

George Wishart's Communion Service.

IN Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, and in Lindsay of Pitscottie's *Historie and Cronicles*, there are accounts of a celebration of Holy Communion conducted by George Wishart in the Castle of St Andrews on the morning of his martyrdom. Wishart had returned to Scotland about 1544, and after preaching in various parts of the country, fell into the hands of Cardinal Beaton in the beginning of the year 1546. He is said to have celebrated the Communion at Dun in 1545, and, if so, this would be the first time that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was ministered after the Reformed manner in our land. Wishart is usually referred to as "Gentleman," but it is probable that he had been ordained to the ministry, either in England or on the Continent, though there is no evidence as to when or where his ordination took place. That he was not in priest's orders in the Church of Rome may be taken as certain, for if he had been, the fact would have been mentioned in the narrative of his trial.

In the account of his life in Bristol he is referred to as a "Reader," which was one of the minor orders of the Church of Rome. Apparently he had been set apart to that office by Latimer, who was then Bishop of Worcester. In the "Confession of Faith" which Wishart translated from the Latin, and which it had been argued on good grounds he intended to introduce for the use of the congregations of the Reformed in Scotland, it is said that ordination should be by "the imposition of hands on the heads of the priests," from which it might be inferred that some such form of ordination had been his.¹ In the Scots edition of Bishop Lesley's *History of Scotland* (1596), he² is referred to as "ane clerk called Maister George Wishart," which indicates that he was then regarded as having been in clerical orders.

¹ *Miscellany of the Wodrow Society*, 17. This Confession had been drawn up by the "Ministers of the Church and Congregation of Switzerland," and is sometimes styled "The Former Confession of the Helvetian Churches." It is quite distinct from the Second Helvetic Confession approved by our General Assembly (except in one particular) in 1566.

² Edinburgh Edition (1830), 191. In the original Latin Edition (1578) he is styled "Nobilis quidam."

It has been argued, with much probability, that the Communion Service which was followed at Berwick-on-Tweed by John Knox, had been derived from that used by George Wishart in Scotland. Unfortunately the only fragment of this order that remains is what may justly be called the least interesting part of the service. It is evident that it was modelled on that prepared by the Church of Zurich. We have unfortunately no details of the order of service used by Wishart in Scotland, except in so far as these have been preserved in the fragment attributed to Knox, and in the accounts of the Communion held at St Andrews by him (Wishart) on the morning of his martyrdom. Of the fragment of Knox's order an account was given in a former Annual,¹ and what now follows is an attempt to reconstruct the order from the narratives left to us by George Buchanan and Lindsay of Pitscottie.

The descriptions of the Communion given by the two writers mentioned are exceedingly interesting, all the more so as the order of service given does not agree with that which was afterwards incorporated in the *Book of Common Order* (Knox's Liturgy). A third account of the service is given by a later writer, David Buchanan, who adds some details to the narrative.

It is only fair to say that Rev. Charles Rogers in his *Life of George Wishart*² puts forward the view that George Buchanan is quite wrong in his statement regarding Wishart's last communion. He is certain that no such service took place. "Wishart," he says, "after his trial would no doubt be carried back to his dungeon under the rude guardianship of unfeeling warders." Incidentally, though he quotes Pitscottie about another incident in Wishart's imprisonment, Rogers is quite silent as to the account of the Communion service given by that writer.

Rogers bases his view that no such Communion took place on two grounds.

(I.) "The statements of Buchanan are unsupported by Knox," and Knox, "could have no motive for suppressing" the narrative of the service in the Castle. The argument from silence is always a weak one, and we know so little about the "motives" which influenced the Reformer in writing his *History*, that it is impossible to come to any conclusions on such grounds. It may be noted, however, that "The manner of his (Wishart's) Accusation Process

¹ *Church Service Society Annual*, 1932-33 : pp. 15-36.

² P. 51.

and Answers " as given by Knox is not original, but is taken " as we have received the same from *The Book of the Martyrs* which word by word we have here inserted."¹ As Knox himself informs us that he did not write an original account but took his statements from another,² it is not difficult to argue that no weight need be given to his alleged " suppression " of the evidence.

(II.) Rogers further argues that no such celebration can have taken place, because " it is extremely improbable that one occupying the position of Governor in the Cardinal's Castle would venture to allow a condemned heretic to consecrate the Eucharist. By so doing, and more especially by partaking of the elements himself, he would have rendered himself liable to a charge of sacrilege attended with imprisonment or death." To this it may be answered that both George Buchanan and Lindsay of Pitscottie lived through the Reformation period ; both were acquainted with what was probable or improbable in these days ; and yet both chronicle the fact that such a service took place. To use Rogers' own expression, " They could have had no motive in inventing it." One cannot imagine either Buchanan or Pitscottie fabricating a story that would place the Cardinal and his servants in a somewhat better light. That such a service was held is accepted by such historians as Grub, McCrie, MacEwen, &c., and though there may be dubiety as to the details, there can be no doubt, I think, as to the general reliability of the two 16th century writers mentioned in this matter.

