

THE
BRITISH COVENANTS
SUITED TO
PRESENT-DAY NEEDS.

By the Rev. JOHN RAMSEY, LL.B.,
BALLYMONEY.

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THE Closing Lecture of Session 1896-97 of the Theological Hall of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, was delivered in the Hall, College Street South, Belfast, by the Rev. John Ramsey, LL.B., Ballymoney. Mr. Ramsey was requested to publish his Lecture, which he consented to do, and it appeared in recent numbers of *The Covenanter*. It is now printed for wider circulation by the Synod's Committee on *Covenant-Renovation and Witness-Bearing*. It is hoped that the importance of the subject, and the temperate, lucid, and comprehensive treatment of it by the Lecturer will secure the attention of many professing Christians, and revive the memory of God's Covenants by which the nation is bound.

Copies may be had on application to the Convener of Synod's Committee, Rev. S. R. McNeilly, Bailiesmills, Lisburn.

The British Covenants

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THE time seems fast approaching when the existence of any deeds bearing the name "British Covenants" will be known only to a few of those who are called Britons. Parliament meets session after session ; but in all its deliberations, and in the speeches even of its most religious and enlightened members, there is no reference to these ancient bonds. Oaths are administered to the Monarch at coronation, to Members of the House of Commons on assembling, and thus to the people through their representatives, but in all the Parliamentary and Promissory Oaths there is no mention of the Covenants. If a canvass were made of all the churches of the land, it would be found that in ninety-nine out of every hundred—we might even say in nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand—not one word is uttered in a twelve-month giving the slightest hint of the nation's having at one time bound itself in a Covenant to God. Even many of those who profess to believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith is Scriptural in its teaching are ignorant that there are usually bound up with the "Confession" these very "Covenants" that are now repudiated. In fact, it is only the few who take an interest in reading the history of our country, or who are driven to read it through educational requirements, who learn that at one time bonds were entered into called "The National Covenant" and "The Solemn League and Covenant." And many of those who read of these are inclined to question the propriety of calling them British. The "National Covenant" of Scotland is set down as the work of a few rabid religionists ; unenlightened Scotchmen, who could

see nothing but their own little nation ; intolerant men, who could brook nothing but what squared with their own opinions. The "Solemn League and Covenant" was, forsooth, for an emergency when the civil liberties of the kingdom were endangered ; and though it was a religious bond as well as a civil, yet it was only as a civil bond, from which some safety was looked for, that it was taken, as it cannot be questioned it was taken, by the great bulk of the British nation. But in spite of all that the enemies of God's truth assert, and superficial observers believe, these Covenants are National and British in the widest and fullest sense of the term.

For what is it that constitutes a deed national ? What, if not subscription by the king and his household, by Parliament, and by subjects almost universally of all ranks ? This is how the National Covenant of Scotland was subscribed, and so also was it twice renewed, and at length entered into by England, too, when civil liberty was threatened in England. As for the Solemn League and Covenant, it has well been said, "It is impossible to conceive how it could have been rendered more emphatically a national engagement." The draft of the document was read over, clause by clause, and approved of in the Westminster Assembly. "It was then," says Hetherington, "appointed by Parliament, and assented to by the Assembly, that the Covenant should be publicly taken by these bodies on the 25th of September. On that day, accordingly, the House of Commons, with the Assembly of Divines and the Scottish Commissioners, met in the Church of St. Margaret, Westminster, and the Rev. Mr. White, of Dorchester, one of the assessors, commenced the solemnity with prayer. Mr. Nye then addressed the dignified and grave audience in a speech of an hour's duration, pointing out the Scripture authority of such covenants, and the advantage of which they had been productive to the Church of God in all ages. Mr. Henderson followed in a speech considerably shorter, but of great dignity and power. Mr. Nye then read the Covenant from the pulpit, slowly and aloud, pausing at the close of every article, while the whole audience of states-

men and divines arose, and with their right hands held up to heaven, worshipped the great name of God, and gave their sacred pledge. Then the members of the House of Commons subscribed the Covenant on one roll of parchment, and the Assembly on another; and when this was done, the solemn scene was closed by prayer and praise to that omniscient God to whom they had lifted up their hands and made their vows." It was shortly after taken by the House of Lords, and in the beginning of the following year it was subscribed by almost all the people of England over 18 years of age. So, also, in Scotland, and by almost all the Protestants in Ireland. The will of the British nation was never as fully consulted, and no law was ever passed that had been as carefully considered and to which such perfect assent was given by the whole British people. Not only did they, through their representatives in Parliament, as is usually done, give their consent to the Covenant, but individual opinion was consulted, and the Covenant was taken with enthusiasm.

