

**For Christ's Crown
And Covenant**

**An Introduction to the
Scottish Covenanters
For Senior School Students**

**Sovereign Grace Union
43 Warwick Road
Rayleigh
Essex
SS6 8PQ**

Preface

In the Preface to his monumental work of 1908 on the Covenanters between the Reformation of 1560 and the Bloodless Revolution of 1689, James King Hewison seeks to present “an absolutely impartial account of the Covenanters” in view of their gross misrepresentation by such writers as Sir Walter Scott. Brought up “among a peasantry whose ancestors fought and fell for the Covenant,” he felt under deep obligation to prove from “their religious and secular bonds and leagues” that they were neither “a rigid sect in the Christian Church” nor “a restless, rebellious political party.” During his researches, King Hewison discovered that the traditions passed from generation to generation beside many a cottage fireside were substantially corroborated by the records he consulted in various libraries.

Today, students of history are taught little or nothing about these God-fearing men, women and children who “loved not their lives to the death” for the sake of ‘Christ’s crown and covenant.’ In this brief study, I hope to remind our generation who these faithful servants of Christ were, what they stood and suffered for, and why we need to restore their principles and life-style to our nation. My prayerful desire in so doing is that their God and ours would mercifully fulfil the desire of the psalmist:

‘Turn us again, O Lord our God,
And upon us vouchsafe
To make Thy countenance to shine,
And so we shall be safe.’

(Psalm 80.3. Scottish Metrical Version)

John M Brentnall

Contents

Historical Introduction.....	
The Covenanters' Distinctive Principles.....	
1. Christ is Lord of the Conscience	
2. Christ is the only Head of His Church	
3. Christ is to be acknowledged in a Free State	
4. These principles are embodied in Scotland's Covenants	
Opposition to Covenanting Principles.....	
1. Its Source: Satan and his accomplices	
2. Its Grounds: Hatred for the Covenanters as Traitors	
3. Its Aims: The Extirpation of both Covenanters and their Principles	
4. Its Nature: Illegal Acts, Cunning and Deception, Flattery and Bribery, Threats, Pursued as Traitors, Imprisonment, Torture, Banishment, Judicial Murder	
Fruit of Covenanting Principles.....	
1. God was glorified by the Covenanters' Testimony	
2. Their Enemies were Punished	
3. A Priceless Heritage was Bequeathed to Us	
4. Many Covenanters were Delivered	
5. Conversions, Revivals, National Reformation	
The Covenanters and Ourselves.....	
1. A Priceless Heritage was Bequeathed to Us	
2. Our Declension from their Principles	
3. Our Great Need of Another Reformation	

Historical Introduction

The Covenanters were a great cloud of witnesses and a noble army of martyrs whose testimony and struggles took place between the burning of Patrick Hamilton, Scotland's proto-martyr, in 1528, and the execution of James Renwick, the last Covenanter to seal his testimony with blood, in 1688. Among their ranks were men and women from all classes of society – statesmen, scholars, ministers, lairds, writers, merchants, soldiers, weavers, farmers, housewives, labourers, servants, sailors, blacksmiths, and many others whose names are surely written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

They first emerged from obscurity during the regency of Mary of Lorraine, widow of James V; were branded by their enemies as Wycliffites, Lollards, New Testamentars and Sacramentarians; and had long practised the act of binding themselves together in alliances, covenants or bonds of communion known as 'godly bands.' As Gospel light spread increasingly throughout Scotland, more and more Christian believers adopted their practice.

The first notable covenant was signed at Dun in 1556, when John Knox and a few noblemen solemnly pledged themselves to "refuse all society with idolatry, and to the utmost of their powers maintain the true preaching of the Evangell of Jesus Christ, as God should offer unto them preachers and opportunity." A year later, while Knox was in Geneva, the enlarged group subscribed 'the common or godly band' in Edinburgh, called themselves 'God's congregation,' and vowed by His grace "with all diligence

to apply continually our whole power, substance and our very lives, to maintain, set forward and establish the most blessed Word of God.”

The three distinct covenants of 1559 (at Perth, Edinburgh and Stirling) resolve “to put away all things that dishonour His Name, that God may be truly and purely worshipped.”

The Leith-Edinburgh Covenant of 1560, subscribed by forty-nine influential laymen and landowners, besides seeking “to procure, by all means possible, that the Truth of God’s Word may have free passage within this realm,” asserted for the people of Scotland the right to conserve their ancient “freedoms and liberties.” As representatives of the Scottish people, they wished to be rid of Mary Stuart’s foreign court, with its continental manners, popish religion and French military protection. By widening its scope to include an important political principle this covenant wielded more influence than any of its predecessors. It provided the basis of agreement with Elizabeth I, the queen of Protestant England, and led directly to the recognition of the Reformed Faith by the Estates of Parliament.

This covenant was soon followed by the Confession of Faith, which was formally accepted as the doctrinal standard of the new Reformed Church. A series of Acts of Parliament abolished all papal authority and an Act of 1567 specified the Reformed Church as “the only true and holy kirk of Jesus Christ within this realm.”

The ideals of these early Covenanters may be summarized in the following points:

1. The restoration of the Word of God to its proper place as the only rule of faith and conduct.
 2. The complete overthrow of popery in Scotland.
 3. Subjection in all areas of Church life to the Headship of Christ the King.
 4. Liberty for everyone to read and apply the teachings of Holy Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
 5. The revival of true Gospel preaching.
 6. The freedom of the Church to convene and worship and conduct Christ's affairs without interference from the civil powers.
 7. The rights of Christian people to choose their own ministers and have any appeals heard in church and civil courts free from ideology and prejudice and vested interests.
 8. To give every child a decent education, every pauper self-respect and work, and every parish a godly minister.
- In short, they wished righteousness to exalt the nation.

The next generation of Covenanters was led by Andrew Melville, whose reforms stressed three major points:

- (1) The Church's independence of the Crown.
- (2) Its Government through the General Assembly.
- (3) Its Discipline through the eldership.

Under Melville's wise guidance the Scottish Reformation proceeded steadily till 1580, when the first National Covenant, prepared by John Craig, declared the people of Scotland's adherence to "the true Christian faith and religion, revealed by the blessed evangel, and received by the kirk of Scotland, as God's eternal Truth and only ground of our salvation." The covenant renounced all kinds of popery, and pledged to maintain "the king's majesty in the defence of Christ, against all enemies

within this realm or without.” It was signed by King James VI, the Privy Council and adult subjects throughout the kingdom, and was re-subscribed in 1590 and 1596. “The kirk of Scotland,” wrote the historian David Calderwood, “was now come to her perfection and the greatest purity that ever she attained unto, both in doctrine and discipline, so that her beauty was admirable to foreign kirks. The assemblies of the saints were never so glorious.”

Among Melville’s successors who held aloft the banner of the covenant John Davidson is noteworthy for the power in his ministry. In 1596 he led over two hundred Scots ministers in a notable day of humiliation held in St Giles, Edinburgh. His last work was a book on *The Enemies of Christ’s Church*. It condemns prelacy as ‘the most subtle and prevalent means to destroy and overthrow religion that ever could have been devised.’ He was long remembered as a venerable ‘father’ of the Kirk.

Other remarkable leaders from this period were John Welsh, the Reformed minister of Ayr. Banished to Blackness Castle for alleged treason, Welsh said how preferable it was for him to experience the darkness of Blackness rather than the blackness of darkness! It was Welsh's remarkable praying and preaching that contributed most to the life of the Church during this turbulent period. He often spent eight hours in prayer.

Robert Rollock, first Principal of Edinburgh University, was influential in training God-fearing students for the ministry, while Robert Bruce of Kinnaird was the means of converting multitudes in and around Larbert and Inverness.

The years between 1596 and 1638 witnessed a powerful and subtle attempt by the Stuart kings (James VI and I, and Charles I) and their parasitic prelates to rob Scotland of her freedom in Christ and to drag her back under the tyranny of men. But their covenant God was their defence.

