

The Cambuslang Revival (1742)

By Rev. Donald B. Macleod

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(The following account was written by the original editor of Dugald Buchanan's Diary. In the extract from Buchanan's Diary in the January issue of our Magazine, reference is made to the revival at Cambuslang and how Buchanan himself heard George Whitefield preach there at that time).

Cambuslang is a parish about four miles south-east of Glasgow, and, at the time of this revival, was under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. M'Culloch, a man of decided piety, and anxiously desirous of the spiritual welfare of his people. In his ordinary course of sermons for nearly a year before the work began, he had been preaching on those subjects which tend most directly to explain the nature, and prove the necessity of regeneration; and, for some months before the remarkable events now about to be mentioned, a more than ordinary concern about religion appeared among his flock; as an evidence of which, a petition was given in to him, subscribed by about ninety heads of families, desiring a weekly lecture; which was readily granted.

This was in the beginning of February, 1742. On the 15th of that month, the different prayer meetings in the parish assembled at his house, and next day they again met for solemn prayer relative to the interests of the gospel. Although this second meeting was of a more private description, others getting notice of it, desired to join, and were admitted: and on the day following, they met a third time for the same purpose. At this period, though several persons had come to the minister under deep concern about their salvation, there had been no great number; but on Thursday the 18th, after sermon, about fifty came to him under alarming apprehensions about the state of their souls; and such was their anxiety, that he had to pass the night in conversing with them.

After this, the desire of the people for religious instruction was so great, that Mr. M'Culloch found himself obliged to provide them a sermon almost daily; and after sermon, he had generally to spend some time with them in exhortation and prayer: and the blessing of God on these ordinances was so great, that by the beginning of May, the number of persons awakened to a deep concern about salvation, exceeded three hundred.

About this time (June 1742), Mr. Whitefield revisited Scotland, and in consequence of earnest invitations, he came to the west country, and to

Cambuslang amongst other places, where, with his customary zeal, he preached three times on the very day of his arrival, to a vast body of people, although he had preached the same morning at Glasgow. The last of these exercises began at nine in the evening, and continued till eleven; and such was the relish for the word of life, that Mr. M'Culloch preached after him till past one in the morning, and even then, the people could hardly be persuaded to depart. All night in the fields the voice of prayer and praise was to be heard.

The Sacrament of the Supper was dispensed on the 11th of July, and the solemnity was so remarkably blessed, that it was speedily repeated. The following extract of a letter written by Mr. M'Culloch, giving an account of the proceedings at this period, will be read with interest:-

“The dispensation of the sacrament was such a sweet and agreeable time to many, that a motion was made by Mr. Webster, and, immediately seconded by Mr. Whitefield, that we should have another such occasion very soon. The motion was very agreeable to me, but I thought it needful to deliberate before coming to a resolution. The thing proposed was extraordinary, but so had the work been for several months. Care was therefore taken to acquaint the several meetings for prayer, who relished the motion well, and prayed for direction to those concerned to determine this matter.

The session met next Lord's day, and taking into consideration the Divine command to celebrate the ordinance often, joined with the extraordinary work that had been here for some time past; and understanding that many who had met with such benefit to their souls at the last solemnity, had expressed an earnest desire of seeing another in this place shortly; and hearing that there were many who intended to have joined at the last occasion, but were kept back through inward discouragements, or outward obstructions, and were wishing soon to see another opportunity of that kind here, to which they might have access; it was therefore resolved, God willing, that the sacrament of the Lord's Supper should be again dispensed in this parish on the third Sabbath of August: and there was first one day, and then another, appointed for a general meeting of the several societies for prayer in the parish, at the manse; but as the manse could not conveniently hold them, they went to the church, and when light failed them there, a good many, of their own free motion, returned to the manse, and continued at prayer and praise till about one o'clock next morning.

One design of these meetings was; to ask that the Lord would continue and increase the blessed work of conviction and conversion, and eminently countenance the dispensing of the holy sacrament of the supper a second time in this place, and thereby make the glory of this latter solemnity to exceed that of the former.

