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A DISCOURSE AGAINST MILLERISM AND MILLENARIANISM, BY THE  
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3 **PETRA** i. 19.—We have also a more sure word of prophecy: whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star, arise in your hearts.

IN our onward march, we see nothing before us. The future is all dark. The first thing, generally, that we know of events is their actual occurrence. And yet there is implanted in us an inextinguishable desire to know the future. Our solicitude about the future becomes at times exceedingly great, absorbing every other concern. It is not strange then that misguided men, wholly ignorant of the oracles of God, should resort to heathen oracles, and the various other pretended sources of divination; and that those who have the Scriptures, should eagerly pry into them, and strive, if possible to find out what phases the future will exhibit. And, thanks be to God, he has not left us to the fruitless conjectures, and fearful bodings of our own unassisted minds. In his great goodness, he has condescended to make not only a revelation of his will in regard to our duty, and the way of life thro' his Son; but he has thrown much light ahead, relieving us from our native darkness. The principal tops of things, the great landmarks of the future he has distinctly pointed out; and in regard to many events, whose foreshewing was intended either for special instruction to the great masses; or for comfort, or warning, or terror to those who were subjects of the prediction, he has descended into all the minutiae of historic relation. This, I say, he has often done. But if in other instances, clouds and darkness have been round about the portentous truths, which seem at random thrown forth, or are under bold and singular figures presented; if only their fulfilment makes them known, what has vain man to object? If God's *judgments* are a great deep, why may not his prophetic declarations be the same? God has in this respect, as in every other, a perfect right to do as seemeth to him good. We are distinctly taught "that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that we thro' patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope." But in all things written, and that intended, we find that God's manner of conveying instruction is exceedingly various. And it by no means follows that every thing intended for our instruction must be fully understood by us in order that it have its intended effect. It is more important to be good than wise. Were all prophecy so framed as only to make us wise, it might leave us less Christian in character than it found us. Whatsoever things were written aforetime

Time may produce other developments: it is the great revealer of all things. A solemn truth, which, if men would but believe it, how greatly would it strengthen our virtue, increase our forbearance, support our courage, and sustain our truth, justice and honour, amid the trials of life; and how much of that detestable baseness, which constitutes so large an element of human nature, would it hold in check, if it could not banish it from the earth.

We have no motive to desire any controversy with any of these persons. None of them are in the way of doing any further injury to the church they have abandoned. It is from a regard, perhaps some may say over sensitive, to our own reputation as a fair and upright man, that we publish the present article. Personally, we are supremely indifferent to the conduct and opinions of such people. Nor have we any idea that the people of Petersburg, care a particle about their stale calumnies, or believe a syllable of what they uttered to our disadvantage. Long after Mr. Hutchinson left the church at Petersburg, we preached Christ Jesus to the people, whose hearts he was willing to poison against us: and in no part of America have our poor labours through the press been more kindly or constantly patronised, than in that fine town, and by members of that noble congregation. In Richmond, the seat of *Mr. Converse's* former labours, long after he found it convenient to emigrate to the North, have we been called in God's providence, once and again, to make proclamation of those blessed doctrines of grace, for devotion to which, the whole New School body have so hated and reviled us. And in how many portions, and to how many tens of thousands of the inhabitants of the slave-holding states have we spoken with kind acceptance on their part, through the press and from the pulpit, since the outbreak of that combination of men, whom God has scattered like chaff, to put us down as an abolitionist! Blessed be God for his good hand over us. Blessed be the name of our God, who has not allowed our enemies to prevail against us. Yea, blessed be his name, who gives his children grace to be found faithful, who catches the wicked in their own pit, and who is, to them that trust him, a very present help in time of trouble.

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THE BI-CENTENARY OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY. JULY 1, 1643  
—1843.—REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

THE Standing Committee appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, which convened at Philadelphia on the 18th of May, 1842,\*—to mature a plan for a suitable commemoration of the two hundredth anniversary of the meeting of the Westminster Assembly, according to the order of the assembly submit the following Report and Recommendations.

On the 1st day of July, 1643, being Saturday, sixty-nine persons, ministers and laymen, the whole of the former having been Episco-

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\* See printed Minutes of the General Assembly for 1842, p. 17 and p. 24.

pally ordained, and nearly all of both sorts being still in the communion of the Church of England, met in Henry VIIIth's chapel, at Westminster, in England, and constituted themselves into "An Extraordinary Synod." Both houses of that illustrious parliament of England, commonly called the Long Parliament, which sat for nearly eighteen years, and accomplished one of the most remarkable revolutions which the world has seen, were present officially on the memorable occasion. The Synod itself was constituted by an ordinance of that Parliament, dated the 12th June, 1643, which summoned it, and in terms enjoined its members "to confer and treat among themselves of such matters and things concerning the liturgy, discipline and government of the Church of England, or the vindication of the same from all false aspersions and misconstructions, as shall be proposed by either or both houses of Parliament, and no other: and to deliver their advices and opinions touching the matters aforesaid, as shall be most agreeable to the word of God, to both or either houses from time to time, in such manner as shall be required."\* By that ordinance, the Synod was to consist of one hundred and twenty-one divines, and thirty lay assessors, of whom, ten were peers, and twenty commoners: to whom were added, at various subsequent periods, fourteen divines, making the whole number appointed by the Parliament one hundred and sixty-five persons.† The General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, being thereto especially requested by the Synod, and by the English Parliament, appointed five ministers and three ruling elders, as commissioners of the Church of Scotland to the Synod met at Westminster;‡ which made the number delegated to it one hundred and seventy-three persons. Some of those appointed members appear never to have met the body; and others to have attended only occasionally: but the majority of them gave diligent and assiduous attention to the duties to which they had thus been called in the good providence of God; and have become famous amongst men, and dear to God's people, by the name of the *Westminster Assembly*.||

It is very common to call this body, the *Westminster Assembly of Divines*. But the ordinance which summoned it, called it "an Assembly of learned and godly divines, and others:" and it has just been shown that thirty-three lay assessors and ruling elders were organic members of it, and it is generally known that this class of members was made up from amongst the most famous men of their times; and there is reason to believe that few members of the Assembly had more influence than several of these.

