

## PART TWO

### SCOTLAND AND THE MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

There never was an age of the world in which a more effective machinery for conversion was, in the shape of schools and bibles and missionaries, put into operation.

*Chalmers*<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>. *Memoirs*, 2, 503.

### Scotland and missions before 1813

---

During Chalmers' life-time Scotland responded, in common with Britain, Europe and America, to the stimuli and opportunities which produced the modern missionary movement. Its special contribution lay not only in what was felt to be a high number<sup>2</sup> of talented<sup>3</sup> missionaries, but in a distinctive philosophy in which a bias towards education was integrated with more direct forms of evangelism. This can be found in some of the aspirations of the ill-fated Darien expedition to Central America at the end of the 17th century, traced through the involvement of the SSPCK in the Highlands of Scotland and among the Indians of North America in the 18th, and seen in the policies drawn up in the 1820s which were implemented in the subsequent decade by the Church's India mission.

The absence of overseas mission before Darien and for long after has some obvious reasons. Scotland did not have anywhere it could send people. A look at involvement overseas during these centuries provides a large part of the answer, though conceivable enthusiasm had it existed might well have contrived an opening. Scots had been in contact with Europe and trading in the Baltic for a long period, and although there were Scots churches in parts of Europe this did not lead immediately to wider religious ambitions. Their role in defending and running the British empire makes it easy to forget that this was not always so. The first to go to America were those under banishment. In the aftermath of Darien there was resentment, and for a time legislation, about Scots holding positions of authority in English colonies. The Union of 1707 marked the beginning of change, but migration to North America and elsewhere was later as far as significant numbers were concerned. It was here the first direct involvement in mission became a possibility, and after the American revolution and a shift of British attention to India, interest in Asia slowly developed.

The SSPCK's work in America was respectable enough, and important because of that, but the suggestion of more widespread commitment was not at first welcome. Nevertheless in the three decades between the founding of the London Missionary Society in 1795 and the decision of the 1824 General Assembly that the Church of Scotland investigate a mission of its own, a considerable change in attitudes took place. Chalmers himself changed from treating such things not very seriously to one who believed the conversion of the world was an obligatory task requiring the involvement of all Christians. The role of the SSPCK meant that for the leadership of the Scottish church at least thinking about mission had long been on their horizons. The question from the 1790s onwards was less about validity, than about seriousness of commitment and the priorities involved. The Scots did not come to the missionary movement in a theological vacuum or with theological barriers as to what it was all about.

The first missionaries supported from Scotland had been those in America who were employed by local corresponding committees of the SSPCK. The first missionaries from Scotland were sent by Scottish voluntary societies. The first generation of missionaries from the established church itself were Chalmers' students. He had been energetic in his support of missionary societies from the time of his conversion, and was keen to harness missionary interest to work for the church at home as well as abroad.

---

<sup>2</sup>. J Calder, *Scotland's march past. The share of Scottish churches in the London Missionary Society*, 1945, 5, 10, 29.

<sup>3</sup>. F S Piggan, *The social background, motivation and training of British Protestant missionaries in India, 1789-1858*, University of London PhD thesis, 1974, 283-317.

From 1823 to 1828, missions were his chief interest outside of his responsibilities as professor of moral philosophy at St Andrews. Although other matters were to the fore after he moved to Edinburgh, the commitment was maintained. During the 1820s and 30s the locus of missionary support in Scotland shifted from the interdenominational societies to the churches, and in Chalmers can be seen the tensions felt by an Evangelical long committed to the societies and in some ways not entirely convinced about the missionary policies of the Church.

A feature of the missionary movement was the widespread formation of the local societies. They had some precedent in praying societies in the past,<sup>4</sup> but these were notable for action as well as prayer. They were also of significance for the ecumenical relationships they cultivated and the way they brought about lay involvement in the mission of the church. During the first half of the 19th century the voluntary religious association became a normative feature of church life. In time they became more denominational in character, but as they did so they prepared the way for the ordinary membership of the Church of Scotland to take on a greater financial responsibility once the willingness and ability of successive governments to aid the established church was eroded.

### *From the Reformation to the Union of Parliaments*

Missionary endeavour towards Scotland if not out from it, can be traced back to Ninian, Columba and Kentigern.<sup>5</sup> However they were more often venerated as saints than emulated as missionaries, and it was many centuries before their precedent was taken as an example. The Reformation in Scotland did not result in mission overseas, but was at least permissive of one taking place. The title page of the *Scots Confession* of 1560 carried the text “And this glaid tydinges of the kingdom shalbe preached throught the hole world for a witness to all nations and then shall the end cum.”<sup>6</sup> Article 16 stated the church was “catholike, that is universal, because it conteinis the Elect of all ages, of all realmes, nations, and tongues.”<sup>7</sup> A prayer at the end included the petition “Let all Nations cleave to thy trew knowledge”.<sup>8</sup>