There can be no denial, then, that the Covenants are National and British. And, if so, they must be binding still. To bonds such as these men apply a method of reasoning that is not usually adopted when dealing with private commercial transactions, or even with public and international affairs of a purely secular kind. Few hesitate to brand as a rogue the man who repudiates his monetary engagements and seeks to escape the payment of his just debts. All who have any lingering belief in British national honour would shrink from recommending the nation to discard its treaty with a friendly state. Yet many of those who deem themselves, and are admitted, to be religious people think that the nation may do with its solemn oaths and covenants with God what they would consider it entirely unjustified in doing, say, with the National Debt or the Treaty of Berlin. Nothing seems plainer than that a national engagement is, like a personal, binding until it is fulfilled. And no one who reads the British Covenants and sees the present condition of British politics and national life would for a moment assert that the Covenants

have been carried out. The one inference that we must draw is, that they are binding still.

When Moses, at the end of his life, was addressing the Israelites and reminding them of God's covenant with them at Horeb, it would seem as if he thought there was some danger of the people's repudiating that covenant, since, in the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, all who had been engaged in the transaction at Horeb had died for their sin. A new generation had arisen, and what more natural than for them to say, "We did not make this covenant, and our fathers had no right to bind us?" But Moses at once meets this objection, and announces a great general principle—the same that the Bible teaches regarding the fall of man by the transgression of our first parents; the same that is exemplified when parents present their children for baptism and covenant for the helpless babes—that children are bound by their parents' moral engagements. "The Lord our God," Moses said, "made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day." This is the principle that guides all honest men in their business transactions, and that is rigorously enforced by the civil law. The heir to a property is held bound by every engagement of his predecessor regarding the property. God holds nations, too, as bound by their treaties, even after the contracting generation has long passed from earth. When the Israelites were being settled in the land of Canaan, they were commanded to exterminate the Canaanites. The Gibeonites (a section of the Amorites, who were among the doomed,) came in disguise to Joshua and the elders, and, representing themselves as inhabitants of a far country, by this trick, obtained a treaty of peace with Israel. When the truth as to these Gibeonites became known to Joshua, he asked counsel of God, and far from being told that the treaty was null because obtained by fraud, Joshua and the Israelites were told that it must be respected to all generations. Saul, the first King of Israel, in a fit of mistaken zeal for God, such as sinful men sometimes give way to, proposed to

exterminate this Canaanitish remnant, and slew some of them. Although that must have been about four centuries after the making of the treaty, God did not allow such covenant-breaking to go unpunished. But in the days of David, when there was a famine for three years, and when David enquired of the Lord, God answered, "It is for Saul and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." And to atone for Saul's sin, seven of his descendants were delivered over to the Gibeonites to be put to death. And God is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

It is often asserted against the Covenants that they are antiquated. If their age be counted by their years, they may be considered old. It is now three hundred and seventeen years since the National Covenant was first subscribed, and two hundred and fifty-three since the swearing of the Solemn League. But there are other writings numbering their years by thousands, against which only the blasphemous would bring the charge of being antiquated. The truly religious think no less of the Ten Commandments because the first writing of them dates back to the time of Moses. There are political documents, too, whose worth is not discounted by their age. It is six hundred and eighty-two years since the granting of Magna Charta, yet that ancient document, marking, as it did, the beginning of British liberty, is never slighted as being antiquated. If antiquity is sufficient to condemn a deed, then the Confession of Faith, the Revolution Settlement, the Bill of Rights, Habeas Corpus Act, and the Act of Union must all share the same fate. But there are other tests than lapse of time. There are the tests of truth and morality. A document or deed that will not stand these tests is antiquated. And, judged by these tests, some documents and claims are antiquated in their infancy, while others are modern in their old age. The Articles of Perth, enjoining kneeling at the Lord's Supper, private baptism, private communion, the observance of holy days, and confirmation, were antiquated as soon as passed, and in twenty years had lost all force; the claim for Dispensing Power made by James II., in order that

he might put himself above all laws and nullify the force of any that were objectionable to his warped and narrow mind, was antiquated as soon as made, and a few months saw its tyrannical proposer dethroned and an exile. But no moral covenant or just treaty made with either God or man can ever grow antiquated in the sense of losing its binding obligation.

