

the Irish Bishops, the head of whom was the learned, pious, and tolerant Archbishop Usher. These ministers were devoted men, and several of them were highly accomplished theologians. They were accustomed to meet together for consultation and various religious exercises which proved of great benefit to themselves and the people who attended them.

But on the accession of Charles I. to the throne of England (1625) persecuting measures were adopted. These were planned by the bigoted Archbishop Laud, and carried out by the tyrannical Sir Thomas Wentworth, afterwards Lord Strafford, who came to Ireland as Lord Deputy in 1633. Strict observance of prelatial forms was now required of the Presbyterian ministers, and the Presbyterian people were required to take what was called the "Black Oath," pledging themselves "to obey and not to protest against any of the king's commands," at the risk of fine and imprisonment.

To escape from the imposition of these intolerant measures several of the ministers who had been deposed by the bishops, fled to Scotland, where they had the honor of taking part in the famous General Assembly, of 1638, by which Scottish Prelacy was overthrown. Some of the Ministers and people embarked for New England, but, having been driven back by adverse winds, when half across the Atlantic, they ultimately found refuge with their brethren in Scotland.

The few ministers and people who remained in Ireland found a short respite from persecution in consequence of the recall of Lord Strafford, who was tried, condemned, and executed, in 1641, as were his fellow-persecutors Archbishop Laud in 1645, and Charles I. in 1649.

In the same year in which Lord Strafford was executed (1641) occurred the great Irish Rebellion, in which it is said that more than 40,000 Protestants lost their lives. This rebellion, which was instigated and inspired by Romish priests, was marked by such savage cruelty and merciless butchery as exceeded even that of the St. Bartholemew Massacres, in France.

On the Episcopalians, whom the Roman Catholics regarded as their worst enemies, the blow fell most severely. Prelacy was almost annihilated in Ulster. The Scottish settlers were now therefore left at liberty to adopt whatever system of church government they thought best. They preferred Presbyterianism, and obtained as pastors several ministers, some of whom had come from Scotland as chaplains with the forces sent to quell the revolt.

On the 10th June, 1642, the year after the Irish massacre, was organized at Carrickfergus, near Belfast, the first regular Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. On the roll of the Presbytery were the names of 7 ministers and 4 ruling elders. Two of the ministers were not present at the time when the Presbytery was organized.

The Church thus organized, prospered greatly during the remaining years of the reign of Chas. I, and during the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, who died in 1658. The Westminster Confession and Larger and Shorter Catechisms were received, and their doctrines faithfully taught in the pulpit and in the homes of the people. The Solemn League and Covenant was adopted and loyally adhered to.

A high standard of morality was maintained. The Presbyterians, now in the ascendant, exhibited a measure of tolerance, which was uncommon in these times. They did little in the way of retaliation for the wrongs they had suffered. On the contrary, they received into communion not a few Episcopalians, who had been their persecutors, and admitted into the ranks of the ministers some of the Episcopalian clergy on their giving evidence of repentance, and, after their being solemnly and formally rebuked.

As for Charles I, they regarded him as a cruel oppressor, but they did not carry their resistance to him to the fatal end. On the contrary, they denounced his execution as an act of murder, and immediately, on the earliest day the Presbytery could meet after hearing of the execution, it assembled in Belfast, and adopted a Declaration to be read in each pulpit, to the effect among other things, that those, who "with cruel hands" put the king to death, were guilty of "an act so horrible as no history, divine or human, ever had a precedent to the like."

From the time of the organization of the Presbytery in 1642, to the restoration in 1660, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland was greatly increased in the number of its ministers and members. The number of ministers increased from 7 in 1642, to upwards of 60 in 1660, while the small band of members in 1642, rose to about 100,000 in 1660. During this period also, the Presbyterian, was, virtually, the Established Church of Ulster. Its ministers occupied the parish churches and received the tithes formerly paid to the curates and dignitaries of the Episcopal Church.

This period of prosperity was brought to a close, when the Stuart family was restored to the throne of England, in the person of the unprincipled