cheered, whose counsel had guided, whose holy example had encouraged them in all good, to be associated and identified with men who hated their strictness, set no value on their peculiar excellencies, and did not feel their need of them, or really care to retain them? Could they have hoped to find themselves in better case than did the sainted Leighton in Scotland, who was misjudged by those he left, mistrusted by those he joined, and at last constrained to abandon in disgust the work for the sake of which he had consented to make this sad self-immolation? But acting as they did, resolving to forego preferment, rather than risk being compromised, these noble confessors at least preserved their own peace of conscience and the esteem and sympathy of those whose esteem and sympathy they truly valued, commanded the respect of their opponents, and bore a testimony to the reality of religious principle which told even on that backsliding generation, and has secured them honour and influence for all future time.

Then a similar course to that Marsden recommends may be said to have been followed in Scotland, both under the first and the second Protestant

episcopacies, as it had been in England on the accession of Elizabeth; and under both it is admitted to have been a signal failure. What the leaders of English Puritanism shrunk from doing at the Restoration several of the leaders of Scottish Puritanism ventured to do both in 1606 and in 1661, as Nicolson, Cooper, and Forbes at the former date, and Sharp, Leighton, Halyburton, and Honeyman at the latter. But they did not thereby succeed in repairing the breaches that had been made in the walls of Zion, nor in working out any great deliverance in the land. The results of their compliance were mortifying to themselves and disappointing to others, and ended in a policy so oppressive and unchristian that Archbishop Leighton declared 'that he would not concur in planting the Christian religion itself in such a manner, much less a form of church-government.'

The fate of the Scottish Presbyterians was more tragic than that of the English. Thrown off their guard by the letter of the king, and the representations of their envoy, they took no active measures to secure the dearly-won liberties of their Church till it was too late to do so. The English advisers of the king had made up their minds, in furtherance of what they deemed English interests, to defy Scottish opinion, and far outdo the repressive policy of Cromwell. That Church which was dear to the Scottish people, and had, notwithstand-

ing many shortcomings, proved itself worthy of their love, which had never swerved in its loyalty to the sovereign, and had suffered much at the hands of the sectaries for its steadfastness in his cause, was not only cramped and repressed, but in a drunken fit deprived by the Parliament of the legal securities which his father had ratified, and the king himself had sworn to. The rights of the younger portion of the ministers to their benefices were put in jeopardy, and on their declining to make the compliances demanded of them, they were ordered by an Act of Council to leave by a certain day. A large number of them did so, and by that Act, and other repressive measures, it is said that nearly four hundred were outed or deprived. How far Sharp, in whom they reposed so unlimited confidence, was the dupe of Monk and Sheldon, and how far he was the willing ally of the one in bringing back the king without conditions, and of the other in the insane attempt to wreath the yoke of a new episcopacy round the neck of the Scottish nation, can hardly now be ascertained. But the result was as fatal to his country and himself as if it had been deliberately planned, and English statesmen and their Scottish dupes or allies had determined to make Scotland a second Ireland. That which Henderson and their other leaders feared in 1641 had now come on them, when they were ex-

hausted by their previous struggles and less able effectually to oppose it. But they were to prove, by their heroic endurance of oppression and cruelty unparalleled, the constancy of their attachment to their beloved Presbytery, and to win back by these means what they had previously thought could be gained and retained by them only by force of arms.

The withdrawal of so many able, zealous, and experienced ministers (about 2000 in England and 400 in Scotland) was unquestionably a sad loss to the national Churches, and the long period of deadness that followed, the mad outbreak of vice, profanity, and religious indifference which for a time seemed to bear down all that was self-restrained and earnestly Christian, was perhaps its saddest consequence, sadder far than any that came to the sufferers themselves from the contempt and hatred and cruel oppression they had to endure. But the ejection of these confessors had other consequences which it would be wrong to overlook. It was overruled for good by Him who orders all things wisely and well, and was the means of working out results which, humanly speaking, could not otherwise have been gained.

