

## What frightened the Port Glasgow women?

### The Quern-Dust Calendar — Ragnall MacilleDhuibh

THERE was talk of a Jacobite landing in Scotland throughout the latter part of 1744 and the early part of 1745, nowhere more, I imagine, than in a place like Newport (now Port) Glasgow, which had been developed since 1676 for that very purpose of providing an open door between the western ocean and the heart of the country.

To this little town in 1744 came 22-year-old Alexander Carlyle, then a student in Glasgow but later to become minister of Inveresk near Edinburgh. He recorded in his memoirs: "In the month of March or April this year, having gone down with a merchant to visit New Port-Glasgow, as our dinner was preparing at the inn, we were alarmed with the howling and weeping of half-a-dozen of women in the kitchen, which was so loud and lasting that I went to see what was the matter, when, after some time, I learnt from the calmest among them that a pedlar had left a copy of Peden's 'Prophecies' that morning, which having read part of, they found that he had predicted woes of every kind to the people of Scotland; and in particular that Clyde would run with blood in the year 1744, which now being some months advanced, they believed that their destruction was at hand."

He went on: "I was puzzled how to pacify them, but calling for the book, I found that the passage which had terrified them was contained in the forty-fourth paragraph, without any allusion whatever to the year; and by this means I quieted their lamentations. Had the intended expedition of Mareschal Saxe been carried into execution in that year, as was intended, their fears might have been realised."

The offending book, Patrick Walker's 'Life and Death of Mr Alexander Peden, Late Minister of the Gospel at New Glenluce in Galloway', was first published in 1724 and reprinted in 1725 (twice), 1728, 1751, 1763, 1775 and 1868. Due to its prophetic content, it was one of the most popular and successful chapbooks that ever circulated in Scotland, and was duly incorporated into the 'Biographia Presbyteriana' of 1827 and 'Six Saints of the Covenant' of 1901 (whose editor candidly describes Peden as 'weird'). It is divided into 45 numbered 'passages', and it would appear that the women of the inn had misunderstood these as referring to the years of the century. But what exactly was it that frightened them so much?

The book concentrates on Peden's role as a leader of the Covenanters during the times of persecution from 1660 to his death in 1686. In passage 40, John Clark of Muirbrook in Carrick says to Peden in 1685, "Sir, what think ye of this present time? Is it not a dark and melancholly day? And can there be a more discouraging time than this?"

Peden replies, "Yes, John, this is indeed a dark discouraging time, but there will be a darker time than this. These silly, graceless, wretched creatures, the curates, shall go down, and after them shall arise a party called Presbyterians, but having little more than the name; and these shall . . . crucify Christ in his cause and interest in Scotland, and shall lay him in his grave; and his friends shall give him his winding-sheet, and he shall lie as one buried for a considerable time."

He goes on: "O then, John, there shall be darkness and dark days, such as the poor Church of Scotland never saw the like of them, nor shall see if once they were over; yea, John, this shall be so dark that if a poor thing would go between the east sea-bank and the west sea-bank, seeking a minister to whom they would communicate their case, or tell them the mind of the Lord concerning the times, he shall not find one."

John asks where the testimony will be then. "In the hands of a few, who shall be despised and undervalued by all, but especially by these ministers who buried Christ; but after that, he shall get up upon them; and at the crack of his winding-sheet, as many of them as are alive, who were at his burial, shall be distracted and mad for fear, not knowing what to do: then, John, there shall be brave days, such as the Church of Scotland never saw the like; but I shall not see them, but you may."

In passage 41, preaching in a barn in Carrick, he stoops down, takes a handful of chaff, and prophesies of the King (James VII, the last of the Stuarts), who is a Catholic, saying, "As ye see me throw away that chaff, so the wind of that vengeance shall blow and drive him off that throne; and he, nor no other of that name, shall ever come on it again."

In passage 42 Peden is preaching at Girvan in Carrick when a communicant, David Mason, arrives late, trampling over people to get near him. Peden says, "There comes the devil's rattle-bag, we do not want him here." Mason turns informer against the Covenanters and is nicknamed the Devil's Rattle-Bags. After the Revolution (1688) he complains to his minister about the nickname and the latter says, "Ye well deserved it, and he was an honest man that gave you it: you and yours must enjoy it, there's no help for it."

In passage 43 Peden's death is near. He is in Auchincloigh, in the house of John Richman in his native parish of Sorn in Ayrshire. There are two beds in the chamber, one for himself and one for Andrew Black from Newmilns. Black is about to go to bed when he hears Peden imploring the Lord to have pity on the west of Scotland, to spare a remnant, and 'not make a full end in the day of His anger'. Peden then gets up from his knees and walks up and down, crying out, "Oh the Monzies, the French Monzies, see how they run, how long will they run? Lord, cut their houghs, and stay their running."

