

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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At the Web Site of the Wicket Gate magazine www.wicketgate.co.uk you will also find the following recordings:

- Through the Bible with the Children – Bible Stories told by Mr Seaton.
- Congregational Praise – the singing of our Church during Worship Services
- Sermons preached by Dr Needham and Mr Seaton
- Historical Lectures given in the Church by Dr Needham
- Podcasts on Various Subjects
- Audio Archive of Sermons from 1970 to 2002. (A Work in Progress)

Orkney's First Dissenters

(The Pastor's Letter May 1978)

Dear Friends,

Over the past couple of years we have been endeavouring to gather material relating to the Baptist churches in Scotland in the past. It has been a slow work, but it is our hope at some future date to be able to reproduce something of what we have gathered in the form of "Baptist Historical Broadsheets." In the meantime, we offer the following account of the formation of the Baptist church in Westray on the Orkney Islands. The author is Henry Harcus, who served the church for over forty years as member, elder, and minister. We commend the article to your interest.

Yours sincerely,
W. J. Seaton

The "Broadsheets" mentioned above were later published in booklet form and titled, "A Short History of the Baptists in Scotland".

During one of his visits to Orkney, Mr Haldane met a young man in Kirkwall who had settled there from North Ronaldsay as a cabinetmaker. He impressed Mr Haldane as possessing more than ordinary mental ability and Christian principle and led him to suggest to the young man the possibility of being called to Mission work in his native land. Finding that he had received the suggestion favourably, (his only objection being his unfitness), Mr Haldane offered him the advantage of two sessions at his training institution under Rev. G. Ewing. William Tulloch (the young man in question) gladly accepted this offer, and proceeded to Glasgow soon afterwards, where he faithfully studied, taking advantage of every source of knowledge which the institution supplied. When his college curriculum was over Mr Haldane sent the young graduate to Orkney with the commission

to preach the gospel in the islands wherever he could find an open door, personally guaranteeing his maintenance. Mr Haldane's evangelistic work having stirred up religious anxiety in the islands, Mr Tulloch found the people generally ready to welcome his messages. After spending a considerable time in itinerating among the various islands, Mr Tulloch was impressed with the desirability of visiting Westray. When he arrived, the people were cordially ready to receive him. He found a number of like mind with himself, and they enjoyed sweet fellowship together.

Their custom was to meet twice on the Lord's Day at such places as were obtainable and convenient for gospel preaching and once during the week for Christian fellowship. On the Lord's Day Mr Tulloch generally occupied the time allotted for exposition and exhortation, but at the week-evening services, held on the Friday of each week, others took part, Mr Tulloch presiding. This gathering was intended to be less formal than the Sabbath services and to encourage the development of latent talent and Christian grace among the brethren. Hence, when the leader had conducted the opening exercises of praise and prayer, had read a portion of Scripture and given the meaning of it, the meeting was thrown open for anyone who chose to take part by exhortation, or question, or prayer. These fellowship meetings were seasons of refreshing, instruction, and comfort. In addition to conducting these services, Mr Tulloch held evangelistic meetings through the week in every corner of the island, and sometimes in other islands. But a time came when the brethren thought they should come closer together in the bonds of the gospel. Hence, at one of the fellowship meetings a motion was submitted that they form themselves into a Church of Christ. It made a deep impression. Some heartily responded, others strenuously opposed it. It was not difficult to account for the opposition.

