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Christian Messenger.

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Ecclesiastical History.

The Great Ejection of 1662.

A LECTURE,

BY J. M. CRAMP, D. D.

CONTINUED.

The provisions of the Act of Uniformity were to the following effect, viz:—

1. That those ministers who had not been episcopally ordained should be re-ordained.
2. That they should declare their unfeigned assent and consent to all and every thing contained in the book of Common Prayer and administration of sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, together with the Psalter, and the form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests and deacons.
3. That they should take the oath of canonical obedience to the bishops.
4. That they should abjure the solemn league and covenant.
5. That they should subscribe a declaration of the unlawfulness of taking up arms against the king, or those commissioned by him, upon any pretence whatsoever.

The authors and promoters of the Act of Uniformity had one object in view, which they pursued with relentless determination, not unmingled with craft and duplicity. King, privy-council, bishops, parliament men were leagued together for the destruction of the Presbyterians, and of those who acted with them. They were beguiled by a pretended Conference for the adjustment of differences, and then handed over, stripped and defenceless, to the vengeance of the law. That vengeance fell upon them with terrific force.

The penalties of the Act were severe. Neglect to make the prescribed declarations exposed the individual to immediate deprivation. Every person who should "consecrate and administer the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper before he was ordained a priest by episcopal ordination," forfeited one hundred pounds for each offence. No minister was to be allowed to preach unless he was licensed by the archbishop or bishops, and had publicly declared his "assent and consent," as above: in default whereof he was "disabled to preach," and was liable to three months imprisonment every time he preached while so "disabled." The penal statutes regarding religion, passed in Queen Elizabeth's time, were also continued in force.

All this was slight and insignificant compared with what followed, as will presently appear. On St. Bartholomew's day, Aug. 24th, 1662, upwards of two thousand ministers were cast out of the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity. We say, "cast out," because the terms of continuance were purposely so contrived as to ensure their removal. As they could not conscientiously comply with the terms it was impossible for them to remain. And no provision was made for them. The "scandalous and insufficient" ministers who were removed during the Commonwealth were entitled to the fifths of the revenues of their benefices; but the Nonconformists and their families were thrown upon the world in a state of utter destitution. Yet this miserable prospect did not deter them. They "counted the cost." They believed that they were called to take up the cross and follow their Lord, and they did so, in the face of poverty and punishment.

It would have been a hard measure if they had been merely turned out of house and home. But that did not satisfy the furies of those times. If, when expelled from the churches the servants of God preached elsewhere, met the attached members of their former flocks for purposes of christian fellowship, or adopted other measures for the diffusion of their principles, the state-church might incur great detriment. They must be silenced. And the law doomed them to silence. By the Conventicle Act (A. D. 1664), all persons present at any religious meeting, not conducted according to the forms of the Church of England, if five persons more than the household were there, were to be imprisoned three months, or pay five pounds; for the second offence, six months, or ten pounds; for the third offence, to be banished for seven years to some of the American plantations, "excepting New England and Virginia" (where they might find friends!), or pay one hundred pounds; the penalty for return or escape from banishment—death! By the Five Mile Act (A. D. 1665), Nonconformist ministers were forbidden to enter any city, town corporate, or borough, or to be found within five miles of the same or within five miles of any place where they formerly officiated, or where they had preached since the Act of Uniformity, unless they took an oath declaratory of the unlawfulness of taking up arms against the king, upon any pretence whatsoever, and of their own intention to endeavour no alteration of the government, either in church or state:—penalty, forty pounds. The second Conventicle Act (A. D. 1670), was still more barbarous. All persons present at unlawful religious meetings were to be fined five shillings each for the first offence, and ten shillings for the second; the "preachers or teachers" to be fined twenty pounds each; the owners of the premises, twenty pounds each. The fines were to be levied by distress and sale, by any justice of the peace, on the oath of two witnesses, "or any other sufficient proof;" and the proceeds were to be divided into three parts, one third for the king, one third for the poor, and one third "to the labourer or his assistants, regard being had to their diligence

and industry in discovering, dispersing, and punishing the said conventicle." If any justice of the peace refused to do his duty he was to be fined five pounds; and the Act was to be "construed most largely and beneficially for the suppressing of conventicles, and for the justification and encouragement of all persons to be employed in the execution thereof!"

