

and industry in discovering, dispersing, and punishing the said conventicle." If any justice of the peace refused to do his duty he was to be fined five pounds; and the Act was to be "*construed most largely and beneficially for the suppressing of conventicles, and for the justification and encouragement of all persons to be employed in the execution thereof!*"

These laws, it will be observed, were not confined to those who had been ejected from the Church of England, and their adherents. They affected all dissidents, of every name, the Independents, the Baptists, the Quakers and others. No man was to "worship God contrary to the law." If he dared to pray, or to praise God, to instruct others, or to receive instruction, in any other manner than the Act of Uniformity enjoined, he must suffer the consequences, in purse, or person, or both. And the penalties of the Act, were enforced on all who should teach children without submitting themselves and declaring their adhesion to the church. Thus the minister was prevented from becoming a schoolmaster, and by that means procuring a livelihood. Every avenue was to be shut against him. He must conform—or go into exile—or die.

The sufferings which befel the Nonconformists in consequence of these Acts, during the reign of Charles II. and James II. were altogether without parallel. At first, the ministers only were the victims. Preaching the gospel in contravention of the law was a crime. Men might not be exhorted to repentance nor trained in piety by those who were not recognised as regular ministers of the Church of England. All others ran the risk of fine and imprisonment; and then, when the fine was paid or the imprisonment terminated, the oath already referred to was required to be taken, or they were called on to give security for "good behaviour," which "good behaviour" was construed to mean abstinence from preaching—a condition to which they could not submit. Protracted impris-