The Covenants that justly and in the fullest sense of the term deserve to be called *National* and *British* are two—*The National Covenant* and *The Solemn League and Covenant*.

By the work of Knox and the other Reformers in Scotland the Gospel made great progress in that land. These Reformers were shrewd, intelligent men who had the minds of statesmen, and who closely watched the doings of Rome both at home and abroad. They saw that Rome was bent on putting out the lamp of truth. For centuries the great Papal councils had been passing laws against "heretics," Rome's name for "Protestants." The Inquisition had been doing its bloody work among the Albigenses and in Spain, and had been all too successful, especially in the latter country. In 1557 it had been introduced into Portugal, with the same murderous results as elsewhere. The "Holy League of Bayonne" was framed in 1565 between France and Spain, at the instigation of the infamous Catherine de' Medici, for the suppression of Protestantism in those countries and in Flanders. One of the results of this "Holy League" was the Massacre of St. Bartholemew's day, planned by Catherine and the Duke of Alva, when it is said that 70,000 Protestants were butchered in Paris alone. In Flanders 18,000 perished on the scaffold, and 100,000 were banished. France and Spain had ever been ready to assist Popish Ireland in its rebellions. Scotland herself had known ere this what the cruel grasp of Rome meant. Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, for her oppressive rule and persecuting support of Rome, had been compelled to fly to England. There she was thrown into prison, and the Popish princes of the Continent began to organise means for her delivery. Nothing is more certain than that the Spanish Armada was but another effort of Popish

hatred to stamp out the Word of God and another outcome of the "Holy League." Sir Walter Scott says, "'The Holy League' was directed against Scotland as well as against other heretical nations." None saw this more clearly than the Reformers, and it was evident to them that the only thing to be done was to meet League with League; and their reply to the "Holy League of Bayonne" was "The National Covenant" of Scotland, subscribed by the King, Parliament, and nation in 1580, and renewed in 1590, 1596, and 1638. By this Covenant the nation solemnly pledged itself to adhere to the Reformed religion, to renounce Popery and all its blasphemous rites and ceremonies, and was bound together for defence and for the support of the King and civil rulers in carrying out the objects of the Covenant.

Almost sixty years later England was threatened with the loss of her civil liberties and the Protestant religion. The Stuart kings had been degenerating in the new soil in which they had been planted. Their insolent and obstinate claims to absolute power, and their Romish predilections, which could not be concealed, had the effect of terrifying Parliament and people. In their distress, it was to the National Covenant of Scotland that they looked hopefully, and that bond which had been Scottish in its origin was heartily and enthusiastically made British by its renewal. It was felt that to oppose the tyranny and perfidy of Charles I., under which the United Kingdom suffered, something ought to be done to make England, Scotland and Ireland more perfectly and indissolubly one. A perfect union was regarded as embracing religious as well as civil affairs. And as Scotland had led the way sixty years before in the framing of a bond that was religious as well as civil, it was to Scotland that England now looked for the framing of a bond to unite the three kingdoms for the defence of their liberty. The result was a Draft, by Alexander Henderson, of The Solemn League and Covenant, which, with very slight alterations, was approved and subscribed by the Westminster Assembly, the Parliament, the House of

Lords, and men of every rank and class throughout the kingdom. The object of the Covenant was "The Reformation and Defence of Religion, the Honour and Happiness of the King, and the Peace and Safety of the Three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland."

Of this Covenant, Hetherington says, "It is difficult to conceive how any calm, unprejudiced, thoughtful, and religious man can peruse the preceding very solemn document without feeling upon his mind an overawing sense of its sublimity and sacredness. The most important of man's interests for time and for eternity are included within its ample scope, and made the subjects of a Solemn League with each other and a sacred Covenant with God. Religion, liberty, and peace are the great elements of human welfare, to the preservation of which it bound the empire; and those by whom it was framed knew well that there can be no safety for these in a land where the mind of the community is dark with ignorance, warped by superstition, misled by error, and degraded by tyranny, civil and ecclesiastical; they pledged themselves to seek extirpation of these pernicious evils. . . . No man who is able to understand its nature, and to feel and appreciate its spirit and its aim, will deny it to be the wisest, the sublimest, and the most sacred document ever framed by uninspired men." Hallam, in his "Constitutional History of England," has given perhaps one of the best summaries of this Covenant. He says, "The Covenant consisted in an oath, to be subscribed by all persons in both kingdoms, whereby they bound themselves to preserve the Reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the Word of God and practice of the best reformed churches; and to endeavour to bring the churches of God, in the three kingdoms, to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of church government, directory for worship and catechising; to endeavour, without respect of persons, the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, and whatsoever should be found contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness; to preserve the rights

and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the kingdoms, and the King's person and authority in the preservation and defence of the true religion and liberties of the kingdoms; to endeavour the discovery of incendiaries and malignants, who hinder the reformation of religion and divide the King from his people, that they may be brought to punishment; finally, to assist and defend all such as should enter into this Covenant, and not suffer themselves to be withdrawn from it, whether to revolt to the opposite party or to give in to a detestable indifference and neutrality."

