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THE COVENANTERS : THEIR FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

THE fifty years' struggle of the Scottish Covenanters against the last three monarchs of the House of Stewart was but an episode in the mighty conflict waged by the Reformed Church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries against the Church of Rome on the one hand and the increasingly powerful monarchs of the European States on the other. The struggle was the direct outcome of the tremendous revolution in human affairs which convulsed Europe in the first-half of the sixteenth century, and goes by the name of the Reformation.

The Reformation marked the end of one era and the beginning of another. Before the Reformation, Europe was, theoretically at least, a unity, both civil and ecclesiastical. Although the modern nations were growing up to maturity before the Reformation, they were yet nominally parts of a greater whole. The Holy Roman Empire—heir of the great Empire of the Cæsars—was largely a fiction, but it was a fiction not altogether without influence. On its civil side, European society could be viewed as a kind of hierarchy, with the Emperor, to whom kings owed allegiance, at the head. Coterminous and co-extensive with this Holy Roman Empire was the Holy Catholic Church, with a spiritual jurisdiction extending over the whole of western Europe—also organised as a hierarchy, presided over by the Pope, the Vicar of Christ upon earth.

This mediæval unity was a great and splendid concept. Even at this late day we cannot but be thrilled by the ideal—a great society organised on feudal and hierarchical lines, with its twin sovereign princes—Pope and Emperor. Had the ideal been put into practice, Europe would have literally basked in the sunshine of righteousness, prosperity and peace. But it was not so; it was never more than an ideal, a state of affairs which was supposed to exist, but did not. Even before that fateful autumn day when Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door at Wittenberg, the Holy Catholic Church had known what it was to be rent asunder by schism, and the Holy Roman Empire was in process of disintegration and decay. Even without the Reformation, some such development was inevitable. But the

Reformation accelerated the pace and brought a speedier disintegration.

"The supreme achievement of the Reformation," contended Figgis, the distinguished English historian, "is the modern State."¹ The element of truth in this generalisation is that the Reformation, by shattering mediæval unity, brought the modern State into being at an earlier date than would have been possible otherwise. The Reformation originated in the first instance as a protest against the moral abuses of the Catholic Church. Luther's main interest was moral and spiritual, not political and ecclesiastical; his aim was reform, not separation. But events proved too strong for him. The Papacy, by its overbearing attitude and intransigent policy, made any compromise impossible; and when the issue was joined, there were others less disinterested than Luther who had their own accounts to settle with Rome. The German princes had long chafed under the spiritual overlordship of the Pope; and they were by no means enamoured of the secular overlordship of the Emperor. And so, by throwing in their lot with the bold monk who at Worms, in 1521, defied both Pope and Emperor, these princes dealt a blow at the two supreme powers, spiritual and temporal. And what these petty princes did in 1521, comparatively powerful monarchs did within the next two decades. The Scandinavian kings, and a still more potent monarch, Henry VIII of England, cut the tie with Rome and thus emphasised the full nationhood of their respective realms.

Now the Reformed Church in the German territories, the Scandinavian countries and still more, in England, had to pay a heavy price for this action on the part of the secular rulers. The price was the control of the Church by these same rulers. The Peace of Augsburg in 1555 laid down the principle *cujus regio, ejus religio*: as the religion of the prince, so must the religion of his subjects be. Meanwhile Henry VIII, by his breach with the Pope, had constituted himself—the secular ruler—supreme head of the English Church. The Church, then, in the lands which had adopted the Lutheran Reformation, and in England also, had jumped from the frying-pan of papal tyranny into the fire of kingly despotism.

The new-found independence of the more important European nations from Imperial and Papal control meant, in practice, the independence of absolute monarchs. The new

¹ Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century, *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. III, p. 736.

Nationalism was really a revived Cæsarism. John Richard Green, the historian, was probably right in saying that to the statesmen of the Tudor period the phrase "an absolute king" meant not a despot, but a king not subject to foreign supervision, either Papal or Imperial.¹ But this phase soon passed. Having got rid of all supra-national checks on their power, the monarchs began to seek the removal of infra-national checks as well. In the Middle Ages, society had been organised, in theory at least, on a recognition of mutual duties and rights. Great nobles in each country had enjoyed a sort of semi-independence, which certainly made for internal anarchy; cities, corporations, trade guilds, had possessed certain privileges. The representatives of the people in Parliaments and Diets assembled were likewise privileged; while, of course, the old Church had enjoyed a position of independence. The kings proceeded to make themselves absolute masters of their territorial domains and to get rid of these checks. The independence of the baronage was broken in most of the larger states; trade was placed in the leading-strings of government; Parliaments were attacked and, in many cases, destroyed; the Church, Lutheran and Anglican, became a department of state. The new régime spelt Absolutism in the civil sphere and Erastianism in the ecclesiastical. This process went on not only in those lands that had thrown off allegiance to Rome, but also in countries still Roman Catholic. Louis XIV, monarch of a country still predominantly Romanist in religion, achieved most completely of all seventeenth-century monarchs the ideal of the servile state.

Thus the first effect of the Reformation was to enhance the power of kings and to enslave the Church in the shackles of absolutism. And there were not wanting ecclesiastical apologists for this state of affairs. The Church of England produced a crop of them, and the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings was developed by Anglican thinkers. Lutheran ecclesiastics were not far behind their Anglican contemporaries in exalting the kingly office. These theories issued in Erastianism—the view that the "civil magistrate" has ultimate power and jurisdiction over all matters civil and ecclesiastical. It is true that Erastus, who gave his name to this doctrine, was "less Erastian than some who, in modern times, have ranked under that designation."² Indeed,

¹ *History of the English People* (revised ed.), p. 478.

² Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, II, p. 572.

it has been questioned whether Erastus was really an Erastian at all.¹ And this is not to be wondered at, for Erastus of Heidelberg was neither a Lutheran nor an Anglican. Simultaneously with the Lutheran Reformation there arose across the Rhine in the democratic cantons of Switzerland a parallel movement. Zwingli of Zurich was a man of a very different stamp from his great contemporary of Wittenberg. Luther's interest, as has been said, was primarily religious and moral. Zwingli's was that, and something more. He had the political instinct which Luther lacked. Luther was a quietist, and in his way a mystic; Zwingli a radical and a man of affairs. As a free-born Swiss, he was interested in liberty. "God," he said, "favours liberty."² "Servile souls who have never realised what freedom is, overwhelm the Cæsars with praises and admire their own destroyer as the hedge-sparrow admires the cuckoo."³ Luther stood for the freedom of the Christian man; Zwingli stood for that, certainly, but for the freedom of the Christian citizen as well.

It is true that Zwingli acted on principles that later on came to be called Erastian; Church and State in Protestant Zurich were regarded as different aspects of the one society. But Zurich was a republic. It knew no regal tyrant, nor accepted any dogma of divine right. The Zwinglian Reformation—more thorough-going than that of Luther—spread over the greater part of Switzerland and into France; and in France, governed as it was by ambitious and despotic rulers, Zwinglian Protestantism became radical and revolutionary. The French Huguenot Church, born in persecution and baptised in blood, struggled desperately on two fronts against the relentless Roman Church on the one hand and the despotic monarchs on the other. The fury of the persecution drove into exile the greatest of all French Huguenots—John Calvin. The land of his exile was Switzerland, and the city was Geneva, French-speaking and Protestant. The leadership of Franco-Swiss Protestantism—of the Reformed Church—passed into his hands, and Zwinglian-ism became transformed into Calvinism. Geneva now became the centre of a thorough-going aggressive Protestantism—a Protestantism which, while diametrically opposed to Romanism in most respects, retained the old Catholic conception of a Church

¹ Cf. Figgis' illuminating essay, "Erastus and Erastianism," *The Divine Right of Kings*, pp. 293-342.

² Quoted Oeschli, *History of Switzerland*, p. 73.

³ Quoted *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Universal, of which national churches were but provinces, a church deriving its *raison d'être* from God alone, owning no head but Christ, and refusing to be subordinated to any earthly monarch. The Calvinistic form of Protestantism spread beyond France and Switzerland into southern Germany, and from thence to the two countries which were the last in Europe to throw off the Romish yoke—the provinces of the Netherlands, now called Holland, and that northern part of Great Britain called Scotland.

In Holland, Calvinism became the driving-power of the movement against the tyranny of the Spanish monarch who reigned there as sovereign overlord. In Scotland, as in France, the new Protestant Church was a Church in rebellion. While in France, the rebellion failed, in Scotland it succeeded. In 1560 Scotland experienced a revolution; "a revolution undoubtedly it was, politically as well as religiously."¹ Right from the beginning the Kirk was in grips with the Crown. Set up in the teeth of the opposition of the Court, the Kirk was not "established" until after the deposition and flight of Mary Queen of Scots. John Knox, the friend and disciple of Calvin, modelled the Church of Scotland, as far as lay in his power, on that of Geneva. It was indeed a Church Militant.

At first the paramount danger was that the floods of the Counter-Reformation would overspread Scotland and destroy the work of Reformation. But the overwhelming disaster to the Spanish Armada in 1588 put an end to that menace, for the time at least. But the ordeal of the Kirk was only beginning. As early as the reign of Mary, the statesmen of the day were intent on asserting state control over the Kirk. Maitland of Lethington, a typical Renaissance politician, sought to regulate the time of the meetings of the General Assembly, the supreme court of the Kirk—an attempt which called forth the memorable retort of John Knox—"Take from us the freedom of Assemblies and you take from us the Evangel."² In the regency of Morton, the issue was joined in earnest. The occasion was the retention of the office of bishop in the new Church. Knox, nearing the close of his life, scented the danger. At one time he seems to have been more or less indifferent to the existence of a modified

¹ MacEwen, *History of the Church in Scotland*, II, p. 145.

² Calderwood, *History*, II, p. 160. Knox, *History of the Reformation in Scotland* (Guthrie ed.), p. 289. McCrie, *Life of John Knox*, p. 184.

episcopacy within Protestantism ; but now he realised that the retention of a hierarchy was to be a possible means of asserting royal control over the Kirk. Hence his uncompromising opposition to the appointment of those quasi-prelates sarcastically dubbed the "tulchan bishops."¹ When James VI came of age and began to shape his policies as King of Scotland, he saw in the Kirk the chief obstacle to the realisation of his dream of reigning as absolute king of a servile state. He wanted control of the Kirk, and he saw in a hierarchy the means of control. Further, he was now heir to the throne of England, and he desired to bring the Church of Scotland into conformity with that of England before Elizabeth's death made him "master of two kingdoms." His preference for Episcopacy was a purely personal one. "Presbytery," as he said in his own pungent way, "agreeth as well with monarchy as God with the Devil." "No bishop, no king."

