

THE PRESBYTERY OF AYR 1581 - 1981

The Wider Outlook

Although the work of the Presbytery was concerned mainly with the people within the confines of Kyle and Carrick, its records bear witness to its concern for those outwith its own area as well as its involvement in national affairs. We include a few examples from these records

JACOBITE REBELLIONS

On 10th August 1715, an extraordinary meeting of the Presbytery was called and an announcement was made of a "designed invasion by a popish pretender from France". Consideration was given as to what could be done at that time. After prayer, "and having taken the present circumstances of affairs to their consideration, they testified their Loyalty and affection and steady adherence to his Majesty King George." Mr. Robert Cumming and John Hunter were asked "to draw the form of an address to his Majesty" within the next fortnight. On 24 August, the address was approved and the Clerk requested to "transmit the same by tomorrow's post" to the Earl of Loudoun so that he might present it to King George in London.

Similarly in 1745, hardly any support for the Jacobite cause was forthcoming from the South of Scotland. Glasgow was "much against" Charles Edward, and in Edinburgh "not one of the mob who were so fond of seeing him ever asked to enlist in his service." Not a single minister of the Kirk supported the rising. Just over two months before Culloden,

1746, February 5 "The Presbytery considering the great service done this Church and nation by his Royal Highness the Duke of Cumberland do nominate Messrs. George Reid senior and William Walker and appoint them to correspond with the Presbytery of Irvine and if it shall be found convenient betwixt and the next Presbytery, that they wait on his Royal Highness in the name of the Presbytery and return him our most humble thanks."

AFRICAN SLAVE TRADE

The Slave Trade deeply concerned the Presbytery and in February 1792, we find "The Presbytery of Ayr have taken into their serious consideration the enormities attending the African Slave Trade, feel themselves constrained to join with many others of their fellow subjects in testifying publicly their abhorrence of a traffic so barbarous and unjust and contrary to the principles of the Gospel. Of this their unanimous opinion the reasons are obvious and need not be enlarged upon: suffice it to say that they do most cordially join with those societies who are appealing to Parliament for its speedy abolition; and that they most cheerfully contribute according to their ability to defraying the necessary expense of said Application. And they appoint their Clerk to publish this their resolution in the Edinburgh and Glasgow newspapers".

NAPOLEONIC WARS

The struggle against Napoleon made considerable impact on the lives of the people of South-West Scotland and the aftermath of Trafalgar and other naval engagements is reflected in the records.

1805, November "A motion was made that all the Ministers of this Presbytery should apply the collections to be made on the ensuing Thanksgiving Day being the 5th of December next for the

purpose of affording relief to the Widows and Children of those who lost their lives, and of the wounded in the late naval engagements. Which Motion being considered the Presbytery unanimously agreed thereto. The Clerk is to inform absent Ministers of this appointment. The Collections to be sent to the Clerk who is to transmit them to the Secretary of the Patriotic Fund at Lloyd's, London".

LOYAL ADDRESSES

Throughout the 19th century and particularly during the reign of Queen Victoria, the Minute Books of Presbytery are filled with loyal addresses to the Queen and to members of the Royal household.

1837, July 6 "Dr. Hill moved that a dutiful and loyal Address of congratulation be presented to her Majesty Queen Victoria, on her accession to the throne. This motion was seconded and unanimously agreed to. Drafts of these Addresses were produced, and after having been read and duly considered, were approved of – the tenor whereof follows . .

To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty, The humble Address of the Presbytery of Ayr.

Most Gracious Majesty,

We your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal Subjects, the Ministers and Elders of the Presbytery of Ayr, in Presbytery assembled, beg leave humbly to express our heartfelt congratulations on Your Majesty's accession to the throne, and our warm attachment to Your Majesty's person and government.

It seems that our forefathers set great store by these "loyal addresses" as they occupy many pages of the Minute Books. Not all, however, were directed to members of the Royal Family. Congratulations were sent, for instance, to James Brown, M.P., who had been Presbytery Elder from Annbank. "Presbytery congratulates James Brown M.P. an esteemed and valued member of the Court on becoming Lord High Commissioner of the General Assembly".

