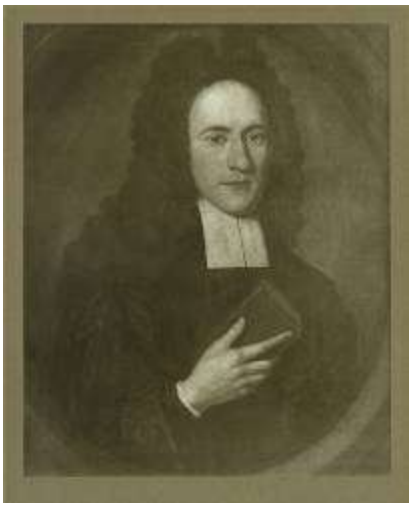
Whose Faith Follow

Collected Articles on Scottish Divines



Ralph Erskine, Secession Minister, Dunfermline

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Preface

Although it is not my native town, Dunfermline was my home from the age of five to the age of twenty-five. Dunfermline has sometimes been referred to as the cradle of the secession movements of the eighteenth century. As a young man, I became interested in the history of the seceders, especially Ralph Erskine who had originally been Minister of Dunfermline Abbey. For some years I was a member and eventually an elder in Erskine Church, Dunfermline.

Having now passed my three score years and ten, I decided to dig out some of the biographical articles that I had written in the past and put them together in booklet form. The articles are not confined only to "worthies" of the secession movements.

This booklet has no pretensions to be an authoritative or a scholarly work. It is merely a collection of popular articles, no more and no less. In reading over these articles some forty years on, there was a real temptation to rewrite or heavily edit them. I have resisted this temptation and, apart from very light revision or clarification, the articles are offered more or less as they were written.

Looking at some of the past controversies within the Kirk through the eyes of men from previous centuries, I cannot help comparing them with some of our own contemporary difficulties. Whilst the causes of division are different today from those of the 18th and 19th centuries they are being no better handled now than they were in previous generations. It seems that in the Church of Scotland we do not always learn from our past mistakes.

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Ebenezer Erskine (1680-1754)

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The name of Erskine is linked permanently with the secession movements in 18th century Scotland. Ebenezer Erskine was a son of Rev Henry Erskine a Presbyterian Minister who had held a pastoral charge at Cornhill in Northumberland but was ejected from his living at the time of the "Great Ejection" of 1662.

After the Revolution Settlement, Henry Erskine was called to the Scottish Border parish of Chirnside where he ministered faithfully for the eight years preceding his death in 1696.

It is an interesting coincidence that the young Ebenezer Erskine was born on 22nd June 1680, the same day on which Richard Cargill and Donald Cargill posted on the market cross at Sanquhar – known to posterity as the Sanquhar Declaration – which disowned Charles Stuart (The Old Pretender) for his tyranny and breaches of the Covenant, declaring war on him and all who helped him.

This serves as a reminder of the general mood and background of these troubled days. It was not a period of tolerance and moderation and men can only be judged within the context of the times in which they lived. Their father's ejection from his home and living, his period of imprisonment and possible torture on the Bass Rock, the family poverty and deprivation for the sake of Christ's Crown and Covenant – all of these factors were inevitably to mould the sons' thoughts on religious matters.

After studying Divinity in the University of Edinburgh, the young Ebenezer was licensed to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Kirkcaldy on 11th February 1703 and, on 22nd September of the same year, he was ordained and inducted to the parish of

Portmoak on the eastern side of Loch Leven. It is interesting that the central area of Scotland, but especially the parts roughly between the lines of the Ochil hills and the Forth were to form the homeland of the Secession movements.

Erskine's ministry at Portmoak was to be a memorable one. It is recorded that literally thousands of people flocked to this picturesque parish to attend the sacrament. He remained at Portmoak until 1731 during which time he was given special grace and was built up by God. He emerged from this quiet little parish as a veritable giant of great spiritual conviction and earnestness as well as a man of broad experience. In 1731 he was presented with a call to the Third Charge of Stirling, to the church formerly ministered to by the saintly James Guthrie who had been martyred after the Restoration of Charles II.

The events which were to lead up to Erskine's secession from the established church in 1733 are, in fact, quite complex. Put simply, the controversy was two-headed: political and theological. In its political sense it concerned the thorny problem of patronage. The right of popular election of a minister had actually only been employed in Scotland for some thirty years which included the Cromwellian period. In 1690, the election was given to the elders and heritors of a parish subject to acquiescence of the local Presbytery; but, in 1712, Parliament removed the right of election from elders and heritors and restored it to patrons (frequently a local landowner).

If, however, a patron did not exercise his right within six months (which very often he did not), the right of election devolved to the Presbytery. In 1732, the General Assembly passed an Act permitting the election of a minister by the elders and heritors where the right had devolved to Presbytery under the 1712 provisions. This Act was, in fact, a sensible and

humane procedure which attempted to remove some of the anomalies of the patronage system.

Erskine, however, quarrelled with the Act since he would have preferred that the right of election should simply devolve to heads of families and not to heritors and elders. To us, this may seem an unimportant distinction, but it was not unimportant at the time. In reality, however, the controversy was really the tip of an iceberg as there was much unrest within the church and great divisions in matters of ecclesiastical polity and theology.

Theologically, the 18th century church was divided into two basic "camps", namely moderates and evangelicals. The moderates (they were not in fact given this title until the second half of the 18th century) were generally favoured among the more influential classes and were to include in their ranks such brilliant men as Principal Robertson, Alexander "Jupiter" Carlyle of Inveresk and John Home of Athelstaneford, author of *The Douglas*. Moderates could be characterised by their formalism and rationalism, their somewhat chilly moralism and intellectualism and were in contrast to the evangelicals.

Evangelical theology was that of the Doctrines of Grace, earnest love of the Word of God within a framework of Calvinism and orthodoxy. One particular evangelical emphasis at the time was the free offer of the Gospel to all men. This sounds uncontroversial yet if, as the Westminster Confession claims, some are predestined for salvation and others for damnation, there is an obvious inconsistency in offering salvation to everyone. A contemporary theological controversy on the needlessness (or otherwise) of forsaking sin before coming to Jesus Christ that ran its course in the Presbytery of Auchterarder only served to fan the flames.

The doctrine of free offer had been set out in a book entitled *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* by Edward Fisher, published in 1645 and rediscovered by Thomas Boston (who was converted under the ministry of Henry Erskine). In 1718, Thomas Hog of Carnock published a new edition of *The Marrow* and the book was condemned by the General Assembly of 1720. Some ministers, however, dissented from this condemnation and their number included Thomas Boston and Ebenezer Erskine.

These men were loyal Calvinists and they did even imply that they would endorse all of the teachings found in *The Marrow*. However, they felt grieved that a book that contained so much that was not only orthodox but warmly evangelical should be dismissed in such a cavalier manner by the General Assembly. The "Marrow Men" (as they came to be called) also took great exception to the fact that John Simson, a Divinity Professor in the College of Glasgow, alleged to have taught certain heretical doctrines (although never convicted of heresy) was very leniently dealt with by the Assembly and, although suspended, was allowed to retain his professorial status and to draw his salary.

The theological waters of 18th century Scotland were often troubled. Although it was a century in which the moderates seemed to be in the ascendant, it was also the century that witnessed the Revival of Cambuslang, the rise of the secession movements and the setting up of many praying societies.

