
Thomas Boston and the Authorship of "Queries to the Friendly-Adviser"

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Thomas Boston (1676-1732) was a prolific writer, but comparatively few of his works were published in his lifetime. One anonymous pamphlet, published in 1722 and generally attributed to him, is *Queries to the Friendly-Adviser*. In this article we give some reasons for doubting that Boston was the author, and we suggest Robert Riccaltoun as a more likely alternative.

1. Boston's non-posthumous publications

We begin with a discussion of those works which were undoubtedly by Boston and which were published in his lifetime. All of these are referred to in his *Memoirs*.¹

¹ Boston's *Memoirs* were published in Edinburgh in 1776 by his grandson. They are a conflation of two manuscripts, *Passages of my Life* and *A General Account of my Life*. The *General Account* was published in full in Edinburgh in 1908, edited by G. D. Low, who hoped also to publish the *Passages* but without success. In 1848-52 Samuel McMillan published Boston's *Complete Works* in Aberdeen in twelve volumes, the twelfth being the *Memoirs*. The *Complete Works* were reprinted in London in 1853, and again by Richard Owen Roberts (Wheaton, Illinois, 1980), and by Tentmaker Publications in 2002. McMillan did not always follow the original editions but we have not noticed any changes in the *Memoirs*. Another common edition of the *Memoirs* is that of G. H. Morrison (Edinburgh, 1899), reprinted by Banner of Truth in 1988. This has the advantage of an index and footnotes but it is slightly abridged from McMillan's edition and, annoyingly, it lacks the useful running head of the year which the other editions have. For convenience, we give the page references for both the McMillan and Morrison editions.

Boston's first publication was anonymous and was an action sermon on Hosea 2:19 entitled *The Everlasting Espousals*, preached at Ettrick on 24th August 1714. A friend offered to publish this and Boston agonized for weeks over whether to agree. He finally gave his consent on 26th January 1715, and a printed copy was in his hand by 26th March. Twelve hundred copies were printed and most of these had been disposed of by the end of May. A second edition, by the same printer, appeared in April the following year and a third edition in 1732, after Boston's death. On 25th April 1716 Boston recorded: "I kept a secret fast for several causes; among which were my study of the accentuation, and for a blessing on the second edition of *The Everlasting Espousals*."²

His next publication, in 1719, was on the Abjuration Oath and was published without his knowledge: "I wrote a paper entituled, *Reasons for refusing the Abjuration Oath in its latest form, 1719*; the which is *in retentis*, together with a printed copy thereof incorrectly done. This, a considerable time after, came surprisingly to my hand, not knowing how it came to be published."³

Boston's third publication, in 1720, was the first edition of *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*.⁴ This consisted of sermons originally preached in Simprin and then expanded in Ettrick in 1708-9. The idea of publishing them was first suggested to him in 1711 by Dr Trotter and they were nearly printed in 1714 but were held back because of the threat of a Jacobite rebellion. Dr Trotter died about 1717 and one of Boston's elders, Thomas Linton, took over as sponsor but he too died the following year. Soon after this the ministers Gabriel Wilson, Henry Davidson, and John Simson offered to put up money for the work and they brought in Robert Wightman, an Edinburgh merchant. Wightman was given permission by Boston to polish the draft and the printing was

² *The everlasting espousals: being a sermon preach'd at the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, August 1714. And publish'd at the desire of some that heard it* (Edinburgh, printed by John Moncur, 1715), 66pp. See *General Account of My Life*, pp. 203, 205, 211-2; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 253-6, 280-1, (Morrison), pp. 277-8, 305-6.

³ *Reasons for refusing the Oath of Abjuration in its latest form, 1719* (no title page), 24pp. The only recorded copy is in Glasgow University Library. See *General Account*, p. 240, and *Memoirs* (McMillan), p. 311, (Morrison), p. 340.

⁴ *Human nature in its four-fold state: of primitive integrity, entire depravation, begun recovery, and consummate happiness or misery; subsisting in the parents of mankind in paradise, the irregenerate, the regenerate, all mankind in the future state. In several practical discourses: by a minister of the Gospel in the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, printed by Mr James M'Euen and Company, and sold at his shop a little below the Cross, 1720), viii+12+614pp.

nearly finished by July 1720, but on examining it Boston found it "pitifully done and mangled". Wightman's revision was far more extensive than Boston had envisaged, and Boston had to arrange for the reprinting of eleven leaves and the preparation of a lengthy list of errata. He finally received a bound copy on 6th November.⁵

Boston does not record how many copies of the first edition were printed but it must have been a large number because Boston himself received a hundred free copies. The book evidently sold well and by July 1721 the printer, James M'Euen, had persuaded Boston to prepare a second edition. This, however, was greatly delayed. Boston was determined to undo Wightman's changes but most of the original draft had been destroyed in the printing. He was still working on his revision in 1727 and he records that he finished preparing the list of errata on 15th November 1729. He received his bound copy of the second edition on 10th January 1730. M'Euen continued in business until 1732 but for some reason the printing of this second edition was entrusted to other hands. Boston received two dozen free copies of the second edition and they sold for four shillings each.⁶

The next publication attributed to Boston is *Queries to the Friendly-Adviser* in 1722, but of this there is no trace in his *General Account* or his *Memoirs*. There are, however, two other publications at that time in which he had a hand and to which he refers in his *Memoirs*. The first was *The representation and petition of several ministers of the Gospel to the General Assembly met at Edinburgh May 1721*. This was submitted to the General Assembly by the twelve Representers but it was Boston who prepared the final draft which was then slightly modified before submission. The second publication was *The protestation of several ministers of the Gospel, against the General Assembly's illegal proceedings, upon the head of doctrine, given in to the*

⁵ *General Account*, pp. 182, 189, 203, 234-5, 248-50; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 209, 233-5, 253, 305, 319-2, (Morrison), pp. 227, 253-5, 275-6, 333-4, 349-53. For a fuller account of the printing of the *Fourfold State* see Philip G. Ryken, *Thomas Boston as Preacher of the Fourfold State* (Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 57-67.