In the 16th century these texts may have conveyed little more than that Scotland ought to included among the nations experiencing reformation. At home the task of the church was clear and pressing and feasible openings for missionary work did not exist. For much of the 17th century as well there was reason enough not to seek responsibilities beyond Scotland’s shores, yet a missionary purpose was becoming marginally more explicit. In 1644 Scots were among those who called for missionary work in America and the West Indies<sup>9</sup> and the following year the *Directory of Public Worship* stated ministers should pray “for the propagation of the gospel and kingdom of Christ to all nations.”<sup>10</sup> The *Shorter Catechism* did not mention the Great Commission, but the *Larger Catechism*

---

<sup>4</sup>. H Watt, ‘The praying societies of the early eighteenth century,’ *Original Secession Magazine*, February 1934, 49-53.

<sup>5</sup>. D Mackichan, *The missionary ideal in the Scottish churches*, 1927, 16-50.

<sup>6</sup>. Matthew 24:14. G D Henderson, *Scots Confession, 1560*, 1937, 33.

<sup>7</sup>. G D Henderson, *ibid*, 71.

<sup>8</sup>. *Ibid*, 99.

<sup>9</sup>. J A Graham, *The missionary expansion of the Reformed Churches*, 1898, 40.

<sup>10</sup>. ‘Of public prayer before the sermon,’ *The directory for the public worship of God. The subordinate standards and other authoritative documents of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1850, 366.

expounded the second petition of the Lord's prayer to include the "spread of the gospel, the conversion of the Jews and the "fulness of the Gentiles".<sup>11</sup> In 1647 there was further expression of concern for the conversion of the Jews,<sup>12</sup> and a letter of encouragement was sent to Scots merchants in Poland, Sweden, Denmark and Hungary noting "the sad and lamentable condition of many thousands of you our countrymen, who are scattered abroad as sheepe having no shepherd."<sup>13</sup> The main purpose was to accompany copies of the newly drawn up *Confession* and *Directory of Public Worship*, but it also expressed the desire "to set forth the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ ... not only throughout this nation, but in other parts also, so far as God gave us a call and opportunity."<sup>14</sup>

However minimal, these were positive steps as far as they went. At least Scotland did not rationalize its situation in its theology and was spared the anti-missionary stances which developed in some other forms of Calvinism and within Lutheranism. If it could not boast a Justinian von Welz<sup>15</sup> (1621-1688) anxious to convert the heathen abroad, neither did it appear to have a Johann Gerhard<sup>16</sup> (1582-1637) arguing the Great Commission had ceased with the apostles.

With the Revolution Settlement the political situation became in some ways more conducive to missionary enterprise and when the Darien scheme was launched in 1695 the General Assembly was active in its support.<sup>17</sup> The six ministers who sailed with the fleets of settlers to the Isthmus of Panama in 1698 and 1699 were instructed to propagate "the glorious light of the gospel ... among the natives for their instruction and conversion".<sup>18</sup>

The scheme was a fiasco,<sup>19</sup> but a missionary motive had been stated and generally accepted, even if it was a church and state mission to plant church and state in a foreign land. It is impossible to know how ideas of taking the faith beyond the boundaries of the colony itself would have fared had it been securely established.

### *The eighteenth century: promoting Christian knowledge*

With the union of the Scottish and the English parliaments in 1707, itself partly an outcome of the Darien failure, there no longer existed the political situation which enabled Scottish commercial and religious interests to reinforce each other in a colonial scheme. What did remain was a situation where political and religious interests coincided in their attitude towards the Highlands of Scotland. In 1709 the Society in Scotland for Propagating Religious Knowledge<sup>20</sup> (SSPCK) was incorporated by royal letters-patent. It had the objects of

---

<sup>11</sup>. *The larger catechism*, question 191. *Subordinate standards*, 1850, 272f.

<sup>12</sup>. J A Graham, *ibid*, 17.

<sup>13</sup>. *AGA*, 1647, 163.

<sup>14</sup>. *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>15</sup>. G Warneck, *Outline of a history of Protestant missions*, 1906, 32-39. J A Scherer, *Justinian Welz*, 1969.

<sup>16</sup>. Warneck, *ibid*, 28-31. H R Boer, *Pentecost and missions*, 1961, 21.

<sup>17</sup>. J Ramsay, 'Scottish Presbyterian foreign missions a century before Carey,' *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*, 39(4), 1961, 201-218.

<sup>18</sup>. *Ibid*, 205.

<sup>19</sup>. John Prebble, *The Darien disaster*, Secker and Warburg, 1968.