It was against this two pronged background that, in 1732, Erskine preached a very controversial sermon to the Synod of Perth and Stirling on the text *The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner*. The Synod felt that the sermon was unduly controversial and rebuked him. This was too much for Erskine who appealed to the General Assembly in 1733. In the meantime, he aggravated matters by publishing the sermon in pamphlet form!

The General Assembly sustained the Synod's rebuke. Erskine immediately lodged a protest which, although procedurally out of order, was read to the General Assembly. In the protest, three other men were associated – William Wilson, Alexander Moncrieff and James Fisher. The Assembly did not take kindly to the tone of the protest and the four were ordered to withdraw it – which they did not.

The Commission of Assembly was, later in that same year, to suspend (not depose) the four ministers. They ignored the suspension and so were deposed in November of 1733. In reply to this, the four stated that they were seceding from the established church.

So, on 15th December 1733, they met, with some others, in a cottage at Gairney Bridge on the west side of Loch Leven, to the south of Kinross, and formed themselves into the Associate Presbytery. (The site of the cottage is still marked by a memorial obelisk.) Curiously, they retained their manses and stipends and continued in the meantime with their normal preaching and pastoral duties.

On reflection, the General Assembly realised that it had been somewhat hasty and harsh in its dealings with the four men and so became conciliatory and forbearing in its attitudes towards them. In 1734 they were officially reinstated. The Assembly even repealed the 1732 Act and sent a commission to London to plea for the total abolition of patronage.

The way seemed open for the four brethren to be received back into the established church with honour and dignity – but this they declined. They were united in their dissatisfaction with the state of theological affairs within the Kirk, the position regarding patronage, the 1712 Act of Toleration and the fact

that the Revolution Settlement had meant the abandonment of the Covenants.

Their final deposition took place in 1740 after the General Assembly had made many attempts to be conciliatory, but to no avail.

Ebenezer Erskine died on 2nd June 1754 in the 74th year of his age and the 51st of his ministry. He will be remembered as a courageous warrior and a soldier of Christ's militant church. The secession, though it was to cause a scar on the church in Scotland was yet to be an instrument of much blessing.

Ralph Erskine (1685 – 1752)

Published in the Bulwark Magazine January 1973

Ralph Erskine was the brother of Ebenezer Erskine, although not quite so well known. If he sometimes lacked the doughtiness of his brother, yet he made up for it in other ways. Ralph was perhaps surprisingly, very musical and played well on the violin. Perhaps even more surprisingly, he smoked. Indeed, he wrote a poem entitled "Smoking Spiritualised" which was included in a volume of his poetry entitled *Gospel Sonnets* first published in 1734. All in all, he was rather more versatile and sensitive than his somewhat formidable brother and was a more attractive personality.

After he left Edinburgh University, he obtained the position of tutor to the family of Lieutenant-Colonel John Erskine (a very distant relative) at Culross and remained there for two years. One of the Colonel's sons was John Erskine who was to become Professor of Scots law at Edinburgh University and author of *An Institute of the Law of Scotland*. John's son, in turn, was Dr John Erskine, the leader of the evangelical party in the established church at the end of the eighteenth century. He is portrayed by Sir Walter Scott in his novel *Guy Mannering*.

In 1709, Ralph was taken on trials for licence to preach the Gospel by the Presbytery of Dunfermline and thereafter he received calls from several churches in the area. It was, however, to the "auld grey toun" of Dunfermline itself that he was eventually guided. Dunfermline, a former capital of Scotland with its many weavers' cottages clustered together in the shadow of its parish church was to be the scene for his whole ministry. Indeed, most of his preaching was to take place within the walls of the ancient sanctuary of Dunfermline Abbey.

The Abbey Church was, at that time, the only church in the burgh and was collegiate charge. In 1711, Ralph was ordained and inducted as Minister of the Second Charge and became Minister of the First Charge in 1716. Rev James Wardlaw was thereafter chosen as Minister of the Second Charge.

The two men laboured together in great harmony and friendship which contained up until the time of Erskine's secession from the national church. It is interesting to note that the two men had a bond of agreement as to their behaviour and conduct with one another. One thing on which they agreed was that neither would listen to gossip or criticism of the other's wife!

Ralph, like his brother was a loyal Calvinist who was also most anxious to stress the free offer of the Gospel. Again, like his brother, he was greatly moved by much that he read in "The Marrow" and took the same theological stand on patronage and on the Simson case. Yet Ralph was not one of the original four who made up the first Associate (Secession) Presbytery in 1733. He was, however, present as an observer at the historic meeting at Gairney Bridge, near Kinross.

He did not finally throw his lot with the secession until 1737 and only then with certain misgivings. His action in joining his brother in the secession was to create a cleavage between Ralph and Mr Wardlaw who, although an evangelical and in great sympathy with all that his senior colleague stood for, yet deplored the whole concept of secession. This was to mark the beginning of a pulpit war which was to continue for some time whilst the bewildered citizens of Dunfermline looked on, not knowing whom to believe.

After he joined the secession, Ralph Erskine's followers built a new church for him; yet his connection with the parish church was to continue for some time yet – indeed it did not finally cease until May, 1742. He was so popular that crowds thronged

to hear him and there appeared to be no real way for the Presbytery to eject him from the pulpit. In many ways, it was foolish of him to continue preaching in the Abbey at all after 1737. Certainly the whole situation was not very edifying for the whole body of Christ. The death of Mr Wardlaw, however, hurried matters on somewhat and, after taking legal advice the Presbytery declared both charges vacant and proposed to "intrude" a Mr Hardy of Culross to preach to the congregation.

The church was guarded against Erskine's entry but when he appeared, no one dared to stop him. It appeared that there might be a riot, but Erskine calmly entered the church, mounted the pulpit and announced the opening Psalm. Mr Hardy, who had remained in the Session House, left the building quietly.

Erskine had won the day, yet immediately afterwards he accepted the ruling that the charge was legally vacant. Thereafter he continued his ministry in the new meeting house erected for him by his flock. He remained there until his death in 1752.

The first building was replaced in 1800 by a fine rectangular edifice which still forms one of the main features of the Dunfermline skyline and is a landmark in the surrounding area. It is perhaps a sign that Ralph Erskine left the established church with considerable misgivings that a Latin inscription, with a certain pathos, was placed above the door of the first church and read (in translation):

Feed and provide, O Christ, for Thy flock scattered abroad.
The Lord will provide.
Ralph Erskine, Minister of God's Word, 1740 [1]

[1] The inscribed stone was mislaid when the 1800 church was built and later rediscovered among some rubbish. It was then built in to the new building.

His ministry continue in the new church until his death in 1752.

The seceders and the moderates were united in one thing – their opposition to the Jacobite cause. Ebenezer Erskine raised a militia company to defend Stirling and Ralph's son Henry did the same at Falkirk where he was minister.

One great sorrow in the life of the Erskine brothers – especially Ralph who was the more sensitive of the two – was the "Burgher controversy". In 1743, a seceder minister by the name of Adam Gib (nicknamed "Pope Gib"), a very doughty fighter who had originally trained for Law, asked the Associate Synod (as it was now called) to condemn outright one clause in the Burgess Oath which was required of burgesses in a mere handful of burghs in Scotland. Basically they were required to *profess and allow the true religion presently professed within this realm and authorised by the laws thereof…* Gib and one of the original four seceders, Rev Alexander Moncrieff (Laird of Culfargie) maintained that the Oath cut across seceder testimony.

