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How Strong Was Our Mountain

The Thirteenth and Concluding Article in a Series on
The Crisis in Evangelism

By JOHN C. HILLS, JR., and WILLIAM E. WELMERS

THERE is a beautiful old hymn, written many years ago, which begins with these tragic words: "Once I thought my mountain strong". With this remorseful beginning, the hymn writer laments the fall of his soul under the onslaughts of Satan. The writer's soul, considered by himself so impregnable, so fortified against attack, had capitulated miserably to the prince of darkness. With heartfelt pleading, he begs his Saviour to rally him in his hour of temptation.

Had this writer been living today, he might well, with slight alteration, have applied his hymn to the condition of the organized church. "Once I thought my mountain strong." Where is that strong mountain, that cherished heritage of our fathers, that mighty Reformation church? That proud structure, which still faintly influences the course of human affairs, arises not before our eyes. We do but read of it, as some traveler who stands before the ruins of a mighty cathedral, vainly trying to capture the glory of its past in the fading print of a molding guide-book. No pride have we in the dimming glory; the dust from the crumbling decay chokes and blinds us.

Will that mountain rise again? Shall we live to see the day when the strength of the organized church is fast rooted in the Word of God once more? Let us not mock ourselves by looking with hopeful eyes to large church organizations. Theirs is the shameful history of retreat from the enemy. They were once the proud

cathedral. They are but the ruins now. Seek not, traveler, to rebuild the edifice on yonder cracking wall. Push it gently, O, so gently—see, it sways under the gentlest touch. Tread not on yonder steps, nor plan a magnificent entrance there again; the original beauty, somewhat retained, ill conceals the hollowness within.

Turn then from the old to the new. If the old has crumbled, we can perhaps build afresh. Surely, there are servants of God the world around who have been forced to build again. Until we find them and join our forces, we can but breathe a prayer of intercession for those unknown spirits of reform. Our immediate concern, in the providence of God, is that infant church conceived half a decade ago in the din of a collapsing denomination. Perhaps that infant church is destined to be the morning star of the new Reformation; perhaps not. It is too early, much too early, to predict the path it shall hew. Its history has largely been one of internal conflict as it groped for its bearings. Out of those struggles has come an adherence to the Reformation theology, to the Biblical heritage of orthodox Christianity. How firm that adherence is even now, no man can say. Suffice it to say that the infant church has found its moorings, and that it has found the right moorings.

Encouraging as this may seem, this is no time for a breathing spell from hard-headed thinking. If what we have been saying about the crisis in evangelism be true, then the crucial point in the history of our infant

The Work of the Westminster Assembly

By the REV. JOHN MURRAY

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THE Westminster Assembly first convened on July 1, 1643. For the first three months the Assembly was largely occupied with the revision of the Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England. Perhaps the two most important events during the course of these three months were the adoption of the Solemn League and Covenant and the arrival in the Assembly of three of the Scottish commissioners.

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland met in August. It was on August 19th that the General Assembly, in answer to the request of both Houses of Parliament in England, nominated and elected Alexander Henderson, Robert Douglas, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie, and George Gillespie, ministers, and John Earl of Casills, John Lord Maitland, and Sir Archibald Johnston of Warriston, ruling elders, with commission and power to them, or any three of them, whereof two should be ministers, to repair to the Assembly of Divines, sitting at Westminster. On or about September 14th three of these arrived in Westminster. On September 15th they were admitted to the Assembly. They were Alexander Henderson, George Gillespie, and John Lord Maitland.

The Solemn League and Covenant was drafted by Alexander Henderson in Scotland and was approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on August 17, 1643. It was then taken to England and after some slight changes it was adopted by the House of Commons and the Westminster Assembly on September 25th. It was then sent back to Scotland and on October 13th it was adopted, signed, and sworn to by the Commission of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and the Committee of the Convention of Estates of the Scottish Parliament and sent throughout the country to be subscribed to by the people.

