

THE COVENANTER.

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[For the Covenanter.]

THE HISTORY OF CIVIL LIBERTY.

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“A day, an hour of virtuous liberty
Is worth a whole eternity of bondage.”

It may not be an unprofitable speculation to trace the history and give the character of that spirit of civil liberty which animated our revolutionary sires, and secured for a season, at least, the rights of the American.

“Than civil liberty—by which I mean all that freedom from constraint which is consistent with the existence and welfare of the social union—there is no earthly blessing of more importance to the intellectual and social improvement of mankind. It is the nurse of genius, the guardian of domestic comfort, the parent of all that is great in national character.”

The history of liberty is the history also of despotism; for it is the history of a mighty energy breaking, at intervals, the chains of consolidated oppression.

In tracing this history, we must revert to the condition of modern Europe at the commencement of the sixteenth century.—The republic of Rome had extended its dominion by the sword over a great portion of Europe, Asia, and Africa. This republic fell by the expansion of its empire—a warning to modern republics—and the corruption of its citizens; and the Cæsars bound upon her neck the yoke which she had fastened upon the neck of the subjected nations. Imperial Rome became divided into the Eastern and Western Empires; Constantinople the seat of the former, and Rome, the boasted mistress of the world, the seat of the latter. The former fell under the yoke of the victorious Ottomans; the latter was conquered and divided by the barbaric Goths and Vandals.

These warlike tribes were the descendants of those ancient barbarians who fled before the victorious legions of all-conquering Rome. “They fled to their mountains for freedom, or took refuge in the inaccessible caverns of the North. There, defended by lakes and rivers, the indignant barbarians lived until time had ripened the seeds of destruction. Then, rushing forth like an impetuous flood, and sweeping every thing before them, they overturned the vast fabric of the Roman Empire, the work and the wonder of ages, taking vengeance on the murderers of mankind; established on its ruins new governments and new manners, and accomplished the most signal revolution in the history of nations.”

Having overthrown this gigantic fabric of despotism, these fierce barbarians established upon its ruins numerous tyrannies not less galling and debasing. The victorious leader of the barbarous horde having subdued a Roman province, claiming himself the sovereignty, distributed the terri-

tory among the officers of his host, whilst the great body became the vassals, ruled by feudal despotism. "In this state," says an elegant writer, "the nations of modern Europe, almost without exception, were beheld at the commencement of the sixteenth century—some lorded over by one, others groaning under the yoke of many oppressors. In not a few of the European States the monarch was absolute, and the people were in reality his slaves; nor in those other States, where, after many struggles with monarchical power, the aristocracy had succeeded in gaining the ascendancy, were the people in circumstances of less degradation. The nobles opposed the power of the monarch; but the object of their opposition was their own aggrandizement, not the liberation of their enslaved subjects; and, remarkable only for their pride and the contempt with which they regarded the inferior classes of society, the transference of power into their hands effected no amelioration in the condition of the people. In fact it was to the latter a matter of extreme indifference, as to any advantage resulting from the change, whether they were in subjection to one despot or a hundred. Such were the features of the political condition of Europe at the commencement of the sixteenth century." In addition to these stupendous fabrics of civil despotism, which pressed with iron weight upon the masses of Europe, there was another power, which made heavier the iron yoke, and riveted the chains of oppression—"a power to which almost all the Christian world did homage, whose influence, if it had not been destroyed, was potent enough to check, in its very commencement, the emancipation of mind, and which, therefore, whilst by perpetuating the reign of darkness, it maintained the security of its own throne, was the guardian of every other system of oppression by which the world called Christian was enslaved."

"That power was Papal Rome—a power, whose nature, greatness, and duration, are among the most surprising phenomena that human history presents to our contemplation. This power, having its seat at Rome, and an Italian priest as the superintendent of its administration, arrogated to itself the prerogative of Deity, claiming unlimited authority over all the world, in secular, as well as in ecclesiastical affairs, assuming to itself the right of dethroning monarchs, and disposing of crowns, and visiting those who refused obedience to its will with the most fatal and sanguinary vengeance—so completely, indeed, did clerical ambition gain the ascendancy over the secular powers, that the greatest of the princes of the earth humbled themselves in the very dust in the presence of him who was called 'the Pope,' and sacrificed before him, at once, the majesty of kings, and the dignity of men."

