

A Memorial of Covenanting (sections 1 - 4)

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Knockbracken. [1857]

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PREFACE

The idea of emitting this "Memorial" originated in the writer's proposal to visit the United States of America. As the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Body in that country had adopted measures for the public renewal of the British Covenants, - adapting them to the circumstances of those who acknowledge their moral obligation and adhere to their grand principles, in a different land, - he was desirous of contributing whatever was in his power to further so important a movement. By relating what the Church's exalted Head had done, in leading His servants in one country to pledge themselves anew to His service by sacred vows, and to lift up a standard for despised truths, and by exhibiting the salutary effects flowing from federal dedication, it was hoped that others might be excited and encouraged to "yield themselves to the Lord," and might be directed in the performance of an all-important duty.

Although the greater part of the Memorial was written previous to his setting out for America, yet, owing to various pressing engagements, the author was unable to revise it for the press; and while sojourning in a distant land, he could not find leisure, as he at one time had expected, to have the work issued there. So soon after his return as he could command time, he betook himself to the completion of the narrative. It is now presented to the public, with the design of perpetuating the remembrance of the Lord's covenant-faithfulness towards one portion of his

heritage: and with the earnest desire that beloved brethren at a distance, united in the same brotherly covenant, may be encouraged and blessed in their labors and trials for the truth's sake;- and that some who are inquiring after the "GOOD OLD WAY," may be lead, by the views here exhibited, to "walk therein," and thus to "find rest for their souls."

In a narrative of Covenant-renovation, it seemed proper to present a condensed argument on behalf of the doctrine of *continued covenant-obligation*, and to give a historical account of the British Covenants- of the revival of their principles, and of attempts that have been made for their public renewal- that such as have not ready access to larger works on these subjects may be informed of the solid grounds on which the principles of federal obligation rest, and that those who are desirous of union throughout the churches may have exhibited an approved basis of Scriptural fellowship, and co-operation for the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom.

It is scarcely needful to add, that it was far from the writer's intention, by the publication of this Memorial, to interfere with the Synod's proposal to emit a Narrative of the recent work of Covenant-Renovation. Such an account would of course be condensed and unique, and of an authoritative character. To effect the different objects to which allusion has been made, this work required to be somewhat diffuse, and to treat a variety of matters. For the sentiments and views of ecclesiastical movements which it

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propounds, the writer has no desire that any others save himself should be held accountable.

Knockbracken, April, 1857.

INTRODUCTION.

The duty of preserving and perpetuating the remembrance of God's gracious dealings with his Church is frequently enjoined and exemplified in Sacred Scripture. As a chief subject of grateful praise, God's people are commanded to "remember his marvelous works that He hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth, O ye seed of Abraham his servant, the children of Jacob his chosen."¹ The Church's pious resolutions declared to be to show to the generation to come what fathers have told them - "His strength, and the wonderful works which He hath done," and to transmit to posterity "the testimony and law which were left in Israel."²

The faithful have ever shown that alike devout gratitude, and the desire to advance the Divine glory, have prompted them to the ready performance of this duty. The pillars erected on the plains of Moab, at the end of the wanderings of Israel in the Arabian desert - the stones set up at Gilgal, when the passage of the Jordan had been effected - that which was selected by Joshua at Shechem, as a witness of renewed covenant-dedication - the song dictated by the Spirit to celebrate the passage of the Red Sea - and many of the sweet psalms of David were designed to preserve the lively remembrance of special Divine interpositions of mercy, and to make future generations acquainted with the displays of the power and grace of God - ever faithful to his covenant. The believing Church is taught to regard the transmission of such a record as not less her duty than her high

¹ Psalm 105: 5,6.

² Psalm 78: 4,5.

privilege. "Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever."³ And when eminent deliverances are experienced, and joyful victories have been achieved, the holy rejoicing of Zion is suitably represented, as considering diligently the stability of the Church, and making known to posterity the wonders wrought for her protection. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her; tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks; consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our Guide even unto death."⁴ On this principle have acted the witnesses for truth in all the bypast ages of the Church's history. Reformers, confessors, and martyrs have all felt that they owed a special duty to the generations to come. They lived for posterity. Not only did they hold fast and display precious truths entrusted to them; but they sought likewise, amid manifold conflicts and sufferings, to transmit them uncorrupt to posterity. Their earnest endeavor was to make known God's mighty acts, in fulfilling his promise - in vindicating his truth - and in supporting and blessing his faithful servants.

The memorials which they have transmitted to us bear testimony to their fervent concern that God might have all the praise. In their estimation, the human instrumentality was nothing, that God might be all and in all. Like the angel worshippers in the prophet's vision, that cover their feet and veil their faces, they ascribe all excellence and honor to their glorious King, and exclaimed as they bowed at his throne, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory."⁵ Similar should be our desire and aim in preserving the memorials of the Lord's covenant-goodness to the Church, exhibited in our

³ Psalm 45: 16,17.

⁴ Psalm 48: 12,13,14.

⁵ Isaiah 6: 3.

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own day. The men of the present are the fathers of succeeding generations. If their duty is to make honorable mention of the Lord's faithfulness to their fathers, it is equally incumbent on them to observe and record the doings of his hand - that others coming after them may perpetuate his praise - that race may declare to succeeding race his mighty deeds.

The difficulty of presenting an impartial record of events as they take place, or soon after their occurrence, has been commonly remarked. The history of transactions that effect important changes in society, it is said, may be better written in the next generation, since the persons concerned in movements as they are taking place, are apt to attach to them undue importance; and posterity is better prepared to estimate aright their character, causes, and effects. This may be to some extent true, in reference to matters of mere worldly interest. But in relation to those which have immediate respect to the Divine glory, displayed in interpositions in behalf of the Church of Christ for deliverance and blessing; it is, on the other hand, of primary importance that the record should date from the time that was signalled by special manifestations of Divine favor. Thus vivid impressions of God's mercy are in some sort retained and imparted to others. Those who have witnessed the plentiful effusions of God's Spirit, and have had experience of his covenant faithfulness, are best fitted, as it is their peculiar duty, to set up a monument of gratitude. The evidence thus furnished in behalf of God's gracious work in Zion, is the most powerful and satisfactory; and in future ages, the members of the Church, whether called to conflict and trial - or blessed with eminent privileges - obtain encouragement, and derive motives for devoted effort and joyful expectation, from considering the Lord's favor vouchsafed to their fathers.

Past periods of revival have been distinguished, not only for the effusion of the Spirit upon the Church, but likewise for the precious records that have been

transmitted to us by those who were privileged to witness the glorious displays of Divine power and love, and who had a part in these auspicious movements. We have the inspired memorials of the first Pentecostal shower of the Spirit, and of subsequent revivals, in the times of primitive Christianity - full, minute, and affecting, written by contemporaneous historians. Many of the leading Reformers are the historians of their own times; and amidst labors most abundant, and manifold perils and sufferings, they regarded it as a paramount duty to register with all care what the Lord did in their day for the revival of his truth - for the support and comfort of his faithful servants, and for the confusion of their enemies. The accounts of subsequent revivals, written by those who were concerned in them, and which have been preserved in the Church, have contributed no little to the encouragement and spiritual benefit of God's people. What a blank would be in our theological literature, if the memoirs of Livingstone and Whitfield, of Brainerd and Payson; or if Jonathan Edward's narrative of the revival at Northampton, or that of Roby and M'Culloch, concerning the work of God at Cambuslang and Kilsyth, were wanting! Brief and scanty as are the records of the Spirit's outpouring at Irvine and Stewarton, under the ministry of David Dickson; and respecting the awakening at *Antrim* and the *Six Mile Water*, in the days of Blair and Livingstone, they are valuable, not only as illustrating the great truth - which Fleming so clearly and fully exhibits - the "fulfillment of Scripture" - but as affording bright hope for the future fortunes of churches and lands that have been visited by waterings of the Spirit. The Church's experience of the Lord's turning again her captivity, and doing great things for her, inspires joyful confidence for the future. "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."⁶ The grand

⁶ Psalm 126: 6.

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incitement and encouragement to believing effort on the part of God's faithful servants for the rebuilding of Zion, and the diffusion of the truth, is furnished by the Lord's past covenant-dealings with his people - "Be strong, all the people of the land, saith the Lord, and work; for I am with you, saith the Lord of host. According to the word that I covenanted with you, when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you; fear ye not."⁷

It is a circumstance worthy of particular observation, that in those countries where the profession of Divine truth was ratified, and secured by solemn scriptural vows, true religion has been preserved, and political liberty has been transmitted from one age to another, much better than in a place where social covenanting was unknown. Revivals of scriptural principle, too, in our day, have occurred more in the former countries than in the latter. Wherever the covenants entered in were full and scriptural, the effects, both in the preservation of truth and purity in the Church, and in securing civil liberty, have been salutary and abiding. This has been remarkably the case with the Waldenses, in Geneva, and in Britain and Ireland. In those parts of the European Continent, where Scriptural covenants were once publicly taken and sworn, religion and liberty still live, and in our day are rapidly reviving and spreading; whereas in other places, as in the countries where Lutheranism was established, and an imperfect reformation was attained, heresy and corruption have spread, and the precious blessings of evangelical religion and civil freedom are, in a great measure, unknown. Amidst much that is evil yet existing in the churches and political condition of Britain, who can doubt that recent important movements - bringing forth into clearer manifestation the great principles of a martyr-testimony; indicate God's remembrance of his covenant, and warrant the expectation that yet a more powerful and extensive revival will

distinguish those sections of the Church, and those lands that were formerly renowned for their solemn federal engagements?

The loving remembrance of scriptural vows, and a renewed sense of their obligation - whether by individuals or communities - are themselves a token of returning Divine favor, and hold out the promise of future more abundant blessing. Under the conviction that recent proceedings in one section of the Redeemer's Church in this land, have been the fruits of special goodness; and with the earnest and assured hope that transactions so solemn and joyful will be followed by results of a gracious and permanent character, - not only to those who were immediately concerned in them and their descend-ants, but likewise to other churches, and to the friends of truth in other lands, the following narrative of Covenant-Renovation is presented to the religious public.

For the benefit of some who are imperfectly acquainted with the doctrine of Covenanting as a scriptural ordinance, and of descending Covenant-obligation - as well as that those who recognise the duty may be prepared to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear,- it appears desirable that a concise view should be first given of the NATURE OF COVENANTING - of the doctrine of descending covenant-obligation - and of the history, contents, and objects of Britain's federal deeds - the Covenants, National and Solemn League. We shall thus be the better prepared to judge of the seasonableness and importance of the recent act of Covenant-renovation, and to appreciate the reasons that serve to render such a duty at the present time especially valuable and advantageous.

⁷ Haggai 2: 4,5.

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SECTION I.

CONDENSED VIEW OF THE NATURE OF COVENANTING, AND OF THE DOCTRINE OF DESCENDING FEDERAL OBLIGATION.

The duty of solemn vowing or covenanting, in certain circumstances, and for important ends, will not be denied by any who admit the supreme authority of the word of God. Indeed, so consonant is the practice to right reason, that men adopt it in the various transactions of human life. Mutual compacts or covenants have been justly said to be “the ligaments of society.” Without such stipulations, and a sense of their continued obligation upon the parties that enter into them, and others that they represent, the affairs of life could not be conducted. All confidence in promises and engagements would be at an end, and society would become utterly disunited and disorganised.

