

These points were all decided in favor of the Presbyterians; and the arguments on both sides were afterwards published, under the title of the "Great Debate between Independency and Presbytery." This decision was presented to parliament, as the humble advice of the Assembly; where it did not experience that kindly reception which the Scottish commissioners especially expected. Instead of affirming with the Assembly, that the Presbyterian form of Church government was of *divine appointment*, it was simply enacted, "That it is lawful and agreeable to the Word of God, that the Church should be governed by Classical and Synodical Assemblies." In all cases of excommunication, an appeal was permitted to the civil power, without whose consent, the sentence could not take effect. The Scotch commissioners remonstrated against these proceedings, as entirely beyond the province of the civil magistrate; but the parliament, firm to their purpose, and afraid of establishing a Presbyterian, instead of Episcopal tyranny, threatened them with a Pro-nunzio, when they silently submitted.

The Assembly next revised a metrical version of the Psalms, to be sung in churches. Its author was Mr. Francis Rous, a member of the House of Commons, and a lay assessor in the Assembly of Divines. After careful revision, it was approved both by the Assembly and Parliament; and being transmitted to Scotland, after a still farther revision, came into general use. It is the version used at the present day in all the Scotch churches.

The most important matter sent down by the Parliament to the Assembly, still demanded their attention—the propriety of revising the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England. These articles were originally composed in 1551, in the reign of Edward Sixth, by Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Ridley, and then contained forty-two articles. They were formed on the basis of Zwingli's Theology, and were publicly approved at a Synod held at London, in 1552. They were afterwards revised in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and reduced to thirty-nine; and they still serve as the best medium between Calvinism on the one hand, and Arminianism on the other. The object of the Assembly was to make them more Calvinistic; and to model them as nearly as possible on the decisions of the Synod of Dort. But it was soon found that the task was nearly impracticable, and leave was requested from Parliament, to be permitted to draw up an entirely new creed. Permission having been granted, a committee was appointed by the Assembly in 1645, to draw up a Confession of Faith; but their labor was not completed till 1647, when it was submitted to the Parliament for approval. The English Parliament changed the title into Articles of Religion, and made the following important retrenchments. They refused to sanction the 30th and 31st chapters "of Church Censures," and "of Synods and Councils," and the fourth section of chapter 29, "of Christian Liberty and Liberty of Conscience." In Scotland, the whole was passed, under the title originally proposed by the Assembly; and was approved of at Edinburgh, by the supreme Church Court, on the 27th of August, 1647. In explanation of the clause, that "magistrates may lawfully call a Synod of ministers, and other fit persons, to consult and advise with about matters of religion;" they affirmed that they understood it "only of kirks not settled or constituted in point of government;" though the Westminster Assembly must have understood it, of a body resembling themselves; a mere deliberative Assembly without any ecclesiastical authority whatever.

The question has been asked, when did the Assembly compose the Longer and Shorter Catechisms? To this enquiry, no very satisfactory answer has been returned; and the question is still left in much obscurity, whether it was composed by an individual, or by a committee of the Assembly. The most interesting document of the age, and one which would have given ample satisfaction on all such subjects, the minutes of Assembly, were burnt in the great fire in London, in 1666. The probability, however, is, that these catechisms were composed by a committee. The reason why the private accounts, written by members of the Assembly, shed no satisfactory light on this interesting subject, probably is, that they never became subjects of discussion. On purely doctrinal points, all was unanimity both in Parliament and in the Assembly. Only two dissents on such questions were entered—one on the doctrine of reprobation, and the other on the imputation of the active and pas-

sive obedience of Christ. Amid such unanimity, there was no room for discussion; and hence we have little correct information on the composition of the catechisms. At the Bicentenary of the Westminster Assembly, held at Edinburgh, on the 12th and 13th of July, 1843, the following interesting anecdote, respecting the Shorter Catechism, was related by Robert Paul, Esq.:—"It has been related," says he, "that the Committee of Divines who were engaged in framing it, came to a pause, when it had to be decided which of them should prepare the answer to that most solemn question, 'What is God?' All stood aback from the task—each one feeling himself to be incompetent for the duty. At length, it was agreed that it should be performed by the youngest man among them, whoever he should turn out to be. Why the youngest should be fixed upon for undertaking that from which the most aged and experienced had shrunk, it is not very easy to see; but so it was; and when the individual had been thus selected, it was found that he would consent to engage in the duty assigned to him, only upon one condition, that while he was so employed, the whole of his brethren should separately betake themselves to silent and earnest prayer, that he might be specially guided by the Divine Spirit in the fulfilment of his work. To this they consented, and within a brief space of time he produced that memorable answer, 'God is a spirit, infinite, unchangeable, and eternal, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth'—a sentence this, containing a definition or statement of the primary truth of religion, which for fulness and concentration, has never been surpassed, and which, under the circumstances that have been mentioned, may be looked upon as having been almost the dictate of inspiration."

The subsequent history of the Confession of Faith may be regarded as almost identical with that of the churches who have adopted it as their symbol. The English Presbyterians soon thought it too stringent, and hence they only required candidates for the ministry to sign it with this modifying clause, "So far as agreeable to the Word of God," an explanation which would have allowed an individual to sign the Mahomedan Koran, or the Indian Shaster. The result might have been easily foreseen. There was a strong tendency in the age to Socinianism; the ministry gradually became first Arian and then Socinian; piety gradually died; and at the present day, the Presbyterian churches belonging to the Puritan divines, are Unitarian meeting-houses. The venerable Matthew Henry was scarcely cold in his grave, before his chapel in Chester passed over to the Arians; and now from that pulpit, where he so faithfully proclaimed the Saviour's divinity and atonement, there is held forth such dogmas, as the dignity of human nature, the beauty of virtue, and the intolerance of what the preacher is pleased to call Calvinistic bigotry. They show strangers the little oak table where Matthew Henry wrote his commentary, and his library; but when one contrasts the glorious past with the mournful present, the exclamation bursts involuntarily from the lips, "How has the gold become dim!" Had these churches insisted that the Confession of Faith should be signed without any qualifying clause, the result might have been different.

The dangers that yet threaten the Confession of Faith are imminent. The tendency of the present age is to low Arminianism and Pelagianism; and men are anxious to divide the honor of salvation between the Creator and the creature. The parties for and against the Confession, have been styled Old and New School; but the terms clearly should be Calvinist and Pelagian. When these new school theologians clearly unfold their views, they intinate that the Bible and the Confession of Faith are not exactly in harmony on the doctrine of election; that Christ is not God's eternal Son; that the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin and of Christ's righteousness, is a mere imputation of effects; that the terms, covenant of works and covenant of grace, convey no distinct meaning; that Christ's death is not a satisfaction for sin, but simply a demonstration of the righteousness of God, a *grand sham by which God imposes on the universe*, and that Christ did not die exclusively for his people, or for his church, but for the world; and yet his death secures no man's salvation. When such preachers belong to a Calvinistic Church, they veil their meaning under loose and ambiguous phraseology, and talk about *liberal and illiberal* expositions of the Confession of Faith, till at last the very foundations of Divine truth are subverted.