These laws, it will be observed, were not confined to those who had been ejected from the Church of England, and their adherents. They affected all dissenters, of every name, the Independents, the Baptists, the Quakers and others. No man was to "worship God contrary to the law." If he dared to pray, or to praise God, to instruct others, or to receive instruction, in any other manner than the Act of Uniformity enjoined, he must suffer the consequences, in purse, or person, or both. And the penalties of the Act, were enforced on all who should teach children without submitting themselves and declaring their adhesion to the church. Thus the minister was prevented from becoming a schoolmaster, and by that means procuring a livelihood. Every avenue was to be shut against him. He must conform—or go into exile—or die.

The sufferings which befel the Nonconformists in consequence of these Acts, during the reign of Charles II. and James II. were altogether without parallel. At first, the ministers only were the victims. Preaching the gospel in contravention of the law was a crime. Men might not be exhorted to repentance nor trained in piety by those who were not recognised as regular ministers of the Church of England. All others ran the risk of fine and imprisonment; and then, when the fine was paid or the imprisonment terminated, the oath already referred to was required to be taken, or they were called on to give security for "good behaviour," which "good behaviour" was construed to mean abstinence from preaching—a condition to which they could not submit. Protracted imprisonment followed, often lasting for years, and in many instances closed only by death.

But the people were bent on the maintenance of their principles. By dint of ingenious management they frequently baffled the designs of the persecutor. The minister was disguised; or he preached in a room with a hole in the wall, through which his hearers, seated in another room, listened to him; or a trap-door was so placed that in the event of disturbance he might slip through it and be concealed elsewhere. Enraged at the failure of their plans, the enemies of truth and freedom adopted more violent measures. Heavier fines were levied. The old laws of Elizabeth were put into rigorous execution. Informers drove a thriving trade in those days. They diligently plied their infamous occupation, and spent the day of the Lord in prowling about for their prey—listening at doors and windows, if haply they might hear the voice of prayer or exhortation—or scouring the fields and woods in search of christian meetings. Like Saul of Tarsus they were "exceedingly mad" against the servants of the Lord, although they went beyond him in one respect, for we do not read that he enriched himself at the expense of the objects of his malice. But those wretched men fattened on the spoils, or wasted the substance so unrighteously acquired, in drunkenness and debauchery.

A brief reference to individual cases will give some idea of the scenes that were enacted, and the desolation that spread over the land.

[We have been obliged to omit here a long list of cases. The whole Lecture will be published in a few days in pamphlet form, together with an Appendix, &c.—Ed.]

The perils, privations and sufferings encountered during those years of persecution would scarcely command belief if they were not amply attested. Ministers of God's word were hunted up and down the country as if they were highwaymen or murderers. They often spent the night in the Lord's service, travelling in the dark to some retired spot, where they met christian friends and worshipped with them till the dawning of the day warned them to separate, lest they should be discovered. The terrible sentence of excommunication was pronounced against many of them, by which all civil rights were taken away, and even access to the churches was denied them—and then they were fined and plundered for not going to church! So hot was the pursuit on some occasions that they assumed other names to avoid detection. They hid themselves in the most secret places they could find, never remaining long in one house, and were sometimes literally reduced to such straits that they had not where to lay their heads. A Nonconformist preacher was in greater peril of liberty and life than the vilest rogues and vagabonds that roamed the country.

WHAT KIND OF MEN WERE THOSE NONCONFORMISTS?

If the inquiry relate to their intellectual acquirements, we may reply by telling of Dr. Seaman, who always carried a small Hebrew bible with him for ordinary use;—of William Wickens, to whom the originals of the Old and New Testaments were so familiar that he read them chiefly in his private devotions; of Edmund Calamy, who had read the whole of Augustine's works five times;—of Samuel Lee, who spoke Latin fluently and elegantly;—of Matthew Poole, the learned compiler of the *Synopsis Criticorum*;—of John Rowe, who "had such a knowledge of Greek, that he began very young to keep a diary in that language, which he continued till his death;"—of Thomas Gilbert, who "had all the Schoolmen at his finger's end;"—of George Moxon, who "was a good lyric poet, and could imitate Horace so exactly as not easily to be distinguished;"—of Samuel Tapper, of whom it is said that "Latin poetry was his amusement during his silence"—that