The conflict reached a climax in 1638, when representatives of the entire nation publicly renewed their covenant with God in Greyfriars churchyard, Edinburgh. In this solemn spot the Reformers gathered all the legitimate charters of the nation into one document and presented them to Jehovah. This was Scotland's reply to Whitehall and Canterbury. The 1638 Assembly, the first free Assembly to be convened in forty years, excommunicated the prelates and secured the Reformed Faith and Presbyterian Church government for a further two decades.

Of this sun-blink in Scotland's cloudy sky, the church historian Kirkton wrote: "I verily believe that there were more souls converted to Christ in that short time [i.e. 1638-1660, 'between the signing and the sifting'] than in any other season since the Reformation . . . Every parish had a minister, every village had a school, every family almost had a Bible." Children were seen reading the Scriptures, swearing was almost unheard anywhere, and throughout the largest part of the country "you would not have lodged in a family where the Lord was not worshipped by reading, singing and public prayer." Further, "every minister was a very full professor of the Reformed religion."

During this period, Scottish loyalty to the crown was sorely tried. Following victory over the Scots, who supported Charles I, Oliver Cromwell established Protectorate rule over Scotland, even forbidding the General Assembly of the Church to meet. Despite this illegal encroachment on the Church's rights, the land enjoyed great peace, a high level of morality and considerable stability. Such prudent leaders as Alexander Henderson and Lord Johnstone of Warriston were at the helm of affairs, and guided the ship of the Church safely. Meanwhile a spiritual galaxy, comprising Samuel Rutherford, Robert Blair, David Dickson, William and James Guthrie, Andrew Gray, James Durham, Hugh Binning and others, fed the people of Scotland with 'the finest of the wheat.' Furthermore, they proved to be sharp arrows in the Lord's hand against Christ's enemies and sensitive comforters to all 'mourners in Zion.' Their sermons, treatises and commentaries are pure gold.

The coronation of Charles II at Scone in 1650 by loyal Scots proved a tragic turning point in the history of the Covenanters. John Livingstone, a Scottish Covenanted minister accompanying Charles from Holland, stated his belief that they were bringing God's wrath back to Scotland. The twenty-eight years between the Restoration of the monarchy (1660) and the Glorious Revolution (1688) proved him right. These were among the most terrible and yet most glorious in the history of any church or nation. They were terrible in revealing the diabolical cruelty of the persecutors of Christ in His members on earth, yet glorious in manifesting the heroic steadfastness of the persecuted. They 'loved not their lives to the death.'

A series of cruel laws, ensnaring questions, crafty indulgences, conscience-forcing oaths, letters of intercommuning, trumped up charges and appalling punishments all succeeded in dividing and weakening the 'faithful of the land.' Such tools of Satan as Archbishop Sharp, the Duke of Lauderdale, the Duke of Rothes, James Graham of Claverhouse (known for his cruelty as 'Bluidy Clavers'), Lord Advocate Mackenzie, 'Black Tam' Dalziel of Binns, James Grierson of Lagg, and the two last Stuart kings (Charles II and James II) wrought havoc among them till only a very small remnant remained. John Howie's *Scots Worthies*, the collection known as *A Cloud of Witnesses*, Alexander Shields' *A Hind Let Loose* and Robert Simpson's *Tales of the Covenanters* recount many a heroic deed and providential deliverance under their tyranny.

During the Killing Time (1684-5), government troops were empowered without indictment or judicial process to kill anyone they met suspected of disaffection to the government and curates, on their refusal to take the Abjuration Oath and answer ensnaring questions to their satisfaction. John Hunter was shot on the spot near Moffat for possessing a Bible; John Brown of Priesthill was ruthlessly murdered before his wife and children for espousing Christ's kingship above that of Charles; many others were imprisoned and tortured.

After prolonged and intense suffering the oppressed nation's cries were heard in heaven and relief was sent. A series of rapid events in England brought James II's reign to an end, and without the shedding of one drop of blood (hence the description 'The Bloodless Revolution')

William of Orange was accepted along with his wife Mary, James' daughter and legitimate heir to the throne. The Declaration of Rights established the throne on a Protestant basis and made it impossible for any but a Protestant to be sovereign. In 1689 William and Mary were crowned in Westminster Abbey, taking for the first time the coronation oath to "preserve the church as it is now established by law."

Historians differ over the use of the term 'revolution,' yet it is clear that a decisive change took place in the relationship between King, Parliament and Church. Britain had been unique in Europe in having a King of a faith different from that of the majority of his subjects. The events of 1688 secured the Protestantism of future sovereigns. These events dovetailed in such a remarkable way that we can only ascribe them to the kind providence of God.

The testimony for which the later Covenanters contended so strenuously and suffered so joyfully, was for the Sole Headship of Christ over His own Church. The precise point at issue between them and their enemies was not whether Christ is Head with respect to all vital spiritual and moral influence in the Church, but whether He is the Head with respect to Government and Direction. The House of Stuart claimed an inherent 'divine right of kings' to exercise jurisdiction over all causes, both civil and ecclesiastical. The Covenanters held that such a claim was a sacrilegious usurpation of Christ's spiritual authority and an impious invasion of His sovereignty; hence their resistance. As Samuel Rutherford expressed the matter:

‘We owe to our royal King and princely Master a testimony.’

‘For Christ’s Crown and Covenant’ was the motto emblazoned on their banners on the fields of Rullion Green, Drumclog, Bothwell Bridge and Ayrs Moss. It was the ground of all their Declarations, as at Rutherglen and Sanquhar; the substance of their defence before circuit courts, rulers and councils; the theme of their scaffold testimonies; the burden of their prayers and the substance of their sermons. It was the core of their books, such as *Naphtali*, *A Hind Let Loose* and *The Cloud of Witnesses*, the principle behind their subscription to the National Covenant, the Solemn League and Covenant and the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, Directory of Public Worship and Form of Church Government.

The following four testimonies are characteristic:

- (1) ‘I leave my testimony against Popery, Prelacy, Erastianism; against all profanity and everything contrary to sound doctrine; particularly against all usurpations made upon Christ’s right, who is the Prince of the Kings of the earth, who alone must bear the glory of ruling His own kingdom, the Church.’ (James Renwick)
- (2) ‘I am come here this day to lay down my life for owning Jesus Christ’s despised interest, and for asserting that He is King, and for averring that He is Head of His own Church.’ (James Skene)
- (3) ‘I suffer for maintaining that Christ is a free King in His own house.’ (Isabel Alison)
- (4) ‘I leave my testimony as a dying man against the horrid usurpation of our Lord’s prerogative and crown right.’ (Captain John Paton)

Conclusion

Perhaps the stirring words of John M'Main best summarize our feelings in relation to the Covenanters. How can we read their testimonies, he laments, "without blushing for our low attainments and small proficiency in the school of Christ! How unlike we are to them! How zealous were they for the honour of Christ! How lukewarm are we, of whatever profession or denomination! How burning was their love to Him, His truths, ordinances and people! How cold is ours! How self-denied and crucified to the world were they! How selfish and worldly are we! . . . Well, these martyrs are now in heaven . . . enjoying the crown laid up for them, confirmed in an unchangeable state of rest and blessedness; we are yet in the stage of action . . . we have our trials before us. Let us [then] imitate the Cloud of Witnesses, and contend for the faith once delivered to the saints."

The Covenanters' Distinctive Principles

Introduction

The three distinctive principles undergirding the Scottish Covenanters' testimony are as follows:

1. Christ is Lord of the Conscience
2. Christ is the only Head of His Church
3. Christ is to be acknowledged in a Free State

These principles are embodied in their covenants, renewed and adapted throughout their history according to need.

Let us consider them.

1. Christ is Lord of the Conscience

This principle may be stated more fully as: **“Christ, and Christ alone, by His Word and Spirit, is the only Lord of the conscience.”**

At the very dawn of the Scottish Reformation, when Adam Wallace was accused in 1551 of ‘such horrible crimes of heresy as were never before heard or thought of in the kingdom,’ the principle is beautifully stated in Wallace’s reply to his accusers: “My lords, I never said nor taught anything but what I found written in this Book, which is the Word of God; and if you be content to judge me by the Word of God, here it is, and what I have said wrong, for that I shall be content to suffer punishment, for never said I anything concerning this accusation but what I found in this Book.”

