

ACCOUNT OF THE ENTRY
OF
"THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT,"

STILL EXISTING IN THE REGISTER-BOOK

OF THE

Parish of St. Lawrence at South Walsham ;

TOGETHER WITH

REMARKABLE ENTRIES IN THE TIME OF THE COMMONWEALTH

IN OTHER PARISHES.

BY THE REV. JAMES BULWER.

MENTION having been made at one of the meetings of this Society, that there was a manuscript entry of the "Solemn League and Covenant" in the parish Register of St. Lawrence, South Walsham, I took an opportunity to go thither with Mr. Harrod, one of our Honorary Secretaries, to ascertain whether such entry at all differed from the printed copies still sparingly met with in the collections of the period. I had previously extracted from a volume of miscellaneous ordinances of the year 1643, existing in the Library at Blickling, the following information. From an Ordinance entitled, "Instructions for the Taking of the Covenant throughout the Kingdom," and comprising Fourteen Articles, we read in Article 13:—

"The manner of taking it to be thus: *The Minister 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 his 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, whereinto the*

Covenant is to be inserted, purposely provided for that end, and kept as a Record in the parish."

And in Article 14, it is ordered, that the Assembly of Divines do prepare "an Exhortation for the better taking, &c.;" and this was also printed.

The following are the first two Articles of

THE SOLEMN LEAGUE AND COVENANT.

I.

"That we shall sincerely, really, and constantly, through the Grace of God, indeavour, in our severall places and callings, the preservation of the Reformed Religion in the Church of *Scotland*, in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, against our common Enemies, the Reformation of Religion in the Kingdoms of *England* and *Ireland*, in Doctrine, Worship, Discipline and Government, according to the word of God, and the Example of the best Reformed Churches; and shall indeavour to bring the Churches of God in the three Kingdoms to the neerest Conjunction and uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church-Government, Directory for Worship and Catechizing. That we, and our posterity after us may, as Brethren, live in Faith and Love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us."

II.

"That we shall in like manner, without respect of persons, indeavour the extirpation of Popery, Prelacy, (that is, Church-Government, by Arch-Bishops, Bishops, their Chancellours and Commissaries, Deanes, Deanes and Chapters, Archdeacons, and all other Ecclesiasticall Offices depending on that Hirarchy,) Superstition, Heresie, Schisme, Prophanenesse, and whatsoever shall be found to be contrary to sound Doctrine, and the power of Godlinesse; lest we partake in other mens' sins, and thereby be in danger to receive of their plagues, and that the Lord may be one, and his name one, in the three Kingdoms."

Altogether, there are six Articles, with a Preface and a Conclusion; and a list of two hundred and twenty-eight signatures is attached, headed by William Lenthall, Speaker, and containing the names of Oliver Cromwell and of the most prominent among the Parliamentarians.

The entry in the South Walsham Register is in the spirit of these instructions; and is as follows:

“Wee, the Inhabitants of the parish of St. Lawrence South Walsham, doe enter into a mutuall and solemne League and Covenant, and each one for himself, wth his hands lifted up unto God most high, doe swear,—

“1. That we shall sincerely, really and constantly, through the grace of God, &c., &c., &c.” (as in the printed copies)—


The Articles are signed by

JOHN BAKER, Clerk


HENRY PLOMBE

WILLIAM HINCKE

JOHN COBB

JOHN  BROWNE,

and fifty-eight others, forty-four of whom made their marks, to which their names were attached.

I am doubtful whether to consider this  a “Merchant’s Mark,”* although the arbitrary conduct of the Government in the matter of Ship-money would lead us to expect in a maritime county the signatures of its merchants.

The Covenant, either in print or manuscript, is now rarely found in our parishes, because, I apprehend, in most of them, it was torn out of the Books, or the Rolls were destroyed, at the

* I am told, that even now, when almost everybody can write, it is not unusual for *Markmen* to have a *peculiar* mark; and that frequently the mark has no allusion whatever in its form to the name. The watermen on our rivers, who are marksmen, have all marks of this kind. The more regular Merchants’ Marks, if I may use the expression, on seals, signs, and edifices, were in less frequent use in the time of James the First.