Since the time of Columba, the Orcadeans had enjoyed no organised form of religion but that of the State Church -first, the Catholic, then the Church of England, and finally the Church of Scotland. To form a church not in connection with the State seemed inadmissible to those whose minds had, by long use, become so familiarised with the State

Church as to prevent their even examining claims of any other. It was not, therefore, a wonder that a motion to form a church at this juncture and in this way should be opposed. The motion was ultimately carried, but it was the cleavage between the two parties. The opposing section withdrew, and by their influence, every place where meetings had been held on the island was closed against Mr Tulloch and his followers. "When one door shuts, another closes!" says the Irishman, and it seemed so here. But truthfully, "When one door shuts, another door opens." And in the light of the subsequent history of the cause, it is not to be wondered at that Providence guided those followers of the Lord to another open door. Their opponents could not prevent them meeting in the open air, and this they did in suitable weather. But they found a large room in the old Noltland Castle, over which no one on the island had any authority, being government property. Willing hands cleaned and prepared the large room, and here the loving disciples continued to meet for some time. Here they organised a church adopting the congregational form of government. It was the first dissenting church in the island and was constituted in the spring of 1803.

The meeting place, which they named Noltland Hall was to them sacred, and it was with a measure of sadness they by-and-by decided to leave it; but it was somewhat dark and damp, and the less-robust felt it unhealthy. So it was proposed to secure a building site and to erect a suitable house of worship. But where could the necessary land be obtained? Four proprietors controlled nearly all the island. The property of one was unsuitable, being too far from the centre of the island. They applied in turn to each of the other three and were met in each case with a refusal. Foiled in their attempt to secure a site from the large proprietors, the brethren made an application to the owner of a single farm, and he cheerfully granted them a site for a church edifice and minister's house on easy terms. This was cause for rejoicing and encouraged them immediately to begin the collecting together of the necessary material for their house of worship. Stones were plentiful and accessible, and willing workers soon had a sufficient quantity on the ground. But about the timber required? They intended to build a tabernacle to seat from four to five hundred

people. The quantity of timber needed for such a building could not be obtained in a treeless island and a treeless county like Orkney. But the way again opened.

Mr Tulloch, who had been appointed pastor of the church at its formation, had by some means obtained the favour of one of the proprietors, for whom a quantity of timber had been landed at no great distance from their building site. Mr Tulloch applied for it and secured it at a low price. An endeavour was made by a wealthy man, no friend of the church, to upset the bargain. He protested against the proprietor letting Mr Tulloch have the wood at such a price and for such a purpose and ended by offering a much higher price - and all evidently not in the best possible spirit. The Laird felt his dignity infringed and turned upon his inquisitor and adviser and said, "Do you mean to insult me? Who gave you authority to interfere in my business? I can manage my own affairs without your advice." And pointing to the door, ordered him to leave. The building was proceeded forthwith; it was completed and dedicated free of all debt in August 1804. It became the spiritual birthplace of many souls, who found in connection with it the nourishment and care they needed for growth in the divine life. Many of the younger members of the church had to leave the island to find their living in distant parts and to communicate the blessings they had received to others.

For five years after the opening of the Tabernacle the work of the church went on steadily, unitedly, and successfully: and additions were frequently made to the church. But about the close of the fifth year, she experienced a degree of unrest and upheaval. Mr Haldane, to whom, under God, the church owed her existence, had by this time become a baptist. The tidings of his change of views caused no little consternation in the church for a time. Some severely condemned his action, others were disposed to give him credit for honesty of purpose. A number of the more intelligent members determined to examine carefully the scriptures on the subject. It began to dawn upon them that possibly they had been overlooking an important command of the Saviour. They opened the question for discussion in their meetings, and earnestly did the pros and cons present their sides of the question,

but for a considerable time no decision was reached, although some seemed to lean towards the baptist side. The majority of the members, with the pastor, held firmly to infant sprinkling as baptism, and the pastor at least preached on the subject - severely condemning the baptist view, and charging those who held that view with gross error. His effort did not help his cause. It led the people more carefully and prayerfully to examine the teaching of the New Testament, with the result that all the most intelligent among them except the pastor came over to the Baptist side. But they were still in the minority, and not wishing to cause division they were sorely exercised as to the path of duty, and earnestly did they cry for guidance from on high. Nor did they cry in vain. Whoever cries like one of old, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" in sincerity will be taught as surely as that one was. In due time the way was made clear, and no division created.