A covenant is a mutual engagement between two parties, implying the performance of certain duties on the one hand, and the fulfillment of promises of the other. In religious covenants, God and his people are the parties. Although, in the latitude of language, a covenant and a vow are sometimes regarded as identical in meaning, there is a distinction between them, simple and easily understood. The latter is an engagement by *one party* only; and in the case of public vows, the persons vowing are severally witnesses of the vows of one another. In a covenant, there is an engagement between two parties. An oath is a solemn appeal to God, the Searcher of hearts, for the truth and sincerity of the person who makes it. In a religious vow, God is regarded as a Sovereign or Master; in an oath, as a witness and Judge. A covenant engagement may be entered into, with or without the ratification of an oath, though it has been properly said to imply both a vow and an oath. Every genuine believer virtually covenants with God, in his acceptance of Christ, and in the whole work

of practical godliness. He takes hold of the covenant of grace - professes his belief in the precious truths of the Scriptures - his dependence upon the promise and grace of the Mediator, and his resolution to walk in the way of holy obedience. This is substantially a *personal covenant*, implied in every act of faith, and expressed more or less explicitly, in all believing prayer. In the pregnant expression of Matthew Henry - “*A life of holiness is a life of renewed acts of self-dedication.*”

A social religious covenant is a joint engagement of a society to perform unitedly certain duties, in cordial dependence upon Divine promises. It is perfectly plain that there is the same warrant for vowing or covenanting in public, as for personal covenanting. The covenanter does nothing in public but what in substance he has frequently done in the privacy of his closet. Even where the covenant is ratified with an oath, there is no greater solemnity than this, than in swearing in relation to other matters. The matter of the oath may be more or less important; but the appeal to God for the sincerity of the juror is the same, and admits of no degrees of solemnity. It is a strange inconsistency in those who are ready to confirm by oath their declarations about things civil or worldly, to object to the same mode of ratification, in religious promises or engagements. As true religion imports binding ourselves to God, we may naturally expect that a solemn ratification by oath should have a principal place in religious engagements. It is beyond doubt that such a solemnity is a frequent subject of injunction, prediction, and approved example in the inspired word. God’s people are said to be characterised by *swearing by his name*. Ancient religious covenants, such as those of Asa and Nehemiah, were ratified by oath. The revival of the Church, and the future conversion of the nations, are represented as intimately connected with religious swearing. “And thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in

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Him shall they glory.”⁸ The example of the “man after God’s own heart,” is exhibited for the imitation of the faithful in all ages - “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.”⁹

In illustration of the nature of covenanting, the following observations may be added:-

First, *All religious covenants are transactions between God and man, and are founded on the covenant of grace.*

God has revealed Himself as the God of mercy, and in virtue of a covenant-transaction between the persons of the Trinity from eternity, as ready to enter into a league of friendship with sinners. In the “counsel of peace,” He has condescended to become his people’s God, and is prepared to sustain towards them all gracious blessed relations. The covenant of grace is in the hands of the Mediator, to be administered, and its blessings communicated to all the heirs of salvation. Hence, in all the federal transactions, into which God has called his people to enter, whether as individuals, or communities, Christ Jesus, given as a “covenant for the people,” is to be regarded as the immediate and high contracting party. He reveals the covenant - brings his people into the bond of it - takes their engagement to his service - purges away its impurity with his blood, and by his grace and strength, enables them to walk in all holy obedience. The grand proposal and discovery of the everlasting covenant is in the gracious and all-comprehensive offer - “*I am thy God.*” When this is apprehended and accepted by faith, the individual or society willingly returns the pledge of devoted service - “*Lord, I am thine, O save me,*” He shall say, “It is my people,” and they shall say, “The Lord is my God.”

It was the Mediator of the new covenant that appeared to Abraham on the plains of Mamre; and as He manifested to him his special favor, took from him a

virtual engagement to all devoted obedience - “I am the Almighty God, walk before me, and be thou perfect.” “I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.”¹⁰ The same glorious Personage appeared on Mount Sinai, and took Israel into a national covenant with Himself. “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people; and all the people answered and said, All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.”¹¹ Here then, are evidently two parties, and a joint engagement, with mutual stipulations - the one, the blessed Mediator, appearing in majesty, and in wonderful mercy and condescension, - the other, a people selected from the nations, to be depositories of Divine truth, and to be incorporated into a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests. A fundamental view of all religious covenants is, that they are based on the covenant which is “ordered in all things and sure,” and that they are in the hand of the Redeemer to prescribe all the matter of the engagement - to accept his people’s dedication, and himself to strengthen them for all right performance of duty. It is this view which exhibits covenanting not only as a solemn duty, but, at the same time, as a very high and ennobling privilege. Those who engage in the covenant must be *voluntary* in the surrender and dedication. It is not, however, optional whether they observe the duty or neglect it. In the day of power, they become a “*willing people.*” They yield themselves to the Lord; and drawn by “cords of love, and bands of a man,” they vow with the whole heart. The covenant thus entered into, is frequently in scripture styled, by way of emphasis, *the Lord’s*. “He hath remembered his covenant.” “Ye shall keep my covenant.” This designation is not used, as if approved covenants, personal or social, were merely of the nature of a law, emanating from the will of a superior, and requiring obedience; but because God’s glory is eminently displayed in the federal engagements of his people, and because

⁸ Jeremiah 4: 2.

⁹ Psalm 119: 106.

¹⁰ Genesis 17: 7

¹¹ Exodus 19: 6-8; Deuteronomy 26: 17-19.

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Divine power and faithfulness are conspicuously seen in every thing connected with the performance.

2. *A covenant with God may embrace various relations of human life, and a variety of matter, and yet it is throughout to be regarded as religious and peculiarly solemn.*

Covenanting is throughout an act of Divine worship, involving a direct appeal to God, and a recognition of his gracious presence. The glorious Being with whom we covenant is the infinitely holy and Omniscient Jehovah. The duties which we engage to perform are weighty and important; and the consequences of obedience or neglect are awfully momentous. As individuals, Christians have the warrant to "take hold" of God's covenant, and to yield themselves to the Lord. Not less incumbent is it upon communities civil or ecclesiastical to devote themselves to God, and to engage unitedly to serve Him. Society may be regarded as a *moral agent* - and as under law to God - the proper subject of moral responsibility - liable to punishment for disobedience and rebellion, and the recipient of rewards in the way of holy obedience. Approved covenants mentioned in Scripture are represented as made with persons in different relations, civil, ecclesiastical, and domestic - as in the instances of covenanting on the plains of Moab, in the last days of Moses, and at Shechem, in the concluding period of the life of Joshua.¹² Many of the ancient religious covenants were strictly *national*, as at Horeb in the days of Asa, Hezekiah, Jehoiada, and Josiah. Corporate bodies are said, at periods yet future, to confederate together, and join themselves to the Lord - some in a Church capacity, and some in other relations.¹³ There is express Divine approval of covenanting in all these conditions and relations.

¹² Deuteronomy 29; Joshua 24.

¹³ Isaiah 19: 18; Jeremiah 50: 5; Zechariah 8: 23; Isaiah 56.

The same covenant may embrace engagements which respect different relations in life, and may comprehend diversified duties. The persons entering into it occupy different stations - as members of the family - subjects of the commonwealth, and in the fellowship of the Church. Whatever God's law requires them to do in these relations, they may bind themselves in covenant to perform. In all relations, the Christian is bound to act as being under law to God, and with a supreme regard to his glory. Things sacred and civil are intimately and inseparably connected. The state of civil society deeply affects the interests of the Church; while the spiritual welfare of the family and the Church promote the prosperity and blessing of the whole community. It is therefore no valid objection to our father's covenants that they were of a *mixed nature* - partly civil and partly ecclesiastical. The ancient covenants, mentioned in Scripture, were of the same character. In the one case, and the other, the glory of God was the great end which the Covenanters had in view. To the advancement of this, all that befell them in providence, all their relations and influence, were subordinated. This stamped with a religious character all that they did or engaged to do. The Divine injunction, "Fear God - Honor the king," bringing into immediate juxtaposition, duties civil and strictly religious, constitutes a full warrant to embrace in the same religious covenant matters of different kinds - even whatever the law of God enjoins.

3. Religious Covenanting is strictly *moral in its nature* - and *most needful for the welfare of the Church* - and it is therefore *a duty always obligatory*.

Vowing or covenanting is a duty founded on the law of nature, springing from the moral relations which necessarily subsist between God and his rational creatures. The practice can with no propriety be said to be a Jewish peculiarity - as it has nothing in it ceremonial or judicial. It belongs to those ordinances which are enjoined by the moral law, which proclaim God's supreme

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authority, and man's entire dependence, and moral responsibility. Hence it is a duty proper to every dispensation of revealed religion. Covenanting was practised with Divine approval before the commencement of the Jewish economy, as in the cases of God's covenanting with Noah and Abraham, and of Jacob's vow at Bethel. Nay, even the law of nature dictates vowing as a suitable part of religious worship. The heathen mariners with whom Jonah sailed, "offered a sacrifice to the Lord, and made vows" - and Pagan moralists and historians bear testimony that such a service was acceptable to the gods, and was frequently practised.

Moreover, public vows are needful to the existence, unity, and fellowship of the Church. Organised religious society supposes a confession of faith in Christ, and obedience to Him; and this is equivalent to a solemn religious engagement. Christians are one in their relation to Christ the Head - and this relation becomes visible by an open and full profession. Such a profession - as it was made in primitive times - was in the form of a solemn and explicit vow. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Communion in the Church, whether with God or one another, implies a joint dedication of the members to God, and giving themselves to one another for the performance of all religious duties.¹⁴ Covenanting itself is the most affecting expression of communion with God, and of the fellowship of saints. Engaging in it, we have near intercourse with God, as our Father and Portion, and devote ourselves to Him; while, at the same time, by mutual pledges and vows, we animate and encourage one another in all holy obedience. All acts of public or social worship imply solemn vowing. In public prayer we present to God not only the desire of the heart, but also joint resolutions. United praise expresses oneness of mind and affection joyfully declared. An assembly of faithful

¹⁴ See Dr. Owen on "The True Nature of a Gospel Church."

worshippers is virtually a covenanting assembly. Cordially devoting themselves to God's service is essential to all spiritual worship. They in reality do nothing aright in acts of worship, if they do not present themselves a living sacrifice. Besides, the duties which the members of the Church, and the separate branches of the Church, owe to one another and to the world can only be adequately performed in the way of public vowing. The open avowal and propagation of the truth - the advancement of Christ's cause - the purity and prosperity of the Church - and devoted efforts for the conversion of the world, require the spirit of love to be in vigorous exercise, and demand self-denial, and persevering exertion. Vows to God and to one another inspire mutual confidence, and prompt to holy, sustained action. The truth is best held and advanced by those who feel that they are "standing before the God of the whole earth," and who can appeal to Him for their sincerity in professing and maintaining it. When the Lord shall build up Zion, and appear to men in His glory, nations and rulers assemble *with one accord* to serve God supreme.

4. The duty of covenanting is *expressly and frequently enjoined by God himself*. The first precept of the Moral Law requires an acknowledgment of God as our God, in public and private; and this is equivalent to solemn vowing. All the other commandments of the Decalogue may be shown to imply the same great duty. We are explicitly commanded, "Vow, and pay to the Lord GOD;" and this is equally enjoined upon communities and individuals.¹⁵ In the future conversion of the nations, covenanting is represented as being brightly exemplified. Israel and Judah thus became confederate in God's service.¹⁶ And in connection with solemn religious vowing, Israel, Egypt, and Assyria are united in holy profession of the truth, and enjoy special tokens of Divine favour and blessing.¹⁷

¹⁵ Psalm 76: 11; Deuteronomy 10: 20-22; Jeremiah 4: 2.

¹⁶ Jeremiah 50: 5.

¹⁷ Isaiah 19: 18 - end.

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5. Religious covenanting *has been exemplified by the faithful in all ages, and by the Church of God in the best periods of her history.* Instead of being *sectarian* in its character, there is no other duty which has been regarded by God's servants as of higher obligation, or from the performance of which greater benefits have been expected. The Church has always been a *covenant-society*; and God's faithful servants have ever esteemed it their highest privilege, by sacred engagements, to avouch the Lord to be their God, and to declare their devotion to his service. Noah, the second father of the human family, immediately after the flood, built an altar, and offered sacrifice, and God gave him the token of his covenant, and swore that there would be no future universal deluge. The covenant with Abraham was renewed to Isaac and Jacob, and is represented by the Apostle Paul, as the perpetual charter of the visible Church,¹⁸ and that which the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, could not disannul. The Church's covenant is substantially the same in all ages - varying only in circumstances, and conditions of special privilege, duty, or trial. It embraces the profession of all truth revealed - obedience to all Divine precepts - faith in the promises - the observance of all Divine ordinances pure and entire, - and the advancement of God's glory throughout the earth. This was the nature of the National Covenant with Israel at Horeb; and the same was the matter of all subsequent renewals recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures - as on the plains of Moab, and in the days of Joshua, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Nehemiah.

