

### *Thomas Campbell.*

DURING the closing days of the eighteenth and the opening days of the nineteenth century, great bitterness and much sectarian strife characterised those who professed the Christian name, in both Europe and America. Amid these unlovely conditions there came into existence a religious movement that was at once a protest against sectarianism and all departures from the simple faith of the New Testament, and a plea for the restoration of New Testament Christianity and Christian unity. It began independently, and yet almost simultaneously in several places on both sides of the Atlantic. Those who pioneered this movement with several beginnings were men and women of the heroic type, who were concerned only with the will of God as they conceived it.

Thomas Campbell was father of one of the big branches of this restoration, movement; but it is scarcely correct to speak of him as the father of the whole of the movement as some have done. He was the father of that branch which began in the early days of the nineteenth century in Pennsylvania, U.S.A., and he has wonderfully influenced the whole of the movement.

He was born in County Down, Ireland, on February 1, 1763. His father, in early life, was a Roman Catholic, but later he became a member of the Church of England. In June, 1787, Thomas was married to Jane Corneigle, whose ancestors were French Huguenots. Their firstborn was Alexander, and he was born on September 12, 1788.

#### *Early Religious Experiences.*

In early life Thomas Campbell became the subject of deep religious impressions, and a great lover of the scriptures. There was much formalism, and apparent want of vital godliness in much of the religious life of his day, and this did not favorably impress this ardent young soul. Because of this he turned from the Episcopal church, and was led towards the Covenanters. He passed through the usual emotional experiences that were so common among Christian people in those days, and sought for the then orthodox assurance of acceptance with God, but all in vain, for quite a time. One day, however, while walking in the fields he felt peace fill his soul, and he trusted Christ. From that day he always recognised himself as one of the Lord's, and sought to use his time and ability in his service. Having a strong desire to enter the ministry his father was consulted, but he was not favorable. He had very little sympathy with his son's religious change, as he was ardent in his attachment to the Church of England, and desired to serve God, so he said, "according to Act of Parliament." This opposition, however, was overcome. After teaching school for a time Thomas Campbell entered Glasgow University, where he took the divinity course of three years. Then he entered the theological school of the Anti-Burgher branch of the Seceder church. Becoming a probationer he preached for such congregations as were without a settled minister, under the supervision of the Synod. "About the year 1798 he accepted a call from a church recently established at Ahorey"; this was close to Armagh, and not a great distance from the town of Newry.

#### *The Preacher.*

As a preacher Thomas Campbell was very popular with the people of the denomination with which he was identified; as a pastor he was most diligent; as an example to the flock he was all that could be desired. In his family circle he was most careful in the religious training of those entrusted to him.

During these days in Ireland he manifested, on more than one occasion, his complete trust in God, and willing submission to his will. They were days of trouble, for uprisings occurred, and rebellions were threatened. One day while Mr. Campbell was preaching the house was surrounded by a troop of Welsh soldiers. The captain evidently thought that he had come across a meeting of rebels, and so he walked into the church building in a threatening manner. Of course there was consternation among the worshippers, but Mr. Campbell commenced to repeat the forty-sixth Psalm--"Thou, O God, art our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." When the captain heard this he bowed his head, listened to the close, and then quietly left. Another day, just as he was about to enter the pulpit, a messenger arrived and informed him that his youngest brother had been killed in an accident. Without revealing his sorrow to the congregation he proceeded with the service, and only when his duties were done did he start for Newry where the accident had happened.

#### *Off to America.*

The dual duties of pastor of the church, and school teacher, seriously affected Mr. Campbell's health, and so he decided to emigrate to America. He left home for Londonderry, from which port he was to sail, on April 1, 1807. The voyage lasted thirty-five days, and on reaching Philadelphia he found the Anti-Burgher Synod of North America assembled in that city. His credentials were presented, and he was heartily received, and was appointed to the Presbytery of Chartiers.