he could read the Greek poets and philosophers as familiarly as if he had been reading English"—and that "he had the Greek Testament by heart, and would, upon any occasion that offered, instantly repeat the text and criticize upon it, as if the book lay open before him";—of John Harmar, who translated the Assembly's Catechism into Greek and Latin;—of Matthew Clark, who was not only well versed in the Classics and in Oriental learning, but actually "learned the modern Persian after he was sixty-six years of age";—of Richard Heath, who corrected the Syriac and Arabic versions of the Scriptures, published in Walton's Polyglott;—of Philip Henry, who assisted Dr. Busby in preparing his Greek Grammar;—of Joseph Truman, whose "head supplied the place of a Lexicon, for he was able to give all the senses of any Greek word, where any thing of moment depended upon it, and to produce authorities, both out of sacred and profane authors";—of Thomas Hill, who when he went to the University of Cambridge to pursue his studies, "was so expert in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, that he was owned to be superior to most of the tutors";—and of such great men as Theophilus Gale, John Howe, Dr. Owen and others, who were very giants in learning.

Christians in the nineteenth century are continually instructed, edified and comforted by the productions of the writers of the seventeenth. The suffering age was made to furnish food for the busy one.

If it be further asked whether, besides using their pens in this manner, these excellent men laboured otherwise for the advancement of truth and piety, ample information may be supplied. They were generally pains-taking and indefatigable pastors; and as preachers of the gospel, both in preparation and practice, they marvellously excelled, and were blessed with great usefulness. Samuel Clark, a voluminous author, spent nine years in the town of Alcester, which, before he settled there was known by the epithet "drunken," but became distinguished for sobriety and religion during his ministry.—Thomas Vincent, who committed to memory the whole of the New Testament and the Psalms, because, he said, those "who took from him his pulpit might in time demand his bible also," devoted himself, when the great plague raged in London, in 1665, to preaching in the parish churches, visiting the sick, and every kind of effort by which relief might be afforded and souls saved;—multitudes flocked to hear him, and great numbers were brought to God.—Dr. Staunton, designated "the searching preacher," one of the most laborious ministers of those times, "was constantly projecting and executing schemes for the honour of God," and would often say to his friends, "Come, what shall we do for God to-day?"—Dr. Thomas Goodwin, "a very considerable scholar and an eminent divine," had purposed, when he commenced his ministry, to adorn his sermons with such flowers of wit and eloquence as he might gather from the best writings, ancient and modern; but the grace of God wrought such a change in him that a very different resolution was formed, "and in the end," he says, "this project of wit and vain-glory was wholly sunk in my heart, and I left all, and have continued in that purpose and practice these threescore years—and I never was so much as tempted to put into a sermon my own withered flowers that I had gathered, and valued more than diamonds, but have preached what I thought was truly edifying, either for conversion of souls, or bringing them up to eternal life."—John Howe, whose sermons displayed uncommon depth of thought, and who was a great man among the great, gave himself up to the work of God with such devotedness and holy solicitude as have been rarely witnessed. The manner in which he conducted the service on fast-days would hardly be imitated now, but showed great powers of endurance, both in the minister and the people. It is thus described;—"He began at nine o'clock with a prayer of a quarter of an hour—read and expounded scripture for about three quarters—prayed an hour—preached another—then prayed half an hour. The people then sang about a quarter of an hour, during which he retired and took a little refreshment. He then came into the pulpit again—prayed an hour more—preached another hour—and then with a prayer of half an hour concluded the service."—When Richard Baxter went to Kidderminster, "there might perhaps be a family in a street that worshipped God"; when he left it, "there was not above a family on the side of a street that did not do it." There were six hundred communicants in his church, and in nearly all the houses in the town his services were gratefully accepted, "for private catechising and personal conference."—This list might be almost indefinitely extended; let it suffice to mention one more illustrious name. Joseph Alleine, whose "Alarm to the Unconverted" has been circulated by hundreds of thousands, and has been the means of conversion to vast numbers, was a man of seraphic godliness. "At the time of his health," writes his wife, "he did constantly rise at or before four of the clock, and would be much troubled if he heard smiths or other craftsmen at work at their trades before he was at communion with God; saying to me often, 'How this noise shames me! Doth not my Master deserve more than theirs?' From four till eight he spent in prayer, holy contemplation, and singing of psalms, in which he much delighted, and did daily practice alone, as well in his family." His ministerial life at Taunton was a series of holy, unremitting toils, "both publicly and from house to house." When the Act of Uniformity displaced him he laboured yet the harder, preaching wherever he could get the people together for that purpose, because he feared that he might soon have only the prison for a meeting-house. "In these months," says Mrs. Alleine, "I know that he hath preached fourteen times in