Though it is not requisite that the practice of covenanting should be enjoined in the New Testament - as being moral in its nature and expressly instituted - it remains in full force, without an explicit abrogation, which we nowhere find in the Scriptures, yet sacred predictions, referring to the new economy, declare the prevalence of solemn vowing, amidst the enlarged privileges of the

¹⁸ Galatians 3: 14 - 18.

Church.¹⁹ Our Lord gives the sanction of his high approval to vowing and swearing in covenant,²⁰ and the apostles tender their engagement to adherence and devoted obedience to Him, in terms of a solemn vow - "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."²¹ The Christians at Rome are exhorted to "yield themselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and their members as instruments of righteousness unto God;" and again, to "present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service."²²

The primitive Christian churches certainly practised covenanting, as they were identified with the church of the former dispensation, distinguished for its federal engagements. The churches of Macedonia - the first planted in Europe - on the occasion of making an extraordinary collection for their poor brethren, - Jewish converts in Judea, "first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to one another by the will of God."²³ This is represented as the fruit of a plentiful effusion of the Spirit. The transaction was not the engagement in making a religious profession, or in sealing ordinances - for such an engagement the apostle naturally expected; but it was something peculiar and worthy of special remark and commendation. Viewed as an act of public vowing or covenanting, as it unquestionably was, it was eminently of Divine approval. It was performed "according to the will of God." Impelled to it by the special influence of the Spirit, the covenanting of these early societies of Gentile converts was laid as the basis of spiritual communion with brethren at a distance, who were of a different stock, and who had indulged undue prejudices against them. It served to give a proper direction to the application of the offerings of Christian liberality. The Macedonian churches

¹⁹ Isaiah 19. 49.; Jeremiah 50.

²⁰ Matthew 5: 17.

²¹ John 6: 68.

²² Romans 6: 13; 12: 1.

²³ 2 Corinthians 8: 5.

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dedicated themselves to the Lord, prior to the devotement of their substance. In short, this beautiful example of covenant-dedication - memorable as being the first on record in the primitive European churches, and among the Gentile converts, exhibited the Church united in the same faith - love abounding - and our Lord's prayer fulfilled - Christians speaking the same things, "perfectly joined together in one heart and one mind."

Similar instances of federal vowing were frequent and common in the primitive churches. Early ecclesiastical history relates that a Christian profession was at first made by a public declaration of adherence to the fundamental articles of the Church's creed, and by an oath to remain steadfast in the faith. Heathen as well as Christian testimonies bear evidence of this practice. Pliny's celebrated letter to the Emperor Trajan,²⁴ expressly states that the Christians residing in Proconsular Asia bound themselves by *solemn oath* to abstain from wickedness, and to practise the duties of godliness and morality. This was the usual practice in the assemblies for worship in the year 107 - some ten or twelve years after the death of John, the last of the apostles. The early Christian fathers, in various places, bear clear testimony of the existence of the same practice. Thus Justin Martyr, in his Second Apology, says, "Baptism (meaning the baptism of adult converts) was given only to those who, to the confession of their

²⁴ "They affirmed that the whole of their fault or error lay in this - that they were wont to meet together on a stated day before it was light, and sing among themselves alternately a hymn to Christ, as to God, and *bind themselves by an oath*, not to the commission of any wickedness, but not to be guilty of theft, or robbery, or adultery; never to falsify their word, nor to deny a pledge committed to them when called upon to return it. When those things were performed, it was their custom to separate, and then to come together again to a meal, which they ate in common without any disorder; but this they had forborne since the publication of my edict, by which, according to your command, I prohibited assemblies." - *Melmoth's Pliny's Letters - Waddington's History of the Church* - p. 10.

faith, added a vow to live according to their knowledge."²⁵ Tertullian, speaking against theatrical representations, says - "These things belong to the pomp of the devils, against which we *swore* at the sealing of our creed." Jerome expressly states that covenanting preceded the rite of baptism - "We enter into covenant with the Sun of righteousness, and swear that we shall serve Him."

The Churches of Christ that made an evangelical profession both before and posterior to the Reformation, exemplified this great duty. The Waldenses not only emitted a Confession of faith, but in the year 1552, when subjected to cruel persecution, they renewed their testimony, and ratified it by solemn oath. And in 1603, they made still more public their confession, addressing it to all Protestant Churches and States, and engaging before the world, to live in the doctrine of the Scriptures, despite all loss and suffering. Who can doubt that this covenant was an eminent means of preserving these noble witnesses from being devoured by the Romish Beast, and of transmitting their testimony and heroic achievements to future generations? At the memorable period of the Reformation and afterwards, public covenanting was extensively resorted to, not only for defence and protection, but also as an approved way of securing and transmitting precious truth. The famous League at Smalcald bound the Protestant princes together, and was to them a tower of strength against the Antichristian oppressor. The Senate and people of Geneva covenanted; and the safety of this small State, surrounded as it was by numerous combined and inveterate foes, was owing, not less to the purity of its faith, than to the blessing of Heaven upon its federal engagement. The reformed churches in Hungary and Transylvania, in Holland and France, all exemplified this scriptural and primitive practice; and the spread of scriptural truth in these countries, and the preservation of the Church, amidst the machinations and oppression of the

²⁵ Written about A.D. 160.

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Papacy, was the fruit of solemn dedication. The "Pilgrim Fathers," who laid the foundation of an extensive Church, and of an "empire of freedom," in the western world, before they landed and entered upon their noble enterprise, engaged in a solemn covenant. This deed, which was several times afterwards renewed, may be regarded as the germ of liberty and greatness, as well as the guarantee for the inheritance of scriptural truth to their descendants. The distinction of the British Churches and nation, arising from their public religious covenants, will be hereafter noticed.

From this hasty sketch, are we not warranted to conclude that the practice of covenanting has the clearest and fullest Divine warrant - that, instead of being sectarian or limited in its observance, it has been practised in all past ages, by all faithful servants of God - and that it has ever characterised the purest churches in their best times, and in periods of special trial and suffering? The most precious benefits, besides, have resulted from the observance of this ordinance. It has been not less an act of religious worship and holy obedience, than a high and honorable privilege - the fruit of peculiar Divine favour. The neglect of this ordinance characterises individuals and churches, as having forsaken the footsteps of the flock, and indicates decay and declension. Return to it, on the other hand, and the proper exemplification of scriptural covenanting, not only identify us with the Church of patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, but they will, moreover, be a valuable means of revival. Thus are lands "married to the Lord," and the Church "puts on her beautiful garments," and appears "clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners."

SECTION II.

THE DOCTRINE OF COVENANT- OBLIGATION.

That religious covenants have a moral obligation not only upon those who enter into them, but likewise upon those who are represented by them, is susceptible of manifold and most satisfactory proof. The law of nature, - the reiterated declarations of Holy Scripture, - and the practice and universal consent of society fully establish this doctrine.

A brief statement of the doctrine of federal obligation, and a condensed outline of the argument in support of it may suffice to present this subject to the reader.

First of all, The grand and fundamental ground of the obligation of a religious covenant is the *Moral Law*. The Law of God alone can bind the conscience. No oath or bond is of any force that is opposed to it. To keep an engagement to do what the Divine law forbids, or to neglect what it requires, renders a person doubly guilty, and is adding sin to sin. The obligation of the law of God is primary and cannot be increased - that of a voluntary oath or engagement is only secondary or subordinate. By the Divine law, we are obliged to the performance of duty whether we choose it or not - by covenants we voluntarily bind ourselves. Both the light of nature, and the precepts and approved examples of Scripture, as we have shown, warrant the practice of covenanting; and where the vows made respect duties enjoined by the law of God, they have an intrinsic obligation of the highest and most constraining kind. The precepts, examples, and predictions of Scripture exhibit in the clearest manner the moral obligation of this great duty; and as these are presented, both before the introduction of the Jewish Economy, and refer to the times that are subsequent to its abrogation, it is evident that this obligation is not restricted to the Jewish people - but that, like the moral law itself, it respects the whole family of mankind - it is universal and perpetual.

2. But, moreover, religious covenants have an obligation *distinct and*

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peculiar. Although the authority of God, expressed in his law and speaking through his word, is supreme, and cannot possibly be increased, there may be a *superadded* obligation on a man's conscience to respect and obey this authority, arising from his own voluntary oath or engagement. This is easily illustrated. We are bound at all times to speak the truth, and to fulfill our promises and federal engagements. If an oath is taken to declare the truth, this adds nothing, it is true, to the authority of the law; but it brings the person swearing under an additional obligation to speak the truth. This does not increase the original obligation; and yet it may be properly regarded as a new and different obligation. An oath is enjoined by Divine authority, and cannot therefore be useless. When properly taken, it is important and valuable. Before the oath was taken, if the person deviated from the truth, he was simply guilty of lying - but afterward, if he speaks falsely, he has added to his sin, the crime of perjury. In the former case, he rebelled against the authority of God - in the latter, he both violates the authority of God, and repugns the obligation of his oath. The usages of all civilised society confirm the doctrine of superadded obligation, arising from oaths and voluntary engagements; and regard perjured persons and covenant-breakers as aggravated criminals. It has been justly observed, that a "Covenant does not bind to any thing additional to what the law of God contains, but it *additionally* binds."²⁶ This superadded obligation of vows, oaths, and covenants is plainly recognised in the Scriptures, (See Numbers 30: 2; Deut. 23: 21; Eccles. 5: 4,5.) Divine threatenings distinctly specify, as a separate ground of punishment, breach of covenant, in addition to the transgression of God's law.²⁷

3. Public religious covenants have a *descending obligation upon posterity represented in them.* They not only bind the original Covenanters, but likewise those whom they

represented, till the objects for which they were framed are accomplished. The representative principle runs extensively through all social transactions, and is recognised in every part of the scheme of Divine revelation. Parents represent and engage for their children, not only in certain ordinances of religion, but also in various social transactions. In civil society, men bind their heirs and executors, as well as themselves; and commercial contracts and international compacts are universally admitted to be obligatory upon the descendants of those who framed them, or who first entered into them. To repudiate such an obligation is regarded by all as aggravated unfaithfulness, and as dissolving the bonds of society.

The principle of continued federal obligation is grounded upon an essential characteristic of organised society. This is its *permanent identity* - so that the obligation is not so much *descending*, as resting upon the same body in different stages of its existence. Society is regarded as morally one, during the whole course of its existence, whatever changes may take place in its individual members. It is a *moral agent* - under law to God - the proper subject of reward or punishment. Having thus a permanent character or moral identity, the obligation is continued, so that the society is bound to implement the unfulfilled engagements of the same community in a preceding period. Covenants that are moral in their nature are thus of *perpetual* obligation. Posterity are properly included in them; and in fulfilling federal engagements, it is not so much one class of persons discharging the obligations come under by another, as society, represented by different members, performing its own permanent obligations.

The Scriptures plainly and most fully declare this moral identity of society, and recognise it, in recounting God's dealings with communities, civil and ecclesiastical. The principle is, indeed essential to the scheme of the Divine government. It is a constitution expressly appointed by God

²⁶ "Nature and Obligation of Public Vowing," by William Symington, D.D. - p. 22.

²⁷ Deut. 31: 20, 21.