“This second sacrament did, indeed, much excel the former, not only in the number of ministers, people, and communicants, but which is the main thing, in a much greater measure of the power and special presence of God, in the observation and experience of multitudes who were attending.

“The ministers who assisted at this solemnity were Mr. Whitefield, Mr. Webster from Edinburgh, Mr. M'Laurin and Mr. Gillies from Glasgow, Mr. Robe from Kilsyth, Mr. Currie from Kinglassie, Mr. M'Knight from Irvine, Mr. Bonar from Torphichen, Mr. Hamilton from Douglas, Mr. Henderson from Blantyre, Mr. Maxwell from Rutherglen, and Mr. Adam from Cathcart. All of them appeared to be very much assisted in their work. Four of them preached on the fast-day; four on Saturday; on Sabbath I cannot tell how many; and five on Monday on which last day it was computed that about twenty-four ministers and preachers were present.

Old Mr. Bonar, though so frail that he took three days to ride eighteen miles from Torphichen to Cambuslang, was so set upon coming here, that he could by no means stay away; and when he was helped up to the tent, preached three times with great life; and returned with much satisfaction and joy. Mr. Whitefield's sermons on Saturday and Sabbath were attended with much power, particularly on Sabbath night about ten, and that on Monday, several crying out; and a very great, but devout weeping and mourning, was observable through the auditory. On Sabbath evening, while he was serving some tables, he appeared to be so filled with the love of God, as to be in a kind of ecstasy or transport, and communicated with much of that blessed frame.

“The number of people that were there on Saturday and Monday, was very considerable; but the number present at the three tents, on the Lord's Day, was so great, that, so far as I can hear, none ever saw the like since the Revolution in Scotland: nor even anywhere else, at any sacrament occasion: some have called them fifty thousand - some forty thousand. The lowest estimate I hear of, with which Mr. Whitefield agrees, who has been much used to great multitudes, makes them to have been upwards of thirty thousand.

“The number of communicants appears to have been about three thousand. The tables were doubled, and the double table was reckoned to contain one hundred and fourteen, one hundred and sixteen, or one hundred and twenty communicants. The number of tables I reckoned had been about twenty-four; but I have been since informed, that a man who sat near the tables, and kept a pen in his hand, and carefully marked each service, said that there were twenty-five double tables, the last wanting only five or six sitters to fill it up. And this account seems the most probable, as agreeing nearly with the number of tokens distributed, which was about three thousand. And some worthy of credit, and that had proper opportunities to know, gave it as their opinion, that there was such a blessed frame upon the people, that if there had been access to tokens, there would have been a thousand more communicants.

“This vast concourse of people, you may easily imagine, came not only from the city of Glasgow and other places nearby, but from many places at a considerable distance. It was reckoned there were two hundred communicants from Edinburgh, two hundred from Kilmarnock, one hundred from Irvine, and one hundred from Stewarton. It was observed that there were some from England and Ireland at this occasion; a considerable number of Quakers were hearers, and some that had formerly been Seceders were communicants.

“There was a great deal of outward decency and regularity about the tables. Public worship began on the Lord’s Day just at half-past eight in the morning. My action sermon, I think, was reasonably short. The third or fourth table was a-serving at twelve o’clock, and the last table about sunset. When that was done, the work was closed with a few words of exhortation, prayer and praise, the precentor having so much day-light as to let him read four lines of a psalm. The passes to and from the tables were, with great care, kept clear for the communicants. The tables filled so quickly, that often there was no more time between one table and another, than to sing four lines of a psalm. The tables were all served in the open air, beside the tent below the brae; the day was temperate: no rain nor wind in the least to disturb. Several persons of considerable rank and distinction, who were elders, most cheerfully assisted our elders in serving tables: such as the honourable Charles Erskine, Bruce of Kennet, Gillon of Wallhouse, and others.

