

ADDRESSES

AT THE

CELEBRATION OF THE

Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary

OF THE

WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

BY THE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

OF THE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

EDITED BY THE

REV. WM. HENRY ROBERTS, D. D., LL. D.

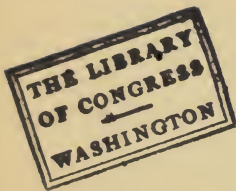


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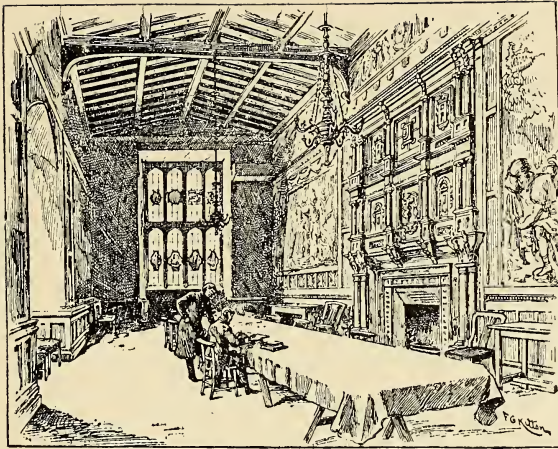
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Jerusalem Chamber, Westminster Abbey.

THE Assembly met here after leaving Henry VII's Chapel towards the end of 1643. Principal BAILLIE in his Letters describes the Chamber as it was occupied by the Assembly. It is a fair room, well hung, wider at the end nearer the door, and on both sides are stages of seats with room for 100 or 120 persons. At the further end is a chair set on a frame a foot from the floor, for the Prolocutor, Dr. TWISSE. Before it, on the floor, are two chairs for the Assessors, Dr. BURGESS and Mr. WHYTE. From these chairs through the length of the room stands a table at which the Scribes, Mr. BYFIELD and Mr. ROBOROUGH, sit. Along the table at Dr. TWISSE'S right hand are three or four ranks of seats; the Commissioners from the Church of Scotland occupy the lowest rank, and behind them are the members of the House of Commons. After a break the seats are continued beyond on the same side of the table and along its end, and from the fireplace to the end of the table at Dr. TWISSE'S left hand. All these are occupied by the Divines. From the fireplace to the door, where there are no seats, chairs are set for the use of the Lords who were appointed to sit in the Assembly. In this room the great works of the Assembly were produced.

THE STORY OF THE WESTMINSTER
ASSEMBLY.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE NORCROSS, D. D.,
PASTOR OF THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
CARLISLE, PENNA.

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ONE hundred years had passed away since England had broken with the pope. The leaven of God's pure Word had done its work. The nation was no longer satisfied with partial reforms.

Of late the superstition, bigotry, and intolerance of Laud and his followers urging on the despotic spirit of the king had made the situation intolerable. The patience of the English people was completely exhausted. The patriotism of the nation was thoroughly aroused. It was evident to every man of Puritan instincts that prelacy must be abolished and the royal prerogative limited, or not a vestige of civil and religious liberty would be left to the English people.

You have already heard to-day how they made the noble choice, how they elected a parliament inspired

with the best impulses of the English people for reform, how they passed an act abolishing prelacy and thereby leveled to the ground "the stately and pompous fabric of Episcopacy," how they summoned an Assembly of Divines for the reformation of the Church, and invited the co-operation of Scotland in a work that might lead to uniformity in religion between the two kingdoms and thereby tend to secure the religious liberty of both.

Actuated by that spirit of dissimulation which was so natural to the king, he had at first pretended to favor a conference of leading divines for the consideration of reforms. His subsequent conduct showed the hollowness of his professions. After many fruitless efforts to secure his co-operation the Parliament decided to act without him.

The English people were bent on radical reforms both in Church and State. Even the conservative House of Lords was deeply imbued with the Puritan tendency of the times. It is but fair to state that this whole movement began within the English Church itself.

We are not to think of the Puritans as a sect of dissenters; they were in fact the evangelical clergy of the Church of England, with their friends among the laity. These Westminster divines with scarce an exception were all in Episcopal orders, educated in their own universities, and most of them graduates. If they were sick of the hierarchy and "weary of

the skeleton of a Mass-Book," as Milton declared, it was because they had caught sight of a better way in the careful study of apostolic usage.