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himself. On this ground, Levi is said to have "paid tithes in Abraham," being yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedec met him. The ancient federal transactions of God's people embraced in them posterity.²⁸ The violation of engagements entered into by society many generations before, is rightly charged as a sin upon the same body in subsequent ages. Thus the land of Israel is smitten with famine in the days of David; and the cause is expressly said to be the breach of covenant made in the days of Joshua - *four hundred years before* - with the Gibeonites.²⁹ The prophet Jeremiah directly charges upon the Jewish nation in his days, the sin of breaking the covenant made with their fathers; and assigns this as the grand cause of the desolation coming upon the land from the Chaldean invasion.³⁰ This could only be done on the ground that the national society was the same. Thus too in Hosea, twelfth chapter, in God's covenanting with Jacob at Bethel, "the angel" is said to speak with Israel in the prophet's days. And in Psalm sixty-sixth, the Church existing hundreds of years afterwards is said to rejoice, as if personally present in the deliverance at the Red Sea. The moral identity of communities is evinced by the dispensation of retributive rewards and punishments, in different stages of their existence. As the personal identity of individuals is clearly seen in the rewards of obedience afterwards reaped, and in the punishments inflicted at one period of life for sins committed at another - so it is, too, in organised society. In the Second Commandment, "the iniquity of fathers" is said to be visited on their children to the third and fourth generations, while mercy is shown to "thousands of them that love God and keep his commandments." "The punishment inflicted on one unhappy generation is the penalty, with interest, of the guilt that had been accumulating during all former generations; and this proves that it was one moral agent during the whole

period."³¹ On this ground of the moral identity of communities, and of continued obligation of covenants, the Jewish people, in the era of the Babylonish captivity, are represented as the same society that came out of Egypt: the Amorites, that were extirpated in the wars of Joshua, were punished for crimes that had been accumulating from the infancy of their national existence; and in accordance with our Lord's denunciation, the vengeance executed in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, was the award of sins that were committed throughout succeeding ages, from the earliest period.³² Thus, too, the two Apocalyptic witnesses and Antichrist have a continued identity through the prophetic period of 1260 years. The doom threatened in inspired prophecy, and executed upon ancient nations - as Amalek, Egypt, Babylon, Idumea, Moab, Ammon, and Tyre, goes on the principle of their moral identity. For crimes increasing from generation to generation, are they ultimately punished and destroyed. The children walk in the steps of their fathers. "Fathers eat sour grapes, and their children's teeth are set on edge." Nations are under law to God. His eyes behold them; and when the measure of their wickedness is full, they become victims of Divine vengeance.

The principle is continually receiving fresh and vivid illustrations in the administration of God's moral government. Modern nations, such as Spain and France, that persecuted Christ's servants and shed the blood of the saints, have become degraded, or are tossed with revolutions, without hope of recovery or rest. The House of Bourbon, since the days of the perfidious slaughter of the Huguenots, has never sat on a secure throne, and is now rejected and cast off as abhorred of the nation. The Jewish people, since the days of the Savior, have been suffering for sins committed during previous ages, and generation after generation have lain under

²⁸ Deut. 5: 2; 29: 14,15.

²⁹ 2 Samuel 21.

³⁰ Jeremiah 11: 10.

³¹ Life of Alexander the Great, in "Family Library" - quoted by White.

³² Matthew 23: 35.

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the fearful malediction which their fathers invoked in shedding the Redeemer's blood.³³ Their miraculous preservation and their outcast condition shows, on the one hand, that they are still visited for the iniquities of their fathers, and yet intimate that God's designs of mercy are to be accomplished in the national salvation of Israel. The moral identity of the Antichristian system is expressly proclaimed in the infliction of the last plagues which are sent for its destruction. The vengeance that overwhelms mystical Babylon is declared to be the vindication of God's moral government towards her, during the whole course of her existence. "Her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities."³⁴ It is retribution the more fearful as it has been long delayed. "Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works; in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double." And it is particularly said to be the avenging of the blood of slaughtered saints.³⁵

The principle of continued or transmissible federal obligation is not liable to the objections that have been urged against it, and is no novelty. We do not make our ancestors a sort of federal heads, as Adam was to the human family, when we allege that posterity are bound by their engagements. This is altogether a misrepresentation of the argument on the subject. The descending obligation of public covenants rests upon the essential character of organised society. It is the same party in different stages of its existence that is bound to moral obedience; and the obligation rests in all its plenitude upon the community as the same moral agent, until the whole matter of the engagement is fulfilled. This principle has been recognised in every age - in things civil as well as ecclesiastical, and may be said to enter as a fundamental element into the laws and usages of society, as well as into matters

purely religious, and the affairs of the Church. Compacts, promises, and oaths are universally regarded as binding not only upon those who make them, but likewise upon those whom they lawfully represent, until the object for which they were brought in is attained. Hence covenants of a moral nature continue obligatory long after the original framers have ceased to exist. In public religious vows, God being the one party and the Church or the nation the other, these parties have a continued existence; and notwithstanding the changes that take place in the constituent members of the one party, the obligation is perpetual, inasmuch as the identity of the corporate bodies remains unaltered.

The continued obligation of public religious covenants is highly *beneficial* in its tendency and effects, and supplies some of the most constraining motives to the performance of solemn duties. Believing in this doctrine, faithful men cherish the joyful expectation that *posterity will be secured in the possession of covenant-blessings* as well as themselves; and on the other hand, *posterity are excited and encouraged to confide in the God of their fathers*. The sense of gratitude - one of the most powerful stimulants to obedience is strengthened, while children reflect on the Divine goodness that consulted for their welfare, by embracing them in the same covenant with their ancestors. Thus in the days of primitive Christianity, Peter reminds the Jews, "Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers."³⁶ On the same principle, believers, with holy boldness, address God in prayer as their fathers' God, and plead, "The Lord our God be with us, as He was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us."³⁷

Again, It inspires an *assured confidence, and a joyful hope*. God who condescended to take his people into covenant, is their "dwelling place in all generations" - and His "mercy is on them that fear Him from

³³ "His blood be upon us and on our children."

³⁴ Revelation 18: 5.

³⁵ Revelation 18: 20; 19: 1, 2.

³⁶ Acts 3: 25.

³⁷ Deuteronomy 4: 31.

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generation to generation.” There is all ground to hope that He who has been gracious to the fathers in time past will be gracious still to their children. Thus the Jewish Lawgiver encouraged the people in the way of holy obedience - “The Lord thy God is a merciful God; He will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers, which He swore unto them.”³⁸ On the other hand, the sense of continued federal obligation speaks *solemn warning*, and furnishes a *powerful motive to deter from all apostasy and disobedience*. Covenant-violation is ever represented as an aggravated sin, exposing those who commit it to the severest calamities.³⁹

Furthermore, we have here a *powerful and prevailing argument* in prayer. The believer, in the spirit of adoption, pleads - “I am thine, save me.”(Psalm 119: 94.) The Church, in trial and distress prays, “We are thine; thou never bearest rule over them; they were not called by thy name.”⁴⁰ And again, Behold, see, we beseech thee, we are all thy people.”⁴¹ Faithful servants of God, like Jeremiah, earnestly supplicate, “Do not abhor us, for thy names sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory; remember, break not thy covenant with us;”⁴² and plead for the conversion of the nations - “Have respect unto thy covenant; for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty.”⁴³ Confidence in prayer is inspired, from the consideration that the covenant is a shield for protection and defence of a covenant people in future generations. Thus Israel, even after much wandering and backsliding, is assured- “And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the Lord their God. But I will, for their sakes, remember the covenant

³⁸ 1 Kings 8: 57.

³⁹ Leviticus 26: 25; Deuteronomy 29:25; Jeremiah 11: 1-3.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 63: 19.

⁴¹ Isaiah 64: 9.

⁴² Jeremiah 14: 21.

⁴³ Psalm 74: 20.

of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God.”⁴⁴

The remarkable favour shown to Britain, amidst the conflicts and convulsions of European nations, has been well traced to God’s special regard to a land once married to Him in covenant. “It was not the ocean which surrounds us; it was not the number and prowess of our fleets and armies, nor the wisdom of our councils, but the sword of the Lord, and the buckler of his favour that saved us.”⁴⁵ Thus, moreover, the *remembrance of the wonderful things that God has done for his people is vividly preserved and transmitted to future generations*. As a primary duty, parents are enjoined to make known to their children God’s mighty works; and this is declared to be a principal part of approved thanksgiving.⁴⁶

Finally, *Federal transmissible obligation eminently displays and promotes the unity of the Church*, and begets a delightful mutual interest between fathers and children. The Church is thus seen to be one in all ages, enjoying the same high covenant privileges, engaged in the same great work, and performing the same duties, and cherishing the same lofty hopes and expectations. Fathers representing their children in covenant, and children recognising the federal deeds of their ancestors, regard each other with the deepest and most cordial interest. The present generation looks back to the past, as the past anticipates the future. The servants of God feel that they are connected by the tenderest ties with them that have gone before; and they learn too to live for posterity. Thus an eminent public spirit is engendered and strengthened. Distant periods are brought together, and the best interests of different generations and races promoted; while the Redeemer’s glory in gathering into one in Himself, a ransomed Church from all nations and ages is eminently advanced.

⁴⁴ Leviticus 26: 44, 45.

⁴⁵ Paxton.

⁴⁶ Psalm 78: 4; 111: 5; 1 Chronicles 16: 12.

SECTION III.

**THE BRITISH COVENANTS: THEIR
HISTORY - CONTENTS - USES.**

From the examples of public social covenanting which have been already adduced, we have seen that the scriptural practice of covenanting characterised the churches of the Reformation in various lands. In none, however, was it so fully adopted as in the British nation, and especially in Scotland. There the reformation attained its brightest development, so that Scotland was at one time justly styled - "Philadelphia among the nations." Through the singular favour of the Mediator, the Scottish Reformers were led early to confederate together, and to bind themselves by sacred engagements to advance the Divine glory, in promoting true religion. Thus were our faithful ancestors cemented in godly union, and inspired with strength of purpose and holy energy; and valuable attainments were transmitted to posterity. The Reformation in North Britain has the peculiar distinction of being, in every progressive stage, the *Covenanted Reformation*; and the Church and nation had the high honor of being, in the fullest sense of the terms - "*a covenanted Church and land.*"

Among the first of the federal deeds of our Scottish forefathers was a brief engagement entered into in 1546 - eight years after the martyrdom of the youthful Patrick Hamilton - by a few gentlemen who met in Mid-Lothian, and pledged their property, reputation, and life, for the preservation of "Christ's blessed Evangel." This was the germ of the future precious

liberties, civil and religious, which, after many a hard struggle, were won for their native country. A few years afterwards, when the adherents of the reformation had considerably increased, a number of solemn engagements for the maintenance of true religion, and for mutual assistance and co-operation were framed, and taken. The first of these was framed in 1556, and subscribed by the friends of the reformation in Mearns. Similar sacred bonds, adapted to the varying circumstances of the reformed, were entered into at Edinburgh in 1557 - at Perth in 1559 - and at Ayr in 1562. These covenants, though voluntary and joyfully taken by some of the most distinguished men in the nation, and by persons of different classes, were not enjoined by the supreme authority either of the nation or of the Church, and were properly private deeds; though they proved of singular benefit, in resisting the machinations of Antichrist, and in promoting evangelical truth, and purity of worship,

The vigorous and violent attempts of the enemies of truth to crush the reformation in various countries, taught the Protestants in Scotland, the importance of closer union and more decisive action, in order to preserve their dearly-acquired liberties, and to transmit to posterity the blessings of pure and undefiled religion. The success of Jesuit policy, in arresting the progress of the Reformation on the Continent - the Bartholomew massacre in France,⁴⁷ which was solemnly celebrated at Rome as the destruction of Protestantism in that country - and the existence of a league among the Roman Catholic princes and the Pope, to exterminate the reformed faith, served to reveal to faithful men their danger, and to convince them that it was only by a death-struggle, that their privileges and very existence, as witnesses for truth, could be maintained. Every means that the Man of

⁴⁷ The Bartholomew massacre was celebrated at Rome by a solemn Te Deum, by order of the Pope; and a medal was struck, with the engraving "Strages Hugonotorum" - the Slaughter of the Huguenots.

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Sin could devise was put in requisition to extirpate evangelical doctrine from Scotland, and to bring back the nation to the bondage of Rome. The Pope was even found to have granted *dispensations* to some of his most devoted servants to profess the reformed religion, for the purpose of undermining and subverting it.