“But what was most remarkable, was the spiritual glory of this solemnity; I mean the gracious and sensible presence of God. Not a few were awakened to

a sense of sin, and their lost and perishing condition without a Saviour. Others had their bands loosed, and were brought into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Many of God's dear children have declared, that it was a happy time to their souls, wherein they were abundantly satisfied with the goodness of God in His ordinance, and filled with joy and peace in believing. I have seen a letter from Edinburgh, the writer of which says, that having talked with many Christians from that city, who had been here at this sacrament, they all owned that God had dealt bountifully with their souls. Some declared that they would not for the world have been absent from this solemnity. Others cried out, 'Now let thy servant depart in peace from this place, since our eyes have seen thy salvation here.' Others wishing if it were the will of God, to die where they were attending God in his ordinances, without returning to the world of their friends, that they might be with Christ in heaven, as that which is incomparably best of all."

Such is the substance of Mr. M'Culloch's account of this remarkable period; and as Mr. Whitefield was frequently at Cambuslang about this time, the following observations, given nearly in his words, will be interesting:- "Persons from all parts flocked to see, and many from many parts went home convinced and converted unto God. A brae, or hill, near the manse at Cambuslang, seemed to be formed by Providence, for containing a large congregation. People sat unwearied till two in the morning to hear sermons, disregarding the weather. You could scarce walk a yard but you must tread upon some, either rejoicing in God for mercies received, or crying out for more.

Thousands and thousands have I seen, before it was possible to catch it by sympathy, melted down under the word and power of God. At the celebration of the holy communion, their joy was so great, that, at the desire of many, both ministers and people, in imitation of Hezekiah's passover they had, a month or two afterwards, a second, which was a general rendezvous for the people of God. The communion table was in the field; three tents at proper distances, all surrounded by a multitude of hearers; about twenty ministers (among whom was good old Mr. Bonar.) attending to preach and assist, all enlivening and enlivened by one another".

Amongst the multitudes that flocked to Cambuslang, at this interesting period, there were persons who went with a design to find matter of diversion, and while the bands of such mockers were, no doubt, generally made stronger, others were made happy monuments of divine grace. The case of two young

men may be mentioned, as affording a striking example of sovereign mercy. They were very profane, and had gone over to be amused with the “falling” at Cambuslang, as they jestingly termed it; but in place of being amused, they were both impressed the same day; and so deep were their convictions, that they were glad to get into a stable hard by, for the purpose of supplicating that grace which they had hitherto despised; and their subsequent conduct afforded reason to conclude, that the word they had that day heard, had proved the savour of life to their souls.

As to what these young men termed “the falling”, it was a way of speaking among scoffers at the time, occasioned by the bodily distress which, in many instances, accompanied conviction. The work was much objected to in consequence; but when the intimate connection of soul and body is considered, it will not appear surprising that great outward agitation should mark the emotions of a soul fully awakened to the dread realities of judgment and eternity. The loss of a dear relative, and many of the other painful vicissitudes of life, when suddenly forced upon the mind, affect the bodily constitution so powerfully, as, in some instances, to occasion even death. And if such is sometimes the effect of things merely temporal, need we wonder that a vivid sense of the sinner's situation out of Christ, with nothing but the brittle thread of life between him and everlasting destruction, should empower the body!

The wonder rather is, that the preaching of the solemn truths of God's word, is so rarely followed by such consequences: and we can account for this only by supposing, that the Spirit of God does not make the sinner at once alive to all the terrors of his condition. With regard to the revival at Cambuslang, the greater number of the subjects of it were not observably under bodily distress; and as for those who were, their lives proved that they had been made partakers of divine grace: which is a proof that agitation is, at least, not inconsistent with a work of the Holy Ghost.

The narrative now given has been fully attested by the most able and pious ministers of the time, and their attestations might be transcribed here did space permit. Amongst others who have borne testimony to this glorious display of divine power, are Mr. M'Laurin, of the Northwest Church of Glasgow (now St. David's), well known by his remarkable sermon on the Cross of Christ: Mr. Hamilton, of the Barony Parish; Mr. Hamilton, of Bothwell: Mr. Hamilton, of Douglas: and Mr. Connell, of Kilbride. Mr. Willison, of Dundee, also, has

recorded his opinion, and the following extract shows what were his sentiments: - "Seeing some are desirous to know my thoughts of the work at Cambuslang, I am willing to own that I have travelled a good way to inquire and get satisfaction about it. And having resided several days in Mr. M'Culloch's house, I had occasion to converse with many who had been awakened and under convictions there; I found several in darkness and great distress about their souls' condition, and with many tears bewailing their sins and original corruption, and especially the sin of unbelief, and slighting of precious Christ.

