

SOME NOTES ON THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT IN ENGLAND,

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PARISH OF
LONG SUTTON IN HAMPSHIRE.

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CONSIDERING how universally the Solemn League and Covenant was subscribed in the parishes of England, it is surprising how few copies remain among parochial records at the present day ; an inquiry extending over many years having failed to bring to light more than eleven in all, and these are scattered over the following counties :—Cambridge, one, at Over ; Cheshire, one, at Woodchurch ; Durham, two, at Easington and Houghton-le-Spring ; Essex, two, at Ashingdon and Hadleigh by the Castle ; Huntingdon, one, at Swynshed ; Kent, two, at Eastwell and Walmer ; Norfolk, one, at South Walsham ; and Suffolk, one, at Earl Soham. It is possible, of course, that there may be some others, but, if so, they cannot be very numerous. Of the kindred document known as the Protestation, copies exist at Alfriston, Sussex ; Appleby Magna, Leicestershire ; Eastwell, Kent ; Goodleigh, near Barnstaple ; Swynshed, Huntingdon ; Wormingford, Colchester ; and in London, at Trinity the Less.

The Solemn League and Covenant was, of course, the price paid by the English Parliament for the assistance of the Scots against the King ; when, in the early stages of the Civil War, success appeared to attend the Royalist forces. Commissioners were dispatched from Scotland, and received at St. Margaret's, Westminster, by both Houses of Parliament and the Assembly of Divines on September 25th, 1643, when the Covenant was presented and subscribed. A copy was ordered to be hung up in every church ; and by an ordinance of both Houses, dated the following February 2nd, it was to be

solemnly taken by all above the age of eighteen assembled in church on the Lord's Day. The manner of taking it is interesting as throwing some light on the existence of the document among parish records :—" The minister " was " to read the whole Covenant distinctly and audibly in the pulpit, and during the time of the reading thereof the whole congregation to be uncovered ; and at the end of the reading thereof all to take it standing, lifting up their right hands bare ; and then afterwards to subscribe it severally, by writing their names (or their marks, to which their names are to be added) in a Parchment Roll, or a Book, wherein the Covenant is to be inserted, purposely provided for that end, and kept as a Record in the parish."

The Protestation was signed by the Commons on May 5th, 1641, just a week before the execution of the Earl of Strafford. It was ordered to be taken by every person above the age of sixteen, and consisted of a promise, vow, and protestation, which ran as follows :—" I, A.B., do, in the presence of Almighty God, promise, vow, and protest to maintain and defend, as far as lawfully I may, with my life, power, and estate, the true reformed Protestant religion, expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England, against all popery, and popish innovations within this realm, contrary to the said doctrine ; and according to the duty of mine allegiance, I will maintain and defend His Majesty's royal person, honour, and estate, as also the power and privileges of parliaments, the lawful rights and liberties of the subject, and every person that maketh this protestation in whatsoever he shall do in the lawful pursuance of the same, and to my power and as far as lawfully I may, I will oppose and by all ways and means endeavour to bring to condign punishment all such as shall either by force, practice, counsels, plots, conspiracies or otherwise, do anything to the contrary of anything in this protestation contained, and further that I shall in all just and honourable ways endeavour to preserve the union and the peace between the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland ; and neither for hope, fear, nor other respect

shall relinquish this promise, vow, and protestation." Of this document copies exist at Alfriston, Sussex; Appleby Magna, Leicestershire; Eastwell, Kent; Goodleigh, near Barnstaple; Swynshed, co. Huntingdon; and Wormingford, near Colchester.

An "explanation" of the Protestation was subsequently issued, which runs as follows:—

"Whereas some doubts have been rayed by severall persons out of this house concerning the meaning of these words contained in this protestation lately made by the members of this house, viz., the true reformed protestant religion expressed in the doctrine of the Church of England against all poperie and popish innovations within this realm contrary to the same doctrine, this house doth declare that by these words was and is meant, only the publicke doctrine professed in the sayd church, so farre as it is opposite to poperie and popish innovations and that the sayd words are not to be extended to the mayntayning of any form of worship, discipline, or government, nor of any rites or ceremonies in the sayd Church of England." The only extant copy of the "explanation" which I have met with is in the registers of the parish of Swynshed, Huntingdon.

A further kindred document, known as the Sacred Vow and Covenant, was signed by the House of Commons on June 6th, 1643, and ordered to be taken by the Armies and Kingdoms. Of this there is a copy in the registers of the parishes of Wormingford, and of Eastwell in Kent.

There was still another document called the Engagement, which ran as follows:—"I do declare and promise, that I will be true and faithful to the Commonwealth of England, as it is now Established without a King or House of Lords." This was dated "Die Mercurii, 2 Januarii, 1649" (1650 N.S.), and ordered to be signed by all of eighteen years and upwards, but I have not heard of a single copy being still in existence among parish records.

