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Ralph Stewart

A Gust of the North Wind:
James Kirkton's *History* of the Covenanters



After the restoration of Charles II in 1660, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was replaced with an Episcopalian one. Many ministers refused to accept the new regime, and were consequently expelled from their parishes and forbidden to preach. They and their supporters were known as Covenanters because they adhered to the principles of the Scottish "National Covenant" of 1638, according to which the church was largely independent of the state. The ministers who did continue preaching, in churches, houses, or out-of-doors "conventicles," faced increasingly heavy penalties. In 1670 the offence became capital, and after 1675 the more notorious ministers were "intercommuned"—anyone associating with them faced the same penalties as the ministers; after 1678 any landowner on whose estate a conventicle had taken place, or a fugitive assisted, could be treated similarly. The laws were, however, too sweeping and harsh to be entirely effective. When the Duke of Lauderdale announced the ordinance against landowners, one of the covenanting ministers promptly held a service on Lauderdale's own enormous estate.¹ And, at least throughout south-west Scotland, Covenanters could usually rely on assistance. Gilbert Burnet, himself an Episcopal minister, records that his mother sheltered

¹William Veitch, *Memoirs of W. Veitch and G. Brysson*. ed. Thomas McCrie (Edinburgh & London, 1825), p. 122.

covenanting rebels after the Pentland Rising of 1666.² It is not surprising, then, that a high proportion of outlawed ministers managed to die in their beds, or even survive to see the re-establishment of Presbyterianism in 1690.

One who did survive was James Kirkton, who was born about 1628 and served in the official ministry till he was expelled from the parish of Merton (in the eastern Borders) in 1662. After this, his legal history follows the pattern of the more extreme Presbyterian ministers, who refused to operate within the Episcopal church and continued to preach outside it. He was intercommuned in 1676 and later spent several years in exile in Holland. When Presbyterianism was restored Kirkton's seniority and record of dissent made him an influential member of the new established church, up to his death in 1699. Perhaps the main indication of his importance is the frequency with which he is attacked by the Episcopal party. In the most famous anti-Presbyterian satire, *The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence* (1692), Kirkton is mentioned and ridiculed more often than anyone else. He is "the everlasting comedian of their party"; his sermons are coarse and bigoted, and "he never preaches but after this ridiculous manner."³ Kirkton was not, however, an easy man to silence—whether by force or ridicule—and he is not quite silenced yet. He left a manuscript giving his own account of the Covenanters and their opponents, written about 1695 and later given the title (probably not by Kirkton) of *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland*.

By the usual criteria of success, the *History* has fared very badly. It was not even published till 1817, and then by an editor who despised Kirkton and his party and wished to demonstrate their foolishness and bigotry. It has not been reprinted, and so little consulted that, throughout the present century, some authors of literary histories (A.M. Mackenzie, M. Lindsay) have had the totally mistaken impression that the book is a diatribe against witches, a "sourcebook of Scottish demonology"⁴—actually, the reader will be hardpressed to find any references to witches or black magic. Yet the *History's* lack of appeal is hardly surprising. The title suggests parochial fanaticism, and this impression is reinforced for anyone aware that Kirkton was an extreme Covenanter. Moreover, the most accessible and quotable parts are unconvincingly glowing descriptions, in the

²Gilbert Burnet, *History of his Own Time*. 1724-34. ed. M. J. R[outh]. 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1833), vol. I, p. 434.

³*The Scotch Presbyterian Eloquence* (London, 1692), pp. 20, 110.

⁴Maurice Lindsay, *History of Scottish Literature* (London, 1977), p. 162.

opening chapter, of the twelve years that preceded the restoration of Charles II, and this has influenced the general impression of the *History's* contents. The *Dictionary of National Biography* says merely: "The book contains a panegyric on the Church of Scotland during the Commonwealth, which later historians have characterized as a 'romance and enthusiastic fable'"⁵; this suggests that the *History* is most notable for its panegyric. And, unfortunately for the book's reputation, its only editor has been a staunch royalist, whose lengthy footnotes are devoted to contradicting most of what the author says.

