

Christ, and of the high attainments we have reached, through the blessing of God, may be traced to the defects which accompanied, and the backslidings which followed the reformation from Popery.

These were extraordinary and stirring times. John Knox, the celebrated Scottish Reformer, and his coadjutors, at the earlier period of public excitement, with great wisdom, and we doubt not under the guidance of the Spirit of God, following no existing model, but looking directly into the Holy Scriptures, had organized the Church in Scotland according to the Presbyterian form; and the great mass of religious society in that country were attached to this model. Their efforts were blessed by God for vastly important purposes, and the happy results of their exertions are experienced at the present day. The reformation, it has been said, prospered so long as the Church retained its independence; but whenever it permitted itself to be re-united to the State, by accepting of civil endowments, and thus reverted to the fundamental principle of Popery, its progress came to a stand. The Pope, indeed, was renounced, with all the gross errors of the system, and the purity of evangelical truth was exhibited; but the monarch of the Stewart family became virtually pope himself, and arrogated the right of Supreme judgment in all ecclesiastical as well as civil matters. The first reformation under Knox and his immediate followers, was steadily prosecuted. Much intemperance was manifested in opposition to various efforts which were made to subvert or destroy the liberty, wherewith Christ had made them free. To the important objects in view, the bonds into which many of the reformers entered towards the commencement, and in the earlier progress of their great struggle, and the National Confession and Covenant, which afterwards was so generally sworn and subscribed, and, in seasons of peril, renewed, were eminently conducive. As they were assailed by those who were resolutely hostile, both to their civil and religious principles, the measure of uniting together for the support of the common cause, and of solemnly pledging themselves to God and to each other, to "stand fast, with one heart and with one mind," in maintaining and promoting it, was not less accordant with the law of nature and the dictates of wisdom, than adapted to their circumstances. It must excite regret, however, that though they nobly asserted the sole Headship of Christ over His Church, they placed so much dependence on the exertion of the civil powers for supporting their religious profession. Not satisfied with procuring the repeal of laws which established iniquity, and empowered the adherents of Romish superstition to persecute all who embraced Protestant principles; nor with obtaining security for the unobscured profession and exercise of the reformed faith, worship, and discipline, they would permit no other faith to be professed, and would have that civil authority which formerly had exclusively enforced submission to Papal usurpation, to impose the new creed, and to punish as a crime the avowal of other religious principles, and the observance of other modes of worship. The trying circumstances in which they were placed, from the spirit and efforts of the enemies of their religion and liberties, may furnish an apology for them, but not a vindication of their measures; and the consequences were really injurious to the interests of true religion. Many, especially among the higher orders, influenced by political considerations, assumed the profession of the reformed faith, though in fact hostile to it, and only waited for a fit opportunity, which in those unsettled times frequently occurred, to display that hostility." (Historical Testimony of the United Secession Church.)

In the early parts of the seventeenth century, James VI. and Charles I. employed their authority mainly by persisting in imposing ceremonies of religion on their subjects in Scotland, to which the more serious classes were conscientiously opposed. A liturgy was at length prepared, and attempts made to model the Church according to the Episcopal form. But this excited the popular rage, and led on to scenes of strife and violence, which terminated in what was called the Second Reformation. Such movements again suggested the necessity of vigorous combination among the friends of Christ, after the manner of their fathers, and led to the renewal of the National Covenant, in which Prelacy, as well as Popery, was solemnly renounced, and in which the subscribers bound themselves to oppose all religious innovations. Their boldness and zeal alarmed King Charles, who still endeavoured to continue the Episcopal form under certain modifications. But nothing short of an entire abolition of Prelacy would satisfy the leaders of the Scottish Church. The famous General Assembly, of 1638, proceeded therefore to take steps for

this purpose, and although the Royal Commissioner dissolved the meeting in the King's name, yet the ministers and elders, with Christian light and zeal, regardless of civil authority when it invaded the prerogatives of Zion's King, continued to sit in spiritual jurisdiction, till they had overturned the whole fabric of Church Government, which James and Charles had reared with so much policy and earnestness. It would have been well that these reformers had persisted in asserting and maintaining the independence of the Church, and both discharged their own ecclesiastical duties without permitting State interference, and refused to be superintended, watched, and controlled in future by any monarch or royal commissioner. But according to the foolish and sinful custom of the times, the acts of this assembly were sent to the king for ratification, who, believing, or perhaps only pretending to believe, the order of bishops in the Church to be of apostolic authority, and the Episcopal plan to be scriptural, refused his sanction to all that this assembly had done. The Presbyterians of Scotland, therefore, unwarrantably, we would say, prepared to defend their Church Government by arms. The king, at the same time, levied an army to support his authority. But such was the distracted state of the nation, that he agreed to withdraw his troops, and to permit the Acts of Assembly to take effect. Still there was opposition to Christ's cause from the Popish and Prelatic parties, and new excuses were found by the monarch and his counsellors to interfere with ecclesiastical matters. Threatenings and hostilities, however, did not intimidate the zealous friends of the Presbyterian cause; and from this period, for several years, the prosperity of the Church was great. "The Lord gave testimony and witness to his own work by a remarkable down-pouring of His Spirit from on high, on the indicatories, and assemblies of his people for worship. The word of the Lord was powerful and successful—the pleasure of the Lord did prosper through the land, and a seed was sown, which the fury and rage of twenty-eight years of hot persecution afterwards could not extirpate." (Gibb's Display.)

This was considered the Second Reformation, and certainly it was an era of great spiritual progress. It was during this season that the solemn league and covenant was constricted and subscribed, having in view a greater uniformity in religion throughout the three kingdoms. It was now also that the Westminster Assembly met, and compiled those invaluable standards of the Confession of Faith, and catechisms larger and shorter, which, with few exceptions to their articles, have been recognised by Presbyterians of almost every name, from that period to this.

But, "in reviewing this period, it is necessary to distinguish between the Reformation itself, and the means which were employed to promote and secure it. Of these many were dictated by sound wisdom, and admirably adapted to meet and subvert the opposition with which the Reformers had to contend. Yet we must lament that the spiritual concerns of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, were too much blended with the political transactions of this eventful period, and that our ancestors manifested too much of a spirit of dependence on the civil power, for its sanction of all their ecclesiastical measures for reformation, and of the whole of their religious profession; and, in so far as they employed civil force for imposing their religious system, excellent as it was, or subjected to civil penalties, for worshipping God according to their consciences, and whose principles or actions were not plainly injurious to the peace and order of civil society, we must disapprove of their conduct, as inconsistent with the spirit of Christ's charity."

The seeds of evangelical doctrine, through the blessing of God, were extensively sown in Scotland during the reign of Charles I., and the protectorate of Cromwell, so that when Charles II. was called to the throne, Presbyterians were numerous, and highly distinguished for piety and zeal. But the interference of the State, which had been too tamely submitted to, even by the golly and conscientious, and the injurious tendency of which they did not fully perceive, was now, in the sovereign providence of God, to be permitted to occasion one of the most fiery trials to which any portion of the Redeemer's Church had ever been subjected, and the faith and patience of professors were now to be brought to the test. This ordeal was the persecution which raged from the Restoration in 1660, to the Revolution in 1688.

It is not necessary here to give a sketch of that dismal persecution—so great a stain on the Government of Great Britain, and so calamitous to the remnant of God's people, especially in Scotland. Suffice it to say