

THE Presbyterian Quarterly.

No. 48--APRIL, 1899.

I. GENESIS OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

For great events in either Church or State there are usually well defined periods of preparation. Such events do not arise suddenly, but come to pass in their fulness of time.

It is with them as with a mighty river. Its vast volume of rushing waters is the product of many smaller streams, and these in turn are made up of many lesser rivulets, which, gathering from distant mountains and flowing through fertile plains, combine to make the great river—the St. Lawrence, the Mississippi or the Amazon; the Rhine, the Danube or the Nile. To understand the river aright, we must trace its various converging streams to their respective sources, in the recesses of lofty mountains, in the depths of trackless forests, or amid the loneliness of distant lakes. Thus explorers have sought the sources of the Nile, the Mississippi and the Amazon, and in this way reliable geography is made.

So it is with the Providence of God, as it works out its great movements, alike in the life of nations and in the history of the Church. These movements can only be rightly understood by tracing the various streams of influence

which have led up to them, and which flowed forth in their great events, up to their distant sources and down their winding courses.

From this view-point we see how the Roman Empire of world-wide dominion, and the Greek language of universal diffusion, made ready a highway for the swift-winged Gospel to spread its blessings speedily over the civilized world. So, too, we see, later on, that the revival of learning, the unrest of men under the tyranny of the Romish hierarchy, and a deepening interest in the spiritual side of religion, flowed together to produce the resistless current of the Protestant Reformation.

With the Westminster Assembly, and its noble and enduring work, the same is true. Various things led up to the convening of this historic and memorable convention, and gave shape to the great task which it was raised up of God to perform. On the inner side the logic of events made the calling of this Assembly both natural and necessary. It met in its fulness of time also.

The theme which this article is to discuss leads to the study of these events, in their real significance, as they culminated, and were crowned in the Assembly at Westminster. We shall seek to trace the logic of Divine Providence, alike over Church and State, in the main events which led to the formation of the Assembly, and we shall take a brief glance at the Assembly itself as thus formed.

The events which combined to bring the Assembly into existence were partly civil or political, and partly religious or ecclesiastical. They lay, in part, in England, and, in part, in Scotland; while continental influences also came in. In only the briefest way can these events be traced out under two main heads, one treating of the political, and the other of the religious aspects of these events, though these were so merged into each other as to be really identical in many cases.

I. The political series of events leading to the calling

of the Assembly carries us back to the Reformation in England, about a century prior to the Assembly. The name of Henry VIII., who came to the English throne eight years before Luther sounded the first loud notes of the German Reformation in 1517, comes up here. About 1526 Henry's quarrel with the Pope began, in connection with the King's desire to divorce his wife of many years, Catherine, to marry Anne Boleyn. After some years of delay the King grew impatient; and, finally, renouncing the jurisdiction of the Pope altogether, he assumed to himself the Headship of the Church in England. A few years later the Pope, when he saw that all hope of submission on the part of Henry was gone, solemnly ex-communicated him from the Church, and went through the hollow form of deposing him from his throne.

Henry was succeeded by Edward VI., who came to the throne as a lad, and who favored the true Reformed faith in various ways. His brief reign of six years did not a little to settle matters in the realm, and one can scarcely help feeling that his reign was all too short.

Then came the dark and dreadful period of Mary—the bloody Mary—when the storm-tossed bark of the Protestant faith was in great danger of utter shipwreck. For a time the prospect was as gloomy as it could be, for it looked as if everything would be lost, that, under Edward, the people had gained for true religion in the realm. Hundreds fled from England to the continent, and a very great number—over 300—suffered martyrdom during less than five years. This was indeed a dark day for true religion in England, and Mary's short reign was as much too long as Edward's had been too short.