Despite this weight of opinion against Kirkton, I wish to argue that his book is a reputable history, unclouded by bigotry or simplemindedness, and indeed that it is still worth reading. Most histories are of interest only to the writer's contemporaries (and a few later historians) but others, such as the works of Kirkton's opponents Clarendon and Burnet, continue to be read by later generations; that is to say, they have achieved some status as literature. I propose that Kirkton's *History* deserves a comparable status—which it has not so far achieved because largely unknown—in that it remains comprehensible and potentially interesting even for a reader without any special curiosity about seventeenth-century Scotland. It is not clear what features enable a history to survive as literature and no doubt different histories survive by somewhat different means—as a glance at Clarendon's and Burnet's works suggests. However, presumably most histories that continue to be read rank high on the basic literary features of structure, theme, character, and style. I shall try to show that Kirkton's work does have the kinds of structure and themes usually expected of good literature. Also, although none of the characters is much developed, Kirkton's pithy descriptions are memorable; and his style is vigorous, witty, and distinctive.

The nature of Kirkton's work has been obscured by a reputation based on circumstances extraneous to the text—so that he has had the unenviable fate of being both unread and vilified. The title usually given to the *History* is misleading: Kirkton is not narrowly concerned with the Scottish Church, but with the relationship between Church and country, and he is writing of a period when the Church was central to national life. The *Dictionary of National Biography* verdict is somewhat unfair in that it omits Kirkton's reservations: he says, for example, of the Commonwealth that "the Lord [was] present in Scotland, tho' in a cloud."⁶ And it is, in any

⁵*Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen & Sidney Lee, (London, 1909), vol. xi.

⁶James Kirkton, *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland from the*

case, the period just before Cromwell, when the Presbyterian Church was most firmly in control, that Kirkton praises most highly. But what makes the verdict of "an enthusiastic fable" seriously deceptive is that it could refer only to the opening chapter, which is a prelude to the main history of 1660 to 1679, and very different from it.

Most twentieth-century historians have been unsympathetic to the Covenanters, and literary critics have tended to follow the historians. "The Act Rescissary of March 1661 quietly restores the tolerantly episcopalian regime of James VI, which earlier had so bloodily been overthrown." "A moderate episcopacy was restored."⁷ The Episcopalian regime is seen as unexceptionable, even benevolent, and this makes it hard to treat the Covenanters' criticism of it with much sympathy; the expectation is that their views will be narrow and intolerant, and critics tend to highlight any such features in works favorable to Presbyterianism, as has happened with Kirkton. Yet the Covenanters' position is not self-evidently unreasonable. The most influential historian of the place and period is probably Gordon Donaldson, who clearly favors the Episcopalian position; yet the data he cites will bear different interpretations. Here, for example, he describes the government in its more benevolent mood: "Therefore, even while the phase of conciliation continued, there had to be a proclamation (1669) against heritors on whose lands conventicles were held, an act of parliament (1670) imposing fines on unlicensed ministers and congregations and the death penalty on preachers at field conventicles...."⁸ Discussing the same set of events, which came to be known as the 'First Indulgence,' Kirkton concludes: "This was thought ane ugly shadow of ane indulgence," (p. 298). He has a case.

Anyone aware that Kirkton was a dispossessed and hunted man throughout most of the period he describes might expect the *History* to consist of strident denunciation of his enemies, perhaps varied by complacent reflections on the final triumph of Presbyterianism. And Kirkton is, indeed, usually said to lack charity: he "frequently exhibits an uncharitable spirit which, while not uncommon in his party, appears to have been

Restoration to the year 1678, ed. C[hables] K. Sharpe (Edinburgh, 1817), p. 55. Further references will appear in the text.

⁷Ronald D.S. Jack, ed. *Scottish Prose 1550-1700* (London, 1971), p. 12.

David Reid, ed. *The Party-coloured Mind: Prose Relating to the Conflict of Church and State in Seventeenth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. iii.