It is interesting to note that the Presbytery, who had sent the appropriate congratulations on "the betrothal of the Duke of York to a Scottish bride", proposed that the Church of Scotland should be recognised at the Royal Wedding. "Presbytery expresses its conviction that the Crown authorities should recognise the position of the Church of Scotland as a national Church by calling upon the Moderator of the General Assembly to take part in the Service in Westminster Abbey." Indeed this did happen and set a precedent for future occasions.

THE CHURCH IN INDIA

The General Assembly's first Missionary for the propagation of the Gospel in India was a Dr. Duff and arrangements were made for him to visit and address the Presbytery on 31st October, 1837—quite an achievement to get a speaker of such calibre, in those days. "A numerous congregation being present, the four last verses of the 23rd paraphrase were sung, and the Presbytery was constituted with prayer. Mr. Ritchie, the Moderator, then mentioned what was the object of the meeting and addressing Dr. Duff, requested that he would make his proposed statement to the Presbytery and to the congregation assembled. Upon which Dr. Duff went to the Pulpit, and spoke at very considerable length. When he had finished, Dr. Auld moved that the cordial thanks of this Presbytery be given to

Dr. Duff for the trouble he had taken in coming to visit the Presbytery and for the eloquent and energetic Address which he had now delivered, and in which he had so clearly explained the deplorable state of Religion among the Natives of India, and the Plan — the Success already attained — and the future prospect of the General Assembly's Mission

A Collection was made at the Church in aid of the Funds of the India Mission, which amounted to Thirty six pounds eleven shillings and sevenpence."

FAILURE OF POTATO CROP

1847, February "The Presbytery having taken in to their serious consideration the present state of their countrymen in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and the destitution prevalent among them, in consequence of the failure of the Potate Crop, which formed the chief part of the food of the lower classes, unanimously did, and hereby do, recommend to all the members of the Presbytery to do what may be in their power, by obtaining subscriptions or making collections in their respective Parishes, to aid the Fund, which is being raised throughout the country of supplying the necessaries of life to the inhabitants of these districts".

LIVINGSTONE CENTENARY

The centenary of David Livingstone's birth was in 1913 and we find Presbytery looking ahead in December 1912. " Presbytery recognise the propriety of having the Centenary of David Livingstone's birth celebrated. Co-operation was asked with the Foreign mission Committee of the U.F. Presbytery of Ayr towards that end." And again in February 1913 "Local evening Services to be held where practicable as well as Public meeting in Ayr.

Addresses on the life of David Livingstone would be delivered in all the Sunday Schools".

WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Although an all male Court in 1913 it would appear that the Presbytery of Ayr could see the great benefit of women's point of view being expressed, particularly in government. On a vote the following was agreed " Presbytery while dissociating themselves from questions of party politics, desire to express their deep sense of the grave social and moral evils against which the movement for women's suffrage is mainly directed. They express sympathy with the desire for greater power to promote moral purity and social reform and recognize the justice of the claim that women's point of view should be presented in the government of the nation".

THE GREAT WAR 1914-1918

1914, September 15 In the first reference to the war it was recorded that the Rev. Oswald Milligan of Ayr St. Leonards would have leave-of-absence as Army Chaplain for one year.

1914, October Resolution: "Presbytery confident that Congregations will continue in intercession for our fighting forces and for those allied with us, take whatever steps seem necessary to encourage those qualified to offer themselves for the service of their country".

1914, December "In accordance with the wish of the King, the first Sunday of the new year to be set apart as a day for humble prayer of intercession throughout the nation. Presbytery are confident it will be so observed in every Parish within the bounds".

1915, February First casualty mentioned—Alan Fenwick a member of Maybole West "a student intending the Ministry". And so on throughout the years of war with many Ministers casualties as well as Kirk members.

1919 July The Moderator referred to the Treaty of Peace which had been signed and expressed the thankfulness of Presbytery and of the Church that the greatest war in history had ended in a victory for righteousness and in the prospect of lasting peace".

RUSSIA

Always quick to speak out against any suppression of religious liberty, Presbytery in February 1930, realising that the Russian people were being restricted in their Christian witness, recorded the following: "Presbytery place on record its protest against any suppression of religious liberty there (Russia) and call upon the President of the Soviet Republics to use his powers to secure to all Russian subjects full and unfettered freedom in spiritual matters. Copies to be sent to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and to the Earl of Glasgow".

