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## SCOTTISH BAPTISTS AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

In the preface to his biting, yet fascinating, pictorial record of the First World War, A. J. P. Taylor suggests that his narrative is 'an academic exercise, as remote from present experience as the great war of Troy'.<sup>1</sup> Such feelings are perhaps the more true after a prolonged period of peace. To those reared in the generation after World War II, the prospect of war, which it was assumed widely would produce a nuclear holocaust, was both disquieting and unthinkable. Despite the ever-present fear of some accidental outbreak, there was - is - a feeling that such a train of events could and would be prevented. With a moral superiority sometimes hard to understand, there grew a belief that men of the later twentieth century, at least in the west, were superior to their forebears. The mass jingoism that apparently swept the country in August 1914 was impossible today. Yet the 1982 South Atlantic War, whether a necessary and bold success for British military skill or the last squalid colonial war, showed to those of us to whom the idea of a nation in arms meant little, just how quickly war develops and how 'public opinion', both Christian and secular, can move easily and quickly from relative pacifism to bellicosity.

This paper was begun in 1980 as an enquiry into the reactions of Scottish Baptists to the strains and stresses produced by a cataclysmic war. It was written, however, against the background of the Falklands conflict which inevitably has affected the course it has taken.

Several factors require to be stated at the outset. First, there is no attempt at completeness - the research is undoubtedly incomplete and inadequate. Secondly, the views studied are limited. The material used was largely the *Scottish Baptist Magazine* for the war years. It is a convenient source, though deficient in a number of ways: it is short - some 16 pages and a few of these, as today, are taken up with news of the churches, book reviews, and advertisements; it is monthly and so often follows events, a problem obvious enough to the editor who could say in January 1915, 'A monthly denominational magazine can make no pretence of giving even a *resume* of the course of the war'.<sup>2</sup> Then, it provides us with the views of a limited number of Scottish Baptists, often the editor, usually ministerial. Yet it is the best source we have and it does provide us with the views of those who led and sustained congregations and in a real sense helped to mould the opinions of their fellow-Christians.

The summer of 1914 saw little hint of trouble to come. It was a warm summer in more ways than one, and the thoughts of the editor were far from war, unless the growing crisis over the Irish Home Rule Bill were to bring civil war. Yet this threat of war always hung in the background. In January 1913 the pages of 'Notes and Comments', the editorial comment which filled the first three pages of the magazine in those days, suggested that 1912 would be chiefly memorable for the uprising of the Balkan people against the 'Unspeakable Turk', but noted that the 'dread possibility of a general European war has

overshadowed all else in the closing months of the year'. Peace was being negotiated, a matter for thankfulness, though much prayer for this was needed:

and such prayer should surely be followed up by eager and persistent efforts to combat on the one hand the militarism and on the other the jealousy and panic fear of other nations and their activities, which are at work like fevers in the blood of the European peoples.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the concern at the prospect of war, it must remain in some doubt as to whether the editor's reference to 'European peoples' included Britain. Nothing more was heard of the subject until July 1914, when it was declared that Dreadnoughts, the deterrent of the day, were useless. Aircraft and submarines were the new powers.

The taxpayer will read it (news of the Dreadnoughts' obsolescence) with some satisfaction and hope that fifty million naval estimates are a thing of the past. If all that is said is true it seems as though naval warfare will be its own victorious enemy; its secrecy and its effectiveness will prevent the nations having recourse to it. We can look with satisfaction upon anything which makes war unlikely either on sea or land.<sup>4</sup>

That war came with stunning suddenness to Scottish Baptists as to the population generally is undoubted. Some ten days after war was declared the office-bearers, led by Tom Lister, the President, and George Yuille, the Secretary, despatched a letter to the churches to address to the Scottish Baptist community a 'few words in view of the lamentable war into which so many ... have been so suddenly plunged'.<sup>5</sup> Sympathy was expressed to all who in the months or years ahead should suffer physically and materially. A continuance of the passionate and earnest prayer which had been offered since the crisis began was urged - no longer prayer for war to be averted, but for God's mercy to be shown to all, that wisdom be given to leaders of government in their responsibility that the war might be brought to a speedy conclusion and that it might 'somehow' be to the glory of God and for the good of the nations. This is what one would have expected of wise spiritual leadership in the denomination.