⁸Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: James V to James VII* (Edinburgh, 1971), p. 369.

particularly strong in him."⁹ Yet most of his judgments of people suggest otherwise. His epitaph on Middleton, head of the government when the Presbyterian ministers were expelled, is "that unhappy, valiant man." He says of Lauderdale, the chief power in Scotland for most of the period: "he was neither judged a cruell persecutor not an avaricious exactor (excepting his brother and wife's solicitations)" (p. 367). Despite the qualification, this is surprisingly generous praise. Even when we come to Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, King's Advocate (chief government prosecutor) from 1677 and an arch-fiend in convenanting demonology—he is traditionally known as "Bluidy Mackenzie"—Kirkton's judgment is restrained. "This man was thought fit for the state's design, and was a man that inclined more to serve than moderate the resolutions of the state" (p. 381). On the whole, despite his strong convictions, Kirkton gives the impression of being fully aware of the complexities of the political situation and of being able to consider them with detachment. With the possible exception of a few early perorations, there is nothing in the tone of the *History* that suggests fanaticism, or lessens its credibility.

However, Kirkton's editor, Sharpe, believes otherwise; reading his edition of the *History* is rather like reading Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. The notes are largely independent of what is supposed to be the main text; they work against it, and frequently overwhelm it. The *History* is sometimes reduced to a line or two at the top of the page while, below, the notes stridently disagree, or present counter-statements about Presbyterian immorality. Kirkton says of Charles I: "they condemned him to die, and struck off his head, to the great astonishment of the world, and the sad regrave of Scotland, excepting those who had lossed their relations by his sword"—a major exception—and proceeds with a terse judgment on a king "who mistook willfulness for constancy" (pp. 46-7). This provokes a much longer encomium below on "King Charles the Martyr." Kirkton records the execution of Mr. Duncan, an Episcopalian minister, for murdering his child; the editor, writing over a century later, makes confident assertions about Mr. Duncan's innocence and "the real father of the child" (pp. 187-8). It is hard to regret Sharpe's emendations, for the clashes between author and editor are often amusing and perhaps illuminating. Nor, I think, does Kirkton's text suffer by comparison with Sharpe's counter-text: Kirkton's coolly ironic statements are frequently met by sweeping, vitriolic attacks, which tend to disprove what they are supposed to demonstrate—that Kirkton stands for "bigoted obstinacy" (p. viii) and the government's supporters for "moderation and good sense" (p. 47). However, the editor has done Kirkton's book a disservice simply by breaking it up so

⁹J[ames] G. Fyfe, ed. *Scottish Diaries and Memoirs, 1550-1746* (Stirling, 1928), p. 238.

thoroughly—typographically, and with topically divergent notes—that it is hard to see the work as a whole.

One of Kirkton's opening statements is, perhaps, misleading: "I conceived it duty at least to preserve some memorial of what I had heard and seen." This may give the impression that his book will be similar in form to Robert Wodrow's later *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, which has records and testimonies arranged by the year and under such sub-headings as "Other Sufferings—not to death" and "Proceedings against the nobility and ministers."¹⁰ In fact, Kirkton's book is a continuous history. It is divided into eight books of unequal length, and may be seen as comprising four parts. The first is the description of the period before 1660; it is in some ways a conventional introduction—that is, a survey of the period before the one that the history is primarily concerned with—but most important for the description of the golden age of the Covenant. The second part (Books II to VI) describes the effects of the restoration of Charles II, and what Kirkton sees as the steady growth of tyranny over a period of about six years, culminating in the bishop's Court of High Commission, for trying dissenters. "Their court was like the old Lyon in the Cave—many came toward him, none returned from him, because all were devoured" (pp. 205-6). The third part (Book VII) records the Pentland Rising (1666) and the government policy of indulgence that followed; this is presented as a false dawn that deceived many of the Presbyterians and brought about internal disagreements. The final part (Book VIII) explains the more bitter dissensions among the Presbyterians, following from the Second Indulgence, which came to a head at the battle of Bothwell Bridge (1679) and led to shattering defeat.