Whilst kings thus bowed in abject servility before the majesty of Papal Rome, the mass of the people was crushed still lower than by civil tyranny into the depths of degradation by the dreadful pressure of spiritual despotism. Seizing upon the strongest principle of our nature—the religious principle—and identified therewith, its control over its subjects was complete. Established under the sanctions of religion, and protected by all the authority of its inviolable sanctities, the huge colossus seemed invulnerable, and with the pride of its imagined omnipotence scorned hostility. Such was the ponderous twofold despotism which crushed the liberties of Europe at the commencement of the sixteenth century. Has there been any amelioration of this condition? and by what influence has this amelioration been effected? The reformation of the sixteenth century has effected in the States of Europe an amelioration of their condi-

tion, and exerted a benign influence upon the liberties of the subject. True, the effect in some of the present kingdoms of Europe has been merely the relaxation of the stringency of the bonds of this twofold despotism; and even in the most highly favoured this liberty of the subject is only partial, not perfect; yet, even this relaxation is a great blessing, for which men should be grateful; it is the first-fruits, the pledge of a glorious harvest. Space will not permit me to take a survey of the Protestant kingdoms, and trace the salutary effects of the Protestant Reformation upon their civil liberties: I will confine my observations to two of these kingdoms, England and Scotland, in which the Reformation had its freest scope, and displayed more fully its ameliorating efficiency.

“The abolition of the feudal system,” says the same excellent writer, “had, indeed, some considerable time before the Reformation, rescued the people from baronial slavery; but it did this only to deliver them up into the power of a royal despot. Henry VIII. was a more absolute monarch than any other that ever filled the British throne; and but for the religious revolution of the fifteenth century, which overthrew the power of the church, and inspired the public mind with a noble feeling of independence, the government of that country, no longer checked by the baronial powers, and supported by the immense influence of the church, would have become, and would this moment have been—a despotism.

With the commencement of the Reformation in England began the establishment of her liberty. By the overthrow which Henry gave to the Roman power throughout his kingdom, there was inflicted on the despotism which he and his predecessors had been attempting to rear, a wound, of which he little dreamed. Thenceforth the genius of tyranny found England to be an ungenial soil. When Henry overthrew, in his kingdom, the Papal domination, he destroyed, unwittingly, the magic spell by which, for many ages, the energies of the people had been bound. A channel was opened, by means of that destruction, for the Reformed doctrines. These were, accordingly, spread far and wide throughout the land; and the consequence was, the accomplishment of a revolution in the sentiments of his subjects which the haughty potentate had not anticipated. An invincible hostility to the Popish superstition, and a deeply-rooted abhorrence of arbitrary power, constituted from that time the prominent features in the popular mind; nor, much as these features were the object of his execration, could the oppressor, with all his previous proscription at once of enemies and friends, accomplish their extinction. Efforts, with that infamous design, he and his successors frequently made; but they were made in vain, and served to render more terrible the explosion which afterwards took place, and which deluged England with native blood. In Scotland the Reformation was the dawn of genuine liberty; and in her the struggle for liberty to which the Reformation gave birth, was carried on with ardour and perseverance. In that struggle the civil, as well as the religious rights of the Scottish people, were involved; and the advocates of the one were found the resolute assertors of the other. During the period in which the last four princes of the house of Stuart filled the united thrones of England and Scotland, royal tyranny met with the firmest and most successful resistance. Long, and with marvellous patience, did the people bear the encroachments of their oppressors, and fondly did they hope that some auspicious revolution would take place in their measures, but their hopes were vain: even the warning voice of sore adversity failed to give wisdom to their rulers; one outrage on their rights

after another was brought to their endurance, till roused to indignation by accumulated wrongs, they expelled the last James from his throne, and determined that thenceforth it should not be possessed by any of his line.

It was in this gigantic struggle with the house of Stuart that the principles of civil liberty were most fully developed. "Tyrants formerly used force, but in this conflict they demanded an explicit owning of arbitrary power. The limitation of kingly power was the question which Scottish martyrs were compelled to decide, and their example may instruct and animate posterity. They investigated and taught under the guidance of feeling, the reciprocal obligations of kings and subjects, the duty of self-defence and resisting tyrants, the generous principle of assisting the oppressed, or in their own language, '*helping the Lord against the mighty*.' These subjects, which have since been investigated by philosophers in the closet, and adorned with eloquence in the senate, were then illustrated by men of feeling in the field. While Russell and Sidney, and other enlightened patriots in England, were plotting against Charles, from a conviction that his right was forfeited, the Covenanters in Scotland, under the same conviction, had the courage to declare war against him. Both the plotters and the warriors fell; but their blood has watered the plant of renown, and succeeding ages have eaten the pleasant fruit."