The disappearance of these documents, which once must have been very general in the parishes of England, is readily

accounted for by the natural desire to get rid of matter of such a compromising nature, when the tide turned and the Restoration came about. One of the first acts of the new Parliament in 1661 was to order the Vow and Covenant to be publicly burned by the common hangman, so there can be small wonder if it and kindred documents were summarily dealt with in the parishes generally, especially as it was now declared to be an unlawful oath.

A curious story attaches to the discovery of one of these documents after the lapse of nearly two hundred years—viz., the Swynshed copy of the Solemn League and Covenant. I quote from the Rev. W. Airy, M.A., Rector of Swynshed :—
 "In 1846 I found the roof of the rectory, a house of the early part of the seventeenth century, in so dilapidated a state that it was necessary to remove it entirely. . . . I found in the angle formed by the springing of one of the principal rafters from the wall plate a small coil of parchment, one end of which, from the rain having penetrated through the roof, had perished ; the rest, which was protected by the rafters, was in good condition, and the writing upon it perfectly legible. This was the Solemn League and Covenant of the little parish of Swynshed." It has the signature of "Thomas Whitehead, Minister," who lived to see the Restoration, and then apparently concealed this copy in the place where it was discovered in 1846.

In other instances the compromising document was removed from the register and destroyed, but still leaving traces of its former existence, as at South Walsham in Norfolk. In that place there were two parishes, S. Laurence and S. Mary, each with its own parish church, the two churches being enclosed in the same churchyard. Each parish had in its registers its own copy of the Solemn League and Covenant, though at the present time only one copy remains. In the other case, the parchment leaves which contained the Covenant have been cut out and doubtless destroyed, but the last two or three signatures still remain, having been written at the top of a clean right-hand page.

A similar thing seems to have happened at Long Sutton in this county (Hampshire), where, during an examination of the old register for quite another purpose, my attention was directed to certain signatures and "marks," by the Vicar, the Rev. P. F. Forbes, which I at once recognized as having in all probability belonged to the Solemn League and Covenant. Further careful examination has convinced me that such is the case; and Long Sutton therefore seems to enjoy the distinction of being the only parish in the county to possess any relics of that document. The words of the Covenant were in this case transcribed into the register at the end of the book, which was turned round for the purpose, and the leaf containing them, together with some of the signatures, including that of the "minister," has been cut out. The names which remain number sixteen in all, out of which five only are actual signatures, the rest being "marks" only, and the hand which wrote the words "the mark of" is clearly the same as that which made the other entries in the register in 1643. I have not been able to establish beyond all doubt the identity of the "minister" of Long Sutton at the date of the Covenant, but all the evidence seems to point to the Reverend Samuel Blundell, who was certainly there for many years and lived to see the Restoration. It is evident that, whoever he was, he accepted the Covenant, for there is no mention of Long Sutton in the minutes of the Committee of Parliament for sequestered livings. Samuel Blundell must have accepted the Covenant, or he would not have been there, as he certainly was, in 1648; and his survival till the reign of Charles II supplies a motive for the disappearance of the leaf. The Long Sutton register records his burial on May 24th, 1663. This parish was a curacy of the neighbouring parish of Crondall, which accounts for the fact that no light is thrown on Mr. Blundell's appointment to the parish by the Books of Institutions; while there are naturally no Diocesan Records of the Commonwealth period, as the Bishopric was suppressed.

The following is the list of signatures as far as they remain:

George Hawkins.
The mark of Anthony Ware.
The mark of John Draper.
The mark of George Narman.
The mark of Thomas Rise.
The mark of John Haell.
Juan (? Evan) Hancock.
The mark of Edward Tornor.
William Knight.
The mark of Stephen Wise.
The mark of James Cooper.
The mark of John Marshall.
The mark of Robert Porter.
The mark of Robert Chandler.
Next one illegible.
James Minns.

The marks themselves are interesting, consisting usually of either the first letter of the name, or of a portion of the letter used as the distinguishing mark of the writer. Robert Chandler's mark is somewhat elaborate, and suggests the idea that he used as his mark a rough sketch of the tower of Sutton Church, with its medieval (probably fifteenth century) bell turret.

George Norton
 Tho: M^{or} of Antwerp
 Tho: M^{or} of John
 Duane
 Tho: M^{or} of
 Young Newman
 Tho: M^{or} of Thomas
 Rife
 Tho: M^{or} of John
 Spall
 John Herbert
 Tho: M^{or} of Edward
 Damer
 William Wright
 Tho: M^{or} of Stephen
 M^{or} of James
 Deppon
 Tho: M^{or} of John
 Marshall
 Tho: M^{or} of Robert
 Ponton

SIGNATURES TO SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.