

Alexander Peden's Prayers

After Charles II became King in 1660 he set about destroying the work of Reformation and religious persecution became the order of the day. Before this, many of the Scots, fearing the loss of the Gospel and the Reformed Faith, signed the National Covenant in 1638, and then, in 1643, they signed, with the English, the Solemn League and Covenant. When under Charles II, persecution came (1660-1685), and raged, as it did later in "the killing times" (1685-1688), godly Scots who adhered to the Covenants (i.e. the Covenanters) suffered most terribly. Among these Covenanters were James Guthrie, Hugh M'Kail, Richard Cameron, John Nisbet, Donald Cargill, James Renwick and, one most notable among them, Alexander Peden.

Peden was born in Auchincloich in Sorn, Ayrshire, in 1626, and became a minister at New Luce, Galloway about 1658. Firm in his Covenanting principles, he was ejected in 1662 for refusing to conform to episcopacy (church government by bishops). He began preaching at Conventicles, unofficial and often illegal gatherings for Reformed worship. He became one of the most famous and revered of the Covenanting preachers.

Persecuted for his faith, Peden was hunted over the hills and valleys, and more than once had to flee to Ireland. On one occasion, he sought to return to Scotland with about twenty other persecuted Scots. They boarded a ship for home, but disturbingly there was not a breath of wind. Peden went on the deck and prayed,

rehearsing before God the times and places in which God had heard his prayers and wonderfully helped him. Waving his hand toward the west from whence he desired the wind, he said, "Lord, give us a loof-ful (i.e. a hand-ful) of wind; fill the sails, Lord, and give us a fresh gale, and let us have a swift and safe passage over to the bloody land, come of us what will."

When he began to pray the sails were hanging loose, but when he had finished they were all blown full, and they travelled quickly and safely to Scotland.

In Galloway, Peden and his fellow-Covenanters received news that soldiers on foot and horse were coming after them, and they decided to run for it. However, John Muirhead, one of their company, was struck with violent and severe pains in his head and body, so that he could scarcely move. Peden shouted, "Stay, stay, lads, let us pray for old John ere we go." He stood up and prayed, "Lord, we hear tell that thy enemies and ours are coming upon us, and thou hast laid thy hand of affliction upon old John; have pity upon him, for thy enemies will have none, his blood will run there where he lies: spare him at this time, we know not if he be ready to die."

Muirhead later testified, with tears streaming from his eyes, that when Peden concluded his prayer, the pains in his head and body quite left him, so that he started up and ran with the rest.

Later on, he and others were still being hotly pursued by soldiers, and they took to the hills which often provided refuge; and although weary and quite worn out, they managed to reach a reasonable height above their persecutors. There Peden again stood up and said, "Let us pray here, for if the Lord hear not and save us, we are all dead men." Then he prayed: "Lord, this is thy enemies' day, hour, and power: they may not be idle; but hast thou no other work for them than to send them after us? Send them after them to whom thou wilt give strength to flee, for our strength's gone...."

He continued: "Twine (i.e. twist or entangle) them about the hill, O Lord, and cast the lap of thy cloak over poor old Sandy (referring to himself) and these poor things, and save us this one time, and we will keep it in remembrance, and tell to the commendation of thy goodness, thy pity and compassion, that thou didst it for us at such a time."

This prayer too was remarkably answered, for a cloud of mist immediately and silently descended and shrouded them so securely that they were completely hidden from their persecutors who were confounded in the mossy bogs. Orders were then given to the soldiers to go instead in search of James Renwick, and a great company with him; and so Peden, and those with him, escaped.

A little before his death, Peden preached

for the last time and, in his prayer after the sermon, he said, "Lord, thou hast been both good and kind to old Sandy though a long tract of time, and given him many years in thy service, which have been but as so many months: but now he's tired of thy world, and hath done the good in it that he will do; let him win away with the honesty he has, for he will gather no more."

Alexander Peden died in a cave on January 28th, 1686, and was buried in the Churchyard of Auchincloich. Forty days later his enemies sent a troop of dragoons, took his body out of its grave and re-interred it at Gallow's Hill, the place of public execution at Cumnock. The people of Cumnock, out of the deepest respect for Peden, abandoned their ancient and usual burial-place, and formed a new one around Peden's grave.