⁶ *Human nature in its four-fold state: of primitive integrity, entire depravation, begun recovery, and consummate happiness or misery, subsisting in the parents of mankind in paradise, the irregenerate, the regenerate, all mankind in the future state. In several practical discourses: by a minister of the Gospel in the Church of Scotland. The second edition, carefully revised by the author* (Edinburgh, printed for Mr James Davidson and John Paton Booksellers, and sold at their shops, 1730), xi+9+608pp. See *General Account*, pp. 257, 279, 293, 296; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 331, 362, 394, 402, 441, (Morrison), pp. 362, 394, 427, 436, 470. According to Ryken, the differences between the first and second editions are minor (p. 66).

General Assembly met at Edinburgh, May 1722, which had also been drafted by Boston and which was handed by the Representatives to the General Assembly on 21st May 1722 and published immediately afterwards.⁷

Boston's next publication was his edition of the *Marrow of Modern Divinity* in 1726.⁸ He began this at the instigation of his friends Gabriel Wilson and Henry Davidson on 10th July 1721 and the notes were finished by the beginning of July 1722. In February 1725 William Wardrob, an apothecary in Edinburgh, proposed publication, and after prayer on April 6th and April 13th Boston gave his permission. The work was published about April 1726 but the printer's name and the place of printing were withheld. "Out of regard," says Boston, "to the authority of the Church, that yet in that matter I durst not obey, I took to myself the name of 'Philalethes Irenaeus', as bearing my real and sincere design therein, viz. truth and peace. In compiling of these notes, I had in view, what was advanced against the *Marrow*, in the several prints extant at that time, and which had come to my hand; especially Principal Hadow's *Antinomianism of the Marrow of Modern Divinity detected*; but naming nobody."⁹

His next publication was a sermon or series of sermons on Phil. 2:7 entitled *The Mystery of Christ in the Form of a Servant*.¹⁰ In 1721 he had promised a few sermons to James M'Euen, the printer of the *Fourfold State*. Presumably this was for the series which M'Euen was running under the title "Five sermons preached before and after the celebration of the Lord's Supper", with contributions from Thomas Halyburton (1721 and 1723), William Wishart (1721), Walter Douglas (1721), John

⁷ *General Account*, pp. 251, 254, 260; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 324, 326, 333, (Morrison), pp. 354-6, 365.

⁸ *The marrow of modern divinity: the first part, touching, both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace: with their use and end, both in the time of the Old Testament, and in the time of the New: clearly describing the way to eternal life, by Jesus Christ: in a dialogue betwixt Evangelista, a minister of the Gospel. Nomista, a legalist. Antinomista, an antinomian, and Neophytus, a young Christian. By E. F. The twelfth edition, corrected. With notes, by Philalethes Irenaeus (s.l., s.n., 1726), 24+viii+384pp.*

⁹ *General Account*, pp. 256, 261-2, 269-70, 274; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 330, 334-5, 346, 351, (Morrison), pp. 361, 366, 379.

¹⁰ *The mystery of Christ in the form of a servant: briefly enquired into, and practically improved; in a sermon preached at the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper: with a further improvement of that mystery, both as to faith and practice; preached after the administration of that ordinance. By a minister of the Gospel, author of the Fourfold State* (Edinburgh, printed by Mr James M'Euen and Company, and sold at the said Mr M'Euen's Shop, 1727), 47pp. A second edition was issued in 1742.

Willison (1722), and William M'George (1729). Boston evidently regretted his promise. The sermons that he eventually sent were preached at and after the Ettrick communion of June 1723 but he did not forward them to M'Euen until 1727. Boston records: "I have also put the last hand to some sermons on Phil. 2:7 . . . and they are now sent in to Mr M'Euen: and so I am relieved of a promise I made, namely, to give him some sermons for the press. When that promise was made several years ago these sermons were not in being, and so could not be in my view. I hope never to make such a promise again, nor to print for printing's sake. And I bless God I am delivered from this by a plain providential call to publish these." The sermons were published in October 1727.¹¹

Boston's final publication during his lifetime was a preface that he wrote to a new edition of *The great sin and chief guiltiness of Scotland*, brought out by Gabriel Wilson about February 1732.¹² In October 1731 Boston had been assisting Wilson at the Maxton communion:

As we were coming away homeward, Mr Wilson put into my hand a printed paper of the Commission of the General Assembly 1650, entituled, *The great sin and chief guiltiness of Scotland, in the contempt of the Gospel*, designed to be reprinted; desiring me to write a preface to it. This I utterly refused, and that in earnest; knowing nothing particularly about the matter, and judging him more fit to manage things of that kind. However he obliged me to keep it, to read it at my leisure, and shew what I observed in it. . . . Getting home on Wednesday, as I lay abed that night, I read the paper abovementioned; and I was thereby, thro' the blessing of God on it, convinced, instructed, directed, comforted, and recovered; and particularly helped towards a right use-making of sacraments

¹¹ *General Account*, pp. 257, 264, 279; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 330-1, 337-8, 362-3, (Morrison), pp. 361-2, 369, 394.