It is to be remembered that this Assembly was not ecclesiastically convened, and was not an ordinary church court. It had, properly speaking, no spiritual power, and was not in any sense a representative body of the clergy, or a national Synod, much less a general one: and the very ordinance which called and constituted it, expressly restrained it from assuming or exercising "any jurisdiction, power, or

\*Rushworth, vol. v, p. 887.

†Their names are given by Neal. *Hist. Puritans*, vol. III., pp. 46—48.

‡Hetherington *Hist. Church of Scotland*, under the year 1643.

||The actual number of English divines who sat in the Assembly was one hundred. Their names are preserved in *Duncan's Collection of Scottish Confessions*, &c., pp. 186—8.

authority ecclesiastical, whatsoever." It was, as itself justly said, "a committee or council to the Parliament, to give their opinion touching such church matters as the houses should lay before them;" and its continued existence depended absolutely on the will of the Parliament which convened it. Whatever authority, therefore, its acts or definitions may have, must be purely that influence which results from the character of the men who made them, or from that of the works themselves; or it must be the result of subsequent and independent adoption or sanction by competent authority, civil or ecclesiastical. In this particular, this Assembly differed from the most of those famous bodies which have in different ages exerted a controlling influence in giving shape to the form and to the doctrine of various branches of the church of Christ.

The Assembly may be said to have subsisted till the 22d of February 1649—a period of five years and eight months, nearly; during which time they held nearly eleven hundred sessions. After this, such members as remained in London were continued as a committee for the examination of ministers, for about three years more, until the revolution effected by Oliver Cromwell, in the constitution of the Parliament in March 1652, seemed to them to abrogate virtually, the authority which convened them, and the Assembly finally broke up.\*

The members who were designated to compose the Assembly, although originally almost entirely Episcopalians, were divided into several very distinct but unequal parties. Some were prelatists of a very high tone; and of such very few ever met with the body, and none continued long in it. The great majority were at first, as were the two houses of Parliament which called the Assembly, and indeed the body of the enlightened and pious portion of the English nation at that time, moderate Episcopalians, men of the old Non-Conformist and Puritan stamp;† of these far the greater part gradually came over to the sentiments, as to church government and discipline which are set forth in the formularies prepared by them, and such as did not, chiefly left the body before its work was done. There was, perhaps, from the beginning, a small but decided and very able body of thorough Presbyterians both in the Parliament and in the Assembly. There was also a small party of Erastians, who were amongst the most learned and noted men of their day. And there were also a few excellent and eminent men who were extremely zealous Independents. It is to be remembered, however, that almost the entire difference between these last and the strict Presbyterians lay in the absolute independency of each separate congregation asserted by the former; and that not only as to most points of doctrine and discipline, but as to many of church order also, these two portions of the Assembly perfectly agreed. For example, they were entirely of one mind in asserting church government to be *jure divino*, and fully agreed also as to the proper mode of organizing particular congregations:‡ points, it must be conceded of great importance, and in

\* Neal, vol. III. 413.

† Baxter's Life.—Neal, vol. II., ch. xii.; and vol. III. ch. iv.

‡ See Apologetic Narr. of the Independents: Neal, vol. III., ch. iv: Lightfoot's Journal.

regard to which modern Congregationalists have generally, it is believed, somewhat different views. It is scarcely necessary to say, that the commissioners from the Scottish General Assembly, were strictly Presbyterian in their views.

Every member of the Assembly, before he took his seat, was required to make and subscribe a solemn declaration, that he would not maintain any thing in matter of doctrine but what he believed in his conscience to be most agreeable to the word of God; or in point of discipline, but what he conceived would conduce most to the glory of God, and the good and peace of his church; and this protestation was publicly read in the Assembly every Monday morning. All their sessions were opened and closed with prayer. Three of their members officiated by turns as chaplains to the two houses of Parliament, and to the body called the "Committee of both Kingdoms." They preceded their labours by a solemn and public fast; and stately and at short intervals, repeatedly humiliated themselves thus before God. And in general, it must be allowed, that the whole of their public proceedings indicated a fixed and habitual conviction of their dependence upon him, a constant sense of his presence, and a deep and earnest assurance of the importance and solemnity of the work to which his providence had called them.

The great works which they produced, with the times and circumstances under which they were perfected, may be imperfectly estimated from the statements which follow:—

1. On the 17th of October, 1643, a committee was appointed on a *Directory for Public Worship*; this part of their duty being amongst the most pressing of all, on account of the Parliament having, by an ordinance, discarded the use of the Liturgy. The Assembly passed the Directory with great unanimity. It was established by an ordinance of the English Parliament, dated January 3, 1645, and by the General Assembly of the Scottish church, which met on the 22d of January of the same year, and afterwards by the Scottish Estates in Parliament.