It is difficult to determine the reactions of the leadership as the crisis developed for it is only from this letter of August 14 that their views can be calculated. Two things were clear, however. Firstly, it was realised that a calamity such as war would bring to the fore some qualities of character which to some extent had been lacking before the war, such as chivalry and self-sacrifice. Secondly, the war was just. Britain had been forced to fight only after exhaustive attempts to maintain peace.

Our prayers (the letter stated) must be rendered the more fervent and confident by the knowledge that our statesmen all through the crisis have laboured so strenuously to secure peace and have only declared war when it seemed that peace could no longer be honourably maintained.<sup>6</sup>

The same two themes were taken up in the September editorial:

The moral state of Europe is pitiful. The only satisfaction we have as Britons is our conviction that, being drawn into it against our will, our hands are clean and our cause is right. The most devoted lover of peace recognises the emergence of the inevitable and can only pray that the issue will be quickly decided in the way of righteousness.<sup>7</sup>

There is much evidence that the war caught people unawares and filled them with sorrow. In the years before 1914 there was much contact between German and British Christians, and much work and contact too in the peace movement.<sup>8</sup> It was with genuine heartbreak that war broke out between the two empires. An editorial note on 'War and Missions' quoted Sir George McAlpine stating regretfully that whatever might be thought of the secular leaders of Germany, those who knew the leaders of German missionary work held them in 'affection to which war can make no difference'.<sup>9</sup> The editor went on to comment:

The German Baptist Community is one of the sweetest flowers which grows on German soil, and British Baptists will have no holier work than to pray for the German churches, and to help in the saving of their missionary work from extinction.<sup>10</sup>

War had separated brothers in Christ and the parting was hard and unpleasant.

In the same issue, brief articles from two ministers who had been on holiday in Germany as war broke out contain similar sentiments. The editor of the *Scottish Baptist*, the Rev. A. T. Walker of Ward Road, Dundee, was in Hamburg before war was declared and recalled the fellowship of believers and sharing a word and prayer at communion. With obvious sorrow he recalls:

There was not any sign of bitterness against the British neither in the Pastor's house nor anywhere else ... I believe the declaration of war came as a surprise and a disappointment to the 'man in the street'.<sup>11</sup>

The Rev. A. Grant Gibb of Aberdeen, holidaying in Belgium and the Rhineland, had recollections of the same attitude:

Had any fellow traveller ventured to predict that these fair and peaceful scenes would shortly be the theatre of a European war, one would almost have questioned his sanity.<sup>12</sup>

Gibb, like Walker, found no evidence of ill-feeling, a marked change from the hostility encountered during the Boer War, though he added significantly, that 'since Britain has been forced to take the field the attitude has doubtless become one of bitterness'.<sup>13</sup> Sorrow there might be, but it was tempered with the realism that once a conflict had started men were quickly consumed with baser motives than those existing in more peaceful times.

Whatever the heartbreak and tragedy of war, writers, correspondents and ministers were clear on one thing: that Britain had been forced to take up arms and was justified in doing so. One simple

editorial comment in October 1914 effectively sums it up: 'The voices are very few that say we were not forced into it'.<sup>14</sup>