¹² *The great sin and chief guiltiness of Scotland: in the contempt of the Gospel, as it was branched out in particulars, by the commission of the General Assembly, in the year, 1650. Re-printed anno 1654, at the desire of the Synod of Lothian, for the fast appointed by them in that year: now again re-printed, with a preface by Mr Thomas Boston minister of the Gospel at Etterick* (Third edition, Edinburgh: Printed, and sold by Mr James Davidson at his Shop opposite to the Cross, and other booksellers, 1732), vi+12pp. The material that Boston was prefacing had recently been included in *A collection of some causes of fasts, appointed by the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland, and their commissions, before the year 1651. For reformation in religion* (s.l., s.n., 1728) viii+40pp. This was published by John M'Main and other Cameronian sympathisers, see Thomas M'Crië (ed.), *Correspondence of Rev Robert Wodrow* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1842-3), vol. 3, p. 231.

received. . . . From the time I read the paper aforesaid, I was so taken with it, that I cried earnestly again and again unto the Lord, that He would vouchsafe to put the honour on me, to be instrumental in the way desired towards its public usefulness; and on the Wednesday and Thursday, while I sat in my bed, by reason of my leg, the Lord gave me somewhat by way of recommendation of it. Herein my soul rejoiced.¹³

Boston does not mention the actual publication of the pamphlet but the *General Account* ends in November 1731. In the same way, there is a letter which Boston wrote on 22nd February 1732 to the Presbytery of Selkirk regarding the General Assembly's "Act and Overture concerning the Method of Planting Vacant Churches" of 1731, which was published in 1734.¹⁴ This, likewise, was written too late to be mentioned in the *Memoirs*. Boston died on 20th May 1732.

There are various other works which Boston prepared for the press but which were not published during his lifetime, such as his sermons on *A View of the Covenant of Grace and Memorial concerning Personal and Family Fasting*, published in 1734; part of *The Sovereignty and Wisdom of God displayed in the Afflictions of Men (Crook in the Lot)*, published in 1737; and the *Tractatus Stigmologicus*, published in 1738. All these are referred to in the *Memoirs*.¹⁵

The purpose of this somewhat lengthy account is to show that all Boston's undoubted non-posthumous publications were referred to by him in his *General Account* and his *Memoirs*; that he was exceptionally cautious about going into print; and that he gave much prayer to the matter, both before publication and after. To adapt the words of the *Book of Common Prayer*, he did not publish "unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly" but "reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God".

¹³ *General Account*, pp. 348-9; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 440-2, (Morrison), pp. 469-70.

¹⁴ *The mind of the modest, holy and learn'd, Mr Thomas Boston, late minister of the gospel at Ettrick: concerning the Act of Assembly 1732, while it was yet an overture; in his letter to the Presbytery thereanent; together with the Presbytery of Selkirk's reasons why the said overture ought not to be turn'd into a standing act; also a speech relative to the same subject, &c. with some thoughts upon the case of the four brethren / the extracts attested to be genuine, by Mr Gabriel Wilson minister at Maxton* (Edinburgh, printed by T. Lumisden and J. Robertson, 1734), 40pp.

¹⁵ *Covenant of Grace: General Account*, p. 290; *Memoirs* (McMillan), p. 388, (Morrison), p. 421; *Memorial on Fasting: General Account*, pp. 210, 293; *Memoirs* (McMillan), pp. 279, 390, 393, (Morrison), pp. 304, 422-3, 426; *Crook in the Lot: Memoirs* (McMillan), p. 443, (Morrison), p. 472; *Tractatus: General Account and Memoirs passim*.

2. "Queries to the Friendly-Adviser"

The Marrow Controversy might be said to have begun with the republication by James Hog in 1718 of Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity*. In 1720 the General Assembly passed an Act condemning the *Marrow* and in 1721 the twelve so-called "Representers" submitted a Representation and Petition to the Assembly requesting the repeal of the Act of 1720. The 1721 Assembly dissolved abruptly when the King's Commissioner was taken ill, and the case was delayed until the following year. A pamphlet war ensued, the two most notable productions being Principal James Hadow's *The Antinomianism of the Marrow of Modern Divinity Detected* (1721) and Robert Riccaltoun's *Politick Disputant* (1722) in which he exposes Hadow's unscrupulous modes of argument.¹⁶

Immediately before the 1722 Assembly another lengthy pamphlet against the *Marrow* appeared bearing the title *A Friendly Advice*.¹⁷ The author of the *Queries* suggests that the author of this pamphlet was "a very near friend to the pretended detector", in other words was Hadow himself. The *Queries to the Friendly-Adviser* was a hasty response, written during the Assembly, to the *Friendly Advice*.¹⁸

The *Queries* begins with an eight-page "prefix'd letter" purporting to be "to a friend" but probably simply a rhetorical device to act as an introduction. The letter is obviously written from within the Representer camp, though by someone who was not a Representer (as we shall see shortly). It bemoans the treatment of the Representatives and lays the blame "at the door of some particular leaders, who either get, or assume too much power, in the direction, and management of our Church

¹⁶ The principal sources on the Marrow Controversy are Thomas M'Crie, "Account of the Controversy respecting the Marrow of Modern Divinity", *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, XXX (August, October, December 1831), New Series I (February 1832); and David C. Lachman, *The Marrow Controversy: An Historical and Theological Analysis* (Rutherford House, Edinburgh, 1988). Also useful is Donald Beaton, "The Marrow of Modern Divinity and the Marrow Controversy", *Records of Scottish Church History Society*, I (1926), pp. 112-134.

¹⁷ *A friendly advice, for preserving the purity of doctrine, and peace of the church: Directed unto the twelve brethren, who gave in their representation in favours of The marrow of modern divinity, to the General Assembly 1721* (Edinburgh, printed by J. Mosman and Company, for John Paton Book-Seller, and to be sold at his shop in the Parliament-Closs, 1722), 134pp. This is the same imprint as for Hadow's *Antinomianism of the Marrow Detected*.