Peden spends all night either on his knees or walking, and in the morning Black and Richman ask who the Monzies are. "Oh, sirs," he replies, "ye'll have a dreadful day by the French Monzies, and a sett of wicked men in these lands who will take part with them, the west of Scotland will pay dear for it; they'll run thicker in the water of Air and Clyde than ever the Highland men did."

I can't imagine what Peden could have meant by Monzies except 'Monsieurs'. By the 'Highland men' he means the 'Highland Host', quartered by Government in 1678 on the Covenanters of Glasgow, Renfrewshire

and Ayrshire in an attempt to cow them into submission. His vision seems to be of French cavalry hunting the people down through the streams or into the sea, and it seems to me to be a deliberate evocation of the well-known picture of Thomas the Rhymer sallying forth from Dumbuck with his mounted knights to fight the last battle for Scotland on the Sandy Ford of Clyde, until, in the words of Hector MacDougall, for example, *bidh an là ud stairean de na mairbh air Abhainn Chluaidh, air chor is gu'm faighear bho thaobh gu taobh dhi le casan tiorma*: 'the dead on that day will form a causeway over the River Clyde, so that it will be possible to cross dry-shod from one side to the other'.

On other occasions Peden is heard saying: "O the Monzies, the Monzies will be thorow the breadth and length of the south and west of Scotland; O I think I see them at our fire-sides, slaying man, wife and children; the remnant will get a breathing; but they will be driven to the wilderness again, and their sharpest showers will be last." Walker then gives the same prophecy as uttered around the same time by three other ministers of the gospel.

First, Thomas Lundie of Rattray in Perthshire tells his wife, "Within a few hours I'll be taken from you; but alas for the day that I see coming upon Scotland: the Lord has letten me see the Frenches marching with their armies thorow the breadth and length of the land, marching to their bridle-reins in the blood of all ranks, and that for a broken, burnt and buried covenant; but neither ye nor I will live to see it."

Then Mr Douglas, 'a godly minister in Galloway', groans on his deathbed and speaks of "sad days for Scotland . . . the sword of foreign enemies . . . O glorious days on the back of them to poor wasted Scotland . . ."

Finally, and also shortly before death, John Welsh of Irongray in Galloway declares in a preface (that is, as he announces a psalm), "But I have greater news to tell you from my great Master, and that is, I see all Scotland a field of blood, and I see all England and Ireland a field of blood. But before that time the Church will get a breathing, but she will fall asleep and will not improve it. But the first wakening she will get, the man will step over his bed-side in his wife and children's blood."

This sets the tone for the apocalyptic passage 44 which so upset the women. They will have noted how Peden claimed that though he would not see these things happen, others might; that nearly half a century had now passed, time for his younger friends to grow old; that people calling themselves Presbyterians were now in charge, as Peden had said; that the Church had 'had a breathing', in Welsh's words, but had fallen asleep, so that power was now in the hands of Moderates like young Carlyle who would 'crucify Christ' and were indeed incapable of telling anyone 'the mind of the Lord concerning the times'. Above all, rumour was rife that the dreaded 'Monsieurs' might land anywhere, any day, and that the men of those mountains across the Clyde would flock to join them.

Passage 44 is introduced as being some notes of Peden's last preface in the Collomwood, at the water of Ayr, a little before his death. Peden begins by clarifying that he is entirely in God's hands: "My Master is the rider, and I'm the horse; I never love to ride but when I find the spurs; I know not what I have to do amongst you this night."

Peden hopes the night will be for the people's good, because it is the last on which he will see them. "It is long since it was our desire to God to have you taken off our hand; and now he's granting us our desire. There are four or five things I have to tell you this night, and the first is this, A bloody sword, a bloody sword, a bloody sword for thee, O Scotland, that shall pierce the hearts of many.

"2dly, Many miles shall ye travel, and shall see nothing but desolation and ruinous wastes in thee, O Scotland.

"3dly, The fertilest places in Scotland shall be as waste and desolate as the mountains.

"4thly, The women with child shall be ript up and dashed in pieces."

The fifth and last prophecy is much more rambling, and is to the effect that "God shall have a conventicle that will make Scotland tremble . . . God shall preach to thee by fire and a bloody sword." There is no doubt in my mind that the immediate cause of the howling and weeping of the six women in the kitchen was Peden's prophecy that 'the women with child shall be ript up and dashed in pieces'. They already knew, as everyone did, that Thomas's Highlanders would one day come with cavalry to repossess the Lowlands, and that on that day Clyde would run with blood; what the godly Mr Peden seemed to be telling them was that this would happen in the fourth month of the forty-fourth year.

**WHFP 13.3.98**