On October 12, 1643, while the Westminster Assembly was working on the sixteenth article of the Thirty Nine Articles there came an order from both Houses of Parliament that

the divines should forthwith "confer and treat among themselves of such a discipline and government as may be most agreeable to God's holy word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed Churches abroad". They were also instructed at the same time to prepare a Directory of Worship or Liturgy for use in the church.

It was in pursuance of this order that the Assembly entered upon prolonged debates on the question of church government, debates that engaged so much of the time of the Assembly during the remainder of 1643 and throughout 1644. These labours on the part of the divines gave us what is known as "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God" and "The Form of Presbyterial Church-Government", both agreed upon by the Assembly. They were also approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in February, 1645.

These two documents form two of the four parts of uniformity in which it was so ardently desired that the whole island should be united. In the Directory for Public Worship we have one of the finest fruits of the work of the Assembly, a document not so well known as the Confession and Catechisms yet one that lies on a plane of excellence not a whit lower than that of the Confession and Catechisms. Nothing in human literature will afford us better instruction in the dignity and decorum that ought to

characterize the public worship of God.

On August 20, 1644, a committee was appointed by the Assembly to prepare matter for a Confession of Faith. The subsequent history of the preparation of the Confession is rather complicated. This history, however, witnesses to the marvelous care and patience with which the divines accomplished the task committed to them.

It was not until September 25, 1646, that the first nineteen chapters of the Confession of Faith were completed and sent to the House of Commons. On October 1st a duplicate was sent to the House of Lords. On October 9th the House of Commons ordered that five hundred copies of these nineteen chapters be printed.

It was on December 4, 1646, that the remaining fourteen chapters of the Confession were completed and it was resolved that the whole Assembly present the whole Confession to both Houses of Parliament. This was done, and on December 10th an order was brought from the House of Commons for the printing of six hundred copies of the Confession. This was the first edition of the whole Confession.

This edition, the first of the whole Confession, did not, however, contain the proof texts. It is of interest to know that the Assembly was quite reluctant to add proof texts. The reason for this was not in the least fear of being unable to support the propositions of the Confession by Scripture but rather that a complete presentation of Scripture proof would have required a volume. However, at the insistence of the House of Commons the Assembly undertook to add proof texts in the margin. Not until January 7, 1647, do we find the Assembly entering upon the debate of proof texts. For the next four months a large part of the Assembly's time was occupied with the consideration of these proof texts. On April 29th this work was completed and on that date the Confession of Faith with Scripture proofs cited on the margin was presented to both Houses of Par-

Young People's Topics

THE article on this page will be an aid in studying the young people's lessons published by the Committee on Christian Education of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, which may be secured from the Rev. Richard W. Gray, 7 Franklin Avenue, Montclair, N. J. The first eight chapters of the Westminster Confession are being studied during January and February.

liament. The House of Commons instructed that six hundred copies of the Confession with proofs be printed. This was the first edition of the Confession with Scripture proofs added.

The Confession of Faith was approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland on August 27, 1647.

In the records of the Westminster Assembly we find a great deal of debate regarding "Catechism" prior to the date upon which the Assembly entered upon the composition of the two Catechisms with which we are familiar, namely, the Larger and Shorter. This lengthy consideration of "Catechism" fitted the Assembly in very admirable fashion for the framing of the Catechisms that were finally adopted and which we know as the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly.

It was on April 15, 1647, that the Assembly entered upon the debate of the Larger Catechism. Much work had, however, been done for months prior to this by a committee that had been appointed to prepare a draft of both Catechisms. From April 15th the attention of the Assembly was largely devoted to the debate on the Larger Catechism.

It is important to note that George Gillespie, one of the ablest of the Scottish Commissioners, left for Scotland on July 16th. When he left, the Assembly had advanced as far as the question that is Question 94 in the completed Catechism.