¹⁸ *Queries to the friendly-adviser, to which is prefix'd a letter to a friend, concerning the affair of the Marrow, &c.* (s.l., s.n., 1722), 36pp. See pp. 24, 34, for remarks on the authorship of the *Friendly Advice*.

affairs". It laments, too, that there are "a goodly number of honest men in the ministry" who disapprove of the Act condemning the *Marrow* but who are not prepared to make "a bold and open declaration of their sentiment".

The remainder of the pamphlet occupies twenty-eight pages and consists of seventeen numbered queries and then a further eight unnumbered queries, as if the printer had omitted to insert the numbers for these. The first four queries are "general" and the rest are said to be "on section I". The impression is that more queries would have been forthcoming had there been time. The queries are uneven in their length and scope. Most consist of a short paragraph but Query VIII takes up three and half pages, largely made up of a speech put into the mouth of a sinner in hell who followed the anti-Marrow doctrine of his minister. Query XVII goes on for nearly eight pages, rehearsing many of the arguments of the *Politick Disputant*, and asking whether that book has not "detected" Principal Hadow's "deepest draughts", "disingenuity", "misrepresentations", and so on. Two or three of the unnumbered queries also relate to the *Politick Disputant*. The pamphlet concludes by promising a discussion of the Westminster Assembly's doctrine of faith, "in our next".

Several of the queries involve personal attacks. One accuses the Friendly Adviser of either "ignorance or disingenuity"; another, of "the most abominable and cunning calumny"; and another names Principal Hadow and accuses him of "error, sophistry, disingenuity, blunders, airy confidence, and assuming spirit, slandering talent, wilful mistakes, uncharitableness, preposterous zeal for an untenable cause, unfairness, legal and anti-evangelical strain, in his performance". It is also hinted that in the 1720 Assembly he took a pen and pretended to cross out certain clauses in the draft Act condemning the *Marrow*, so as to deceive some members of the Assembly into voting for it.

The timing of publication of the *Queries* is curious. The 1722 Assembly commenced on Thursday 10th May and the *Friendly Advice* probably came out at the beginning of that week.¹⁹ Presumably the

¹⁹ Several other publications came out about this time. One was the *Some Observations upon the Answers of the Brethren to the Queries proposed to them*, an 86-page tract written anonymously against the *Marrow*. On the other side, John Williamson on 12th May republished the *Second Part of the Marrow of Modern Divinity*, only the first part having been published by Hog in 1718. About the same time he published anonymously *The Scope and Substance of the Marrow of Modern Divinity*, an 148-page defence of the *Marrow* against Principal Hadow's attacks.

author of the *Queries* immediately began his response but the prefatory letter was not completed until Saturday 19th May by which time the *Marrow* case was nearing its conclusion.²⁰ Probably the type for the body of the pamphlet had already been set up, but even so, assuming Sabbath observance, the pamphlet cannot have been published before Monday 21st. The Assembly was due to meet at 3pm on Monday but in fact it met about 5pm and disposed of the case of the *Marrow* that evening. It is possible that a hundred and sixty copies of the *Queries* were printed and sewn up by Monday afternoon for distribution to the members of the Assembly but they would hardly have had time to read it before the vote. By the next day the pamphlet was out of date as far as the Assembly was concerned. The advertised price on the title page was 2d but one wonders how many copies were sold.

The purpose of publication of the *Queries* is unclear. Presumably it was intended to complement Williamson's *Scope and Substance of the Marrow* but its influence on the Assembly's decision on the *Marrow* must have been minimal, given its late appearance. The author seems to have been aware of this and his prefatory letter makes little attempt to address those members of the Assembly who were undecided on the *Marrow*. Its main purpose seems, instead, to have been as an interim attack on Principal Hadow until a fuller one could be prepared. Indeed the author virtually affirms this in one of his queries: "And whether this Book [the *Queries*] may not mean Time, serve the Principal to think on, till he be attack'd from another Airth, or from the same after another Manner, as he may reasonably expect, but not long for?"²¹ The haste to publish, presumably, was because the attack on Hadow could more readily be distributed to members of the Assembly while they were still considering the *Marrow*.

²⁰ The prefatory letter concludes with the words: "For last Night a *Committee* of the whole House sat till near Twelve at Night on it, and yet parted without concluding what the Sense of the Assembly's Act was. And how to reconcile it with the *Scriptures*, and our *Standarts*," *Queries*, p. 8. This is the same event referred to in Robert Wodrow's letter of 19th May: "Yesterday the same committee met at four in the afternoon and sat till near twelve at night," Wodrow, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 649.

²¹ *Queries*, p. 34.

3. Was Boston the author?

The *Queries* are attributed to Boston by the *English Short Title Catalogue*, and by Ryken, Lachman, Addison, Low, and Halkett and Laing. We have not found any earlier attribution than that of Halkett and Laing (1885), nor have we seen any discussion on why Boston is thought to have been the author.²² M'Crie, significantly, refers to the pamphlet without attributing it to Boston.²³ We regard it as exceedingly unlikely that Boston was the author, for the following reasons.

First, the aggressive and sarcastic style of the publication is quite alien to Boston. This is already evident from the quotations we have given, but the three opening queries will provide further confirmation:

Whether this Friendly Advice may not be, with as much Reason, given to a good Number of Ministers in *Scotland*, as to the *Representers* against the *Assembly's Act*, condemning the *Marrow*?

Whether this Pamphlet, be not, under the *Mask of a Friendly Advice*, rather *truly* designed to rivet the groundless Jealousies, which some have admitted of the *Heterodoxy* of the *Representers*, and to excite *Resentments* on that Account, in the Minds of the Members of the *General Assembly*?