<sup>20</sup>. The SSPCK, not to be confused with the English SPCK. M G Jones, *The charity school movement*, 1938, 176-214; J MacInnes, *The Evangelical Movement in the Highlands of Scotland, 1688-1800*, 1951, 236-252. D E Meek, 'Scottish

promoting Christian knowledge and increase of piety and virtue within Scotland, especially in the Highlands, Islands and remote places thereof, where error, idolatry, superstition and ignorance do mostly abound by reason of the largeness of parishes and scarcity of schools, and for propagating the same in popish and infidel parts of the world.<sup>21</sup>

Little time was lost setting up charity schools in the Highlands and the SSPCK was soon an important agency for extending the influence of Lowland Presbyterian religion and Whig politics. With respect to “infidel parts of the world,” there was not quite the same commitment, but a legacy tied to overseas work<sup>22</sup> became available in 1717 and in the 1720s fresh interest was stimulated by Robert Millar<sup>23</sup> of Paisley (1672-1752) with his publication, *The history of the propagation of Christianity and overthrow of paganism*.<sup>24</sup> It may be no accident that Paisley continued to be a centre of mission interest. Millar’s work was republished in London, read in America, translated into Dutch and extracted into other publications.<sup>25</sup>

In 1730 steps were eventually taken by the SSPCK to establish a mission among North American Indians.<sup>26</sup> In 1732 the Assembly approved taking up a collection in which the donors could decide whether to support their work in the Highlands and Islands or to help “subsist missionary ministers or schoolmasters in foreign parts of the world.”<sup>27</sup>

The resulting North American mission was never large and the directors in Scotland and their corresponding committees in America saw themselves as administrators of limited funds rather than propagators of missionary principle. Despite some mixed results their stewardship was not without success.<sup>28</sup> Aided by Jonathan Edwards, the journal of David Brainerd (1718-1747) one of those employed by the Society, became in due course a classic of missionary devotion.

---

Highlanders, North American Indians and the SSPCK: some cultural perspectives,’ *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 23(3), 1989, 378-396. G Robb, ‘Popular religion and the Christianization of the Scottish Highlands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,’ *Journal of Religious History*, 16(1) June 1990, 18-34. H R Sefton, ‘The Scotch Society in the American Colonies in the eighteenth century,’ *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1971, 169-184. D J Withrington, ‘The SPCK and Highland schools in the mid-eighteenth century,’ *Scottish Historical Review*, 41(132), 1962, 89-99.

<sup>21</sup>. Letters patent, 1709, bound in with SSPCK Records, Minutes of General Meetings, 1, 1709-1718. SRO/GRH GD 95.1.1.

<sup>22</sup>. *AGA*, 1732, 617.

<sup>23</sup>. *Fasti*, 3, 166.

<sup>24</sup>. A Fawcett, *The Cambuslang Revival*, 1971, 214f, 229. R E Davies, ‘Robert Millar - an eighteenth century Scottish Latourette,’ *Evangelical Quarterly*, 62(2), 1990, 143-156. J Foster, ‘A Scottish contributor to the missionary awakening: Robert Millar of Paisley,’ *International Review of Missions*, 37, 1948, 138-145.

<sup>25</sup>. R E Davies, *ibid*, 144ff.

<sup>26</sup>. *An account of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge, from its commencement in 1709, 1774*, 7, 13-19

<sup>27</sup>. *AGA*, 1732, 618.

<sup>28</sup>. Among the missionaries it employed was David Brainerd (1718-1747).

The annual sermons provide an almost continuous record into the 19th century, but overt missionary references from the 18th century are not conspicuous. In 1733 the Edinburgh Divinity Professor James Smith, noted the example of the missionary John Eliot (1604-1690).<sup>29</sup> In 1752 John Bonar of Cockpen referred to “the barbarous regions of Africa, the untutored Indians and the miserate inhabitants of the more distant parts of our own country.”<sup>30</sup> A sermon by Principal Robertson in 1755 was as much as anything an apology for inaction<sup>31</sup> - “the conversion of distant nations is not the chief care of the SPCK.”<sup>32</sup> However in 1765 James Robertson showed some interest in the Jews and in making the gospel known “in the dark corners of the earth.”<sup>33</sup>

In 1762 the General Assembly approved a collection specifically for the American work and the following year the Society published an *Account of some late attempts ... to Christianize the North American Indians*.<sup>34</sup> Fairly large collections were taken up aided by the visit of William Occum, an American Indian, and “to all appearances a typical New England divine.”<sup>35</sup> More generally in the eyes of Lowland supporters there was little difference between a pagan Indian and a pagan or Catholic Highlander,<sup>36</sup> and in each case the means of religious salvation and political stabilization were essentially the same.

The method employed in Scotland was the establishment of schools and the maintenance of schoolmasters and it was not long before the preaching of evangelists was supplemented by the teaching of schoolmasters in America. Evangelization and education however were really inseparable in the view of the Society. Its schoolmasters frequently acted as lay missionaries and the curriculum in both Highland and Indian schools included the study of Scripture and the Westminster Shorter Catechism.<sup>37</sup>

However limited the resources, once established, the commitment of the Church of Scotland through the SSPCK was perfectly real. A consequence was that when the missionary movement arose at the end of the century, whatever else might be said, the

---

<sup>29</sup>. James Smith, *The misery of ignorant and unconverted sinners*, SSPCK sermon, January 1, 1733, 20-22.