I have been asked to tell the story of the Westminster Assembly. This naturally begins with the selection of the men who were to assist the Parliament in so grave a task as the reformation of the Church. The first choice of members for the Assembly showed the fairness and impartiality of Parliament. Their selection included men of all shades of opinion on the burning questions of the hour, except the advocates of Laud's Romanizing methods.

In the original ordinance four bishops were named, and of the others called at the same time five became bishops afterward. The list of names in the original Ordinance amounts to 151 in all, namely, 10 Lords and 20 Commoners, as lay-assessors, and 121 divines. But of these only 69 appeared the first day, and generally the attendance seems to have ranged between 60 and 80. About 25 declined attending because the king forbade their meeting for the purposes mentioned in the parliamentary ordinance, and thus the Episcopal party was not as well represented in the Assembly as the Parliament had intended.

The Assembly of Divines met in Westminster Abbey on the first day of July, 1643. It was opened with a sermon by the prolocutor, Rev. Wm. Twisse, D. D., from the text, "I will not leave you comfort-

less." The Assembly was then organized in the chapel of Henry VII., where its first sessions were held, but finding the place uncomfortably cold as the season advanced, the Assembly removed to the Jerusalem Chamber, a room of peculiar historic interest, "where," as Dean Stanley avers, "twice over the majestic language of the English Bible has been revised." Here the Assembly wrought patiently until its great work was accomplished.

This meeting of divines was originally called to reform the Government and Liturgy of the Church of England and to vindicate and clear its doctrines "from all false aspersions and misconstructions." The real meaning of this last phrase was to so interpret or hedge the Thirty-nine Articles, as to render them incapable of the Romish gloss, which Laud in that day and Pusey and his associates in our own have imposed upon them. The indefiniteness of statement which is sometimes vaunted as an excellence in the Thirty-nine Articles was evidently not so regarded by the leading spirits of that age.

But the Civil War was making history fast, and the mission of the Assembly was soon extended and elevated into the preparation of a common Confession of Faith, Directory for Worship, Form of Government, and Public Catechism for the churches of the three kingdoms. This ideal of what was requisite for a thoroughly reformed church seems to have been

first suggested by the General Assembly of the Scotch Church.

In the conflict which the Parliament was waging against King Charles I. victory at first perched on the banners of the royal cause. Chastened by these reverses, the Parliament sought a closer alliance with the people and the Kirk of Scotland. Commissioners from the English Parliament and from the Westminster Assembly, were sent to Edinburgh to make friendly overtures and seek a closer alliance. The pathetic account which they gave of affairs in the English Church touched all hearts and is said to have drawn tears from the eyes of the sympathetic Scots.

The intention of the English commissioners to Scotland was only to effect a civil league, but the Scotch leaders, knowing how much religion was involved in the quarrel, would hear of nothing short of a struggle for the purification of the Church and the union of the three kingdoms in a common faith. The result was the "Solemn League and Covenant," which became a religious and political bond between the two kingdoms and a potent factor in all the subsequent history of the times.

The Solemn League and Covenant bound all who accepted its terms to sincerely and constantly seek the preservation of the reformed religion in the Church of Scotland, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government; the reformation of religion in the

kingdoms of England and Ireland "according to the Word of God and the example of the best reformed churches;" and to an effort to bring the churches of the three kingdoms into uniformity "in religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory for Worship, and Catechising." The Covenanters also pledged themselves to the extirpation of popery and prelacy.

As a result of this union with the people and Kirk of Scotland, the Scottish Commissioners came to the Assembly, and though they did not accept a voting power in its deliberations, it is admitted by all that they exerted a very commanding influence on its final decisions.

The most conspicuous character among them was Alexander Henderson, the author of the Solemn League and Covenant, and confessedly the greatest man in the Church of Scotland since the days of John Knox. Beside him stood Samuel Rutherford, both learned and saintly, one of the most impressive preachers of his time, who was twice invited to a theological chair in Holland. With them came George Gillespie, the darling of Scotland, the prince of disputants, who "with the fire of youth had the wisdom of age," and Robert Baillie, whose graphic "Letters" remain to this day the most vivid picture of the Assembly and its times in our possession. With these ministers were associated as ruling elders the venerable and eloquent Johnstone of Warriston and the youthful

but courteous Lord Maitland, afterward the Earl of Lauderdale. Others were appointed who seem never to have taken their seats, but these six went to London and were duly accredited by act of Parliament and given seats in the Assembly.