For what reasons, then, did Scottish Baptists defend this view? The most eloquent statement came in September 1917 from the pen of the Rev. T. H. Martin in the longest article on the war during the 1914-1918 period, entitled 'A Review of the War'. In it Martin delineated five reasons for Britain being compelled to fight. They were, firstly, that the war was a conflict against the rule of brute force; secondly, a conflict on behalf of the rights of the smaller and weaker nationalities; thirdly, a conflict on behalf of honourable conduct in international affairs; fourth, a conflict of moral ideals; and fifth, a conflict for world peace.<sup>15</sup> It was a just fight against German militarism which most obviously revealed its true character in the decision to ignore a guarantee of neutrality and launch an attack on France through Belgium. With Scottish Baptists, as with British public opinion as a whole, the Belgian issue removed what little doubts remained over Britain's involvement in the war. By October of 1914, the office-bearers could confidently proclaim the support of the denomination for the war in a resolution moved by T. W. Lister at the Assembly in Glasgow, which, unlike the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland Autumn Assembly, went ahead as normal. Lister's motion expressed sorrow at the outbreak of war in Europe and sympathy with all to whom it caused distress, 'especially with the inhabitants of Belgium'.<sup>16</sup> It went on to express satisfaction that war was declared only when the Government, after strenuously attempting to find a peaceful solution, was 'compelled to do so in fidelity to treaty obligations'.<sup>17</sup> For Lister and the delegates there is little doubt that these obligations were to maintain Belgian neutrality. The resolution closed by expressing confidence in the justice of the nation's cause and trust in God for ultimate victory.

That the Belgian episode created a sympathetic frame of mind in Britain and provided a moral stimulus for going to war is amply illustrated in a book of sermons by Walter Mursell, minister of Coats Memorial Church, Paisley, entitled *The Bruising of Belgium and other Sermons During Wartime*. In the sermon used for the title of the book, preached on November 15, 1914 Mursell declared,

That one word - 'Belgium' - is enough to justify our entry into this war, enough to rouse the chivalry of our people, enough to determine us to fight to such a finish that tyranny will never be able to create or to grasp such an opportunity again.<sup>18</sup>

Belgium had been ruined, devastated, its cities spoiled, its villages burned and her people driven from their homes. She had been 'ruthlessly and treacherously'<sup>19</sup> invaded by a nation which had sworn to protect her neutrality - and worse, Mursell thundered,

Because they had the courage to resist their foes, to stand for freedom and honour and independence, to spoil the invader's plans they have had to endure reprisals of such cruel severity and brutal savagery that the whole world has stood appalled at the spectacle.<sup>20</sup>

Noting that Belgium had gained valuable time for the British and that the bravery of the Belgians had saved Great Britain, Mursell suggested to his people (quoting the words of Jesus, 'I was hungry and you gave me food') that Belgium was Christ in modern garb and exhorted them to give aid to the Belgians through practical help such as hospitality and a great deal more.

But here is something else we must try to do, that we must pledge our manhood and shed our blood to do, and that is to give Belgium back her country.<sup>21</sup>

Mursell's is the only extant Scottish Baptist sermon so far discovered on this theme, but it is reasonable to think that many more ministers seized upon the plight of the Belgians and used their example of bravery and a stand for freedom to proclaim the righteousness of the war into which Britain had been driven. Few indeed were the voices who suggested that the fate of Belgium was the judgement of God for that country's sins in the Congo. In the support Baptists willingly gave to the war effort the issue of Belgium was an important cornerstone.

Such might be expected in the autumn of 1914, but one recent historian of Britain's involvement in the First World War, Zara Steiner, poses an interesting question which the magazine at least partially answers. Steiner asks,

Why, after it became clear that the stalemate would be a long one, the casualty lists unbearable and the decisions of the military futile, men continued to fight.<sup>22</sup>

At least part of the answer is to be found in the reasons why Christians supported the war in the first place. There was no weakening in the condemnation of German militarism, no decline in the willingness to uphold honour and righteousness in supporting Belgium during the whole course of the war. In the words of a Baptist historian of the *Nonconformist Conscience*, 'The Great War became a crusade'.<sup>23</sup>

During the course of the war the Belgian issue, if anything, began to consume men more and more and support for Belgium and the decrying of German barbarism grew ever more strident. In December 1914, an editorial commented thus on reports of German barbarism in Belgium, reports undoubtedly encouraged by official British propaganda:

Whatever Germany may have been in Art and Culture, her Belgian record has destroyed the goodwill of the whole of enlightened civilisation.<sup>24</sup>

It went on to suggest to its readers that Christian Britain would be quite incapable of such atrocities.