<sup>30</sup>. John Bonar, *The nature and necessity of a religious education*, SSPCK sermon, January 6, 1752, 39.

<sup>31</sup>. D Mackichan, *The missionary ideal in the Scottish churches*, 1927, 72f.

<sup>32</sup>. William Robertson, *The situation of the world at the time of Christ's appearance and its connection with the success of his religion, considered*, 6th edition, 1791, 53. Robertson stressed that God worked by gradualism, one is tempted to say moderatism, and believed Christianity was responsible for superior European arts, arms and sciences. The sermon was translated into German and as late as 1817 drew a critical review from the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, 15(2), August 1817, 69-76.

<sup>33</sup>. James Robertson, *The resemblance of Jesus to Moses considered*, SSPCK sermon February 25, 1865, 73, 81.

<sup>34</sup>. *Account of some late attempts by the correspondents of the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge to Christianize the North American Indians*, Edinburgh, 1763.

<sup>35</sup>. H R Sefton, *ibid*, 180. D Mackichan, *ibid*, 71.

<sup>36</sup>. H R Sefton, *ibid*, 182.

<sup>37</sup>. *Ibid*, 184.

principle of missions was not open to serious question. With regard to missionary method, the integration of evangelism and education, known from experience in Scotland, was believed to work equally well among North American Indians. As was later pointed out, the SSPCK was a missionary society, a bible society and a school society,<sup>38</sup> and not least among its characteristics was that it enjoyed the support of both Moderate and Evangelical. For some time annual sermons were held in London<sup>39</sup> as well as Edinburgh and among the expatriate Scots strong in its support<sup>40</sup> were many behind the formation of the London Missionary Society in 1795.

### ***The birth of modern missions: 1792-1813***

The formation of the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792 owed something to a ‘Scottish connection’ traceable to a ‘concert for prayer’ inspired by the Cambuslang Revival of 1741.<sup>41</sup> The Baptist mission was in turn to have influence on Scottish churchmen including Chalmers. However it was the London Missionary Society<sup>42</sup> founded in 1795 which first stimulated widespread interest in the conversion of the world.<sup>43</sup> The four ministers of Church of Scotland pulpits in London were all active supporters,<sup>44</sup> as were other expatriate Scots.<sup>45</sup> In Scotland, LMS directors were elected from most

---

<sup>38</sup>. A Thomson, *The ultimate and universal prevalence of the Christian religion*, SSPCK sermon, 1817, 39. See also Chalmers, *Works*, 11, 221-246.

<sup>39</sup>. The earliest I have reference to is 1789.

<sup>40</sup>. “This nursery of later LMS leaders.” J A de Jong, *As the waters cover the sea. Millennial expectations in the rise of Anglo-American missions 1640-1810*, 1970, 168.

<sup>41</sup>. R Pierce Beaver, ‘The concert of prayer for mission,’ *Ecumenical Review*, 10, 1957, 420-427. A Fawcett, *Cambuslang Revival*, 1971, 223-235. J Foster, ‘The bicentenary of Jonathan Edwards’ “Humble attempt”,’ *International Review of Missions*, 37, 1948, 375-381. E A Payne, ‘The evangelical revival and the beginnings of the modern missionary movement,’ *Congregational Quarterly*, 21, 1943, 223-246.

<sup>42</sup>. I M Fletcher, ‘The fundamental principle of the London Missionary Society,’ *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 19, 1960-1963, 138-146, 192-198, 222-229. C S Horne, *The story of the LMS 1795-1895*, 1895, R Lovett, *The history of the London Missionary Society 1795-1895*, 1899.

<sup>43</sup>. The LMS was inspired by the BMS and able to capitalize on interest generated by the Baptists. It saw itself as national and inter-denominational - hence its designation as “The Missionary Society” before custom changed it to London Missionary Society.

<sup>44</sup>. Henry Hunter (1741-1802) of London Wall (*Fasti*, 7, 491), William Smith of Camberwell (*Fasti*, 7, 494. R Lovett, *ibid*, 1, 17, 24), James Steven (1761-1824) of Crown Court (*Fasti*, 7, 468; 3, 118) and John Love (1757-1825) of Crispin Street, who was joint secretary of the LMS until he moved to Anderston in 1800 where he became secretary of the Glasgow Missionary Society (*Fasti*, 3, 389. R Lovett, *ibid*, 1, 43).