After more than a hundred years of American freedom, it may seem strange to many of us that the great Assembly of Westminster was only the creature of the Parliament. It was merely asked to give "humble advice" to the popular power that had called it into existence. It was denounced, repudiated, and threatened by the king, but there it expected nothing. From the dominant Puritan party which had elected the Long Parliament, and from that patriotic body itself, the Assembly had the right to expect at least courtesy and reverence; but the event proved that having grasped the unscriptural powers of the king as head of the Church, the Parliament was slow to yield the point of its own infallibility.

It is difficult for us to understand the religious ferment of the time. It was a period of spiritual revival, and the new wine of truth burst the old bottles of custom. The public mind had been greatly exasperated by the spiritual despotism of Laud, who had made himself hateful by his cruelties and ridiculous by his apings of popery. Unfortunately the reformation in England during the former century had been conducted by the court

and the hierarchy. Its foundations had been laid along the lines of political expediency rather than scriptural teaching. But the light of the written Word had fallen on the conscience of the Church, and it was ill at ease.

For long years the self-willed king had tried to rule without a parliament, but finally he had come to the end of his tether in that direction. He had reluctantly summoned a parliament, and that body proved to be "the most religious political assembly that ever met in or out of England." The popular will as expressed in the vote of the Long Parliament declared that the Church of England must be reformed.

It should never be forgotten that the Puritan movement was in the Church itself. The Westminster divines with a few exceptions had received Episcopal ordination, had been trained in the use of the Prayer Book, had submitted to the domination of the State in spiritual matters, had been taught that the king was the head of the Church, and that the highest duty of the subject was passive obedience. But the day of reckoning had come; the people proposed that all these high claims should be brought to the test of God's Word. Whatever could bear that test might stand, but all the rest must be brought into conformity with the divine pattern which is revealed in the holy oracles of God.

It was in this spirit that every member of the

Assembly was required to make the following vow or protestation before he could sit in the Assembly :

“I do seriously promise and vow, in the presence of Almighty God, that in this Assembly, whereof I am a member, I will maintain nothing in point of doctrine but what I believe to be most agreeable to the Word of God; nor in point of discipline, but what I shall conceive to conduce most to the glory of God and the good and peace of his Church.”

This vow, which had almost the sanctity of an oath, “was appointed to be read afresh every Monday morning that its solemn influence might be constantly felt.”

And here we might well make a study of the leading men in the Assembly, but this has been assigned to another speaker.

The first work laid to their hand by Parliament was the revision of the Thirty-nine Articles. While the notes of members and the minutes of the Assembly give us only a meager outline of the range of debate, we know that many questions raised were discussed with great minuteness and critical acumen, but with that prolixity which afterward so wearied the patience of the Scotch Commissioners, who confessed the ability of the speakers, but chafed under the “longsomeness” of their methods.

It was during these debates that the Scotch Commissioners arrived and took their seats. Immediately

after this, namely, on September 25, 1643, the Solemn League and Covenant was taken with all solemnity by both Houses of Parliament and the Assembly, in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, a little church which still stands almost under the shadow of the great Abbey. Lightfoot gives a very graphic account of the scene in his "Journal." The oath to the Covenant was taken with uplifted hands, after which all went into the chancel and subscribed their names to this immortal document.

But to resume with the work of the Assembly: before the 12th of October the Assembly had revised fifteen of the Articles and were proceeding with the sixteenth, when they were abruptly ordered by Parliament to take in hand the Government and Liturgy of the Church. These early debates on the great fundamentals of religion did little more than discover the spirit of the Assembly, show who were the talking members, and reveal the herculean task which the theological spirit of the times had laid upon these venerable fathers.

With the consideration of Government and Worship began what has been called "the war of the giants." On the subject of Doctrine the Assembly was practically a unit. These godly divines were all Calvinists. If there was an Arminian among them, he neither peeped nor muttered. It was the theocentric doctrine of Paul, Augustine, Wycliffe, and Calvin, which inspired the people of England in all

the days of their noble struggle for civil and religious liberty.