On December the 22d, 1620, a noble band of Puritan pilgrims arrived in the Mayflower, and landed on the rock of Plymouth. These brave men, fleeing from the oppression of James I., retired to Holland, and thence emigrated to America. Other valiant men, oppressed by the arbitrary maxims, and abhorring the tyrannical principles of the Stuart dynasty, following the example of the first pilgrims, also took refuge in the wilds of America. These founded the colonies of New Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay. By other Puritans, who fled from the Laudean persecution, the oppressions of the Star Chamber and the High Commission Courts, the colony of New Haven was also founded. By an examination of the history of the first settlers of the colonies which constituted the primitive United States, with the exception of some of the Southern, it will be found that they were men, in general, of similar character, who fled from civil and religious oppression in their native lands, and sought an asylum in the American wilderness. Succeeding generations swelled the tide of emigration, and planted the colonies with a race of men who derived the love of liberty from the blood of their fathers and the bosoms of heroic mothers; and were the men qualified by nature and by education, in the times "when monarchs owned no sceptre but the sword," "to foil a tyrant's and bigot's bloody rage."

"Civil and religious liberty seems to be the very perfume of the Puritan atmosphere, which every descendant of the pilgrim must inalienably enjoy." Whatever may be the course of the present generation of the descendants of the Puritan pilgrims, that generation which belonged to the era of the American Revolution was the first to lift the arm of resistance against the oppressor, and to shed their blood in the cause of colonial freedom. Whilst Patrick Henry was thundering in the ears of the Southern cavalier, and with difficulty roused his dormant courage, the children of the Puritan pilgrim had watered with their blood the seeds of liberty, which their fathers had strewn on the plains of Lexington and the heights of Bunker Hill.

Such is the brief history of the spirit of civil liberty which animated our fathers, and nerved their arm in the revolutionary struggle. I vene-

rate the patriots and heroes of the American Revolution. I admire the man of any age and of any country who stands forth the champion of right, and in the hour of his country's peril jeopardizes his life for the rescue of those rights of which her citizens have been robbed by despotic power—or for the defence and preservation of those rights of which they are in possession, when they are assailed by daring usurpation. I honour, therefore, those men raised up by a gracious Providence—the Washingtons, the Warrens, the Adamsons, the Witherspoons, the Hancocks—and a host of others of unfading renown, who, animated by a pure and noble patriotism, “pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honour,” for the deliverance of their country from the British yoke.

Were their times “the times that tried men’s souls?” *They were the men of the times*—men who *had souls*—souls equal to the fiery ordeal by which they were tried—not those shrivelled spectres of humanity, who rant, and strut, and shout, and bluster in the political arena—who would sell their country for “the spoils of office”—*for thirty pieces of silver*. They were men whom the Most High had animated with a sense of the value of human rights, and with a spirit to *risk all*—even life itself—for the security of civil liberty. I thank Almighty God that he raised them up, and put upon them such a measure of his Spirit as endowed them for their work, and set them as an example before the nations of the earth, of what men ought to peril for those rights which are his precious boon to mankind, to be guarded with the jealousy of a most fervent love.

The 4th of July, 1776, is a day to be remembered, not only because of any local benefits, but chiefly because it belongs not to the United States only—IT BELONGS TO THE WORLD. It is the first grand evidence that the seventh apocalyptic trumpet has been blown, which proclaims the downfall and utter desolation of immoral and despotic civil governments. It is a great day, therefore, not in the light in which the demagogue views it, who feels not, and is incapable of feeling, the stirrings of its generous spirit; but as contemplated by the *Christian patriot*, who looks upon men not as mere machines, and pliant instruments of self-aggrandizement, but as fellow-beings endowed with equal rights—inalienable as the gift of God.

That day was a grand era in the history of the human race. Its spirit and its principles, though inoperative to an alarming degree in the present generation, and though they may be lost, as we believe, for a season, to this nation; yet, *as the day belongs to the world*, that spirit of civil liberty then roused into powerful action *shall never die*,—those sacred principles then promulgated *shall never perish*; but that spirit and those principles shall animate men of a generation, now preparing, in this and in all lands; and by the potency which the SON OF GOD shall confer upon them, shall burst the chains of the enslaved nations.