Robert Seater, a man of considerable mental ability though not highly educated, and a careful student of the scriptures had come to a decision on the question of baptism. He assured Mr Tulloch that in his endeavour to prove infant sprinkling to be baptism he had utterly failed. Mr Seater had been the pastor's stand-by for five years, for whenever the pastor was absent Brother Seater had supplied for him. He, therefore, felt somewhat entitled to a hearing in public on this question, and all the more so, because the pastor had advocated the opposite side. It was therefore announced at the close of the next public meeting that Brother Seater, on the following Sabbath evening, would give to the congregation a statement of his settled convictions on the question of baptism.

The people were requested to bring their New Testaments, for to it would the appeal be made as the only infallible standard. On the Sabbath evening the Tabernacle was crowded with anxious listeners. In his introductory remarks Mr Seater assured his hearers that, while Mr Haldane had been a great blessing to him and to the cause, it was not Mr Haldane who had made him a baptist, but his own understanding of the will of Christ as revealed in the New Testament, and expressed his astonishment that any intelligent student of the Word stumbled over the ordinance. He had been shut up to the

following conclusions: - First, that the truly penitent and believing soul is the only fit subject for baptism. Second, the baptism of the believer is immersion in water. Third, union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection is symbolised in baptism; and this is made manifest by the believer's hatred of sin, and by walking in newness of life. After stating each proposition, he announced his proof texts and asked his hearers to read them aloud, which they did. The address, which occupied nearly an hour, made a profound impression.

(To be continued)

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

Dear Boys and Girls,

An old man by the name of Simon once lived on a little farm where he worked very hard every day trying to make a living for himself.

One day when he was digging in his field, his spade suddenly struck against something hard in the ground, so he stopped digging, reached down, and began to clear away the earth with his hands. He soon pulled an old pot out of the ground, and with a disgusted grunt threw it to the one side. When he had finished his work for the day, he was just about to make his way back to his little cottage when he remembered the pot. "May as well take it with me," he thought to himself; and so, with the pot dangling at the end of his finger, he made his way homeward.

After his evening meal, he took the old pot in his hand and began to scrape away the earth. Suddenly, he realised that there was something written on the pot, and he began to rub away the dirt as fast

as he could. Again, however, he just gave another disgusted grunt and threw the pot in a corner of the room, for the words were written in a strange language that he could not understand. Old Simon was just about to settle down for a snooze in his chair when there was a knock at his door. It was the local school-teacher who had been passing and had decided to give his old friend a call.

As they sat talking, the school-teacher's eye fell on the old pot in the corner. "What's this?" he asked Simon. "Just an old pot," said the old farmer, "it's got some writing on it, but I don't know what it means." The teacher took the pot in his hand, and began to carefully remove the earth that had stuck in the grooves that the letters of the words made. "There," he said finally, "now let's see what it says," and he read out the two words that had been engraved on the pot. "Dig Deeper," they said. "That's what you should have done, Simon," said the teacher, "You should have dug deeper." So next day, old Simon did just that. And what do you think, boys and girls? He soon discovered many valuable things that he was able to sell so that he never had to worry about a shortage of food and clothes again.

Some people you know, like old Simon, read a little bit of the Bible and then just throw it to the one side, because they can't be bothered taking the time or trouble to understand some of the things written there. But, boys and girls, you must always "dig deeper" – go on reading more, and more. And if you do, you too will discover something of great value. Not earthly treasure such as the old man discovered, but the treasure of knowing Jesus Christ as your Saviour. "Dig deeper," then.

Love,
Mrs Seaton.

Prayers Unheard and Heard.

When James Haldane was captain of one of Britain's warships he was engaged in a terrible battle which saw his entire deck crew slaughtered by an enemy broadside.