The fortunes of this war between Church and State swayed now one way, now another. James could only master the Kirk if he had the wholehearted support of the nobles ; and the Scots barons had always been turbulent and disloyal. Sometimes James had to conciliate the Kirk, as when he assented to the legislation of 1592 ; but these concessions were made only to be withdrawn. Under the leadership of the redoubtable Andrew Melville, the Kirk put up a magnificent fight, resisting the royal pretensions to call assemblies and to interfere in ecclesiastical government at every step ; and Melville did not hesitate to tell the King, in ever memorable phrase, that "there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland," and that in Christ's Church James was neither "a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member."² But the accession of James to the English throne tipped the balance, and brought the conflict to an end, temporarily at least. With Melville and other leaders exiled, and the nobles definitely ranged on the King's side, the Kirk was reduced to submission, and when James died in 1625, the struggle, was, to all appearances, finished.

His son and successor, Charles I, was at once the most moral and the most stupid of the Stewarts. Not content with consolidating his father's victories over the Scots Kirk and the English Parliament, Charles sighed for more worlds to conquer.

¹ Calderwood, *History*, III, p. 207.

² *Ibid.*, V, p. 440. James Melville, *Diary*, p. 325.

Not satisfied with the assimilation of the Kirk to the Church of England in matters of government, he attempted to bring about uniformity of worship, and at the same time he antagonised the nobles by alienating many of the lands which their grandfathers had seized at the Reformation. The riot in St. Giles' in July, 1637, was the spark which set Scotland ablaze. This led to a general uprising not only of the clergy but of the laity, not only of the commons but of the nobles. The result was a second Scottish revolution, and the charter of this revolution was the National Covenant, signed in Edinburgh in February, 1638, and afterwards all over the country by all classes of the community. Charles had no alternative but to make concessions in the face of so menacing a posture on the part of his ancient kingdom. He was forced to allow a "free Assembly" and a "free Parliament." The former, which met in Glasgow in November, 1638, undid at a stroke everything which James VI had done, abolished Episcopacy and rescinded all the legislation of the latter part of that king's reign. The Assembly which met in Edinburgh a year later ratified these revolutionary measures, and the "free Parliament" did likewise. The Covenanters, as the popular national party came to be called, realised from the first that the concessions of Charles were made to gain time; and so they put themselves into a posture of defence, raising an army to assert their rights. And in 1639, the Covenanters made their first tactical error; they prevailed upon the Privy Council to pass an Act making the subscription of the Covenant compulsory on the whole of Scotland.

Meanwhile Charles was in the throes of a struggle against his English Parliament, and his extremity proved to be the opportunity of the Covenanters. The King was unable to proceed against the Scots; and after the Scots invasion of England in 1640 and the occupation of Newcastle by Leslie's army, Charles was forced to yield and to ratify the acts of the Assembly and the Parliament. He was now preparing for the inevitable civil war in England. Doubtless the knowledge that if Charles succeeded in crushing the Parliamentary party he would at once proceed to the conquest of Scotland led the Covenanters to embark on the course which they took and to intervene in the Civil War on the side of the Parliament. To do so was not only good tactics; it was a potent blow for liberty. But the Scots leaders—Argyle, Warriston, Henderson and others—made a fatal blunder in their

mode of procedure. They assisted the Parliamentarians on their own conditions; chief among these was the signature of the Solemn League and Covenant, in which the Parliamentarians were obliged to pledge themselves to establish Presbyterianism, not only in England but in Popish Ireland as well.

The consequence of this piece of bad statesmanship was a serious one—the division of the forces of progress in Great Britain. As long as the war lasted, Scots and English held together. The Roundheads stood in desperate need of Scottish assistance and were in no mood to raise difficulties. But difficulties were inevitable; they were only postponed. Meanwhile, Scotland itself was no longer unanimous. Many who had signed the Covenant, among them Montrose, objected to the Covenanters' support of the Roundheads against the King; and as a consequence, a Scottish Royalist party arose, and Scotland itself was racked with a fierce and sanguinary civil war.

The close of the English war and the defeat of Charles brought to a head the differences between Scots and English. The Roundhead party, now supreme, was predominantly Independent in Church polity and was in no mood to establish Presbyterianism in England; and so a wedge was driven between the two peoples. The execution of Charles I by the Roundheads widened the gulf; the mass of the Covenanters rallied to the support of Charles' young son, and proclaimed him as Charles II. The situation was an ever-changing one. A minority of the Covenanters were opposed to co-operation with Royalists for the purpose of enthroning Charles even if he did sign the Covenants. They rightly saw that, like his father, he would sign any document in an emergency, and when the emergency had passed he would not regard himself as obliged to observe his bond. The Covenanters became divided into two parties—the Protesters, who took this view, and the Resolutioners, who trusted the King. Meanwhile Cromwell led the Roundheads over the Border and inflicted overwhelming defeat on the Scots at Dunbar. Herein lay the tragedy of the situation. Despite differences on the abstract question of Presbyterianism versus Independency, Covenanters and Roundheads were fellow-crusaders in a great enterprise—the enterprise of putting an end to absolutism in Church and State and discrediting the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, and of preserving civil and religious

liberty in Great Britain. That Cromwell had his faults there can be no doubt; but the main responsibility rests upon the Covenanters, on both sections, for their insistence at this period on the Divine Right of Presbytery, and on the Resolutioners in particular for their foolish trafficking with the son of their great enemy. So Cromwell came to Scotland as a conqueror rather than an ally, and co-operation between Roundheads and Covenanters became impossible.