Such is the era, and such were the men of '76—the descendants of heroes, who had, in their fatherland, watered the plant of renown with their heart's blood: men who had bared their bosom to the storm of despotic rage, bosoms animated by patriotic fire, which fire became the inheritance of their children in the Western wilderness; by whom it was cherished until it burst forth into a vehement flame, dissolving the chains of despotism forged by the British tyrant.

Whence that noble spirit? Where caught that sacred fire? That spirit, we have seen, was derived from the warriors of Zion; that fire was kindled at the sacred flame for ever burning on the altar of God. It

is indisputable truth that civil liberty has advanced side by side with religious liberty. The spirit of '76 was eminently a religious spirit: not that all the heroes were religious men; but the great principles which animated the age to which they belonged were the inspiration of the spirit of Zion, and the heroes of the battle-field were raised up and sustained to accomplish the work of God.

The just principles of freedom were never comprehended by the Grecian and Roman republics. They veered to either extreme, of popular tyranny on the one hand, or power concentrated in a species of oligarchy, on the other; and oppression was the consequence of the dominancy of either the populace or the few. How often did Greece ostracize her noblest patriots and most virtuous citizens, because of the excess and superiority of their patriotism and virtue! Why were the just principles of freedom unknown to those ancient republics? The grand reason was, their ignorance of the law of God and the true religion—the religion of the Son of God. In the law of God we have a transcript of the rights of mankind, associated with the claims of God upon the human race. The essence of this law consists in *love* to God and love to our fellow-men. Where this law is known and received, and this love animates the breasts of men, the rights of men, guarantied by the law, will be recognised and cherished. The full spirit of this love must be possessed and exercised, or *true liberty* will not be established and preserved by any people. God's rights must be recognised and respected, in order to the security of human rights. We must render to God the things that are God's, as well as to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's. God must be loved and feared, and then man will be loved and respected. Men will then do to others as they would that they should do to them. Where there is not the love and fear of the true God, and due regard for his rights, a nation will not long preserve the little knowledge of human right and liberty of which it may have been possessed. An all-grasping selfishness will prevail, and every one will oppress his neighbour, and they who have the power will be considered as possessing the right; a fell spirit of individuality, or of *party*, will banish piety and patriotism, and trample upon all right.

Much has been ascribed to the revival of literature in the latter part of the fifteenth century, and the beginning of the sixteenth, in awakening from its slumbers the spirit of liberty pressed down by ages of despotism into the lethargy of slavery; but much more, perhaps, than it deserves. It is certainly true, that the revival of literature was incidentally auxiliary in qualifying men for the perusal of the Scriptures, locked up in the dead languages, as well as buried in the cells of stupid and dronish monks; but it is also most certainly true, that some of the most cultivated minds, as to mere literature, were the most servile slaves of despotism. I might instance the celebrated ERASMUS! an accomplished scholar, who, for the paltry price of literary fame, enrolled himself under the banner of the mitred priest and royal despot, though himself, at first, an advocate of Reformation. It is also observable, that the age in which we live, the glorious nineteenth century, boasts of its literary refinement, and of eclipsing all past ages in the extent of intellectual culture—yet, amidst this blaze of literary glory the spirit of liberty is expiring, and its fruits are withering as vegetable life, and its luxuriant products under the searing breath of autumn—and this too in Columbia!

The truth is, it was not until Luther read THE BIBLE, and his spirit was stirred by its spirit, that he arose in gigantic might, and seized, and

shook, with his single arm, the pillars of idolatry and despotism, and made them totter upon the foundations of many generations. WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY. The Spirit of the Lord is with HIS TRUTH; and that soul upon which he writes the law of God cannot be a slave. The body may be in chains, but its ransomed inhabitant cannot be bound, and waits but a fitting opportunity to burst the fetters which gall the outer man. Its "glorious power" was displayed in the Reformation. The knowledge of God's word confers a knowledge of divine and human rights, and the soul is thus fired by the noblest spirit of liberty. There is no principle so powerful as THE LOVE OF GOD. There is nothing which gives such decision and energy and fearless resolution to the human soul. It mocketh at fear, and is not affrighted, neither turneth back from the sword.

The Puritan of England, and the Covenanter of Scotland, displayed, in the most sublime manner, the mightiness of this unconquerable spirit of liberty.