On the accession of James VI. those dangers were greatly increased. The boyish age of the monarch - his subjection to the guidance of unprincipled favorites - the report that the Pope had himself written several letters to the king - and the arrival in Scotland of numbers of Jesuits and seminary priests, with the interception of several letters of dispensation from Rome, excited a just and well-grounded alarm throughout the nation, that a deep laid plot was hatching to destroy the Reformed faith, and to crush the liberties of Scotland. At this crisis, James, either to remove suspicion from himself and his favorite, or to restore public confidence, requested JOHN CRAIG, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, and his chaplain, to draw up a short Confession of the Reformed Faith, and a Solemn Covenant - which might be publicly taken, as a bond and vow - pledging the nation to determined resistance to the wicked designs of the enemy. This remarkable document was styled "THE SCOTS' CONFESSION," and was the NATIONAL COVENANT OF SCOTLAND in its original form. It contains a full and very explicit abjuration of the corruptions of Popery, both in doctrine and in its superstitious and idolatrous rites, and it disclaimed especially the Pope's usurped authority and his wicked hierarchy. It was, at the same time, a solemn bond of adherence to the doctrine and discipline of the Reformed Church, under promise and oath, "to defend his Majesty's person and authority, with their goods, bodies, and lives, in defence of Christ's Evangel, liberties of our country, ministration of justice, and punishment of iniquity, against all enemies, within the realm or without." This Bond was sworn by the king and his household, on the 20th of January, 1581; and soon afterwards, in consequence of an order of

the Privy Council, and an act of the General Assembly, it was taken by persons of all ranks throughout the kingdom. The happy effect of these vigorous measures was to dissipate fear, restore public confidence, and bind the nation in the most solemn manner in firm attachment to the principles of the Reformation. The schemes of enemies were frustrated - the Church was inspired with renewed courage, and the State, as if drawing from the solemn transaction a higher idea of its proper functions as an institution of God for the promotion of His glory, towards the end of the same year, ratified all the former acts in favour of the true religion then professed. Besides its sacred character and object as a religious Bond, the National Covenant must ever be regarded as the grand bulwark of Scottish liberty and independence. "To this much-vilified Bond," says a candid historian, "every Scotchman ought to look with as great reverence as Englishmen do the Magna Charta. it was what saved the country from absolute despotism, and to it we may trace back the origin of all the successful efforts made by the inhabitants of Britain, in defence of their freedom, during the succeeding reigns of the Stuarts."⁴⁸

The National Covenant was renewed in 1590, on the occasion of the deliverance of the country from a threatened Spanish invasion, which was set on foot by the Popish powers to destroy the liberties of Britain. At this period, the General Bond was appended to the covenant; and by order of the council, a commission, to be assisted by *one hundred and thirty* of the nobility and gentry, was given to *ninety-six* ministers, to convene the godly and well-affected of all ranks throughout the kingdom, to administer the covenant and receive signatures. Copies of the original covenant, with the General Bond, were printed and circulated throughout the kingdom, and were cheerfully and generally subscribed.

In the year 1596, another renovation of the national covenant took place, and

⁴⁸ Aikman's History of Scotland, Vol. III., p. 445.

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proved a signal means of revival to the Church and nation. This originated in the General Assembly, on the motion of the venerable John Davidson, minister of Prestonpans. After a solemn public confession of sin, the ministers and elders present, to the number of *four hundred*, with uplifted hands, renewed their covenant with God, "protesting to walk more warily in their ways, and to be more diligent in their charges." "There have been many days," says Calderwood, "of humiliation for present judgments and imminent dangers, but the like for sin and defection was never seen since the Reformation."⁴⁹ The Assembly took measures for engaging the nation generally in the same solemn work. Many of the Synods and Presbyteries, after special preparation, took the covenant, with evident tokens of the Divine presence. In the Synod of Fife, particularly, on the occasion of covenant-renovation, there were manifold tokens of the gracious and powerful presence of the Spirit. Although soon after, severe and long-continued trials befell the Church of Scotland, there can be no doubt that this memorable instance of covenanting served important purposes, in the sovereign designs of Zion's King towards his people. It prevented defection, united the faithful more firmly in the bond of a common brotherhood,- prepared the Church for sifting temptations and trials - and rendered it more difficult for enemies to wrest from her her dearly-bought privileges. The remembrance of the covenant of their God sustained his servants during the long night of their oppressions, and at the darkest hour served to animate them with the joyful hope that the Lord would yet visit the land, and bring back to it his departed glory. The National Covenant was not renewed again, except by the Presbytery of St. Andrew's and the Synod of Lothian, till the year 1638, at the morning-break of the Second Reformation.

The attempts made by James the Sixth, in the latter part of his reign, and

⁴⁹ Calderwood's History of the Church of Scotland - Vol. V. p. 407; Melville's Diary - pp. 222, 223.

persevered in by his son and successor, Charles the First, to force Prelacy upon the nation of Scotland, led to the renovation of the covenant in 1638, and to the introduction of the Second Reformation. The long oppressions arising from the adoption of the *Perth Articles* were followed by yet greater hardships to the faithful; and the introduction of a *Book of Canons*, and a *Liturgy* for the Church of Scotland, was designed to complete the scheme of Prelatic domination. By the Canons, the whole Presbyterian policy was at once set aside; and the Scottish Liturgy only differed from that of the Episcopal Church in England, by approaching more nearly in various particulars to the Roman Breviary. These changes were made solely by regal authority - and refusal to adopt them was to be visited by summary punishment.

When the spirit of the nation was roused to resist these innovations, and to assert their ancient rights, the happy proposal was adopted to renew the national covenant. After some preparatory measures were taken, it was agreed to make two additions to the original covenant - the one written by ARCHIBALD JOHNSTON, afterwards Lord Wariston, in which numerous acts of Parliament are adduced, to show that the proceedings of the Covenanters were constitutional; and the other penned by ALEXANDER HENDERSON, applying the principles of the covenant against the recent Prelatic innovations. The covenant, thus enlarged, assumed the form in which it is usually printed with the Westminster Confession. The covenant was sworn and subscribed on the 28th February, 1638; and on that and the two following days, no fewer than 60,000 signatures were affixed to it. An old historian describes in suitable terms the conclusion of this eminent work of covenant renovation: - "With groans and tears streaming down their face, they all lifted up their hands at once. After the oath had been administered, the people were prayerfully enjoined to begin the work of personal reformation. At the conclusion, everybody seemed to feel that a great measure of the Divine presence

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had accompanied the solemnities of the day; and with their hearts much comforted and strengthened for every duty, the enormous crowd retired about nine o'clock." Copies of the covenant were afterwards sent to all parts of the kingdom; and it was everywhere taken with the utmost cordiality. "The matter was so holy," said the Earl of Rothes, "that they held it to be irreligious to use wicked means for advancing so good a work."

This remarkable instance of covenanting is justly characterised by Henderson and Dickson in their First Reply to the doctors of Aberdeen;- "This was the day of the Lord's power, in which multitudes offered themselves most willingly, like the dew-drops of the morning." And Livingstone, and eye-witness, bears testimony to the solemn impressions and happy effects of the taking of the covenant throughout the kingdom - "I was present at Lanark," says he, "and several other parishes, when on Sabbath after the forenoon's sermon, the covenant was read and sworn; and I may truly say, that in all my lifetime, excepting at the Kirk of Shotts, I never saw such motions from the Spirit of God. All the people generally and most willingly concurred. I have seen more than 1000 persons, all at once, lifting up their hands, and the tears falling down from their eyes; so that throughout the whole land, excepting the professed Papists, and some few who adhered to the prelates, people universally entered into the covenant of God."

The covenant, as taken at this juncture, proved eminent service to the cause of reformation. It united the nation in one invincible band, and rendered the attempts of enemies abortive. It led to other important steps of reformation, until the scriptural liberties of the nation were secured, and the lovely spectacle was exhibited of a reformed State in friendly conjunction with a Church distinguished for purity, without the one invading the other. In the year 1639, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland enjoined the taking

of the covenant ecclesiastically, and ordained that it should be engrossed in the records of the Church. The Parliament, in 1640, ratified the covenant, and converted it into a standing law of the kingdom, and a test of admission to office. It was placed on the records, with other Acts of Parliament, and ordained to be publicly read at the opening of every Parliament, before proceeding to business, and to be sworn by every member upon pain of forfeiting his seat. All judges, magistrates, and other state officers, were required to swear and subscribe the covenant, before entering upon office. In the year 1649, the Scottish estates enacted that the king should, as a part of his coronation oath, declare his approval of the Covenants, National and Solemn League, and his obligation in his high station to prosecute the ends thereof. Accordingly, Charles Second, at his coronation at Scone, swore and subscribed the covenant, though his life afterwards afforded sad evidence of his complicated perfidy.

It thus appears that the National Covenant is to be properly regarded as, in the fullest sense, the federal deed of the nation. It was embodied in the constitution, and became, in truth, an essential part of it. At the time in which it was taken, and afterwards, it was everywhere regarded as the Magna Charta of the civil and religious liberties of Scotland. It restrained the power of the sovereign within constitutional limits, and taught the people just views of their rights and liberties; and its grand excellence consisted in settling the whole on a scriptural foundation. The English patriots assumed it as the basis of the Solemn League and covenant. It served to unite the hearts and concentrate the efforts of friends of liberty throughout the three kingdoms. It originated the admirable measures of the Long Parliament, and was, in truth, the groundwork of the Second Reformation - the influence of which will be yet felt in Britain, and in other lands, in the future revival and triumph of evangelical religion and genuine liberty.

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An eminent French statesman and historian says of the Westminster Assembly, whose existence and measures may evidently be traced to the national covenant- "It founded the power of the Commons, and caused English society to take a wide step from the monstrous inequality of the feudal system."⁵⁰ It has been ably shown too, that the expression of the principal parts of the American "DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE" was taken from the articles of the national covenant.⁵¹ So that the two great nations in the world, where true religion and civil liberty are most flourishing, are indebted to the national covenant for all that constitutes the main elements of their greatness and prosperity. The taking of the covenant at the close of the Second Reformation was closely linked with the passing of the "Act of Classes," by which irreligious men, and the enemies of the Reformation were excluded from places of power and trust in the nation, - the renewed approval of the Second Book of Discipline, and the abolition of patronage. The aim of these measures was, according to the statement of an excellent historian, "The construction of what the world has never yet seen - a Christian Government, composed of men whose ruling principle should be to fear God and honor the King."⁵²

The obligation of this venerable deed rests mainly upon its moral and scriptural principles, and is independent of the conduct of the Covenanters. Although it is believed that the character and measures of the leading reformers in Scotland, at the memorable period of the Second Reformation, will advantageously compare with those of the patriots of any other age or country, we are not required to approve of every thing, either in the one or the other, in maintaining that the covenant is of perpetual moral obligation. It was in full accordance with the precepts and examples of God's word - and it cannot be shown to

be intolerant and persecuting in its principles - nor can the conduct of those who employed it as an instrument for establishing and protecting the liberties, civil and religious, of the nation be shown to be illegal and rebellious, without impeaching the wisdom and authority of God speaking in the oracles of truth, and without denying to a nation the right of throwing off the yoke of oppression, and securing for itself true rational liberty. Beyond any dispute, this covenant was in the highest sense *national* - and to it, in a great measure, the Scottish people owe their high distinction among nations. In adopting it, as the foundation of their dearest rights, and the bulwark of their liberties, they set an example to other countries, which, we cannot doubt, will be yet extensively followed in the days when all lands shall bow down to the sceptre of Prince Messiah.

THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

The Solemn League and Covenant owes its origin to the earnest struggles of the spirit of religious freedom against error and arbitrary power. At a period of no ordinary peril to the cause of true religion, and to the liberties and civil rights of Britain, was it framed; and the impartial verdict of historians of very different views is, that to this admirable Bond we owe the deliverance of the nation from imminent dangers, and that through it the blessings of civil and religious liberty have been transmitted as a precious inheritance to an ungrateful posterity.

In the civil war between Charles First and the English Parliament, in the early part of the year 1643, the king had generally been successful in his military operations, and the affairs of the Parliament had been reduced to a critical and dangerous position. Had the Scottish nation thrown its weight at this crisis into to the royal cause, there can be little doubt that the monarch would have triumphed over the liberties of his English

⁵⁰ Guizot's "History of the English Revolution."

⁵¹ Dr. Smyth on "The Mecklenburg Declaration."

⁵² Hetherington.