The '45 Rebellion temporarily distracted the fathers and brethren from this question but it was taken up again in 1746 and 1747 when the seceders virtually split into in two, into Burghers and Antiburghers, i.e. those who thought that it was permissible for seceders to take the Oath and those who did not. This was a tragic event for all concerned. As J H Leckie [2] put it, "… the Antiburghers were perhaps the more logical, but the Burghers were the more sane …"

When the split came the Antiburghers purported to excommunicate the Burghers. One prominent Antiburgher was John Erskine, a son of Ralph. Indeed, Ralph Erskine was a particular target of Antiburgher denunciation. He himself

[2] *Secession Memories*, 1926, p.51

published two pamphlets on the controversy entitled *Fancy no Faith* and *Fancy still no Faith*.

With remarkable zeal, the Antiburghers were now to wage a veritable crusade against a whole collection of obscure oaths, including the Constable's Oath, the Chapman's Oath and the Mason's Oath!

In the course of time, the split was to be further complicated by the division of both Burghers and Antiburghers into "Auld Lichts" who favoured Covenants and a state connection and "New Lichts" who favoured what was later known as the Voluntary Principle and were Anti-Covenanting.

One other highlight of Dunfermline's religious life during the time of Ralph Erskine was the visit of the famous Methodist preacher George Whitefield in 1741. This is a story in itself as it began cordially yet finished less so. Had a close liaison been established between the Methodists and the seceders, the subsequent history of the church in Scotland might have been very different.

Ralph Erskine died in Dunfermline in 1752 in the 68th year of his age and the 42nd of his ministry. His bones lie, very fittingly, in the Abbey Churchyard and a handsome monument was erected on his grave in 1876. The text on the monument reads:

Remember them which had the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversations, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever. (Hebrews 13: 7-8)

Some Sidelights on Ralph Erskine

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To those who know anything about the Scottish Seceders, there immediately springs to mind the name of Ebenezer Erskine [1680-1754], minister at Portmoak from 1703 until 1731 when he moved to Stirling, and leader of the Seceders. The same Ebenezer Erskine was an impressive and majestic person both in word and in deed, a man of brilliance and eloquence whose gifts made him appear to overshadow his younger brother Ralph.

Ralph Erskine [1685-1752] perhaps lacked some of the impressiveness of his brother, yet Robert Mackenzie says of him [3] that he was "…gentler, more ideal, more mystical than his brother, fond of music and proficient on the violin."

Ralph was not one of the original Seceders of 1733 although he had been closely associated with his brother's stand on the "Marrow" controversy, patronage and the Simson case. However in 1740 when he was finally deposed by the General Assembly, he threw in his lot with his brother and the Associate Presbytery.

In 1711 he had been appointed as Minister of the Second Charge at the famous Dunfermline Abbey and in 1716 he became Minister of the First Charge of that Church. That he was a scholar and a theologian of considerable ability can be shown by the fact that his collected Works in ten volumes passed through many editions. *Gospel Sonnets*, his best known work, was first published in 1734.

Ralph Erskine was the son of Rev Henry Erskine of Cornhill, Northumberland and later of Chirnside in Berwickshire. Henry Erskine was a Puritan and, as such, was forced to vacate his

[3] *John Brown of Haddington,* 1918, p.70

living at Cornhill under the Act of Uniformity, 1662. One of the great successes of Henry Erskine's preaching was the conversion of Thomas Boston.

In his turn, Ralph had made considerable study of many of the great commentators, preferring above all Matthew Henry. Among his favourite writers were Owen, Manton, Flavel and Boston. But above all books the one he studied most was, of course, his Bible. His biographer, Fraser of Kennoway could say "His delight in study was cordial and persevering." Ralph was an emphatic believer in the Sovereignty of God as may be seen from the following extract from his diary:

After I had remembered the public abroad and at home, particularly to beseeching the Lord to bless my ministry at Dunfermline and to remember His words, 'Lo, I am with you' and to bless what I was preaching on, even all things being in the hand of Christ, that He would give evidence of it by His working powerfully upon many. I was then helped to beg the Spirit constantly to water and watch me. Under a sense of absolute weakness and inability to stand for myself, I was helped, with a heart poured out before God, to declare to Him that, though He was calling me to wait upon Him, yet I could not wait on Him a moment unless He would water me 'every moment.' I was made to seek assistance, success, strength and courage for my work in the congregation, while the Lord called me to the ministry therein, being conscious that my fainting spirit was unfit for any work, if the Lord would not be with me.

His sermons were characterised by solid preparation in the Spirit and with due and careful thought. One criticism that is sometimes laid against him is that he overdid the concept of the wrath of God. Perhaps we should just let Ralph speak for himself: "… I love not, sirs, to preach of wrath and hell, but I see so many people running that way through their slighting the

road that leads to Heaven, that I am resolved you shall not have it to say hereafter that you had a minister who never told you where you were going. Nay, you shall rather have it to say 'Our minister told us to fell from the wrath to come'."

Ralph Erskine's sermons were always written out in full and, for the most part he kept fairly close to his script during delivery. It is said of him that he had an excellent pulpit appearance, a pleasing voice and a pleasant manner. In particular he was in the habit of making many full and free offers of Christ to his hearers in a persuasive, attractive manner in which he urged them to accept the offer which was graciously made to them on the authority of the divine Word. Above all, he was true pastor, who knew his people and, as such, was able to speak to their particular needs, hopes and aspirations.

Like all true preachers, both then and now, he considered his exposition of the Scriptures on Sunday to be the central part of his whole ministry. In the early years of his ministry, he expounded the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, the Acts of the Apostles and, later, the themes of the Epistles.

Of Ralph Erskine we could certainly say that he was a preacher and a pastor and that, for him, these were not two unconnected functions. His journals give us ample evidence of his care and anxiety for his people in sickness, death or any kind of trouble.

In matters of discipline too he was dutiful – a minister of such a large flock in Dunfermline could not be otherwise – yet never was he harsh or vindictive. Of considerable interest is a list of questions used by him to remind elders of their duties. These eight questions, whilst not exhaustive, are very useful and at least in general outline, could be used with profit in the twentieth century for elders or their equivalent in other traditions of the church.

The rules read as follows:

1. ***Do you keep up the worship of God in your family and endeavour it morning and evening?***
2. ***Do you visit the sick in your quarter*** [4] ***and pray with them?***
3. ***Do you attend the monthly meeting of the session, except in cases of necessary absence?***
4. ***Do you endeavour to bring in no subject that may divert from duty in these meetings?***
5. ***Do you search out scandals that you hear of in your several quarters?***
6. ***Do you enquire for certificates from persons coming from other congregations that live in your quarters?***
7. ***Do you take care of the poor in your quarters and duly apply for them when you know that they are really needy?***
8. ***Do you keep the session's private affairs; and make it your business, before the dispensing of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to enquire into the conversation of every one in your quarter, that apply for tokens?***

Prior to his deposition from Dunfermline Abbey, his followers had begun to build a new church for him. This building was replaced by a larger church in 1800 which is still in use. It is an impressive structure formerly known as Queen Anne Street Church [which is how it is cited by Mackenzie *supra cit.*] and now as "Erskine Church". A very fine memorial statue of Ralph Erskine by Handyside Ritchie was placed and dedicated outside the church in 1849 and still holds pride of place. [5]

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[4] An elder's quarter would correspond with an elder's district today.