The reasons which induced the English Parliament to discard the Liturgy, are set forth in the preface of its act, and those of the Assembly in recommending the substitution of their "Directory for the Public Worship of God," in the place of the "Book of Common Prayer," are succinctly stated in their preface to the Directory:\* and the candid study of them will show that two centuries of further experience have only confirmed the judgment of the Parliament and the Assembly, in the whole subject. The importance of the change and of the principles on which it is to be justified may be easily perceived when it is considered that amongst the alterations produced by this substitution were, the suggestion of topics for extemporaneous prayer substituted in the place of a prescribed form of prayer; the rejection of the Apocrypha from public use in the worship of God; the rejection of private and lay baptism, as well as the use of god-fathers and god-mothers, and the sign of the cross in baptism; the disuse of private communion and administration of the Lord's supper to the sick; the substitution of the communion table for an altar; the

\* The Directory will be found at large in Neal, vol. V., Appendix viii.

excluding of profane and unconverted persons from the Lord's table ; the abrogation of the prohibition to marry during lent ; the disuse of private confession and authoritative absolution, in the visitation of the sick ; the disuse of all formal services in the burial of the dead ; the discarding of saints' days, and of all clerical vestments. A careful comparison of the Directory of the Westminster Assembly, with that ratified in May 1821, by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, and now in use in our church, will, it is probable, cause both surprise and regret at the extent of the changes, abridgments and substitutions—generally for the worse—which have been, we cannot but think, most improvidently made ; and perhaps it might be considered, by no means an unfit improvement of the present season, to restore the venerable Directory from a great mass of the emendations which a restless spirit and superficial views of divine things have pushed farther than is generally supposed.

2. The doctrinal standards composed by this Assembly consisted of a Confession of Faith and a larger and shorter Catechism. At first and for some time, their attention was occupied with a revision of the Articles of the Church of England ; and they went as far as to the end of the 15th article, in this work.\* But it was afterwards determined, at the instance of the Scottish commissioners, to compile a full and independent system from the Scriptures ; and on the 9th of May, 1645, a committee was appointed for this purpose. On the 26th of May 1646, the work was finished and reported to the Assembly,—which, however, had been occupied during the intervening time, as part of its stated business, in examining and determining the various propositions which make up the system ; which, it is well known, is throughout composed, not of arguments, but of comprehensive definitions and statements of truth. This "Confession of Faith," was presented to the Parliament on the 11th of December 1646, by the whole Assembly in a body. The Commons House was engaged above a year on this Confession ; and on the 22d of March, 1648, presented it to the House of Lords, with some alterations and reservations in regard to those parts which related to the power of discipline—church censures—the keys—synods and councils—marriage and divorce—and the duty of the church and the civil magistrate towards religious offenders. On the 28th of June 1648, it was established by an ordinance of Parliament—with the aforesaid reservations—and published under the title, "Articles of religion approved and passed by both houses of Parliament, after advice had with an assembly of divines called together by them for that purpose."† The General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland which met at Edinburgh on the 4th of August 1647, ratified this Confession, in the form in which it came from the hands of the Westminster Assembly ; and the Scottish Parliament of 1690, again expressly established it.‡ Whilst the Confession of Faith was passing through the Assembly, committees were appointed to digest its articles, which are more particularly moral and dogmatical, into two Catechisms ; a larger one,

\* Neal, vol. V., Appendix vii., gives the emendations.

† Rushworth, p. 1055.

‡ Hetherington, under these years.

for public exposition, and a shorter one for more general use. The latter was presented to Parliament in November 1647, the former in April 1648; though they must have been both completed by the Assembly, before 24th of Oct., 1647, since on that day, which was about a week before the Scottish Commissioners took their leave of the body, it was entered on its Journal that some one or all of them had been with the Assembly "during all the time they had been debating and perfecting these four things mentioned in the covenant, viz., the composing a directory for public worship, an uniform confession of faith, a form of church government and discipline, and a public catechism."\* On the 15th of Sept., 1648, the Parliament approved and published these catechisms; which had been adopted by the Scottish Assembly in the previous July.† This Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms were formally adopted by the highest judicatory of the Presbyterian church in this country, then called the "Synod of New York and Philadelphia," at its last meeting preceding the formation of the present General Assembly. This occurred at Philadelphia, May 21—29, 1788. A single "small amendment" as it is called in the Larger Catechism, and "some alterations" in three paragraphs of the Confession, were the only changes made in them.‡ It is not, however, to be understood that this was the first occasion on which these doctrinal standards have been openly avowed by this church; on the contrary, it has always professed them from the first emigration of its members to this continent, and on various occasions our ecclesiastical courts have, with great distinctness, renewed the open profession of them.§ But in the year 1788, the ministry of that church had, during about a century of labours and struggles not unmingled with persecutions, increased from a single person to one hundred and sixty-nine ministers;|| and the Synod having determined, two years before, to re-model all its Presbyteries—divide itself into four Synods, and constitute a General Assembly to convene on the third Thursday in May 1789, in the city of Philadelphia, and be constituted by an equal delegation of ministers and ruling elders from the sixteen new-modelled Presbyteries; it was deemed a suitable occasion to review these formularies, and adopt them anew by a public and fundamental act. Fifty-five years of subsequent effort and experience, during which the Lord has so severely tried the faith of the church, so greatly enlarged its borders, and so thoroughly purged and delivered it, have so resulted, that it is not too much to say that there probably never existed a single communion so great in the number of its ministers and churches and covering so large an extent of country, which embraced with more simplicity the great doctrines set forth in these formularies than the Presbyterian Church in the United States does at this moment; nor is it too much to add, that its present position, is far more advantageous for the maintenance and diffusion of these blessed truths amongst men, than it has

\* Neal, Vol. III. p. 322.

† Duncan's Collection of Scottish Confessions, &c., p. 326 and 396.

‡ Printed Records of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S., pp. 539 and 547.

§ See Printed Records, &c., p. 92-3, (year 1729,) and p. 232, (1745,) p. 286, (1758,) &c.

|| See printed Records, p. 541—2.

ever been before. With what gratitude to God should we dwell on these things? With what humility, faithfulness and zeal should we improve them?

