

# THE PRESBYTERIAN QUARTERLY.

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NO. 43.—JANUARY, 1898

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## I. THE ISRAEL TABLET OF MERNEPTAH.

EVER since the Rosetta Stone unlocked the Egyptian hieroglyphs scholars have eagerly searched these ancient records for some mention of the Israelites, who, according to their own Scriptures, sojourned in the land of the Pharaohs for four hundred and thirty years, being cruelly oppressed during a portion of this period, and forced to build for the government the great store cities of Rameses and Pithom, and who then marched out of the country under the human leadership of Moses and with the miraculous assistance of the Almighty. But, although Pithom itself has been unearthed and identified beyond question by its own inscriptions found on the spot, and although the monuments and papyri have given us abundant proofs of the correctness of the biblical references to Egyptian manners and customs, once impeached by a rash criticism, and although the political conditions of the country in the several stages of its history were closely connected with the fortunes of Israel for several centuries and with the outworking of its predicted destiny (Gen. xv. 13-16), yet until last year there has never been found a single clear reference in the Egyptian records to the children of Israel. Neither the brick-makers, who are represented on the well-known wall-painting of a Theban tomb, and who were once supposed to be the enslaved Hebrews, nor the Habiri of the Tel-el-Amarna tablets, who are described as having stormed various cities of Southern Palestine in the time of Khuenaten (fifteenth century, B. C.), and whom Haynes and Conder still take to be the invading He-

## VI. THE PERSONNEL OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY.

IN the investigation of such a subject as the above we find outspread a wide and interesting field. It can be treated here only in the most general way. From the frequent and lengthy debates and intellectual tilts that took place between the members of opposing parties in the Assembly we are enabled to form some idea of their views, their learning, and relative ability. Yet to understand the doctrines and principles for which the leading men stood we must think ourselves back into the age in which they lived, and must become a party to their spiritual and mental development. Religious as well as philosophical or historical truths are never more interesting to us than when studied in the characters of individual men who illustrate them. If we would seek to understand the great doctrine of the Trinity embodied in the Nicene Creed, we would study it as illustrated through its champion, Athanasius. If we would understand the prominence given to justification by faith in the doctrine and preaching of the Reformation, we would study it as represented by Luther. If we wished to find the much-abused doctrine of predestination as it is offered to the world in its clearest form, we would trace its development in the logical mind of Calvin. And so, if we wish to understand the Calvinistic doctrines which moulded England and Scotland, and, through their sons, have left a strong impress upon our own land, we would study them as they wrought themselves out in the minds, and were embodied in the creed, of the Westminster Assembly of divines.

The Westminster Assembly is the most important council ever held in the Reformed Church. When we consider the small number who constituted it, and the far-reaching influence which they have exerted, we must pronounce it one of the most important councils of Christendom. The Council of Nicea (325 A. D.), the most important council of the church after the council at Jerusalem, had from fifteen hundred to two thousand attendants;

the Council of Chalcedon (451 A. D.) numbered six hundred and thirty bishops and deputies; but the Westminster Assembly never numbered, at any of its sessions, more than ninety-six or one hundred divines; and the average attendance, so Baillie tells us, was about sixty.

The Westminster Assembly was no exception, in many things, to the other great councils of the church. As soon as it convened in Westminster Abbey, we become aware of the fact that it is composed of different, and in some respects conflicting, elements. An earnest effort had been made by the king (at first) and by the Parliament to make the Assembly a fair representation of the religious ideas of all the land. The bill of Parliament abolishing the hierarchy, though never receiving the royal sanction, was virtually an abolition of the existing religious system. In calling the Assembly, then, the purpose of Parliament was twofold: (1), To vindicate the doctrines of the Church of England from misrepresentations, and to show that it was in conformity with the other Reformed churches; (2), To effect those changes in her polity and worship which would bring her into closer union with the churches of Scotland and of the continent. In the royal ordinance for assembling the council, the language was to the effect that each county should send two delegates. All parties and all sections were to be fairly represented. At the first meeting there were present several Episcopalians, and at least one bishop, Non-conformists, Presbyterians, Independents, and Erastians. It will be remembered that, after the king opposed the session of the Assembly and issued his condemnation of it, the Episcopalians, who were almost all royalists, left the Assembly. Dr. Featly alone remained, though he also left afterwards. There can be no doubt that the larger element of the Assembly was Presbyterian, yet the tenor of the Assembly was at first by no means decided. It can scarcely be said, with Hetherington, that the "native aim and tendency" of the Assembly was to establish the Presbyterian system in England. English Presbyterianism was, it is true, strong among the more conservative Puritans. Presbyterianism was, perhaps, the predominant system of the Reformed churches of the continent; but the Presbyterian bent given to the Assembly