An example of the power with which this principle took hold of men’s minds may be seen in the case of Lord Ruthven, Provost of Perth at the time of the First

Reformation. Commanded by the Queen Regent to suppress the Reformers in his town, he replied: "I can make their persons and their goods subject to your Majesty, but I have no power over their minds and consciences."

In his confrontations with Queen Mary, Knox checked her claim that conscience told her that the Church of Rome was the true Church of God with the retort: "Conscience, Madam, requires knowledge. And I fear that right knowledge have ye none."

Two generations later, when Charles I sought to impose High Anglicanism on his Scottish subjects, Lord Loudon told him: "The people of Scotland will obey you in everything with the utmost cheerfulness, provided you do not touch their religion and their conscience."

In 1647, when the old *Scots Confession* was replaced by the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the same truth is boldly asserted in chapter 20, paragraph 2: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to His Word."

We also find the same testimony near the close of the covenanting period. Addressing Christian friends for the last time before her execution in 1681, Marion Harvie said: "I adhere to the holy and sweet Scriptures of God, which have been my rule in all I have done, in which my soul has been refreshed . . . I adhere to the Confession of Faith BECAUSE agreeable to the Scriptures." This is the essence of the Covenanters' testimony on this point.

Through out their history, they rested on such Scriptures as Matthew 23.10; Acts 4.19 and 5.29; James 4.12.

2. Christ is the only Head of His Church

If Christ is Lord of the individual conscience, the Covenanters claimed, He is also Lord of the Church's conscience. He alone is her Head, and her life and character must not be taken from Rome, or Canterbury, nor even Geneva, but from His own authoritative Word. This is why the framers of the 1560 Confession laid down as the leading mark of the 'true Kirk' that she "always heareth and obeyeth the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor."

John Welsh, Knox's son-in-law, gave as the special reason for his imprisonment in Blackness Castle that "first . . . Christ is the Head of His Church; secondly, that she is free in her government from all jurisdictions except Christ's."

So too in 1649 the Preamble to an act of parliament expressly acknowledges the Kingship of Christ by stating: "everything in the house of God must be ordered according to His will and commandment."

When the covenanting minister John Livingstone was ordered to leave his charge at Ancrum, he reminded his flock: "the prerogative royal of Jesus Christ, and the peace of a man's own conscience, are not to be violated on any consideration."

Isabel Alison also, about to suffer martyrdom, issued as her testimony: "I lay down my life for adhering to Jesus Christ, His being a free King in His own house."

3. Christ is to be acknowledged in a Free State

Since religious freedom is the great bulwark of civil freedom, we find the Covenanters asserting the rule of Christ over the State. Their view was that, as 'King of nations' Christ should be acknowledged in a free state, governed by a freely elected parliament, and that His Word should be the directory of the conscience of the nation.

Two writers in particular gave this principle great prominence: George Buchanan and Samuel Rutherford.

Buchanan's treatise *De Jure Regni apud Scotos* (1579) denounces both tyranny and anarchy in the boldest terms, placing both rulers and people subject to justice as embodied in the Moral Law of God. The laws by which every nation should be governed, he claimed, are derived not only from "the inmost recesses of nature," but have also been specifically "ordained by God, explained by His inspired prophets, and confirmed by the Son of God, Himself also God." Furthermore, it is sin "to add, to retrench, to repeal or alter a single article in those laws." Consequently all civil authority is to be "circumscribed and confined to fixed limits" so that civil rulers are "to exhibit a living example of divine justice."

Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex* re-affirms all Buchanan's major conclusions. In a series of intricate arguments it proves that "truth to Christ cannot be treason to Caesar," adding forcefully: "the conscience of the monarch and the conscience of the inferior judges are equally *under immediate subjection to the King of kings*." Acting on Christ's behalf, the civil ruler is to be the "keeper, preserver and avenger of God's law."

Many a Covenanting sermon, commentary and testimony echoes these sentiments, thereby rooting the principle into the heart of the nation. Says David Dickson, for example: "It is no disparagement to the greatest monarchs to be subject to Christ Jesus, to stand in awe of Him, to submit themselves to Him, and promote His service to their power; for the command to all and to them in special is: 'Serve the Lord in fear.' (*Commentary on Psalm 2.11*)" The government's repeated refusal to give Christ the kiss of allegiance drew from the Covenanting martyr Donald Cargill the lament: "I thought it was as if I had seen one wearing my Husband's garments after he had killed Him."

Principles embodied in Covenants

These three principles asserting the sole Headship of Christ over the individual, the Church and the State were embodied in a series of covenants. Joshua's example (Joshua 24.1-28) and later Biblical renewals of the covenant (Solomon in 1 Kings 8 and Ezra 10) were adduced as precedents. Those who subscribed to them, including some of the noblest in the land, were resolved to give their lives in maintaining them. Indeed, many of them did so, both in the fields and on the scaffold.

The *National Covenants* of 1580 and 1638, along with the *Solemn League and Covenant* of 1643, are the most prominent banners displayed because of the truth in Scotland's chequered history. They were rallying points around which the soldiers of Christ gathered to fight the good fight of faith.

Although the late Professor G. D. Henderson stated fifty or so years ago that there was no likelihood of the

covenants being renewed today, a return to Scotland's covenanted God is her most pressing need. As he mounted the scaffold before his judicial murder, James Guthrie expressed the hope that one day the nation would return to her forsaken God. "The covenants, the covenants," he cried, "shall yet be Scotland's reviving!"

Conclusion

The covenanting principle has far-reaching consequences for our nation today. With the blessing of God, its faithful implementation would be the means of converting many to Christ and a God-fearing, upright way of life; of cleansing the professing Church of its unauthorised and unworthy elements; and of reforming the state till it would reflect the righteousness God requires of us in the Bible. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14.34)

The historian Kirkton confirms this when, writing of the period "between the signing and the sifting" (1638-1660) he recalls: "Every parish had a minister, every village had a school, every family almost had a Bible." Children were found reading the Scriptures, swearing was almost unheard anywhere, and throughout large areas of the country "you would not have lodged in a family where the Lord was not worshipped by reading, singing and public prayer." Indeed, "every minister was a very full professor of the Reformed religion." The Anglican Bishop Burnet tells the same story: "The ministers were so full of the Scriptures, and so ready at extempore prayer, that from that they grew to extempore sermons. They had brought the people to such a degree of knowledge that cottagers and servants could have prayed *extempore* . . . As they [the

ministers] lived in great familiarity with their people, and used to pray and to talk often with them in private, so it can hardly be imagined to what a degree they were revered and loved by them.”

Not only so, the crown rights of King Jesus became the very motto of the nation’s military life. When the gallant Scots army lay at Dunse-muir (1639), notes the historian Stevenson: “each captain had his colours flying at his tent door, whereon was this inscription in letters of gold: CHRIST’S CROWN AND COVENANT.”

As the 21st century proceeds, there is not even ‘a cloud the size of a man’s hand’ indicating a desire to renew our covenant with God. As the late Finlay Beaton of Inverness once said: “This nation has been taken higher than any other since Old Testament Israel in being in covenant with God, and no nation has been brought lower after such a privilege.” How are the mighty fallen!

Opposition to Covenanting Principles

Introduction

The enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Genesis 3.15) broke out in open persecution during the Restoration period (1660-1688). This persecution was ruthless, bloody and remorseless. It has been calculated that around eighteen thousand Scottish Covenanters suffered in one way or another during the persecution, government and prelatic cruelty reaching its peak in 'the killing time' around 1685.

1. Its Source

There can be no doubt that the source of all the opposition to the Covenanters and their principles was Satan, who from the beginning has been a murderer of both souls and bodies. The Covenanters understood this well when they quoted the apostle's words: "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6.12) So we find even the moderate Robert Baillie preaching in 1643 on Zechariah 3.1-2 a sermon entitled 'Satan the leader in chief to all who resist the reparation of Zion.'

In this war to the death, Satan's agents, accomplices and tools were chosen mainly from those in authority, in both State and Church.