Then follows the long and brilliant reign of Elizabeth—from 1558 to 1603—a period of 45 years, when the Reformation in the modified form represented by the Anglican Church was virtually established, as it has continued down to the present time. The national power of England was

greatly increased, and Ireland was made an integral part of the Empire. This remarkable woman had no real sympathy with the Lutheran and Calvinistic phases of the Reformation, and she ever retained a measure of affection for the Romish Church, on the side of religion. At the same time, on the political side, she guarded most scrupulously her claim to be the head of the Church in England. It was towards the close of her reign that the Puritans began to make their views felt in the sphere of the State. Believing, as they did, in the necessity of a complete reformation in religion, they paved the way for those views of civil government, which culminated in Hampden, Cromwell and Pym, about the time of the Westminster Assembly. The civil contest was between the King and Parliament; and the religious struggle was between Bishop and Presbyter. Out of both the civil and the religious conflict came the Westminster Assembly a little later.

Then followed the Stuarts, a favored yet ill-fated royal house. James VI., of Scotland, came to the throne as James I., uniting by his accession the two kingdoms of England and Scotland. He reigned from 1604 to 1623, when he was succeeded by the misguided and unfortunate Charles, who amid constant turmoil of public affairs continued to reign and misrule till 1648, a period of 26 years, when he was put to death on the scaffold at the hands of the Parliament, and largely under the influence of Oliver Cromwell. It was during this distracting time that the Westminster Assembly convened. Throughout, the King was opposed to the Assembly and its work, for he evidently thought that it was too democratic, and too decidedly Presbyterian, to suit his views.

Politically, the utter folly of the Stuart line forced the Parliament to attempt to settle the religious disputes which prevailed on every hand. The notion of the divine right of kings was met by the assertion of the God-given rights of the people. The Cavalier and the Roundhead opposed each

other strenuously in the halls of legislation, and fought each other bitterly on the battlefield. In like manner, the advocates of Prelacy, and the adherents of Presbytery and Independency waged as bitter a controversy in matters ecclesiastical as was pursued on the field of military combat. Politically, therefore, there were interests of vital importance which called aloud for settlement in the realm, and which could never be really settled till they were settled right. With these, indirectly, the Assembly had not a little to do.

II. In the second place we pass to trace the religious lines of influence which produced the Westminster Assembly. These were perhaps more varied, and of deeper significance, than those which lay in the political sphere. In a very brief way can we now sketch some of these which come most obviously into view.

These influences had their source partly in England; and, in part, they flowed in from Scotland, and over from the continent. Indeed, Scotland, and Geneva, and Holland had a great deal to do with the influences and movements which culminated in the remarkable Westminster Assembly.

The Reformation movement in England is not only of thrilling interest, and full of painful romance, but it is exceedingly difficult to interpret it aright. So many factors enter into it, and such diverse claims are made on its behalf, that it is not easy to reach a well balanced conclusion in regard to its inner significance. *First*, there is a large personal element, represented by Henry VIII, and, afterwards, by other English sovereigns, especially by Elizabeth. Then, the effects of the writings of Luther, and other continental Reformers, began to appear in England as early as 1530. In like manner the vast influence of John Knox, directly on Scotland and indirectly on England, also enters into the problem. And, in the time of Edward VI, the hand of Melancthon was felt, through the Augsburg

Confession, as is evident from the Articles of Edward. But, perhaps the strongest single influence came from Zwingle and Calvin, for Calvin's Institutes was for a time the text-book in theology in the great English universities.

The tendency of the English sovereigns and aristocracy to Episcopacy was strong, and it did not take many decades for the gathering conflict to assume definite shape. The result was the Puritan conflict on English soil, which must ever be regarded as one of the most remarkable periods in the history of England. It was a time of transition and readjustment. In the state, the contest was between absolute monarchy and representative government; and in the church, it was between Episcopacy and Puritanism, in which both Independency and Presbyterianism are to be included from this point of view.