Others I found in a most desirable frame, overcome with a sense of the wonderful love and loveliness of Jesus Christ, even sick of love, and inviting all about them to help them praise Him. I spoke also with many who had got relief from their soul trouble, and in whom the gracious work of the Spirit of God appeared in the fruits and effects of it, according to my apprehension; such as their ingenuous confessing of their former evil ways, and professing of sin; very low and abasing thoughts of themselves; renouncing the vanities of the world, and all their own doings and righteousness, and relying wholly upon Christ for righteousness and strength: and expressing great love to Christ, to the Bible, to secret prayer, to the people of God, and to His image, in whomsoever it was, without respect to persons or parties; and also love to their enemies.

I conversed with some who had been very wicked and scandalous, but now wonderfully changed; though some were rude and boisterous before, they now had the meekness and mildness of the lamb before them; and though I conversed with a great number, both men and women, old and young, I could observe nothing visionary or enthusiastic about them, for their discourses were solid, and experience scriptural. I had heard much of this surprising work by letters, and by eye-witnesses, before I came, but all that made slight impressions on me when compared with what I was an eye and ear witness to myself. Upon the whole, I look upon the work at Cambuslang to be a most singular and marvellous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which Christ hath promised; and I pray it may be a happy forerunner of a general reviving of the work of God in this poor decayed Church, and a blessed means of union among all the lovers of our dear Jesus."

We have likewise the testimony of Mr. M'Culloch himself, who, in a letter written about nine years after the revival, and when ample time had been afforded to test the sincerity of the professions then made, writes nearly as

follows: - "Setting aside all those that appeared under awakenings here in 1742, who have since remarkably backslidden, there is a considerable number of the then awakened that appear to bring forth good fruits. I do not talk of them at random, nor speak of their number in a loose, general, and confused way, but have now before me, at the writing of this, 27th April, 1751, a list of about four hundred persons awakened here, at Cambuslang, in 1742, who from that time to the time of their death, or to this, that is, for these nine years past, have been all enabled to behave, in a good measure, as becometh the gospel, by anything I could ever see, and by the best information I could get concerning them."

While this letter furnishes such satisfactory evidence of the reality of the work, the following paragraph, from the same communication, affords a beautiful proof of the humility of him who was a main instrument in promoting it: When I mention such comfortable abiding effects of this work, I would not have it ascribed to any creature., but that the entire glory of it should be given to God, whose work it was. It is true, there were many ministers here, from places near and more remote; and some of them men of great eminence, who preached at my desire, and who also joined with me in exhortation to souls appearing in spiritual distress, who resorted to the manse.

But what could all these avail without the divine power and blessing? Whoever plant and water, it is God that gives the increase. Ministers are but instruments in His hands. No praise was due to the rams horns, though Jericho's walls fell down at their blast: if God will vouchsafe that His word shall breathe through ministers, it is God, and not the means, must have the praise. It is very fit and reasonable that He that builds the temple should bear the glory: and Christ is both the foundation and founder of the church, and therefore let all the glory be ascribed to Him."

The period which elapsed between 1740 and 1750, forms an important era in the religious history, not of the little village of Cambuslang only, but it may almost be said of Scotland, as revivals were then very general. During these ten years a great multitude of souls were added to the Church; and it is important to remark, that a spirit of prayer was extensively prevalent. In illustration of this, the substance of a letter, written at Edinburgh in 1743, by Mr. George Muir, afterwards one of the ministers of Paisley, may be quoted:-

The praying societies in this place are, as near as we can guess, between twenty-four and thirty; some of which will be obliged to divide, by reason of

too many meeting together, which will increase the number. Amongst them are several meetings of boys and girls, who in general seem to be growing in grace, and increasing in knowledge. The little lambs appear to be unwilling to rest upon duties, or anything short of Christ. There are several meetings of young women, who, I am informed, hold on very well; and there are numbers of young men, who meet for the excellent purpose of glorifying God, and promoting Christian knowledge.