In his "Fifty Years' Struggle of the Scottish Covenanters," Dodds thus enunciates the principles embodied in the two Covenants:—

"1. Defence of the Reformed Presbyterian Religion in Scotland.

2. Promotion of uniformity amongst the churches in the three kingdoms.

3. Extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, and all unsound forms of worship.

4. Preservation of the Parliaments and of the liberties of the people.

5. Defence of the Sovereign in his maintaining the Reformed religion.

6. Discovery and punishment of malignants and disturbers of the peace and welfare of the nation.

7. Mutual defence and protection of each individually, and of all jointly, who were within the bonds of the Covenant.

8. Sincere and earnest endeavour to set an example before the world of public, personal, and domestic virtue, and godliness."

There are two matters in these Covenants to which passing notice may be given, inasmuch as they stumble many at the present day, and cause the Covenants to be evil spoken of. First, the word *extirpation* is taken by some as carrying with it the idea of persecution or punishment, with bodily suffering, and perhaps death. It is, however, noteworthy that systems

and not men are contemplated as liable to this extirpation, and that special pains were taken to point out what the Prelacy was that was to be extirpated, viz., church-government by Archbishops, Bishops, etc. The Covenanters were plain speaking men who said just what they meant to say. If the word had been aimed at the men instead of the systems, then nothing would have kept the Covenanters from saying Papists and Prelatists instead of Popery and Prelacy. Besides, in the exhortation sent out by the Westminster Assembly, when the extirpation of Prelacy, as a sinful and merely human system, is spoken of, it is expressly added, "Nor is any man hereby bound to offer any violence to their persons, but only in his place and calling to endeavour their extirpation in a lawful way." Before the charge of persecution can be established there must be proof that persecution was a result of the Covenants. Persecution did follow, but it was persecution *of* the Covenanters, not *by* them. And no instance can be pointed to of the Covenanted nation attempting to extirpate Papists and Prelatists by the sword. The other matter on which objection is sometimes taken to the Solemn League and Covenant is the pledge, "to endeavour the discovery of all such as have been or shall be incendiaries, malignants, or evil instruments." Who were these "incendiaries" and "malignants?" Men like Strafford and Laud, and, at a later time, Claverhouse, Dalziel, and "bloody" Mackenzie, who aided the King, and even urged him on, in his insane course of tyranny and persecution which soon would have ruined the nation. The Covenant was the written constitution of Britain, and those who swore it pledged themselves to expose and bring to punishment those who worked for the overthrow of that glorious constitution. In fact, this article simply bound the Covenanters to put down all treason, and traitors such as Charles I. and his partizans were proving themselves to be. Every nation endeavours to suppress treason, and rightly so; and it would be passing strange if a Covenanted nation should have no right similarly to act in self-defence.

Are the principles of these Covenants applicable to-day?

And, if so, how would matters be affected by their application? What bearing would they have on ecclesiastical, national, and personal life now? We purpose looking only at a few of the applications that may be made of the Covenants to modern life. These will be examples, and instances may be multiplied at will.

I.—WHAT IS THE BEARING OF THE COVENANTS
ECCLESIASTICALLY?

They deal with the *doctrine* of the church, and point to the only standard the church of Christ has any warrant for looking to in matters of doctrine—the Word of God. This Word is, over and over again, pointed to as supreme. There is no question as to what is the Word of God. It was the same Bible that we have that was taken by the Westminster Divines, and whose truth and perfect accuracy are being shown more clearly every day by the marvellous discoveries that are being made in Eastern lands, to the utter confusion of those who have prated about its errors and inaccuracies, and who have represented sacred history as made up of fables and myths. The Covenanters believed in the absolute perfection and infallibility of the Bible as God gave it to men. In this they were centuries in advance of the modern worshippers of “Higher Criticism.” They regarded this written Word as above all human authority. And so they said, “We detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman antichrist upon the Scriptures of God, . . . his erroneous doctrine against the sufficiency of the written Word.” What the Covenants contemplated was a church perfectly under the authority of Christ in doctrine. Can such an ideal ever grow old? Is it not perfectly suited to present needs?