### *Driven Out.*

The population in the parts where he labored in the gospel was very sparse, and consequently many devout believers were deprived of religious privileges. This troubled Mr. Campbell, and so while travelling with a young preacher named Wilson, to hold among the scattered settlers a "sacramental celebration," he invited members of other branches of the church to commune. This action, together with conversations they had together, convinced Mr. Wilson that Mr. Campbell was not sound in the faith of the Seceder church. This conviction caused him to lay a charge before the Presbytery, and that body found him deserving of censure. Mr. Campbell appealed to the Synod, and while the sentence was set aside on some technical ground the matter was referred to a committee, and that committee accused him of evasion and equivocation. So bitter did the sectarian spirit make his fellow-laborers towards him that in a little while he was forced to withdraw from the Synod. This step caused him grief as he was a man of peace, and wonderfully generous in spirit.

### *The Christian Association.*

Although practically driven out from the body with which he had been associated Thomas Campbell did not cease to preach, but continued his work in private houses and in the open, wherever he could gather people together. He had no thought of starting a new church, but he called his friends together to consider their position. At that meeting he suggested that they should take for their motto the now famous saying--"Where the scriptures speak, we speak; and where the scriptures are silent, we are silent."

Those who gathered together decided to form an association in the interests of undenominational Christianity, and Christian unity. This association came into existence on August 17, 1809, and was called "The Christian Association of Washington." On September 7 of that year Mr. Campbell read before the association the now historic "Declaration and Address." Someone has called that document "the great charter of the restoration movement." It set forth that nothing should be inculcated that was of human authority "as having any place in the constitution, faith or worship of the Christian church," and that nothing should be taught "as a matter of faith or duty for which there cannot be produced a 'Thus saith the Lord,' either in express terms or by approved example." It further set forth that the church was originally one, and pleaded that the original unity should be restored, declaring that nothing was necessary for this except "to conform to the model and adopt the practice of the primitive church, expressly exhibited in the New Testament." It is a most comprehensive document, and the principles laid down in it paved the way for one of the greatest of modern religious movements, that which seeks a return to New Testament Christianity and the unity of believers on that ground. When it was adopted, and ordered to be printed, neither Mr. Campbell nor any of the others present had any idea how far it would lead them.

### *Developments.*

A log house was soon erected at a place called Brush Run, as a meeting-place for the association. After a little the members of that association were formed into a church, although Thomas Campbell was at first reluctant to agree to this. Up to this time Mr. Campbell had no idea that advocating unity on the New Testament basis would touch the question of baptism, but the study of the New Testament brought conviction, and in 1812 Mr. Campbell and others were immersed by Mr. Mathias Luce, a Baptist preacher. At first Mr. Luce hesitated, as the Campbells had laid it down that they were to be baptised upon a confession of their faith in Christ, just as people were in the days of the apostles, and that was not according to the Baptist custom of that day. Still longing for a wider fellowship with the people of God, the Brush Run church, at the suggestion of some Baptists, sought admission to the Redstone Baptist Association in the year 1813; this association lasted till 1832, but it was not a very happy arrangement, as much opposition was waged against the Campbells by many of the Baptists.

### *Closing Days.*

Thomas Campbell's last discourse was delivered at Bethany on June 1, 1851. It was preached as a farewell sermon at the earnest request of many friends. Some time before this he had ceased his itinerating work among the churches owing to the growing infirmities of age, and had made his home at Bethany with his son Alexander. That farewell sermon was on the great theme of love to God and love to man. At this time the aged saint was blind. He lived until January 4, 1854, when he peacefully passed away, being only about a month short of ninety-one years of age. He left behind a sweet fragrance of a life that had been lived with God. He had been a man wonderfully courteous, and was characterised by a remarkable gentleness of disposition, and yet he held unswervingly to his convictions. He was one of the originators of the idea of Christian unity by a return to the simple Christianity of the New Testament, and seemed to see the matter clearer than did Barton W. Stone, who had started out on similar lines some years before, but whose work was unknown to Thomas Campbell when he started to make the great plea. But Campbell was nearly fifty years of age when he was providentially led to make the move. A younger man was needed to make the plea his life's work, and that younger man was found in Thomas Campbell's son, Alexander. He proved to be one with the culture and vigor necessary to carry on the work to a glorious success.