

A Peculiar People

THE Glasites were a peculiar people. At least so thought John Wesley. On

In Wesley's Day

October 29, 1745, he writes in his *Journal*: "A young gentleman called upon me whose father is an eminent minister in Scotland, and was in union with Mr.

Glass till Mr. Glass renounced him because they did not agree as to the eating of blood."

"Eating of blood" seems rather an unusual subject to quarrel over. The Glasites, however, in their Judaizing zeal, refused to eat any food composed of blood, as well as anything that had been strangled. This was because of the extremely literal way in which their founder, John Glas, read the Scriptures.

John Glas, born at Auchtermuchty, Fifeshire, in 1695, was almost inevitably destined for the Church by his clerical ancestry on both sides. He was ordained at Tealing, Forfarshire, in 1719, and soon became a very popular preacher. In 1725 (the year of Wesley's ordination) he formed a religious society within his parish—a society similar in some respects to those which in later years were to provide Methodists with intimate religious fellowship. Glas had strong views about the National Church, and about civil authorities interfering in religious matters; and his publication of these views in 1727 led to his being accused (quite rightly) of Independency, and he was suspended from the ministry, his sterling character and devoted labours being insufficient to outweigh his iconoclastic speculations.

Removing to Dundee, he gathered around him the first Glasite congregation. He had an even greater reverence than Wesley for the practices of the Primitive Church. Besides the dietetic prescriptions noted above, he reintroduced the celebration of the Love Feast. This was more an actual than a symbolic feast, the introduction of broth giving the church the nickname of "the kail kirk." Glas also revived the "kiss of peace," and the public washing of feet. Dundee was a stepping-stone to Perth, where Glas built his first meeting-house. Here his daughter Katherine—one of his fifteen children, all healthy—married Robert Sandeman, at the time hesitating between medicine and the church. Sandeman became the most popular exponent of Glasite views; so much so, in fact, that Sandemanian became synonymous with Glasite, and only in Scotland was the older name retained. By 1768—apparently the high-water mark of the sect—there were twenty-six Glasite congregations in Great Britain, with a total membership of 886, among the largest being Dundee (149), Perth (100), London (48), and Kirkby Stephen (45). Three years later Sandeman died in America, followed in 1773 by Glas.

In 1757 Wesley was to cross swords with the Glasites as the protagonists of Calvinism, Sandeman in particular drawing the charge of Antinomianism upon the sect by his insistence, as expressed on his tombstone—

"That the bare work of Christ, without a thought or deed on the part of man, is sufficient to present the chief of sinners guiltless before God."

It is perhaps a commentary on these contrasted standards of Christian belief that, while to-day Methodists are numbered by the million, the Glasites have dwindled down to two small churches—one in Edinburgh, the other in London.

F. B.

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