Due attention is given also to *worship*. And in this matter the same high standard is taken, and the same perfect guide is looked to—the written Word of God. The true view of worship is taken as something that is to be rendered to God in spirit and in truth. What could sinful man know of the

matter or the manner of such worship unless God had given light in His Word? So the Covenants recognised that in worship there was no place for the will and tastes of man—no place for anything but the will and desire of God. The innovations and inventions of men were condemned, and a pure, simple, spiritual, New Testament worship was contemplated. "We, Noblemen, Barons, Gentlemen, Burghesses, Ministers, and Commons under-subscribing, considering divers times before, and especially at this time, the danger of the true reformed religion, of the King's honour, and of the public peace of the kingdom, by the manifold innovations and evils, generally contained and particularly mentioned in our late supplications, complaints, and protestations; do hereby profess, and before God, His angels, and the world, solemnly declare, That with our whole heart we agree, and resolve all the days of our life constantly to adhere unto and to defend the foresaid true religion, and (forbearing the practice of all innovations already introduced in the matters of the worship of God . . .) to labour, by all means lawful, to recover the purity and liberty of the Gospel, as it was established and professed before the foresaid novations." The teaching of the Covenants is in direct contradiction to modern opinion regarding the worship of God—as opposed to it, in fact, as the remedy is to the disease; and as modern, then, as the truth of God always is. Even now the souls of many are revolting against the ornate, sensuous, materialistic, unspiritual worship that has been long sought after. There are indications—few, indeed, but still encouraging—that, however old-fashioned the Covenant idea of worship was and is, the time is coming, and not so far off as we sometimes think, when that same idea will be modern and all-prevailing.

Nor was *discipline* overlooked in the Covenants. This was regarded as an ordinance of God for preserving the purity of the church and for doing good to the soul that was dealt with. And here also it was the hand of the Lord that was looked for, and guidance was sought from the Word of God. The Covenanters saw clearly that there was no authority in

Scripture for throwing open membership in the Church to all who chose to claim it. They saw, too, what so many modern sects have failed to see at the beginning of their career, but what all have been before long compelled to admit, and what many who have begun by opposing have ended by abusing—that no church can live without discipline. Errors must be extirpated, and offenders must be excluded. Ecclesiastical “malignants, incendiaries, and evil instruments” must be discovered and brought to trial. And what is it that most of all mars the good name of the church in the world now? It is not the dulness of her worship, nor the rigidity of her government, nor the sternness of her doctrine. It is the fact that so many of her members are the veriest hypocrites, and by their actions wholly belie their profession. It is the lack of discipline that most of all gives the adversary occasion to blaspheme. A wholesome, just and impartial church discipline is one of the crying needs of the present day. And the message of the Covenants is an exactly suitable message.

Church *government* also was dealt with in the Covenants. This was not thought to be such a trifling matter and so easy of settlement that the sinful reason of man could decide what the form ought to be. The Covenanters were so humble and so distrustful of self in this, as in all other religious matters, that their appeal for guidance was to the Word of God and to it alone. And so the system of Church government set up was the New Testament, apostolic, simple, and Christ-honouring system of Presbyterianism. History was anticipated, and that form of church government was adopted, because Scriptural, which was destined, two and a half centuries afterwards, to have more advocates in the Protestant world than any other form. In this respect even modern opinion will give some slight praise to the Covenanters, and admit that as to the form of church government they were in no way behind their own or any other time.

Even some specific questions that are regarded as pre-eminently modern questions were dealt with in the Covenants. The question of church union is not so new as many of its

foolish advocates would represent it to be. The Covenants contemplated church union, and to effect union was one of the objects for which they were framed. And the views of the Reformers on this question were as mature as their views regarding doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. The same guide was looked to in this as in other matters, and the view of the Word of God was taken—that union can be brought about only by the acceptance of God's truth, that error is the cause of all the schisms that have separated professing Christians, and that perfect union could never be brought about by dropping distinctive principles and letting go some items of divine truth. They understood, better than most modern advocates of union, the meaning of Christ's prayer, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us . . . that they may be one even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." The union contemplated was as far above that vague, sinewless union thought of in the present day as the heavens are above the earth. "We shall," said the Covenanters, "endeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confession of faith, form of Church government, directory for worship and catechising; that we and our posterity after us may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us."