Whether this Friendly Adviser hath not a mighty Conceit of himself, and of his Performance, when, it seems he hath projected, That the *Representers* should, upon a very cursory perusal of his Book, quit the Cause they have so deliberately engaged in; seeing he hath delayed it's publication till they can't have Time to allow it a deliberate Reading and Examination? Whether this industrious keeping up of the Book be not a Ground of Jealousie of this sinister Design?²⁴

²² Ryken, pp. 56n, 311; Lachman, p. 381; William Addison, *The Life and Writings of Thomas Boston of Ettrick* (Edinburgh, 1936), pp. 144-5; *General Account*, p. 358; Samuel Halkett and John Laing, *A Dictionary of the Anonymous and Pseudonymous Literature of Great Britain* (4 vols., Edinburgh, 1882-88).

²³ M'Crie, *Account*, Aug. 1831, p. 551n). John Brown of Whitburn in the first edition of *Gospel Truth Accurately Stated* (Edinburgh, 1817), mentions the *Queries* in passing without attribution, pp. 31-2. We have not had an opportunity of consulting Brown's "greatly enlarged and improved" second edition (Glasgow, 1831).

²⁴ *Queries*, pp. 9-10.

It is very hard to imagine Boston writing in this way, and one feels that his sensitive conscience would have smitten him had he done so. His friends Alexander Colden, Gabriel Wilson, and Henry Davidson described him as having "a natural aversion to anything rude or uncivil in words or behaviour, and a delicate feeling, in case of meeting with ought of that sort"; though they acknowledged that he "could be heavy or severe in his words when there was just occasion, or he judged the same necessary". In the Marrow controversy, they said, he carefully avoided inflammatory language:

[It] was his settled mind, that solidly and strongly to establish the truth, was in many cases the best, the shortest, and the most effectual way to confute error, without irritating and inflaming the passions of men, to their own, and to the truth's prejudice, both of them. Therefore in his explication and vindication of the Protestant doctrine, in a paroxysm quarrelled and condemned in a certain book, he answered all and everybody but took notice expressly of nobody. He obeyed the voice, "But thou, O man of God, flee these things".²⁵

A second reason for thinking that Boston did not write the *Queries* is that he makes no mention of them in his *Memoirs* or in his *General Account of My Life*. As we have seen, he refers, usually at considerable length, to every other publishing venture in which he was engaged; and it is almost impossible to think that something as controversial as this could have passed entirely without comment. We regard this reason as virtually conclusive.

A third reason for thinking that Boston did not write the *Queries* is the haste with which they were composed, and the hurry with which the decision to publish them was taken. This, as we have seen, was not at all Boston's way. Furthermore, the consequence of this haste was that the *Queries* are no more than a minor and disappointing contribution to the controversy. They lack the weightiness of Boston's authentic publications.

²⁵ Preface to Thomas Boston, *The Sovereignty and Wisdom of God displayed in the Afflictions of Men* (Edinburgh, 1737). Our argument is confirmed by Addison who, although he attributes the *Queries* to Boston, regards them as a discredit to him, thus implying that they are quite different from his usual gracious and edifying style, p. 145.

The fourth, and perhaps most conclusive, reason for thinking that Boston did not write the *Queries* is that the author states, or at least implies, that he was not one of the Representatives. He was intimately acquainted with them, he says, but he did not know what they intended to do: “I much doubt, if they will find it their Duty to let their Testimony fall, tho’ their *own Mother* should treat them, as is feared. But I know not their *Resolves*.”²⁶ Boston could hardly have written this when he had with him a protest, already prepared, which he was fully expecting and intending to present to the Assembly in the event of a negative decision. If the author was not a Representative then not only is Boston eliminated but also others who had written in defence of the *Marrow* such as Hog, James Kid, Gabriel Wilson, and John Williamson.

For these several reasons we think that the attribution of the *Queries* to Boston can be rejected, unless some overwhelming evidence to the contrary can be brought forward.²⁷

4. Was Robert Riccaltoun the author?

The author of the *Queries to the Friendly-Adviser* was present at the 1722 Assembly though not a commissioner; was a friend and supporter of the Representatives though not one of them; had the spirit and the financial means to engage in pamphlet warfare; and was prepared to employ the weapons of sarcasm and personal criticism. He was also well versed in the arguments of *The Politick Disputant*. Who was this person?

The obvious candidate is Robert Riccaltoun himself. Riccaltoun was born in 1691, studied at Edinburgh University, was licensed by the Presbytery of Kelso in 1717, and was assistant to Archibald Deans at Bowden “for a number of years” prior to 1725. In that year he was settled as minister of Hobkirk where he remained until his death in 1769.²⁸

²⁶ *Queries*, pp. 5-6.

²⁷ Agnew mentions an early-eighteenth-century list of pamphlets, in contemporary handwriting, which he used to identify the authorship of one Marrow pamphlet, D. C. A. Agnew, *Theology of Consolation* (privately printed, 1880), p. 398. It is possible that the same or a similar list identifies Boston as the author of the *Queries*. But it is evident that there was considerably uncertainty, even then, about the authorship of several of the Marrow pamphlets; see e.g. M’Crie, *Account*, Dec. 1831, p. 822n; Wodrow, *Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 649; and Robert Wodrow, *Analecta* (4 vols., Maitland Club, Glasgow, 1842-3), vol. 3, pp. 235-6.

²⁸ Biographical information about Riccaltoun can be found in standard sources such as *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, *Dictionary of National Biography*, and *Oxford Dictionary of National*

Probably his first publication was the *Politick Disputant*, and his subsequent works on the *Marrow*, both published in 1723, were the *Review of an Essay on Gospel and Legal Preaching* and the *Sober Enquiry*.²⁹ Thereafter he did not publish anything until his *Inquiry into the Spirit and Tendency of Sandeman's Letters on Theron and Aspasio* in 1762. Three volumes of *Works* never before printed were published posthumously by his son in 1771-2. Three other works are also sometimes attributed to him. Two of these, *The Controversie concerning the Marrow of Modern Divinity: considered in several familiar dialogues, Dialogue I* (1721), and *Dialogue II* (1722), are more usually attributed to James Hog.³⁰ The third, *A dissertation on the conduct of the Jewish Sanhedrim, and the advice offered by Gamaliel, in the famous trial of the Apostles, Acts v. 17-41: considered as an argument for the truth of Christianity* (Edinburgh, 1769) is usually attributed to Duncan Shaw.