The Church of England was in all its best elements as intensely Calvinistic as the Presbyterians of Scotland or the Huguenots of the Continent. Therefore the Assembly had not been called together to formulate a creed. Even the most zealous of the Puritans accepted the system taught in the Thirty-nine Articles. They were asked to vindicate and clear the same "from all false aspersions and misconstructions." This they would have done, gladly, but "the logic of events" finally swept them forward into a much larger undertaking. They were destined to produce a system of doctrine, polity, and worship which after two hundred and fifty years of turmoil and criticism still needs but little revision.

It was, however, when they approached the subject of Church Government that differences of opinion became emphatic. This diversity ran all the way from Episcopacy on the one hand to Independency on the other. Nine-tenths of the whole body were at heart Presbyterians, many were willing to go the whole length of a *jure divino* claim for Presbytery, but a large minority only insisted that the system is scriptural and expedient, while they were willing to say that neither papacy, prelacy, nor independency is to be found in the Bible.

With singular unanimity the Reformers had reached the conclusion that Presbytery was the govern-

ment established by the apostles in the New Testament Church. The overwhelming majority of the Westminster fathers under the sanction of an oath professed the same conclusion. But when did all the Church see eye to eye on such a question?

It has been customary to describe the Westminster Assembly as made up of three parties, the Presbyterians, the Independents, and the Erastians.

The Presbyterians were in the majority and gained strength as the discussion advanced. Their scheme is based on the New Testament principle that bishops and presbyters are identical, and that the Church is a unit, and has the right of self-government by a series of representative judicatories composed of clerical and lay members. The system is republican in spirit, avoiding the perils of democracy on the one hand, and the evils of oligarchy on the other. It had been adopted in the Reformed Churches on the Continent where it was possible, and had been worked for nearly a hundred years in Scotland, where it had recently enjoyed a signal triumph.

For twelve years England had been governed without a parliament. The people now proposed to be heard. Men were walking the streets of London with noses slit and ears cropped, the marks of the paternal interest of Archbishop Laud in the thorough discipline of his spiritual children. The people had made up their minds to be done forever with prelatical pretensions. Even before the Assembly met the

bishops had been turned out of the House of Lords, a measure to which the king had given his reluctant consent. The English people naturally turned to the other Reformed Churches for their model, and these Churches were confessedly Presbyterian.

In Scotland the Presbyterian Church had shown itself the friend of the people, and had presented a bold front to the despotic spirit of the king and the half-popish system of the cruel and bigoted Laud. A people who were smarting under the tyranny of the Star Chamber and Bishop's Courts of High Commission, were naturally favorable to a system in which the people had a voice. The Assembly proved to be overwhelmingly Presbyterian.

A second party was the Independents. These were few in number, but ably led by Dr. Thomas Godwin and the Rev. Philip Nye. They were called "the five dissenting brethren" by the Presbyterians, from the plausible "Apologetical Narration" which they offered to Parliament, after they had made a long and factious opposition to the majority of the Assembly.

Some of these brethren had been driven to Holland by the spiritual despotism of Laud, and their experience while in exile with single congregations of their expatriated countrymen, led them to attach undue importance to an independent church, and they were not in sympathy with the wider plans of those who sought for national uniformity.

Though never numbering more than twelve mem-

bers, the Independents were able to retard the final decision of the Assembly, carry on an intrigue with Cromwell and the army, foster the growth of fanatical sectaries in the country, and finally defeat the practical adoption of Presbytery in England. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the words of Dr. Schaff: "Independency . . . is preferred by the English mind because it comes nearer to Episcopacy, in making each pastor a bishop in his own congregation."

It is often claimed by their descendants that the Independents were the first to advocate toleration. But to this it may be replied that they were in the minority, and were only asking to be let alone and to go on with their own divisive schemes, and that when they established their system in New England they made it very uncomfortable for the Quakers, Baptists, and others who differed with them. The sweet spirit of toleration was not very well understood in that age by any party; and no one who takes the trouble to study the long and weary debates of the Assembly will conclude that the Independents had a monopoly of the meekness and charity there exhibited.

A third party in the Assembly was the Erastian, so called from Erastus, a physician of Heidelberg, and later of Basel, who wrote a book which was published after his death, in which he denied the right of church officers to excommunicate. These men dis-

sented from the grand proposition of the Assembly, that, "The Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church-officers, distinct from the Civil Magistrate." On the contrary, they wished to make the Church only a department of the State, and maintained that all Church government ought to be in the hands of the civil rulers. They denied that any particular form of Church government was prescribed in the New Testament, and claimed for the State the right to establish such form as might seem most expedient.