The opening of the *History* is, understandably, somber. "Defection in a Church useth ordinarily to be attended with silence among the witnesses, so that succeeding ages can hardly have an account how the gold became dross, or how the faithful woman became a harlot." The tone is reminiscent of the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, where the poet recalls the loss of Eden, and Milton's situation in the 1660s did resemble that of the Covenanters in the 1680s. "On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues/In darkness, and with dangers compassed round" (Book 7, ll 26-7). The obvious difference is that by the time Kirkton wrote, in the reign of William III, his party had again triumphed politically. Yet there is no hint of this in his introduction—indeed, the metaphors in the opening sentence imply an irrevocable collapse—and little in the body of the *History*. For Kirkton, the years between 1660 and 1679 remained a crucial period, when vital el-

¹⁰Robert Wodrow, *The history of the sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution*, ed. R. Burns, 4 vols. (Glasgow & London, 1828-30).

ements of Scotland's religious, political and cultural life were extinguished. Despite his disappointment, the fact that Presbyterianism had been restored might be expected to affect the *History* in at least two ways. First, an unqualified tragic view would be hard to sustain, and this partly explains why, although the book is structured as a tragedy, its dominant style is ironic. Second, Kirkton need not be concerned to "justify the ways of God to men." If the restoration of Presbyterianism has not brought back the golden age, the Presbyterians themselves must be defective; and this suggests that their earlier defeats may have been partly their own fault. Kirkton does speak of "defection" and "apostasie" in the opening paragraph, which suggests that he is focussing on the Presbyterians' weaknesses rather than their enemies' strengths; and the latter part of the *History* is largely an account of his own party's delusions and mistakes.

Book I is a brief survey of the Church over many centuries (though gradually becoming more detailed as Kirkton's own period is approached). Kirkton conveys the movement of events by describing a few key scenes, notably the riots at Perth in 1559 and at Edinburgh in 1637. "As the first reformation that abolished popery begun at Perth with the throw of a stone in a boy's hand, so the second reformation, which abolished episcopacy, begun with this throw of a stool in a woman's hand" (p. 31). Unlike the remainder of the *History*, Book I has an aura of romance. The "high noon" when the Presbyterians ruled (1648-50) is, understandably, most vividly described and most idealized; and seems, indeed, more like a remote vision than a description of familiar places within living memory. This is partly because the narrator gives few concrete particulars, and frankly conveys his own beliefs and ideals: "these two years, in my opinion, were the best two years that Scotland ever saw" (p. 48). Also, most of the metaphors used to describe this period are emblematic and generalized, suggesting an unattainable ideal. "Than was Scotland a heap of wheat set about with lilies, uniform, or a palace of silver beautifully proportioned" (p. 49). Even a reference to the limitations of the golden age conveys this ethereal quality: "I should not paint the moon faithfully if I marked not her spots" (p. 50). Succeeding developments are implicitly measured against the near perfection of this period, "that the darkness of the night may the better be conceived" (p. 2).

The starting and finishing points of the main history—1660 to 1679—are not, then, arbitrary: Kirkton is following the effects of the Restoration settlement through to the tragedy (for the Presbyterians) of Bothwell Bridge. Within this period he is flexible about chronological order, for example in dealing with the Court of High Commission: "I have put the business of the commission together, though it was acted by parcels" (p. 210). More significantly, he passes briefly over what, by his

judgment, is relatively unimportant, and gives extended treatment to what is—such as the Pentland Rising. To be able to make such judgments, the historian must have one or more themes—to decide what is notable from among the innumerable possibilities—and in carrying out the judgments he imposes some kind of pattern on his work. Kirkton is entirely clear about his main historical themes: the reign of Charles II was a lamentable one for Scotland, in which most of its national traditions and freedoms were destroyed; this state of affairs was more or less inevitable, given the constitutional terms of the Restoration and the personal character of the king; and it was accomplished primarily through the destruction of Presbyterianism and establishment of an Episcopal state. One broad pattern that follows from these themes is that the *History* devotes most space to the early part of the period—over twice as much to the first half as to the second. Once Kirkton has explained the causes and immediate consequences of the Restoration, when "the sun went down at noon," what happens in the ensuing twilight period becomes more predictable.

