

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_tbhs_01.php

Between the Leaves of an Odd Volume.

NINE pamphlets of 1752 to 1765 bound together, recently discarded from one of our colleges and acquired by another, are the spines of a vertebral column, on which the body of a story may grow, setting forth the origin of Scotch Baptists and the kindred energy of an English friend.

James Rutherford was born in the north of England and educated as a Presbyterian; but when at the Latin school in Jedburgh during 1752, he was led by Vincent's Catechism to study the question of baptism, which he did from the Bible alone. This led him to the conclusion that baptism was intended for believers only, and that it should be administered by immersion. He had heard vaguely of English Baptists, and now sought for their books, of which he obtained Wilson's Scripture Manual (Exhibit one). He resolved to make acquaintance with some of the body, and an intimate friend, Robert Hall, having joined a Baptist church at the Juniper Dye House, four miles south of Hexham, he called to get an introduction when the school broke up for harvesting.

He reached the place on Saturday, and though Hall was not there, David Fernie the minister welcomed him to the experience meeting, and to witness a baptism in the river that evening. He concealed his own opinions, to hear what they had to say, but when next day another candidate appeared, he also gave his experience, and both were baptized in the stream. Soon afterwards, his cousin William Peden followed his example. They found their relations cool

to them, and both threw in their lot with the rural church, where Fernie was promoting a wide evangelism. He used them at the Newcastle church, whence Peden went to Sunderland, but died young.

Rutherford's friend, Robert Hall, was recommended to Arnsby by his brother Christopher, settling at the flourishing port of Whitehaven. To this port Rutherford went, and crossed in a ship under Captain Fletcher to Dublin. The old church in Swift's Alley, under Oswald and Samuel Edwards of late, had been coquetting with the General Baptist Assembly; and it would seem that a second church had been gathered by John Johnson of Liverpool, a friend of Christopher Hall, to which church Rutherford had been called. He wrote in February 1754 that while they were kind and loving, they were too polite and grand for a rustic like him. More serious was it that they were bitter enemies to the doctrines of grace, reckoning him as high as Gill, if not quite as high as Johnson. Yet he made good his footing, welcomed Johnson, and when the latter published a very doctrinal sermon on the River of God, a second edition appeared at Dublin in 1756 (Exhibit two).

Johnson's church naturally contained many mariners, as may be seen by their tombstones at Fabius to-day. One of these was Captain Samuel Hunter, junior, who died in January 1758. Johnson preached a long and most edifying sermon, devoid of personal details but rich in experience, which shows what an original line he was taking (Exhibit three).

Rutherford met with great success in Dublin, and in the same year published two sermons which he had preached to a very numerous auditory at baptismal services. He appended to them an account of his own conversion (Exhibit four). It should be compared with Douglas' account in his History of the Northern Baptist Churches, pages 174-179.

Rutherford became so famous that when John Collett Ryland removed from Warwick to Northampton, he was invited to succeed him; but like his cousin William Peden, he died early, in the year 1761.

Meantime from another quarter in North Britain, enquiries were being made. John Glas, deposed from the ministry of the Church of Scotland in 1728, had founded a small sect, which was introduced to London through his son-in-law, Robert Sandeman, in 1760, by letters to Hervey, the author of *Theron and Aspasio*. A lengthy anonymous letter was published, professing to refute him from the lips of an old woman (Exhibit five). The point of the argument was that the principles of Glas and Sandeman, if thoroughly applied, would lead them on to abandon infant baptism.

This was independently discovered by two Scotchmen who quitted the Glassites in 1763, Archibald M'Lean and Robert Carmichael. The former closely repeated the experience of Rutherford, examining the New Testament alone, without any help from a Baptist. By 1765 the two friends saw their duty clear. They did not know of the churches in Carlisle, Newcastle, and the rest of the group fostered by their compatriot Fernie. Nor do they seem to have known how Sir William Sinclair of Dunbeath in Caithness had found his way to the same position, and had formed a little church at Keiss in 1750.

They wrote to Dr. Gill of Southwark, asking him to come to Edinburgh and Glasgow and form a church; but he declined, inviting them to visit England instead, just as one of their countrymen had done in 1694 for the same purpose. Robert Carmichael went, satisfied the doctor, and on 9 October 1765 was baptized at the great baptistery annexed to the Barbican meeting-house, which then served most of the London churches. A sermon preached on

the occasion was published the same year (Exhibit six). From the labours of Carmichael and his friends, the Baptist cause was established in the Scottish centres.

Gill's neighbour, Joseph Brown, had a brother John who was at this time pastor in Kettering. A sermon of his at a public administration of baptism constitutes Exhibit seven. Appended to it are two hymns used on the occasion; two verses will illustrate the respective proportions of history, poetry and doctrine that were then usual:—

From Candace Queen the Eunuch came
To worship at Jerusalem;
On his return did God display
His sovereign Grace whilst on the Way.
As Philip's orders were divine,
With Haste he must the Chariot join;
The sacred Text did he explain,
And preached Jesus from the same.

Meantime George II had died, and at the coronation of his successor, John Johnson preached a most loyal sermon, as befitted a minister who in 1745 had taken up arms to support the dynasty against the Scottish invasion and the Young Pretender (Exhibit eight). It was consistent to say that "if necessity requires, we ought to hazard our lives, in fighting in their defence." What he would have said, about 1776, had he lived across the Atlantic, we are left to conjecture.

In Johnson's peculiar doctrines which have been set forth in these pages already, he had one great supporter, Samuel Fisher of Norwich. A sermon of his on the Indwelling of the Spirit, constitutes Exhibit nine. It is a welcome sign that the spread of Baptist principles into fresh regions, to which the volume testifies, was accompanied by a discovery of some truths long neglected, and a deepening of spiritual experience.