<sup>45</sup>. Notably David Bogue (1750-1825) of Gosport and Alexander Waugh (1754-1827) of the Associate Synod Congregation, Wells Street, London. Bogue had been

denominations. Out of 28 who were Scottish directors sometime during the period 1796-1800, 14 were Church of Scotland, seven Associate Synod, three Independent, one Relief and one from the General Associate Synod of Antiburghers.<sup>46</sup>

In September 1795, just after the inaugural meetings of the LMS, a circular letter was sent out inviting the “co-operation of ministers and friends in Scotland”.<sup>47</sup> The response was amazing. While this communication was still on its way, the then Antiburgher minister of Huntly, George Cowie (1749-1806) was already raising a hundred pounds in his congregation and had begun prayer meetings for missions.<sup>48</sup> The Glasgow Missionary Society<sup>49</sup> and the Edinburgh Missionary Society<sup>50</sup> were formed in February 1796 and later that year other societies were founded in Aberdeen, Dundee,

---

assistant to Smith at Camberwell, but left the Church of Scotland for the Independents. A letter of Bogue’s in the *Evangelical Magazine*, September 1794, 378-380, was the call to action which led to the formation of the LMS. Waugh was the author of the ‘fundamental principle’ which sought to ensure a truly interdenominational constitution. George Jerment (1759-1819), the Antiburgher minister in London also supported the society. I M Fletcher, *ibid*, C S Horne, *ibid*, 16. *Fasti*, 7, 494f.

<sup>46</sup>. Appendix 7, table 1. In two cases the denomination is not clear.

<sup>47</sup>. R Lovett, *ibid*, 1, 44.

<sup>48</sup>. A few years later Cowie was dismissed by the Antiburghers and became an Independent. H Escott, *A history of Scottish Congregationalism*. 1960, 73, 297. R Kinniburgh, *Fathers of Independency in Scotland*, 1851, 14, 19.

<sup>49</sup>. Early records of the Glasgow Missionary Society are hard to find. The report for 1797 is bound with A Pirie, *The duties and qualifications of a gospel missionary, a sermon preached before the Glasgow Missionary Society, November 7, 1797, Glasgow 1797* (copies in NCL and NLS). Some quarterly papers published in the 1820s are bound in with the NCL series of the *Scottish missionary Register*. See also, W Brown, *History of the propagation of Christianity*, 1854, 2, 450-473.

<sup>50</sup>. W Brown, *ibid*, 2, 415-449. Brown was secretary of the society from 1821. In 1819 the name was changed to Scottish Missionary Society. The original regulations and a circular sent out to Scottish ministers in March 1796 were reprinted in R Heron, *Account of the proceedings and debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 27th May 1796*, 66-74. Many of their annual sermons were published together with the reports of the directors. For the first five years the *Missionary Magazine*, published in Edinburgh, is an important source. A complete set is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. From 1800-1819, annual reports and extracts of correspondence can be found in the *Religious Monitor*, and to a lesser extent from 1810 onwards in the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*. From 1829 the society published the *Scottish Missionary Register*, for many years a successful periodical which carried information on a wide range of missionary activity at home as well as abroad. See also J Kilpatrick, ‘The records of the Scottish Missionary Society (1796-1848),’ *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 1950, 196-210. Most of the primary sources referred to by Kilpatrick are in the NLS, MSS 8012-8014, 8938-8989. For an account of the Scottish Missionary Society Russian mission see M V Jones, ‘The sad and curious story of Karass, 1802-1835,’ *Oxford Slavonic papers*, NS 8, 1975, 53-81.

Newton-upon-Ayr, Paisley,<sup>51</sup> Perth and Stirling. By 1800 there were societies in Dumfries, Dunse, Greenock and Tain.<sup>52</sup>

All the local societies supported the LMS, many also the Baptists and the Moravians as well as the Edinburgh and Glasgow societies when they began sending missionaries in their own right. Interest in missions overseas stimulated concern for the heathen at home as is evident from the *Missionary Magazine* which began in 1796 under the editorship of Greville Ewing (1767-1841), the secretary of the Edinburgh society. Sermons on the universal claims of Christianity appeared in considerable numbers.<sup>53</sup>

Although many local societies had a bias towards a particular church, their composition often reflected the interdenominational ideals of the LMS. The Edinburgh Missionary Society was supported by Church of Scotland Evangelicals and by Seceders.<sup>54</sup> The first meeting of the Paisley society brought together representatives of most churches, and the monthly meeting of directors functioned as a ministers' fraternal. It was attended by four from the Church of Scotland as well as ministers of the Burgher, Antiburgher and Relief congregations.<sup>55</sup> An efficient band of collectors was organized to canvass subscriptions and together with collections taken at sermons for the cause, large sums of money were raised. Paisley forwarded the LMS £552 in 1797 and £295 in 1799. These figures were not untypical.<sup>56</sup>