The *History* has, in fact, the basic unity usually required of a work of literature: it has a definite beginning and end, and the parts are consistent with each other and justly proportioned. One may also expect to find, in literature, a completely worked out pattern that encompasses all the details. The *History* actually comes close to achieving this, for almost every event recorded may be seen as a specific illustration or development of the main themes. Like other accounts of the period, Kirkton begins with the executions of Argyle, Guthrie, and Warriston (the leading nobleman who subscribed to the Covenant of 1638, a notable Presbyterian minister, and the surviving author of the Covenant), but he discusses them as instances of Scotland losing her rights and becoming scapegoat for the king's earlier defeats. The Scots, unlike the English, had omitted to secure indemnity for what had been done during the Commonwealth period, and had relied on "fair words and big promises" (p. 59) from the king; they were to discover that "the whole nation was concluded guilty of treason" (p. 69) and all were liable to punishment.

One also expects literature to touch on fundamental themes, independent of time and place, and the *History* deals with the perennial issue of the gap between perception and reality. Kirkton's treatment of the historical themes emphasizes incongruities—between people's expectations of the Restoration and what actually came to pass, between the promises of the king and government and their practices, between the standards one expects of clergymen and the behavior of the new Episcopal curates. This stress on incongruities is mirrored in the consistently ironic style that takes over near the end of Book I, which concludes: "Monck became sole master of the parliament army, and all Brittan, which his victory he improved

by bringing about the much-desired change of bringing home the king, after which strange changes happened: Upon which wee purpose more particularly to insist" (p. 56). But the summary of Scottish history already given has implied that matters are never "improved" by kings, the "much-desired" change will prove disastrous, and the "strange changes" should have been anticipated. The *History* goes on to show how people deluded themselves and what the results were.

Kirkton's images are, admittedly, usually conventional and rather colorless; but they do work together as aspects of an analogy that helps to organize and judge the information he presents. In his account of the first session of the king's parliament, which set about establishing Episcopacy, building images dominate. The oath of the king's supremacy is "the foundation stone of their whole building" (p. 89). A more specific declaration on the king's absolute power on church matters is the "copestone." In parallel with this, parliament is determined to destroy the "foundation" of the Covenant, which Kirkton significantly envisages as a "fortress" (p. 94) rather than a temple—it is, above all, for defence of the people's rights. After recounting the executions of Argyle and Guthrie, he sums up on the parliament's work as having "overturned the foundation of Scotland's old freedoms" (p. 113) and "laid a new foundation upon which they designed to build, and that was the king's pleasure" (p. 97). The re-establishment of Episcopacy is compared to the rebuilding of Jericho—in that it is doomed to failure, and the builders will be plagued.

Analogies from plants are frequent in the Bible, and therefore come naturally to Kirkton when he discusses the state of a church. In Book I he uses them to describe the success of Presbyterianism: "the reformation religion prospered and spread her root and branches mightilie" (p. 12); "they might see how the vine flourished, and how the pomegranate bud-ded" (p. 49). The latter statement, incongruous as it is in reference to Scotland, does suggest the ideal, Eden-like state that Kirkton attributes to the Scottish Church before Cromwell's conquest. When he details the setting up of Episcopacy, in Book IV, plant images reappear: "as episcopacy is a branch of popery, so it led always to the root" (p. 129). It is a poisonous plant, alien to the Scottish Eden and destructive of it. The principal designates have to go to London to become bishops, for Episcopal ordination is "a flower not to be found in a Scottish gardine" (p. 137). When the bishops return and begin to exert power "godliness withered under their shaddow" (p. 129). Here the conventional analogy, comparing Presbyterian Scotland to Eden, is the basis for some metaphors that come to life. Later, in concluding his accounts of how Episcopacy was established, Kirkton spells out the tree analogy in detail. "The root was a popish king, who hade given his power to the beast; the stock was a perjured bishop,

acting as the king's minister or servant; the curats the branches. How could the fruit be edification?" (p. 217). Whatever this lacks in color and subtlety, it is at least clear and trenchant.