On the religious side, the way was further prepared in a very definite way for the Westminster Assembly by the preparation, before it met, of various creeds or doctrinal statements of religious truth. First of all, there were the creeds of the period of Henry VIII. The Ten Articles, in 1536, were the first; and they made but little modification of the Romish Creed, with the King put in the place of the Pope as the head of the Church. The Thirteen Articles of 1538 were more Protestant, but were never approved by Henry. Then came the Six Articles, in 1539, which marked a return to Romish doctrine, and they have been fittingly called "The Whip With Six Strings." The Articles of Edward in 1552 mark a distinct advance in the formation of a creed. They were forty-two in number, and they form the basis, and largely the materials, of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican churches everywhere. In the time of Elizabeth, the Eleven Articles were issued, but they were soon displaced by the Thirty-nine Articles of 1563.

The Lambeth Articles are also of much interest in relation to the Westminster Assembly and its work, for they

are distinctly Calvinistic throughout. Though these Articles never had ecclesiastical authority, they are of great historical importance. They appeared in 1595, and consists of Nine Articles. Elizabeth was not in sympathy with Calvinism, and hence she could not regard the Lambeth Articles with the least favor. Indeed, she bitterly opposed the introduction of these Articles, for she prosecuted the divines who drew them up, and ordered the recall of the Articles at once.

Of still deeper interest in this connection are the Articles of Ussher, known as the Irish Articles. They appeared in 1615, and were drawn up by Archbishop Ussher, of Dublin. They became the doctrinal symbols of the Irish Episcopal Church. They are 104 in number, and they constitute the chief basis of the Westminster Standards, in many respects, for no pre-existing creed did more to shape the materials of the Confession of Faith of Westminster than these Articles of Ussher, who was himself a member of the Assembly.

Another strong stream of influence flowed in from Scotland. Under Knox the Reformation in Scotland, in its origin and result, was very different from the reform movement in England. In Scotland it was first a religious movement, and then a political; in England it was primarily a political movement, and then became a religious reform. In the former case we have Presbyterianism, with virtual separation of Church and State; and in the latter Episcopacy, with union between Church and State.

The Scotch Confession dates from 1560, and was framed by Knox, it is said, in an incredibly short time. It consists of Twenty-five Articles, and sets forth the clear evangelical doctrines of the Christian faith. It definitely asserts the Headship of Christ over his Church, and for a long time it exerted a strong influence upon the Scottish Church. It is remarkable that the Scottish Church, after using this home-made Confession for over eighty years, should have

adopted the Westminster Confession, made in another place altogether. This clearly reveals how much concession the Church in Scotland was ready to make in order to have peace and uniformity in religion in the whole realm.

In close connection with the Scottish Confession, the Covenants are to be named. These are most solemn pledges to defend the Reformed Faith. The First Covenant was made in 1556 as a defense against Popery, and it was solemnly ratified at several places. Then follows the National Covenant, first in 1581, and again in 1638. It was drawn up by John Craig, was ratified by the Scottish Parliament, and even signed by Charles I., when his coronation took place in Scotland. Last of all these is the Solemn League and Covenant in 1643, the very year the Westminster Assembly was called to meet. It was aimed specially against Episcopacy, though it told also against Popery. Its great significance for us is that it really forms the connecting link between Scottish Presbyterianism and English Puritanism. It also brought near together the General Assembly and the Church in Scotland, and the Assembly at Westminster, and it associates the Scottish Parliament with the Long Parliament very closely in the great events in which they both had a part.

The survey of religious influences would not be complete did we not take notice of the Continental streams which mingled with those already noted, to produce the Westminster Assembly, and to prepare the way for its enduring work. We have seen that in Scotland the Reformation was more thorough than in England. The same is true of Geneva and Holland. There, too, the Reformation was quite complete, and from these centres strong influences were brought to bear upon the Reform movement in England, and that for years prior to the Westminster Assembly. It is well known that there was in Elizabeth's day a strong party in England, who wished for a more complete reform in religion than the Episcopacy

of that time represented. This party in her day, and afterwards in the time of James I., and Charles I., was in constant communication with the thorough-going Reformers on the Continent, as well as in Scotland. Hence, we see how intimately the Westminster Assembly, which grew out of the desire for thorough reform in religion in England, is related with the reform movements in Scotland, and on the Continent, as the ordinance calling the Assembly itself distinctly affirms, when it says that the Assembly to meet shall seek to bring the Church in England into "nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and the other Reformed Churches abroad."