After the final collapse of the Royalist cause at Worcester, followed a period of ten years' comparative quiet. But the breach between Resolutioners and Protesters in Scotland remained. Cromwell in 1653 dissolved the General Assembly, and the two parties fought out their differences in the lower courts. The Resolutioners still pinned their faith to a Stewart restoration, and indeed they were largely instrumental in bringing about the return of the King from exile after Cromwell's death. Up to the eleventh hour they believed in the Covenanted King, and expected that his word would be his bond. They were speedily disillusioned. No sooner had Charles returned as unchallenged King of Great Britain than his vengeance fell on the Protesters. The execution of Guthrie as well as Argyle, and later of Johnston of Warriston indicated the temper of the King and his advisers. And largely through the treachery of one of their own number, James Sharp, the Resolutioners found that Charles was as faithless as his father. Episcopacy was restored and the royal supremacy reasserted.

The passing by the servile Scottish Parliament in 1661 of the Act Rescissory, annulling all legislation since 1638, marked the beginning of the second and most tragic phase in the Covenanted struggle. Charles II was now in a position as favourable as that of his father in 1638 had been unfavourable. The land was exhausted by war and strife; the Covenanted party was weak and divided; the nobles were attached to the King's side by reasons of self-interest, and Parliament was well under control. England, too, was quiet, and Charles was enjoying a great, though quite unmerited, personal popularity. Charles and his advisers were in the most favourable position for the realisation of their aim—to transform Scotland into an absolute despotism and to realise first in Scotland and later in England a servile State. Charles II had no interest in religion or in the Church; he was at heart, at this period at least, an atheist with a leaning

to Rome ; all he cared for was to bring the Kirk under control, and he hoped to do this through the royal supremacy and the re-establishment of Episcopacy. The twenty-eight years' persecution of later Covenanters was not undertaken in the interests of any church or creed ; it was first and foremost a political persecution.

That the establishment of absolute government in Church and State alike was the settled policy of the Stewart kings and their successive governments in Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution is quite evident from a perusal of the various Acts of Parliament and Council and of the numerous oaths and bonds which were imposed. In 1661, besides the Act Rescissory, an Act was passed declaring it to be "high treason" for subjects "of whatever number, upon any pretext whatsoever, to rise, continue in arms, or to enter into bonds or leagues with foreigners or among themselves, without his Majesty's special warrant and approbation had and obtained thereto."¹ This meant the abolition of the right of association. In September, 1661, the Privy Council prohibited anyone not of "known loyalty and affection to his majesty's government" to become a magistrate or councillor in any burgh.² Another repressive act stipulated that any person "called to any public trust" must, besides taking the oath of allegiance, assert under his handwriting "his majesty's royal prerogative as is expressed in the acts passed in the present parliament."³ Still more outrageous was the "act for the preservation of his majesty's person, authority and government," according to which "all who by writing, printing, praying, preaching, libelling, remonstrating, or by any malicious and advised speaking, express, publish, or declare any words or sentences to stir up the people to the hatred and dislike of his majesty's royal prerogative and supremacy in causes ecclesiastical or of the government of the Church by archbishops and bishop" were declared not only to be "incapable of enjoying or exercising any place or employment, civil, ecclesiastical or military within this church and kingdom," but to be "liable to such further pains as are due by law in such cases."⁴

¹ Thomson's *Acts of Parliament of Scotland*, VII, p. 18.

² Wodrow, I, pp. 244-45.

³ Thomson's *Acts*, VII, p. 45.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 378.

Enactments of such a kind constituted a challenge to the elementary rights of men, and were in the most irreconcilable opposition to the traditional attitude of Calvinism. Further, Charles' Scots Administration began its régime in a spirit of the most reckless violence. The executions of Argyle, Guthrie, and and later of Warriston; the public burning of the Covenants and of Rutherford's *Lex Rex*, were a foretaste of what was to follow. The amazing levity of the so-called "Drunken Parliament" which passed the Act Rescissory in 1661 was eclipsed by the violence of the "Drunken Council" which met at Glasgow in the following year and decreed the ejection from their pulpits of several hundred ministers who had not complied with the new ecclesiastical regulations. These ministers, driven out of their churches, declined to give up the exercise of their ministry and thus originated "the church in the fields."

Three well-defined stages are to be traced in the struggle from 1660 to 1688. The first period extended until the Pentland Rising of 1666; the second stage lasted from 1666 until the much more formidable rebellion in 1679; the third stage from 1679 to the Revolution. During the first stage, the chief of the King's administrators in Scotland were Middleton and Rothes, the first a rough soldier of fortune, the second a vicious-living aristocrat, both of whom were grossly intemperate in their private lives.¹ During this period, opposition to the Government was chiefly confined to the south-western shires where the Protestant party had exercised the greatest influence. There field-preaching on the part of the outed ministers commenced soon after their eviction. The situation steadily worsened, until a small body of men, well-nigh distracted by persecution, rose in arms in Galloway and, joined by recruits in Ayrshire and Lanarkshire, marched near to the gates of Edinburgh. The rising was easily crushed by the Royalist troops under "the bloody Dalziel" at Rullion Green, on the slopes of the Pentland Hills; and the punishments meted out to the prisoners taken at the battle were calculated to strike terror into the hearts of all who might contemplate similar action in future. But these severities had no effect in stamping out resistance to the government. Field meetings continued in the south-west, and even began to spread in the south-east and across the Forth into Fife. The violence of Rothes and the

¹ Burnet, *History of his own Times*, pp. 93, 163.

military commanders Turner, Ballantine and Dalziel, failed to bring about anything approaching conformity.