was largely the result of political complications. It is by no means certain, as Hetherington affirms, that Pym and Hampden favored Presbyterianism by their free choice. It is more probable that Pym was led to favor it from his desire to secure the cooperation of Scotland with the Parliament against the king. This is, doubtless, the reason why the Scottish commissioners were admitted to their seats, and the Scottish League and Covenant was sworn to by both houses of Parliament and by the Assembly. This religious and political league between the two nations brought English statesmen and divines to look with favor on the Presbyterian system, then in operation in Scotland; and this, together with the influence of the Scottish commissioners, gave the dominant Presbyterian tone to the Assembly.

English Presbyterianism was represented in the Assembly by such divines as Gataker, Calamy, Palmer, Vines, and Reynolds. In the House of Commons the chief promoters of Presbytery were William Waller, Stapleton, Clotworthy, Rudyard, Massey, Maynard, and Glynn; but of these only Clotworthy, Glynn, Maynard, and Rudyard were members of the Assembly. By far the most influential commoners who were also members of the Assembly were John Selden, Pym, Sir Oliver St. John, and Sir Harry Vane; and these were opposed to Presbyterianism. Beside the Presbyterian party there was also the Independent element. They were few in number, but shrewd and learned, and of undoubted piety. Altogether they numbered ten or eleven. The leading Independents were Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Burroughs, Bridge, and Simpson. Of these the most learned and influential was Thomas Goodwin. He was a rigid Calvinist and a fellow of Cambridge University. During the persecutions of the Puritans under Charles I. he fled to Arnheim, Holland, where he preached until his return to England at the calling of the Long Parliament. Goodwin was a great favorite with Cromwell, and was influential in the army. He and the famous John Owen were called "the two Atlases and patriarchs of Independency." Philip Nye was the next in influence in the ranks of the Independents. He was originally a Presbyterian, but is accused of deserting to the Independents as they grew in power. He was a famous de-

bater and ecclesiastical politician, and was in constant touch with Harry Vane and Pym and the other influential Independents of the army. While in the Assembly it was hinted that he was somewhat of a cat's paw in the hands of political leaders. Burroughs was a gentle, lovable man; Bridge was studious and learned; and Simpson was a better preacher than he was a scholar or debater. These were all men tenacious of purpose, often unscrupulous, and, from their political support in Parliament, were far more of a power than would appear from their small number. The Independents were Calvinists, the chief point of difference between them and the Presbyterians being one of polity, not of doctrine. At first the Independents and the Presbyterians were very near together, both being members of the great Puritan party; but the Parliament insisted that the question of church government should be first settled, and this was where they differed. As the controversy increased, the line of demarcation between them grew more and more distinct, until, in February, 1644, the Independents came out in a pamphlet addressed to parliament, and entitled *An Apologetical Narration*. This was understood to be an attempt to win over Parliament to their view, and it deepened the Presbyterian opposition. They made a brave fight, but were overruled in almost all their points.