Thus it came to pass that this memorable Assembly, whose 250th Anniversary has been celebrated, gathered up into itself the varied yet kindred streams which flowed from the pure springs which rose among the hills of Scotland, the mountains of Switzerland and the plains of Holland, and then in turn this Assembly, with its venerable symbols, has, in the Providence of God, become the unfailing reservoir from which has flowed numberless pure and life-giving streams, into lands far and near, to make glad the city of God, even to the very ends of the earth.

From this hurried sketch, the lines of political and religious influence which led up to the Westminster Assembly may in part be understood. The political line dates from Henry VIII, and runs on through Edward, Mary, and Elizabeth, then into the Stuarts, who, with their fatal doctrine of the divine right of kings, did much to develop the political aspects of Puritanism, as an emphatic protest against despotism alike in Church and State. On the religious side the Westminster Assembly was the product of the partial reform which was effected in England, and which many earnest minds felt to be incomplete, and of the influences which flowed into England from Scotland, Geneva, and Holland, where the Reformation was thorough-going and complete. All these

influences combined to produce the strong religious factor in the rising Puritan movement, and to produce a state of conflict and confusion, which the Act of Supremacy and the Act of Uniformity could neither allay nor remove. Nay, rather, these forcible and unspiritual restraints aggravated the disease rather than healed it.

In addition, there were Creeds and Liturgies of various kinds in existence among the people, and the utmost confusion of belief and practice prevailed on every side. Each party was a law to itself, and no effective arbiter appeared on the scene to settle these disputes. The spheres and function of Church and State were not clearly understood, though the Puritans were moving in the right direction, and at times, perhaps, in danger of going too fast and too far. Thus political and religious chaos reigned, but the Spirit of God was moving upon the confusion, and at length that Spirit led to the formation of the Westminster Assembly, and guided its devout and learned members in their splendid work.

The immediate providential events leading to the Assembly were the Long Parliament, essentially Puritans, and the Scottish Parliament, thoroughly Presbyterian, on the political side; and on the religious side stand the Irish Articles, the Scottish Confession, and the writings of the Continental Reformers. In due time the Assembly was called, not by the King, but by the representatives of the people in the Long Parliament. It was convened to settle the disputes and differences in regard to religion in the realm, for the express purpose of bringing about a measure of uniformity in Doctrine, Government, Discipline and Worship. As the differences in government and worship were far greater than in doctrine, so it was with these that the Assembly was directed chiefly to deal, though before their work was done they covered the whole ground in the symbols they gave to the world.

III. In the third place, it may aid us in getting a clearer

view of the conditions which, as already described, led to this memorable Assembly, if we look for a little at the gathering itself, and note its general character, and briefly view its disputes and decisions.

As we have already seen, there was utter confusion in Church and State in the realm, for a generation prior to the Assembly, especially from 1620 to 1643, when that body met. There were several political parties, in particular the Royalist and the Parliamentary. Both of these stand in close relation to the Assembly; the former against it, the latter with it. Then there were a greater number of ecclesiastical parties. First, there were Anglicans, who were more in sympathy with Popery than with Reform. Secondly, there were Episcopalians, who were Erastian in their views, and who would place the Church under the State. Thirdly, there were more moderate Episcopalians, who were in sympathy with the true Reformed faith. Fourthly, there were the Independents, who were the heart of the Puritan party. Lastly, the Presbyterians, who held a somewhat middle place between the Independents and the moderate Episcopalians, and who, among themselves, exhibited two distinct types of Presbyterianism, the moderate and the *jure divino* types.

With the first and second religious parties King Charles was in secret sympathy, while the other three parties were generally ranked with the Parliament. Hence all these parties had intimate relations with the Assembly, either by way of antagonism or sympathy.

In the Assembly itself there were at least four well-defined parties. First, we have the consistent Episcopalians; secondly, the Erastians; thirdly, the Independents, and fourthly, the Presbyterians. These classes indicate the religious conditions of England at this time.

