

### THE EARLY HISTORY OF PRESBYTERIANISM IN THE UNITED STATES.

From Hodge's "Constitutional History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America."

"The history of American colonization is the history of the crimes of Europe." The Scotch presbyterians had not escaped their portion of the persecutions, which all opposers of prelacy, in Great Britain, experienced during the reigns of James II. and Charles I. It was not, however, until the restoration of Charles II. that the measure of their wrongs and sorrows was rendered full. James had been educated a calvinist and presbyterian, and when leaving Scotland to ascend the vacant throne of Elizabeth, he assured his countrymen of his love for their church, and of his determination to support it. He had, however, hardly crossed the Tweed before he began to manifest his aversion to a form of church discipline, which he regarded as essentially republican. The submissive demeanour of the English bishops, and their high doctrine as to the power of kings, confirmed a conversion which had already taken place. The Scottish presbyters were accustomed to urge him to repent of his sins; the English bishops, on their knees, assured him he spoke by the immediate assistance of God. It is not wonderful, therefore, that James adopted the cause of the latter, and made it his own. He knew enough, however, of the people whom he had left, or had sufficient respect for their opinions, to induce him to proceed with some degree of caution in his attempts to bring the ecclesiastical polity of Scotland into harmony with that of England. His more unhappy son determined to effect at once, and by authority, what his arbitrary, but timid father was content to accomplish gradually, and with some appearance of co-operation by the church. He first ordered a book of canons to be published, and enforced on his own authority, altering essentially the constitution of the church; and then a liturgy, copied in a great measure from that of England, but altered by Laud, so as to bring it into nearer conformity with the Roman missal. This he ordered should be used by all ministers, on pain of suspension. It was resisted in all parts of the kingdom, and by all classes of the people, from political as well as religious motives. It was not merely a form of prayer, but an absolute despotism, which the people opposed. If the king, without the concurrence of the nation or the church, could introduce the English liturgy, why not the Roman mass? These arbitrary measures excited an opposition which "preserved the liberties, and overthrew the monarchy of England."

Unjust as was the conduct of this unfortunate monarch, it appears mild and honourable when compared with that of his son. Charles II., at the time of his father's death was a friendless fugitive. The Scotch offered to receive him as their king, on condition that he should pledge himself by oath to regard and preserve their presbyterian form of church government. To this he assented. When he arrived in

the kingdom he subscribed the covenant; and again at his coronation, under circumstances of much more than usual solemnity, he swore to preserve it inviolate. The Scotch, accordingly, armed in his defence; but, divided among themselves, and led by a general very unfit to cope with Cromwell, they were soon defeated, and Charles was again driven to the continent. When he returned in 1660, he voluntarily renewed his promise to the Scotch, by whom his restoration had been greatly promoted, not to interfere with the liberty of their church. No sooner, however, was he firmly seated on his throne, than all these oaths and promises were forgotten. Presbyterianism was at once abolished, and episcopacy established; not such as it was under James I, when bishops were little more than standing moderators of the presbyteries, but invested by the arbitrary mandate of the king, with the fullness of prelatical power. An act was passed making it penal even to speak publicly or privately against the king's supremacy, or the government of the church by archbishops and bishops. A court of high commission, of which all the prelates were members, was erected and armed with inquisitorial powers. Multitudes of learned and pious ministers were ejected from their parishes, and ignorant and ungodly men, for the most part introduced in their stead. Yet the people were forced, under severe penalties to attend the ministrations of these unworthy men. All ejected ministers were prohibited preaching or praying except in their own families; and preaching or praying in the fields was made punishable with death. Any one, though the nearest relative, who should shelter, aid, or in any way minister to the wants of those denounced, was held liable to the same penalty as the person assisted. All landholders were required to give bond that their families and dependents should abstain from attending any conventicle. To enforce these wicked laws torture was freely used to extort evidence or confession; families were reduced to ruin by exorbitant fines; the prisons were filled with victims of oppression; multitudes were banished and sold as slaves; women and even children were tortured or murdered for refusing to take an oath they could not understand; soldiers were quartered upon the defenceless inhabitants, and allowed free license; men were hunted like wild beasts, and shot or gibbeted along the highways. Modern history hardly affords a parallel to the cruelty and oppression under which Scotland groaned for nearly thirty years. And what was all this for? It was to support episcopacy. It was done for the bishops, and, in a great measure, by them. They were the instigators and supporters of these cruel laws, and of the still more cruel execution of them. Is it any wonder, then, that the Scotch abhorred episcopacy? It was in their experience identified with despotism, superstition, and irreligion. Their love of presbyterianism was one with their love of liberty and religion. As the parliament of Scotland was never a fair representation of the people, the general assembly of their church be-