

Our Young People

For Dominion Presbyterian.

Presbyterianism in Ireland.

By Woodford.

There are records going to show that in the third century the chief king of Ireland became a Christian. In the fourth century Coelestinus, an Irishman, figures in the religious controversies of the day, and early in the fifth century we read in Prosper's Chronicon of "the Irish believing in Christ." This comparatively pure form of Christianity survived in the country, even when Romish corruption was most rampant, until the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the organization of the Presbyterian Church, according to its present model, took place. The history of Christianity in Ireland, therefore, is of the first importance to any who wish to get acquainted with the principles and worth of Presbyterianism.

The authentic history of Christianity in Ireland dates from the middle of the fifth century; the missionary was St. Patrick. He was born on the Clyde, near Dumbarton, it is supposed, and when sixteen was carried captive by freebooters to Ireland. Although piously brought up, it was in Ireland, and when in bondage there, that he was "born again." After six years of slavery he returned to his father's house, but, by a vision, was led to make up his mind to go back as a missionary. He is the patron saint of Ireland; the three-leaved shamrock, by which he illustrated the doctrine of the Trinity to the King of Meath, is the national emblem of the Irish.

There is nothing to show that he visited Ireland as an emissary of the Pope. Any trustworthy records we have inform us that the system of church government, doctrine and worship that was his was mainly Presbyterianism. ("There seems to have been a bishop in every village."—Goldwin Smith.) Prelacy, or Episcopalianism, was introduced gradually, until at last Papacy, or Popery, was the result. How this came to be observant readers of reports of the ritualistic controversy in England at the present time can conclude for themselves. Little by little the pure stream of early religion, as it was in the days of St. Patrick, became corrupted, until in 1155 Pope Adrian IV. had gained such supremacy over Ireland that he handed the country bodily over to Henry II. of England. From this time until the Reformation the people were oppressed, rather than governed, by their overlords, temporal and spiritual.

The Reformation came to the Irish

weighted by the fact that it was the religion of their conquerors, and was gone about in a decidedly half-hearted way. The first step was taken in 1537, when the Irish Parliament threw off the authority of the Pope and declared the King of England, Henry VIII., supreme head on earth of the Church of Ireland. Popery was re-established by Queen Mary, and set aside in the reign of Queen Elizabeth — in whose reign Trinity College, Dublin, was founded, the head of which was a Presbyterian clergyman, and two of the Fellows of which were of the same creed.

The present organization of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland dates from the early years of the seventeenth century. With the forfeiture of the lands of some of the Irish chiefs because of rebellion, an ingress of Scotch and English took place. Scotch Presbyterians found their way mainly to the Province of Ulster, and of course were accompanied by their ministers. Under Archbishop Ussher, the Primate of the Irish Church, who in his youth had studied in Trinity College, Dublin, of which a Presbyterian was principal, toleration, on condition of a nominal subjection to the Irish bishops, was granted the Presbyterians.

The accession of Charles I. and the administration of Archbishop Laud, meant bitter trials for Presbyterians wherever these men could harass them. In Ireland Sir Thomas Wentworth, who was appointed Lord Deputy in 1633, carried out the instructions of Charles and Laud. The worthy representatives of Presbyterianism at this time met in controversy Romanists, Separatists and Arminians, and routed all; but Episcopacy, with Charles in London, Laud at his ear, and the crafty and cruel Wentworth in Dublin Castle, made the outlook for Presbyterianism dark in the extreme. Not a few planned going to America.

All Presbyterians were called on to take the Black Oath, according to which they were not only required to swear allegiance to King Charles, but to swear also that they would never oppose anything he might be pleased to command; and further, that they would renounce and abjure all covenants, such as the National Covenant, which had been the means of saving Presbyterianism in Scotland. Persecutions followed, and so bitter was Wentworth that he planned the banishment of every Presbyterian from Ulster. Before his plan could be carried out the Long Parliament met; he was impeached for his deeds and executed.

In 1641, the year in which Wentworth was executed, rebellion, instigated and inspired by the Romish priests, broke out, and 40,000 Protestants were butchered. The advice of the Romish priests was that the Protestants were worse than dogs, they were devils, and served the devil and the killing of them was a meritorious act. The Scottish Church gave the needed assistance, persuading the Scottish Parliament to vote 10,000 men for the relief of Ireland. With each regiment was a chaplain, who organized a session in each regiment of such officers as were distinguished for piety. In this way Ireland owes the first proper organization of the Presbyterian Church there to Scotland. With four such sessions, the first regular Presbytery in Ireland met on June 10th, 1642. Applications for ministers came in speedily, and although duly qualified pastors were none too plentiful in Scotland, the Assembly appointed six of the best ministers to go temporarily over to Ireland. At several subsequent Assemblies the course of sending over several ministers for some months was followed.

The persecutions in the reign of Charles II. arose chiefly out of the attempt to enforce the Act of Conformity. Prelacy was re-established, and the Presbyterians, who had been so loyal to the King, suffered. The good Bishop Jeremy Taylor was a leader of the persecutors, but as time went on, although the bishops were anxious to annoy the Presbyterians, the Government grew less and less willing to assist these worthies. The declaration for liberty of conscience in the reign of James II. was more for the substitution of Popery for Prelacy and Protestantism than for the relief of the Presbyterians. All that led up to and eventuated in the siege of Derry proved this.

When the regiment of Roman Catholics was at the gates of Derry, and the Mayor knew not what course to pursue, it was Rev. James Gordon, a Presbyterian minister, whose advice, "Shut the gates and keep them out," as against Bishop Hopkins' disapproval of such a course, that saved the city. Colonel Lundy, an Episcopalian, was sent by the representatives of England in Ireland, to govern the city. He, professing fealty to King William of Orange, who about this time had landed at Torbay, in England, did his best for James, and advised surrender. Although nominally an Episcopalian, he really befriended the Romanists. The citizens of Derry rejected his proposal, and Lundy fled. Presbyterianism and Episcopacy now dwelt together in unity, worshipping in the same building.

The siege over, with the restoration of peace came the renewal of persecutions on the part of the Episcopalian. King William authorized the payment of £1,200 per annum to the Presbyterians for their loyalty to his cause. While he reigned Presbyterianism prospered,