Once the possibility of doing so was set before them, people rushed to support world-wide Christian mission. Many factors contributed to this seemingly instantaneous popularity. In England links with the Evangelical Revival are apparent. In Scotland the Evangelical party was a minority which could not yet foresee a change in their fortunes, but those such as its leader John Erskine (1721-1803)<sup>57</sup> had long had international interests and embraced a movement whose moment had now come. The colleague of Principal Robertson at the Greyfriars Church in Edinburgh, he corresponded with the Continent and America, learnt German late in life and republished what he learnt from afield.<sup>58</sup> He had been a link in the chain between Cambuslang Carey via Jonathan Edwards, he was close to David Bogue and other Scots involved in the LMS and his defence of missions in the General Assembly in 1796 has gone into history.<sup>59</sup>

Individual evangelicals who had moved out of the Established church were keen and some subsequent general support owed a good deal to the activities of James and Robert Haldane.<sup>60</sup> Within the Church of Scotland however the association of missions with the Haldanes was at first a liability. The Haldanes were frustrated in efforts to embark on a large-scale mission to India modelled on Carey<sup>61</sup> and were forced to turn

---

<sup>51</sup>. Minutes of procedure of the Paisley London Missionary Society, March 1796 to November 1815, Paisley Public Library, 651.77 REN-IP.

<sup>52</sup>. Appendix 6, Scottish missionary societies, 1795-1825.

<sup>53</sup>. Bibliography 9, Scottish missionary sermons, 1795-1820.

<sup>54</sup>. J J Matheson, *A memoir of Greville Ewing*, 1843, 71f.

<sup>55</sup>. Paisley London Missionary Society, minutes, *ibid*.

<sup>56</sup>. LMS reports of directors, 1797-1800.

<sup>57</sup>. *Fasti*, 1, 47f.

<sup>58</sup>. A L Drummond, *The Kirk and the Continent*, 1956, 157f. J A de Jong, *ibid*, 166f, 172.

<sup>59</sup>. H Watt, "Moderator, Rax me that bible," *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 10(1) 1948, 54f.

<sup>60</sup>. A L Drummond and J Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843*, 152f. J H S Burleigh, *Church history of Scotland*, 311f. H Escott, *A history of Scottish Congregationalism*, 1960, 50ff.

<sup>61</sup>. See correspondence including a printed letter from Robert Haldane, David Bogue, William Innes and Greville Ewing of 16 February 1797. EUL La II 500. Some

their attention to preaching revival in Scotland. In 1799 the Church of Scotland passed an Act of Assembly and Pastoral Admonition linking the Haldanes' movement and its "strange and self-authorized teachers of religion" with the French Revolution.<sup>62</sup>

Groups who had broken from the Church of Scotland during the century might have been an expected seed-bed of support. It was these who were most commonly associated with financial independence and independent thought. However if individuals were spontaneous, as churches these groups were generally more guarded. While the Associate Synod of Burghers appointed a committee to correspond with the LMS early in 1796, it could not help financially.<sup>63</sup> The Relief responded to LMS enquiries in friendly terms, but their only action was a mission to the Highlands.<sup>64</sup> The General Associate Synod of objected to the "latitudinarian" constitutions of the societies, and to Christians of different convictions mixing together instead of maintaining "the testimony which each sect was supposed to lift up against the errors of all the rest". Lay involvement was frowned on,<sup>65</sup> and Reformed Presbyterians joined the Antiburghers in thinking that matters of policy were too important to be compromised by co-operative action.<sup>66</sup>

Missionary activity being dependent on opportunity as much as obligation, improving links of trade and communication were important in giving a sense of being part of a wider world. Factors such as moves for the abolition of the slave trade, the economic advantages of the Industrial Revolution and the facilities and experiences afforded by an emerging empire aided the growth of the movement. The Haldane experience suggested that frontal attack by the wrong people was not going to get very far, but there was nevertheless the possibility of free association despite government suspicions, and the existence of disposable income made action possible outside churches whose administrative machinery had no provision for missionary activity. The French Revolution was an impetus to sermons on prophetic themes not just to doubts about people's loyalty. If to some in the troubled decade of the 1790s, any association was suspect and overseas missions never seemed less important, to others in an age of portents they never seemed more. It only needed the later conviction and a feasible situation in which to begin for a missionary movement to emerge.

The most famous debate took place in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 1796.<sup>67</sup> By 58 to 44, the Moderate majority rejected an Evangelical

---

English supporters such as John Newton felt that earlier enthusiasm for events in France and the way the group sought to force the East India Company's hand were counterproductive. A K Davidson, *The development and influence of the British Missionary Movement's attitudes towards India, 1786-1830*, University of Aberdeen, PhD thesis, 1973, 102.

<sup>62</sup>. *AGA*, 1799, 868-873.

<sup>63</sup>. J M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, 1841, 574f. R Lovett, *ibid*, 1, 75.

<sup>64</sup>. G Struthers, *The history of the rise, progress and principles of the Relief Church*, 1843, 394.