War is always cruel, but we cannot conceive a British Army on its way to Berlin leaving behind it such tears of blood and anguish as the Germans have scattered broadcast over Belgium.<sup>25</sup>

A further turn of the moral screw came in March 1915 when the editor commented on the Report of the Committee on Alleged German Outrages chaired by Lord Bryce:

The minds and morals of the invaders must have 'reeled into barbarism' long before they set out on their Godless march to have been capable of such shrieking atrocities.<sup>26</sup>

It was recognised by the editor that such horrors as had occurred were a possibility in any nation. 'Only loyalty to the teachings of Christianity will save a people from similar atavistic surprises'.<sup>27</sup> There was a clear implication, though, that there was no such loyalty in Germany, which was firmly in the camp of the forces of darkness.

The Rev. Thomas Stewart in an article, 'Shall not God avenge His own Elect?' in the May 1915 edition, reaffirmed that Britain was involved in a just cause. 'We are at war ... because we seek justice for the oppressed, for the weak equally with the strong'.<sup>28</sup> It was to be expected that outrage following the execution of Edith Cavell on 12 October 1915 would increase such feelings. In December 1915, the Rev. J. T. Forbes contributed an article with the militaristic-sounding title of 'The Recruiting Call'. In a critique of pacifism he offered reasons why Britain was involved. 'If any war is justified this war is', he proclaimed, adding that,

force can be sanctified just as suffering can be sane. It was so to win civil and religious freedom; to destroy the slave trade... It is so today to oppose the treaty breakers and war makers of Germany; to make stable the position of small countries and the comity of European nations.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps aided by a change of editor to Principal Jervis Coats, whose views on the prosecution of war appear more determined and fixed than those of the previous editor, there appeared an astonishing editorial comment on the German atrocities in Belgium in March 1917. Coats set out to clarify the issues at stake, declaring that, 'above all there are involved in it the very foundations of civilisation and morality, the fate of all laws, human and divine.'<sup>30</sup>

Asking the question, 'Why are we of this British Empire at war?', he was able to rule out certain motives for British involvement. It was not a war of ambition, nor of aggression, nor to be over anyone. The empire had been thrust upon Britain and had largely been governed for good, with Egypt, serving as an example for the rest of the empire, rescued from bankruptcy, bondage and political and social chaos. All this, however, stood in marked contrast to Germany.

How have the Germans ruled poor Belgium? For its good? Ah, me! And how would they rule us if they had the chance - which God forfend?

He then quotes a story of Dr Robert Bridges, the Poet Laureate, of an incident involving an American in Berlin in 1913 in discussion with a Prussian relating what Germany would do when they had conquered England. An indemnity of £20 billion would be required, together with

an army of occupation until it was paid off. The conversation continued, 'But if they refused to work, how can you compel them?' 'The lash,' said the Prussian. 'What! Slavery!' 'Yes, slavery'. Coats commented:

Such a state of mind is with us inconceivable. But it is an accurate expression of the soul(?) of that German militarism we are seeking to destroy. There can be no doubt that if Prussian forces were to effect a landing on these shores, and to bring these fair islands under their sway, there would be set on foot an orgy of pillage and outrage and murder compared with which the atrocities perpetrated in Belgium and France would appear pale and mild.

The war was, he concluded, 'a spiritual conflict. It is a fight against "the powers of darkness"'.

Such an outburst suggests several things. Even after two and a half years of war the twin preoccupations of German militarism and atrocities in Belgium were still persuasive factors in continuing to motivate considerable determination to prosecute the war, and this after the horrendous casualties at Verdun and the Somme the previous year. Yet we should notice also the way in which the editor is prepared to pass off a third-hand account (at least) of German terrorization without apparently even considering the possibility of the remarks being anything other than the truth. In the sense that the supposed conversation is so obviously ludicrous, it marks a low point in the *Scottish Baptist Magazine's* editorial comment. True, the editor, like other citizens, had no means of checking the statement and was the recipient of official propaganda and the jingoistic rantings of the popular press, but one might expect more restraint from one of the leaders of Scottish Baptist opinion. Comment such as this, though, clearly played a vital part in maintaining the crusading spirit of the nation despite the increasing casualties and suffering.

