

CHAPTER IV

FIRST PERSECUTIONS IN SCOTLAND

THE first persecutions of Quakers were in Lanarkshire and Ayrshire in 1656 and 1657. In this both ministers of the Church and civil magistrates joined. No discrimination was made between native Friends and "publick" Friends from across the Border. For the prosecution and persecution of the latter, a very opportune weapon came into the hands of the civil authorities in Cromwell's Vagrancy Act of 1656.¹ "Vagrancy" was held to apply not merely to troublesome beggars and "distressed soldiers", but to all who were found outside their own locality and could give no account of their business or object which was deemed satisfactory to the judgment or caprice of the magistrates.² Itinerant Quakers, who for the time being had no fixed abode and no "occupation" except the unpopular and "suspect" one of spreading their doctrines, thus fell very easily within the meaning and scope of the Act. Cruel advantage was taken of it.

At Strathaven in Midsummer 1656, John Bowrom and William Stockdale for "declareing the Word of the Lord in the streets" were pelted with mud and stones by the populace and driven out. Later in the year, Stockdale and a Cumberland Quaker, John Gill, with a number of others from Glassford district fared similarly at Glassford Churchyard, where they had been holding a meeting.³ At the instance of William Hamilton the minister, John Hart, Andrew Brown, and John Lacocoke were cited before the Lanarkshire Justices at Hamilton, charged with disturbing the minister in Church as he catechised and blessed the people. The Quakers were found guilty, fined twenty shillings sterling each, and as they could not or would not pay, they were committed to Hamilton Tolbooth. From there they were removed to Glasgow and imprisoned for three weeks and excommunicated.⁴

Brown was again summoned by Hamilton in 1657 and appeared at Lanark, charged with molesting the minister in his own manse at Glassford. It seems that Brown called to deliver a paper, a scuffle ensued, and the Quaker was roughly handled. It is

impossible at this distance of time and with so scanty evidence to be certain which party was the more to blame. At all events, Brown was sentenced to twenty-four days in the Tolbooth of Lanark.⁵ In another case, John Gill with another Friend, George Wilson, were in trouble for questioning the minister in church. There was no charge of interrupting the service, but they were arrested. Wilson was mobbed to the effusion of blood, the constable making no effort to protect him. This same officer, Marshall, thrust another Friend, Richard Ismay, into the stocks, apparently on his own responsibility, and subsequently Ismay was sentenced to three weeks' imprisonment in Glassford Castle and Hamilton Tolbooth for preaching.

In 1657, John Hart was back in court, this time at Lanark, and along with a widow, Janet Hamilton. They were accused before the magistrate by the minister of entertaining Quakers in their own houses, especially George Wilson, and so of "resetting" law breakers. As they refused to pay their fines, they had to go to prison for eight days. All Hamilton's efforts and petty malice, however, seemed to have little effect, for during the next century the Glassford Meeting grew steadily to be the largest in Scotland. This is fitting, as Glassford was the cradle of the Quaker faith North of the Tweed.

The immediate occasion of persecution at Douglas was the first Quaker marriage in Scotland, in 1656. The contracting parties, William Mitchell of Douglas and Mary Inglis for taking each other as man and wife before witnesses "according to the form and manner of the saints recorded in the Scriptures" found themselves before the magistrates at Hamilton at the instigation of the Rev. Peter Kid. The unfortunate Mitchell was fined twenty shillings, with the alternative of twenty stripes on his bare body at the Mercat Cross on market day, and was prohibited from "cohabiting with that woman". As he very naturally refused to yield, he was put in the stocks at the Market Place and then handed over to the town bailiffs who threw him into the Tolbooth. About a month later a "bright idea" occurred to Francis Aird, minister of Dalsersf, of getting Mitchell handed over to a recruiting officer for the French wars, and he was transferred from Hamilton Tolbooth to the Canongate Tolbooth in Edinburgh till he should go overseas. But justice came to her own, for some time later Mitchell was set free by order of General Monk.⁶

Such treatment of Mitchell and others was without excuse and indeed was quite illegal as yet; for only in 1661 was the "Act against Clandestine and Unlawful Marriages" passed, which stipulated that only marriages performed according to the law and order of the Church of Scotland were legal. This was followed in 1672 by the "Act against Unlawful Ordinations", by which those who were married by an unauthorised person were liable to lose all their marriage rights and interest.⁷