LEAVE OF ABSENCE FOR MINISTERS

This seemed to be a feature of the '30's when Ministers asked for permission to travel abroad either to visit Congregations with Scottish connections or to look after a Church. "St. Quivox Minister three months leave of absence to participate in the centenary celebrations of St. Andrews Church, Huntingdon, Quebec of which his grandfather had been the first Minister". Ayr Trinity Minister six months off "to visit India and Ceylon as Commissioner from the Church of Scotland to Scottish Congregations and Scottish Regiments in these countries".

Ayr 1st Charge Minister six weeks off "to accompany the Moderator of the General Assembly to Egypt and the Sudan".

Ayr Darlington Minister six months leave "to undertake charge of St. Andrews Church, Cairo".

SECOND WORLD WAR 1939 — 1945

Presbytery seemed to take greater notice of the Second World War as early as 8th March 1939 it was being stated "It will probably be necessary to increase the number of Ministers and Missionaries required in areas chosen to receive persons from the more congested and dangerous areas".

"Ministers wherever possible to fit themselves by training for A.R.P. work and refrain from undertaking any pledge which would bring them automatically under control of local authority or Government Department without first consulting Presbytery".

And early in the War an increase in the Old Age Pension was called for, when Presbytery— "respectfully urge upon the Government to take immediate steps to increase the amount of their (O.A.P's) weekly pension".

Even then it seemed necessary to complain about the lack of Religious Broadcasting "Presbytery protest against the trivial nature of the B.B.C. programmes and the almost complete disappearance of Scottish Religious Broadcasts".

Ministers offered their services as Chaplains in Huts and Canteens. Ayr Presbytery presented a Mobile Canteen in 1941. In 1946 we find "concern aroused by the proposal to settle Polish Forces in Scotland and to give them nationality. Two matters had to be kept in view by the Presbytery — the prevailing unemployment in Scotland and the fact that the Polish Forces were largely Roman Catholic".

IRELAND

Throughout its four hundred years the Presbytery has maintained very close links with Ireland, particularly in times of trouble.

1689 April 24"It is appointed that wednesday next, the 2st of May, be kept a fast day in every congregation within their bounds for Ireland's condition, the bad weather, etc."

1689 June 4"M r. William Eccles is appointed to receive the contribution for the distressed protestants of France and Ireland .. ."

1689 August 27 "M r John Mairs submitted himself to the Presbytry, only reserving liberty to return to his own congregation in Ireland when he might have access thereto, which was granted, this Presbytery declaring that his fixing in Coiltoun for a time shall no wayes preclude his return to Ireland so soon as he may have access to his own congregation there".

In 1868 great interest wastaken in a proposal to alter the position of the Episcopalian Church of Ireland. Presbytery sent a petition to the House of Commons "your Petitioners view with alarm a reposition recently made in your Honourable House to disestablish and disendow the Church of Ireland. In the opinion of your Petitioners this is at once wrong in Principle and fraught with disastrous consequences to the peace of Ireland and the best interests of Gospel truth in that country".

In 1912, the Presbytery took a strong line against the HOME RULE BILL — IRELAND. A letter had been received from the Presbytery of Belfast asking Protestants in Scotland and England to bring influence to bear on M.P's to defeat the Home Rule Bill. After discussion, on vote "Presbytery express their sympathy with the Protestants in Ireland in view of the dangers to their religious liberty with which they believe and we believe that they are menaced by certain political proposals before the country".

More recently, in the 1970's when the severity of the problems in Ireland was escalating, Presbytery invited the Principal Clerk to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to address its members in Ayr to give them a report on conditions throughout Ulster. This Dr. Weir did and it was also arranged that Ministers and Elders be sent to Belfast, on behalf of the Presbytery, to assess the situation for themselves. Close contact has been maintained and in 1981 a further Deliverance was passed. "Presbytery, conscious of the link over many years between ourselves and our Christian Brethern in Ulster, express solidarity with them at this present time and urge them to remain calm and steadfast. Presbytery deplore the action of the media in personalising a convicted criminal

already condemned by Cardinal Hume for seeking to take his own life. Presbytery request the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to keep them fully informed on events in the Province".