

THE COVENANTER January 1981

SKETCH OF A COVENANTER

The following sketch was written by Thomas Houston and appeared in the very first issue of "The Covenanter" 150 years ago. It is in keeping with his avowed intention that the magazine should reflect the life of the Church and above all, the character of its members. The article, somewhat abbreviated, is very relevant to our situation today.

A genuine Covenanter, convinced of the original depravity of human nature, and sensible of the imperfection of reason, considers a revelation from God essential to guide him in matters of faith and practice ; and he firmly believes the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be that revelation. This he takes upon its own intrinsic evidence, and he does not consider some portions to be inspired and some not, but believes the whole to be the dictates of the Spirit of Truth. He is fully convinced that the Scriptures reveal the infinite and incomprehensible God as eternally and necessarily subsisting in three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Spirit.

In the next place, he considers Adam to have been the federal head and representative of all his posterity, that the guilt he contracted in transgressing the Divine command, is justly imputed to him and to his descendants, and consequently that they all come into the world in a state of moral pollution and debasement. He is aware that this is an unpopular doctrine because it humbles human pride and because federal representation is generally misunderstood or denied. The Covenanter, however, who is worthy of the name, believes that in consequence of the everlasting covenant made with the Lord Jesus Christ concerning the redemption of elect sinners, God has been pleased to deal with men by way of covenant-representation in all ages of the world.

Moreover, a Covenanter believes that the death of Christ was a real sacrifice and atonement for sin; that it derived its merit and efficacy from Divine appointment and the infinite dignity of His person, and that a true Christian not only assents to what the Scripture reveals concerning the obedience and suffering of the Saviour, but appropriates His righteousness and confidently pleads it as the only ground of his justification and acceptance with God.

Further, a Covenanter believes, that when sin had entered into the world and defaced the Creator's glory as originally displayed in his visible works, and when the Second Person of the Trinity assumed the actual administration of the Divine Government and engaged to rule until order was completely restored, the Father did not consequently forfeit His right to govern, but appointed the Mediator to exercise all authority and power in heaven and on earth, that His enemies might be subdued, the elect saved, and God might be all in all. The glorious and mighty Lord who sits enthroned at the Father's right hand, is exalted above all principality and power and might and dominion and exercises unlimited sway as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When therefore, a Covenanter finds any human being encroaching on the prerogatives of his Saviour, assuming a headship or dominion over the Church, or attempting to violate any of her privileges which the Redeemer has purchased with His blood, he feels indignant and testifies against such daring usurpation.

As Christ has instituted the plan of worship, and has distinctly described those ordinances which He will bless for bringing His Church to her ultimate perfection, a Covenanter is a strenuous advocate for Spiritual qualifications in those who rule whether in Church or

State. Jesus Christ has an indisputable right to prescribe the qualifications and duties of His servants. A Covenanter will neither bless nor curse those who are usurpers, but will leave them to the righteous judgment of Him to whom all men must render a final account.

Although numerous objections have been raised against our Covenants as if they were useful only for a time and obligatory only upon those who entered into them, a true Covenanter considers them to be the glory of these kingdoms, sanctioned by numerous scriptural examples, strictly moral in their nature and ends, highly expedient for the promoting of religion, solemnly sworn by men of all ranks, and so he assents to their perpetual obligation.

Whilst a Covenanter believes that the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and are a perfect rule of faith and morals, he, at the same time, maintains the necessity for Creeds and Confessions and accounts them of paramount importance to the Church in her militant and imperfect estate. A Covenanter's testimony in behalf of the doctrines of the Westminster Confession is particularly dear to him. because it is written and sealed by the blood of his ancestors and bequeathed to him as a sacred deposit. As he is therefore not ashamed of it, he states it to the world in the candour and sincerity of his heart.

A Covenanter who is pledged to defend the truth and uphold the principles of civil and religious liberty may well feel aggrieved when, at times, he is charged with disloyalty. The truth is that a Covenanter is as loyal as any of his neighbours though he may not be so forward in proclaiming it. It is not manifested in fulsome flattery and praise, but is regulated by the Word of God. Godly living and good citizenship are the best evidences of true loyalty.