In East Kilbride, two men suffered for conscience's sake. One was a Westmorland man, Richard Pinder, who addressed the assembled congregation apparently before the service, for there was "no priest with them". For this he was summarily arrested and sentenced to imprisonment in Rutherglen. On the Sunday following, he was publicly exhibited in the stocks at the Church for five hours: after this, he was bandied about from constable to constable till they finally got him over the Border. The other victim, Thomas Jack, was, through the action of John Burnet, minister of East Kilbride, imprisoned in Glasgow in 1657. Wodrow evidently considered Burnet "the right type", for he "had been singularly useful in that parish, where there were a great many Quakers and separatists: and yet by his painful and excellent preaching *and other labours*, he reclaimed most part of them".⁸

In Lesmahagow, where three Friends, John Hart, Andrew Brown, and George Weir, visited the Church, Weir began, probably at the end of the service, to read an anti-clerical paper. But he did not get far, as John Hume, the minister, ordered the people "to knock down that excommunicat stranger, whereupon the people did beat them and put them out of the synagogue".⁹ Weir was savagely used, and outside, the Quakers were "dirted" with stones and lime without any interference by the minister, his own family even taking part.

Returning to Hamilton, we find again Richard Ismay holding a meeting on the Green, when James Naismith, minister of the First Charge, passed on his way from church. Ismay's language to the minister was needlessly rude, for which he was immediately arrested and put in the Tolbooth, seemingly without trial. From there he was removed to Glasgow and spent his time between prison cell and appearances at the stocks in the Market Place till finally he was expelled from the City. Quakers were also mal-

treated in Kirkintilloch, where Henry Forsyth, the minister, incited the people to stone them as a work of apostolic merit.¹⁰

Two cases of persecution were recorded in Ayrshire about this time in Kilmaurs and Newmilns respectively. A band of Lanarkshire Friends comprising Hamilton, Hart, and Brown, with Stockdale and Wilson, had come to Kilmaurs, where on the orders of Sir William Mure of Rowallan they were arrested as vagabonds and imprisoned at Kilmarnock. At Newmilns, two months later, Hart and Wilson appeared, this time with Christopher Fell. When they went to an inn for lodging about ten o'clock, they were not only refused it, but dragged out of doors and stoned out of the village into the open fields. This was in obedience to the Synod of Glasgow and Ayr's drastic excommunication of the Quakers as a body in May 1657, whereby all parishioners were forbidden to have any business dealings with them or to give the Friends "any intertainment in meet, drinke, or lodging".¹¹ The ministers, armed with this ecclesiastical weapon, used it so arbitrarily and callously that one of the Justices of the Peace, Colonel Ashfield, interposed and put a stop to the tyranny. He later became a Quaker himself.

Previously to this, the two Presbyteries of Hamilton and Lanark had taken proceedings against individual Quakers. To the first, Hamilton and Hart were summoned to answer to a list of charges. They appear to have been threatened with "Clubb Law" by Naismith of Hamilton, and at his instance chiefly, the Quakers were imprisoned by the bailiff.

In October 1656, the Presbytery of Lanark decided to take action against parishioners of Douglas and Lesmahagow whose names had been reported by their respective ministers for apostasy to Quakerism. With the exception of Mitchell, the Quaker bridegroom, all ignored two consecutive summons of the Presbytery to appear and answer the charges against them of denying the validity of the Church, her ministry, and sacraments. Evidence having been led against them in their absence, the Presbytery decided to hold a "solemn day of humiliatioun" on the 30th April, 1657, when the Moderator, after a sermon by Kid, passed sentence of excommunication on the absentees in both parishes.¹² One of the ministers who took part was Thomas Kirkcaldy of Carnwarth, a descendant of Kirkcaldy of Grange.

The severity of the sentence failed to stamp out Quakerism in

Lanarkshire, but it roused the Scottish Quakers to address a vigorous Protest and Appeal “to the Parliament sitting at Westminster” in 1659. The Preamble accused the ministers of instigating their landlords to turn them out, which was calculated to ruin them as inoffensive and honest crofters, artisans, or tradesmen. The sympathies of the people were with them, they said, but they dared not continue trading with them through “slavish fear of their landlords and these men called ministers”. Then follows a large representation of the names of the sufferers and their persecutors, most of whom have been already mentioned. This rare Broadside may still be seen in the Library of the British Museum.