An interesting account of his life was published by John Newton in 1795 from information received from Riccaltoun's son. It seems that Riccaltoun had inherited a considerable sum of money from his father but got himself into financial trouble by becoming surety for Walter Hugens, his wife's brother-in-law.³¹ Hugens defaulted on his debts and Riccaltoun spent the rest of his life trying to pay them off. According to Newton, the problem surfaced when Hugens was settled as minister of Dunrossness in Shetland, which was in 1720. We are inclined, however,

Biography; see also John Newton, *Works* (6 vols., Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 1988), vol. 6, pp. 447-52, and Agnew, pp. 334-341. The ODNB entry blunders in describing Riccaltoun as a member of the Moderate party. It also summarizes the Marrow controversy as pitting "the radical evangelicalism of the Marrow men against the more moderate Presbyterianism of the General Assembly"; an unsuccessful attempt, one feels, to conceal the author's unfamiliarity with the subject.

²⁹ Riccaltoun's son believed that his father wrote the *Sober Enquiry*, which seems conclusive, Newton, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 449, 452. The other two works are almost invariably attributed to him. The *Sober Enquiry* is generally regarded as one of the most able and useful works to come out of the Marrow controversy, see e.g. Brown, *Gospel Truth*, p. 346; John Macleod, *Scottish Theology* (Edinburgh, 1943), p. 158.

³⁰ Low (pp. 362-3) and Lachman (pp. 362-4, 494) ascribe them to Hog; Agnew (pp. 334, 338) and Beaton (p. 132) to Riccaltoun. Among contemporaries, Matthew Crawford thought that they were by Hog (M'Crie, *Account*, Dec. 1831, p. 822n) and Robert Wodrow by John Williamson (*Correspondence*, vol. 2, p. 649). Beaton thought that they showed "remarkable ability", while Lachman finds them "not well written", "rambling", "verbose", and "obscure". The first dialogue was reprinted in *A full and true State of the Controversy concerning the Marrow of Modern Divinity* (Glasgow, 1773), now available as a print-on-demand title.

³¹ Newton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 449. The *Fasti* implies a more remote relationship between Riccaltoun's and Hugens' wives – possibly they were first cousins.

to think that there is a slight inaccuracy here. Riccaltoun was not married until August 1724, so his son was describing events that occurred before his birth and might therefore be vague over precise dates. It seems unlikely, from his several publications in 1722-3, that Riccaltoun was heavily in debt at that stage, and more likely that the debts came upon him in 1724 and were the main reason why he could no longer afford to publish. In any case, in 1722 Riccaltoun seems to have been in the financial position to publish pamphlets if he wanted to.³²

In addition to this financial consideration, there are further reasons for regarding Riccaltoun as a possible author of the *Queries*. For instance, his other publications indicate that he had the time and the inclination to engage in pamphlet warfare. They show, too, that he had the combative nature to have written the *Queries*. He had already attacked Hadow directly and personally in the *Politick Disputant* and in that he had shown that he was a master of sarcasm.³³ Furthermore, there were comparatively few active combatants in the controversy. Against the *Marrow* there were Hadow, William Dunlop, James Adams, Hugh Maxwell, and, later, James Ballantine. On the *Marrow* side there were Hog, James Kid, Gabriel Wilson, and John Williamson. All of these latter writers were Representers, and Riccaltoun is the only non-Representer known to have written in defence of the *Marrow*. The fact that Riccaltoun was already involved makes it more likely that he would take up his pen again.

Another reason for thinking of Riccaltoun is the ability that appears in the *Queries*, notwithstanding the evident haste in its composition. There is a deftness in pursuing and cornering Hadow which is reminiscent of the *Politick Disputant*. Here, for example, is part of Query XVII:

³² The cost of publishing, then as now, was not inconsiderable. James Hog must have been a man of substantial means, judging by the number of his publications.

³³ The best-known example of his wit is in his *Review* of James Ballantine's *Essay upon Gospel and Legal Preaching* (1723). Among the "Errata" in the *Review* is the following in capital letters, "page 101. For Balentinus read Valentinus". On turning to the page 101, one finds the sentence, "Tertullian tells us that Balentinus, the author of the sect of the Valentinians, was so swelled with the conceit of his merit that it made him think of being made a bishop. I do not think our Essayer is so very aspiring . . ." (see Agnew, p. 398; John Warrack, *The Moderators of the Church of Scotland from 1690-1740* (Edinburgh, 1913), pp. 277-8, 352). A similar pun comes in the *Queries*, p. 5: "Some few [of the ministers of the Church] are as hard hearted towards these Representing Brethren as a craig [a spur of rock] or a smith's anvil." James Craig of Edinburgh and James Smith of Cramond were two of the leading opponents of the *Marrow*. Smith was the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1723 and 1731.