State Persecutors

David Dickson expected this from his study of Scripture in general, and Psalm 2 in particular. Commenting on verse 2

of this Messianic Psalm, he writes: “The chief instruments that Satan stirreth up against Christ, to be heads and leaders to heathen and godless people in opposing and persecuting Christ’s kingdom and church, are the magistrates, rulers and statesmen, that he may colour his malice with the shadow of authority and law.”

George Hutcheson identified the same enemy from his reading of Habakkuk 2.12 – “Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity.” He says: “Pretence of public good and zeal to advance the State and government is one of the fig-leaves with which men think to cover their oppression and make it plausible.”

Besides the House of Stuart and their faction, lay patrons and power-hungry nobles such as Maitland of Lethington were not slow to cast in their lot with Christ’s enemies. Even as early as Knox’s day, when the intrepid Reformer condemned Lethington’s covetousness before the Scottish parliament, the resentful landowner was heard to remark cynically: “We may now forget ourselves and bear the barrow to build the house of God.” Knox, we recall, wanted the nobility’s ill-gotten gains to be ploughed into education, care for the poor, and sustenance for the ministry, and so to benefit Scotland as a whole.

Other tools of the devil were French troops quartered in Edinburgh and Haddington; antagonistic or intimidated members of parliament; defectors from the covenanting cause (such as Muncie of Durisdeer) who turned informers and betrayed God’s people to their enemies; cold-blooded dragoons and their captains such as Tam Dalziel

(nicknamed ‘the Muscovite ox’ and ‘the great Russina bear’) and John Graham of Claverhouse (‘bluidy Clavers’). Either out of lust for spoil or from sheer cruelty, they all wrought havoc amongst the faithful of the land.

Church Persecutors

Allied to monsters in the State were cunning ‘churchmen’ such as the Romish priest Cardinal Beaton (Knox’s ‘carnal cardinal’); Archbishop Sharp (‘Sharp of that ilk’); Bishop Paterson (inventor of the thumb screws!); Archbishop Laud (who had Alexander Leighton’s nose slit, ears cut off, face branded with a hot iron, and all his goods confiscated while he was in prison); and intruded curates (whom Wodrow described as ‘the dregs of the nation’ for their ignorance and illiteracy). These enjoyed the superstitious and cowed support of thousands among the people.

It is noteworthy that, when the Covenanters were the only ones in the land who had the true interests of both Church and State at heart, their chief persecutors were drawn from Church and State leaders. As Hugh M’Kail aptly said, referring to Charles II, Lord Advocate Mackenzie and Archbishop Sharp respectively, there is “a Pharoah on the throne, a Haman in the state, and a Judas in the church.” One perceptive observer put the matter in a nutshell when he remarked: “The Church must disregard the voice of Christ, her only King, and adopt prelacy at the bidding of Caesar!”

2. Its Grounds

The *actual* grounds of opposition to the Covenanters was Satan’s and his minions’ hatred of Christ; for all his

enmity, malice, guile and envy are always directed primarily at the Son of God in our nature, whose obedience unto death both sealed his downfall and robbed him of his usurped power. As members of the Body of Christ, believers are the targets at which Satan shoots his fiery darts. As John Donne, the non-persecuting Dean of St. Paul's, said: "Satan hates us, but is loath to lose us."

The *alleged* grounds of persecution, however, were as vile and plausible as those of the Jews against their Messiah. Just as they pretended that Christ was a threat to imperial Rome, so the enemies of the Covenanters cried out against them with the same feigned allegiance: "We have no king but Caesar!"

James Melville saw this clearly enough when, while weighing his persecutors' charge that 'it was not for religion, but for high treason, that such are so handled,' he told his hearers: "Do you not here espy the craft of the cruel fiend, who dare not in this age of knowledge and light of the Gospel oppose himself against the truth, as the scribes and Pharisees durst not gainstand the doctrine of Christ, but seeks, under pretence of laws and cloaks of justice, to make the godly and true professors and preachers to be shameful spectacles, that thereby men may be ashamed of the verity of the evangel; even as Christ was put to death under the name of sedition and treason." While, therefore, the actual ground of persecution was hatred, the alleged ground was treason.

3. Its Aims

If the grounds of opposition to the Covenanters were deceitfully disguised, its aims were not. Their enemies

avowedly sought the extirpation of both the Covenanters and their principles. Because God was not in all their thoughts, they foolishly believed that if they could kill the witnesses, they could silence the witness. As the Word of God has taught from the beginning, there can be no compromise settlement between truth and error, no peaceful co-existence between godliness and wickedness. The triumph of one is the defeat of the other.

In this, however, they made the fatal mistake of forgetting that “the Lord reigneth,” and that the death of His people is not the death of His cause. Driven by blind hatred and lust for power, they may have slain thousands on the moors and scaffolds of Scotland, but they could not bury the principles for which the Covenanters were happy to die.

4. Its Nature

Nevertheless, the nature of their attempts confirmed the truth that “the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” (Proverbs 12.10)

a. Illegal Acts

In the first place, they framed iniquity by a law (Psalm 94.20) by passing Acts of Parliament that were utterly subversive of the Gospel. By a legal loophole in the 1567 Act, which retained the right of lay patrons to foist the men of their choice on a people, willy-nilly, an army of wooden, lifeless curates were forced onto congregations. Before long, these ‘Tulchan bishops,’ as they were shrewdly called by the Scottish peasantry (a tulchan being a calf’s skin stuffed by the farmer with straw to make the cow give milk!) threatened to over-run the entire country.

In this allegory, the calves were the servile curates who were satisfied with the mere title; the cow was the people, always giving to their greedy overlords; and the farmer was the feudal barons and prelates who grew rich with the takings!

This wretched practice led Patrick Adamson to observe three kinds of bishop in Scotland: 1. 'My Lord Bishop.' 2. 'My Lord's Bishop.' 3. 'The Lord's Bishop.' "My Lord Bishop," he explained, was "the Popish and Prelatical kind." My Lord's Bishop was "the Tulchan," and the Lord's Bishop was "the true minister." Here we see canny Scottish character and pawky Scots humour combine to shrewd effect!

In 1584 further Acts of Parliament, known as the 'Black Acts,' laid all the powers in Church and State at the king's feet; and though these were later annulled, the year 1606 saw James I and VI, now king of England and Scotland, recognized by law as 'absolute prince, judge and governor over all persons, estates and causes, both spiritual and temporal, within his said realm.' From this time on, James' hired servants were foisted on General Assemblies and intruded into Presbyteries till by 1618 the Church stood in abject submission to the State.

Later on in the covenanting struggle, after Charles II had deceived many faithful Presbyterians by his swearing of the Covenant, in one blow (by the Act Recissory of 1661) he struck out of the statute book every law favouring the cause of Christ, and imposed new tyrannical legislation on the nation. By the time Middleton's 'Drunken Parliament' sat, Scotland had become a police state.

b. Cunning and Deception

The second weapon used by the enemies of Christ's crown and covenant was cunning and deception. An example of their methods may be seen in the case of Adamson, Archbishop of St. Andrews, and the chief tool of King James' Erastian policy in Scotland. Adamson framed a covenant to be subscribed by all ministers, asserting the king's supremacy over the Church '*according to the Word of God.*' This ensnaring phrase trapped several into selling their birthright, including John Craig and John Erskine of Dun. "It was," comments James Melville bluntly, "as if one should say he would obey the pope and his prelates according to the Word of God."

A generation later, we find Charles I secretly instructing the Marquis of Hamilton, his commissioner to the 1638 General Assembly: "You must labour that bishops may have votes in assemblies, which if you cannot obtain, then you are to protest in their favour in the most fervent manner you can think of. As for the Moderator in the Assembly, you are to labour that he may be a bishop . . . You are to labour that the Five Articles of Perth (all Anglican, not Presbyterian) to be held as indifferent . . . You are to protest against the abolishing of bishops, and to give way to as few restrictions of their power as you can . . . You are to advise the bishops to forbear sitting at the council till better and more favourable times for them."