<sup>65</sup>. J M'Kerrow, *ibid*, 383.

<sup>66</sup>. M Hutchison, *The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland*, 1893, 249.

<sup>67</sup>. The only known primary record of the debate is (Robert Heron), *Proceedings and debate in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, 27th May 1796*, 1796. This was compiled from memory and checked by some of the speakers. Hill considered it "incorrect and incomplete, but ... as far as it goes, does not appear to me to contain anything false". (G Hill to R Dundas, 2 March 1797, EUL IA ii 500). G White, 'Highly preposterous': origins of Scottish missions, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 19(2), 1976, 111-124 gives some of the

motion to refer to a committee overtures asking the Assembly to consider “the most effectual methods by which the Church of Scotland may contribute to the diffusion of the Gospel over the world” and the authorization of “a general collection throughout the Church to aid the several societies for propagating the Gospel among the heathen nations”<sup>68</sup>.

The second of these overtures was tactically unfortunate and the political climate was sufficiently sensitive to lend plausibility to the suggestion that missionary societies were potentially seditious. The Moderates were the government party and it cannot have been irrelevant that attempts to allow missionaries into British India had failed in 1793. The successful motion gave “the circumstances of the times” as the reason for not “adopting any particular measure”, but it also expressed an intention “to embrace with zeal ... any favourable opportunity ... which Divine Providence may hereafter open”.<sup>69</sup>

Some Moderate speakers provided generations of Evangelicals with ammunition, but what ought to be noted is that the principle of missions was less at issue than the philosophy on which they were to be based and political questions about who was involved. The activity envisaged by the new societies was not specified, and behind comments about people needing to be “polished and refined in their manners before they can be properly enlightened in religious truths”<sup>70</sup> lay concern whether the LMS and Edinburgh Missionary Society shared the emphasis on education characteristic of the SSPCK. An unspoken objection would have been the interdenominational character of the societies. Ecumenical tendencies were a developing Evangelical trait, not a Moderate one.

The decision of the Assembly was less important than it first appeared. The margin and the nature of the defeat still indicated widespread and solid support for the emerging missionary cause. If the vote had gone to the Evangelicals it would have said something about their strength relative to the Moderates, but missions would still have been left in the hands of voluntary societies. Either way, the role of the church itself in missionary activity was a question for the future to decide.

Far more crucial to its immediate fortunes was what happened to the first missionaries the societies actually sent out. The first party of 30 from the LMS were sent to the South Pacific and found, almost but not quite to a man, they could not cope with what was asked of them. News of this reached the LMS in 1799. On its way with a second contingent their ship the *Duff* was captured by the French and most found their way not to the Pacific but back to Britain.<sup>71</sup> From Scotland six missionaries had been sent to West Africa by the Glasgow Missionary Society and the Edinburgh Missionary Society, but they also met tragedy or failure. No permanent mission was established, never mind any converts made.<sup>72</sup> By 1800 there was practically nothing to show for a very considerable sacrifice of enthusiasm, money and lives. In the beginning the greatest problem of missions was not the failure of the churches, it was the failure of the societies.

Disappointment was obvious,<sup>73</sup> but committees of the local societies tried to rally round.<sup>74</sup> Public support could not be expected to be so resilient and the fall-off in support

---

intellectual background. Hugh Miller, *The two parties in the Church of Scotland exhibited as missionary and anti-missionary*, 1841 is coloured by Disruption politics.

<sup>68</sup>. R Heron, *ibid*, 43.

<sup>69</sup>. *Ibid*, 53. *AGA*, 1796. SRO/GRH CH1/4/15.

<sup>70</sup>. R Heron, *ibid*, 18.

<sup>71</sup>. R Lovett, *ibid*, 1, 63-65.

<sup>72</sup>. W Brown, *ibid*, 2, 419f, 53-456.

<sup>73</sup>. Paisley London Missionary Society minutes, 1, 10 September 1799.

was dramatic. Meetings were thinly attended,<sup>75</sup> funds slowed to a trickle<sup>76</sup> and recruitment dropped sharply. The Glasgow Missionary Society gave up sending missionaries, and the Edinburgh Missionary Society withdrew from Africa. It was a year or two before it began another mission, this time to Russia.

For the LMS the lesson was salutary and a more considered approach to recruitment and training resulted. Nevertheless for several years the movement tended to drift. Many found the Bible Society an outlet for the interests which had led them to support missionary societies. After the indifferent beginnings of the latter, for Scots as for others, the translation and distribution of bibles appeared a sounder and more certain strategy - one in which co-operative and missionary ideals could be realized with fewer tensions. At least that is what they believed at the time.