A good many old men, substantial, standing Christians, meet for edification (the glory of their God being always their chief end), and are thereby revived, and very much refreshed. This is not all; for several country people are beginning to assemble together, in little meetings, to worship God; and I am informed, that about two miles from this place, several ploughmen, and other illiterate persons, meet, and are going sweetly on, having some added to their number daily. In the east country, also, near Dunbar, many are now meeting for social prayer and conversation upon religious matters, having the Lord with them of a truth; and in that place, there is a more eager thirsting for the word, and the ministers are learning to speak with new tongues."

Such remarkable manifestations of the Holy Spirit have been so long withheld from the churches of Scotland; that many who bear the name of Christian are tempted to think, that His affecting operations on the souls of men, through the preaching of the gospel, belonged only to the extra- ordinary ministrations of the apostles; and that now no more is necessary, in order to make men good Christians, but a mere rational conviction of the deformity of vice, and of the beauty and excellency of virtue.

An external profession of religion, with a general assent to the truths of revelation, and a life un-blameable in the eye of human laws, are all that is considered needful, though, at the same time, the person be an absolute stranger to the faith of God's elect, and to the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ, having made no particular application of Jesus Christ to Himself, nor having been brought to rest upon Him alone for the whole of his salvation: and yet it is as certain as God's word is true, that unless the moral man in the world is "born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God;" and that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ," be he otherwise what he will, "he is none of His." Great, and alas! too successful endeavours have been made to bring men to rest upon a ministry and ordinance without the Spirit.

By nature we love not God, nor the things of God; the Sabbath is a weariness - the Scriptures are without interest, and the ordinances of God's house possess no attraction. In this state we are obviously unfit for the eternal Sabbath, and for the blessed employments of the upper sanctuary. We must be changed if we would ever enjoy these. This change the Spirit of God accomplishes on every soul that comes to Christ. Our tastes, therefore, afford a plain test by which our state may be ascertained.

Reader; have you any relish for these things? Have you any sympathy with the hungering and thirsting after God, which was so remarkably displayed at Cambuslang? If you have not - if conscience tells you that religion is unsavoury, it is certain that you are without Christ, and consequently without hope. Up then, and flee to Christ; delay not, for "now is the accepted time." The needful change the Holy Spirit will accomplish in you, "to-day, if you will hear his voice." "God now commandeth all me everywhere to repent." This command is laid as a terror across your path; you cannot proceed one step further in an irreligious course without trampling it under foot; without practically saying, "God commands me to repent, but I will -not repent: the Holy Ghost sayeth, hear His voice to-day, but to-day I will not hear it." If to-morrow's rising sun find you out of the narrow way of life, it will find you where God forbids you to be on pain of His severest displeasure. - Remember eternity is at hand. - Time speeds away.

"No winds along the hills can flee,
So swiftly, or so smooth as he:
Like fiery steed - from stage to stage,
He bears us on from youth to age,
Then plunges in the fearful sea
Of fathomless eternity."

Let the faithful in Christ Jesus, into whose hands this narrative may come, be stirred up to earnest, persevering prayer, that the Lord's work may be successfully carried on in Scotland, even the great work of quickening the dead, justifying the guilty, and sanctifying the ungodly. Let Christians throughout the land unite for this purpose. Let congregations unite to implore the divine blessing on the labours of their pastors.

It is in this manner that the arm of the Lord must be awakened; and when societies for prayer are multiplied, we may be assured that a day of power is at hand. The showers which have before refreshed our land will refresh it yet

again, and the gospel will anew be preached with the Spirit sent down from above, making ministers divinely wise to win souls to Christ, and sending them forth in all corners and churches of this land, with as full a blessing of the gospel of Christ, as Scotland or America has ever before experienced.