

The cause of the Covenanters received a second serious blow, in the defection of James Sharp, minister of Crail. He had been sent to London to plead for Presbytery; but played a double game, and as a reward for his perfidy was created Archbishop of St. Andrew's. Parliament enacted that "all persons in public trust should subscribe a declaration renouncing the Covenant, as unlawful and seditious." The Covenanters were torn in pieces, and publicly burned by the common hangman in Linlithgow. It was ordered that all ministers who had been admitted to orders subsequent to 1649, should accept prelacy on pain of being banished from their parish.

Middleton, whose scheme this was, boasted that there would not be ten ministers who would fail to comply. To their lasting honour, be it said, nearly four hundred ministers resigned their livings; and in the face of an approaching winter, with but scant preparation, left their manse to seek shelter in the wilderness, and to subsist solely by the care of Him who "feeds the young ravens when they cry."

In the room of these pious and not unfrequently scholarly men, the bishops imported a herd of unlettered and irreligious curates—"the dregs and refuse of the northern parts," men either "debauched or stupid, or both." They speedily became the objects of mingled contempt and hatred. So notorious was their unfitness, that the wits of the day declared that "the cows in the North were in danger, since all the herdsmen had become ministers." The scorn of the people found vent in various ways. Unknown persons barricaded the church doors, and "the poor curate had to climb in at the windows. Sometimes his boots were filled with ants. Sometimes women brought their

children with them to church, and encouraged them to cry, till the voice of the preacher was drowned in a stormy chorus from the infant choir."

Persecution now became widespread. Some of the ejected ministers persisted in preaching, and openly denounced the Government. An ordinance was obtained, declaring such acts as sedition.

Many ministers were imprisoned. Some fled to foreign parts. The aged Lord Worrieston, an eminent Covenanter, was pursued to Holland, surprised at his prayers, dragged aboard ship; and, despite age, and bodily and mental weakness, was conducted, on foot and bareheaded, from Leith to the Tolbooth of Edinburgh, and sent tottering to the scaffold.

Parliament proceeded to yet more extreme measures. The Scot's Mile Act commanded all nonconforming ministers to remove from their parishes within three weeks, and not to reside within twenty miles thereof. To this was added, what was known as the "Bishops' Drag Net"—an act to compel the people to attend the services of the obnoxious curates, or to part with a fourth part of their goods. A Court of High Commissions was established to enforce submission. It was compared to the lion's cave in the fable, where there were many footsteps leading in, but none returning. During the two years of its existence,

"It banished ministers, whipped women, and after branding and scourging boys, whipped them off to the Barbadoes as slaves. Worst of all, it made it an act of sedition even to give charity to the ejected ministers. If any of these had knocked at the door of one of his own parishioners and sought a cup of cold water, or a piece of pease-meal bannock, the asking and the giving were alike a crime."