3. The greatest difficulties and the most protracted debates in the Westminster Assembly, were on various subjects connected with church government and discipline; indeed it was only upon subjects of this nature that very serious differences of opinion existed amongst the members of that body. At an early stage of their deliberations, many questions of this nature were thrown upon them by the Parliament, and were obliged to be disposed of, in consequence of the absolute necessity of erecting some tribunal to examine, to ordain, to try and to depose ministers; and the mere neglect to determine such matters was practically to encourage every sort of excess in the country. For the bishops sided with the king in the civil war then raging; a very large part of the inferior clergy in the old establishment were men of immoral lives, and besides negligent of their work and incompetent for it; and the growing fanaticism of the times, filled the country with presumptuous men, who, upon their own mere motion, assumed the functions of religious teachers. Nor were these matters ever finally and satisfactorily arranged between the Assembly and the Parliament; although the former, with great labour, perfected its work, and the latter, from time to time, by ordinance after ordinance, adopted portions of the directory for ordination, the discipline, and the form of government digested by the Assembly, until the entire Presbyterian system was virtually set up by the laws of England as the established religion of the kingdom. The formularies of the Assembly were approved by the General Assembly of the church of Scotland in 1645.\* The great points of difference in the Assembly, were such as these; the office and warrant of the Ruling Elder, whether there be such an office, whether it be *jure divino*, and what are its nature and functions: ordination, what it is and in whose hands—whether of Bishops or the Presbytery, and if with the latter, is that body itself *jure divino*; discipline, what is its nature and extent, with whom is it lodged, whether with the brotherhood, the eldership, or the civil power—and if with either of the two first, whether *jure divino*; church courts, whether they be independent or subordinated to each other, and whether in either case, they are subject to the civil power *in spiritualibus*; the pastoral office, whether it be exclusively parochial, and that *jure divino*, &c. &c. The result of all was, the successive and complete establishment, in the Assembly, of the Presbyterian system, very nearly upon the model then existing in Scotland. In this form it was introduced as far as circumstances would admit, into the United States, from the earliest times. The present form of government and discipline of our church were digested during the years 1786, 7, 8,† by the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, preparatory to the erection of the General Assembly. Though the former preserved the main features of

\*Neal, Vol. III, appendix 9, gives them at large. The approving act is printed in Duncan's Collections, p. 164; it contained important reservation, upon points still not fully determined.

†See printed records of the Presbyterian church for the years named.

the Westminster Assembly's form of government—there are numerous and in some instances very considerable changes; and practically the working of our system is in many respects different from that established in England under the advice of that Assembly. Our discipline was compiled chiefly from the Scottish forms, of which it is rather a meagre compend. The most careless observer cannot fail to be struck with the remarkable resemblance which exists between the model of our church government and that of our civil institutions; and it is not unworthy of being kept in remembrance that some of the distinguished men who aided in forming the Constitution of the United States, were at the same time engaged in digesting the form of government of the Presbyterian Church in this country. This close resemblance, it is obvious, must always give our system a powerful hold on the affections of our countrymen, and quicken in the bosoms of our people the sentiment of patriotism by a coincidence at once so striking and so grateful. Nor can we, as lovers of civil liberty, fail to note, that this system was established in England at the only period of true freedom in her long annals, and by the hands of the same statesmen and patriots who laid the deep foundations of the greater part of that freedom she still enjoys; and that it was not subverted until a corrupt and perfidious tyrant was again upon her throne. Religion itself we readily admit, is compatible in its interior work with every condition of human institutions; but its own institutions are essentially free, and their action can be perfectly developed only under circumstances answerable to their nature. It ought to be remembered that the Synod of 1788, which made the important changes in our church organization which have been intimated, which amended some and digested others, and adopted all our present formularies, was only an ordinary Synod, as the previous one of 1786 which took the initiative in this great work, also was. A convincing proof that those theories which allow to our existing General Assembly and other church courts only such powers as are exhibited and defined in our form of government; as well as those which make the Presbyteries, the source of power to the higher church courts, are wholly fallacious. For the history of our church shows, that the Assembly is itself the real representative of the original body in this country; which having first grown large enough to do so, constituted itself into a Presbytery, then divided itself into several Presbyteries and constituted a Synod, and at length divided that Synod into several, reorganized all its Presbyteries and constituted this General Assembly. All which things it did, in the exercise of its common and inherent powers, the whole of which remain as before in all the church courts, which are indeed ordained not of man but of God, and cannot therefore lawfully either assume or demit powers of themselves. And no church constitution can of right be any thing more, than a system of definitions and rules drawn from God's word, and a covenant between those who are of one mind upon the points stated; and where it is silent, the authority is not vacated, but remains untouched, to be settled out of the Scriptures. So that our church constitution is to be assimilated rather to that of one of our states, where what is not withheld is allowed, than to that of the national government, where what is not granted is withheld; the more especially as ecclesiastical power is not only exclu-

sively moral, but is also purely declarative and ministerial. It is worthy also of being remembered that although there were a hundred and sixty-nine ministers, and a much larger number of congregations composing the Synod of 1758, all which ministers should properly have sat in that Synod, and all the congregations been represented by ruling elders; yet in fact only forty-one ministers and about a dozen elders were members of it; and this small fraction of the church accomplished all the important changes already mentioned, without requiring a subsequent approval either by the Presbyteries or the new Assembly. And the acquiescence in these changes, which was general and cordial, as well as the fact of their having been preferred under such circumstances, confirms the belief that the view here presented of the theory of our church power was that originally held.