[5] As a result of a union, the congregation was renamed St Andrew's Erskine in 1974. In 1998, the congregation moved out of the town centre and now worship in a smaller modern building in a residential area. The former Erskine Church was used as a crèche for a short time before standing empty for a number of years. The building was allowed to fall into a very poor state of repair, damaged by water ingress, vandalism and general neglect. Historic Scotland registered it as a building at risk in 2007. A large pub chain was interested in buying the property, which stands in the middle of the town but the costs of renovation and conversion were too high. More

In a short article such as this one cannot hope to do anything like justice to such a man of the stature Ralph Erskine. No mention, for example, has been made of the famous meeting in Dunfermline between Erskine and Whitefield which is a study in itself – and a fascinating one too.

The main purpose of this brief article is to remind readers that there are many "pearls of great price" waiting to be rediscovered in writers such as Ralph Erskine.

Erskine Church, Dunfermline c 1965

recently, the property has passed into the ownership of a multi-denominational Christian group who have secured substantial funding to convert the building into a café and conference centre.

John Brown of Haddington (1722-87)

Published in the Bulwark Magazine June/July 1973

The name "John Brown" may be an ordinary and homely name but on this occasion it represents no ordinary man. John Brown of Haddington was far from being ordinary as his biographer, Robert Mackenzie [6] makes clear. Indeed, Brown of Haddington, like many of the spiritual giants of the past, was to exercise a ministry in Scotland which, although long forgotten by most, had a great influence in its time and considerable effects on our national and spiritual life.

John Brown was born in a hamlet named Carpow near Abernethy on Tay into a poor but godly home. His parents both died when he was a child and as a result his formal schooling was fairly slight. Yet, even as a child, he had a great thirst for knowledge and could read such books as Guthrie's *The Christian's Great Interest* and Alleine's *An Alarm to the Unconverted* as well as the *Letters* of Samuel Rutherford. When his schooling was at an end, he worked as a shepherd-boy on the hills around Abernethy.

For a considerable part of his young life he was greatly helped by Alexander Moncrieff, minister at Abernethy and one of the original four who founded the Associate (Secession) Presbytery at Gairney Bridge in 1733.[7] Moncrieff, also the Laird of Culgfargie, was a man with good family connections and a brilliant intellect. He had been educated at Perth Academy and at the Universities of St Andrews and Leyden. He became Professor of the Associate Church in 1742 and in 1747 he threw in his lot with the Antiburghers.[8]

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[6] *John Brown of Haddington,* 1918

[7] *The Bulwark*, December 1972 p.129

[8] *The Bulwark*, January 1973 p.140

With an ultimate view of entering the ministry, the young Brown set himself the task of learning Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but he had no grammar books to help him. He mastered the Greek alphabet and many of the words by sheer hard work and by comparing different Greek words with the English text.

Although this is an exceptionally hard and difficult way in which to master Greek, it is certainly possible and his biographer, Mackenzie, shows us in detail how it was done.

There is a famous story of John Brown at the age of sixteen going 24 miles on foot to St Andrews to buy a Greek New Testament. When he went into the bookshop and made his request known, it was looked at with surprise as he was clearly a poor lad and roughly dressed. A University Professor, who was in the shop, picked up a Greek New Testament and said to him "Boy, if you can read that book, you shall have it for nothing." John Brown could easily prove his ability to read it and so he walked happily home to Abernethy to tend his flock with a Greek New Testament in his pocket.

One would have thought that such efforts on the young man's behalf would have inclined Alexander Moncrieff even more in his favour. It was not to be so. The question arose in the parish as to how young Brown had been able to master the Greek alphabet without any human help. The immediate conclusion was that he could only have been helped by an inhuman agency – namely by Satan himself.

At the time in which Brown lived, this was a serious accusation. The last execution of a witch in Scotland had taken place at Dornoch in 1722, the year in which Brown had been born. There was still a real fear of witchcraft throughout the land. Had Brown lived a few years earlier, the accusation could have cost him his very life. Moncrieff chose to believe that the young man

had been in league with Satan. The two of them were never reconciled. Rumours were rife and, although the young Brown was cleared by the Abernethy Kirk Session of all accusations of witchcraft (Moncrieff dissenting), he was obliged to leave the district which had been his one and only home.

Brown now became a pedlar and was destined to continue in this hard and difficult way of life for five years. Yet in these five years he had time to grow both in wisdom and stature as he continued avidly his process of self education. Also, he had opportunities of attending the Sacrament Seasons at places where the Secession movement was strong, such as Dunfermline, Stirling, Burntisland and Falkirk.

John Brown also bore arms in the '45 Rebellion – on the Hanoverian side, of course. During most of the time he was stationed at Edinburgh Castle. Again, this time was put to good use and he did a great deal of studying. He bought many books from the shop of John Gray in the Grassmarket. Gray was a son-in-law of Ebenezer Erskine.

After the defeat of the rebels, he went back to being a pedlar for a short time and then became schoolmaster at Gairney Bridge. This tiny hamlet on the west side of Loch Leven had many connections with the Secession movement. It was there in 1733 that the first Associate Presbytery was formed. It was also there that a famous aspiring Secession minister, the poet and paraphraser Michael Bruce was to be schoolmaster for a short time before his untimely death. After teaching for a while at Gairney Bridge, John Brown moved to Spittal, near Penucuik.

When the Secession split into Burgher and Antiburgher – and Moncrieff sided with the latter – the Burgher party required a professor of their own. The choice fell on Ebenezer Erskine of Stirling, who was afterwards to be succeeded by his son-in-law,

James Fisher, now of Glasgow. As long as Moncrieff was the sole Professor for the Secession, the ministry had been barred to John Brown. Ironically, the Burgher controversy now opened the way for him to train for the ministry and he was also to be Erskine's very first student. In 1750, John Brown became a licentiate of the Associate Church (Burgher Synod).

In 1751, he was called to minister in the quiet and pleasant town of Haddington in East Lothian, the birthplace of John Knox. This was destined to be his sole pastoral charge yet it was to be the beginning of a long and influential, as well as a very fruitful ministry. Though he was now an able and erudite scholar, one of his chief desires was to make the Gospel understandable to all.

His preaching style was simple and earnest, lacking much of the dramatic style of its day, yet proving much more effective. The sceptic philosopher David Hume commented that Brown preached "as if he were conscious that Christ was at his elbow."

During his ministry, Brown published a great many books and pamphlets. His first book had the (somewhat long-winded) title "An Help for the Ignorant, being an Essay towards an Easy, Plain, Practical and Extensive Explication of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms". It is usually known as "Brown's Explication." One of his greatest works was his Dictionary of the Bible which he first published in 1769.

Although a Dictionary of this type may seem commonplace to us now, there was a real dearth of such works at the time and the publication of Brown's Dictionary was to be a real landmark in the history of Biblical studies. It is not surprising that Brown's reputation as a scholar and linguist became considerable not only in Scotland but beyond.

In 1763, James Fisher, the Secession Professor, died and was succeeded by John Swanston of Kinross. Swanston, however, died in 1767 and John Brown was appointed to take his place. This now meant that young men who wished to train for the ministry in the Secession Church would come to study at Haddington. A great many men were to pass through his hands. Some of them bore names that would become household names in Scotland although unfortunately most of them are now long forgotten. Two of his most famous students were George Lawson of Selkirk, who was eventually to succeed him and Alexander Waugh, one of the founders of the London Missionary Society.

As a Professor, John Brown was no easy master to serve. He worked very hard himself and expected his students to do likewise. He demanded the very highest possible standards from them – but he demanded the same for himself. It is recorded that he was often in the habit of visiting his students between the hours of six and eight in the morning. But he was never harsh or unkind and his students held him in the highest possible regard, esteem and genuine affection.

