

THE HEROES OF THE COVENANT.

BY FULTON SMITH.

"Freedom to worship God."

ON a bright morning in March, 1638, there assembled in the Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh, a numerous company of earnest pious men and women. It was a day never to be forgotten. Men, hoary-headed and bent with age, trudged many a weary mile from their homes among the glens and hills of their native land to be present at this important gathering. The highways leading from the surrounding districts to the metropolis were thronged with eager crowds of old and young. What could it be that so stirred the hearts of these men and women, made their conversation so animated, and caused tears to flow down many a furrowed cheek, while the countenances of the young beamed with a calm, cheerful look of buoyant hope? The time was ripe for the Scottish nation to make a clear and open confession of faith. Well may the aged mourn for the days when they could worship their God in peace, none daring to make them afraid! The young must now declare themselves upon the side of Gospel, truth, and liberty. Presbyterian worship, the worship of their forefathers, was in danger of being undermined, and finally swept away before the dread flood of Popery. King Charles I. wished to enforce his own form of worship upon the people; he resolved to introduce into the Scottish service some features which were only too closely allied to Roman Catholicism. His courtiers also had shown signs recently of adherence to the Romish Church, and it leaked out that the King himself, when in Holland, had sworn fealty to the Pope of Rome. A century had scarce passed away since John Knox had lifted up his voice and testimony against Papal aggression, and had succeeded in pulling down the monasteries scattered up and down the country. The enthusiasm of the first Reformation was, however, somewhat abated, but the weapons of Rome were only being whetted the keener during the lull, and the operations of priestcraft were being directed in a new channel. Through the ritualism of prelacy was the foe about to make a fresh and formidable attack upon the simple form of Presbyterian worship. In every succeeding age has it been so, the tactics of the aggressive power of the Vatican devising some subtler scheme to accomplish the overthrow of Christendom.

This, then, was the occasion and necessity of the first national covenant of Scotland, from the subscription of which arose the name *Covenanters*. It was originally drawn up by one John Craig, of Edinburgh, in 1557, but was renewed, with an addition, by Archibald Johnston, afterwards Lord Warriston, in 1638. The church and churchyard of Greyfriars was densely filled with the "gravest, wisest, and best of Scotland's pious sons and daughters," met together to declare their allegiance to God and to maintain the purity of his worship. The meeting was constituted by Alexander Henderson, one of the ministers of Edinburgh, in a prayer of wonderful earnestness, pathos, and sublimity of tone. The great roll of parchment was then unfolded by Sir Archibald Johnston, who began to read the covenant aloud in a clear and sonorous voice. The religious awe which pervaded that vast concourse was as each one felt they were alone in the presence of the Majesty of Heaven. The text of the covenant was as follows:—

"We, perceiving how Satan, in his members, the anti-christs of our time, cruelly doth rage, seeking to downthrow and destroy the evangel of Christ and His congregation, fight, accordingly to our bounden duty, to strive in our Master's cause, even unto the death, being certain of the victory in Him—the which, our duty being well considered, we do promise before the Majesty of God and His congregation. That we, by His grace, shall, with all diligence, continually apply our whole power, substance, and our very lives, to maintain, set forward, and establish the most blessed Word of God and His congregation, and shall labour at our possibility to have faithful ministers, purely and truly to minister Christ's evangel and sacraments to His people. We shall maintain them, nourish them, and defend them, the whole congregation of Christ, and every member thereof, at our sole powers and waiving [expending] of our lives against Satan and all wicked power that does intend tyranny and rebellion against the aforesaid congregation. Unto the which

holy word and congregation we do join us, and also do renounce and forsake the congregation of Satan, with all superstitions, abominations, and idolatry thereof. And, moreover, shall declare ourselves manifestly enemies thereto by this our faithful promise before God, testified to His congregation, by our subscription at these presents. God called to witness."

After the document was read, none seemed disposed to break in upon the solemn, sacred stillness which prevailed over the assemblage, as if each thought the other more worthy to subscribe the first name upon the sacred bond. "At length an aged nobleman, the venerable Earl of Sutherland, came forward slowly and reverentially, and with throbbing heart and trembling hand, subscribed Scotland's covenant with God. All hesitation in a moment disappeared, as name after name was added to the instrument. After all within the church had signed, it was taken to the churchyard and spread out on a level gravestone to obtain the subscription of the assembled multitude. Here the scene became, if possible, still more impressive. The intense emotions of many became irrepresible. Some wept aloud; some burst into a shout of exultation; some, after their names, added the words *till death*; and some, opening a vein, subscribed with their own warm blood. As the space became filled, they wrote their names in a contracted form, limiting them at last to the initial letters, till not a spot remained in which another letter could be inscribed."

This testimony, so influentially signed, strengthened the hearts of the people and prepared them to face the calamitous times which awaited them. The blue banner of the Covenant thus nobly unfurled was, alas! soon destined to be dragged well-nigh to the ground and be dipped in the blood of its defenders. The uncompromising persecution which almost immediately followed upon this declaration of civil and religious liberty is one of the saddest records in human history. The Covenanters were driven to take up arms in self-defence.

The memorable Assembly in Glasgow, which met in May, 1638, presided over by Alexander Henderson, and in which the Royal Commissioner made a forcible attempt to prevent the free action of its members to abolish prelacy in Scotland, brought matters to a crisis. The King, deeming his authority and dignity assailed through the resistance, thus offered to his commissioner, at once despatched a body of soldiers to enforce submission to his commands. Little did Janet Geddes think of the results which would follow that eventful day some twelve months before, when she picked her stool at the head of the Dean of Edinburgh, as he read the prayers in St. Giles's, and dared him "to say mass at her lug." It was the spark which lighted anew the torch of the Reformation. The manifesto which the people assembled in crowds to sign, and the outbreak of Glasgow Assembly, were but the natural sequence to the disturbance which that zealous woman so unceremoniously inaugurated.

The rights and liberties which these, our forefathers, strove and died for, are the rights and liberties we enjoy at this present hour. While the mighty changes in religious thought and practice which are occurring in these days, at home and abroad, with electric-like rapidity, it may be well to stand by to look back on the history of religious progress, and see if none of the ancient landmarks, so nobly defended by these devoted men, are being removed. If John Knox and his followers apprehended danger from Jesuitical machinations, there is surely cause enough for our being on the watch-tower of a pure faith and worship to defend and maintain the dear-bought privileges bequeathed by our ancestors.

DON'T HURRY.—What is life, if we are continually in a hurry? A fearful proportion of men kill themselves while pursuing the bubble of wealth. This rush and worry day after day, this restless anxiety after something you have not got, is like pebble-stones in machinery; they grate and grind the life out of you. You have useless burdens; throw them off. You have a great deal of needless care; throw it off. Pull in the strings. Compact your business. Take time for thought of better things. Go out into the air and let God's sun shine down on your head. Stop thinking of business and profit. Stop grumbling at adverse providences. You will probably never see much better times than these in this doomed world. Your most opportune season is now; your happiest day is to-day. Calmly do your duty, and let God take care of his own world.