Accordingly, Charles and his chief advisers decided on a new policy. Rothes was removed from his position of primacy in Scottish affairs; Turner and Ballantine were disgraced, and the crafty and ambitious John Maitland, Earl and afterwards Duke of Lauderdale, now became the virtual head of the Scottish administration. Though Lauderdale shared the vices of his predecessors, Middleton and Rothes, and was much addicted to drunkenness, he possessed what they lacked—statesmanship of a kind, and a political sense, which led him to realise that a policy of conciliation had better be tried. Accordingly, he associated himself with the saintly Leighton, who favoured some scheme of accommodation—a system of church government half-Episcopal, half-Presbyterian—with Gilbert Burnet, a rising young conformist minister with sympathy for toleration, and with Sir Robert Moray, an enlightened public servant, a politician of a type somewhat rare in those days, “whose kindliness of nature ever made him an advocate for clemency and moderation.”¹ The deliberations of this group of more or less liberal-minded people resulted in the issue on June 7th, 1669, of what was called the First Letter of Indulgence, allowing ministers who “lived peaceably and orderly” to re-occupy their parishes, if these happened to be vacant, or to be eligible for presentation to parishes by patrons, while other orderly outed ministers were to receive payment from the tiends of vacant parishes. Forty-three of the outed ministers availed themselves of this concession, and so the first wedge was driven into the unity of the Covenanting party. The indulged were now to constitute a little “kirk within the kirk,” holding their appointments at the good pleasure of the government.

In granting the Indulgence, Lauderdale took good care to make plain the conditions under which it was granted, and the consequences of refusing to accept it. Under his domination the subservient Parliament passed immediately after the “Act anent the supremacy,” reiterating the supreme authority of the monarch over all persons, declaring “the ordering and disposal of the external government and policy of the Church” to be “an inherent right of the Crown,” and stating that ecclesiastical meetings and matters to be proposed and determined therein were

¹ Hewison, *The Covenanter*, II, p. 215. Cf. Robertson, *The Life of Sir Robert Moray*.

to be settled as his majesty and his successors "in their royal wisdom shall think fit."¹ Thus the indulgence was made to appear in its true light—as granted by the good pleasure of an irresponsible despot. This Act was suggestively followed by an "act anent the militia" declaring that "it is his majesty's prerogative royal and undoubted right to have the power of raising in arms the subjects of this kingdom, and of the commanding, ordering and disbanding, or otherwise disposing of them as he shall think fit."² Then in 1670 followed much more stringent acts against the keeping of conventicles, providing that any minister who preached in the open or to a house full of people, if anyone happened to be outside the door, was made liable to death and confiscation, and the outed ministers were forbidden to preach, pray, or expound the Scriptures, except in their own homes in presence of their families."³ Finally, the act "anent deponing" was the crowning infamy, for under it, as Wodrow truly put it, "every good subject is bound down not only to inform against his neighbour, his father or mother for going to a field meeting or house conventicle, but likewise to be a hangman to everyone that shall be condemned for what was now a crime."⁴

The effect of this legislation was simply to intensify the spirit of resistance. None of the outstanding leaders accepted the Indulgence, and the prestige of such men as Welch, Blackadder, Peden, Cargill and others who refused to avail themselves of such a tainted gift rose steadily higher. All over the country conventicles increased in number. As early as 1669 Fife was a hot-bed of field-preaching. In 1674, the movement spread to Clydesdale and Renfrewshire, and in 1675-76 field-meetings became quite common in East Lothian, the Merse, and Teviotdale; in 1677 the movement extended over Tweeddale and Mid-Lothian up to the very gates of Edinburgh. In 1677-78 Dumbartonshire and Perthshire were affected by the movement, which was, in Blackadder's words, "like to break in toward the Highlands."⁵ This is corroborated by a letter of the Bishop of Galloway to the Lord Register, in which the prelate complained bitterly of "the great and insolent field conventicles

¹ Thomson's *Acts*, VII, p. 554.

² *Ibid.*, p. 554.

³ Thomson's *Acts*, VIII, p. 9.

⁴ Wodrow, II, p. 118. Thomson's *Acts*, VIII, p. 7.

⁵ Letter to McWard, *Memoirs* (2nd ed.), p. 180.

in Perthshire" and of a "constant field conventicle" attended by "several shoals of Highlanders in their trews and many bare-legged flocking thither to propagat the mischief of the good old cause."¹

A sinister sign of the times was that from 1670 onwards the practice of carrying defensive arms to conventicles grew steadily. "Bloody skirmishes" resulted, as Kirkton tells us, in many places, "especially in Lothian."² Even at Whitekirk, just opposite the Bass, now garrisoned and a state prison for refractory Covenanters, an armed conventicle drove off the troops in 1678, and it was evident to the government that another rebellion was not only possible, but probable.