Again, he says: "I give you leave to flatter them with what hopes you please, so you engage not me against any grounds, and in particular that you consent neither to the calling of Parliament nor General Assembly until the Covenant be disavowed and given up, your chief end

being to win time that they may not commit public follies until I be ready to suppress them.” Again, he adds: “And as for this General Assembly, though I can expect no good from it, yet I hope you may hinder much of the ill; first, by putting divisions among them concerning the legality of their elections, then by protestations against their tumultuous proceedings. And, I think it were not amiss if you could get their freedom defined (before their meeting) so that it were not done too much in their favour.”

c. Flattery and Bribery

A further means of undermining the unity and strength of God’s people was flattery and bribery.

Regent Morton, for example, always scheming to overthrow the young Reformed Church, repeatedly sought to bend the integrity of Andrew Melville by offering him the Archbishopric of St. Andrews.

During the Great Persecution, in 1674 the sum of 400 Scots pounds was offered for the capture of the field preacher Gabriel Semple, while anyone who offered him protection could be slain with impunity. Similarly, 5000 merks were offered for the capture of Donald Cargill, dead or alive, following his excommunication of the king and his councillors. In such ways these faithful servants of God were treated as common gangsters.

d. Threats

In addition, threats of the severest kind were made to try and intimidate the Covenanters into submission. The Montgomery case of 1582 yields a notorious example. Because a certain Montgomery had been canvassing for

the Bishopric of Glasgow (!), he was expected to be disciplined at the next General Assembly of the Church. But the king's Messenger at Arms forbade the Assembly to excommunicate him, "under the pains of rebellion and putting them to the horn." In the event, the Assembly ignored the threat, and debarred the offender from all church privileges.

In the same year, at Perth, before the king himself and his council, Captain James Stewart stepped forward and belligerently demanded of the Covenanting ministers who had presented their grievances to the court: "Who dare subscribe these treasonable articles?" To which Andrew Melville replied: "We dare, and will subscribe them, and give our lives in the cause." Taking the pen from the clerk, he signed before them all, followed by his brethren.

e. Pursued as Traitors

When these threats failed to subdue the Covenanters' spirits, sterner measures were taken. Shields' *A Hind Let Loose*, Howie's *Scots Worthies*, *A Cloud of Witnesses*, Peden's *Life*, Renwick's *Letters*, Smellie's *Men of the Covenant*, Simpson's *Traditions of the Covenanters*, Purves' *Fair Sunshine*, tell their story with appreciation and candour.

Some spent much of their time on the Ayrshire and Galloway moors fleeing from the merciless dragoons. The historian Kirkton writes: "I have known John Welsh ride three days and two nights without sleep, and preach upon a mountain at midnight in one of the nights!"

Robert Gillespie was persecuted from the day he was licensed to preach till the day of his death, merely for proclaiming Christ's evangel.

f. Imprisonment

Gospel ministers especially, though not exclusively, were thrown into squalid dungeons, as at Edinburgh Castle, Inverness, Blackness and the Bass Rock.

In 1660, John Scott and James Guthrie, with two of their ruling elders, met in Edinburgh to greet Charles II on his return from exile, and to remind him of his covenant pledges to the people of Scotland. For their loyalty, they were imprisoned the same night in Edinburgh Castle, where their harsh treatment caused permanent mental damage to one of them.

In 1611, John Straitoun of Forres was imprisoned in Inverness Castle, where he died after two years, merely for denouncing the prelates and refusing to acknowledge the Bishop of St. Andrews.

John Welsh of Ayr was clapped in Blackness Castle for attending the Church's Assembly in Aberdeen, which the king had forbidden. There he penned his famous letter to Lillias Dunbar, and quipped that he was so thankful to be in the darkness of Blackness, and not in the blackness of darkness!

Alexander Peden, James Fraser of Brea, and the younger Robert Traill, to name no more, were confined to a loathsome dungeon on the Bass Rock, two miles off shore

in the Firth of Forth. Many accounts survive of their and others' sufferings and cheerful faith.

One of the numerous incidents of appalling cruelty at this time is connected with 'Dreadful' Dunnotar Castle, near Stonehaven, on the Aberdeenshire coast. It was the scene of the most appalling cruelty to 122 men and 45 women who were herded like cattle and marched all the way from Edinburgh to their sea-girt prison. Their crime was hearing with some joy of the Earl of Argyll's attempt to free his country from popery (1685). Here they were thrust into a filthy cellar known as 'the Whig's Vault' (40ft long by 6ft high by 18ft wide), "full of mire, ankle deep," with only "one window towards the sea" (Wodrow), and kept there all summer. With no toilet, no change of clothes, and made to pay for all food and water brought to them, many grew sick and faint, "stifled for want of air." Some of them caught dysentery; others died of disease, their fellow prisoners not being allowed even to bury them. Those who remained (including the godly minister John Fraser of Alness) were not given so much as a candle to tend to the sick and dying at night! On one occasion, 25 escaped, but some were shot in the attempt. Fifteen of them were betrayed by a washerwoman on the beach, apprehended and tortured with lighted matches placed between their fingers till they burnt to the bone! Some died of the torture. Only the intercession of the governor's lady alleviated the sufferings of the women.

g. Torture

In some cases, the authorities resorted to barbaric cruelty in attempting to extort confessions from their victims, whose only 'crimes' had been preaching or hearing the

Gospel, or defending themselves against lawless murderers.

The most notorious form of torture was 'The Boot,' a punishment from watching which even members of the Council shrank, but which James II and VII sat through 'with an unmoved indifference.' The prisoner's leg and knee were enclosed in a tight iron case. A wedge was then placed between the knee and the rim of the case, and heavy blows of a mallet crushed both knee and calf.

For stating publicly that the Church was persecuted "sometimes by a Pharaoh on the throne, sometimes by a Haman in the state, and sometimes by a Judas in the Church," the gracious young minister Hugh M'Kail received eleven blows, till his leg was smashed to pulp, after which he was imprisoned without medical attention, and hanged four days later! Amazingly, by the grace of God, M'Kail retained his sense of humour to the last. When asked on the day before his execution: "How's your leg?" he replied: "I don't worry about my leg. I'm too busy thinking of my neck!"

h. Banishment

David Black, minister at St. Andrews, was banished to the Highlands in 1596 for his alleged 'injurious expressions' from the pulpit.

In 1600, Robert Bruce of Kinnaird was banished to France for refusing to give thanks according to the prescribed form for the king's deliverance from the Gowrie Conspiracy. Five years later, he was banished to Inverness as a dangerous man; yet it was his vigilance under God

that had kept the kingdom secure while his monarch was absent marrying Anne of Denmark!

The same year, eight ministers were banished to the Highlands and Islands, and six were exiled abroad, for protesting against James' arbitrary interdiction of the Church's General Assembly. On this occasion, Gilbert Brown, a notorious papal agent, was freed from prison and entertained at public expense. Noted a chronicler of the day: "Barabbas was released, and the faithful preachers of the Word of God were retained in loathsome dungeons."

In 1617 the church historian David Calderwood, minister of Crailing, in Fifeshire, was deprived of his living, imprisoned first at St. Andrews, then at Edinburgh, and finally deported to Holland. A petition to defer his deportation on account of heavy storms in the North Sea was met by James I with the retort: "If he be drowned in the seas he may thank God he hath escaped a worse death."

In 1636 Samuel Rutherford was banished to Aberdeen, an Episcopal stronghold, for denouncing Arminianism and prelacy. He was, however, not imprisoned, but lodged "in an honest man's house." While there, he penned many of his famous letters, and won several to Christ through his private ministry.

Donald Cargill was banished north of the River Tay for refusing to keep the Thanksgiving Day for the restoration of Charles II.

Others were deported to the British colonies overseas.

i. Judicial Murder

Like their Saviour before them, many Covenanters suffered judicial murder at the hands of cruel monsters who acted as accuser, judge and jury rolled into one.

Two notorious cases were those of Daniel McMichael of Blairfoot and John Brown of Priesthill.