He had replacements piped on deck from below, but when they saw the awful carnage, they were seized with desperation and almost turned on the spot. Captain Haldane sprang into their midst, shouting out oaths and curses, and saying that he wished they might all sink to hell. An old believing sailor stepped forward, and touching his cap, said, "Captain, I believe God answers prayer; and if God had answered your prayer just now, what would have become of us?" Having spoken this the old marine retired to his post, but after the battle, James Haldane retired to his cabin, and there began the process of conviction and conversion that came to his heart.

He began to "evangelise" his brother Robert, but the latter was enraged by his brother's zeal and efforts and told him never to enter his house again until he had changed his views. "Very well, Robert," he said, "but I have one comfort in the case, and that is, you cannot prevent me from praying for you;" and holding out his hand, he took his leave of him.

Robert Haldane couldn't rid his heart and mind of the fact that his brother was constantly praying on his behalf, and as the work of conviction and conversion had first taken place with James, so it now began to take place and was completed in the case of Robert, as well.

Note - James Haldane, mentioned here is the same James Haldane as mentioned in the Pastor's Letter in this edition. Should you wish to know more about the Haldane brothers, you will find two audio lectures in the pages of the magazine online.

http://www.wicketgate.co.uk/lectures/lecture_haldanes.html

http://www.wicketgate.co.uk/lectures/lecture_haldane_tour_1797.html

Gleanings in the Psalms

Psalm 83



Title. " A Song or Psalm of Asaph." This Psalm, according to the title was composed by Asaph. In accordance with this, we read in 1st Chronicles chapter 20 verse 14 that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel who is probably the author of the psalm. Our psalm is a true picture of the state of feeling which prevailed throughout the people during the danger under Jehoshaphat. According to the history of Chronicles, they praised God at that time, in the midst of their danger, and with a loud voice. And here, in this title, this psalm is called "A Song" (of praise); and so it is, although it is in the form of a prayer. It is a song of triumph sung before victory; all the distress is simply committed to God.

E. W. Hegstenberg.

Verse 1. "Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God." In Scripture, there are several reasons why the Lord *keeps silence* when His people are in danger and *sits still* when there is most need to give help and assistance. For one thing, the Lord does it to try their faith, as we see clearly in Matthew 8 verse 24, where it is said that our Lord Christ was asleep: "There arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish." We read more fully in Mark 4 and Luke 8, that he left them (when the ship was covered with waves, and they were rowing for their lives) to sleep peacefully in the ship until, when they awoke him, he rebuked them for their little faith: "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that you have no faith? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." Truly, the Lord will not suffer his people to be *overwhelmed*: that is certain; but he

will suffer them to come very near, that the waves *cover* them - but all to try their faith. I find another reason in Isaiah 59, and that is: the Lord doth keep silence in the midst of the troubles of his people, *to try men's uprightness*, and discover who will stick to God, and His cause, and His people, out of uprightness of heart. For if God should always *appear* for his cause, God and his cause should have many favourites and friends. But, sometimes God leaves his cause, and leaves his people, and leaves his gospel and his ordinances to the wide world, to see who will plead for it and who will stick to it.

Walter Cradock, in "Divine Drops." 1650

Verse 1. "Keep not thou silence, O God ..." Is the Lord silent? Then be not thou silent, but cry unto him till he breaks the silence.

Stark

Verse 2. "For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult ..." The whole world is like an *army* - a brigade of men, as it were - under a general, and God is "the Lord of hosts" - that is, the Lord of his armies. Now, when there is a tumult in an army, they complain to the officers, to the general especially, and he must come and suppress it. Therefore, says the psalmist, Thou, O Lord of Hosts, thou art the general of the world: lo, there is a tumult in the world - there is a mutiny.