A second measure of Indulgence in 1672 led to no result; plans for ecclesiastical accommodation failed, and negotiations with the Indulged ministers came to nothing. And even in the servile Scottish Parliament there were ominous signs of a revival of something like Whiggery, when Hamilton, Tweeddale, Queensberry and other nobles demanded in 1673 the discussion of the "national grievances." Lauderdale now definitely turned to savage repression; and he probably welcomed the rebellion of 1679 which culminated at Bothwell Brig. Gilbert Burnet records that Lauderdale had said to him, "Would to God they would rebel, that so he might bring over an army of Irish Papists to cut all their throats."³ The Covenanters had followed a policy of studied pacificism. The field-meetings were for worship alone. "Both ministers and people," as Blackadder said, "who used such meetings were peaceable, not set on revenge but only endeavouring to keep up the free preaching of the Gospel in purity and power in as harmless and inoffensive a way as possible."⁴ Blackadder indeed deprecated the arming of the field conventicles, believing that the Lord called for a testimony by suffering rather than by outward deliverance.⁵

Nevertheless, Lauderdale had his wish. The assassination of the traitor Sharp, Archbishop of St. Andrews, followed by the defeat of Graham of Claverhouse at the hands of an armed conventicle at Drumclog, resulted in a rebellion on a great scale,

¹ Wodrow, II, p. 450.

² *History*, p. 364.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁴ Wodrow, II, p. 157, note.

⁵ *Memoirs*, (2nd ed.), p. 220.

in which the insurgents occupied Glasgow and for a short period dominated the West. The rising ended disastrously at Bothwell Brig, and those taken in battle, or arrested as disaffected, were treated with the most savage brutality. This defeat finally broke the unity of the Covenanting party. Ever since the first Indulgence, there had been differences not only between indulged and non-indulged, but among the non-indulged themselves as to their proper attitude to the indulged. Two outed ministers, Brown of Wamphray and Robert McWard, who had found a place of asylum at Rotterdam, poured forth a flood of tracts and treatises in the sixties and seventies, and they denounced not only the Indulgence but those who availed themselves of it. Accordingly, some of the younger ministers, including John Welwood and Richard Cameron, even before Bothwell, began to advocate "separation from the indulged." Men like Welch and Blackadder, while condemning those ministers who had accepted the Indulgence, were not prepared to go to such a length. A further and even more potent cause of division was the deepening hostility not only to the prelates and the government but to the King and to the House of Stewart itself. Two Declarations were made in 1679 in the name of the persecuted party. In one, the Hamilton Declaration, in the drafting of which Welch took a leading part, loyalty to the king's person was professed, and any desire to diminish the King's just power and greatness was repudiated; only redress of grievances and the convening of a free Parliament and Assembly were demanded. The other, the Rutherglen Declaration, drawn up by Hackston of Rathillet and Hamilton of Preston, with the assistance of Cargill, breathed the spirit of defiance and those who read it publicly burned the oppressive Acts of Parliament. Even before Bothwell the division had begun.

Bothwell marked the end of the more moderate party. Welch retired to England in disgust; Blackadder, sympathetic to the extremists but unable to go all the way with them, alone continued to preach until in 1681 he was arrested and sent to the Bass. Most of the moderates were browbeaten into a sullen acquiescence. And correspondingly, the extremists became more embittered and more uncompromising. Richard Cameron, a young schoolmaster turned preacher, had been in Holland during the Bothwell rising; he had been ordained to the ministry by the irreconcilable exiles, Brown and McWard. "Richard,"

said McWard to the young man before the ordination ceremony, "the public standard of the Gospel is now fallen in Scotland, and if I know anything of the mind of the Lord, ye are called to undergo your trials before us, and go home and lift the fallen standard and display it publicly before the world; but before ye put your hand to it, ye shall go to as many of the field-ministers as ye can find and give them your hearty invitation to go with you; and if they will not go, go your lone, and the Lord will go with you."¹ Cameron returned to Scotland, not only to denounce the Indulgence and to preach separation from the indulged, but to do something more significant—renounce allegiance to the throne and preach separation from the State. He found only two ministers willing to throw in their lot with him—Donald Cargill and Thomas Douglas. Cargill was an old man, who had been "outed" in 1662. His adhesion was therefore of the greatest value to Cameron. The fruit of the deliberations of these ministers and a number of laymen, such as Hackston of Rathillet and Hall of Haughhead, was the drawing-up of two documents of far-reaching import—the Queensferry Paper, so called because it was seized on the person of Hall of Haughhead in the course of a scuffle at Queensferry; and the Sanquhar Declaration, so called because of the town in which it was promulgated. The former of these may well be called the *magna charta* of the Cameronian party.

In this document, generally believed to be in the main the work of Cargill, the left-wing Covenanters declared that there was no alternative to withdrawing allegiance to the king and from the whole House of Stewart. They then proceeded to set up a community of their own; declaring against hereditary monarchy altogether—"government by a single person being most liable to inconveniences and aptest to degenerate into tyranny, as long and sad experience hath taught us."² The new commonwealth was to be a kind of republic, with laws modelled on those of ancient Israel. The paper closed with a warning that "if we be pursued or troubled any further, in worshipping, rights and liberties, that we shall look upon it as a declaring war, and take all the advantages that one enemy doth of another, and seek to cause to perish all that shall in a hostile measure assault

¹ *Six Saints of the Covenant*, I, pp. 224-25.