Even as late as February 1918 similar sentiments were being expressed, though by this time there was a suggestion that the war was beginning to weary even those who most vociferously supported it. Noting that in the coming months the churches would be called to suffer even more, the editor could still maintain that

the foundations of the Kingdom of God, 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost' are being undermined by a savage and ruthless power. There is therefore nothing for it but to stand up against this evil influence, till it is overcome.<sup>31</sup>

It would appear that, at least among Scottish Baptists, the moral issues involved in the war and the righteousness of the struggle were vital factors in sustaining support for the national effort through the bitterest and darkest periods of the conflict. Whether this moral imperative roused the population at large is another matter, but it is one which should not be underestimated. Those who know and believe themselves to be in the right are usually willing to endure opposition for the cause they support.

That this moral conflict was different from other wars was also



relatively easy to observe. In September 1917 three ways in which the Great War differed from previous wars was suggested. It was a world war; it was one waged in all elements, on land, sea and air, under the earth and under the sea; it was distinguished more than any other war by its 'frightfulness'.<sup>32</sup> The editor could have added another difference, taken up five months previously in April 1917, when Scottish Baptists were encouraged to 'do their Bit'. The war was a total war in which all were involved and none excluded.

We are all, man, woman and child being asked to do something and maintain and guard our fatherland at this time of storm and stress; and it is our duty to respond wholeheartedly to the call.<sup>33</sup>

The contribution could be made in a number of ways: active service, rigid economy or in the practice of self-denial. However small, the participation of everyone was essential.

With the necessity to mobilise the resources of the nation, Government action was felt more strongly than ever before. The attitude of the *Scottish Baptist Magazine* to government interference was somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand it was necessary to safeguard basic freedom and to ensure that the provisions of the Defence of the Realm Act were not overpowering. In July 1915, noting that restrictions on Trade Unions were being relaxed by consent, the magazine commented:

it is gratifying to know that it is by consent and not by the application of the powers given by the Defence of the Realm Act. That which can be obtained by agreement is better than by the use of force.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand there were times when government action was observed to be not nearly strong enough. The most obvious example of this was the Government's apparent unwillingness to take severe measures to reduce the amount of liquor available. This was the subject of two resolutions passed on 21 October, 1914 at the Assembly. One protested strongly against the sending of 150,000 gallons of rum to the troops on the Western Front. The other, proposed by the Rev. Alex. Bremner, Secretary of the Scottish Baptist Total Abstinence Society, called for 'His Majesty's Government to take into consideration the advisability of closing all places licensed for the sale of intoxicants during the continuance of the war'.<sup>35</sup> Pressure for prohibition was kept up during the four years of war and total abstinence became very much a crusade within a crusade. This came out most strongly in April 1915 when the magazine linked the temperance question with state control. It was noted that in times of crisis people accept laws which in normal times would be fiercely resisted and offered as examples the government commandeering of workshops and the turning of workmen into government servants. No one objected to the provision of war materials in this way, but it was clear that the same authority was slow to take action in regulating drink. Yet the availability of drink was hampering the effectiveness of the war effort and thereby risking the safety and freedom of the nation. Apart from Germany, there was a secondary enemy, the drink trade. In the eyes of the *Scottish Baptist*,

The drink trade comes second only to German militarism in the thoroughness of its preparations and the ramifications of its interests... It would rather see Britain free than sober. Unless something be done, and that quickly, it will be neither free nor sober.<sup>36</sup>

