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THE ADVOCATE, PICTOU.

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THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

Continued from page four.

and spiritual questions entered into the controversy, to which we cannot now refer. Elizabeth, as her nature prompted, could brook no opposition, and so she caused a proclamation to be issued, requiring immediate uniformity in worship on pain of deprivation of office.

Matters have now reached a crisis, and the storm hursts in magnificent fury. The ministers of London were all summoned, and the question put to them, "Whether they would conform to the apparatus established by law, and subscribe their submission on the spot." Of these 37 out of the 38, absolutely refused, and we are told that even their opponents admitted that these 37 were the best and ablest ministers in London. Even Miles Coverdale, the translator of the Bible, now feeble and venerable, and Fox, who wrote the Book of Martyrs, and who did so much to check popery, were driven from their houses and flocks, and exposed to moral and poverty, "because they would not consent to disgrace their persons with the gaudy vestments characteristic of Romish superstition."

And now the Puritans of England come forth to their place in history. In Puritanism there has been something narrow and intolerant that has passed or will pass away. But there was also something we believe that will never pass away,—high moral and spiritual aims.—As a recent writer expresses it, "strong individual energy on behalf of every thing that was held lovely and of good report, and the contempt alike for outward formalities apart from spiritual grace, and for the commandments of their fellow men, whether kings or popes, to act otherwise than in accordance with the dictates of their consciences." Puritanism was but the highest expression of Protestantism. In the case before us the point of divergence was simply this: The king or queen virtually said, "I am now your pope, you shall thus and thus believe and do." But the Puritan stood up and said, "God hath committed to me, and all who like me believe His word, the oracles of truth. He hath given me faculties to comprehend these oracles. My conscience is charged with the right of fulfilling these functions. I cannot believe and worship as you dictate to me. I must obey my God."

It would become a very interesting subject, to follow out the operation of the principle which actuated this Puritan movement; its influence in England to-day in the independent and other, nonconformist denominations; the escape of the new world to Holland; how the new world was in them provided with a future population in the Pilgrim Fathers. They were the true beginning and soul of America. The Revolution and Washington are the fruits of them. And not until the destiny of New England, in its bearing upon the West and South, and upon Canada too, has fully unfolded itself, will it be known what a vast influence has been exerted by that little company of Puritans that left England and built homes and churches on this side of the Atlantic.

Puritanism after a time became organized, and we have then two opposing parties—the Court High Church and the Puritan. The latter were subjected to great persecution, though Parliament time and again interposed in their behalf. But the Puritans were driven from all legislative remedy, by the overbearing intolerance of Elizabeth aided by the prelates.

After long conflict, what has been termed "a cessation of hostilities" took place. Elizabeth was growing old; and both parties were sunken in what course would be taken by her successor. In the early part of 1603, the Queen died, and James VI. of Scotland came to the throne. It was fondly hoped by the Puritans, that his Presbyterian training would induce him to respect their views and treat them more favourably. But his theory of government was absolute despotism. And he saw that if civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions were kept separate, it would be impossible to realize his theory of absolutism. He knew how opposed the Church of Scotland was to civil rulers meddling with matters of a spiritual character; and he was

"well aware, that he would easily acquire an influence over titled and wealthy clergy at Court, which he could never obtain over a General Assembly." And so by the help of English influence, he managed to secure the appointment of bishops, and so change the government of the Scottish Church, as to put a measure of suppression on General Assemblies.

Things in England grew worse; and the Puritans were more exasperated to a fever, by the constantly increasing severity of their treatment. The domineering proceedings of the prelatic party, taken together with the dangerous nature of the policies which they advocated, began to arouse the people. They felt that all liberty was being endangered. Parliament began to interpose, and to demand that grievances should be redressed. But the king met all their remonstrances and petitions with the assertion of his royal prerogative. Parliament again asserted its rights, and urged more lenient treatment of the Puritans. Afraid of this partial manifestation of freedom, the king dissolved the Parliament, and determined to govern the country without Parliament. This arbitrary conduct fairly aroused the mind of England. Never did any sovereign so violently against the opinions and feelings of the people, and isolate himself in a more intolerable way from the nation.