Whether the *Pol[itick] Disp[utant]* hath not made it plain, that the pretended *Detector* [i.e. Hadow] industriously keeps his own opinion out of sight, lest he should seem to come too near to the *Marrow* in the point under consideration. Whether this be not made good in several instances, as . . . in telling us, the six *Antinomian* positions are all linked together in a chain, so as if one of them be true, all must be so . . . concealing, that some of them, e.g. the second, "*A believer doth not commit sin*", are the express words of Scripture, 1 John 3:9 "*Whosoever is born of God*" (which one would think makes no odds at all, seeing every believer is born of God, and everyone that is born of God is a believer) N.B. "*doth not commit sin*"? Whether doth the Principal think this Scripture proposition is an *Antinomian* tenor? Whether doth he think it so linked with the rest, that they must be true if it be so? Whether it be not needful to understand this Scripture expression in such a sense as agrees with truth, and the analogy of faith? Whether it be not needful to compare Scripture with Scripture, for discerning its true scope? Whether all glossing of that Scripture expression is to be detested? Whether it be impracticable to gloss it into orthodoxy? And if it be capable of an orthodox gloss, whether is not that expression in the *Marrow*, that is so like it, that it is indeed the very same in sense and almost in words, "*Believers doth not commit sin*", also capable of being glossed into a sound sense? And if so, whether all the rest may not be so glossed, seeing the P[ri]ncipal himself owns that they are so linked together, that they must either be all true or all false?³⁴

The most direct argument, however, for linking Riccaltoun with the *Queries* is the familiarity that the author of the *Queries* shows with the *Politick Disputant*, and the jealousy that he evinces for it. Indeed we are inclined to think that this gives the clue to the publication of the *Queries*. We conjecture that Riccaltoun, knowing or suspecting that the *Friendly Advice* was the work of Hadow, and believing that he had already entirely exposed Hadow in the *Politick Disputant*, was vexed that Hadow had completely ignored the *Politick Disputant* in the *Friendly Advice*. In writing the *Queries*, he knew that probably it would be too late to influence the Assembly, but his aim was to put into the hands of the commissioners

³⁴ *Queries*, pp. 29-31; cf. *Politick Disputant* (Edinburgh, s.n., 1722), p. 56.

something that, when read later, would advertise the *Politick Disputant*, would undermine their confidence in Hadow, and would prepare the ground for his *Sober Enquiry* which was in preparation. As we have mentioned, the author of the *Queries* virtually affirms this “interim” purpose in one of his questions: “And whether this Book [the *Queries*] may not mean Time, serve the Principal to think on, till he be attack’d from another Airth, or from the same after another Manner, as he may reasonably expect, but not long for?”³⁵

These arguments do not, perhaps, prove that Riccaltoun was the author of the *Queries* but they show that he is by far the most likely candidate. We are not aware of any other name that is even remotely plausible.³⁶ At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that the attribution of the *Queries* to Riccaltoun raises, or at least accentuates, certain difficulties; and to the brief discussion of these we now turn.

The *Politick Disputant* was published “a considerable time” before the May Assembly of 1722 – perhaps about February, one might guess.³⁷ The final page carries a “Postscript by a private Christian”, who seems in fact to have been Riccaltoun again. The postscript warns those who spread and recommend Principal Hadow’s *Antinomianism of the Marrow of Modern Divinity Detected* to “remember that enquiry can be made after him of which take the preceding sheets as a preliminary to a more direct answer, which was in manuscript before this, tho’ its publication in providence delayed”. It is natural to interpret this as a reference to the *Sober Enquiry*, then presumably existing in manuscript. The *Queries*, similarly, closes with a promise of a discussion on the Westminster Assembly’s doctrine of faith “in our next”. If the *Queries* was indeed by Riccaltoun, then this too is presumably a reference to the *Sober Enquiry*.

When we turn to the preface of the *Sober Enquiry*, however, we find a number of puzzles. The first is detachment that Riccaltoun professes towards the Marrow Controversy. He deplores the zeal of the combatants. “It is well known,” he says, “what heights zealots of both sides are carried to, that charity seems neither to be regarded as a grace nor a moral virtue, tho’ designed by the Author of our holy and

³⁵ *Queries*, p. 34.

³⁶ Wodrow attributes the *Politick Disputant*, the *Essay on Gospel and Legal Preaching*, and the *Sober Enquiry* to “one Mr Rutherford, a preacher in the East Country”, *Analecta*, vol. 3, pp. 235-6. This must just be a mistake for Riccaltoun because there was no Church of Scotland minister called Rutherford at that time.

³⁷ *Queries*, p. 24.

peaceable religion as the very badge and cognizance of his follower: and I am sorry to say I cannot tell which side have carried their uncharitable zeal highest."³⁸ One would hardly think that the writer of these words could be the author of the abundantly zealous *Queries*. On the other hand it is universally accepted that he was the author of the equally zealous *Politick Disputant*. It seems, therefore, that the profession of detachment and neutrality was nothing but a pose; and indeed the remainder of the preface confirms this impression, as it becomes apparent that Riccaltoun was drawing his sword exclusively against Principal Hadow.

A second puzzle is Riccaltoun's explanation of why the *Sober Enquiry* had not appeared earlier.

There is one question, I know some people will be curious to have answered, *Why this was delay'd so long?* I do not reckon myself bound to account to any body, for the promises have been oftner than once made, or, shall I call them threatenings, of answering the *Principal's* book, as I am not in the least concerned in them. If it would not offend the author, I never thought that book worth bestowing so much pains on; nor should I ever have been prevail'd with to do so much as is here, were it not that I have seen what ill effects it has had upon people's minds, and how greedily embraced by some, who could have furnished much better thoughts of their own.³⁹

It is difficult to know what he means in saying that he is "not in the least concerned" in these promises or threatenings. The natural meaning is that he did not make them, which would imply that he was not the "Private Christian" at the end of the *Politick Disputant*, nor the author of the *Queries*. But then, who was this "Private Christian", if it was not Riccaltoun, and how had he got control of Riccaltoun's manuscripts? And who was the author of the *Queries*, and why did he so confidently promise his "next" on faith which he never produced, not to mention his forthcoming attack "after another manner" on Principal Hadow? A more likely interpretation, therefore, is that Riccaltoun is saying that he was not concerned about these promises, that is, that he felt no urgency for

³⁸ *A Sober Enquiry into the Grounds of the Present Differences in the Church of Scotland* (s.l., s.n., 1723), p. vi.

