

## Cupar, Fife, 1652-1659.

[In the Commonwealth period Baptist groups are known to have arisen in five places in Scotland, namely, Leith, Ayr, Perth, Cupar and Aberdeen. The following is the story of the Cupar episode, told in detail for the first time.]

THE year 1652 opened with English soldiers in Fife. Their appearance was the inevitable result of the misfortunes of Worcester the previous year, when the Scottish army under King Charles had been utterly routed by Cromwell's legions. With the soldiers from the south came new ideas, and these ideas caused no small commotion in the county town of Cupar, where, toward the end of the summer, Colonel Fairfax's regiment of foot encamped on the banks of the fair Eden. No sooner had the regiment settled into its winter quarters than the chaplain, a certain Mr. Browne, began preaching to the populace. His dialect was strange to the ear; his preaching stance on the green grass was certainly unconventional; but the substance of his discourses was the most startling. For Mr. Browne was a Baptist, and Cupar had never known anything but Presbyterianism.

The Cupar Presbytery was alarmed, but could not stop the enthusiastic evangelist. In their *Book of Common Order*, John Knox had written, "We damn the error of the anabaptists, who deny baptism to appertain to children." Probably, also, the news had come to their ears that the brother of the Ceres minister, John Row of Aberdeen, had turned Baptist, and had been appointed Principal of Aberdeen University by the English Commissioners. "These were sore days for the Kirk," wrote Silvester Horne, "for they were days when men and women not of their persuasion had equal liberty with themselves to preach and worship." The first baptismal service must have been disturbing. The record of them is in the diary of John Lamont of Newton.

"Oct., 1652. Cupar, this month and the former, the said Mr. Browne did rebaptise several of Col. Fairfax's foot regiment in the water of the Eden, neare to Erdries loodging, by dipping them in the water ouer head and eares, many of the inhabitants looking on."

The earnest brethren of the Presbytery were in no small measure perturbed at the innovation, and the camp preacher was

challenged to a public debate in the Parish Church. He accepted, and two days were set aside for the meeting, October 12th and 14th. The Presbytery was represented by Mr. James Wood, minister of St. Andrew's, the Cupar charge being vacant. Great crowds attended, for the least among the prophets could safely foretell that this was an event to be discussed round the hearth, and in the ale house, for many months to come.

On the first day, according to the records, the questions at issue concerned the doctrine of the Fall. What punishment, it was asked, did Adam bring upon himself at the Fall? Mr. Browne argued vigorously that only man's temporal state was affected, and that the warning, "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," had reference to physical death. This position, it is obvious, was that of Dr. Arminius, who held that by the Fall man did not lose any powers of the soul which the Creator had placed there. Against it, Mr. Wood contended that both physical and spiritual death were involved. Do we not read that we are all by nature the children of wrath? Mr. Browne protested that this was an unfair use of the text, for all that was intended by it was a description of our temporal state.

On the second day, the rival opinions on the doctrine of the Atonement were debated. The discussion centred principally on the question, Whether Christ died for all, or only for some? Mr. Browne professed himself a believer in the universality of the Atonement. The death of Christ was on behalf of every man. Did not Hebrews ii. 6 say that He tasted death for every man? That, replied the St. Andrew's man, was what the English version said, but the Greek word for "every," *pantos*, only meant "every" in the sense of "all." Humanity in general, and not every man in particular, was the intended reference. At this point, his opponent cried that he was a Calvinist. This greatly offended Mr. Wood, and he strenuously denied that he was either a Calvinist or a Lutheran. He did not desire to be called after any man. Thus they argued for some time until the minister confessed himself "spent." He would be pleased, said he, to meet his opponent in St. Andrew's, or correspond with him, but he could not debate any longer with a man who would not be convinced of his errors. Mr. Browne, however, was far from admitting defeat, and called on any in the audience who might care to continue the debate. None forthcoming, he inquired if any would debate with him on the question of infant baptism. This offer again failed to find a response, and the meeting was dismissed.

Among those who were attracted to the camp meetings, and were persuaded to accept the Baptist's faith were three sisters, Elspet, Isobel and Christin Millar. Only Christin was resident

in Cupar, but all were within the Presbytery area. They were well-known in the district, and there was no small commotion when they were publicly baptised in the Eden. There were other converts, but only one other name is known, that of Isobel Webster, and it is recorded that the established church had to use strong measures to persuade parents to bring their children for christening.

In June the following year, 1653, the regiment was ordered for summer training to Falkland, but not before a romance had been happily concluded within the little group of Baptists. One of the English soldiers, William Thomson, asked the hand of Isobel Webster in marriage, and she consenting, they were married by Mr. Browne, and set up house together in the town.