The Westminster Assembly, amongst its other labours, paid considerable attention to the metrical version of the psalms for use in public worship. It is impossible to determine exactly what was done by it, in this respect; but it is known that the Commons House of Parliament, being moved thereto by divers complaints of the obsolete version of Sternhold & Hopkins, passed an ordinance on the 14th of November 1643, desiring the Assembly to recommend some other version to be used in the churches. During two full years, the metrical version then lately made by Francis Rouse or Roos, who was a member both of the Commons House and of the Assembly, appears to have been under examination; and on the 20th November 1645, the Assembly reported to the Parliament, that they had caused this new version to be carefully perused, altered and amended, and that they did "humbly conceive" it might "be useful and profitable to the church," if this version was "permitted to be publicly sung;" and the house accordingly authorized its use.\* During the progress of this matter in England, the Scottish General Assembly was very assiduously occupied with it;† and the new version was finally adopted by that body in 1649.‡ It is well known that our church has never held that the Psalms are *exclusively* to be used in singing the praises of God.§ But on the contrary, believing that he is to be praised for all that he is, and in all that he does, and knowing that every portion of his blessed word contains revelations of himself, and that these are in general far clearer and more extensive in the New Testament than in the Psalms; it has always contended for the use of a psalmody which should embrace, to the utmost extent possible, the whole revealed grounds of the religious praise of God. And at various periods it has bestowed peculiar care on the compilation and preparation of sacred songs whose composition, paraphrase, or translation, rests on this constant, obvious, and as it appears to us, unquestionable principle. After five years of arduous labour, in committee and in the Assembly, a new collection is now passing through the press, which it is hoped will be found to meet all the just expecta-

\* Neal, Vol. III., p. 266.

† See Aiton's Life of Henderson, pp. 573—80: and Balie's Letters, dated June 17, and Nov. 25. 1645: and *Hist. West. Ass.*, compiled for the Pres. Board of Publication, pp. 98—102.

‡ See approving acts in Duncan's Collection, pp. 559 and 560.

§ See printed Records for 1778, p. 447 and p. 449, and places there alluded to.

tions of the churches. While it is much to be regretted that a matter of this kind should be permitted to divide from us, considerable portions of those who agree with us in most points of faith, order, and practice; it is due to candour and to the present occasion, to state distinctly our continued and perfect confidence in the scripturalness, the propriety, and the expediency of the principles constantly adopted and acted on by this church, in regard to this interesting subject.

It does not appear that the Westminster Assembly had any agency in preparing the Annotations upon the Scriptures, which pass under its name; nor that it took any order on this important subject. The work referred to, states in its preface,\* that it was prepared by a body of divines appointed by the Committee of Religion, of the House of Commons; and that this appointment was made in consequence of a petition from the stationers and printers of London for license to print the notes in the English version called the *Geneva Bible*, along with the text of the new or King James's version, first printed in 1612: and that their original appointment contemplated little more than a thorough revision of those notes, which had been written and published about the year 1560, by learned and pious English exiles at Geneva, at the head of whom was the great John Knox.† It is hardly too much to say that the greatest deficiency of our church in this country up to the present moment, is the want of a sound, thorough, complete and attractive commentary upon the entire Bible; a commentary composed in the sense of our church formularies, and throughout conformable to our views. Nor is it too much to add, that the lack of such a book has left a gap through which our families and congregations have been constantly liable to an inundation of books obnoxious to the most serious objections; and by means of which, shallow views of religion have spread, wholesome impressions have been effaced, the influence of our doctrine and order been weakened in our own body, and evils produced, the extent of which it is impossible to estimate. Nor can we conceive of a more valuable or appropriate service which could at this time be rendered to our church and to the reading world, than for this Assembly to take such steps as will secure the preparation and publication of just such a commentary as we need.

There is one remarkable difference between the method directed to be pursued in the ordination of ministers, by the Form of Government of the Westminster Assembly and our own. The former seems to have required neither a subscription to the articles of religion nor a distinct public profession of their adoption in a set form; but in lieu thereof the person proposed for ordination, was required to produce more ample testimonials, to be perhaps more thoroughly examined in the Presbytery, and far more so by it publicly on the occasion of his ordination according to a directory prepared in relation to the whole subject. Without hazarding any particular expression of opinion in the case, it may be safely affirmed that the history of our church affords the most ample and melancholy proof, that professions and

\* P. 9, folio edition of 1645.

† Their names will be found in Neal, Vol. III., p. 414.

‡ McCrie's Life of Knox, Vol. I, p. 214.

subscriptions according to set forms, no matter how precise and solemn those forms may be, cannot be relied on, as substitutes for the thorough training, testimonials, supervision, and examinations, contemplated in the more ancient standards.

It would be a very grievous error to imagine that the great principles, doctrines and results embodied in the standards of faith, order, discipline, and worship, digested by the Westminster Assembly, were discoveries made by that venerable body. Probably there is not a solitary truth asserted, or principle laid down in any part of those summaries, which had not been fully elaborated, distinctly stated, clearly proved, and long practiced by some portion of the church of God, before that Assembly met. So far as their testimony is against popery, it was the common and established sentiment of the reformed world for nearly a century previous, and of thousands of holy men before the dawn of the reformation itself. Their decisions against diocesan Episcopacy and in favour of Presbytery were the mere expression of the universal and constant judgment of all the reformed churches, except that of England; and even in England itself, the great body of the original reformers and non-conformists did not desire, but were forced by kingly power to allow the accumulated evils and follies of prelacy. In Scotland especially, prelacy was little less odious than popery; and it was only a few years before the Westminster Assembly convened, that the famous Glasgow Assembly of 1638 had crowned with triumph a national struggle of half a century against it; and the whole nation roused itself up, as one man, to resist to the death all attempts to restore by force a system which had filled Scotland with blood and tears. The Scottish national covenant, and the solemn league and covenant of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, which latter covenant resulted from this successful attempt on the part of the Scotch people to emancipate themselves from prelacy imposed by violence and fraud upon them, and was taken by the British Parliament and the Westminster Assembly; exhibited and perhaps fostered a temper in that generation which rendered such churchmen as the cruel and perfidious Laud, and such prelacy as he aimed to set up in the three kingdoms, as odious as the worst specimens of popes and popery. It is worthy of much consideration that this same Laud is in our day ranked by many prelatists, along with Charles himself, as a Christian martyr, and that some of his worst heresies and principles are rapidly spreading in the bosom of Anglican and Anglo-American episcopacy. The testimony of the Assembly against Arminianism, decided and clear as it is, is scarcely more so than that of most of the creeds of the Reformation, and perhaps not so explicit and pointed as that of the famous Synod of Dort, which but twenty-five years before, had, with great labour and solemnity, and with the consent and acquiescence of reformed Europe in general, declared the doctrine of Christ touching Divine predestination, redemption by the death of Christ, man's corruption, the method of his conversion to God, and the perseverance of the saints. And it may be allowed to us here, to call attention to the general and somewhat remarkable similarity between the heresies and proceedings of the disturbers of the peace and purity of the Belgic churches before 1618, and those of the party that had so nearly overwhelmed