Only two ministers, Dr. Lightfoot and Mr. Coleman, were decidedly Erastians, but a considerable number of the lay-assessors, chiefly lawyers, were advocates of this secular policy. Insignificant as this party was in point of numbers, it derived importance from the reputation for Hebrew and rabbinical learning enjoyed by some of its members—Lightfoot, Coleman, and "the learned Selden"—and still more from the powerful support the party received from Parliament, most of whom, according to Baillie, were "down-right Erastians." "The pope and the king," says this lively chronicler, "were never more earnest for the headship of the Church than the plurality of this Parliament."

The evils of spiritual despotism were so many and so flagrant in that age, that it is not strange many sought the remedy in the subjection of the Church

to the State. This was the practical solution of all their difficulties at the time of the Restoration, when Charles II. was allowed to place his licentious foot on the neck of the prostrate Church. But such a settlement never lasts, and the English Church of this century has been passing through the convulsions of revolution, simply because her sons to-day are not willing to abide by the Erastian principles which satisfied their fathers in the middle of the 17th century. The whole Anglo-Catholic movement of our times began in a protest against the subjection of the Church of Christ to the domination of Cæsar. And here a loyal Presbyterian could join hands with John Henry Newman and the Oxford school; but we would soon have to part company when they start toward Rome to find spiritual independence. It is poor policy to try to escape from one usurpation by falling into another and a worse one.

Time will not permit a full account of the several steps which led to the adoption of the "Form of Government" as it finally passed the Assembly. Its Presbyterian principles had to run the gauntlet between the Independents and the Erastians. The debates were long and tough. Every premise was measured and every word in definition was weighed; every argument was sifted and every proof-text was traced back through the versions to the original Scriptures. There were honest difficulties to be met and captious objections to be answered. But finally

the system was painfully wrought out and the proof-texts selected and the Form of Church Government and Directory for Ordination was laid before Parliament. As a whole, it never was adopted by the civil authority of England, but on February 10, 1645, it was accepted and adopted by the General Assembly of the Scotch Church.

Another subject submitted to the Assembly at the same time was that of "Liturgy." The "Directory for Public Worship" was the first of the formularies which the Westminster fathers prepared and completed according to the terms of their Solemn League and Covenant. The promptness with which this work was accomplished points significantly to the fact that here the Westminster divines were far more united than on the subject of church government.

Whatever may have been the theoretical views of these men as to the lawfulness of an optional liturgy leaving room for free prayer, all were prepared in the interest of peace and Christian Union "to lay aside the former liturgy, with the many rites and ceremonies formerly used in the worship of God," and adopt a simple Directory as a guide and help to the minister in the various parts of public worship.

The privilege of free prayer was greatly appreciated at this time, and wonderful gifts in that direction were soon discovered among the members. We smile at the mention of prayers one or two hours

long, but we should remember that these men were exulting in a new-found liberty, and rejoicing that they were no longer "under tutors and governors" when approaching "the throne of grace."

And so, though there were keen debates about certain details—as to what profession of faith should be exacted from a parent when presenting his child for baptism; as to the qualifications to be required of those admitted to the sealing ordinances of the Church, and as to the exact position to be taken in the act of observing the Lord's Supper; yet the work of preparing the Directory for Worship went on with far greater harmony than that of settling the Form of Church Government, or agreeing as to the principles and methods of Ordination.

That the Prayer Book was to be laid aside was evidently a foregone conclusion from the beginning. The Preface to the Directory, which is still retained in the standards of the Scotch and Irish Churches, but has been revised out of our American Book, argues stoutly against the use of a liturgy.

That Preface begins by conceding that "in the beginning of the blessed reformation our wise and pious ancestors" had done much to correct many things which "by the Word" they had "discovered to be vain, erroneous, superstitious, and idolatrous in the public worship of God." It goes on to recite some of the benefits which had come to the Church in the Book of Common Prayer—that "the mass and the

rest of the Latin service" had been removed, that "the public worship was celebrated in our own tongue," and that many of the common people had received the benefit of "hearing the Scriptures read in their own language." It confesses that these things had caused "many godly and learned men to rejoice much in the Book of Common Prayer."