In some cases, then, the provisions for exceptional state action were being underused. The drink question apart, however, response to increasing government power was cautious. This is well illustrated in the reactions to the gradual introduction of conscription. Response to the call for volunteers was encouraging in the autumn of 1914, and, encouraged by ministers and leaders of the denomination, Baptists responded as well as others. Within weeks of the commencement of war, it was reckoned that over five hundred had been called up as members of the Territorials. By December, the Hillhead Church had a printed list of nearly 160 who had enlisted out of a membership of 575. In February 1915 a report of the Fife Association stated that at least 226 men from the Fife churches were serving with the colours. The report of the Committee of Social Service to the 1915 Assembly estimated that between 4000 to 5000 men associated with the congregations had joined the services.<sup>37</sup> This was encouraging and it led to the conclusion, found in the July 1915 issue, that though many were beginning to demand compulsory service, 'The need for it has not yet been shown'.<sup>38</sup> By February of the following year opinion had altered. The response of men to join up had been magnificent, but not enough. Consequently support for the Military Service Bill was assured. This support was not given, however, without some misgivings. The following month the editorial questioned the value of conscripted men.

We are sensible of a feeling of regret that such a fine record shall be broken for the sake of bringing in a few thousands whose addition to the effectiveness of the army may be almost negligible.<sup>39</sup>

Two years later, in 1918, such qualms had disappeared in the desperation to find more men. Comment was made on a meeting of the Baptist Union of Scotland Council, where a resolution had been passed expressing regret at the withdrawal of the 'Clergy Clause' from the Man-Power Bill. Recognising that the question of taking part in non-combatant or combatant work was a matter for individual conscience, the Council earnestly recommended 'to our ministers the duty and privilege of personal service to the country at this time of urgent need'.<sup>40</sup>

The commencement of conscription introduced the linked problem of conscience. What of those whose understanding of Scripture forced them to the view that they could not participate in war? It was recognised that such a problem existed and that British churches were familiar to such appeals to the word of God. In April 1916 the 'Notes and Comments' column stated:

Our members will be the last to sneer or throw ridicule on such appeals... The remarkable thing is not that the pleas of conscientious objection are so many, but that relatively they are so few.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless there was also an indication that those who had chosen to serve were those whose understanding of Scripture was closest to the truth.

Whilst not wishing to judge any man, we believe it is a tender conscience and a love of righteousness and liberty which have driven the choicest of our sons and brothers to take their place in the Kingdom's forces.<sup>42</sup>

This statement drew in the following month a stinging letter of rebuke from one irate Baptist, a certain 'anon, Yours on Christ's side, apostles and martyrs'. 'What drivell! he started, 'coming from a source that should be authoritative. What utter abominable drivell. It is no wonder that our church is in a low condition when ostensible heads and teachers pour forth from their carnal hearts statements diametrically opposed to the Word of Truth'.<sup>43</sup>

Clearly here was an opponent of the war in Scottish Baptist ranks. He is significant, for his was the only voice raised in opposition in the columns of the magazine during the whole course of the war. His views on the leadership were just about printable. It was hardly surprising that ordinary people were unenthralled by religion while

shepherds and pastors (for the most part in wolves clothing) go so far astray ... from any standpoint this war is unchristian and abominable. God permits certain events, but he holds the perpetrators responsible just the same.<sup>44</sup>

The editor contented himself, in the light of this furious attack, with a restrained rebuke. 'We would tranquillize our pugnacious brother by assuring him that the paragraph quoted is quite innocuous'.<sup>45</sup>

Yet strong as the magazine was in supporting the war, concern was voiced at the treatment of conscientious objectors by Tribunals. Indeed there was high respect for men who would endure pain and penalties rather than be untrue to their sincere convictions, and though objectors could be awkward and hinder rather than help their case, it was recognised that the letter and spirit of the Military Service Act were often neglected and the provisions made for objectors were ignored. The country could expect sacrifice from her citizens, but it was for the civil authority rather than the military to determine what service should be given.

Although we might imagine that this issue would be one which would provoke reaction among Baptists, there it remained. That one anonymous letter was the only forceful support of objection during the war. To Scottish Baptists, at least, it would appear there was little to object to.