Whatever England and these United States enjoy of liberty, it is acknowledged by all, except their hereditary foes, they are indebted for it to their labour, their sufferings, their blood. It was the spirit of religious liberty, their zeal especially for the supremacy of God their Saviour, that animated them in the conflict, and enabled them to resist lawless, but triumphant power, and endure, with unshrinking fortitude, the most terrible tortures, and grapple with death in its most awful forms. All who were not actuated by this spirit shrank away from the contest, or crouched, like slaves, at the feet of successful tyranny, *or had their price*; but the warriors of God, and of his law, fought in the last intrenchment, and stood fixed and fearless, and, in the arms of death, sang exultingly of VICTORY! Victory for future generations! The grand principle of their LEAGUE which bound their souls to God and to each other, in indissoluble alliance, was *the preservation and defence of the true religion, and liberties of the kingdom*. May their mantle fall upon every man who claims relationship to them, and their heroic and indomitable spirit animate his bosom.

If the liberties of England will be preserved and enlarged, and the liberties of these United States, they will owe their preservation and enlargement *to men of kindred principle and spirit*. If their liberties fall before despotic powers, in alliance with papal superstition and intolerance, as they are threatened, they will fall, because the spirit of true religion hath withdrawn from these lands, or those in whom it dwells are crushed by overwhelming force, in the awful judgment of God against the crimes of guilty nations. "Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt hath lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men."

It is a fact, therefore, that civil liberty has advanced in the train of religious liberty; that the spirit that animated the Revolutionary patriot, was begotten by the spirit that warmed the heart of the generous Puritan, and gave prowess to the unyielding Covenanter. What though the heroes and patriots of the Revolution were not all religious men? What though French infidelity had perverted the best principles of some of the embattled legions, and many of the counsellors at the helm of state? yet, they were the sons of religious sires, and nursed at the breasts of pious mothers, and were rocked in the cradle of religious freedom. That spirit which moved them was essentially the spirit of their Puritan fathers, which,

like the odour of the rose, abides and refreshes, after the substance in which it is inherent has withered and decayed.

Forcibly are these sentiments confirmed by a modern writer, and what he affirms of England is pre-eminently true of these United States.

"God," says this eloquent writer, "would not permit that all the earth should be enslaved anew, and to prevent it, He gave courage to multitudes of Christians in Britain, that they might contend (through the tedious years of two centuries) with the pallid, mitred, inhuman monsters of church power; and with a succession of ferocious or dotard queens and kings. They did so contend—and at the last, blood was stayed, the priest was soiled, and England freed!

"England was freed! What does it not owe to these men, (with all their faults, and to the women too, and the babes, (for the priest loves always the most delicate victims) whose tears, and groans, and patience; whose imprisonments and destitute wanderings; whose torments and lamentable deaths, were the price of its deliverance. This debt is strictly incalculable; not because the benefits so obtained are more than can be distinctly reckoned; but because the happy consequences are even now in full flow over our own and other countries, and are promising to run down with a flowing stream to all future time. Fairly may it be questioned whether, if in that long struggle the priest had vanquished the Puritans and Covenanters, England would not at this moment have been as Spain! Fairly may we say, and on solid ground of philosophical calculation may it be surmised, that if church power had then prevailed over its victims, not a residue of English liberty would have been saved. But the liberty of religion being once rescued, *that most potent of all the elements of freedom, drawing with it by an indissoluble alliance, all other elements*, has preserved for our use and enjoyment, whatever ennobles us among the nations of the earth—knowledge and philosophy—commerce and courage with their attendant wealth and power; as well as that political frame-work which has been the envy and admiration of the world."

THE PAPAL POLICY.

The following, from the London Times, is a true and able exposition of the policy of the Papal Court. It is long, but so is the subject.—Ed. Cov.

If the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in England, and the appointment of two such emissaries as Cardinal Wiseman and Archbishop Cullen to conduct the Papal policy in this country, had been isolated facts, intended only, as was said, for the better spiritual government and the greater convenience of persons professing the Roman Catholic faith, it might be contended that the resentment roused among the people of England by that Popish aggression had exceeded the real necessity of the case. But, with instinctive consciousness and certainty, the English nation felt that this was the touch of the old enemy of their liberties and their independence; and, on looking round them, they perceived that the Romish aggression in this country was but a part of a vast attempt to extend and renew the pretensions and powers of the Papacy throughout the world. We see, and for many reasons we deplore, the renewal of that fierce controversy between Catholic and Protestant of which the infatuation and ambition of the Court of Rome have once more given the