But if all this is heartily admitted, it is only to prepare the way for the strong indictment against "the Service Book" which follows. The Westminster fathers testify that "long and sad experience hath made it manifest that the liturgy used in the Church of England (notwithstanding all the pains and religious intentions of the compilers of it) hath proved an offence, not only to many of the godly at home, but also to the reformed churches abroad." They go on to assert that the Prayer Book contains "many unprofitable and burdensome ceremonies," that its glorification by "the prelates and their faction" had been a "great hindrance to the preaching of the Word," that of late in some places, it had pushed preaching out as "unnecessary, or, at best, as far inferior to the reading of common prayer," and that joining in this service had been made "no better than an idol by many ignorant and superstitious people."

All this was bad enough, but the gravest objection was against the system itself. They testified "that the liturgy hath been a great means . . . to make and increase an idle and unedifying ministry, which

contented itself with set forms made to their hands by others, without putting forth themselves to exercise the gift of prayer, with which our Lord Jesus Christ pleaseth to furnish all his servants whom he calls to that office."

In summing up their argument against the Prayer Book, they declare that "upon these and many the like weighty considerations in reference to the whole book in general, and because of diverse particulars contained in it . . . we have . . . resolved to lay aside the former liturgy, with the many rites and ceremonies formerly used in the worship of God, and have agreed upon this following Directory for all the parts of public worship."

This radical reformation has controlled the churches accepting the Westminster Standards ever since. From that day to this the Presbyterian Church has been non-liturgical. At the time of the Restoration, the Presbyterian party seemed to be willing, for the sake of peace, to make some concessions to the lovers of the Prayer Book; but when they were compelled to go out from the Established Church, the Non-Conformists did not make a revised Prayer Book for themselves. On the contrary, they remained true to the position of the Westminster Assembly, and practised the liberty of free prayer. The same is true of the American Church. Here and there a voice may have been raised in deprecation of a careless and perfunctory service of prayer in Presbyterian

worship; here and there a formalist may have proposed a return to liturgical methods, but the Church has remained firm. The apostolic doctrine that the people of God are "a royal priesthood" full of the Holy Ghost and of power to do their own praying, has remained our birthright as Presbyterians to this day.

Perhaps before leaving this subject of worship a word should be said concerning the metrical version of the Psalms, which as "altered and amended" was recommended "to be publicly sung."

Mr. Francis Rous was a member of Parliament and a lay-assessor in the Assembly. His metrical version of the Psalter was referred to the Assembly for examination and approval. It was carefully read in the public sessions of the body, and after receiving some emendations, was recommended as "useful and profitable to the Church." The House of Commons in consequence resolved "that this Book of Psalms set forth by Mr. Rous, and perused by the Assembly of Divines, be forthwith printed."

As is well known, this version became very dear to the Churches of Scotland, and a badge of orthodoxy to many of their successors in America. It is now almost wholly supplanted in the Churches of this country, but people are still living who love and cherish the rugged strength of Rous's version.

The last subject of general importance on which the labors of the Assembly were expended was a "Public Catechism." There had been no end of

private catechisms, for the careful indoctrination of the young was a thought familiar and grateful to the Puritan mind.

All the reformers had shown their sense of its importance either by writing catechisms or making a diligent use of those composed by others. It is not generally known how much thought and effort had been expended already in England on the subject of catechetical instruction. Dr. Mitchell, who has made a study of the Westminster Assembly and its times, declares as to the "floods" of catechisms already published by the Puritans, that their name was legion.

The subject of a catechism was one of the first to receive the attention of the Assembly, and as this part of their work was the last to be finished, it is but fair to conclude that the task was found to be one of considerable difficulty. But it can be justly said, in view of the result, that here the Westminster divines attained their greatest triumph. The Shorter Catechism, which was finished last, is the consummate flower of all their labors.

The whole subject seems to have been first considered by a committee of which the "gracious and learned little Palmer," as Baillie calls him, was the chairman. This Herbert Palmer had the reputation of being "the best catechist in England." He was the author of a catechism which had gone through several editions, and he had a peculiar method of

his own to which he was much attached, and which seems to have won the approval of the Scotch Commissioners, though it met with opposition in the Assembly. Months and years were spent at the task, but still the result was unsatisfactory. If ever George Gillespie was asked to pray for light and help in the definition of God, as a well-known tradition reports, it must have been during these labors; for he was in his grave when the Shorter Catechism was composed. Finally, when the work seemed almost accomplished, the Assembly fell into such "endless janglings about both the method and the matter," says Baillie, "that all think it will be longsome work."