In 1771 he published his *General History of the Christian Church*. In the same year, Janet Thomson, his first wife died and in 1733 he married Violet Crombie.

In 1778 there appeared the first edition of his *Self Interpreting Bible*, the work for which he is still best known. In essence, this was a very real attempt to help ordinary men and women to read and understand the Bible for themselves. It used the marginal references originated by John Canne and contained introductory and historical material as well as copious notes printed beneath the text of Scripture.

Such editions of the Bible are not without their disadvantages insofar as they can lead the reader into thinking that the notes

carry the same authority as Scripture itself. Yet *Brown's Bible* passed through many editions and was greatly used in the edification of souls. C H Spurgeon in *Commenting and Commentators* rather condemns it with faint praise and adds that the New Testament notes are an "undisguised plagiarism from Guyse." This comment is a little harsh. It is only right to point out that Brown makes no claim for the originality of his notes and openly acknowledged his indebtedness to many commentators including Guyse.

The famous Oxford preacher, Charles Simeon, found the work invaluable and sought to encourage its circulation among clergymen in England. Many editions of *Browns Bible* have been printed since it first appeared in 1778.

John Brown of Haddington died on 19th June 1787 aged 65, having spent 36 years as a pastor in Haddington and 20 years as Professor of the Associate Church (Burgher Synod). Though few would acknowledge the fact today, it is to men such as Brown that Scotland owes a great debt, Perhaps this will only be realised when it is too late.

John Brown of Broughton Place (1784-1858)

Published in the Bulwark Magazine September/October 1973

John Brown of Broughton Place occupies a position all of his own among Scottish Divines of the last century. He was a grandson of John Brown of Haddington and a son of Rev John Brown of Whitburn. In some ways he had a less brilliant mind than his grandfather but outwardly he had a warmer and friendlier personality. He enjoyed a much more comfortable way of life than his grandparents had done; yet his ministry was certainly not one of ease nor was it without its sorrows.

Brown's theological education was under the saintly George Lawson of Selkirk who had succeeded to John Brown of Haddington's position as sole Professor of the Associate (Seceder) Synod. His first pastoral charge was Biggar to which he was inducted in 1806 and in which he stayed some sixteen years.

It was during this time that he built up a justifiable reputation as an expositor of Scripture. At this time in history it appears that much of the contemporary expository preaching had become dry and formal. This was due to the fact that much of it was, in reality, not expository at all. Many preachers were in the habit of coming to Scripture with certain matters of doctrine in their minds on which they wished to preach. With this end in mind they would choose texts to fortify the doctrine.[9]

John Brown broke way from this shackle and went back to true expository preaching, to the great traditions of Calvin and the Puritan Fathers, by expounding verse by verse what Scripture itself says. His expositions proved to be spiritually warm, practical and experiential.

[9] One might suggest that this is still a common practice!

In 1822 he was called to minister to the United Associate congregation worshipping in Rose Street, Edinburgh. In 1829 he moved to the pastorate of Broughton Place Church in the New Town of Edinburgh. This recently built handsome Classical building that housed Brown and his congregation of some 1,500 souls is still in use as a place of worship. For a considerable period of in its history, it was commonly known as "Dr John Brown's Chapel".[10]

Broughton Place was the charge where Brown's ministry was destined to be most influential. A contemporary account [11] of his preaching in that church describes him thus: "… he seemed … to be one of the finest looking men I had ever seen. His face was beautifully chiselled, almost like marble; his forehead was high and bare; his thin white locks flowed lengthily over his ears and collar; his eye was black and piercing like an eagle's … and his voice was clear and ringing, sometimes trumpet like"

In 1834, Brown was appointed as Professor of Exegetical Theology in the United Associate Synod (formed in 1820 by the union of the Burgher and Anti-Burgher "New Lichts" movements. Since the time of the union, the system of training for the ministry had been somewhat altered. There were now four Professors who were also in full-time pastoral charges. Students came to study now in the Synod Hall (then in Queen Street) over the summer months. They were expected to work diligently during this period. Their studies for the rest of the year were under the supervision of their home Presbyteries.

John Brown was able to use his pulpit gifts for the benefit of his students. His expository preaching had prepared him well for expository lecturing to future ministers. In later life, Brown was

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[10] Broughton Place Church appeared in the film *Chariots of Fire* (1981). Built to the design of the distinguished Edinburgh Architect, Archibald Elliot, it is a Grade A listed building. It was abandoned as a place of worship in 1991 and now serves as an antiques showroom.

[11] W M Taylor, quoted in A R MacEwan, *Life and Letters of John Cairns*, 1895

to publish much of his material in commentary format. It is interesting to note that several of them have now been reprinted for our own day and generation.

Among his most famous are *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord Jesus Christ* and *Expository Discourses on I Peter*; among his commentaries are works on Romans, Galatians, Hebrews and II Peter. Writing of Brown, C H Spurgeon says "We always think of Brown as a Puritan born out of due time. Everything he has left us is massive gold. He is both rich and clear profound and perspicuous." There can be no doubt either that expounding the Scriptures was John Brown's greatest delight. Writing of his work on Hebrews he says "Happier hours than those which I have spent in composing these expository discourses I can scarcely expect to spend on this side of the grave."

Yet not all of Brown's life was happy as he was to become the centre point of a raging theological controversy. Rev James Morison of Clerk Lane's Church, Kilmarnock, a former student of Dr Brown's was indicted for heresy. Morison held and preached a universal view of the Atonement. This is fact was not denied by Morison who was subsequently deposed by the Synod. Brown, whilst not agreeing with everything that Morison said, spoke on his behalf and suggested that "… there ought to be room in the United Secession Church for men who held views similar to Mr Morison …" Brown also added that Morison was certainly in error "in certain respects".

In fairness to Morison, it should be said that he held only a universal view of the Atonement and that he did not believe in universal salvation as is sometimes supposed. By an act of contumacy, Morrison effectively deposed himself. He went on to form the Evangelical Union ("EU") in 1843 (two days before the Disruption of the Free Church). The majority of the EU

congregations united with the Congregational Union of Scotland in 1896.

The question of universality, whether of Atonement or salvation, was of great importance at its time. In the Established Kirk, John McLeod Campbell, Minister at Rhu, had been deposed for holding similar (although better expressed) doctrines to Morison. Rev Dr Andrew Thomson (composer of the famous Psalm tune *Saint George's Edinburgh*), a leading evangelical, had published a series of sermons in book form entitled *The Doctrine of Universal Pardon Considered and Refuted* which, as the title would imply, took a different view.

Morison attributed at least some of his views to Brown's teaching and the latter had appeared to take Morison's side at the trial. So, Brown had at laid himself open to the suspicion of an ultra-conservative Minority, led by Rev Dr Andrew Marshall of Kirkintilloch. Marshall later became a Hyper-Calvinist and stayed out of the union of the United Associate and Relief Churches in 1847.

Theologically, Brown was certainly orthodox; yet he appears to have adopted a position which at least tended in the direction of Amyraldianism. This teaching took its name from Moses Amyraut, a seventeenth-century French Reformed theologian. It is sometimes known by other names such as Universal Calvinism.

In outline, it teaches that "God willed by an antecedent decree that all men should be saved on condition of repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. He therefore sent Christ into the world to die for all men. But seeing that, left to themselves, none would repent and believe, He, by a subsequent decree, elected some as the objects of the saving operation of His grace. These and these only are actually saved." [12] There is disagreement even

[12] Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine*, 1938

now among Reformed scholars as to how far, if at all, his teachings square with the doctrines of *The Marrow*.