Weak with fever, McMichael was concealed by friends in caves as the dragoons hunted him from moor to moor. When with the aid of sniffer dogs 'Black' Tam Dalziel found his prey, he led him away. Pausing at Dalveen Pass, he told him after interrogation: "Do you not know that your life is in my hand?" "No," he replied, "My life is in the Lord's hand, and if He see good, He can make you the instrument to take it away." Immediately he was ordered to make his last prayer, and was then shot. A crude but sincere inscription in Durisdeer churchyard reminds the reader:

'I rest in peace till Jesus rend the cloud,
And judge 'twixt me and those who shed my
blood.'

John Brown and his nephew were captured by John Graham of Claverhouse ('Bluidy Clavers') and his troops in 1685 at the height of 'the Killing Time.' Brown answered so well to his cross-questioning that Clavers remarked: "Well, if he has never preached, much has he prayed in his time. Go to your prayers, for you shall immediately die." Three times the Covenanter's prayer was interrupted. "I gave you leave to pray, and you have begun to preach," he bawled. "Sir," replied Brown, "You that calls this preaching know neither the nature of

preaching nor praying,” and finished his last prayer. “Take goodbye of your wife and children,” ordered Clavers. Isabel Brown stood by with a child in her arms and another child by Brown’s first wife by her side. He approached her and said: “Now, Isabel, the day is come that I told you would come when I spoke to you first of marrying me.” She replied: “Indeed, John, I can willingly part with you.” “That is all I desire,” he responded. “I have no more to do but to die. I have been in happy case to meet with death for so many years.” He kissed her and the children, and wished them blood-bought and Gospel-promised blessings. Clavers rudely interrupted and ordered his dragoons to shoot him. They were so deeply affected that they lowered their rifles and refused to fire. Immediately Clavers drew his pistol, put it to Brown’s head, and blew out his brains! Leering with evil, he turned to Brown’s widow and said: “And what do you think of your fine husband now?” Through her tears, she answered: “I ever thought much good of him, and more than ever now.” “It were but just to lay you beside him,” said Clavers. “If you were permitted, I doubt not your cruelty would go that length,” she said. “But then, how will ye answer to God for this morning’s work?” He replied haughtily: “To man I can be answerable. And as for God, I shall take Him into my own hand!” Then he rode off.

Two other examples of judicial murder were sixty-two-year-old Margaret Maclachlan and eighteen-year-old Margaret Wilson, drowned in the Solway outside Wigtown, in Galloway. Two long wooden stakes were driven into the bed of the burn (stream) that fills with seawater at high tide. The older saint, placed nearer the rising waters, never spoke a word to man; her last minutes on

earth were spent in communion with her Lord. As she was choking in the waves, the brutal soldiers asked the younger woman: "What do you think of her now?" She replied: "Think! I see Christ wrestling there. Think ye that we are sufferers? No, it is Christ in us, for He sends none a warfare at their own charges." She began to sing Psalm 25 at verse 7:

‘My sins and faults of youth
Do Thou, O Lord, forget;
After Thy mercy think on me,
And for Thy goodness great.

God good and upright is:
The way He'll sinners show;
The meek in judgment He will guide,
And make His paths to know.'

Then she read aloud from the Bible she had taken with her to the stake: "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8.37-39)

As soon as the waves touched her head, the soldiers pulled her out, and commanded her to pray for the king as supreme. She told them that she wished the salvation of all and the damnation of none. They dashed her head under the water and pulled her out again. Some one on the shore pled with her to obey them. But she said: "Lord, give him repentance, forgiveness, and salvation, if it be Thy holy will."

Grierson of Lagg, a hateful enemy of all godliness, cried out: "Damned bitch! We do not want such prayers. Tender her the oath." "No! No!" she replied. "No sinful oaths for me. I am one of Christ's children. Let me go." So they callously flung her back into the sea.

These two noble women loved not their lives to the death. David Hackston of Rathillet, already wounded from injuries suffered at Ayrsmoss, was captured and brought immediately before the Council in Edinburgh. True to Christ and His covenant, Hackston was sentenced to the most savage and barbaric death imaginable: the sentence was carried out to the detail. His hands were cut off, then he was drawn on a pulley to the top of the gallows. When he had choked a little, they let him down again. The hangman then opened his flesh with a sharp knife and pulled out his heart. It fell on the scaffold, and quivered there. The hangman picked it up on the point of his knife, and carrying it round the four corners of the scaffold, showed it the onlookers, saying: "Here is the heart of a traitor!" Hackston's heart and bowels were then burned; his head was cut off, and hanged on the Netherbow Port. His body was quartered, one part being displayed at St. Andrews, another at Glasgow, a third at Leith, and the fourth at Burntisland!

Such are the tender mercies of the enemies of Jesus Christ.

Fruit of Covenanting Principles

In a parting address to His disciples, our Lord and Saviour told them: “He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.” (John 15.5) That ‘noble army of martyrs’ known as the Covenanters (all martyrs in spirit, many so in fact) brought forth much fruit.

1. God was glorified by their Testimony

In the first place, God was glorified by their testimony. This testimony was both true to Holy Scripture and kept faithfully to the death. Let us call some of these witnesses, and hear how they glorified Him.

When Adam Wallace was about to be burned to death, he said: “Let it not offend you that I suffer death this day for the truth’s sake, for the disciple is not greater than his Master.”

When eighty-two-years-old Walter Mill arrived at the stake, he said: “I praise God that He hath called me among the rest of His servants to seal His truth with my life; and as I have received it of Him, so I willingly offer it up for His glory.”

When Andrew Melville was offered by Regent Morton the alternative of hanging or banishment, he replied: “It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or on the ground. The earth is the Lord’s . . . Let God be glorified, it will not be in your power to hang or exile His truth.”

When Donald Cargill was about to ascend the scaffold, he cried out: “This is the most joyful day that ever I saw in my pilgrimage on earth . . . I have been a man of great sins, but He has been a God of great mercies.”

When old Alan Cameron was shown the head and hands of his son Richard as he lay in prison at Edinburgh, and was cruelly asked if he knew them, he replied: “I know them. I know them. They are my son’s, my own dear son’s. It is the Lord. Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me or mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.”

When James Renwick wrote to absent friends from a hideout on the Ayrshire moors, he told them: “Though the world thinketh my case most miserable, yet I think it is so happy that I know not a man this day upon the face of the earth with whom I would exchange my lot . . .

O, I cannot express how sweet times I have had when the curtains of heaven have been drawn, when the quietness of all things in the silent watches of the night, has brought to my mind the duty of admiring the deep, silent and inexpressible ocean of joy and wonder, wherein the whole family of the higher house are everlastingly drowned, each star leading me out to wonder what **He** must be who is the Star of Jacob, the Bright and Morning Star, who maketh all His own to shine as stars of the firmament.”

These are a mere sample of the Covenanters’ God-glorifying testimony.

2. Their Enemies were Punished

Though God reserves the right to punish His people's enemies finally on the Last Day, He often metes out the beginnings of their torments in this life. Many examples of this truth survive from covenanting times.

When Regent Morton was executed for high treason in 1581, he echoed the well-known words of Cardinal Wolsey, executed by Henry VIII: "It is for my sins that God has justly brought me to this place, for if I had served my God as truly as I did my king, I had not come here."

Both Mary Queen of Scots and Charles I, sworn enemies of the Covenanters, were beheaded for high treason.

The voluptuous Charles II died joking, a hardened reprobate.

James II lost his throne and fled the country in fear.

Chancellor Rothes, enraged at Donald Cargill's answers during the Covenanter's examination, threatened him with death. Cargill replied: "My Lord Rothes, forbear to threaten me; for die what death I will, your eyes will not see it." Soon afterwards, Rothes died in agony on his bed.

At Cargill's mock trial, the council members cast equal votes, one half for imprisonment on the Bass Rock, the other for hanging. The Earl of Argyll, who had the deciding vote, said: "Let him go to the gallows, and die like a traitor!" Four years later, when the earl led an uprising against the government, he was found one morning in a very disturbed state of mind. He explained

that all the disappointments he had suffered during that affair did not trouble him nearly as much as his vote against Cargill. Then he added: "And now I am persuaded I shall die a violent death in that same spot where he died." This premonition was shortly afterwards fulfilled!