The recovery of the home base was slow. From 1807 the LMS became more active in promoting local small societies which helped provide a more stable income. Of immense significance were developments in relation to India. It was the most obvious field for British missionaries, but one where initiatives were blocked by the East India Company's fear of disturbance to their commercial interests. Chaplains appointed by the Company had a broader vision, but by and large they could only plan for another day. The presence of William Carey (1761-1834) as a pioneer who could only be a missionary on Danish territory and who took work as a plantation superintendent to be on British illustrated frustration and stimulated concern.<sup>77</sup>

In 1793, the year Carey left for Bengal, Wilberforce had failed in an attempt to obtain provision for missionaries in the company's charter when it was renewed by parliament. Twenty years later an Evangelical campaign to open India to Christian missions was at length successful.<sup>78</sup> Many forces contributed to this, not least the efforts of one of the chaplains, Cambuslang-born Claudius Buchanan (1766-1815). Through prize essays in the British universities, sermons, contributions to a pamphlet war consequent on the Sepoy rebellion in 1806, and his book *Christian researches in Asia*, published in 1811, Buchanan was instrumental in changing British perception of Indian society.

Many in the 18th century had been impressed by the antiquity and depth of Indian culture, but Buchanan presented a picture of popular Hinduism characterized by *sati*, infanticide and *juggernaut* to the extent that humanitarian considerations alone demanded something be done.<sup>79</sup> Wilberforce wrote Scotland had done more than England, but still

---

<sup>74</sup>. Paisley expressed their "concern and sorrow" and sent the balance of their funds to the LMS. *ibid.* Societies in Dundee, Kilmarnock, Glasgow and Inverness reacted similarly. LMS home correspondence from M Colquhoun, 19 September 1799, SOAS LMS 11/6/A; J V McKenzie, 2 September 1799, SOAS LMS 11/8/A; J Mackintyre, 20 September 1799, SOAS LMS 11/8/A; A Fraser, 22 October 1799, SOAS LMS 11/8/; J Black, 17 September 1799, SOAS LMS 11/8/A.

<sup>75</sup>. Paisley London Missionary Society minutes, 5, January 1799.

<sup>76</sup>. In 1798-1800 the Dundee Missionary Society was sending £100 to £150 a year to the LMS. By 1806 this had dropped to £36 and by 1810 to £30. The same pattern can be seen in the figures for Aberdeen, Perth, Glasgow and Paisley. LMS reports of directors, 1797-1810.

<sup>77</sup>. A Christopher Smith, 'The legacy of William Carey,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 16(1) Jan 1992, 2-8.

<sup>78</sup>. E H Howse, *Saints in politics*, 1971, 82-93. J Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 1977, 235-238.

<sup>79</sup>. A K Davidson, *ibid.* H Pearson, *Memoirs of the life and writings of the Rev Claudius Buchanan*, 1817.

asked if the supporters of missions were asleep.<sup>80</sup> The Associate Synod was among many who petitioned parliament,<sup>81</sup> and Scottish Evangelicals were active in the campaign.<sup>82</sup> Contrary to subsequent impressions,<sup>83</sup> the General Assembly resisted appeals from Buchanan and Wilberforce.<sup>84</sup> The Assembly had set up a committee on the charter renewal in 1812, but neither its brief nor its report made any mention of missionaries. Their sole concern was obtaining entry for Church of Scotland chaplains.<sup>85</sup>

The passing of the missionary clauses in 1813 opened a new era for the missionary movement from Britain. India provided a non-Christian population, British influence, stability and communications and the societies were in a position to regain support they had earlier enjoyed.

Yet once missions had official sanction it was only a matter of time before churches were likely to decide this was a function which belonged more properly to them than to voluntary organizations. If in Scotland the stage was set for the revival of the societies, in the acceptance of their message was the seed of their demise.

---

<sup>80</sup>. W Wilberforce to J Campbell, 19 March 1813, SRO/GRH GD 50.235.11.

<sup>81</sup>. J M'Kerrow, *History of the Secession Church*, 1841, 633.

<sup>82</sup>. R Burns, *Memoir of Stevenson Macgill*, 1842, 55f. *Edinburgh Christian Instructor*, 6, 1813, 1-20, 77-87. Z Macaulay to R Paul, 5 June 1813, NLS 5139 f.57.

<sup>83</sup>. E G K Hewat, *Vision and achievement 1796-1956*, 1960, 34, says the Church of Scotland was the first to petition for the opening of India to missions, but it asked for chaplains not missionaries. The error is repeated by A L Drummond and J Bulloch, *The Scottish Church 1688-1843*, 181 and by G Donaldson, *The faith of the Scots*, Batsford, 1990, 121. The original culprit is probably R W Weir, *A history of the foreign missions of the Church of Scotland*, 1900, 27.

<sup>84</sup>. R I and S W Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 1838, 4, 14f. H Pearson, *ibid*, 278.

<sup>85</sup>. *AGA*, 1812, 14. *AGA*, 1813, 13. SRO/GRH CH1/2/141, 29 May 1813.