First, Their conduct bore striking testimony to the reality of religious principle. As I have just stated, it may be doubted whether the conformity of these men, and the continuance of the whole of

them in the national Churches, would have arrested the sad course of events, and saved the nation then so resolutely bent on breaking loose from all restraint. But it might have shut their own mouths or weakened the force of the testimony which in more fortunate times they had borne for God and godliness, and would have had still to bear before men who were resolved to own them only as either knaves or fools. Their conformity in the circumstances, it seems to me, would have done more than anything else to justify the opinion that, after all their professions, they were but hypocrites or fair-weather Christians, who, whatever they might say for religion, were as reluctant as their neighbours to make any real sacrifice for it. But when their leaders, rather than prove unfaithful to the convictions which in more fortunate times they had avowed, chose to forego the ease and independence which were within their reach, and to refuse the dignities which were offered them, and when so large a number of their followers joined them in surrendering their preferences and exposing themselves to certain privation, and to almost as certain persecution, and when, notwithstanding all they had to suffer, they persevered in their course, whatever men may say of them, they dare not for very shame say that they were not in sober earnest about religion and the scriptural organisation of the Church, and under

obloquy and apparent defeat achieving for their Master and themselves a glorious moral victory. A distinguished member of a later secession has illustrated the grandeur of the Puritan one by a comparison it would have been invidious in me to suggest, but I may venture to repeat his words: 'They went forth each man alone. They had no free press to plead their cause; they had no free country in which to organise and carry on their church; they had no Chalmers to be the Moses of their exodus; they went forth as Abraham did, not knowing where they should obtain their next meal, or where they should sleep the next night—casting themselves and their little ones on the providence of God.' And I may venture to add that, if ever the words of the Apostle might be truly applied to any of his successors, they might be so to them: 'Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat.' The diaries of Philip Henry, recently published, furnish many noble and touching illustrations of this.

Second, It secured the ultimate triumph of the cause of civil liberty and religious toleration. Had all that they ventured to ask at the Restoration been frankly conceded to them, the loss to Britain and to Anglo-Saxon Christendom might have been far greater than the gain. Some of the worst excesses of the later Stuarts might have been escaped.

The crown might have been a little more chary in exceeding its prerogatives and abusing its influence, but its province would not have been so distinctly marked out, so carefully limited, or so faithfully kept as it has been under that happy Revolution Settlement, which was the real outcome of the influence of moderate Puritanism in its application to the State. The Church might have been somewhat more comprehensive, somewhat more tolerant of the friends of evangelical truth within her pale than for long she was, but she would not have been a whit more tolerant of those who were beyond her pale. In fact, from their smaller numbers and less influential position, the final triumph of the principle of toleration might have been long deferred. As I have said already, that was a noble principle which the Assembly had enshrined in its Confession, and while it shall continue to survive Puritanism will not need to hide its diminished head before any of the other Isms of the day: 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience, and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and

reason also.' If in the day of their prosperity they had affirmed this principle, a large number of them had failed consistently and lovingly to carry it out in practice. God suffered them to be cast into a furnace seven times heated, that they might learn in adversity the lesson they had not thoroughly mastered in prosperity, and from bitter experience be led to realise the full value and extent of the principle enshrined in their own Confession.

Third, It has kept open for settlement in more fortunate times the questions which were then not ripe for settlement. Had these men conformed, having all conceded which they had ventured to ask, the constitution of the national Churches would have been but slightly modified, the cause of more free and simple worship, of a reasonably independent church action and government, and of a more pure and vigorous church discipline, would have been but little advanced. But by their ejection and continuance in separation, a testimony was kept up for the truths for which they and their fathers had witnessed, and by the experiences through which their descendants have since passed they have been enabled to give practical proof of the vitality of the principles for which their fathers contended, and to provide a contribution of no mean value for the happier times when English-speaking Christians on both sides of the Atlantic shall be inclined to forget

the sad past and to labour together in rearing to their common Father and Redeemer a nobler temple than we have yet seen, and when perhaps even the bright vision of a united Protestantism, such as Cranmer and Calvin longed for, and Ussher, Leighton, Henderson, Howe, and Baxter laboured for, may be realised.