The controversy dragged on and was eventually concluded in 1845 when Brown was finally cleared of all charges of teaching unsound doctrine. Even his opponents then conceded that his theology was orthodox but suggested that some of the expressions he had used were at least open to misconstruction.

Interestingly enough, Dr Brown and Dr Marshall were allies in another matter – the movement that sought to disestablish the Church of Scotland and move towards what came to be known as the Voluntary Principle. Indeed, Brown was so strongly against State connection with the church (unlike his grandfather) that he refused to pay the Annuity Tax that was levelled on citizens of Edinburgh to pay the stipends of the ministers of the Burgh Churches. Rather than pay the Tax, he allowed some of his goods to be poinded and sold by the civil authorities.

A son of John Brown of Broughton Place, also named John Brown, was to continue the family name as a medical doctor and author of *Rab and his Friends* and other works. His *Letter to John Cairns* [13]is a tender and sympathetic portrait of his father. Although not called to the ministry, John Brown the son was proud to own and support the church of his fathers.

John Brown of Broughton Place died in 1858, having fought the good fight of faith, leaving behind him valuable expositions of the Scriptures that he loved and happy memories of one who was a gracious preacher and teacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

[13] Edinburgh, 1869

Memoirs of David Brown

Published in the Banner of Truth Magazine 141 (1975)

Although the Free Church College in Aberdeen was much smaller than its two sister Colleges of Edinburgh [New College] and Glasgow, it was certainly not without distinction either in learning or piety. Among the line of distinguished men of God who taught in this College were Patrick Fairbairn and George Smeaton, both of whom in due time were translated respectively to service in the Glasgow and Edinburgh Colleges respectively. One man, however who spent his whole teaching life in the Aberdeen College was David Brown, DD, LLD, known to nmost readers of this magazine for his commentary on *The Four Gospels.*

He was born on 17th August 1803 in Aberdeen, son of a local book-seller who was to be twice Lord Provost of that City and a grandson of a famous North-East evangelical, Rev William Brown, first Minister of the Secession Church of Craigdam, Aberdeenshire. This church was a remarkable centre of spiritual fervour in an area that was predominantly "Moderate" or Episcopalian.

David Brown's early boyhood days were spent in the family home in Broad Street near Marishall College and within a stone's throw of houses associated with such different literary figures as Lord Byron and Alexander Cruden [of *Cruden's Concordance* fame].

He was educated at the Grammar School of Aberdeen and at Marischal College where he graduated MA in 1821. Though he was going through a period of severe personal doubts, he entered the Divinity Hall. These doubts were to continue throughout his studies and his friendship with John Duncan [later to become the famous 'Rabbi' Duncan of New College] at a time when the latter was embracing theism, was far from helpful.

When his Divinity studies were complete, the young Brown went to Edinburgh for further studies, still being unsure as to his future. It was during the time spent in Edinburgh that he was soundly converted under the ministrations of Cesar Milan of Geneva who was preaching for a time in that city. Now that he had an understanding of the doctrines of grace, Brown hastened back to Aberdeen to confront his friend John Duncan. The subsequent conversion of the sceptical Duncan is another story but he was to become one of the most distinguished preachers and teachers ever to come out of the Free Church in the 19th century. It was Brown who was to write his friend's biography [*Memoir of John Duncan*] [14] and to edit a volume of his Communion sermons [*Pulpit and Communion Table*].

From 1830 to 1832, Brown assisted Edward Irving in his Caledonian Chapel in Hatton Garden, London. In 1830, Irving, generally credited as the founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church was at his most influential and, indeed, the best stage of his ministry. Irving's preaching and his interpretation of Scripture drew vast crowds at the time. Whatever else this period in London did for Brown, it certainly planted in him a great interest in the interpretation of prophecy. At first he shared the pre-millennial views of Irving but, after considerable private study, he changed to the post-millennial position of which he was to become one of the foremost exponents.

After David Brown left London, it was to be some time before he was settled in a pastoral charge. It seemed that his association with Irving was going to cost him dear. After a time of locum preaching and pastoral work in Dumbarton, during which time he developed greatly both intellectually and spiritually, he

[14] 1872. C H Spurgeon admits in a letter to Brown that he had not realised that the Brown of *Memoirs of John Duncan* was the same Brown as the writer of the commentaries. He wrote, 'Browns to the right of us, Browns to the left of us, God bless them all!"

was called to be minister of a new Chapel of Ease at Ord near Banff in 1836.

As minister of such a Chapel, he did not enjoy all the privileges of a parish minister and the area lacked many of the facilities that he might have enjoyed in one of the cities or larger towns of Scotland. Yet his ministry in Ord was to be a source of much blessing both to himself and his people. His friendly and easy manner, coupled with his evangelical earnestness, made them most acceptable to those to whom he ministered.

At the time of the Disruption in 1843, his sympathies were very much with Chalmers and his followers. This was not surprising since he lived in very close proximity to the parish of Aberchirder which was the scene of a chain of events nicknamed the 'Reel of Bogie' which helped to bring the Disruption issues to a head. Because of his sympathies, Brown was locked out of his own church by the Earl of Seafield. Shortly afterwards, Brown was translated to the new charge of Free St James's, Glasgow.

It was during his ministry there that he published his book *Christ's Second Advent*, based on previously published papers. In many ways this work, which sets out the post millennial position on the Coming of Christ, was to be his most influential even if it is not now so well known. About the same time he began his work on the contribution he was to make to a new commentary on the whole of Scripture to be published by William Collins and known as *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown*.[15] 'No one can estimate the good his work on the Second Advent has done', wrote Professor B B Warfield, the distinguished Princeton Scholar, ' … and his commentaries have seemed to many of us to distil the very essence of the Gospel.' In 1852, Brown was awarded the honorary degree of DD by Princeton College.

[15] Originally it had been hoped that Brown would undertake the whole of the New Testament section. In fact, he only completed the chapters on the Gospels, Acts and Romans.

At the age of 54, Brown began the most influential period of his life when he was appointed Professor of Apologetics, Church History and Exegetics of the Gospels at the Free Church College in Aberdeen. It had been hoped by some that he would be appointed to the Chair of New Testament Exegesis at New College but this was given instead to George Smeaton,[16] whose Chair in Aberdeen was then given to Brown.

Brown's period as a teacher in Aberdeen was to be fruitful and influential. Robertson Nicoll says of him that 'He was anxious to turn out good scholars and had a keen sense of literary form. But he was far more anxious that his students should be winners of souls.' He was to see only too well the inherent dangers of Higher Criticism and, with much personal pain and regret, he felt obliged to oppose, both in Presbytery and General Assembly the views promulgated by William Roberson Smith, a young colleague Professor in the Aberdeen College who was eventually removed from his Chair in 1881. Brown had an affection for Smith and a natural dislike on controversy, but he was quite clear in which direction his duty lay.[17]

To his dying day, he remained an opponent of all Higher Critical theories, unlike many of his academic contemporaries and he retained his great reverence for Scripture.

During his time as a Professor in Aberdeen, he wrote a small but learned book on *The Restoration of the Jews* in which he examined the Scriptural evidence for the national conversion of Israel and its ingathering and return to the homeland. In this work, he went rather further than his contemporaries in the

[16] Smeaton, a grand-nephew of John Smeaton, the distinguished civil engineer, was part of a group of friends which included Robert Murray McCheyne, Horatius and Andrew Bonar, and Sir Henry Wellwood Moncrieff. See John W Keddie, *George Smeaton*, 2007.