It is often said that the present century has seen the birth of the missionary spirit. The development and application of this spirit have certainly been more noticeable during the last hundred years than for many previous centuries. But yet this subject of missions, to which so much present-day spiritual energy is being bent, and for the zealous advocacy of which our own generation takes to itself so much credit, was not overlooked by the framers of the Covenants. Ireland was then, as a large portion of it is still, groaning under the cruel, iron heel of Rome. England had for centuries been in sovereign possession of Ireland. Yet even when Britain

became Protestant there was no national effort made to spread the Word of God among the Roman Catholic Irish, and to teach them the truth. Consequently Ireland had been in a continual ferment, and rebellion had been constantly in the air. The Covenanters saw that the only cure for Ireland's ills was the Word of God, and that the darkness of Romanism and all the crime and misery attendant thereon could be banished only by the light of God's truth. And so they bound themselves that they would "sincerely, really, and constantly, through the grace of God, endeavour the reformation of religion in the Kingdom of Ireland in doctrine, worship, discipline and government, according to the Word of God and the example of the best reformed Churches." Does not this show that they were prepared for missionary work, and that the fulfilment of the Covenants would have meant the giving of the Bible to Ireland, as Rome has ever been refusing to give it, and not to Ireland alone but to the heathen nations of the world.

II.—TO WHAT WOULD THEIR APPLICATION LEAD US NATIONALLY?

The Covenants recognised the monarch. The Covenanters were neither anti-government nor anti-monarchy men. They expressly declared, "That we have no intention nor desire to attempt anything that may turn to the dishonour of God, or to the diminution of the King's greatness and authority; but, on the contrary, we promise and swear, That we shall, to the uttermost of our power, with our means and lives, stand to the defence of our dread sovereign the King's majesty, his person and authority, in the defence and preservation of the foresaid true religion, liberties and laws of the kingdom. . . . Neither do we fear the foul aspersions of rebellion, combination, or what else our adversaries, from their craft and malice, would put upon us; seeing what we do is so well-warranted, and ariseth from an unfeigned desire to maintain the true worship of God, the majesty of our King, and the peace of the kingdom, for the common happiness of ourselves and our

posterity." But the character of the king contemplated was such as befits the ruler of a Christian nation. The Covenanters looked for a pledged servant of God on the throne whose Christianity would be shown in the only way genuine Christianity can be shown—by a credible profession coupled with a consistent life. They never intended to have on the throne of Christian, Covenanted Britain a liar or a libertine, such as the Stuarts and some of the Guelphs afterwards showed themselves to be. They held the Scriptural idea—"He that ruleth over men must be wise, ruling in the fear of God." Nor did they pledge their fealty to a gambling, Sabbath-breaking, dissolute, and immoral Royalty such as is often seen in our own time. What they looked for was a king, Christian in more than name, ruling in the fear of God over a Christian people.

The Parliament was to be an assembly of professing Christians who should give practical proof of their Christianity, and whose lives should be free from scandal. Could anything be more absurd than to have an assembly of Atheists, Agnostics, adulterers, Roman Catholics, Jews, Mohammedans, and Hindus making laws for a Christian, Protestant people? The Covenanters did not take that illogical, anti-Protestant, and falsely so-called liberal position that so many present-day Protestants take. But they held principles that if held now would exclude from the House of Commons men like Bradlaugh, and Morley, and Dilke, and the followers of Cardinal Vaughan and Archbishop Walsh, and would "make way for better men."

Legislation was to go forward according to the Word of God. It is noteworthy that in every paragraph of the Covenants and in every step that was contemplated this supreme standard is pointed to, and the strong desire and determination are manifested of keeping close to that divine guide. Thus British law was to be made moral and Scriptural, and all contrary to the Word of God was to be swept away. What more necessary doctrine now, and yet what one is more overlooked? Most men would be laughed at who based an

argument for or against any law either on the moral law or the Holy Scriptures. We have now in Britain the sad spectacle of the Legislature of one of the greatest Christian nations on earth afraid or unwilling to appeal to the only guide for Christian conduct and the only revelation of the will of the Christian's God.