Walter Cradock

Verse 3. "They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones." This representation of God's people is worthy of our notice: - "Thy hidden ones." We often hide to preserve. This is the meaning of the word in the parable, with regard to the discovery of the treasure in the field; "which when a man hath found, he hideth it." His aim is not to conceal, but to secure, and the cause is but for the effect. Thus God's people are hidden. He hid Noah in the ark, and the waters that drowned the world could not *find* him. When his judgments were coming over this land, "Come my people," saith he, "enter thou into the chambers and shut thy doors about thee; hide thee also for a little season, until the indignation be overpast." Hence the promise, "Thou shalt hide them in secret of thy presence from the pride of man: thou shalt keep them secretly in a

pavilion from the strife of tongues." Hence the confidence expressed by David, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me; he shall set me upon a rock." The Saviour could say, "In the shadow of his hand hath he hid me." And, "All the saints are in his hand." They are kept by the power of God through faith, unto salvation. For he himself is their "refuge", and their "hiding place". They are his "hidden ones".

William Jay



Noltland Castle, Westray: -

Where the Orkney church met in the early days prior to building their own church premises.

“But they found a large room in the old Noltland Castle, over which no one on the island had any authority ...” From the account.

Thomas Brooks
And
The Sweetness of Christian Assurance.

Such is Satan's envy and enmity against a Christian's joy and comfort that he cannot but act to the utmost of his power to keep poor souls in doubt and darkness. Satan knows that assurance is a pearl of great price that will make the soul happy for ever; he knows that assurance turns a Christian's wilderness into a paradise; he knows that assurance begets in Christians the most noble and generous spirits; he knows that assurance is that which will make men strong to do exploits - to shake his tottering kingdom about his ears. Therefore, he is as studious and industrious to keep souls from assurance, as he was to cast Adam out of paradise.

It is no wonder that Satan, who envied the first seeds of grace that divine love owed in your soul, should envy the increase of that grace - yea, thy assurance, which is the top and crown of grace. When thou wast a babe, Satan cast water upon thy smoking flax that it might not flame forth into assurance; and now thou art grown up to some more maturity he is raised in his enmity, so that he cannot but put out his power and policy to keep you from the assurance of felicity and glory. Satan envies thy candle-light, thy torch-light, thy star-light; how much more then, that the sun should shine upon thee! He envies thy eating of the crumbs of mercy under the table; how much more that, as a child, thou shouldst sit at Wisdom's table, and eat and drink abundantly of Wisdom's delicacies! Satan envies thy feeding on husks among the swine; how much more that thou shouldst eat of the fatted calf! Satan envies thy sitting with Mordecai at the king's gate; how much more that thou shouldst wear the king's robes! Satan envies thy tasting of the least drop of comfort; how much more thy swimming in those pleasures that be at God's right hand for evermore! He envies thee sitting on God's knee; how much more thy lying in his bosom! He envies thy being admitted into his service; how much more that thou shouldst be of his court and council!

Satan knows that assurance is manna in the wilderness, it is water out of a rock, it is a guiding cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He knows that assurance is a salve for all sores, a medicine for all diseases, and a remedy against every malady. He knows that assurance is a Christian's anchor at sea and his shield upon land. That it is a staff to support him, and a sword to defend him; a pavilion to hide him, and a cordial to cheer him; and, therefore, he labours, both as a lion and as a serpent, to keep poor souls from a well-grounded assurance.

Ah! Christians, have not you need to seek assurance with all your might, who have to contend with so mighty an adversary? One who cares not what torments he heaps upon himself so long as he is able to torment you by keeping your souls and assurance asunder? Oh that this very consideration might make you restless to ever hold this sweet white stone in your bosoms.

A Caution On Wrong Expectations.

A woman once attended a communion service where Ebenezer Erskine was one of the preachers. She was greatly blessed under his ministry and decided to go and hear him at the next opportunity. This she did, but she got very little out of his sermon - or at least, none of the strong impressions that she received on the first occasion. She felt somewhat upset, and decided to approach the preacher after the service, and ask him why he thought there could be such a difference for her in the two occasions. "Madam," said the minister, "the reason is this: last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus Christ, but today you have come to hear Ebenezer Erskine."