The first account of the service, and perhaps the most interesting is that given by Pitscottie in his *Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*. It is as follows:—" By this when the table was covered and bread set thereon, Mr George began to his exhortation, the which declared to them³ Christ's latter supper, death, and passion, which continued the space of half an hour ; exhorting them to leave rancour, malice, and envy, and affix in their hearts love and charity, one to the other ; that they may be members in Christ their Advocate and Mediator to His Father ; that their sacrifice and prayer may be accepted at our Father's hand, conform to our salvation or redemption. This being ended, Mr George took bread and wine.

¹ Works, I., 148.

² The account of Wishart's trial and death appears in the first edition of the *Actes and Monuments* of John Foxe printed in 1563.

³ " The friends and servants of the Governor " according to George Buchanan. Pitscottie tells us that the Captain of the Castle was also present.

He cut the bread in sundry parts in pieces, he blessed it in the name¹ of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,² and took one piece of it, and ate it in the same manner, saying the same words; and giving a portion of it to the Captain and to every man round about, beseeching them to eat and drink with him for Christ's sake, and in His name and in remembrance of His death. And drank to them all round about, beseeching them in this same manner to drink with him of that cup for Christ's sake which was wine, for they would drink no more with him at that time, for he was to taste a better (bitter ?) cup within a short time, and that for love to God and preaching the Evangel of Christ. 'But take ye no slander thereof, but pray for me and I shall pray for you, that our joy may be in Heaven with our Saviour thereof, for there is nothing in this earth but dolor.' When Mr George made an end of this, he said the grace and thanked God,³ and soon thereafter passed to his chamber to contemplation and prayer."

Lindsay was only a boy at the time of Wishart's martyrdom, at which it is possible he was present. Pitscottie, which was his residence and by the name of which he is usually called, is no great distance from St Andrews, and he seems to have had information which was not known to Foxe or to Knox.

We have in George Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, a second account, which in Aikman's translation⁴ reads as follows:—"In the meantime the table being covered as is the custom with a linen cloth and bread placed upon it, George began a short and clear discourse upon the last supper and upon the sufferings and death of Christ, and spoke about half an hour. He specially exhorted them to lay aside wrath, envy, and malice, that their minds might be filled with love one to another, and so become perfect members of Christ, who daily intercedes with the Father, that we, through Him, our sacrifice, may obtain eternal life. When he had thus spoken, when he had given God thanks, he brake the bread and gave a little to each, and in like manner he gave the wine after he himself had tasted, entreating them to remember in this Sacrament, for the

¹ In the earliest Consecration Prayer of which we have any record, that of Justin Martyr, we find that in giving thanks the officiating Presbyter "glorifies the Father of the Universe in the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." 1st Apol., lxv.

² It is with these words that the Zurich Communion service opens. They were found in Scottish prayers of consecration at a later period.

³ This may simply be the "Grace after Meat," but more probably it refers to a prayer of thanksgiving at the close of the reception.

⁴ II., 357. For the original see Latin Edition (Edinburgh, 1582): *Rerum Scoticum Historia*, Folio 178.

last time along with him, the memorial of Christ's death ; as for himself a more bitter portion was prepared for no other reason except preaching the Gospel. After which, having again returned thanks, he retired into his chamber and finished his devotions." Buchanan was a man of about forty years of age at the time of Wishart's death, and although he was not in Scotland at that period, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of his account.

These narratives, short though they are, throw a flood of light on some of the practices of the early Reformed Church in Scotland. There is first of all the association of preaching with the celebration of the Sacrament.¹ Even at such a time Wishart would not celebrate, until he had discoursed about half an hour on the Lord's Supper and the sufferings and death of our Lord. To faith was to be added works, for the writers show how the martyr insisted on the purity of life and character of those who participated in the Communion.

It is interesting to note how Wishart declared that they should "lay aside wrath, envy, and malice," for these are among the things which the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* specially mentions as debarring from the Lord's Table.² We have references to Christ's intercession for His people on earth, and to His sacrifice for them. The Romanists as is well known, insisted that the Sacrifice of the Mass was truly propitiatory,³ and was rightly offered not only for the sins of the living, but also for those who had departed this life and were in purgatory. No doctrine of the mediaeval church was more vehemently attacked by the Reformers than was this doctrine of the Mass. They considered that it was derogatory to the great Sacrifice on Calvary, which to them was the only Sacrifice known to the Church of Christ.