There was another party in the Assembly who gave rise to another controversy. They were called the Erastians, so named from Erastus, a physician of Heidelberg, who held peculiar views on church government. He taught "that the pastoral office is only persuasive, like that of a professor over his students, without any direct power; that baptism, the Lord's supper, and all other gospel ordinances were free and open to all; and that the minister might state and explain what were the proper qualifications, and might dissuade the vicious and unqualified from the communion, but had no power to refuse it, or to inflict any kind of censure" (Hetherington's *History of the Westminster Assembly*, p. 120); that the punishment of all offences belongs exclusively to the civil magistrate; that the church is simply a "creature of the state." In the Assembly there were only two divines who championed these ideas, the learned John Lightfoot and Thomas Cole-

man. Both were famous oriental scholars and Hebraists. Their influence would seem small amidst the Presbyterian and Independent majority; but we must remember that, though only two of the divines were Erastians, almost the whole of Parliament was of this belief, and in the Assembly they were led by the learned and influential commoner, John Selden, backed by Whitelocke and Sir Oliver St. John. No member of the Assembly was better known, or enjoyed a wider reputation for scholarship, than John Selden. He was called the most learned man in England. The places he filled in the public service and the amount of literary work done by him are amazing. He was a lawyer, and, though he rarely went into court as an advocate, yet he accumulated a considerable fortune from his practice. His literary labors include works on English history and English law, mythology, literary criticism, theology, and oriental antiquities. He published a work on *Titles of Honor* and another on *Syrian Mythology*, which, though two hundred and fifty years old, are still the best of their kind. His work *De Jure Naturali et Gentium juxta Disciplinam Ebræorum* (A. D. 1640) Mr. Hallam pronounces "among the greatest achievements in erudition that any English writer has performed." (*Literature of Europe*, Part III., pages 145, 146.) During these labors he held a seat in Parliament, under the king and afterwards; was active in the impeachment of Buckingham, and in drafting the resolutions against illegal tonnage and poundage. He was a member of the committees which arranged for the impeachment of Stafford and Laud; was twice committed to the Tower himself, and during one imprisonment there wrote a book on a manuscript borrowed from his jailer. Any cause that he might champion could well be thought strong; and he threw all the weight of his vast erudition and political influence in the scale for Erastianism.

It will be seen, then, that these three parties—Presbyterian, Independent, and Erastian—were more equally matched than would at first appear. The Presbyterians were strong numerically, and besides Gataker, Calamy, Palmer, Vines, and Reynolds, any one of whom could be called a "walking library," they had the undivided support of the Scotch commissioners. The Inde-

pendents, though few in number, were supported by the powerful Lords Say, Brooke, and Manchester, of the House of Peers, besides Pym and Vane, of the Commons; and all these were members of the Assembly as well as of Parliament. We have already noted the strength of the Erastians. Their doctrine appealed to the political leaders, for it gave them that control in matters ecclesiastical which they had just wrenched from the king in civil matters. We cannot, even in this short sketch, fail to note four other commissioners, who, while having no vote in the Assembly, exerted a great influence in all its debates and decisions. "The four Scotch divines," says Hetherington, with pardonable pride, "were in every respect distinguished men, and would have been so regarded in any age or country." Of these, Alexander Henderson was, perhaps, the most influential. His learning was general rather than minute, and he was characterized by the two qualities of dignity and comprehensiveness. His influence on his time was far-reaching. He was twice Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and was made rector of the University of Edinburgh. He went with the commissioners of the Scotch Parliament to treat with the king at Uxbridge and Newcastle. He was the framer of most of the constitution of the Church of Scotland, and "the Solemn League and Covenant was his own composition." "He wrote the principal part of the Confession of Faith with his own hand. The Directory was formed under his eye," and the Form of Government adopted by the Westminster Assembly was a transcript of the one which he had previously drafted for the Church of Scotland. As long as Presbyterians respect their symbols of faith and government, as long as the Presbyterian system is more than a memory or a name, as long as the historian shall still chronicle for us the story of the stormy times of Charles I. and Cromwell, the memory of Alexander Henderson will be revered. He was of the stuff that martyrs are made of. Scarcely less prominent was the figure of George Gillespie. His learning was less comprehensive, but more accurate, than that of Henderson, and his intellectual power and keenness in debate were undisputed. Though but twenty-nine years of age at the time he was sent to the Assembly, and the youngest

man there of any prominence, his learning and brilliance speedily won for him a place among the recognized leaders. He vindicated his powers by holding his own in debate against such men as Selden and Lightfoot, Goodwin and Nye. Both Baillie and Lightfoot, in their journals, seem to acknowledge that he alone fully met Selden's learned argument to prove that the word "church," in Matthew xviii. 17, referred to a temporal and civil, not a spiritual, organization. The tremendous strain of his work told on his constitution, and he left the Assembly, and returned to the land of his fathers to die, in 1648, being just thirty-four years of age. Samuel Rutherford was also eminent as a controversialist, and was twice invited to a professorship in Holland. Robert Baillie, the fourth and last of the Scotch divines, was a man of learning and versatility. He has left, in his journal, a most interesting account of the Assembly's proceedings, written during its sessions.