These lectures on the Westminster Assembly, and the Westminster Standards, must now be brought to a close. I am sure that, after the length to which this one has already extended, you will excuse me from attempting to enter more fully into certain debatable questions which I have been able to touch on only in the most incidental manner. I should like to say something more on the question whether England was in any sense ripe for Presbytery in the middle of the 17th century, and whether our countrymen, by their over-keenness in pressing it, did not cast away a good chance of a more moderate, but more stable settlement, such as Ussher had proposed, under which the old Church of England might have proved to be one of the fairest daughters of the Reformation and remained in loving sympathy and hearty fellowship with the sister Churches. I must be content, however, to pass over such inviting topics, and to confine myself in a few closing sentences to one point only. It is said that the Westminster Assembly was, after all, a failure, and

that its standards, ere many years had passed, were cast aside in the land which gave them birth. Indeed it was so, and so' was much of the regard for God and things divine. Many, set free from the restraint under which they had for a time been kept, surrendered themselves up to every excess of riot. The very king, for whose sake so much had been dared and suffered by loyal Presbyterians, heartlessly forgot the promises he had given, and abandoned them to the mercy of their old antagonists. The court he gathered round him was the most dissolute which England for centuries had seen, and many, of whom better things might have been expected, contended but feebly against iniquity in high places. Many of whom the age was not worthy surrendered their livings rather than submit to the new Act of Uniformity, and went forth from the Church they loved and wished to serve, to prove, under contempt and persecution, the reality of the Christian principles they had professed in the day of their prosperity and their deep attachment to the constitution of their native land. But though their doctrinal standards were haughtily ignored and themselves ejected from the reconstituted Church, their theology lived on all the same. It lived on in the Episcopal Churches of England and Scotland in the teaching of Reynolds, Conant, Wallis, Hopkins, and Leighton, and several other like-minded

men, who strove to be faithful to God in the midst of abounding defection. It lived on too, in the teaching of those who went forth as outcasts from society and the Churches of their native land, preached it by their meek and holy lives when no longer allowed to preach it by their lips, and out of their deep poverty and sore tribulation enriched after generations and stored the treasures of their experience and teaching in those precious practical treatises which will live while the English language continues to be spoken, and the faith of St. Paul, Augustine, Ussher, and Leighton to be valued, by the Anglo-Saxon race. Even in that time of lowest depression, emphatic testimony was borne to it by John Bunyan and his Baptist brethren, when, in 1677, they substantially adopted the Confession of the Westminster Assembly, as the Independents had previously done. In his thrilling sermons and inimitable allegories he secured for it as wide and loving acceptance among the humble and unlettered as the masterly discussions and defences of its more learned advocates secured for it among many of the educated and thoughtful. It is said to have been from the writings of Manton that Augustus Toplady, who was to stand so resolutely in its defence in the following century within the national Church, received his first earnest impressions.

The Westminster Confession and Catechisms

continued to be adhered to in Scotland, within as well as without the reconstituted Church, even after the Acts of Parliament which had ratified them were repealed. And, though cast out in Old England, they were taken in in the New, and in other colonies beyond the Atlantic, first by the children of the Pilgrim Fathers, and then by the descendants of the Scottish and Scoto-Irish emigrants of a later day, under whose joint tutelage mainly the United States have grown up into a great and noble nation—the heirs with us on this side of the old Augustinian faith and Presbyterian order, and I will add, so far as my acquaintance warrants me to speak, its main hope and stay in the future. In the same sad years not less emphatic testimony to the hold their system of theology still had on the minds of a very pious and earnest part of the nation was borne by the publication of numerous editions of the Shorter Catechism in England. These incontrovertibly show, either that, notwithstanding their hard lot, Nonconformists were at that time more numerous than has generally been supposed, or else that Evangelical ministers of the national Church did not yet scruple to avail themselves of a Catechism which they knew King Charles and his chaplains had in 1648 been willing to sanction; and even under apparent defeat Puritanism continued largely to influence the English nation.