These qualities are, indeed, characteristic of Kirkton's style; even his hostile editor concedes that Kirkton "writes with spirit." The strength of his feelings is most evident in the opening book: in the praise of Scotland's zenith, the bitter disappointment at its passing, and the support of armed resistance to the king. The Reformation was achieved in Scotland because the Protestant lords were ready to fight, and "there was never ane parasite divine to condemn defensive arms at that time" (p. 9). And Kirkton gives an exultant account of the events of 1639 that led up to the Civil War, when the king raised three "brave" armies to overwhelm Scotland: "But all these were but clouds of vapours before the north wind of the covenanters... (p. 34). In the main part of the *History*, however, Kirkton's strongly partisan sentiments are usually expressed through, and controlled by, his irony. The sentiments are still very evident, for the irony is unambiguous; if there is a choice to be made, Kirkton almost always favors clarity over suggestiveness. He tells the story of James Sharpe, as a young man, dreaming that he has become minister of Crail, then that he is Archbishop of St. Andrews, then that he is a coach driving fast to hell. Since all Kirkton's original readers would know that the first two dreams had come true, the point of the story is obvious. However, Kirkton cannot resist underlining it: "What way he drove I shall not say, but all the countrey knew he drove most fiercely to his death that day he was killed..." (p. 83).

Kirkton's writing gives an impression of compressed energy, usually finding an outlet in irony. The most frequent kind involves setting up an apparently unexceptionable statement, or set of statements, and then undercutting. The king's return prompts many to expect rich rewards, in special favors and wealth. "All that hade suffered for him in his warr, lossed for him of their estate, or been advocates for him in a tavern dispute, hoped well to be noticed as his friends..." (p. 60). The irony of deliberate anti-climax sharpens the condemnation here, of those who hoped to make themselves wealthy at the expense of the Presbyterians, but also ensures a fairly balanced judgment; part of the point is that many had indeed suffered severely in the king's interest. Kirkton himself is aware of the danger of becoming merely strident in his denunciations—"the truth looks so very like hatred" (p. 179)—and a seasoning of irony helps to make them acceptable. Fletcher, the King's Advocate, who exhorted large fines from innocent people "was ane honest man of the new mode, (that is, a man void of principles)..." (p. 66). An Episcopalian minister was convicted of murder: "yet for the honour of the clergy, he was by Charles the Second

pardoned, and sent home to his paroch to preach upon the sixth command" (p. 187)—again, the sting in the tail.

Kirkton is not, however, exclusively concerned with the dishonesty of his opponents, and he is not obsessively ironic; he is capable of varying his style to accommodate different themes. About the mid-point of the *History*, towards the end of Book V, there is a sense of gathering momentum. The various ordinances set up to root out Presbyterianism are now, in the mid 1660s, in place and being acted on, and the Presbyterians have few options left beyond open rebellion. Kirkton's writing becomes more direct and urgent. The curates "accuse when they please" to the soldiers: "and here there was a short process; the souldier is judge, no witness is used, the sentence is pronounced, the souldier executes his own sentence...." The jagged style echoes the peremptory actions of the soldiers. Admittedly, even in such descriptions of the Presbyterians' hardships, there are flickers of irony at the expense of their persecutors. "They mockt religious worship, they beat the poor people, the men they bind and wound, they dragg to church and prison, and both with equal violence" (p. 200).

In the later parts of the *History*, the judgments necessarily become less clear-cut. Kirkton describes the Pentland Rising of November 1666 with somewhat mixed feelings: he fully supports the rebels' cause, and has no moral scruples about rising in arms, but believes the rebellion was doomed from the beginning, and that the rebels deceived themselves. They thought, for example, that they might get sympathy from the king, and began by drinking his health: "a labour they might well have spared, for they hade cruel thanks" (p. 232). At the town of Lanark "this rolling snowball was at the biggest" (p. 238), an image that suggests both the random way the rebels assembled and the ease with which they could be dispersed. But here the irony is less sharp than before, for Kirkton is much more ready to sympathize with the rebels' misfortune than blame them for lack of foresight. "It would have pitied a heart to see so many faint, weary, half-drowned, half-starved creatures betwixt their enemies behind and enemies before" (p. 240).