[17] Interestingly, there is a blue plaque on the external wall of the former College in honour of Robertson Smith and none for David Brown, whose portrait used to hang in the College Hall. The College building itself is now a public house and the College Hall is a night club named Babylon.

Princeton School who held to a view of national Jewish conversion but who saw no real evidence of restoration. In view of certain political events of this century, Brown's interpretations have been looked at by recent evangelical scholars with more interest.

Brown maintained to the end an optimistic view of the future mission of the Gospel and spoke in such terms as Moderator of the Free General Assembly in 1885, whilst also sounding a warning against the erosion of the Gospel truths.

In 1872, he became Principal of the Aberdeen College and he held this position until his death in 1897, although he retired from his Chair in 1886. He remained vigorous throughout his old age and maintained a wide interest in local and evangelistic work and social amelioration.[18] In Aberdeen his nickname among students was the "Running Commentary" because of his quickness of step!

He was twice honoured by the University of Aberdeen – by a DD in 1872 and by an LLD in 1896. He also served on the Revision Committee that produced the Revised Version of the New Testament in 1881. His personal feeling was that he was reasonably satisfied with the work but felt that there had been too many changes that were not necessary.

David Brown's contribution to the spiritual life of the Free Church was considerable, not least in his interest in the church life of his native Aberdeen. When he was a student, the theological teaching in Aberdeen was either Moderate or dryly orthodox, with the honourable exception of James Kidd.[19] The same could be said of much of the contemporary preaching in the North-East generally. When Brown died in 1897 at the age of

[18] In 1870 David Brown was a founding member of the Aberdeen Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, a major and comprehensive local charity which still operates in the City under the name of Voluntary Service Aberdeen.

[19] See further in separate article below.

94, the tide had certainly turned and this was in no small part due to his earnest and gracious influence and his unswerving loyalty to Scripture. On the day in which he died, he was heard to repeat the following lines:

When I am to die,
Receive me I'll cry,
For Jesus hath loved me,
I cannot tell why;
But this I do find,
We two are so joined,
That He won't be in glory
And leave me behind.

In many ways, these simple lines sum up his whole life and faith. He was accorded a Civic Funeral and his biographer, W Garden Blaikie, records that the Hall of the Free Church College was packed to overflowing. During his lifetime, Brown would never have anticipated this as he was a very modest, self-effacing man who followed Jeremiah's counsel 'Seek not great things for thyself.'

Now he had entered his eternal rest.

James Kidd of Aberdeen (1761 – 1834)

Published in the Banner of Truth Magazine 122 (1973)

In the 19th century evangelical circles in Aberdeen one figure seems to take a special pre-eminence, namely Dr James Kidd, minister at Gilcomston and Professor of Oriental Languages at Marishal College. Even today, nearly a century and a half after his death, quite a few Aberdonians can quote stories or anecdotes of Dr Kidd.

Just as C H Spurgeon is often remembered for his warmth and good humour rather than for his great and powerful ministry, so Dr Kidd tends to be remembered in Aberdeen for his strong personality rather than for the great spiritual fruits which his ministry produced in that city. Part of the purpose of this article is to attempt to redress the balance.

In background and education, James Kidd had no connection with Aberdeen and was guided to that northern city by several remarkable turns of Providence. He was born on 6th November 1761 at Loughbrickland, Co Down. When he was only a few months old, his father died and the family moved to Broughshane in Co Antrim. James Kidd's mother was a godly woman who instilled in her son a genuine love for Scripture and the Catechisms. When he was eight years old he was present with his mother at a Communion season and knew then that God had called him to be a minister of the Gospel.

His formal education was disjointed and somewhat slight but, like many young men of that time, he was able to educate himself to a considerable extent.

In his early twenties, he felt guided to emigrate to America and so he set off for the new world accompanied by his wife, the daughter of a Ballymena farmer. He landed at Philadelphia in

1784 and thereafter worked for some time as a tutor in the households of various wealthy families. Eventually he saved up enough money to enter the Pennsylvania College as a student. It was while studying at the College that he first came to grips with the study of Hebrew which was to become one of the great loves of his life.

It had been his intention when he went to America to return to Scotland for a time to study under John Brown at Haddington; Brown, however, died in 1787. Nevertheless, after his study at Pennsylvania College was complete, Kidd decided that he would still go to Scotland for his theological training at Edinburgh University. He left his wife and family in America as, at the time, he had every intention of returning there after his studies were completed. While studying at Edinburgh he also taught classes in Hebrew and Arabic to give himself and his family some financial support.

When his studies were complete in 1795, he was advised that the Chair of Oriental Languages at Marischal College Aberdeen was vacant and he was urged to apply for this position. His application was successful. Accordingly, he sent for his wife and family to come to Scotland to join him as he prepared to take up his new duties in Aberdeen, a city of which he had no previous knowledge. Little did it occur to him then that this was he was to spend the rest of his life. Tragically, on the voyage to Scotland, their youngest child was swept overboard ship and was lost. Mrs Kidd never fully recovered from the shock of the disaster.

In Aberdeen, the Kidd family found a situation quite different from anything they had known before. Aberdeen at the time was a very Scottish city and somewhat independent in outlook. Road links, even then, with the south were relatively poor. Yet it was a city with two separate universities – King's College founded in

1495 and Marischal College founded in 1593. The two Colleges united in 1860.

James Kidd tackled his new position with joy and enthusiasm although he found that, even in those days, Hebrew was not the most popular subject among theological students! At the same time, he continued his own theological studies both at Marischal and King's Colleges. In theology and background, Kidd was thoroughly reformed and Presbyterian and he had originally been drawn to the Associate [Seceder] tradition. After the death of John Brown, however, he felt guided towards the Established Church. He applied to the Presbytery of Aberdeen to be taken on trials for licence. The Presbytery appointed him to preach before a deputation on 28th February 1796 in Kinellar Church.[20]

Kidd wrote in his journal 'The congregation was larger than usual owing to want of sermon in some of the neighbouring parish churches.' This terse comment sums up the general position in Aberdeen at that time. In the main, the Established Church was in the hands of the "Moderates" and the theological climate in the city was on the level with their somewhat chilly rationalism. Even the dissenting churches seemed to lack a certain power in Aberdeen at that particular time. The teachings of Calvin and Knox had not made a strong impact on Aberdeen. Readers may recollect that it was to Aberdeen that the saintly Samuel Rutherford was exiled.

In a very real sense [although not apparent at the time], when the Presbytery sustained James Kidd's trials for licence it was a turning point in the religious life of Aberdeen. By the middle of the 19th century there was emerging a strong and vital reformed witness and, humanly speaking, much of the credit must go to him.

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[20] The writer of this article was Minister of Kinellar Church from 1970-75. The actual church, built on an ancient Christian site was rebuilt in 1801. It was abandoned as a place of worship some years ago and is currently derelict.

He continued in his Chair at Marischal College – he was to retain this position for the rest of his life – and was also appointed to the evening lectureship in Trinity Chapel, a chapel of ease situated in the Shiprow.[21] There he was to give the Sunday evening lecture [exposition of Scripture] over the next five years. The ministry of this fervent young Irishman took Aberdeen by storm. The chapel was soon packed out every Sunday evening with people who were thirsty for the Word. It was during these five years that he himself developed and matured as a preacher and expositor.

