

HISTORY OF THE IRISH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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History of the Irish Presbyterian Church by Thomas Hamilton

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IRISH PRESBYTERIAN
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HISTORY
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BY THE
REV. THOMAS HAMILTON, D.D.,
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PREFACE.



IN writing this handbook I have had two objects in view. First, I wished to do what in me lay to make Irish Presbyterians thoroughly acquainted with their own history. It is neither creditable nor advantageous that so many of us know far more about the past life of other Churches than of our own—are better acquainted with the olden ecclesiastical history of Scotland or England, or even Germany, than of Ireland—and can tell more of Knox and Melville, of Bothwell Brig and the Pentlands, of Latimer and Cranmer, and Luther and Calvin, than of St. Patrick and Edward Brice and Robert Blair, of 'The Eagle Wing' and 'The Black Oath,' of the Sixmilewater Awakening and the persecutions in the days of the Charleses and Anne. Knowledge must prepare the way before loyalty can reign. We cannot be expected to take that interest in, or have that love for, the Church of our fathers which we ought—we cannot clearly comprehend either her position or her rights in this land, unless we know something of her origin, her contendings, her sufferings, her whole past experience. If this book helps in any measure to spread among Irish Presbyterians a knowledge of the history of their Church,—a history of which it is a shame and a loss to be ignorant,—it will have

accomplished the first object for which it was penned. I have had another aim in preparing it. Recent political events have called public attention very prominently to Ireland, and largely to the North of Ireland, where Presbyterianism was planted in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and where still its great strength lies. It is well at such a time to see to it that the circumstances and needs of the people are properly understood, that they are read not in the deceptive glare of a passing excitement, but by the calm, clear light of the torch of history. It is especially important, not only to Irish Protestantism but to all Irish interests, that the position and the past of Ulster should be accurately discerned and read. If this handbook helps at all towards the attainment of these desirable, indeed necessary, ends, its second *raison d'être* will have been most gratifyingly vindicated.

Dr. Reid's *History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland*, with its continuation by Dr. Killen, has no doubt served both purposes to some extent already. We have no more admirable history of any Church. Mr. Froude has well said that it is 'the very best book which has ever been written on these matters.' It is only when one has had occasion, as I have had, to study it minutely, to compare it with the authorities on which it is based, and with other histories which run side by side with it, that the patient research, the arduous toil, the accuracy, the fidelity, the soundness of judgment to which almost every page of that splendid work bears witness, can be fully appreciated or appraised. But evidently this great work is too large and too expensive to be circulated as widely as the history of the Irish Presbyterian Church ought to be. A three-volume book can never be expected to penetrate to the farmhouses and cottages of the country-side, or to the artisans' dwellings in the

city, still less to be read by the young generation which is attending Bible Class and Sabbath School. It is not even every wealthy merchant or country gentleman that will study, as it deserves to be studied, a work so large. The existence of a compact and concise handbook on the subject will at all events render ignorance, if not impossible, at least inexcusable, and may have the happy effect of so whetting the appetite of the reader that he will not be satisfied until he has feasted on the rich fare provided by the first and best historians of the Irish Presbyterian Church. Many things also have happened during the nearly twenty years which have passed since the last (and best) edition of this Presbyterian classic was published, not to speak of the more than fifty which have elapsed since the first appearance of its first volume. Valuable State papers have been given to the public, other historians have re-sifted Reid and Killen's materials, re-weighed their conclusions, and thrown fresh light on many transactions with which they deal, while important events have occurred, some of them so lately as this present year, which deserve a more permanent record than they can obtain in the columns of a newspaper. Besides, it will be noticed that the present work carries back our ecclesiastical story further into the past than Dr. Reid has done, so that both at beginning and end it covers a larger ground.

To Reid obligations will be found in many cases acknowledged throughout the work. But much more is due to him than could be acknowledged. Besides other indebtednesses which are owned in the proper place, it is only right also to mention here the large general help derived from President Killen's *Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*, Dr. Witherow's *Derry and Enniskillen*, and *The Boyne and Aghrim*, and valuable hints obtained from the late Dr. Croskery, not only through the medium of various

productions of his pen, but in personal intercourse. From the Rev. T. Y. Killen, D.D.,¹ and the Rev. Alexander Gordon of Belfast, the Rev. C. H. Irwin, M.A., Bray, and the Rev. J. Armstrong, Plymouth, not a few helpful kindnesses were also received.

I trust that the handbook may be found to have set in a clear light, and before many eyes, one of the noblest histories which the Church of Christ has to tell, that its perusal may bind Irish Presbyterians in firmer allegiance to their grand old Church, and lead many besides Irish Presbyterians better to understand and appreciate our past history and our present position.

BROOKVALE HOUSE,
BELFAST, *October*, 1886.

¹ While the first edition of this work was passing through the press, Dr. Killen was suddenly cut down on October 21st, 1886. He was born in Ballymena on October 30th, 1826, entered Belfast College in 1842, was licensed by the Presbytery of Carrickfergus in 1848, and laboured successively as a missionary at Camlin, and as pastor of the congregations of 3rd Ranelston, Ballykelly, and Duncairn, Belfast, with great fidelity.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

THE fact that within three months after the first appearance of this little book the preparation of a Second Edition had to be set about, sufficiently demonstrates the need which was felt for some such manual of our Irish Presbyterian Church history. The work has now been carefully revised throughout; typographical and other errors have been corrected; some additions have been made, and an Index has been appended which will facilitate consultation. In this improved form it is hoped that the handbook will be found better fitted than ever to serve the ends for which it was written.

BROOKVALE HOUSE,
BELFAST, *April*, 1887.