our own church before 1837. It is known that at the era of the Westminster Assembly, Antinomianism and Ana-Baptism, had made but small progress in any part of Western Europe, and had scarcely excited any decided apprehension in the British isles. The Assembly, however, once and again, bore its open and emphatic testimony against these and other heresies and disorders, which became more and more formidable amid the civil commotions which raged around them during almost the whole period of their sessions;—but even in this, they did but re-echo the constant sentiment of the reformed churches. In what it set up, it clearly manifested the same great truths, and perfectly exhibited the same absolute sympathy with the common and constant doctrine of the purest churches, in all past ages, as well as with those then existing around them. The month after the Assembly met, it declared that “the creeds that go under the name of the Nice creed, Athanasian creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostles’ creed, are thoroughly to be received and believed, for that the matter of them may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.”\* At the same early period of their labours, they entered into correspondence with the reformed churches and divines on the continent, and not only themselves solicited the aid of the church of Scotland,—at that moment the purest, most enlightened, and most efficient of all existing churches, but the Parliament of England made a similar appeal to that venerable church, and both the Parliament and the Assembly sent commissioners to Scotland to enforce a requisition so extraordinary, and so honorable to all the parties.† Five years before (in 1638) the church of Scotland had thoroughly emancipated herself: and the intervening period had been employed with great diligence and energy in perfecting what she still delights to call her *second reformation*. During the greater part of 1640 and ’41 several of the ablest divines of Scotland had resided in London by appointment of the Scottish authorities, in order to assist by their counsels on ecclesiastical affairs, the commissioners who were maturing a treaty between the Covenanters and the Long Parliament; and during their stay submitted to the “Lords of the Treaty,” as the convention was called, a remarkable paper in which they attempted to show that “conformity of church government between the two nations” would be “one principal means of continued peace.”‡ At the Scottish General Assembly of 1641, it was resolved to digest more perfectly a Confession of Faith, a larger and shorter Catechism, a platform of church government, and a directory for worship; and this great work was by order of the Assembly, laid upon the man who had suggested it; the same who had before suggested to the “Lords of Treaty” the idea of conformity between the two kingdoms—the same whom God had so remarkably used and honoured at the memorable era of 1638—who was the prime mover of the *National Covenant*, and the author of the *Solemn League and Covenant*—who afterwards undoubtedly exerted more influence in the Westminster Assembly, than any other person; and who

\* *Journal of the Assembly of Divines*, Lightfoot’s Works, Vol. XIII., p. 10.

† *Rushworth*, Vol. V., pp. 468—9. *Neal*, Vol. III., p. 56.

‡ *Hetherington*, pp. 228—9.

was, by God's grace, by far the most important man of his generation in the church of Christ, and had, beyond all comparison, a greater share than any other mortal, in shaping the standards of which this report treats, and through them on the destiny of Presbyterianism to the present hour. That man was *Alexander Henderson*;\* a man raised up by God for great and good designs; fitted by his grace for the glorious work set before him; and richly deserving to rank with *Calvin*, *Knox*, and *Melville*, in the gratitude of all who love Christ Jesus and his blessed kingdom. Soon after the arrival in Edinburgh of the Commissioners of the Westminster Assembly and the English Parliament sent up to Scotland to ask for the presence and aid of Scottish divines, upon conference with the General Assembly of the church of Scotland, the latter drew up, and on the 17th of August 1643, unanimously adopted, *The Solemn League and Covenant*, which was also unanimously ratified on the same day by the Convention of the Scottish estates.† During the month of September following, the British Parliament and the Westminster Assembly approved this document, certainly one of the most searching and effective ever drawn up by man; and on the 25th day of that month, the Parliament and the Assembly, came together in St. Margaret's church, Westminster, and with solemn religious services, individually subscribed the covenant and swore to observe it.‡ It is well known that the great body of the English and Scotch people, and of the Irish Protestants, subscribed this covenant with absolute enthusiasm. The whole transaction must be admitted to be one of the most remarkable national movements recorded in the annals of the world. If any are disposed to cavil at some features of it, they should remember that the papal leagues for the extirpation of heretics, and their public and general butcheries in endeavouring to carry them into effect, which the preceding century had witnessed, had not lost the impression of their horror and perfidy. They should consider that the frightful massacre of the protestants in Ireland had occurred but two years before, and that, there was great reason to believe, by the connivance of the king himself. They should consider, how much innocent blood had been shed, how much cruelty had been perpetrated, how much perfidy had been systematically employed, both in England and in Scotland, to hunt down true religion, and to set up a religion half-reformed from popery, disfigured by puerile and heathenish rites, and hateful to the people by its dreadful spirit. And then perhaps, we shall admit, that the movement was as far from being destitute of sober reason as it was remarkable for its profound conviction and its fervid enthusiasm. However this may be, it is impossible to reflect that this solemn league and covenant had amongst its avowed objects, "the preservation of the reformed religion in the church of Scotland, in doctrine,

\**Aiton of Dolphinton* has compiled an interesting Memoir of the Life and Times of this illustrious man; published, Edinburg, 1836, in 8vo, pp. 674. But the whole history of the Scottish church and nation of that era—of the Westminster Assembly, and of the relations between England and Scotland from the accession of Charles 1st, till his own death, is full of him.