Restoration. Indeed all documents of this period are scarce: their preservation would have furnished very awkward evidence against many influential families throughout the realm; but particularly against the clergy of the associated counties, in the event of a Restoration. More than a fifth of the beneficed clergy of the kingdom were ejected for refusing the Covenant;—that is, for refusing to subscribe a deliberate pledge to overturn the Established Church:—the other four-fifths were either passive spectators, or, like John Baker, were content to retain the loaves and fishes at the price of apostacy. The gentry and lowest orders were more favourable to the King than to the Covenanters, even in those counties which associated for the Parliament; but it was not so with the middle classes; and this, perhaps, accounts for the small proportion, five out of sixty-three, among the subscribers who could write; although the list, if strictly confined to St. Lawrence, must have contained more than a fourth of the inhabitants.

Seventeen years afterwards, one of the first acts of the new Parliament was, to vote that the “Solemn League and Covenant” should be burnt* by the common hangman—a proceeding in which the common people, Hume tells us, assisted with much alacrity.

By far the greater part of the Norfolk Registers of this particular period, and of the following years, are in the greatest confusion. A few marriages before the magistrates, certified by the sworn registrars, and now and then a pithy sentence, commemorating the hearty welcome of the Restoration, are all the traces of this changed state of things still to be found in parish documents. Thus in the Register of Aylsham, there are, from September 29th 1653 to 1657, sixty-two entries of marriages, all witnessed by magistrates

* Burnet (I think) mentions that the Cavalier party counted exactly *six hundred and sixty-six* words, the number of Antichrist in the Apocalypse, in the Solemn League and Covenant.

of the neighbourhood; and the entries state, that the marriages were published either "in the publique meeting place called the Church of Aylsham," or "at y^e Market Crosse of Aylsham, three markt dayes," or "three Lord's days," or "at the market place three severall market days;" and only twice "in our p^rish church three Lord's days."

In 1660, among the baptisms, the then vicar has written: "King Charles y^e second happily returned May y^e 29, beinge his birth day, then compleatly aged 30. *Blessed bee God and General George Munke Duke of Albemarle.*"

In the Register of the neighbouring parish of Erpingham there are nine entries of marriages before the same magistrates, and one performed by the rector, Richard Hobbys, but signed by the sworn registrar.

This rector has written, under date 1645:

"Exijt Leiturgia Anglicana."*

And further on, A^o. 1662:

"Leiturgia Anglicana restaurata est."

And under the date of July 17, 1673:

"Mdum., that I Richard Hobbys, Rector of Erpingham, and I John Hobbys, Curate of Matlask, did receive the Sacrament at Ingworth with many other Ministers, on the two & twenty day of June, 1673; and also at the next quarter, sessions, on the sixteenth of July, we did in open court, with our own hands, give in our certificates thereof; Thomas Gay, shoemaker, and Wm. Neele, couper, of the said towne of Ingworth, making oath thereof in the said Court of Sessions. And also that we, the aforesaid Richard Hobbys and John Hobbys, the ffather and the sonne, did in open court then take the oaths of Supremacy and Alleigeance to the K^{gs} Mat^{ys}, and did also renounce the Popish doctrine of

* The Ordinance for the "Directory instead of the Book of Common Prayer," is dated Jan. 10, 1644, which was the very day of Laud's execution.

Transubstantiation, and did each of us accordingly subscribe our names in a Parchment Roll.

“In witness whereof wee have subscribed our names on the seaventeenth day of July 1673.

“RIC: HOBBS: R^r of Erpingham.”

In another place is this entry :

“1674. Richardus Hobbs Berkiensis natu, in hanc rectoriam tertio die Decembris 1640, a Richardo Montague Episcopo Norvicensi collatus, institutus, et inductus. * * * * hanc Ecclesiam in dubijs plerumque ac turbidis temporibus annos triginta tres *moderatè* rexit, die tertio Julij placidè in domino obdormivit, anno ætatis suæ septuagesimo, sepultus fuit quinto die Julij, Anno Dni 1674.”