In the last fifth of the *History*, when Kirkton considers the few years of "Indulgence" that followed Pentland, and then the events that led to another rebellion and the defeat of Bothwell Bridge, his attitudes become more complicated again. For much of this period, his party were not merely spectators or victims but were also involved in making decisions, and he cannot preserve his previous detachment. He condemns the Indulgences, which offered terms under which some Presbyterian ministers could resume preaching, as traps laid to destroy his Church, but is not prepared to attack those who accepted the government's terms. The great increase in conventicles through the 1670s should be a matter for rejoic-

ing; but Kirkton is aware, not only that the "killing times" of the 1680s lie ahead, but also that there is something flawed in these displays of strength, that they are in part a result of disunity amongst the Presbyterians.

This last part of the *History* is muted in tone, compared to what has gone before, but is in some ways not merely a conclusion but a climax. Kirkton was himself a major actor in this period, so that much of what he writes is based on first-hand experience, and he is considering the crucial period in which the Presbyterians began to quarrel amongst themselves, and consequently became unable to defend their cause effectively. In the earlier parts of the *History* there are occasional, sometimes surprising, reminders that Kirkton was eye-witness to some of what he describes; for example, he spoke with Wariston in prison, before his execution (p. 171). Now, however, Kirkton claims special authority: "my information is as full and exact as any man's in Scotland can be" (p. 337). The claim seems justified, for Kirkton has moved near center stage. He is one of the two Presbyterian representatives sent to lobby Lord Stair, in an attempt to make the conditions of the Indulgence generally acceptable; and later he becomes, for a time, the leading opponent of the Indulgence, "the man who hade used greatest freedom in dissuading his brethren from complying with the state's design" (pp. 336-7).

Kirkton does not offer an explicit analysis of what went wrong, but does show that the latter part of 1672, when the Presbyterian ministers debated amongst themselves what to do about the Indulgence, marks a watershed. Failures both in judgment and in courage began to appear. Some wished to deliver a vehement letter of protest to the government, containing many treasonable expressions; others—or, often, the same people—wished to leave Edinburgh before the protest was delivered, "and leave their brethren in the town to be their proxies for martyrdom" (p. 329). Ultimately, the bribe (as Kirkton conceives it) of Indulgence, which would give back status and income to the deposed ministers, proved too strong for many to whom it was offered. Others believed that those who accepted indulged ministries had betrayed their church. "Here the presbyterians, who hade been unite till now, divided: nor is the wound so cured this day but the scarre is to be seen" (p. 334). This is one of the very few references in the *History* to the state of the Church in the 1690s, though there are many places where the tone suggests that what went wrong in the past has not yet been remedied.

If those who accepted the Indulgence failed primarily in courage, as Kirkton partly suggests, some of those who organized conventicles were apparently deficient in judgment. Yet this is the one area in the *History* where Kirkton is ambiguous about his opinions. On the whole, his heart is with those who attended conventicles and were prepared for armed resis-

tance against the soldiers; yet he seems rather doubtful about the many wonderful conversions reported, and regrets the increasing violence. And one effect of all this activity was to weaken the unity of the Church. "Ministers preacht (without the censure of their presbytery,) whatever was their own opinion in any emergent case, the people were sometimes as much judges as disciples; yet it was believed the gospel hade in these years large as great success, as if the presbyterians hade possessed the churches" (p. 362). Here "it was believed" indicates an uncharacteristic lack of commitment on Kirkton's part.

The loss of unity—or of what unity previously existed—was soon to be crucial. At the battle of Bothwell Bridge, unlike Pentland, the Covenanters had an adequate army and good prospects for military and political success; but their internal disagreements were so intense that they were still squabbling in the face of the enemy, and failed to carry out a battle plan. The *History's* title (probably not Kirkton's) specifies the years 1660 to 1678—and the battle was in the following year. However, the final words of the *History* are "Bothwell Bridge"; although Kirkton does not describe the battle, he has explained the situation that led up to it, and the reasons for the Covenanters' total defeat. "The excellencie of a history is naked truth" say Kirkton (p. 113)—but the truth is elusive. To establish it, the writer of a history requires sound and detailed knowledge of facts, the judgment to interpret these and establish patterns and themes, and the courage and honesty to set down his conclusions. Kirkton is such a writer.

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