The war undoubtedly created problems for the churches, though despite the difficulties the work of the gospel went on. The editor noted in May 1915 that reports from the churches showed little disturbance of church work, a fact borne out by the minutes of the Leslie Church, where it is almost possible to believe that the war

never existed. Yet there was an awareness that the churches, almost without exception, had members in the battle line. Early in the war it was obvious that some churches had been severely hit by the withdrawal of the younger men, and by 1916 churches acknowledged the decrease in their membership and numbers. Concern was especially expressed for the fishing communities on the east coast where, even by December 1914, many were out of work. The following month the magazine could report that fishing in most places had ceased and that the main industry of many villages had been destroyed. In such places church attendances and finances were badly hit and the Union quickly sought practical help of some £300 'as a buttress against the inevitable collapse of many a small church which was already standing in difficulty'.<sup>46</sup>

September 1915 saw the publication of an article by the Secretary of the Anstruther Church, 'Anster by the Sea', describing the disaster which had befallen the town.

One of the busiest of the smaller fishing towns on the east coast a year ago, it is now a dead city (industrially) and a fish is one of the last things you see.<sup>47</sup>

The church, from a membership of 100, could show a roll of honour of fifty men. As the Secretary commented, 'For a church of 100 members I imagine that will nearly touch a record'.<sup>48</sup>

In October 1915, a report of the quarterly meetings of the Union spoke of a fall in the membership of several of the churches in fishing communities of about two-thirds. The situation was clearly serious. The annual business meeting of the Pittenweem Church in December 1914 talked of 'the great crushing depression so very much felt in our district caused by the War'.<sup>49</sup> In May 1916, Pittenweem was one of the churches aided by the Emergency Fund, receiving £10 for the church and a bonus of £5 for the Pastor. The problems were not simply financial for these small churches. Pittenweem also found their station closed by 1917 and pulpit supply consequently harder to obtain and more expensive. Yet one is struck by the fortitude of the church in bearing its burdens. Throughout the war, despite obvious financial difficulty, contributions were made to the Union and attempts made to maintain a settled ministry.

The effects of the war were to be felt not only in material ways but also on the attitudes of the men themselves. One young Baptist serving at the front, in fact a student at the Baptist Theological College of Scotland, wrote regarding the preparations the churches were making for those who would return. He drew attention to the fact that many would be difficult to deal with, for they were reforming their ideas of religion and the church. His solution was to call for a simpler way of expressing the faith, an appeal that was taken up by the editor, who emphasised that it was necessary to regain the fact that the Lord intended that 'affectionate, passionate affection should be the motive power in his followers' lives'.<sup>50</sup>

This change in attitude had been noticed much earlier. In an impressive article on 'Our Volunteer Army' in June 1916, the Rev. John MacBeath reported on some time he had spent with the Y.M.C.A.

MacBeath noticed the steely way the men endured the hardship of the trenches, and that they had no love of slackers and shirkers back home. They had, he said, 'looked in the face the red ruin of war and they have become in many cases thoughtful and grave'. But thoughtfulness was perhaps the least of the changes.

Old distinctions have fallen away. Old differences are obliterated. The men have changed and they will change many things after the war. Old opinions have been revised. Old political creeds have been recast, new leaders are in the making and new policies are in the shaping amongst our men.

It was, to MacBeath, clear that, 'The war has made faith difficult'.<sup>52</sup>

The point was noted in an editorial the following month. Life would be a more serious thing to those who returned, and there was a concern to communicate the gospel to them. Yet, the impression is given that those who had not seen the reality of the conflict had little idea of how much the attitudes of the men had changed and even less idea as to how the churches should approach the altered situation.