As Alexander Peden was conducting a service of worship in his prison on the Bass Rock, a woman mocked and laughed at him. "Poor thing," he said. "Thou mockest and laughest at the worship of God, but ere long God shall work such a sudden surprising judgment on thee that shall stay thy laughing, and thou shalt not escape it." Soon after, as she was walking along the cliffs of the Rock, a strong gust of wind swept her over the edge into the sea, where she was drowned!

In such ways as these the Covenanters' enemies were punished without them lifting a finger against them.

3. Many Covenanters were Delivered

Despite the deaths of so many of God's faithful servants, many covenanters were amazingly delivered from the hands of their enemies.

At the dawn of the Scottish Reformation, when the Queen Regent was about to crush it with French troops, Elizabeth I of England's treaty with the Scottish parliament promising military aid averted the disaster.

When Regent Morton was at the height of his power, his office was suddenly taken from him.

In 1585, when the enforcement of the Black Acts under Regent Arran had driven many Covenanters into England for refuge, a revival of the covenanting spirit among the nobles and people expelled Arran from office.

In 1588, when the Spanish Armada was about to attack these shores, an extra-ordinary convening of the Scottish General Assembly sent a deputation to King James, which resulted in the framing of a bond of allegiance against the common foe.

In 1638, on the tide of a true spiritual revival throughout Scotland, the General Assembly, representing the energy and unity of the nation, expelled the prelacy imposed on Scotland by Charles I, and led the Church in a campaign of faithfulness to the covenants.

Of the many deliverances recounted by Dr. Simpson in his *Tales of the Covenanters* we mention only two.

When a tiny party of covenanters were exhausted on the Galloway moors, with the armed dragoons in hot pursuit, Alexander Peden knelt down and prayed: "Twine them about the hill, Lord, and cast the lap of Thy cloak over old Sandy and thir poor things; and we will keep it in remembrance, and tell it to the commendation of Thy goodness, pity and compassion, what Thou didst for us at such a time." Suddenly a mist enshrouded the spot where they knelt, leaving the dragoons confused and unable to discover them, so they went away.

A young woman was crossing the moors on her way to a communion. A party of dragoons intercepted her,

expecting her to lead them to their intended victims. When asked where she was going, she replied: “My Elder Brother has died, and I am going to see what He has left me!” Did not her Lord teach her that the Holy Spirit would give her an answer when interrogated?

4. Conversions, Revivals, National Reformation

Throughout the covenanting period, Scotland witnessed many individual conversions, local revivals of true religion, and even a national reformation.

a. Individual Conversions

We mention only two examples of individual conversions to Christ.

1. The noted minister of Fenwick, William Guthrie, was travelling home late one evening when he lost his way on the moors. He prayed, loosening the reins of his horse. The steed led him to a farmhouse, where a Romish priest had just administered ‘extreme unction’ to the farmer’s dying wife. Guthrie said nothing till the priest had left. Then he went to the dying woman and asked her if she enjoyed peace in the prospect of death as a result of what the priest had said to her. She replied that she did not, whereupon he spoke to her of salvation through faith in the atoning blood of the Redeemer. As he spoke, the Lord taught her inwardly, and opened her heart to receive the word of eternal life. Soon she died, triumphing in the Lord Jesus. When the minister reached his home, he told his wife: “I came to a farmhouse, where I found a woman in a state of nature; I saw her in a state of grace, and I left her in a state of glory!”

2. Young Alexander Henderson, the unpopular Episcopal incumbent of Leuchars in Fife, hearing of the fame of the covenanting minister Robert Bruce of Kinnaird, went to a communion service in the neighbourhood where Bruce was assisting the local minister. He placed himself in a dark corner of the building, where he hoped to remain unnoticed. Bruce entered the pulpit, and after a characteristic pause, read with great feeling the words of the Saviour: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a THIEF and a ROBBER." These words, so descriptive of Henderson as an 'intruded vicar,' were thrust like a sword into his heart, and led to his conversion to Christ. By 1638 he was so highly esteemed for his wisdom and prudence that the General Assembly elected him as their Moderator. He steered that noble gathering through the most intricate problems, leading to the excommunication of the prelates and the settling of Presbyterianism once more.

b. Local Revivals and Memorable Communions

Adherence to the covenants was attended with rich spiritual blessings on a wider scale, in local revivals and memorable communions.

John Livingstone testifies: "Some two or three years after the English had in a manner subdued the land, there began some reviving of the work of God in the land in several parts. Sundry were brought in by the ministry of the Word . . . Communion were very lively, and many ran to them."

In 1630 about five hundred people were converted to Christ under one sermon. Livingstone himself was the

preacher. At the Kirk of Shotts, Lanarkshire, Livingstone always found more liberty in preaching than elsewhere. On the Monday of a communion season in 1630 he was due to preach. In fear and trembling he spent the previous night in prayer and conference with several other Christians. In the morning he was so aware of his own unworthiness and weakness that he thought of stealing away. But thinking he could not distrust God, he launched into his sermon on Ezekiel 36.25 – “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” “Here” says John Howie, “he was led out in such a melting strain that, by the down-pouring of the Spirit from on high, a most discernible change was wrought on about five hundred of his hearers.”

Livingstone was the instrument of much lasting good to others. On moving to Ancrum in 1648, he found its inhabitants “simple . . . tractable, but very ignorant, and some of them” loose-living. Before long, his services were crowded with attentive and solemnized hearers, who “saw the Lord’s power and His grace in the sanctuary.”

The border country between England and Scotland was also richly blessed. Under the preaching of Gilbert Rule, Gabriel Semple and others, the people of Northumberland and Cumberland, described in the 1660s as “ignorant, barbarous and debauched with all manner of wickedness,” were evangelized. Many were converted. A particular communion at Hazelrig in Northumberland attracted numerous local villagers, who as onlookers were deeply affected. “Several on that occasion,” recalled Semple,

“were brought to the Lord that had not the least profession of religion before, and continued in the same.”

These communions were conscious expressions of the Church’s covenanting with God. The Lord’s Supper was viewed as God’s seal on His Covenant of Grace. At His table the people renewed their covenant pledges and fed spiritually on Christ.

One of the most memorable communions of all was held in the Spring of 1678 at East Nisbet on the banks of the River Whitadder. The Earl of Hume, a bitter enemy of the covenanters, had threatened to give his horses communion wine to drink and to trample the communion bread under foot if they held their feast in Teviotdale. Large numbers from Selkirk, Teviotdale, Gala Water and further afield gathered that day in the natural amphitheatre where the service was held. Five ministers officiated – John Welsh, John Blackadder, Archibald Riddell, John Dickson and John Rae. Three thousand communicants were addressed at sixteen tables!

John Blackadder noted the occasion in his diary: “There was a solemnity in the place befitting the occasion, and elevating the whole soul to a pure and holy frame . . . Few such days were seen in the desolate Church of Scotland, and few will ever witness the like. There was a rich and plentiful effusion of the Spirit shed abroad on many hearts . . . The ministers were visibly assisted to speak home to the conscience of the hearers. It seemed as if God had touched the lips with a live coal from His altar, for they who witnessed declared they carried more like ambassadors from the court of heaven than men cast in

earthly mould . . . It was pleasant as the night fell to hear their melody swelling in full unison along the hill, the whole congregation joining with one accord and praising God with the voice of Psalms.”

c. National Reformation

The years between 1637 and 1660 were especially notable as years of national reformation. They were described by friends of the covenant as “years of the right hand of the Son of Man,” “when Christ reigned gloriously in Scotland.”

In our Historical Introduction we read the description of this period by the historian Kirkton. Bishop Burnet tells the same story: “The ministers were so full of the Scriptures, and so ready at extempore prayer, that from that they grew to practise extempore sermons. They had brought the people to such a degree of knowledge that cottagers and servants could have prayed extempore. By these means they had a comprehension of matters of religion greater than I have seen among that sort of people anywhere. As they lived in great familiarity with their people, and used to pray and talk oft with them in private, so it can hardly be imagined to what a degree they were revered and loved by them.”