The mutual oaths of rulers and ruled were also brought within the ample scope of the Covenants. And when we contrast with them the modern oaths taken in these relationships, we see how poor and weak, and in some points blasphemous, these latter are, and how holy the relationship was deemed by the Covenanters. Take the modern Coronation Oath, as it is contained in the questions put by the Archbishop or Bishop to the King or Queen—"Will you solemnly swear to govern the people of this Kingdom of England, and the dominions thereto belonging, according to the Statutes in Parliament agreed on, and the laws and customs of the same? Will you to your power cause law and justice, in mercy, to be executed in all your judgments? Will you to the utmost of your power maintain the laws of God, the true profession of the Gospel, and the Protestant reformed religion established by the law? And will you preserve unto the bishops and clergy of this realm, and to the churches committed to their charge, all such rights and privileges as by law do or shall appertain unto them, or any of them?" Contrast with this the ideas of the Covenanters as to the sovereign's duties and oath—"That all kings and princes at their coronation and reception of their princely authority shall make their faithful promise by their solemn oath, in the presence of the eternal God, that, enduring the whole time of their lives, they shall serve the same eternal God, to the uttermost of their power, according as he hath required in his most holy Word contained in the Old and New Testaments; and according to the same Word shall maintain the true religion of Jesus Christ, 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 foresaid Word and according to the laudable laws and constitutions received in this realm in nowise repugnant to the said will of the eternal God." Or take the present vague Oath of Allegiance, blasphemous where it is not vague; so hazy that men of all creeds and of no creed can take it and be wholly ignorant of what they are binding themselves to; so blasphemous when fully understood that any Christian ought to shrink from undertaking it—"I do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, her heirs and successors according to law." At first sight this may seem a harmless engagement. It is when we come to enquire what is meant by "allegiance" that we realise the blasphemy of it. The swearer is not left to put his own construction on the word "allegiance." That word is, partly at least, defined by Act of Parliament. "There shall be repealed the several Acts and parts of Acts specified in the Schedule hereto to the extent in the said Schedule in that behalf mentioned: Provided always that the Repeal of these Acts or any of them, or of any parts thereof, shall not be construed to weaken or in any manner to affect any Laws or Statutes now in force for preserving and upholding the Supremacy of our Lady the Queen, Her Heirs and Successors, *in all matters Civil and Ecclesiastical, within this realm or other Her Majesty's Dominions.*" And opposite to this put the oath of the Covenants as it related to allegiance to the sovereign—"We promise and protest with our hearts, under the same oath, hand-writ, and pains, that we shall defend his person and authority with our goods, bodies, and lives, in defence of Christ, his evangel, liberties of our country, ministration of justice, and punishment of iniquity, against all enemies within this realm or without, as we desire our God to be a strong and merciful defender to us in the day of our death and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Taking it for granted, as we do, that whatever is nearest to the mind of Christ and

most honouring to Him is best suited to present-day needs, it is almost unnecessary to ask which of these oaths is the more modern and suited to the condition of a Christian people.

Even on specific matters of legislation the Covenants speak with no uncertain voice. Take, for instance, the question of the Repeal of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland. What say the Covenants? "And whereas the happiness of a blessed peace between these kingdoms, denied in former times to our progenitors, is by the good providence of God, granted unto us, and hath been lately concluded and settled by both Parliaments; we shall each one of us, according to our place and interest, endeavour that they may remain conjoined in a firm peace and union to all posterity; and that justice may be done upon the wilful opposers thereof, in manner expressed in the precedent article." The endowment of the Romish Church, educationally and otherwise, is just now engaging the attention of politicians. The Covenants may be applied to this question. "And therefore we abhor and detest all contrary religion and doctrine; but chiefly all kind of Papistry in general and particular heads, even as they are now damned and confuted by the Word of God and Kirk of Scotland." The swearers of that oath would not have wrestled long with the question of the endowment of Romanism. "Extirpation" of Rome's doctrines can in no way be squared with the endowment of her colleges and schools. On the subject of the disestablishment of the Prelatic Church of England the Covenants speak with equal strength and precision. And the Westminster Assembly in their "Exhortation" sent out with the Solemn League and Covenant said, "If it be said, the extirpation of Prelacy is new and unwarrantable, this will appear to all impartial understandings (tho' new) to be not only warrantable but necessary; if they consider that the very life and soul thereof is already taken from it by an Act passed in this present Parliament, so as (like Jezebel's carcase, of which no more was left but the skull, the feet, and the palms of the hands) nothing of jurisdiction remains but what is precarious in

them, and voluntary in those who submit unto them : that their whole government is at best but a human constitution, and such as is found and adjudged by both houses of Parliament (in which the judgment of the whole kingdom is involved and declared) not only very prejudicial to the civil state, but a great hindrance also to the perfect reformation of religion. Yea, who knoweth it not to be too much an enemy thereunto and destructive to the power of godliness and pure administration of the ordinances of Christ ? which moved the well-affected almost throughout this kingdom long since to petition this parliament (as hath been desired before, even in the reign of Queen Elizabeth and of King James) for a total abolition of the same."