The Act enjoining all marriages to be made before justices of the peace was passed in Cromwell's first Parliament, summoned on the 8th of June, and meeting at the Council Chamber at Whitehall July 4th, 1653. About one hundred and twenty members were present. They chose Francis Rous, Esq., Provost of Eton, speaker; appointed eleven committees, and passed the Act just mentioned. “Which Act,” says a subsequent writer, “has occasioned a great deal of mirth and as much wit as the men were capable of; as if à legal compact before a magistrate would not be as valid, if so made by law, as the performance of a curate. The persons to be married were to come before some justice of the peace: the man and woman pronounced the words before him; and the justice pronounced them lawfully married. The justice said no more than, *he declared the marriage valid*. Sometimes the persons to be married would bring a minister with them before the justice, as if his presence consecrated the ceremony.”

The Act itself has escaped my search. In our public collections the series is generally broken from 1640 to 1660;

but it is obvious, that the principle of considering marriage exclusively a *civil* contract, was not new to the framers of the marriage act in 1837.

Another Act was also passed at this time, ordering that the *birth* and not the *baptism* of children should be thenceforth registered. And an example of its provisions being attended to may be seen in the parish of Worstead. The Register here is very irregular from 1649, the first year of the incumbency of W. Raby (who, I believe, was ejected), until 1656, when Raby's signature appears again at the foot of the pages, as was customary. During the latter years of this interval, the entries are of children "*born*" instead of "*baptized*," as in the preceding and subsequent years.

In 1654, after a marriage before Sir John Hobart, "accordinge to Ordinance of Parliament," is written,

"O TEMPORA! O MORES!"

About 1656, an attempt appears to have been made to supply the omissions of births and burials in this Register, by sending a person round from house to house. Hence, the entries occur by families, not by a regular succession of dates. The paid registrar, it would seem, if in small villages there was one at all, was very negligent of his duty.

I will not occupy the attention of the Society farther than by adding two other very short illustrations of these remarks.

At Dilham, the Vicar Osborne, who survived the intrusive minister, recommences his entries with

"FEAR GOD AND HONOUR Y^E KYNGE!"

And at North Walsham, where the registrar was "Robert Lubbocke, sworne as keeper of the register, before Edmond Borman,* Esq., Justice of the Peace, A^o 1653," is this: "1653. Banns of marriage between Robert Thompson of North Walsham, Clerk, and Mary Smith of Brampton, were

* A Justice of Norwich.—Blomefield, Vol. II., p. 281.

published in the *Market* of North Walsham, and that of Worstead, by R. Lubbock." And, "1654. Robert Thomson of North Walsham in Norfolk, Clerke, single man, and Mary Smith of Brampton, married." No day is specified. The intrusive minister at this time was Richard Breviter, whose name occurs in the commission for ejecting ministers and schoolmasters in Norfolk. Five were empowered to act.

Since the Usurpation, scarcely two centuries have passed away; and yet, as observed above, it is very rarely that we find a connected account of these matters preserved in any one parish from 1640 to 1660. Many register-books contain no notice whatever of the Orders of the Parliament; and many others, kept by the recusant ministers, were treated, at the Restoration, in the same way that the Corporation of Norwich treated all Acts of Assembly passed during the same period,—namely, they renounced, and probably destroyed all records of, them. It is difficult to imagine the state of country-society under the sudden and extraordinary changes which then daily took place, and for which there seems to have been no previous preparation in the minds of the people, and not the slightest consideration or sympathy for their condition on the part of the rulers. There was neither order nor government in ecclesiastical any more than in civil affairs; and it is in this point of view that detached extracts, in themselves valueless, receive an importance, by now and then shedding a ray of light through the darkness in which this period of intrigue and anarchy is enveloped; when

Ausi omnes immane nefas, ausoque potiti.

"All dared bold crimes, and thrived in what they dared."

JAMES BULWER.

Aylsham, Nov. 30, 1846.