On August 9th, when the Assembly was working on the third commandment in the Larger Catechism, the Assembly called for the report on the Shorter Catechism and not until October 25th do we have the first mention of debate upon it. George Gillespie had therefore taken his final departure from the Assembly before the latter entered upon the debate of the Shorter Catechism.

On October 15th the Larger Catechism was completed and it was ordered to be transcribed. On this date an interesting minute occurs in the records of the Assembly. Upon motion by Samuel Rutherford, another of the Scottish Commissioners, it was ordered to be recorded in the Scribes' books that "The Assembly hath enjoyed the assistance of the Honorable Reverend and learned Commissioners from the Church of Scotland in the work of the Assembly; dur-

ing all the time of the debating and perfecting of the 4 things mentioned in the Covenant, viz. the Directory for Worship, the Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, and Catechism, some of the Reverend and learned Divines Commissioners from the Church of Scotland have been present in and assisting to this Assembly". This shows the jealousy with which the Scottish Commissioners regarded the sanctity of the Covenant and the fidelity with which they discharged their commission. Rutherford took his leave of the Assembly on November 9th.

On October 22nd the Larger Catechism was ordered to be sent to both Houses of Parliament.

Not later than November 25th the Shorter Catechism was completed, for on that day it was delivered to the House of Commons. Both Catechisms were approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in July, 1648.

To sum up therefore, the period over which the Westminster Assembly completed its work on the five important documents for which it is held in perpetual remembrance extended from October 12, 1643, to November 25, 1647. This is a period of more than four years. The five documents to which allusion is here made are the Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Public Worship, and the Form of Presbyterian Church-Government and they constitute the four heads of uniformity mentioned in the Solemn League and Covenant, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms being both included under the one head of Catechism.

The last of the sessions of the Assembly that is numbered is that of February 22, 1649. This is session 1163.

The work produced by the Westminster Assembly has lived and will permanently live. The reason is obvious. The work was wrought with superb care, patience, precision, and above all with earnest and intelligent devotion to the Word of God and zeal for His glory. Sanctified theological learning has never been brought to bear with greater effect upon the formulation of the Christian Faith. While it would be dishonoring to the Holy Spirit to accord to these documents a place in any way equal to the Word of God either in prin-

ciple or in practical effect, yet it would also be dishonoring to the Holy Spirit, who has promised to be with His church to the end, to undervalue or neglect what is the product of His illumination and direction in the hearts and minds of His faithful servants. Other men laboured and we have entered into their labours.

(CORRECTION: In the issue of THE PRESBYTERIAN GUARDIAN for January 25th, it was stated that the Long Parliament was dissolved by Cromwell in 1652. This is incorrect. It was dissolved by Cromwell in April, 1653.

—J. M.)

News Notes of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

KNOX Church, Philadelphia: During the holiday season, special music was supplied by the choir. . . . Motion pictures of the 1940 and 1941 Sunday school picnics were shown recently and much enjoyed. . . . The members of the Ladies' Aid Society have set as their goal a gift of \$100 to the building fund before Easter. . . . The Rev. and Mrs. Richard B. Gaffin addressed the January 23rd meeting of the missionary society, and showed motion pictures of their work in China. . . . A large delegation of young people attended a recent Quarryville Bible Conference rally at the Calvary Church of Willow Grove.

Calvary Church, Middletown, Pa.: As a result of the first week of visitation work now being conducted by Miss Margaret Hunt, sister of the Rev. Bruce F. Hunt, several families are planning to attend the church's services. . . . The varsity basket ball team of Wheaton College, whose players and coach are earnest Christians, conducted a service at the church on January 30th. The team is touring the eastern states and playing several college teams.

Faith Church, Pittsgrove, N. J.: The Rev. Edwin H. Rian was guest preacher on Sunday, January 25th. . . . Private George Botbyl, a member of the church who is now stationed at Hawaii, has been reported safe after the recent attack on Pearl Harbor. . . . Nine Sunday school teachers attend a training course led by the pastor, the Rev. Edward B. Cooper.