The expedient of composing two catechisms was a thought which dawned slowly on the minds of the Assembly. In a letter of the Scotch Commissioners to their own Church which bears evidence of being from the hand of Rutherford, they say: "The Assembly of Divines, after they had made some progress in the catechism which was brought in to them from their committee, and having found it very difficult to satisfy themselves or the world with one form of catechism, or to dress up milk and meat both in one dish, have, after second thoughts, recommitted the work, that two forms of catechism may be prepared, one more exact and comprehensive; another more easie and short for new beginners." And so it was arranged that we have become the heirs of a Larger and a Shorter Catechism.

The definitions of the Larger Catechism are in a great measure abridged from the Confession of Faith, though traces of matter derived from other sources may be found in it. This monumental work was finished October 15, 1647, and shortly after was carried up to the two Houses by the prolocutor and the whole Assembly, when they were formally thanked "for their great labor and pains in compiling this Long Catechism."

The Shorter Catechism was not composed till after the Larger one had been virtually completed. On the 5th of August, 1647, it was resolved that the Shorter Catechism should be taken in hand "by a committee now to be chosen." Mr. Herbert Palmer was made the convener of this committee, of which the prolocutor was nominally the chairman.

As the work on this, "the ripest fruit of the Assembly's thought and experience," was mainly done in committee, we cannot trace the various steps by which it was brought to its present perfection. But this we do know, that Mr. Palmer died soon after the appointment of the committee, that Henderson and Gillespie had both gone home to Scotland and there passed to their reward, and that Baillie also had returned and was busy with his professorship in Glasgow. Only Rutherford remained, and he was longing to be released, as he "did not think the elaboration of this catechism of sufficient importance to detain him from his college and his flock at St.

Andrews." But he was persuaded to remain until it had been reported to the Assembly, when he took his final leave. Before his departure he suggested that a record be made in the "Scribe's Books," of the fact that the Assembly had enjoyed the assistance of the Commissioners from the Church of Scotland, during all the time spent in debating and perfecting the four things mentioned in the Covenant, viz., a Directory for Worship, a Confession of Faith, a Form of Church Government, and a Catechism. The suggestion was approved by the House, and the record was made in very complimentary terms.

The Shorter Catechism was finally finished and the great work of the Assembly was done, but it was not formally dissolved. On February 22, 1649, the Assembly was changed into a committee for conducting the trial and examination of ministers. Many of the members had gone home, but those who remained continued to act as a Church Court for the conduct of matters ecclesiastical, subject to the will of Parliament.

As the Parliament never did accept those parts of the Confession of Faith which condemned Erastianism, the Presbyterians were not willing to set up Presbyteries and Synods which would be shorn of all their Scriptural powers, and as neither party would yield, there was a dead-lock and it was a time of great confusion. Prelacy had been abolished by law, the Prayer Book had been laid aside by act of

Parliament, the old system was under the ban of the acting government, but Presbyteries and Synods were not organized; and finally the heavy hand of the dictator, Cromwell, cut the Gordian knot by abolishing the Parliament, and the Assembly ceased to exist when that popular branch of the government thus was set aside by a military despotism; for such the Protectorate of Cromwell was, however good it may have been for the common weal of Englishmen.

The Assembly had been lectured and bullied by the Parliament, because it would not say that the Church is merely a creature of civil government and a department of the State, but to their glory it can be affirmed, that the Westminster fathers never quailed nor betrayed the truth as they understood it. With heroic fortitude they had braved the wrath of the king and the hierarchy when at first they attended on the summons of the Parliament. With endless patience they listened to the arguments of Independents and Erastians, who combined to defeat the will of the majority. In dignified silence they endured the pettifogging taunts of Selden's "Nine Queries" respecting the *jure divino* rights of the Church. In devout reliance on divine assistance they fasted and prayed and wrought and waited for light from on high, and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. With laborious painstaking they searched the Scriptures to find the whole counsel of God on the questions submitted to them for their "humble advice." They

did not "make haste," but being assembled in solemn session "five years, six months, and twenty-two days," they left on record as the result of their labors, the most remarkable symbols in the possession of the Christian Church.