So, too, Christ was the great High Priest, and as we see here, Wishart lays special emphasis on those two cardinal points of the Faith. To him it is evident that the Lord's Supper was more than a simple memorial meal. It was "a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself

¹ This was one of the things on which Knox and the other Reformers insisted most strongly. In a letter (1559) to Mrs Locke, Knox says, "Your sacraments were ministered . . . without the soul . . . because they were ministered without the word truly and openly preached": *Works* VI., 12. In the early days of the Reformed Church in Scotland those who had not heard the Sermon were not allowed to communicate: *Register of St Andrews*, 862.

² Rubric in the Communion Service. The Curate is not to suffer any to be "partakers of the Lord's Table" if he perceives "hatred and malice to reign" in them.

³ See Canon, 3, Session xxii., Council of Trent.

(Christ) by Himself," with a "spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same."¹ There is also contained in the words, "members of Christ," the teaching that the "Sacrament as it is visible to us is the act not of the individual, but an act of the Church in which the individual participates."² If ever there was a time when a minister might have been excused for not dwelling on this aspect of the truth, it was on that morning at St Andrews when Wishart found himself cut off from the Church militant. Yet it was as "members of Christ" that his few friends were invited to partake with him at God's Table.

Another point that emerges from both narratives is that Wishart appears to have served each communicant separately.³ If so, this was a departure from the use of Zurich and also from that followed later by the Puritans in England and by all in Scotland. Knox insisted that the communicants should pass the bread and cup from hand to hand, which is still⁴ the Scottish practice.⁵ Wishart, however, seems to have followed the Anglican method whereby the officiating minister (or ministers) served each communicant individually. Pitscottie's statement, that Wishart cut the bread "in sundry parts in pieces," and after taking one piece himself, gave the others to the communicants, puts this beyond doubt if the details of the narrative are to be relied on.

In cutting the bread in presence of the worshippers, he was following to some extent Roman precedent. It was the custom both in England and Scotland at the conclusion of the Mass that a loaf be brought to the officiating priest, and after this had been blessed by him, it was cut into pieces and distributed to the worshippers. "Then all came up to the chancel steps and received the morsel from the celebrant, whose hand they kissed. This blessed bread signified the fraternal love that always ought to bind Christians together."⁶

In having "individual breads," the martyr was following the custom of the mediaeval Church where each com-

¹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, xxix., 2.

² Wotherspoon, *Religious Values of the Sacraments*, 255.

³ "He brake the bread and gave a little to each and in like manner he gave the wine": Buchanan.

⁴ The General Assembly of 1616 ordered that "the Communion be given to every one severally out of the minister's hand": Calderwood, *Hist.* vii., 285.

⁵ At least, in the Church of Scotland and the other Presbyterian Churches. It was at one time the custom among the Episcopalians also.

⁶ Cardinal Gasquet, *Parish Life in Mediaeval England*, 157-8. The practice appears to have lasted in some parts of Scotland until the Reformation. It is still observed in some Churches in France.

municant received a separate "Host." In later days this was strongly objected to by many of the Scottish ministers. George Gillespie,¹ for example, writes strongly against the practice of having the Sacramental Bread in "*multas minutias*," and a little later the Presbytery of Perth² complained that at some Communion "the bread is cut into small pieces like dyts." In spite of this, the earlier practice has held its own in some parishes even to the present time, and seems to be more common to-day than it was thirty years ago.

Another point the narrative makes quite clear is that Wishart communicated first himself. It was only after he had taken and eaten one piece that he gave a portion to the Captain "and to every man round about." So also with the cup. He partook of it first of all himself, and then besought the rest "in the same manner to drink with him." In the Zurich Order, the presiding minister communicated himself first of all, and then served the ministers assisting him. No mention is made of the minister's communion in the *Book of Common Order*, though it is likely that the ancient custom was followed. Calvin's practice was the same,³ and we find that the old rule was adhered to by both Presbyterians and Episcopalians in Scotland in the 17th century. This is still the usual custom in the National Church, but one occasionally finds (in somewhat unexpected quarters, be it said) this Catholic practice being departed from.

We cannot lay much stress on the fact that this Communion at St Andrews was celebrated in the morning before breakfast, and that in consequence all who took part in it were fasting. Yet the custom of coming fasting to the Communion Table long prevailed in our land.⁴ Indeed in some places the fast before Communion was more rigorously enforced in the Reformed Church, than it had been in the Roman.⁵ It also remained the Scottish custom to allow no one to communicate after twelve noon, which practice was another mediaeval survival.⁶ It is worthy of

¹ *English Popish Ceremonies*, 207.

² Hunter, *Diocese and Presbytery of Dunkeld*, 47.