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subjects, and accomplished his darling project of establishing arbitrary power and perpetuating Prelatic domination. At this eventful time, the Westminster Assembly had convened, at the call of the Long Parliament, to devise measures for a thorough reformation of religion, but, at first, they made little progress. Sensible of this, the Divines petitioned both Houses of Parliament to appoint a day of public fasting and humiliation, that "every one might bitterly bewail his own sins, and cry mightily to God, for Christ's sake, to remove his wrath, and heal the land." And they entreat the rulers, moreover, "instantly to take into their most serious consideration how they may more speedily set up Christ more gloriously, in all his ordinances, within the kingdom, and reform all things amiss throughout the land, wherein God is more specially and more immediately dishonored." The Westminster Assembly, and the Long Parliament, actuated by such feelings, sent commissioners to the Scottish Parliament, and to the General Assembly then sitting - the one to obtain the aid of the Scottish nation in conducting the war against the king, and the other to solicit assistance in prosecuting the work of reformation. In the Letter from the Westminster Assembly, the following moving expression occurs: - "The Kingdom of England is in a deplorable condition - on the edge of a most desperate precipice, ready to be swallowed up by Satan and his instruments. Great is the cruelty of their enemies against such as fall into their hands, being armed against them, not only as men, but as Christians, as Protestants, and as reformers; and if they are given up to their rage, the safety of all Protestant Churches will be endangered." And they add - "In a deeper sense of this danger, than we can express, we address you, in the bowels of Christ, for your most fervent prayers, and advice, what farther to do for the making of our own and the kingdom's peace with God, and for the uniting of the Protestant party more firmly, that we may all serve God with

one consent, and stand up against Antichrist as one man."⁵³

Alexander Henderson presided at this meeting of the General Assembly. The response to the application from the English Commissioners was the proposal that a mutual Bond should be drawn up, stating the grounds on which assistance should be rendered, and the two nations co-operate in the struggle for liberty.⁵⁴ The English Commissioners only contemplated a civil league, but as the entire contest in Scotland had been of a religious character, and had been conducted to a prosperous issue, principally by means of the national covenant, it was insisted by both the Convention of Estates and the General Assembly, that the proposed league should be of a religious nature. On the suggestion of Sir Harry Vane, the bond of union between the two kingdoms was framed, so as to embrace both ideas, and to be partly religious and partly civil. The preparation of the Bond was entrusted to Alexander Henderson; and when of the 17th of August, the draught of the Solemn League and Covenant was submitted to the General Assembly, it was adopted unanimously, amidst thee applause of some, and the bursting tears of joy of others. The covenant was then transmitted to the English Parliament and the Westminster Assembly; and being, with some slight alterations, approved by them, it was taken on the 25th of September. On that memorable day, the members of the House of Commons, with the Assembly of Divines, and the Scottish Commissioners, met in the Church of St. Margaret's, Westminster. The Rev. Mr. White, of Dorchester, one of the Assessors, commenced with prayer. Alexander Henderson addressed the Assembly, justifying from Scripture the practice of covenanting, and showing its

⁵³ The Delegates from the Parliament were Sir Harry Vane, William Armour, and Messrs. Hatcher and Darley; those of the Westminster Assembly were the Rev. Stephen Marshall, a Presbyterian, and the Rev. Philip Nye, an Independent.

⁵⁴ Baillie's Letters - Vol. I. pp. 364, 365.

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manifold advantages to the Church in all ages. Mr. Nye then read the Covenant from the pulpit slowly, and aloud, pausing at the end of each article, while the whole audience of statesmen and divines stood up reverently to worship, and with uplifted hands swore to its performance. After prayer, at the close, the members of the House of Commons subscribed their names to the covenant in one roll of parchment, and the Assembly of Divines in another.⁵⁵ The covenant was taken by the House of Lords, on the 15th of October, after a sermon by Dr. Temple, from Nehemiah 10: 29, and an exhortation by Mr. Coleman. On the following Lord's day, it was also taken by the congregations in and around London. In the month of February following, the Parliament ordained that the covenant should be taken throughout the kingdom of England, by all persons who had sufficient knowledge, above the age of eighteen years. This order was accompanied by a suitable Exhortation of the Westminster Assembly. Both were sent to military officers, that it might be taken by soldiers under their command - to governors of towns and garrisons - to committees of Parliament in the several counties, and to ministers and churchwardens, that it might be read and explained to the people. It was ordered to be publicly read in every church and congregation in the kingdom, on every day of public fasting and humiliation. English Protestants residing in foreign countries were invited to join with their brethren in England in this sacred league; and not only they, but also some of the Continental Churches expressed their readiness to comply with this invitation. These orders did not require the power of public authority to enforce them; as it is acknowledged, even by historians unfriendly to the principles of the covenant, that "the great majority of the religious part of the nation were zealous for the covenant."

⁵⁵ It is stated by Rushworth ("Historical Collections" - Vol. V. pp. 480, 481), that this roll was subscribed by 228 members of the House of Commons, whose names are given - among these appears the name of Oliver Cromwell.

In Scotland, the Solemn League and Covenant was received with the highest approval, and cordial unanimity. The General Assembly, in their Act adopting it, say - "With all their hearts, and with one voice, they approve and embrace the same, as the most powerful means, by the blessing of God, for settling and preserving the true Protestant religion, with perfect peace in His Majesty's dominions, and propagating the same to other nations, and for establishing His Majesty's throne to all ages and generations." Printed copies were sent to the moderator of every presbytery; and it was ordered that it should be received and explained on the Sabbath, and then, on a subsequent Sabbath, tendered to the people. Throughout the kingdom, it was everywhere received with fasting and prayer, and embraced with the utmost unanimity. In 1644, it was ratified by act of Parliament; and it was again renewed in Scotland, by all ranks, at the close of the Second Reformation, with an Acknowledgment of sins, and Engagement to duties, in 1648, and by the Scottish Parliament in 1649.

As the Solemn League and Covenant was designed to be a Bond of union, and the basis of the reformation of religion in the Three Kingdoms, provision was made that it should be taken by the Protestants in Ireland, in conjunction with their brethren in England and Scotland. In 1644, it was very generally administered throughout the North of Ireland, by four ministers, who were deputed for this purpose by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. No constraint was anywhere employed. The officers, soldiers, and people generally, welcomed the covenant as a happy instrument of revival, and fraternal confidence. It was carefully explained to them before they were admitted to swear it. Some were held back, till they had obtained more knowledge; and the only complaint was, that ministers were "over-scrupulous" in admitting persons to subscribe. A contemporary writer⁵⁶ says - "The covenant was taken in all places with

⁵⁶ Adair, in his MSS. History.

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great affection; partly sorrow for former judgments, and sins and miseries; partly joy, in the hopes of laying a foundation for the work of God in the land, and overthrowing Popery and Prelacy, which had been the havoc and ruin of that poor church. Sighs and tears were joined together. Indeed, they were assisted with more than the ordinary presence of God in that work in every place they went to, so that all the hearers did bear them witness that God was with them. Yea, even the malignants, who were against the covenant, durst not appear on the contrary; for the people generally held these ministers as servants of God, and coming with a blessed message and reward to them.”

The Solemn League and Covenant has been greatly misrepresented and vilified. Notwithstanding, it may justly be termed, in the words of an excellent historian - “A document the noblest, in its essential nature and principles, of all that are recorded among the international transactions of the world.” When captious objections have been raised against it, adopted often without inquiry, and handed down even to our own times, and while it has been represented as premature, we agree with the same judicious writer, when he characterises it “as the wisest, sublimest, and most sacred document ever framed by uninspired men;” and with him we may ask - “Has it perished amid the strife of tongues? Has it sunk into oblivion, and ceased to be a living element in the quick realms of thought? Are there none by whom it is still regarded with sacred veneration? Is it not true, that at this very moment, there are many minds of great power and energy earnestly engaged in reviving its mighty principles, and fearlessly holding them forth before the world’s startled gaze? And if such be the case, may it not be, that what two hundred years ago was premature, has now nearly the period of its full maturity, and is on the point of raising its sacred and majestic hand, strong

in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”⁵⁷

Rejoicing in the prospect of this revival of the principles of the Solemn League, and believing that “the period of its full maturity” is not far distant, we present a brief view of its contents and leading objects:-

The Solemn League consists of a Preface, Six Articles, and a Conclusion. Article First, consists of three Clauses. 1. An engagement to maintain the reformation already reached in the Church of Scotland. 2. To endeavor “the reformation of the kingdom of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word God, and the example of the best reformed churches. And 3. They engage that they shall endeavor to bring the Churches of God in the Three Kingdoms, to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion.” The importance of this Article must be admitted by all who value evangelical doctrine and scriptural order. The Church of Scotland had attained to eminent purity in faith and worship. In England, on the other hand, the Reformation had been arrested in its progress, and the Church in its ritual and formulas exhibited many evidences of corruption. It was surely of vital consequence to reform the Churches in Britain, according to the pattern of the Divine word; and to unite them in one harmonious body, was an undertaking worthy of men of large hearts and sanctified intellects.

Article II. engages those who take it to “engage - without respect of persons, to endeavor the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness.” From this clause, the gravest objections have been brought against the covenant. It has been represented as involving intolerant and persecuting

⁵⁷ Hetherington’s “History of the Westminster Assembly”- pp. 133, 134.

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principles; and those who acknowledge its obligation have been exhibited as cherishing the most odious spirit. The least candid consideration of the document itself is sufficient to show the groundlessness of these allegations. Evidently this covenant binds us to labor to extirpate *unscriptural systems and evil practices*, and not persons. The term itself does not imply that the Covenanters are to have recourse to violent means to accomplish the ends proposed. Our Saviour declared that "every plant which his Heavenly Father had not planted should be rooted out" (extirpated). And every Christian must regard himself as solemnly bound to labor by all means to cooperate in this design. All will admit that it is the Church's duty to endeavor to root out all superstition, heresy, schism, and profaneness. And if Popery and Prelacy are, as every Presbyterian must believe, without warrant in the word of God, they are not of God's planting, and therefore it is equally incumbent to seek their extirpation. In the "exhortation of the Westminster Assembly" to the taking of the Solemn League - when referring to this clause, the Divines assert, "Nor is any man hereby bound to offer violence to their persons, but only in his place and calling to endeavor their extirpation in a lawful way." To wrest this passage as warranting of persecution is plainly to attach to it a meaning which the words do not warrant, in opposition to the express declaration of the Covenanters themselves. The conduct of those who framed and first took the covenant while the supreme power of the nation was in their hands, affords ample proof that they were far from being actuated by the principles or spirit of persecution. None suffered at their hands, in person or property, merely on a religious account. The means employed for extirpating error and profaneness were moral and scriptural. Though themselves hated, vilified and persecuted, our forefathers never persecuted.

Article III. is an engagement to maintain the rights and liberties of the parliament, and the "King's Majesty's person and authority, in preservation and

defence of true religion and liberties of the kingdom." This clause is a full refutation of the stale and oft-repeated slander, that the Covenanters were men of extravagant principles. It shows them to have been actuated by the purest patriotism. The preservation of true religion and scriptural liberty was their principal aim. Their allegiance to the sovereign was limited and regulated by a fervent regard to the liberties and best interests of the nation. The Covenant plainly inculcates the doctrine - which is fundamental to British freedom - that when the monarch violates the original compact, and tramples on the constitutional rights of his subjects, the sovereign power reverts to the people. Both the ruler and the ruled are to be guided by a paramount regard to the defence and promotion of true religion.

Article IV. engages the Covenanters - "With all faithfulness, to endeavor the discovery and punishment of incendiaries and malignants, in an orderly and legal manner," &c. This article was evidently of a temporary nature, though the principle involved in it is susceptible of application to other times and circumstances. For a number of years before the Covenant was framed, a numerous party, significantly called MALIGNANTS,⁵⁸ had, under high pretences of zeal for the Church, introduced unscriptural and unauthorised innovations, and had imposed them by severe civil penalties on the consciences of their brethren. They professed devoted loyalty, and urged forward the most arbitrary and unconstitutional measures of the government, and they assiduously sowed

⁵⁸ The celebrated George Gillespie - the most eloquent of the Scottish Commissioners who attended the Westminster Assembly - left a dying testimony against the admission of Malignants to places of power and trust in the nation. An able tractate from his pen, written against "Association with Malignants," is among his collected works; it may be safely affirmed respecting it, that for scriptural argument, and calm, logical reasoning, it is not surpassed by any of the controversial pieces of the period. The principles which it advocates are, in all ages, an essential part of a faithful testimony for truth.