In 1801, he was called to minister at Gilcomston Chapel of Ease which came under the jurisdiction of the two ministers of the parish of Old Machar.[22] He accepted the call and this, in fact, was to be his sole pastoral charge; from beginning to end it was an evangelical ministry. Though a scholar, he was always simple, direct and yet profound in the pulpit. His chapel was soon crowded to capacity [2,000] three times every Sunday. In his pulpit work, he expounded the entire Bible twice and was commencing a third series at the time he died.

His congregation was drawn mainly from the working people who had come in large numbers from the country to seek work and had settled in the area of Aberdeen known as Gilcomston. Life was not easy in those days. There was much drunkenness and immorality as well as a shocking ignorance of the Gospel. James Kidd could somehow manage to combine being a University professor and a popular preacher and pastor at the same time.

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[21] Surprisingly, this building survives at the corner of Guild Street and Exchange Street. Having been vacated in favour of more commodious premises, it has passed through many subsequent uses, including a theatre, menagerie, warehouse and hot food take-away. Immediately next door in Trinity Lane is the former Catholic Apostolic Church, used for many years as a banana warehouse and now tastefully restored as a popular restaurant.,

[22] The main church of Old Machar was St Machar's Cathedral in Old Aberdeen. The city was originally divided into two main parishes – St Nicholas and Old Machar – lying on the east and west sides respectively of the Den Burn.

His ministry at Gilcomston was not, however, without its difficulties. He was, for a while, the victim of real persecution when certain individuals tried, without success, to blacken his character. All their charges were proved to have been entirely false. Also, his ministry was not helped by the fact that he was under the jurisdiction of the two ministers of Old Machar who were not always sympathetic or supportive. It was not until 1834, the year of his death, that chapels of ease were given more or less equal status with parish churches.

Great pressures were put upn his time and so his published writings are few in comparison to his gifts and intellect. In 1815 he published *An Essay on the Doctrine of the Trinity* and in 1822 his major work *Dissertation on the Eternal Sonship*.[23] In addition he published a book of sermons, a volume of skeleton sermons and various pamphlets.

In 1818 he was awarded the degree of DD by the New Jersey College [Princeton]. He also had a strong formative influence on a young Aberdeen man called John Duncan, afterwards 'Rabbi' Duncan of New College.[24]

As mentioned earlier, Dr Kidd is often remembered today for his witty and even outrageous remarks both in and out of the pulpit. Indeed, Rev James Stark in his generally excellent and sympathetic biography [25] of Kidd actually includes a chapter of anecdotes entitled *Kiddiana*. That James Kidd is remembered mainly for such superficial reasons is regrettable and the present writer has not included any of these anecdotes in this article.

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[23] Republished 1872

[24] See *Life of John Duncan* by David Brown, 1872

[25] *James Kidd of Aberdeen*, 1892

Much more worthy of reproduction is part of a letter that he wrote in 1825 to the Marquis of Huntly thanking him for his kindness to the poor of Gilcomston. He wrote: "I venture to subjoin a copy of the Holy Scriptures with my letter of thanks which I hope you will deign to accept. I do this, my lord, not because I suppose that you are unacquainted with the Word of God, but as your lordship has treated me like a marquis, I attempt to return the compliment as a minister of God."

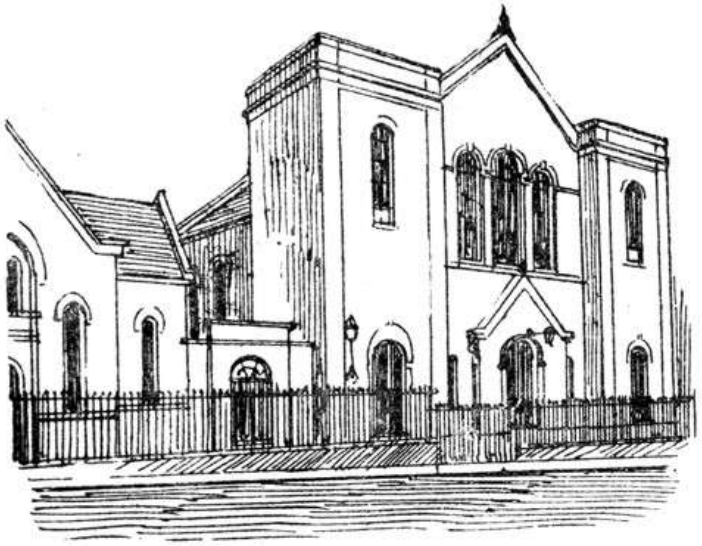
James Kidd was one who remained faithful to the end and whose ministry grew richer with the passing of the years. He could, for example, write in his journal in 1832: "In reading Colquhoun on *The Law and the Gospel*, his view of the doctrines, the promises, the offers, the invitations of the Gospel … notwithstanding that I had endeavoured to preach the Gospel from the day I was licensed, yet I never perceived what the Gospel is so clearly. Blessed be God! … Oh, what a mercy the Gospel is! How precious! How sweet! All free grace! All free gifts!"

He was taken ill on 19th December 1834 and was unable to preach on the following Sunday. On the 23rd [Tuesday] he went to Marischal College to meet his students who were awed into silence by his death-like pallor. He translated with them the first chapter of Job. He then turned to give wise counsel on the work of the Christian ministry and urged them to be diligent in all their work. He cited Matthew Poole as a diligent man who was worthy of imitation.

He died on 24th December in his home in Chapel Street [named after his own chapel]. On the day of his funeral, all work was suspended in the city. His remains lie in St Nicholas Churchyard in the heart of the modern city of Aberdeen. Two streets near the site of his house named 'Kidd Street' and 'Minister Lane' respectively also help to perpetuate his memory. The site of his chapel is still occupied by the parish church of Gilcomston. The

other Gilcomston church – Gilcomston South – was the former Free Church and is situated in Union Street.[26] The whole area has changed beyond recognition since Kidd's day.

Yet Kidd's influence is far from dead. His ministry was to be a harbinger of new things in Aberdeen and throughout Scotland. Many famous preacher and teachers of worth were to have close connections with Aberdeen in the 19th century. These include, to name but a few, John Duncan, David Brown, Thomas McCrie, Patrick Fairbairn, George Smeaton, Alfred Edersheim and Samuel McMillan. In particular, the Free Church College in Aberdeen was to wield a great influence for good not only in the city but throughout Scotland and, indeed, throughout the world.



Gilcomston Chapel

[26] As a result of a union, Kidd's old church was renamed Denburn Parish Church. The building is no longer used as a place of worship. Most of the congregation of Gilcomston South Church seceded from the Church of Scotland in 2013 although the breakaway congregation still currently worship in the Union Street building.

Other Booklets by Alasdair Gordon

Beneath the Cross of Jesus (1972, 2013)

Christmas Snow and Other Poems (2013)

Consider your Verdict (1971, 2013)

Dial Good News (2013)

Historical Notes on Fintray Parish Church (1973) *

Lochore and Ballingry: A Parish History (1961) *

The Hope of Israel [Alasdair Gordon and William Still (1977)] *

* Denotes currently out of print

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Alasdair Gordon has also written articles on the under-noted for the *Dictionary of Evangelical Biography*[27], copyright of which remains with the publishers.

William Lindsay Alexander
James Bannerman
John Brown of Broughton Place
Robert Buchanan
Patrick Clason
Alexander Dyce Davidson
James Kidd
Angus Makellar
George Smeaton
Alexander Thomson of Banchory
William Wilson

[27] Originally issued as the *Blackwell Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* (Editor: Donald Lewis) in 1995, it was reissued as *The Dictionary of Evangelical Biography* in the USA in 2005.