So things went on. James' "kingcraft" was manifesting itself in more and more open despotism. The heart of England was being fairly touched, resistance to political tyranny began to show itself among those who thought or cared little for the sufferings of those subjected to an ecclesiastical tyranny equally great. But the gathering storm did not break, for James had not the courage to carry out to the full, the tyrannous purposes he had conceived, and in the meantime his death led the long-suffering people to pause, till it would be seen what his successor would pursue.

When Charles took possession of the throne, matters grew worse and worse. Unfortunately he entertained all his father's despotic notions regarding the royal prerogative. He was equally insincere, but possessed of much greater intellectual powers, and it was soon seen that his ecclesiastical policy would be even more hostile to the Puritans than that of his father had been. His marriage to the daughter of the French king, a zealous Roman Catholic, aroused suspicion among those who feared a dangerous increase of popery. As if to impart additional intensity to the growing antagonism, Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, was put practically at the head of ecclesiastical affairs. He proceeded to impose fresh ceremonies of the most absurd character, upon the church, and fresh indignities upon the Puritans. Never perhaps was there a period when the principles of civil and religious liberty were more seriously outraged.

But things reached a climax when, regardless of popular feelings and prompted by Laud, Charles attempted to force upon Scotland the prayer book and all the prelatic rites and ceremonies under which the Puritans had so long groaned. But it was far too late in the day to attempt that method in Scotland. The free spirit of the Scots felt itself insulted, and was fired with indignation; and accordingly took up arms in self defence. "Then followed a wide, deep and steady determination to wrench around the despotic yoke of prelacy, and to restore to Scotland, in all its original purity and freedom, her own Presbyterian Church. Pledging themselves in a sacred national covenant, the noblest and the wisest, and the best of Scotland's sons and daughters prepared to encounter every peril, and to sacrifice all that life holds dear, rather than yield up their most precious birthright liberty." (Hetherington.) The king raised an army to subdue them by force. But he afterwards prudently drew back from the perilous course. The attempt to raise an army exhausted his treasury and compelled him reluctantly to call a parliament and ask for supplies.

It had not met for eleven years. The spirit of liberty was now stronger in the bosom of its members than ever before, and less disposed to prostrate itself before the royal prerogative. They would grant supplies only as he redressed grievances. Disappointed and enraged, the king again dissolved parliament and threw the leading members into prison.

After a time it became again necessary to summon parliament. Exertions were made on both sides in the election of members. The spirit of England was now fairly roused. They felt that a crisis had come; and so by far the greater majority were in favour of the defenders of liberty.

In that parliament the leading men of England were gathered. It has been said that no age or nation has ever produced men of greater eminence in ability or character, than were the leaders in that celebrated parliament—such men as Pym, Hampden, Cromwell and Selden. Such was the famous Long Parliament.

They set themselves to redress grievances. Laud was impeached. Redress was granted to several who suffered under prelatic tyranny. The history of the doings of this parliament is a remarkably interesting chapter in history. But we cannot touch them. In carrying out the work of reformation, an act was passed ordaining that the prelatic form of church government should be abolished from 5th Nov., 1643; and it was also determined to call an assembly of Divines to complete the necessary reformation. That assembly was not immediately called. They still sought redress from the king. But as he would make no concessions in behalf of civil and religious liberty, Parliament resolved to wait no longer, and so passed an ordinance and convened the assembly by their own authority. We are now in a position to look at that assembly and its work, but must postpone this till another Sabbath morning.

In leaving the subject for the present, I would ask, do we not, as we look at these similar facts in history realize more fully the value of civil and religious liberty, and how much we owe to the past? It was her battle for the truth that made Britain Great Britain, a "mother of nations and mistress of the seas," the home of the downtrodden and the oppressed. And any unprejudiced view of the history of the times at which we were glancing this morning, will show, that no political regeneration will ever stand, unless based upon the truth of God. The more we fully realize the truth in the past, have lived and suffered in vain. And as we think of their heroic struggles, may we be stimulated to be faithful to the truth, and stand by the liberties and privileges which came down to us from struggles in which our fathers were engaged, the fruits of which we are now enjoying.

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