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suspensions and dissensions between the king and his most faithful subjects. To oppose and punish such persons was evidently a sacred duty - as their presence and counsels about the throne were the grand obstacles to the establishment of constitutional freedom. They were, in truth, inveterate enemies to both their king and country; and as such were certainly deserving of punishment. Proverbs 25: 6 - *“Take away the wicked from before the king, and his throne shall be established in righteousness.”*

Article V. contains an engagement of the Covenanters to “endeavor according to their place and interest that the kingdoms may remain conjoured in a firm peace and union to all posterity.” The object of a former article was to effect the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion in the Church - this is an engagement to secure and perpetuate peace on a solid basis to these nations in their civil capacity. The Solemn League was thus a treaty of union between the three kingdoms, promoting their mutual interests and common prosperity. When we contemplate the broad and scriptural basis on which this confederation was founded, we cannot doubt that it had been adhered to, jarring elements had long since disappeared, and the blessings of firm concord, and a happy peace would have been attained, and become permanent.

The Sixth Article pledges those who take the covenant to mutual defence, fraternal union and mutual assistance, and the advancement of the principles of the covenant. The Conclusion is an engagement to all godly practice, with a solemn appeal to God as the Searcher of hearts for the sincerity of the Covenanters. It need not be shown how important is this part of the vow to all who desire the prevalence of pure and undefiled religion.

Our illustrious ancestors did not regard the articles of the Covenant merely as principles to be professed. They viewed them as worthy to be promoted by devoted and sustained action - as entitled to have all

sacrifices made for their universal diffusion - and to be embodied in all holy and exemplary living. Such should still be the evidence of sincerity and devotedness which those who embrace the covenant should present to the world. Great principles thus professed and reduced to practice become the seed of a glorious harvest. *“They that come of Jacob shall take root, and bud, and blossom, and fill the face of the world with fruit.”*

From this brief view of the contents of the Solemn League and Covenant, the grand OBJECTS of this celebrated instrument may be readily gathered.

It was, first of all, a Sacred Bond *for the safety and preservation of those who engaged in it, and of all that they hold most dear and valuable.* In the preamble to the League, the framers refer to plots, and conspiracies of the enemies of the Reformation; and declare that they enter into the covenant for “the preservation of themselves, and their religion, from utter ruin and destruction.” That this was no idle alarm, the history of those times bears ample testimony. The spirit of Popery actuated the court. The fruits of Jesuit policy were seen in the forcible suppression of Protestantism, and the slaughter of Protestants in many parts of the continent. The Gunpowder treason in England, and the Irish Massacre had but recently occurred. It was therefore a justifiable and necessary measure of self-preservation for the Covenanters to protect themselves, and even to aim at the extirpation of a system which authorised such treacherous and sanguinary proceedings. Even the stringent regulations concerning the taking of the covenant were rendered necessary, as a means of preservation from the bloody plots of papists, and the abettors of arbitrary power. History testifies that a plot for the universal massacre of the heads of the Covenanters, by the royalist party, had been deliberately framed, but was defeated for want of

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concert, or from jealousy and mistrust among the principal actors.⁵⁹

The Solemn League was, moreover, a *standard displayed for the defence of civil and religious liberty*. Never were the grand principles of constitutional liberty more plainly and fully declared; and the just limits of the power of rulers and the rights of the people more clearly exhibited, than in this admirable instrument. The men who framed and entered into this bond, were neither anti-government in their principles, nor opposed to legitimate monarchy. Theirs was a loyalty not blind or fitful, but enlightened and scriptural. They believed that both rulers and people are under God's authority, and are responsible to Him for the exercise of their respective functions, - whether in setting up rulers, or in exercising political power. The Third Article of the Solemn League plainly implies that the people have a right to appoint rulers, and prescribe the conditions of government, according to the will of God; that no rulers should be chosen who are not friendly to true religion; and that the supreme ruler is bound to respect and maintain the constitutional liberties of the nation. Civil liberty was regarded as founded on and inseparable from religious purity and freedom; and the basis of both was declared to be the word of God. The king was to be amenable to the authority of the enthroned Mediator; while the subjection and civil duties of the people were to be regulated in accordance with his revealed will. In these fundamental principles, so briefly but yet so clearly enunciated, are contained the germs of all true and permanent liberty; and it is not too much to say, that to the Solemn League and Covenant, Britain and America are largely indebted for the constitutional freedom which they possess above other nations.

2. Another grand object proposed in the Solemn League and Covenant was the *extension of Reformation*. It was an instrument

once for revival in the Church, and for the propagation of true religion throughout the world. Long prior to the era of modern missions, it recognised the paramount duty of Christians to make known God's "light and salvation" throughout the nations, and was a sacred confederacy formed by devoted men for the universal establishment of the Savior's kingdom. The reformation that had been happily attained in Scotland, the Covenanters earnestly sought to extend to England and Ireland. Alexander Henderson, in the noble designs of his capacious and catholic spirit, contemplated proposing the Solemn League as a means of union and propagation of truth to the reformed States and Churches on the Continent; and some of the latter signified their readiness to enter formally into the vow of God. Had this admirable project been accomplished, what a different moral and religious aspect would European nations present from what they now exhibit! Popery and its innumerable attendant evils - ignorance, superstition, oppression and immorality - would have been banished from this quarter of the globe. Britain itself, illuminated with gospel truth, would have been the centre of light to other nations, and from it would have "sounded out the word" of God to remote regions. May not this admirable instrument be destined yet to be a valuable means for promoting the great missionary enterprise? So soon as the principles of the Solemn League and Covenant shall have been properly appreciated, and its obligation felt - the propagation of true religion at home, and the conversion of the world, will appear a matter of paramount importance, and will call forth the sanctified energies of the Church, to a far larger extent than we have yet witnessed.

3. The Solemn League and Covenant was designed *to promote union and uniformity* among the friends of truth. The importance of these objects cannot be overrated. Union on a scriptural basis is most valuable; and union, to be permanent, and productive of its full happy fruits, must be sought in the way of uniformity, in doctrine, worship,

⁵⁹ Aikman's History of Scotland - Vol. IV. pp. 126, 127.

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discipline and government in the Church. The primitive Church was thus distinguished, for they were “of one heart and of one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.” Inspired prophecy, moreover, assures us that this shall be characteristic of future times. “The Lord shall be King over all the earth. There shall be one Lord, and his name one.” The article in the covenant respecting union is strikingly and beautifully expressed. “We shall endeavor,” declare the Covenanters, “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.” There never was a more comprehensive basis of union than that which was thus presented to the Churches. The Solemn League and Covenant did, for a season, unite the friends of truth in the bond of a holy brotherhood; and, under the Divine blessing, it may do so again. While other schemes of union, in which truth is compromised, and in which there is no provision made for promoting purity of worship and ordinances, must prove abortive, this will be lasting, and productive of the most salutary results.

4. *The removal of Prelacy and numerous evils connected with it*, was another distinct object of the Solemn League. Our forefathers conscientiously believed that the system of Prelacy, as established in England, and attempted to be forced upon the people of Scotland, was destitute of scripture warrant, oppressive, and hostile to the interests of true religion. The Parliament that convened the Westminster Assembly, in both Houses, had condemned Prelacy, as “an evil justly offensive, and burdensome to the kingdom, a great impediment to the growth of religion - and very prejudicial to the state and government of the kingdom.” The Solemn League embodied the nation’s protest against what had obstructed the progress of reformation, and had been found oppressive to faithful men. If such

are the fruits of Prelacy - and if, as some distinguished Prelatists themselves have declared,⁶⁰ Diocesan episcopacy is unknown in the New Testament, and had no existence in the Christian Church for the *first three hundred years*, who will say that our forefathers were wrong in abjuring it in the covenant, and in seeking its extirpation?

Lastly, The Solemn League was designed to be *an eminent means for promoting practical godliness*. In the conclusion, the Covenanters declare - “their true and unfeigned purpose, desire, and endeavor, for themselves, and for all others under their power and charge, both in public and private, in all duties they owe to God and man, to amend their lives, and each one to go before another, in the example of a real reformation.” Such were the noble ends of our fathers’ covenant - ends in which the glory of God, and the interests of true religion, and genuine morality, were deeply concerned. If such objects are distinctly proposed in the Divine word, and are of the highest value to communities and individuals, we may surely conclude that the principles and obligation of the covenant are morally unalterable; and we are, besides, warranted to expect, that, in a day of approaching revival, these will be universally acknowledged.

The view of this admirable document presented by an excellent historian is just, as it is eloquently expressed.

“It is difficult to conceive how any calm, unprejudiced, thoughtful and religious man can peruse this 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. Religious liberty and peace are the grand elements of human welfare, to the preservation of which it bound the empire; and as those by whom it was framed knew well that there can be no

⁶⁰ Archbishop Whately.

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safety for these in a land where the minds of the community are dark with ignorance, warped by superstition, misled by error, and degraded by tyranny, civil and ecclesiastical, they pledged themselves to seek the extirpation of these pernicious evils Aware, alas! how often the wisest and best schemes are perverted and destroyed by base intrigues of selfish and designing men, the Covenanters solemnly pledged themselves to each other and to God, not to suffer themselves to be divided, or withdrawn from the constant and persevering prosecution of their great and sacred cause, till its triumph should be secured, or their own lives terminated. In this strong resolution, were involved a lofty singleness of purpose, deliberate determination, and not only self-denial, but, if necessary, self-sacrifice, that to the world a great example might be given for better times to follow, and to realise.”⁶¹

SECTION IV.

THE CONTINUED OBLIGATION AND RENEWAL OF THE BRITISH COVENANTS.

From the historical view we have given of the Covenants National and Solemn League, it must appear manifest that they are *national covenants* - eminently seasonable, and comprehensive - and that their adoption as public instruments of revival and reformation was productive of most beneficial results. If the doctrine which has already been advanced concerning the moral identity of nations be true, - and we are satisfied that it rests on grounds at once rational and scriptural, then these memorable deeds must be regarded as being of permanent obligation. They were certainly lawful and scriptural as to their matter; they were entered into at a seasonable time; the objects which they contemplated were of the highest importance, both in respect to the promotion of the Divine glory, and to the

best interests of the Church and nation; and there were special tokens of the Divine approval upon the proceedings which were consequent upon their introduction.

The British covenants are of continued obligation.

First of all, - Because the MATTER of them is *moral* and *scriptural*, and therefore worthy to be prosecuted in all ages. The intrinsic obligation to present the same testimony for truth, and to seek alike deliverance from the evils specified in the covenants of our fathers, devolves with equal right upon us as upon them. Till the great ends of these deeds shall have been fully attained, they lay each succeeding generation professing Christ's truths, and acknowledging the authority of his word, under obligation to labor for their accomplishment. On the other ground of the moral character of our fathers' federal deeds, they may be regarded as, in some sort, obligatory upon other Churches and nations, besides those that can trace their descent directly from the original Covenanters. And certainly, those who have sprung from the same stock, and who in America, or in the distant colonial dependencies of Britain, owe much of the scriptural light and freedom which they enjoy to the principles developed in the sacred vows of Britain, and to the blessing that has remarkably rested upon a nation, which was married to the Lord, have peculiar reasons to view these covenants as worthy of all admiration, and devoted regard.

But, Secondly, and chiefly, - These covenants were strictly NATIONAL DEEDS, and on this ground they are of perpetual obligation upon the British nation. The supreme authorities in Church and State entered into them - the people of all ranks willingly and joyfully came under the engagement. They became part of the fundamental compact between the ruler and the subject; and were assumed, after solemn and careful deliberation, not only as the ground of international union, and mutual

⁶¹ Hetherington's History of the Westminster Assembly. - pp. 132, 133.

