

fabric of tyranny, the narrative of which constitutes the darkest page in British history. Instead of carrying out—as in his coronation oath he had sworn to do—the great objects and ends of the Presbyterian Covenanted Reformation as then attained to, one of his first acts was to sweep it all away with the besom of an Act called *The Act Rescissory*. By that one act, all that had been done by the church and nation during thirty years in favor of it was swept away. All the reforming Acts of Parliament were declared null and void. The covenants which had been so solemnly sworn and subscribed by the king and parliament, and by all classes, were declared to be unlawful oaths, and were subsequently ordered to be burnt by the hands of the common hangman. Thus, by one act of despotic tyranny, the whole government of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland was completely demolished. The Prelatic system that had been set aside was again set up and established. Diocesan bishops were restored to their former position and authority. The government of the Church by synods and general assemblies was abolished, and all were prohibited from even condemning the change. In one day, between three hundred and four hundred presbyterian ministers were driven from their churches, their manse, and their flocks. Into the places of these ejected ministers men were introduced of the lowest type in literature and morals. Bishop Burnet declares:—"They were the worst preachers I ever heard. They were ignorant to a reproach, and many of them were openly vicious."

It was on the ministry of such men, that the Presbyterian people of Scotland were required to wait on pain of fines, imprisonment, banishment and death. To turn their backs upon their loved pastors who had so long and faithfully broken to them the bread of life—who had joined their hands together in the tenderest of earthly ties—who had baptized their children—who had led them up the hill of communion and had many a time comforted them in sorrow's dark hour; and to wait upon the ministrations of such hirelings as Bishop Burnet describes, was the demand that was made upon our Presbyterian forefathers, on pain of the forfeiture of estate, liberty, and even life itself. Is it strange that they should refuse? Is it strange that they should refuse to give up their consciences at the bidding of any man or any body of men? Is it strange that they should still hold on to the pastors of their choice, and if they could not meet them in the places where prayer was wont to be made in former years, that they should wish to meet them on the mountain side, or the secluded glen, or the private dwelling? And is it strange that faithful ministers, who had not received their commission from an earthly king, should refuse to lay it down at the bidding of an earthly monarch, and that, when driven from their churches, where they could no longer meet with their people, they should wish to meet them in retired spots where "the vulture's eye" could not see them, and where "the fierce lion" could not annoy.

This was the origin of *Conventicles*, as they were called in those days. When driven from their pulpits, the presbyterian pastors repaired to the fields, to the mountains, to the glens, to any spot that would furnish an opportunity of declaring "the unsearchable riches of Christ," undetected by the eye of the informer and unmolested by the sword of the dragoon.