³ *La Forme*, (Strasburg, 1545), "Le Ministre recoit le premier le pain et le vin." Pullain, (1551), has a rubric to the same effect. See Maxwell, *John Knox's Geneva Service Book*, 207.

⁴ McMillan: *Worship of the Scottish Reformed Church*, 197-8. Communion was very often celebrated in the very early morning in Scotland in the 17th Century: *Ibid*, chap. xv.

⁵ At St Andrews in 1598 the Communion fast was ordered to begin at eight o'clock on the Saturday night and to end at four o'clock on Sunday afternoon: *Register of St Andrews*, 861.

⁶ Lee: *Lectures on Church History*, I., 402.

note that Knox who had much to allege against Roman forms is altogether silent as to these two mediaeval practices. Had he objected to either, he most certainly would have let his objections be known. Wishart, we know, approved of fasting because it was commended in Scripture, and also because he had found it beneficial in his own life.¹

In addition to the narratives of Pitscottie and George Buchanan, we have a third, which, though agreeing in the main with them both, gives some additional details regarding the service. This is to be found in the edition of *Knox's History*, edited by David Buchanan and published at London in 1644. According to this account,² Wishart's consecration prayer consisted of "giving of thanks and blessing the bread and wine." Perhaps we should not emphasise too strongly the difference of phraseology, but it may be noted that about the time this work was published, objection was being taken to the prayer of consecration in the *Book of Common Order* on the ground that it contained no petition for the "blessing" of the elements.³

The words with which Wishart is said by David Buchanan to have administered the sacred Elements form a rather remarkable feature of the service as given by him. "Remember that Christ died for thee, and feed on it (the bread) spiritually." "Remember that Christ's blood was shed for thee, &c." Buchanan's statement is corroborated to some extent by the words of Pitscottie "beseeching them to eat and drink with him for Christ's sake, and in His name and in remembrance of His death." It is also in accordance with, or at least is in no way contradictory of, the narrative set forth by George Buchanan.

In the *Zurich Order* the words used at the administration of the Elements are those of the Apostle, I. Corin. xi., 24-26, from "Take, eat, this is My Body" to "Ye shall publish the death of the Lord and highly praise Him for the same until He cometh." In the *Book of Common Order* no form is given, but it is known that words taken from the narrative of the Institution were used. Probably Calderwood⁴ has preserved the formula then in use, "Our Lord in that night in which He was betrayed took bread, and gave thanks as we have now done, and break it as I also now break, and gave to His disciples, saying (then he hands it to those

¹ Knox : *History*, I., 166.

² Knox : *History*, I., 484.

³ Row : *Historie*, 331.

⁴ *Altare Damascenum*, 777.

nearest on the right and on the left), 'This is My Body.' " In the *First Prayer Book of King Edward VI.* (1549), the words prescribed are: "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." "The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul unto everlasting life." In the *Second Prayer Book of King Edward VI.* (1552), these words were omitted, and in their place were the following: "Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on Him in thy heart by faith and with thanksgiving." "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful." The late Principal Lindsay regarded this change as the most important that was made in passing from the one book to the other. "The difference," he wrote, "represented by the change in these words is between what *might* be the doctrine of transubstantiation and a sacramental theory distinctly lower than that of Luther or Calvin, and which might be pure Zwinglianism."¹

The phrases used in the *Second Prayer Book*² of King Edward VI. bear some resemblance to forms put forward by the Polish Reformer, John Laski, and it has usually been supposed that it was from those forms that they were derived.³ But the form attributed to Wishart here is more like these Anglican phrases than are the ones used by Laski. We know that Knox had a good deal to do with the preparation of the "Black" Rubric in the *Second Prayer Book*, which explains why kneeling is not prohibited at the reception of the consecrated Elements. Might it be through him that the change was made in the "words of delivery"? That the change was made at the instance of the more extreme among the Reformers is undoubted, and it is at least possible that Knox brought those forms used by Wishart before Cranmer and his colleagues, with the result that similar ones were inserted in the Prayer Book of 1552.⁴

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¹ *History of the Reformation*, II., 362-3.

² In the *Elizabethan Prayer Book* the phrases used in the First and Second Prayer Books of King Edward were conjoined, and those united phrases remain to this day. In *Laud's Liturgy* (1637), the words of the First Book were retained. This seems to have been done at the instance of Wedderburn, then Bishop of Dunblane. The words given in the Westminster Directory, it may be noted, are more in line with those of the First Book than with those of the Second.

³ Brightman: *English Rite*, I., lxii.

⁴ At the period when it was being compiled, Knox was stationed at Newcastle, but he was in touch with Cranmer and other Protestant leaders. Sometime in the Autumn of 1552 he preached before the King and Council. *Original Letters*, (Parker Society), 591.