

he is not devoutly thankful to God he either does not believe what they endured or he does not know what he is permitted to enjoy." "I still see," says James in his declining years, "all the objections to religious establishments in all their magnitude, and feel them in all their weight, but I am so affected with a sense of the evils of infidelity and immorality, of sin in all its forms, and unbelief in all its grades, which are crushing the souls of men, that I cannot but stretch out the right hand of fellowship to men who amidst the forms of an established church are seeking by the power of true religion to save from evil. I am arrived at that period of life when the shadows of evening are gathering around me, when I am alternately looking back upon the course I have run, and forward to the account I must give, and if I know myself I can truly say that I have both a more entire conviction of the Scriptural authority for Nonconformity and more charity for those who in this respect differ from me."

#### Presbyterian Nonconformity in Birmingham, 1662 to 1747.

The history of Nonconformity in Birmingham as represented by the Independent Order of Protestant Dissenters, originates in the operation of the Five-Mile Act, which forbade under heavy penalties any Nonconformist minister taking up his residence within five miles of any corporate town. This Act did not apply to Birmingham, not being then a corporate town, and it consequently became the resort and refuge of many of the ejected ministers in 1662.

A room was licensed for public worship and one of the ejected ministers, a Mr. Fisher, became the preacher. On further indulgence by James II. in 1687 a regular society was formed and William Turtow, an ejected minister from Rowley Regis, became the minister of the society and continued so until his death in 1716.

In 1689 after the passing of the "Act of Toleration" the first meeting house was erected in Birmingham. It became known as the "Old Meeting." It was obscurely situated and screened by houses in the then narrow streets of Dudley street, the Inkleys, and Worcester street, — a quaint, many-gabled structure.

In 1692 another meeting-house was built in Digbeth in a yard known for long after and until recently as "Meeting-house yard." This was the original of the "New Meeting." Both of these societies were about that time called Presbyterian, but as before quoted from James "they had little of the Presbyterian about them except that they ruled church affairs by trustees and elders and shut out the suffrages of the congregations," a state of things which probably accounted later on for minutes and trust deeds which provided for a freedom from "the licentious effects of the want of discipline and of an impious domination."

The first minister of the society worshipping in the meeting-house in Digbeth was Mr. Sillitoe.

The early years of the 18th century in 1715 witnessed the destruction of the two first meeting-houses in an outburst of fury by the partisans of the State Church.

The "Old Meeting" was restored much after the old fashion of it, as the interior only suffered. The "New Meeting" was erected on a new site in Moor street and still exists as a Chapel belonging to the Catholics.

At the "Old Meeting" Edward Broadhurst followed William Turtow and was minister from 1716 to 1730. An epitaph to him by Dr. Isaac Watts stood to his memory on a tablet in front of the new meeting-house. Two days after the opening of the "New Meeting" house the Rev. Samuel