³⁹ *Sober Enquiry*, p. xii.

their fulfilment because he doubted whether Hadow's book was worth answering in the first place. Such a statement is then difficult to reconcile with the publishing of the promises, and with the hasty production of the *Queries*, but perhaps Riccaltoun had second thoughts about the usefulness of publishing the *Sober Enquiry*, and it is possible, too, that financial constraints were starting to hold him back.

A third puzzle is the satisfaction which he expresses with the decision of the recent Assembly, and his anxiety over the one that lay ahead.

Being of this disposition [i.e. scarcely thinking Hadow's book worth answering], it was no wonder, if the moderation and prudent caution, shown by the last *Assembly*, prevailed with me to believe that the matter was effectually laid asleep; and I should have suffered the *Marrow* to lie forever under the most injurious imputations, ere I had revived the debate, by attempting its vindication. It was upon this view that I laid aside all thoughts of this design, before they were well concerted; nor, I think, should I ever have prevailed with myself to resume, had not this business been again brought again upon the field, and new work cut out for the next *Assembly*; and that, if I am able to judge of any in these matters, of a more ticklish nature than the other, as it not only revives the old controversies, but brings several new ones upon the field, and indeed gives one a very odd view of the case ministers are like to be in, if things are carried on at this rate that the *Assembly* must be called upon to determine every problem, which has been disputed in Reformed Churches or universities, since the *Reformation*, and decide every minute difference in men's opinions.⁴⁰

Again, it is difficult to know what he is referring to. The *Sober Enquiry* was published in 1723 but whether before or after the General Assembly is unclear. If it was before the 1723 Assembly then the "moderation" and "prudent caution" must refer to the decision of the 1722 Assembly over the *Marrow*, while the "new" and "ticklish" work cut

⁴⁰ *Sober Enquiry*, pp. xii-xiii. The original punctuation attaches the first four words of this quotation ("Being of this disposition") to the sentence preceding them, where they make little sense. Riccaltoun complains in his "Errata" that his "distance from the press" hindered his revision of some of the sheets.

out for the next Assembly is presumably the case of Gabriel Wilson.⁴¹ But for a sympathizer with the *Marrow*, the only thing moderate and prudent about the conduct of the 1722 Assembly towards the *Marrow* was their ignoring the protest of the Marrowmen rather than deposing them, and this hardly merits the encomium bestowed.⁴² If, on the other hand, the *Sober Enquiry* was published after the 1723 Assembly then the "moderation" and "prudent caution" must have been in the case of Gabriel Wilson (which might possibly warrant that description), but then one is at a loss to identify the "new" and "ticklish" work – a work of such moment as to justify the appearance of the *Sober Enquiry* after a year and a half of delay.⁴³

We cannot resolve these difficulties, but they exist whether one attributes the *Queries* to Riccaltoun or not. They are not, therefore, a sufficient reason for rejecting his authorship. The fact is that the preface to the *Sober Enquiry*, like the *Queries*, is not well-conceived and does not leave a favourable impression of the author's straightforwardness. There is too much cleverness and pretence, as he adopts positions and expresses opinions which he does not wholeheartedly believe. John Newton says that Riccaltoun thought that his financial difficulties had had a blessed effect upon his character; and in looking through his writings from this period, one cannot help but concur:

His son has often heard him say, that it [his financial difficulty] was the very best dispensation that could have befallen him; as he

⁴¹ This is the view that Lachman takes, p. 432, and n.1. In October 1721 Gabriel Wilson had preached a sermon entitled *The Trust* on 1 Tim. 6:20 before the Synod of Merse and Teviotdale. Some members of the Synod had taken offence at his Marrow doctrine and initiated a case against him. This reached the Assembly in 1723.

⁴² The Act of 1722 was a very lengthy justification of the General Assembly's procedure in 1720, reiterating most of the errors, and concluding as follows: "And considering that the brethren's desire that the Act, 1720, should be repealed is unjust, the Assembly does refuse the same. And because of the injurious reflections contained in their Representation, as above mentioned, the Assembly do appoint their moderator, in their name, to rebuke and admonish them: and though their offence deserves a much higher censure, yet the Assembly forbears it, in the hopes that the great lenity used towards them shall engage them to a more dutiful behaviour in time coming," *Acts of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638-1842* (Edinburgh, 1843), pp. 548-556.

⁴³ Wilson was admonished to observe the terms of the 1722 Act and "to keep the form of sound words, and to beware of expressing himself upon any occasion in such terms as may be of bad influence on Christian practice, or any ways tend to weaken the life and power of godliness, and be of dangerous consequence to the great interests of precious souls", *Acts of the Church of Scotland*, pp. 565-6.

thought, that, if he had not been so borne down, his spirit might have been very haughty and overbearing.⁴⁴

In conclusion, we think it nearly certain that Thomas Boston did not write the *Queries to the Friendly-Adviser*, and very likely that Robert Riccaltoun did. There are several other Marrow pamphlets whose authorship would merit investigation, notably the *Familiar Dialogues* of 1721 and 1722. The difficulty in studying the Marrow controversy is in getting access to the extensive but rare material for long enough to give it proper thought. This situation might change as more of the older books are digitized.

⁴⁴ Newton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 449. On the other hand, Wodrow, writing in October 1725, had heard that Rutherford (i.e. Riccaltoun) was “a modest, blate [diffident, timid, bashful] man in his public sermons”, *Analecta*, vol. 3, p. 236.