This glorious period was triggered off by the action of an old woman. The Episcopal Dean of Edinburgh was about to read from the Prayer Book that had been unlawfully imposed on Scotland when Jennie Geddes flung a stool at him, crying out: “Will ye say Mass in my lug?” A popular riot ensued in St. Giles’ and the streets outside. This led to the convening of representatives of the entire nation in

Greyfriars church and churchyard in 1638. Here, in the bodily resting-place of their ancestors, they gathered together all the legitimate charters of the nation and publicly renewed their covenant with God.

Inside the building Johnston of Warriston, the lawyer of the covenant, unrolled the parchment and read the sacred document. A 19th century historian continues the story: “When he had finished, all was still as the grave. But the silence was soon broken. An aged man of noble air was seen advancing. He came forward slowly, and deep emotion was visible in his venerable features. He took up the pen with a trembling hand and signed the document. A general movement now took place. All the Presbyterians in the church pressed forward to the covenant and subscribed their names. But this was not enough; a whole nation was waiting. The immense parchment was carried into the churchyard and spread out on a large tombstone to receive the signature of the church. Scotland had never beheld a day like that.”

Recalls Alexander Henderson, who had helped to draw up the covenant: “This was the day of the Lord’s power, in which multitudes offered themselves most willingly, like dewdrops of the morning. This was indeed the great day of Israel, wherein the arm of the Lord was revealed – the day of the Redeemer’s strength, on which the princes of the people assembled to swear their allegiance to the King of kings.”

Copies of the covenant were then made and circulated for subscription throughout the kingdom. Characteristic of its reception was the response of the people of Hawick, in the

Borders. After solemnly preparing their hearts, crowds gathered “amid tears and acclamation to sign the sacred document.”

In 1643 the power of the covenant extended to England. At St. Margaret’s, Westminster, the English Members of Parliament, the Assembly of Divines, and the Scottish Commissioners stood together with uplifted hands, and as article after article was read, they took the same solemn oath to God.

William Twisse, Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, expressed their thoughts when he said: “We know what followed here upon a desire of King James to unite us under one church government, the Episcopal; now God hath brought us under the bond of a covenant to bring us under one form of government, and we have cause to magnify His gracious hand in the union of hearts and affections among all the good people in both kingdoms.”

Alexander Henderson, one of the Scottish Commissioners, could hardly contain himself for joy. “Doubtless,” he exclaimed before the whole body of assembled divines, “no other than God was the Father of two such blessed twins, that at one instant of time so many godly, learned and orthodox of the two kingdoms should so happily concur and meet with their desires.”

“This Solemn League and Covenant,” writes the church historian Hetherington, “was the noblest in its essential features of all that are recorded among the international transactions of the world.” Prepared and subscribed in a

spirit of deep piety, these documents represent the highest spiritual point in the history of the covenanters.

One remarkable fruit of the nation's commitment to the covenants was that the crown rights of King Jesus became the very motto of its military life. When the gallant Scots army lay at Dunse-muir in 1639 "each captain had his colours flying at his tent door, wherein was this inscription in letters of gold: CHRIST'S CROWN AND COVENANT." This motto was displayed on the moors and fields of gathered covenanter communities right throughout the persecution.

The Covenanters and Ourselves

In closing our brief account of this noble army of witnesses and martyrs, we feel constrained to bring the covenanters' testimony to bear on ourselves.

1. They bequeathed to us a Priceless Heritage

Whether we value it or not, the covenanters bequeathed to us a priceless heritage. A nation that has once been in covenant with Almighty God is incredibly privileged.

In Psalm 78, God Himself calls us to attend to the truths He is about to deliver. In Psalm 44, the psalmist reminds us of the works of God wrought for His people in former days, pleading with Him to reveal Himself again on their behalf.

Those truths and works concern the testimony He established with His people of old. Comments the covenanter David Dickson: "God's old works have new use in all ages." "Those are worthy of the name of fathers in the church, in relation to posterity, who transmit the truth of God contained in Scripture." Furthermore, "the godly in every age ought to have the same care to transmit the word of truth to *their* posterity, which their ancestors had to transmit it to them."

In his final testimony, before being hanged in the Edinburgh Grassmarket, Captain John Paton of Fenwick pointed his hearers to the documents enshrining his covenanting principles: "I adhere to the sweet Scriptures of truth of the Old and New Testament and preached

Gospel by a faithful sent ministry, whereby He [God] many times communicated Himself to the souls of His people, and to me in particular, both in the kirks, and since on the fields, and in the private meetings of His people for prayer and supplication to Him. I adhere to our solemn Covenants, National and Solemn League, Acknowledgment of Sins, and Engagement to Duties, which became national. I adhere to our Confession of Faith, Larger and Shorter Catechisms, Causes of Wrath, and to all the testimonies given by His people formerly and of late, either on fields or scaffolds, these years bygone – insofar as they are agreeable to His Word and the practice of our worthy Reformers, and holy, true zeal, according to His rule. I adhere to all our glorious work of reformation.”

In this spirit the covenanter James Skene challenged his generation: “Consider how our fathers contended for truth, and must we lose what they gained?” Let us continue his challenges. Was gentle Patrick Hamilton burnt to death for nothing? Did bold John Knox wear himself out to no purpose? Were majestic Bruce and prudent Henderson raised up in vain? Has heavenly-minded Rutherford passed this way without a cause? Did faithful Guthrie’s head hand on the Netherbow for years without a message for our day? Were Christ’s witnesses imprisoned, tortured, banished, shot, hanged, beheaded, drawn and quartered for us to return to paganism? As Captain John Paton said: “They gave me the choice to sin or suffer, and I chose to suffer rather than sin.”

The principles for which the covenanters contended so loyally are now maintained by only a few remaining

Reformed churches. They undergird our unwritten political constitution. They are more precious than the whole world. Are we to forfeit them for the sake of some European or worldwide confederation? And dare we believe with the martyr James Guthrie: “The Covenants, the Covenants, will yet be Scotland’s reviving”?

2. Our Declension from their Principles

Sadly, these principles have lain too long under the ashes of neglect. As long ago as 1960, the late Professor Henderson of Aberdeen wrote: “There is no thought of renewing the covenants today.” Half a century later, they are almost universally despised or neglected. Yet Scotland and England are the only nations on earth since the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that have been in covenant with God.

We who were once taken so high are now brought so low. Our spiritual and moral degeneration is writ large on our daily life. Consequently, we are now reaping what we have sown. The Lord is now inflicting our sinful nation with His long-threatened but long-withheld judgments. Our present parlous condition should make us fear that even heavier judgments are soon to be poured out on us. The cry of the godly covenanting weaver John Malcolm deserves our most serious attention: “O Scotland, wilt thou never be made wise, until thou be betrayed into the hands of thine enemies?”

The present generation glories in its alleged tolerance. But tolerance of doctrinal heresy, ethical immorality and contempt of God is condemned from the beginning of the

Bible to the end. (Genesis 35.2; Judges 2.1-2; Isaiah 8.12-13, 19-20; Romans 1.18-2.11; 2 John 1.21)

Those who plead for toleration are pleading only to live as they like. They mistake liberty for licence. But as human nature is sinful, it will only degenerate more and more if left to itself.

Many claim that public opinion is a sufficient safeguard of our ancient rights and privileges. But under atheistic and ruthless rulers the people grow atheistic and ruthless too. Not until the faith of the covenanters pervades and controls our national life shall our political constitution and our religious liberty be safe.

3. Our Great Need of Another Reformation

We stand in dire need, therefore, of another Reformation. We need to acknowledge afresh our sinful departure from God, and to submit once more to the absolute sovereignty of Christ in His Word. No man is his own master. No church is its own head. No state is its own legislator. As one old covenanting protest says: "There is no absolute and undoubted authority in the world excepting the sovereign authority of Christ the King." In begging the Lord for this privilege, Ezra 9, Nehemiah 9 and Daniel 9 are most suitable precedents.

May our prayers and services, hearts and lives, be filled with that glorious spirit that concludes one of the last expressions of the covenant of grace: "Let King Jesus reign and all His enemies be scattered!"