To harmonize these divergent views, so as, if possible, to secure uniformity in the religion of the realm, was the immense task set for the Assembly. It is evident to us, at

this later day, that this was well nigh an impossible task, and it was made all the more difficult, because the leaders of these various parties did not then see, as we now have learned it, the distinction between outward uniformity and inward unity, amid a measure of outward diversity. Another element of great difficulty in the way of the Assembly was the fact that the relations of Church and State were not clearly understood at that day by very many. The principle of a free Church in a free State was only beginning to dawn; and before the Assembly closed it had risen above the horizon, never to set again among a free people. We praise, rather than blame, the Assembly for its service here; for while it did not produce the uniformity which it was appointed to effect, it did for subsequent ages something far better, the advantage of which we, in this country, fully enjoy, and should ever highly value.

Soon after the Long Parliament met it addressed itself to the task which the disturbed condition of Church and State forced upon it. The temper of the Parliament was for the most part against the King and the bishops. The first bill convening the Assembly was passed in 1642, but it did not receive the royal assent. But next year, on June the 12th, Parliament took things into its own hands, and passed an ordinance calling an Assembly of learned and godly divines, and others, to meet at Westminster on July 1st, 1643. The purpose of the Assembly is stated to have been, "To effect a more perfect reformation of the Church of England in its Liturgy, Discipline and Government on the basis of the Word of God, and thus to bring it into nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and with the Reformed Churches on the continent."

The Assembly then summoned was to consist of 151 members. Thirty of these were laymen, 10 from the House of Lords, and 20 from the Commons. These were named first in the ordinance of Parliament, and among them were scholars and statesmen like Selden, Pym, Whitelocke, and

Vane. There were also to be 121 divines, chosen from different sections of the country, and representing the diverse religious views of the people. A large number of these were Presbyterians, a smaller number were Episcopalians, few of whom, owing to the King's edict, sat in the Assembly. A small company were Independents, but they were influential, and had the support of Cromwell and the Army.

The Assembly was thus brought into existence by the authority of the State, though the Parliament, as the representative of the people, instead of the crown, exercised this authority. It was not convened by ecclesiastical authority, for Parliament named the members and gave the Assembly its instructions. It was called "to consult and advise of such matters . . . as shall be proposed unto them by the Houses of Parliament, and to give advice to Parliament when . . . required." It will thus be seen that it was to act under Parliament, which body chose the officers of the Assembly, paid its expenses, directed its labors and passed on all its decisions and conclusions. Still it is only just to add, that when the Assembly was once constituted, it was not hampered by the Parliament, but was, for the most part, left free to the fullest debate upon all points raised. Hence, we find that the results of the Assembly show that men of great ability, wide learning and deep piety were in the Assembly. And it may properly be added that the Long Parliament itself was one of the most religious political bodies that ever met in any land or age. In spite of the efforts of King Charles to hinder the good work of the Assembly, it pursued its task from year to year, and with a patience and devotion worthy of all praise, and thus its members continued to serve the cause of truth and righteousness, as few men since Apostolic days have served it.

A glance at the Assembly, as it convenes, is all that we have time to take. Of the Episcopalians there were

to be seen four prelates and five doctors of divinity. Of the Erastians, Selden, Lightfoot and Coleman were chief. There were only five avowed Independents, though others were in sympathy with them. Goodwin and Nye were their leaders. The Presbyterians constituted the majority of the members, and they continued to take an active part in the debates, till the Assembly concluded its labors, thus giving a good example of the perseverance of the saints. Cartwright, Twisse, Travers, Gataker, Palmer and Reynolds were prominent in their ranks. And the Scottish commissioners, eight in number, must not be overlooked. They were not really members of the Assembly, for they were appointed by neither of the English or Scottish Parliament, but by the General Assembly of the Scottish Church, which was decidedly Presbyterian. They sat with the Assembly ; and, in proportion to their number, exerted a great influence upon its decisions. Henderson, Gillespie and Baillie are the three chief names of this company.