The tyrannical power, which reverted again to the Presbytery, was soon directed against the baptised, but they persisted in their faith, and the clerk of the Presbytery unwittingly paid a high tribute to their zeal when he wrote, in 1657, that "these persons use diligence to reduce others to the same error." It was at the Synod of Fife meeting of September, 1656, that a determined attempt was begun to stamp out the few who maintained the Baptist "heresy." The Presbytery of Cupar had asked the Synod for advice on the matter, and they instructed the Cupar minister, "in whose congregation they were," to proceed against them "according to the order of this church in such cases." Having received this instruction, the Cupar Presbytery at its next meeting in November cited the principal offenders to appear before them, "and ordeines the kirk officer of the parish of Cupar to summon them, to wit, Elspet, Isobel and Christin Millars." When they appeared the Moderator questioned them about their beliefs. He came to the main issue right away. "Do you regard your baptism in infancy as valid baptism?" "No," the sisters replied, "we do not regard sprinkling at infancy as true baptism." "Do you also deny the teaching of the church with regard to the atonement?" "Yes," they agreed, "we believe that Christ died for all and not only for some." "What, then, do you think about the doctrine of election? Is it not plainly taught in the Scriptures?" "Yes," they agreed again, "it is. But election is not absolute and unconditional. Freedom of choice is also taught in the Scriptures." "What!" cried the Moderator, "is not the Spirit of God irresistible?" "We believe that the Spirit of God is irresistible when God wills it." "Do you also agree with the heresy that the soul sleeps till the resurrection?" "We do," was their answer. It was plain that the sisters were not to be moved, and they were dismissed with the charge to appear again when summoned. This they did until they saw no point in submitting themselves further to questioning.

The matter appears in the minutes of the Synod at the next meeting in April, 1657, where it is recorded, "that the *pro primo* prayer before excommunication said in Cupar church by order of the Presbytery had failed to move the contumacious heretics . . ." The Presbytery were recommended to summon them again, and if they refused, "to proceed against them to the highest ecclesiastical censure according to the order and steps of procedure usual in this church." At the Presbytery meeting of June 4th, the invitation to conference having again been rejected, the sisters were declared contumacious, and ordered to be summoned out of the pulpit publicly. But Mr. John Makgill, the Cupar minister, requested permission to visit privately Christin Millar before naming her. This he did, and advised his brethren on June 18th to delay a little, as he thought there was the possibility of repentance. It was a false hope, however, and from his pulpit on the following Sunday he performed the first step in excommunication. July 11th saw the final proclamation delivered with the terrible prayer, "Here we in Thy Name exclude and excommunicate from Thy body, and from our society, Christin Millar, as a person slanderous, proud, contemner, and a member for this present altogether corrupted and pernicious to the body. And her sin (albeit with sorrow of heart) by virtue of our ministry, we bind and pronounce the same to be bound in heaven and earth. We further give over into the hands and power of the Devil the said Christin Millar to the destruction of her flesh; straitly charging all that profess the Lord Jesus, to whose knowledge this our sentence shall come to repute, and to hold the said Christin Millar accursed, and unworthy of the society of Christians; declaring unto all men that such as hereafter, before her repentance, shall haunt or familiarly accompany her, are partakers of her impiety and subject to the like excommunication."

The curt note was thereafter inserted in the Kirk Session records:

July. 11. 1658. Christin Myllar, anabaptist, is excommunicated this day, *excommunicatore majore*.

The awful sentence having been pronounced, we hear nothing more of this staunch woman. We may infer that the sentence would be rigorously enforced. She would have none to speak to her, trade with her, give her employment, or bury her. It is not surprising that the next attempt at coercion ended in recantation. William Thomson and his wife Isobel were cited three times to appear for examination before the Presbytery, but refused. Forthwith Thomson was publicly summoned from the pulpit, and visited. Excommunication was threatened, and on February 10th, 1659, he consented to appear before the church court and, "professed that he was convinced of his errore and

defectione to Anabaptisme, whereto he had been through ignorance seduced, and was content to submit to any way of satisfaction for the removing of that scandall; as also for the scandall of his disorderly way of marriage with Isobel Webster. The Presbytery ordeines," the minute continues, "that he shall go to the congregation of Cupar, wher he was dipped and give offence, and there present his child of four yeirs old to be baptised ther publicly before the congregation, to profess his faults afoirsaid and to promise ther (as he had done heere) to seek God for stedfastness heirafter; and his wyffe Isobel Webster was lykewayes appointed to declare her repentance, the afoirsaid day, for her disorderly way of marriage."

There were no more excommunications. Those who conorted with the Baptists gave way before these stern measures. Thus Cupar again achieved a united church, and no more secessions to the Baptist cause were made until 155 years later, in 1815, when another pioneer, the Rev. Jonathan Watson, braved the opposition of his day, and constituted the Baptist cause in the Royal burgh, which still continues its witness to this day.

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*Christian Citizenship*, by T. G. Dunning, M.A., Ph.D. Foreword by The Rt. Hon. Ernest Brown, M.P. (Kingsgate Press, 1s. net).

For over ten years Dr. Dunning has had the almost impossible task of directing three departments of the Baptist Union, Education, Temperance and Social Service. The confidence he has won throughout the denomination—and indeed among Baptists on the Continent and in the States—attests the success he has achieved in this unenviable position. The practical probems of Citizenship have been much before him, and in this little volume he discusses how the Christian, a citizen of a spiritual realm, should meet the claims of the earthly order to which he belongs. He does not shirk difficulties, and gives advice which will be of much value to social workers.

*A Short History of Baptist Missionary Work in British Honduras, 1822-1939*, by Robert Cleghorn, O.B.E., J.P. (Kingsgate Press, 1s. 6d. net).

An interesting but unpretentious account, in twenty-nine short chapters, of Missionary work in British Honduras. The author last year celebrated the jubilee of his arrival in Central America, and, in addition to retelling the story of earlier years, he relates many interesting experiences of his own long period of devoted service.