This is but a brief glance at the main parties and the leading minds of the Assembly. It is through a careful study of these men and of their mental and spiritual development that we get a proper idea of the spirit of the Assembly.

We are told by modern writers that this Assembly was sectional in its character, and that from it we can expect nothing but a sectional creed. We are informed that the culture and intellect of England were not represented in it. We have already mentioned the fact that every effort was made both by the king, before his change of mind, and by the Parliament to secure a fair representation. Every county was to elect two delegates. Mitchell, the very highest authority on this subject, says: "If ever an attempt was made to bring together a synod of men of different judgments in all non-essential matters, it was in the case of the Westminster Assembly." It is argued that there were better men in England, outside of the Assembly, for drafting a representative creed. The most learned man in all England at that time was, doubtless, Archbishop Ussher; and, though not in attendance upon the council, he was invited to a seat; and he, together with Whitgift, Abbott, and Tyndale, was practically in agreement with all their conclusions. Chillingworth and Ralph Cudworth were not there, but both were alluded to approvingly,



and one was appointed to a place in Cambridge University. The Assembly had no lack of learning or culture so long as Twisse, Lightfoot, Coleman, Gataker, Gillespie, and Selden were there. Hallam himself, though prejudiced in favor of episcopacy, said that this gathering was "equal in learning, good sense, and other merits to any Lower House of Convocation that ever made a figure in England." It was ridiculed in the popular doggerel:

"Pretty Synod, does it sit,  
Voyn of grace as well as wit,  
And makes no canons!

"From the Synod's nonsense and their treason,  
And from their catechistic reason,  
Good heaven defend us!"

Even men like Milton and Clarendon spoke of it with lofty scorn. But Milton only differed from them in their ideas about divorce, and when we remember the poet's domestic life, perhaps we can excuse him. Clarendon was very careful not to censure them until he had gotten their aid to put Charles II. back upon the throne, and discovered that by neither threat nor promise could he bind them to his will. Nobler than either of these, trustier than them all, is the testimony of the gentle Richard Baxter. He said that, though not learned or worthy enough to be a member himself, he could testify that so far as he was able to judge, never since the apostolic days had a synod of more excellent divines sat in Christendom than this Assembly in Westminster Abbey.

But these Westminster divines rise still higher in our estimation when we remember the fearlessness with which they expressed their convictions, and the consistency with which they lived up to those convictions in after life. There had been other councils in the history of the church, and many noble creeds had been formulated, from the Creed of Nicea to the Creed of the Synod of Dort; but the Westminster Assembly was the first to embody in its canons the great principle which was, indeed, the very root and foundation of Puritanism, namely, liberty of conscience. I know of no nobler declaration in any creed, of no more fearless assertion of religious truth, than is contained in the second section

of the twentieth chapter of the Confession of Faith: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also." Language like this sounds strange in the midst of our civil and religious liberty; but to the men who penned these words they contained living, precious truths. Goodwin and Nye and Bridge and Burroughs learned to love them and battle for them as they lived expatriated in Holland or were deprived of their livings in England. Good old Dr. Twisse could die for them without a living, in almost abject poverty. John Selden felt their force when twice thrown into the Tower for alleged treason in his writings. And the descendants of Henderson and Gillespie and Rutherford and Baillie were willing, if need be, to seal their allegiance to them with their own blood during the bitter persecutions of the Covenanters.