In the State during these sad years things went

from bad to worse till the tyranny, licentiousness, and Popish proclivities of the later Stuart kings once more roused the nation against them, and provoked a revolution which, being more strictly kept within the lines of the constitution, has proved more practical and permanent. With the advent of William of Orange to the British throne Protestantism was once more saved, and civil and religious liberty at length was settled on a stable foundation. He not only granted by law a large toleration outside to orthodox dissenters, but also strove to make the national Church so comprehensive that if possible the mischief of St. Bartholomew's day might be repaired, and moderate Puritans again find room within its pale. The success of this great scheme was prevented chiefly by the Jacobites and extreme High Churchmen, but in part also, it must be admitted, by the indifference shown for it by not a few of the Puritan leaders. Notwithstanding the hard experiences through which they had passed, they were still a numerous and influential body, especially in London and other towns. It seemed as if, like ancient Israel, the more they were afflicted the more they multiplied and grew, and that it was not till the counsel of Balaam was adopted against them, or by them against themselves, and they fell off from the Evangelical faith of their fathers, that much real injury happened to them. 'So far as outward prosperity was con-

cerned the position and prospects of Presbyterianism were never,' Dr. M'Crie assures us, 'brighter or more promising than at the era of the Revolution. In the great metropolis its chapels were thickly planted, and they were filled with wealthy and influential congregations, which, so long as the older ministers survived, were favoured with a pure and vigorous dispensation of the Gospel, and in good measure kept alive the flame of holy zeal and heavenly devotion which had warmed the Church under the winter of persecution.' Dr. Stoughton seems to think that at that era Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists together embraced nearly half of the population of England. Early in the 18th century a religious declension was ushered in, which in greater or less degree extended to all the Churches in Britain and on the Continent, 'a spiritual blight, which,' as Dr. M'Crie so well says, 'it is difficult to explain in any other way than by the withdrawal of God's Spirit from the Churches of the Reformation.' The Presbyterians of England, from their aversion to or neglect of subscription, even in the most general form, were among the first to suffer in this long and chilling winter time. Many of their congregations dwindled away; not a few of their members, coming under the new Evangelical impulse given to England by Whitfield, sought for themselves a new home. Others merged with

the Independents ; others lapsed into Rationalism, if not into Arianism or Unitarianism, and the old Presbyterian Church of South Britain now lives mainly in the immortal writings of its early teachers, in the memory of the heroic sufferings they so meekly bore, and of their noble-hearted faithfulness to Christ and His truth in times of trial and rebuke. The torch of Evangelical Presbyterianism has been once more rekindled from Scotland, and promises now to give a brighter light than it has done for long. But the old lamp has been virtually extinguished, and the lamp-stand removed out of its place—reading to all, in these somewhat similar times, the much needed lesson that no past attainments, no past services, no past sacrifices will avail to preserve a Church from decay and dissolution if it hold not the beginning of its confidence steadfast unto the end, if it cleave not close to its divine Redeemer and be not unashamed of Him and His words when brought face to face with any faithless and scoffing generation, if it allows the light of Evangelical truth and the fire of Evangelical piety to die out or to die down. Let those of us who think we stand remember those who have fallen, and take good heed to ourselves lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and from him who is the light and life of men. And let us persevere in prayer, that He

with whom is the residue of the Spirit may be pleased to send down on us, in more abundant measure than ever hitherto, the influences of His Holy Spirit to revive His work in all the Churches of the Presbyterian family and to give us times of refreshing from His presence and from the glory of His power, such as our fathers longed for and were often privileged largely to enjoy. The standards of the Westminster Assembly have not failed to bind the Church and nation which have held by them to many sister and daughter Churches of which we have no cause to be ashamed, and which, with only the bond the Assembly provided to bind them to the historic past,—to the principles embodied in the creeds of the undivided Church, and to the teaching of Augustine and Calvin—have continued to live and thrive and do as noble service in the cause of our common Lord as any of those which claim a higher pedigree and retain a more rigid and elaborate ritual. And the end is not yet, nor while God continues to honour the Evangelical teaching of many of the distinguished ministers in all our Presbyterian Churches to turn multitudes from lives of sin and selfishness to those of holiness and self-sacrifice, to comfort the wounded in spirit and quicken the careless, have we any cause to fear for the great principles of that Evangelical system long held in common by all the Reformed Churches.