†*Hetherington*, 336. The document at large is in Vol. III., pp. 39—68 of Neal's Hist. Puritans. Also in Rushworth, Vol. V., p. 478.

‡*Lightfoot's Journal*, p. 15.

worship, discipline, and government ;" " the reformation of religion in the kingdoms of England and Ireland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches ;" the bringing of the " church of God in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in religion, confessing of faith, form of church government, directory for worship, and catechising : " and " the extirpation of popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, profaneness, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness ; " and not at once perceive that from the moment of its being sworn to and subscribed by the Westminster Assembly, which was within three months after it first met—there no longer remained a doubt as to the general result of the labours of that great Assembly, and the prevailing character of the standards they must at last produce. And the whole of these reflections show how true it is, that nothing was invented, nothing originated by that Assembly ; but that its whole labours resulted only in making it more clear and evident that the glorious and long descended truth of God is in all ages the same ; and that the great merit of the standards compiled by it is their clearness, their simplicity, their conformity with the general doctrine of God's elect, and their faithful exhibition of the system of truth which the ever blessed God has revealed to us in that word, which is the only infallible rule of our faith and practice.

The men who composed that Assembly never imagined for a moment, nor do we, that they were not liable, like other men, to great and manifold errors ; and they saw plainly that they were surrounded by difficulties and hindrances. The spirit of their age, beyond a doubt, more or less influenced their conduct, their views, and their opinions ; and we can discover more clearly than it was possible for them to do, the sources, the extent, and the consequences of errors arising from such causes. The greatest and the most fatal of these, was the universal conviction then prevalent, that it was the duty of all commonwealths to establish and support the church of Christ, by the active intervention of the civil power and as a clear civil obligation. From this principle others necessarily follow, which at the first step involve the church in mortal conflict with the state ; a conflict which can have no end, except in Erastianism or in popery ; for if the conflict be not interminable, the state must subject the church, or the church must subject the state. And the second step in the development of the principle leads just as directly to schism ; for if the state must establish religion, it must be that form of it which the state itself approves as best, and to expect all states to approve the same either for form or substance, or to expect the same state to remain constant in one view, is utterly absurd, and opposed to all experience. The third step leads inevitably to intolerance ; if, indeed, it does not by logical necessity, force us into a position where it is very difficult to escape from an obligation to persecute ; so much so indeed, that God has in few things more manifestly displayed his grace to the Presbyterian body throughout the world than in this, that though portions of them have been long subjected to this severe temptation, their hands are unpolluted except with their own blood. To plead a divine warrant for religious establishments from the ex-

ample of the Old Testament church, is to forget that a theocracy exists no more; that Jesus himself put away that dispensation by the sacrifice of himself. To support it upon the allowed ground that the state itself is ordained of God, and that its highest function and plainest duty is to honor him in all its acts; is to forget that being so ordained, apart from the church, it is a separate ordination, separately instituted, separately accountable, and to be separately judged. To argue for the necessity of any such establishment, is to be blind to all existing developments of God's providence, forgetful of the glorious struggles and triumphs of the church during her earliest and brightest centuries, and of the horrible corruptions which sprung from the coronation of the cross. To plead for such a principle as inherent in the religion of Jesus, is to surrender the blessed hope of that coming day when every authority but that of the glorified Redeemer will be abolished upon earth, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. For nearly a century and a half the Presbyterian body in America, constantly repudiating this dangerous and unsound principle, and all its evil consequences, constantly asserting with our fathers the absolute freedom of the church, but constantly proclaiming against the doctrine of our fathers—its total separation from the state; has, by God's blessing, grown from the smallest beginnings to her present strength, rendering to the state ten thousand favours without ever asking for one peculiar to herself, and conferring upon mankind blessings which cannot be numbered, without taking from the meanest human being the smallest of those rights which placed him on the common level with ourselves. How manifold has been the experience of the same body in England, Ireland, and Scotland, since the era of the Westminster Assembly, that the doctrine we repudiate, cannot possibly sustain the church of God in any thing distinctive of her vocation, even when it operates most freely in her behalf; but may be used with exterminating fury, when it is corruptly turned against her? Alas! where is now the once precious and illustrious national, covenanted Presbyterian church of England? And what might she not have been, but for the doctrine of church and state, by force of which, the execrable *Charles II.* and his fierce and corrupt prelates tore her up root and branch? And how nearly had the same servants of Satan, by the power of the same principle, extirpated, even in Scotland, the faith which seemed rooted like the everlasting hills? And at this very moment, how affecting it is to remember that this great error of that venerable and beloved church, is so turned upon her own bosom, that the very anniversary which we will signalize with so great thankfulness and joy,—may with her be a time not only of trial and mourning, but of open schism and dreadful apostacy! Alas! how idle if not impious are those exaggerated commendations, which heap upon the Westminster Assembly almost such praises as are due to inspiration itself; when even a solitary error, sanctified by their illustrious names, has wrought in wicked hands, such frightful calamities to a cause which themselves loved more than life.

Looking around us after the lapse of two centuries, during which mankind has made such wonderful progress, and witnessed such amazing revolutions, and been subjected to such repeated and terri-

ble convulsions, we cannot fail to see that the very same forms of error and vice against which the members of the Westminster Assembly bound their souls to strive "without respect of persons," still trouble the earth, and endanger the truth. "Popery, prelacy, superstition, heresy, schism, and profaneness," with many things "contrary to sound doctrine and the power of godliness"—are still to be resisted by all who would not "partake in other men's sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues." We are, therefore, as fully obliged as they were, "sincerely, really, and constantly through the grace of God, in our several places and callings" to strive and to testify against these defections and sins, and never to be deterred from our fidelity, nor seduced "to the contrary part," nor "give ourselves to a detestable indifferency or neutrality" in things "which so much concern the glory of God" and the good of a world that lieth in sin.