² Wodrow, III, p. 210.

us, and to maintain, relieve and right ourselves of those that have wronged us, but not to trouble or injure any but those that have injured us.”¹

On June 22nd, 1680, Richard Cameron at the Cross at Sanquhar publicly disowned Charles Stewart as “having any title to or interest in” “the Crown or Government of Scotland, which had been forfeited by breaches of Covenant, usurpation of Christ’s prerogative and civil tyranny.” Cameron and his associates declared war against “such a tyrant and usurper,”² though they did not go so far as the Queensferry paper in establishing a state of their own, or in threatening reprisals. At the Torwood, Cargill carried the movement of rebellion a stage further. Taking the Sanquhar policy for granted, Cargill, preaching at the Torwood, in Stirlingshire, from Ezekiel xxi. 25-27—“Thus saith the Lord God, remove the diadem and take off the crown”—excommunicated Charles II and his advisers, and cut them off from the fellowship of the visible church.³ Cameron and Cargill paid for their courage with their lives. The former fell in a skirmish at Ayrsmoss, on July 22nd, 1680; the latter fell into the hands of the Government and “glorified God in the Grassmarket” on July 27th, 1681. Nevertheless, they had done their work. Their gesture of defiance was by no means fruitless. They had founded a party of resolute, uncompromising men and women, who maintained for eight years a defiant struggle against the Stewart despotism. For a time they were led by James Renwick, a young man of courage and constancy, a powerful preacher and a magnetic personality, who as a student witnessed the execution of Cargill in the Grassmarket and decided to dedicate his life to carrying on his work. The United Societies, founded in 1681, virtually constituted a “state within the State.” No one could be recognised as a member of a society meeting “who took any of the bonds tendered by the Government, who paid cess, locality, or militia money to the civil authorities, or stipends to the curates or indulged clergy; made use of a government pass, voluntarily appeared before any court of law, supplied any commodities to the enemy, allowed another to do any of these things in their name, or in any form recognised the ministry of indulged or

¹ Wodrow, III, p. 211.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 212-213.

³ The Excommunication in *Sermons in Times of Persecution*, p. 498.

silent Presbyterians."¹ It was as a society at war with the State that the United Societies launched the *Apologetical Relation*, written by James Renwick, on November 8th, 1684. This document simply developed the policy of the Queensferry paper, and threatened reprisals against persecutors and informers.

After 1680 the Government sank deeper and deeper into a policy of bloody persecution. Bothwell Brig marked the inauguration of a policy of blood and more blood and still more blood. A third Indulgence had been proclaimed through the agency of Monmouth, but proved futile, and the policy of moderation was finally laid aside. And so the years from 1681 onwards have been justly called the "killing time." Lauderdale's long reign was now over. James, Duke of York—afterwards James VII—came north to Scotland, as the representative of his royal brother. His policy was blood and iron. It would never be well, said James, "till all the south-side of Forth were made a hunting-field."² And whether James were in Edinburgh in person, or ruling through Queensberry and Perth from London, his policy remained one of terrorism. It was on the Cameronians—the suffering remnant of the Covenanting party—that the full brunt of the anger of the Royalists was to descend. Into this last period fall most of the martyrdoms which have burned themselves into the memory of the Scottish people—the shooting of John Brown of Priesthill and of Andrew Hislop, the drowning of Margaret Maclauchlan and Margaret Wilson on Solway sands. These and innumerable similar killings carried out by such men as Claverhouse and Lag were inevitable results of the policy of the Stewart monarchy in its final days.

Even in the servile Scottish Parliament, opposition began to manifest itself before the killing time commenced. In 1678, when Lauderdale, definitely committed to repression, asked Parliament for thirty thousand pounds a year for five years for the purpose of maintaining an army to repress conventicles, the Duke of Hamilton was able to rally thirty-one members including Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, in opposition to the proposals. But it was not until the Duke of York forced Parliament to pass the Act of Succession and the Test Act that the existence of a Whig "opposition" began to make itself felt. This opposition

¹ Hutchison, *Reformed Presbyterian Church*, p. 59.

² Shields, *A Hind Let Loose*, p. 141.

was unorganised and contained men of very different types and sharply contrasted attitudes, and the repressive measures went through in spite of them. But the spirit of antagonism remained; numerous noblemen and commoners of Whig sympathies had been compelled to seek refuge in Holland, and it was there that plans were laid for the overthrow of James VII just after he had succeeded to the throne. The Earl of Argyle, who had agreed to take the Test Act only as far as it was consistent with itself, and had escaped from prison and fled to Holland to evade James' vengeance, led this expedition, which may be called an unconstitutional manifestation of Whig principles, concurrently with Monmouth's descent on England. Between the Whiggism of Argyle and the Puritanism of the Hillmen there could be no real understanding, and while the Cameronians sympathised with Argyle's expedition, they rendered no actual assistance. Anyhow, the expedition failed, and Argyle and others paid the price with their lives.

During the brief three years of his reign, James pursued relentlessly his dual policy—of making himself absolute and Great Britain Roman Catholic. The two policies were really antagonistic, and the attempt was foredoomed to failure. In his effort to promote the spread of Romanism, James found it necessary to pursue, alike in Scotland and in England, an ostensible policy of tolerance. His Scottish Parliament shied at his request that the penal laws against his "innocent subjects, those of the Roman Catholic religion," should be repealed. James therefore ignored Parliament, and asked the Privy Council to rescind these laws. This was in 1686. In the following year he adopted the rôle of a wise and tolerant monarch, and in his three "Letters of Indulgence" he graciously permitted Presbyterian Nonconformists to have the same liberty as their Romanist fellow-subjects. The first two letters contained unacceptable conditions, but the mass of Presbyterians—the old moderate Covenanters—felt that they could without violation of conscience avail themselves of the third. As a consequence, ministers in exile and in hiding were able to resume their ministry, and to erect, outside of the Episcopal Establishment, the framework of a Presbyterian Church. These ministers were to form the nucleus of the Revolution Establishment.

