

WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

In these days, when Popery appears to be manifesting signs of renewed vitality, combining all its forces and exerting all its powerful influence to crush independence of thought, and annihilate civil and religious freedom, in order to regain its once cruel and despotic supremacy; when we see the arrogant assumptions of Archbishop Laud, or Puseyism, as modernly termed, unblushingly advocated by so many determined and influential supporters, a brief sketch of the illustrious Westminster Assembly, so effective under the guidance of Divine Providence, in terminating the barbaric cruelties of the time, and successfully resisting the unbounded pretensions of the other, may not be regarded as improper or inexpedient.

To this Assembly of divines are we, as Presbyterians, indebted for the subordinate standards of our church, the Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms. These exhibit the fundamental doctrines of revealed religion, in a manner that has defied criticism and unsparing assault, and commanded the assent and admiration of the most pious and intelligent among Christians.

The reformation in England was only a kind of half measure, a compromise between Popery and Protestantism. The King's supremacy was substituted for that of the Pope's. This assumption of ecclesiastical supremacy by the King led to innumerable dissensions, bloody persecutions and violent wars. All who refused spiritual submission to the King were prosecuted with pains and penalties.—The independence of conscience was denied and religious toleration disallowed. The church order and form of government were assimilated as nearly as possible to the Romish model. The whole order of prelate hierarchy, from the Archbishop down to the poor and laborious Curate, was retained. Many of the vestments and ceremonies of Popery were adopted and enjoined with unrelenting and blood-thirsty rigidity. The most tyrannical and cruel legislative enactments were sanctioned by the Established Church and enforced with despotic violence. The Sabbath day was desecrated, and profane and immoral books, such as "The King's book of Sports," were ordered by Episcopal authority, to be publicly read in churches on the Lord's day. To these impious commands obedience was enforced upon the clergy by threatened ejectments and civil penalties. The Bishops advanced the most arrogant pretensions, such as the divine right of episcopacy, their own co-ordinate jurisdiction with, and perfect independence of, the civil power, in matters secular as well as ecclesiastical. These unreasonable and unscriptural pretensions had the effect of checking the growth of piety within the prelate establishment, and rousing the whole nation into antagonism,—to rebellion against the usurped authority. So much so, that in the month of September 1642, a Bill was passed through the House of Commons, and in the same month, though the House of Lords, entitled "An Act for the better abolishing and taking away all Archbishops, Bishops, their Chancellors and Commissaries, &c., and ordaining that after the 5th of November, 1643, there shall be no Archbishops, &c., including the whole array of dignitaries and Cathedral functionaries, and all their jurisdictions, and offices shall cease and determine, and become absolutely void, that their possessions should return to the King,"