

Richard Cameron ¹

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“LORD, spare the green and take the ripe.” With these words on his lips, Richard Cameron led his small force of Covenanters into battle on a July day three hundred and fifty years ago this week. A month earlier, on the first anniversary of Bothwell Bridge, he had issued, at Sanquhar, the famous Declaration disowning “Charles Stuart, that has been reigning (or rather tyrannising, as we may say) on the Throne of Britain these years bygone.” Charles had forfeited the Crown of Scotland “by his perjury and breach of covenant both to God and his Kirk,” and Cameron, with some twenty followers, solemnly declared “war with such a tyrant and usurper and against all such as have strengthened him, sided with, or anywise acknowledged him in his tyranny.”

The King had been a perjured man for some twenty years, for it was in 1660 that he repudiated the subscription to two Covenants which had been extorted from him as a condition of recognition as King of Scots in 1650. Posterity is inclined to regard the royal tyranny and misgovernment as graver crimes than the royal perjury, but Cameron and his disciples were convinced that the tyranny followed logically from the perjury, and they placed it in the forefront of the monarch's offences.

The little band at Sanquhar and the small body of troops that gathered to the standard of the Covenant believed that, after so many years of suffering, the Day of the Lord was at hand, and that the weak things of this world were about to be chosen to confound the strong.

At Ayrsmoss, or Aird's Moss, this confidence was put to the test, and Providence seemed to be on the side of the big battalions. The Covenanters were hopelessly defeated; Richard Cameron was among “the ripe” who fell, and others of the leaders were reserved for a more cruel death. Cameron was not much over thirty, but hunted men grow old early, and all who followed him into battle looked upon him as ripe for the Master's Kingdom. His prayer had been granted, and he was preserved from the evils that were to come in the next eight years. Yet his sacrifice was not in vain. It is likely enough that he, like

¹ The above appeared as one of the leading articles in the "Glasgow Herald" (22nd July) and is reprinted by the kind permission of the editor, Sir Robert Bruce. We have pleasure in presenting it to our readers as coming from one of the most important organs of the provincial press and as showing a sympathy with the Covenanters not too common even in Scottish secular journals.-Editor.

those who bore his name, would have disapproved of the conditions under which the Revolution brought victory to the Presbyterian cause, but he had his share in that victory. His biographer, the late Principal Herkless, remarked about him that he died, if he did not always live, for civil and religious liberty, and his name is rightly honoured as that of a martyr. Fate has conferred upon him two other distinctions, one, at all events, of which he would have disowned.

The title of "Cameronians" as applied to a body of Christian people would have seemed to him to be an undue elevation of the "creature." The servant's name should not be given to the Master's followers. This was the feeling of those who maintained his testimony, but the reverence paid to his memory was so great that, in spite of themselves they had to accept the designation. The other significance of the term Cameronians is not open to the same objection. From the followers of Richard Cameron, in the summer of 1689, the Earl of Angus and Colonel Cleland formed a company of soldiers. It developed into the famous regiment which has borne for nearly two centuries and a half the name of the minister of the Gospel who fell at Ayrsmoss, and has fought many a stubborn fight for freedom.