This "toleration," as it was called, was accepted by the mass of the people. But the Cameronians stood out: they refused

such a toleration on the ground that it was polluted at the source. Acceptance would have meant for them acknowledging the royal supremacy. Their position was logically unassailable. It was similar to that of the Covenanters who refused the first Indulgence in 1669. To have accepted this toleration at the hands of one whom they had disowned as a tyrant would have meant disloyalty to their whole testimony since 1680. So the unequal warfare continued, until the folly and stupidity of James, in his capacity of King of England, brought about with dramatic suddenness the "Glorious Revolution." The Revolution found the leadership of this suffering remnant of the Covenanters in the hands of a young man of eight-and-twenty, Alexander Shields, with whom were associated William Boyd and Thomas Lining. Shields, who was by far the ablest of the three, received his theological training at the University of Utrecht. He had suffered imprisonment, first in London, then in the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, later on the Bass, and again in the Tolbooth. Making his escape from the latter prison, he was for a time the chief lieutenant of James Renwick, and on Renwick's execution became the acknowledged leader of the suffering remnant. In the summer of 1687 Shields, along with his brother Michael, were sent by the United Societies to Holland, in order to superintend the publication of the *Informatory Vindication* of the suffering people. The brothers resided in Utrecht, and in that historic city Alexander, assisted by Michael, wrote the greater part of his book, *A Hind Let Loose*, on which he had been engaged while in prison. This book, which has been allowed to fall into a comparative oblivion which is quite undeserved, is worthy to rank with Buchanan's *De Jure Regni* and Rutherford's *Lex Rex* among the chief Scottish contributions to political and ecclesiastical thought. The book was published anonymously at Utrecht in the autumn of 1687, and its importance was at once recognised by the authorities in Scotland. Copies began to arrive in Scotland in March, 1688, and were at once seized by orders of the Government; and the book was bracketed with Buchanan's, Rutherford's, and others of similar tendency.

It is probable that this, the reasoned exposition of Cameronian thought, had no small influence in Holland, and most likely came under the notice of the Stadtholder, then turning over in his own mind the pros and cons of his projected invasion of Great Britain. In describing the barbarities of the persecution

in Scotland, Shields emphasised the crowning atrocity of the Wigtown martyrdoms. "Neither," he said, "were women spared, but some were hanged, some drowned, tied to stakes within the seamark, to be devoured gradually with the growing waves, and some of them of a very young, some of an old age."¹ Most of the barbarities exposed by Shields were commented on by the Stadtholder in his *Declaration* to the people of Scotland, dated October 10th, 1688, including the destroying of "the poor people" "by hanging, shooting and drowning them, without any form of law or respect to sex or age."² It is not at all improbable that William had read *A Hind Let Loose* and had been influenced by what the writer had to tell of the sufferings of the people of Scotland.

The expedition of William of Orange to deliver Great Britain from the absolute rule of one who was not only a cruel tyrant but a bigoted Papist, resulted, as we all know, in what has been called by universal consent the "Glorious Revolution." This event—the triumphant vindication of the principles for which the Covenanters and especially the Cameronian section had contended—resulted, however, in discord and division in the ranks of the United Societies. Shields, Boyd and Lining, believing that the Revolution had brought freedom to Scotland and that the Cameronians had gained the substance of what they had struggled and suffered for, entered the Kirk reconstituted by the Revolution; but a considerable section, led by the intractable Sir Robert Hamilton of Preston, would not enter into a Church containing men who had accepted indulgences, or who had conformed to Prelacy, nor consider as valid any settlement which did not re-impose the Covenants on the Kirk and people of Scotland.

While the extreme left-wing were perhaps logically consistent in their uncompromising attitude, I believe that Shields and those who followed him read the situation aright. The Covenanters had not gained everything for which they had contended; but they had won a splendid victory. In one of the darkest hours in Scottish, in British, in European history, when, in Shields' own picturesque words, "the crowned heads or horns of the beast, the tyrants, alias kings of Europe" were "advancing their prerogatives upon the ruins of the nations and

¹ *A Hind Let Loose*, 1st ed., p. 197.

² Quoted Wodrow, *History*, IV, p. 471.

churches' privileges" to "a pitch of absoluteness,"¹ the Scottish Covenanters stood foursquare for "Christ's Crown and Covenant," for liberty of worship, liberty of conscience, right of association, freedom of the press—in short, for the Rights of Man. Eighteen thousand, according to the inscription on the Martyrs' Monument in Greyfriars, laid down their lives rather than surrender their dearest liberties—a few of them aristocrats, a considerable number of them ministers of religion, but by far the greater number of them humble and obscure people—men and women, youths and maidens, to whom liberty was dearer than life, and to whom righteousness and justice and the things of Christ mattered greatly. We need not try to assess at this time of day just what the sufferings of these people gained for Scotland, for Great Britain, and for Europe. Suffice it to say that they kept the torch of Christian liberty burning in freedom's darkest night, and wrote one of the brightest pages of Scottish history.

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¹ *A Hind Let Loose*, 1st ed., pp. 1-2.