So too, if we will but consider the trial which during these two centuries, God has been pleased to make of the precious truths set forth in our standards, and of the scriptural order and discipline declared in them; and observe how they have been owned and blessed of him, and how amid ten thousand snares and devices of Satan, and through long ages of persecution by wicked rulers and corrupt sects, and under the perpetual assaults of carnal wisdom, they have still signalized their heavenly origin, and proved, by the grace of God, their glorious fitness as instruments of salvation; we shall see reason enough to hold fast to them, as plain and faithful summaries in which the true reformed religion, "according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches"—is really and plainly held forth; and by which, faithfully observed, "we, and our posterity after us, may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us."

Neither can we fail to see, in the retrospect of the past, that we have been, like our fathers, "guilty of many sins and provocations against God and his Son Jesus Christ," by which many "distresses and dangers" have come upon us, and through which we have just cause to fear many more. Wherefore on this signal and solemn occasion, it well becomes us to feel, and "to profess and declare, before God and the world, our unfeigned desire to be humbled for our own sins," for the sins of our church, and for the sins of our country; and to cultivate a "true and unfeigned purpose, desire, and endeavor, for ourselves and all others under our charge, both in public and private, in all duties we owe to God and man, to amend our lives, and each one to go before another in the example of a real reformation, that the Lord may turn away his wrath and heavy indignation," and establish our church and country in truth and peace.\*

It is not permitted to man that he should pry into the secret purposes of God. Who can tell,—who can imagine, what two centuries more may bring forth? Is this useless struggle of light with darkness to be still protracted, while yet the long suffering of God waiteth, and the heirs of salvation are slowly and painfully gathered into

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\* The words in inverted commas in this and the two preceding paragraphs are taken from *The Solemn League and Covenant*.

the fold? Or will the King Eternal make a short work in righteousness, and once more shaking not earth only but heaven also, suddenly appear in glory, and take to himself the kingdom purchased with his most precious blood? Or will the powers of darkness and of hell, in fierce and universal outbreak, rage and triumph, tear once more, and that more fearfully than in all their former butcheries, the outcast children of God's love, and thus fill up to the topmost brim, the cup of the fierceness of that wrath which God at last will make them drain even unto the utmost dregs?—Jehovah reigns; it is enough.

To improve the present season, is our great duty and true wisdom. In doing this, with reference to this occasion, it has been thought, that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church in the United States of America, in which, first of all, it is believed the celebration of the bi-centenary of the Westminster Assembly was suggested, and which took the initiative in regard to an observance, which it is hoped, God will own and bless, being now in session, might properly and with good reason to expect the divine favor:

I. Take such order as may cause its venerable standards to be more carefully studied, more perfectly understood, and more faithfully observed by all the members and office bearers of this church; and that the children of the church may be more thoroughly indoctrinated therein, and more faithfully trained thereby.

II. Take such further order as will cause the history of the past trials, persecutions, and faithfulness of the true church of God, and especially of our own branch of it, to be more distinctly a subject of study, especially by those who are, or are expecting to become office bearers in the church; and, as part of this general object, adopt some plan for the general observance of the — day of —, as a season specially devoted to the general instruction of our people, by the ministers, in the great facts connected with the subject then commemorated.

III. Take such further order as will bring our church into a closer and more perfect union with all other evangelical churches, and especially with such as adopt our own formularies—or others of kindred spirit and form.

IV. Take such further order as will be needful to cause to be prepared, in convenient season, by competent persons chosen from time to time by the General Assembly, a complete, but comprehensive commentary on the whole word of God, expounded according to the system embodied in all our standards,—so that this great and necessary work, being fitly accomplished, our congregations may have a standard exposition of our whole doctrine, and not be exposed, as now they are, in that regard; and so that this work may be connected, at least in its origin, with this memorable occasion, and be published, as it shall be from time to time prepared.

And whereas our brethren of the Church of Scotland are now contending for those great principles which they and we have received as a common inheritance and trust from a common source; and it is probable that in maintaining them, they will be called upon to make great sacrifices and to endure much suffering; and whereas that church has received and still maintains the formularies prepared by the Westminster Assembly, which we also have received: Therefore,

V. The General Assembly, as an expression of its gratitude to God

for the many and great blessings conferred on the church and the world, through the instrumentality of the Westminster Assembly, should recommend that on the — day of — special prayer be made in all our churches to beseech the Great Head of the church to look in mercy upon our suffering brethren, to grant them the guidance and consolations of his holy Spirit, and to overrule all their trials to the furtherance of truth and holiness, and to the establishment of his church in that liberty wherewith he hath made his people free.

VI. That the Assembly ought further to recommend to all the pastors and churches under its care, that collections be made in that mode and at that time during the current year, which shall be most convenient, and that the money thus collected, be forwarded to the treasurer of the trustees of the General Assembly, to be by him transmitted to the Rev. Drs. Chalmers, Gordon, and Candlish, ministers, and — Dunlop, esq., and Sir David Brewster, elders, to be appropriated as they may think most subservient to the interest of the church with which they are connected.

In submitting the foregoing report and recommendations, the chairman of the committee is directed to say, that the report itself is approved by five members, being all that convened; that the recommendations numbered I., II., III., are approved by eight members, being the whole that have given any expression of opinion; that the one numbered IV. is approved by five members, and dissented from by three; and that those numbered V. and VI. are approved by five members, being all who have expressed an opinion in regard to them. The chairman of the committee, by its order and on its behalf, and concurring with the majority in every case, subscribes and submits the whole.\*

ROBERT J. BRECKINRIDGE,

*Chairman of the standing committee of the Bi-Centenary  
of the Westminster Assembly.*

PHILADELPHIA, May 19, 1843.

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\*The reader will understand that this report and recommendations are here printed in the form in which they were submitted to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church. At the period of putting the last sheets of this No. of our periodical to press, we are ignorant of the action of that body in the premises.

[EDITOR.]