We have been told these men were intolerant. Perhaps many of them were. Baillie thought every one a fool or a knave who did not believe in the divine right of presbytery. We must remember that the act of Parliament for the burning of heretics was still upon the statute books of England. If Presbyterians were intolerant, so were the Independents, as was proven in the early history of New England. And be it remembered that though Presbyterianism was in the ascendancy at this time in England, yet no attempt was made by the Presbyterian majority in the Assembly to force their polity upon the people as was afterwards done by Laud in Scotland. We can, in large measure, forgive the intolerant spirit of some of the members when we remember the spirit of their age. The spirit of the Westminster Assembly was the spirit of Puritan England. The Puritan had witnessed the dissipation of his dream of a universal and tolerant church at the death of Elizabeth. He had watched the lines closing about Protestantism in Germany and France and Holland. He saw with a sinking heart the drift of the religious spirit of the

Stuarts, and as hope died in his soul his mood became hard and stern. In his bitter struggle with the papacy he saw no room for compromise, no place for tolerance. The danger threatening, the precious interests at stake demanded that the line be drawn clearly and strongly between truth as he understood it and loved it, and what he held to be error. This stern, uncompromising spirit told upon his theology. The liberal spirit of the renaissance was crushed. More and Colet were forgotten or ignored, and the men who met in Westminster Abbey were determined to give to the world a system of dogma which, if it partook of their own rigidity, might, at the same time, stand as the bulwark of Protestantism against Rome and the salvation of their distressed church.

Finally, in our study of the spirit and work of these men, one fact cannot escape us. It has been contended that their spirit was the spirit of Augustine and Ambrose, and perhaps it was, but more distinct than the influence of either of these master spirits, overshadowing all else, and like a mighty undercurrent, shaping the drift of the Assembly, was the genius of the great John Calvin. "An original and immortal man," the greatest theologian of the Reformed Church, as he was, I find his imprint upon almost every member of that Assembly. We must remember that though differing in polity and worship, and many minor particulars, yet almost to a man the Assembly was Calvinistic.

Their theology wears the unmistakable stamp of the scholar of Geneva. Like him, they were no fencers in sophistry. Like him, they neither defied, nor destroyed reason. Like him, they took Christ as the supreme head of the church, and the Scriptures as their last authority, and with a logicalness as fearless as it was resistless, they drew their conclusions. Like Calvin, too, their theology radiates from one great central truth—the sovereignty of God. They have stated this in its clearest, most unequivocal terms, and though this doctrine, with its conclusions, has never commended itself to a large part of the Christian world, yet, after all, it is perhaps the most logical of all the systems of religious truth men have ever framed. To these men, as to Calvin, God is always a personal and immanent being. He is not the God of the pantheist revealed in nature's glories; he is not the

God of the deist beyond nature, but the God of the believing saint in every age, who holds in his hands the reins of human destiny. Few men who know anything will dare ridicule the Westminster divines. They were cast in no common mould. Whatever may be the honors the future holds for Presbyterianism they must come in for their share. Whatever contributions to national greatness the Puritan brought to Holland, or England, or America, they must claim as partly their work. So long as the world respects loyalty to conviction, faithfulness to trust, profound learning, and exegetical ability, their memories can never die. An unthinking and frivolous soul may find no charm in their brilliant intellectuality, and the stern logic by which they settled some of the mysteries of divine providence and human destiny. The generation of to-day will hardly build a monument to their memory. Their work, however, will remain as a rich legacy to the world of the loftiest religious enthusiasm of the Reformed Church. They will be revered as the founders of a system of religious dogma, which, in spite of the death knell repeatedly sounded by its enemies, still lives and counts in its train some of the brightest intellects and noblest institutions of learning in this country and Europe. From the rock-bound coasts of New England to the long wash of Pacific Seas, we still mark the imprint of their genius upon the thousands of sturdy yeomanry who are our nation's hope and pride. We know a living church is a growing church, yet we believe that beneath all surface changes lie the foundations of eternal truth. We will receive what these fathers have bequeathed to us; we will construe their message with due regard to the prejudices of their age; yet will we reverently guard the imperishable truth it contains. And when the world has produced another school of scholars as ripe as they, as capable of handling fundamental truth, and as reverent in their dealings with God's inspired word, it will be time enough then to think of replacing their creed with one abreast of the modern world.

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