

Presbyterian finds no difficulty in seeing the grand features, the leading principles, of his own system articulately taught or plainly exemplified by the Apostles and the primitive followers of Christ. He finds a purity of ministers, of pastors—Christ alone being Chief Pastor. He finds the Session, the Presbytery, the Synod or General Council. He finds that all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, far or near, acknowledge the authority of the assembled representatives of the church. He must indeed confess sorrowing that a “falling away” soon commenced and that the church became corrupt as well in doctrine as in government. Many antichrists, seducers, false teachers, crept into the fold, and devoured with ravenous greed the silly flock. Heresy was speedily followed by lordly assumption and tyranny. The simplicity of Scripture rule and apostolic teaching was foolishness in the eyes of the wise and prudent of this world. A spurious priesthood, culminating in a gigantic prelacy, reared its haughty head—usurped the kingly and priestly offices of Christ, and involved Christendom for long dolorous centuries in darkness and spiritual death. But even during those ages God had his faithful witnesses, though scattered, feeble, and few. The banner of the Gospel was upheld by the “puritans” [Paulitians] of the East, and still more illustriously by a persecuted remnant in the West. For amid cold Alpine mountains and in quiet Alpine valleys the Presbyterian polity was maintained in all its pristine purity, and the light of Gospel truth continued to shine with undimmed lustre though the great world hated it and turned away. In due time God raised up a Zwingli, a Farel, a Calvin, a Knox—a noble army of Reformers and Martyrs who, seizing the torch of truth, held it aloft and passed it on from land to land. Many nations saw and wondered and believed. In England alone of all Protestant Christendom was prelacy retained. Presbyterianism then extended far and wide, and wherever it went it proclaimed faithfully the glad tidings of salvation and sowed the seed of civil and religious liberty. Holland and Switzerland, under its influence, became an asylum in which multitudes of our own persecuted forefathers found grateful shelter; and Scotland having once tasted the liberty with which Christ entrusts his people, rejected with holy indignation the advances of a haughty southern prelacy, backed though it was by regal authority and recommended by such powerful arguments as are furnished by the rack, the sword and the scaffold. Even in the rank, unfriendly soil of England, Presbyterianism took root and during the short day of its ascendancy accomplished a noble work of which all subsequent generations have reaped the benefit, however unmindful of its source. More than two hundred years ago, the Presbyterians of England promulgated that golden sentence—“GOD ALONE IS LORD OF THE CONSCIENCE”—a sentence which has echoed and re-echoed from shore to shore—penetrating the prison houses of tyranny—waking up the nations—overturning thrones and dynasties—caught up by people after people and generation after generation, till now the very dungeons of Rome and Naples have given up their victims! While English prelacy and continental popery were engaged in persecuting those who refused to profess pernicious error—while Anabaptism by its wild vagaries was disgracing the very name of Protestantism and liberty, Presbyterianism was training the people of Scotland and Holland and Switzerland to be the most industrious, intelligent and Christian in the world. Pure in doctrine, energetic in action, democratic and liberal, yet perfectly well-ordered, it presented to the statesman, the churchman, and the philosopher, the realization of that bright ideal which they had so long striven to attain—a system in which freedom and order, united action and individual liber-