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protection and intercourse, but likewise as the basis of national legislation and administration. If the British nation be morally the same society that came under these arrangements, then it is certainly yet bound to carry out the ends which they proposed, and that until these shall have been fully attained. If righteous laws bind posterity - if oaths are binding - if bonds oblige heirs - if compacts are of force while the national society exists, - then assuredly the British covenants have a continued obligation, and that of a higher and more sacred character than any laws and compacts which pertain merely to worldly interests and relations. A treaty about war or peace or commerce continues to bind, and it must surely be much more binding when its object is religion. The engagements of rulers to a people, or of a people to their rulers - as in the Magna Charta, and the Bill of Rights, - are held to be of fundamental, permanent obligation; and certainly, the covenant by which both rulers and people are not only mutually bound to one another, but also to Him who is moral Governor of the nations, and Prince of the kings of the earth, can plead a still higher obligation. It is universally admitted that a righteous league between nation and nation is binding; and while the breach of international treaties is held to be perfidious and criminal, is there not aggravated sin in a nation breaking its covenant with God? Before the permanent obligation of the British Covenants can be set aside, objectors will require to shew that the nation is not possessed of a permanent moral identity - or, admitting this, that it is not still bound by its own just engagements. But such an identity and obligation can only be denied by repudiating, at the same time, all public faith, and by maintaining that no bonds or treaties whatever bind posterity. Few, it is presumed, are prepared to maintain a position that would evidently disorganise society, and destroy all public confidence. Those who, in our day, are most ready to repudiate the obligation of our fathers' sacred covenants, can strenuously plead for the continued obligation of engagements about matters of

civil or worldly interest, and would vehemently resist as opposed to all right reason, and a daring violation of public faith, the repudiation of the National Debt - of the Habeas Corpus Act, or of the compact of the British nation with the House of Hanover.

The allegation that the Covenants, National and Solemn League, were rejected by the nation at the Restoration, by the Act Rescissory, and that they have ceased to be obligatory - on the principle that the authority which enacted a law, may afterwards repeal it, is of no weight with those who consider properly the circumstances of the case, or who have due regard to Scriptural precedent. In the covenants of our illustrious forefathers, the exalted Mediator - the Head of the nation, was one of the contracting parties; and He can never give to a people a right to dispense with the obligation of solemn duties enjoined in his word. The apostasies of ancient Israel and the enactments of wicked princes did not set aside the obligation of the National Covenant, which God repeatedly styles *his* - the breach of which, too, inspired prophets frequently and expressly ascribe as the grand cause of national judgments. The existence of national sins necessarily implies that a people are implicated in the guilt of their forefathers, and that they are bound too, by their federal engagements. Few, it is presumed, will venture to carry out to its legitimate consequences the principle of the objection; and assert not only that the British Covenants are not binding, but likewise that no such public federal deeds are of continued obligation. This can only be attempted by a denial, or utter perversion of the many scriptural declarations, in which the permanent obligation of national covenants is declared or plainly inferred.

**TESTIMONIES IN FAVOUR OF THE
CONTINUED OBLIGATION OF THE
BRITISH COVENANTS.**

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The doctrine of the continued obligation of the British Covenants has been maintained and inculcated by many of the most distinguished servants of God in these countries, from the period that they were first framed, down to the present time. Our venerable ancestors - the Reformers and Martyrs of the seventeenth century, - explicitly avouched this sentiment, and declared their adherence to it, in the most solemn circumstances. The Solemn League itself asserts its lasting obligation. The Covenanters declare themselves bound to endeavor that the nations may "remain conjoined in a firm peace and union to all posterity." (Fifth Article). The General Assembly that proposed and adopted the Solemn League, in their Act of August 17th, 1643, declare the covenant to be "the most powerful means, by the blessing of God, for settling and preserving the Protestant religion with perfect peace in his Majesty's dominions, and propagating the same to other nations, and for establishing his Majesty's throne to all ages and generations."

On the last occasion, too, of the national renewal of the Solemn League in Scotland, the General Assembly in its "SEASONABLE AND NECESSARY WARNING," dated July 27th, 1649, strongly asserts its paramount obligation - "Albeit the League and Covenant be despised by that prevailing party in England, and the work of uniformity, through retardments and obstructions that have come in the way, be almost forgotten by these kingdoms, yet the obligation of that Covenant is perpetual; and all the duties contained therein are constantly to be minded and prosecuted by every one of us, and our posterity, according to their place and stations."

The Martyrs that suffered under the Prelatical persecution, from the first to the last, avouched steadfast belief in the perpetual obligation of the British Covenants, and sealed with their blood, this as a special and prominent article of their testimony. "God," said the noble MARQUIS OF ARGYLE on the scaffold, "hath laid

engagements on Scotland. We are tied by covenants to religion and reformation. Those that were then unborn are yet engaged; and it passeth the power of all magistrates under heaven to absolve them from the oath of God. They deceive themselves, and, it may be, would deceive others, who think otherwise." The REV. JAMES GUTHRIE, who suffered a few days after the Marquis of Argyle, said in his dying testimony - "I do bear witness to the National Covenant of Scotland, and the Solemn League and Covenant betwixt the three kingdoms. These sacred, solemn public oaths of God, I believe can be loosed by no person, or party, or power upon earth, but are still binding upon these kingdoms, and will be for ever hereafter; and are ratified and sealed by the conversion of many thousand souls, since our entering thereunto." The memorable last words of this excellent man, indicate how cordially he believed in the perpetual obligation of the covenants; and were prophetic of the future revival and triumph of the principles contained in them. A few minutes before he was turned over on the scaffold - raising the cap from his face, he firmly and loudly exclaimed - "*The Covenants - the Covenants will yet be Scotland's reviving.*"

Since the Revolution in 1688, when a Settlement, civil and ecclesiastical, was established, which amounted to a disannulling of the Covenanted Reformation, there have been, in these countries, always a number of witnesses, who have testified in behalf of the perpetual obligation of the nation's scriptural vows. True it is, the rulers at that period passed over in oblivion, the eminent attainments of reforming times, and the nation ingloriously acquiesced in the neglect and apostasy - while even the Presbyterian Church of Scotland uttered no protestation against acts which despoiled her of some of her most valuable privileges, and offered no plea in favour of former sacred engagements. But, for many years after the Revolution, a number of the most distinguished evangelical ministers of the Established Church of Scotland, continued to plead in

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their writings for the obligation of the covenants - to point out the evils flowing from the neglect and breach of federal vows- and to urge upon the Church and nation, a return to covenanted fidelity. Until the time that the baleful influence of Moderatism had extensively corrupted the Scottish National Church, there were always some within her pale to plead for the integrity and binding force of her time-honored federal engagements; and these were known as the ablest advocates of Scriptural doctrine and practical godliness. The men whose writings tended to promote the cause of evangelical truth, and to nourish the piety of Scotland during the incubus of moderatism and the declension of practical godliness, which characterised a great part of the eighteenth century - almost without exception, held the permanent obligation of the nation's sacred vows. Though their connection with the Revolution Church placed them in a position most unfavorable to give proper effect to their pleadings, there can be no doubt, that their writings tended to keep alive in the public mind a sense of federal obligation.⁶²

From the close of the Prelatical persecution, and the era of the Revolution, there have been not only individuals, but likewise religious bodies that have publicly professed adherence to the covenants, National and Solemn League, and that have embodied this profession in their ecclesiastical symbols. The SOCIETY PEOPLE - much as they have been misrepresented and reproached by historians of former and later times, and by writers of fiction, accounted it their honor to maintain the scriptural principles of the Second Reformation - and especially, to hold fast the sacredness and inviolability of the nation's vows. The OLD DISSENTERS, as

⁶² The excellent Willison of Dundee, whose works have been eminently blessed for the edification and comfort of God's people, in various parts of his writings, refers to the obligation of the British Covenants, and represents departure from them as a principle cause of the evil in the Church and of Divine displeasure against the nation.

they were termed, refused to incorporate either with the civil or ecclesiastical establishment of the Revolution, from a faithful regard to the covenants, National and Solemn League, which they cordially believed to be scriptural, and from the obligation of which they held, that no earthly power could absolve them. However the profane moralist may sneer at such men, or persons of lax and time-serving principles may condemn them, it must be confessed that they made a noble stand for sound principle, at a time when it was no easy task to oppose themselves to a nation's defection. Candid historians have at length begun to do them tardy justice; and we may hope that the day is coming, when, with the revival and spread of evangelical truth, their principles and conduct will be still farther appreciated.

The REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, claiming to be the proper descendants of Scotland's covenanted reformers and martyrs, from its earliest organisation, embodied an acknowledgment of the perpetual obligation of the British covenants, in the fundamental articles of its public profession; and has been a constant witness to it, in every by-past period of its history. It has given the most decided and unambiguous testimony to this important principle, by refusing to incorporate with the national society, or to take any part in national measures which would, in any degree, compromise it. The fathers of the SECESSION, without exception, professed in their writings and public ecclesiastical deeds, the same doctrine; and though that section of the Church early countenanced practices which appear to us incompatible with a full admission of the national obligation of the British Covenants; and the larger part of the Secession Body at a later period gave up this article of their profession, there has always been a distinguished minority, that have firmly maintained the principles which others rejected. Such truly-eminant men - as John Brown of Haddington - Dr. M'Crie, the historian of Knox and Melville, and Stevenson and Paxton, have emitted vindications of the doctrine of continued

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federal engagement, which opponents have never been able to answer; and they themselves willingly endured privations in maintaining this important doctrine.

At various times, too, the principle of descending covenant obligation has been practically exemplified by the renovation, by the Secession Church, of the British Covenants, in accommodation to its circumstances as an ecclesiastical body. This was done shortly after the first organisation of the Secession Church, by one of its branches;⁶³ and on several occasions, in later times, by the *Original Seceders* - that portion which, amidst various defections and trials, has adhered steadfastly to the grand principles of the Secession.⁶⁴ The large and influential body - the Free Church of Scotland - though it does not in its constitution, formally or explicitly own the obligation of the federal deeds of the fathers of the Scottish Reformation, and though its "*Claim of Rights*" is, in several instances, evidently incompatible with a full recognition of the Reformation attainments, has yet manifested, by numbers of its ministers and members, a sense of the value and importance of covenant obligation. In the "Overture of a Testimony" prepared by a committee, consisting of several leading ministers of the Free Church, the covenants of our fathers are mentioned in terms of the highest respect; and it is explicitly declared that both the Church and the nation lie under special obligation to be the Lord's

⁶³ The Anti-burgher part of the Secession. - See Gibb's Display.

⁶⁴ The most recent instance of Covenant-Renovation by this section of the Church occurred at the meeting of Synod held in Glasgow, in May 1853 - when the ministers and elders assembled manifested their earnest attachment to the British covenants, by swearing them, in a Bond suited to their state and circumstances.

The doctrine of continued federal obligation, and the special obligation of the British Covenants have been ably exhibited and defended in various writings of the late Dr. M'Crie, particularly in his "Sermons on the Unity of the Church," - and in the "Testimony of the Original Secession Church," and in the writings of Stevenson and Paxton.

people, in virtue of the Scriptural vows of their forefathers. An Association too has been recently formed among ministers and other office-bearers in the Free Church, in whose declaration of fundamental principles, the obligation of the British Covenants is strongly asserted. It is, moreover, confessed that prevailing evils in the Free Church and throughout the land are to be traced to breach of covenant; and the proposal is put forward to adopt practical measures for the revival of a sense of covenant-obligation, and even for the public renewal of former federal engagements. In some of the presbyteries of the Free Church, a similar proposal has been made and entertained. Such movements are to be regarded with deep interest. They indicate the special favour of the God of our fathers in keeping alive a sense of the principle of federal obligation. He remembers his covenant, by exciting his faithful servants to remember it. Though some may not be fully aware of the consequences to which a practical owning of the British Covenants would lead them, in dissolving connection with corrupt civil systems, yet we hail these pleadings and proposals as showing that great principles long neglected are rising into public notice, and that the time is hastening on, when, in the way of solemn federal dedication, many devoted men will resolutely contend for them, and achieve for them a glorious triumph. Events of a solemn character that are transpiring throughout the nations - the ominous signs of trials and changes of a momentous kind approaching - and the felt necessities of the Church for revival and a bond of union and co-operation in Christian effort, and for common defence against enemies and increasing evils, are pressing upon thoughtful and earnest minds inquiries into the nature of federal obligation; and are urging them to seek after the observance of an ordinance which inspired prediction assures us will be the basis of future revival and enlargement. These we regard as hopeful symptoms of the progress and ascendancy of a martyr-testimony; and we cannot but cherish the assured conviction

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that the federal union, Ephraim and Judah shall be “one stick” in the Lord’s hand - when the Lord shall be King over all the earth, - when there shall be one Lord, and his name one.