

V. THE COVENANT.

It was useless, he held, for the Presbyterians to defend their former actions by appealing to a certain clause in the Covenant. But to understand Milton's contemptuous reference to the 'fine clause' of the 'riddling Covenant,' it is necessary to pause for a moment to consider this bone of contention among all parties in the last year of Charles' reign. The Solemn League and Covenant of August, 1643, was based upon the Scottish National Covenant of 1638, which in its turn had been imported from France. A religious pact between England and Scotland, it was not only a league between two kingdoms to defend their civil liberties, but paved the way for uniformity in church matters, for the abolition of episcopacy, and the establishment of Presbyterianism in England. On its acceptance by the English parliament, copies of the document were signed at Westminster,¹ and in nearly all the parishes of England and Scotland. The text of the Covenant² was easy to understand, but it contained one clause which was afterwards to be interpreted according as a man turned to the support of king or parliament. This offending clause read as follows:—'We shall with the same sincerity, reality and constancy, in our several vocations, endeavour with our estates and lives mutually to preserve the rights and privileges of the Parliaments, and the liberties of the Kingdoms, and to preserve and defend the King's Majesty's person and authority, in the preservation and defence of the true Religion and

¹ The event is described by Neale, *Hist. of the Puritans* 1. 466. See also Whitelocke, *Memor.* 1. 202.

² For a full text of the Covenant see Rushworth, *Hist. Coll.* 5. 478, 479.