Even international relationships were at any rate touched by the spirit of the Covenants. And it would be a glorious day for England now if the spirit of the Covenanters was being manifested by her in her relationship to the Eastern question. The "Concert of Europe" would not then be the consideration to which everything else would have to bow. The laws of Christ and the cause of suffering humanity would weigh with her far more heavily than the "Concert of Europe." Oliver Cromwell, afterwards Lord Protector of England, was one of the first to sign the Solemn League and Covenant. When, after the execution of Charles I., he was raised to the highest position England could confer on a subject, he carried at least some of his Covenanting principles with him. In his treaty with France he refused to bind himself not to succour the persecuted Huguenots ; and again and again they sought to him for advice and help, which were freely given. Under his stern, but, in the main, godly rule British sympathy and British cannon brought to the persecuted Vaudois a peace they had not known for centuries. As Hallam says, "The oppressed Protestants in Catholic kingdoms, disgusted at the lukewarmness and half-apostacy of the Stuarts, looked up to him as their patron and mediator." "He placed England," says Macaulay, "at the head of the Protestant interest, and in the first rank of Christian Powers. He taught every nation

to value her friendship and to dread her enmity. But he did not squander her resources in a vain attempt to invest her with that supremacy which no power, in the modern system of Europe, can safely affect or can long retain." If the same spirit existed in our rulers now, even at the cost of British treasure and British blood, and, if need be, even of the sacrifice of the "Concert of Europe," the rule of the "Arch Assassin" who sits in the Yildz Kiosk would last just until the British fleet could sail into the Golden Horn; the blood of persecuted Armenia would be wiped out in the blood of the murderous Turk; Greece, instead of being threatened with the combined fleets of the Great Powers, would be applauded for her heroic effort to bring freedom to downtrodden Crete; and British cannon, instead of firing on the oppressed, would be turned on the oppressor.

III.—HOW DO THE COVENANTS BEAR ON PERSONAL LIFE ?

We might ask, How have they borne? Ask the Martyrs' Monuments scattered over Scotland. Ask the "Cloud of Witnesses" and the "Scots Worthies." They will answer that, for purity of life and high-toned self-sacrificing Christian conduct, the Covenanters' betters never were in the world. Is it not true that, in every age since, those who have sworn these Covenants and kept them have, with general consent, taken rank as the most exemplary Christians? And if there seem any indications now that Covenanters are losing their good name, is this not due to their failure to conform to their Covenant vows?

The Covenants are sometimes blamed for being theological and not practical, but those who framed them knew of no separation between sound theology and godly practice. What could be more practical and more suited to present-day needs than the vow we find near the end of the National Covenant, as renewed in 1638:—"And because we cannot look for a blessing from God upon our proceedings except with our profession and subscription we join such a life and conversation as beseemeth Christians who have renewed their covenant

with God; we therefore faithfully promise for ourselves, our followers, and all others under us, both in public and in our particular families and personal carriage, to endeavour to keep ourselves within the bounds of Christian liberty, and to be good examples to others of all godliness, soberness, and righteousness, and of every duty we owe to God and man."

In short, then, the vow of the Covenants is a vow of ecclesiastical, national, and personal subjection to Jesus Christ. Is that not the vow that everyone owes to the Saviour? Is that not the vow that shall yet universally be made to Him? And is not that the shortest way, the only way, to true peace, liberty, and happiness? If so, is it not what the present generation needs as much as any other? And if we should hold our peace as to these truths, should we not be held guilty by the great Sovereign to whom our most perfect allegiance is due? These Covenants it becomes each generation to recognise and renew. And it is with this as with every other duty—the refusal of one man to undertake it in no way justifies the refusal of another, and the refusal of the majority in no way frees from obligation the minority. As it is the duty of one believer, even though he should be compelled to stand alone, to come out and be separate from unbelievers, so it is the duty now of everyone who believes in the present binding obligation of the Covenants to set his seal to them, and personally acknowledge them, even though he should be the only one in the nation to take up such a position. If, then, the nation persist in its refusal to recognise these Scriptural Covenants it made with God, and if other churches persist in ignoring them, let us, the members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, personally and collectively, in word and in deed, say with Joshua, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." We cannot do more; we dare not do less. God help us. Amen.