The debates were more upon matters of Government and Worship than upon points of Doctrine, for all were Calvinistic in doctrine. The debate between the Independents and the Presbyterians touching the form of government lasted about thirty days, and on other points there was much discussion. Touching the mode of baptism it was decided, by a vote of one, that immersion should not be recognized as valid baptism. But into further particulars concerning the Assembly proceedings we cannot now enter. Suffice it to say that the Assembly gave to the world "The Directory for Worship," "The Form of Church Government," "The Confession of Faith," and the two "Catechisms," Larger and Shorter. These are monuments more lasting than granite of the noble work the Assembly did.

In closing this article we make two or three reflections upon the Assembly and its work, and upon the men who composed it, and the value of the service they rendered.

First, the members of the Assembly were, as a body,

able, learned and devout men, who worked faithfully at the task given them to do. As to their ability and learning we have abundant testimony, and the work they did is sufficient evidence in itself of this. That they labored faithfully is shown by the long debates and thorough discussion of every disputed point. Nothing was passed upon till it was fully considered from every point of view. Probably no council of the Church ever did its work so thoroughly as this.

Secondly, they revered the Word of God. The ordinance appointing them directed that every point should be settled on the basis of the Word of God; and the history of their debates, together with the importance attached to the proof-texts from Scripture, show how carefully they carried out their commission. Every article, and each statement, was quarried out of the bed rock of Holy Scripture, and the debates in the Assembly were largely discussions of the texts adduced in support of the various propositions. Hence, we have a creed that is scriptural in the very highest degree. How vain are many of the objections to our creed when we consider this fact!

Thirdly, much importance was attached to the formation of the Catechisms. They were made after the Confession, to a large extent. The Larger was made first, and was intended chiefly for the office-bearers in the church. Then the Shorter was drawn up for the instruction of the young. It is the condensed essence of all that had gone before, and it stands absolutely unrivalled among the means of religious teaching for the young people. Our churches, our Sabbath schools and our homes should never forget this, or allow such an instrument of catechetical instruction to lie unused. It is a form of sound words into which the Spirit of God will shed light and meaning in after years.

Lastly, the earnest piety of the members of the Assembly, and the devotional spirit which marked their work should never be forgotten. Amid all their long debates and earnest discussion they never forgot their dependence

upon the Holy Spirit, and the light which comes down from above. They held solemn fast days once a month, and the services often lasted without a break for eight hours. Here is a brief sketch of such a service: "Dr. Twisse opened with a short prayer, Dr. Marshall prayed two hours most divinely, confessing the sins of the members of the Assembly in a wonderfully prudent and pathetic way. After this, Mr. Arrowsmith preached one hour. Then came a Psalm, after which Mr. Vines prayed near two hours. Then came a Psalm, and Mr. Henderson brought them to a short, sweet conference of the heart, and Dr. Twisse closed with a short prayer and blessing."

One little wonders that such devotion, coupled with such learning and patience, made the Assembly so remarkable in itself and of such vast influence in its own and subsequent times. They were men of God; they had strong convictions, and they left their mark on the Church in a way that can never be effaced.

We ought to recognize the wonderful Providence of God, which brought this Assembly into existence; we ought to be grateful to God that he gave them grace to continue and complete their labors; we should cherish with sacred regard the memory of this historic Assembly, and we should seek to emulate their spirit and apply the truth of God, which its symbols exhibit to our own age, with its new and perplexing problems, assured that the Gospel is still the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.

The Doctrine and Polity and the Worship of our Standard is scriptural and complete. Its Calvinism is consistent and moderate, and thoroughly evangelical. Its Presbyterianism is scriptural, and alike stable and flexible, and so suited to be a power wherever it exerts its influence, and to be adapted to the new and changing problems of successive ages. It presents the faith once delivered to the Saints in its most complete and scriptural form, and our true privilege is to declare and teach the whole counsel of God, to

old and young, which our Standards set forth from the Scriptures, for the salvation and reformation of men, and society, and nations, to the glory of the triune Jehovah.

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