Hostilities came to an end in November 1918. It was marked with thankfulness and hope for the future. War had brought people together and that togetherness of spirit was encouraging for the days ahead. There was an indication, too, that reforms which might have taken a generation to effect were already on the way, to the benefit of the community. The war had been long and hard, but Scottish Baptists had played their part, as they had been urged to do. Besides the thousands who had either volunteered or had been conscripted the magazine could report on twenty-three ministers who served with the Y.M.C.A., sixteen students at the College who had joined the forces, and eight chaplains, including the Rev. Thomas Jones of Paisley and the Rev. W. C. Charteris of the Ayr Church, who by the conclusion of hostilities had risen to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and been awarded the Military Cross. Both men had contributed regular articles to the magazine on the role of the chaplains.

1919 brought a time for stocktaking and for remembrance. The Roll of Honour, started in January 1917, showed five hundred from Scottish Baptist congregations who had been killed. They were drawn from seventy-five churches. Hillhead had lost most with fifty-five recorded dead, but smaller churches suffered as badly, perhaps more, since their resources were less. Fraserburgh lost ten and Anstruther eleven. Yet even these tragic losses could be doubled. As the magazine itself said, the list was incomplete for two reasons. It was not commenced until the war had been in progress for two and a half years, and it was certain that there were some churches which had not provided returns. On the other side of the Roll of Honour, eighty-one special honours had been awarded, including 6 D.S.O.s, 20 M.C.s, 29 M.M.s, the Legion of Honour and the Croix de Guerre. Such a record and such losses naturally provoked two reactions and it is fitting to close with the comments of the magazine in May 1919,

This is a splendid and heart-burning record. It represents a series of brave deeds and heroic self-aggregations, of which we as a denomination may well be proud. It represents too, many

hearts which are sad and sore at the loss of dear ones who will never cheer their lot again in this world, and also the loss to the churches of fresh young lives which might have been of inestimable aid to them in their life and work.<sup>53</sup>

## NOTES

This paper was originally read at a meeting of the Scottish Baptist History Project in Dundee on 22 May 1982.

- 1 A. J. P. Taylor, *The First World War: An Illustrated History*, London, 1963, p. 11.
- 2 *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (hereafter SBM), January 1915, p.2.
- 3 SBM January 1913, p.2.
- 4 SBM July 1914, p.106.
- 5 SBM September 1914, p.137.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p.138.
- 8 See K. W. Clements, 'Baptists and the Outbreak of the First World War', *Baptist Quarterly*, vol.26 (1975), p.78f.
- 9 SBM September 1914, p.139.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid. pp.147-8.
- 12 Ibid. p.149.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 SBM October 1914, p.154.
- 15 SBM September 1917, p.130.
- 16 *The Scottish Baptist Year Book*, 1915, p.27.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 W. A. Mursell, *The Bruising of Belgium and Other Sermons During War-time*, Paisley, 1915, p.24.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid. p.30.
- 22 Zara S. Steiner, *Britain and the Origins of the First World War*, London, 1977, p.256.
- 23 D. W. Bebbington, *The Nonconformist Conscience: Chapel and Politics 1870-1914*, London, 1982, p.126.
- 24 SBM December 1914, p.190.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 SBM March 1915, p.33.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 SBM May 1915, p.68.

- 29 SBM December 1915, p.186.
- 30 SBM March 1917, p.33, for this and the quotations which follow.
- 31 SBM February 1918, p.17.
- 32 SBM September 1917, p.130.
- 33 SBM April 1917, p.51.
- 34 SBM July 1915, p.97.
- 35 *The Scottish Baptist Year Book*, 1915, p.27.
- 36 SBM April 1915, p.49.
- 37 SBM November 1915, p.172.
- 38 SBM July 1915, p.97.
- 39 SBM March 1916, p.33.
- 40 SBM June 1918, p.81.
- 41 SBM April 1916, p.50.
- 42 Ibid. p.51.
- 43 SBM May 1916, p.75.
- 44 Ibid., p.75-6.
- 45 Ibid., p.76.
- 46 SBM January 1915, p.2.
- 47 SBM September 1915, p.142.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 *Minutes of Pittenweem Baptist Church*, December 1914.
- 50 SBM April 1917, p.50.
- 51 SBM June 1916, p.85.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 SBM May 1919, p.60.

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