

## Episodes in the Life of May Drummond.

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This lady, celebrated by Pope<sup>1</sup> and others, was, according to Robert Chambers, "in many respects perhaps the most remarkable woman Scotland ever produced," with the exception of the Duchess of Lauderdale.<sup>2</sup>

The following brief notice of her is given by George Crosfield in his *Memoirs of Samuel Fothergill*, 1843, p. 106 :

"May Drummond was of a considerable family in North Britain. She was convinced of Friends' principles at Edinburgh, by the ministry of Thomas Story, about 1731, at the time that her brother, George Drummond, was the provost of that city. He was one of the principal founders of the Royal Infirmary, and his sister was active in procuring funds from Friends in England in aid of the Institution. The various sums contributed by several Quarterly Meetings remain recorded on a board in one of the apartments.<sup>3</sup> M. Drummond had much to endure from her relations and friends, who, being what were considered of genteel rank, were much grieved at her uniting herself to the despised people called Quakers, and were all against her, except a younger brother.<sup>4</sup> She nevertheless continued firm in her attachment to the principles she had embraced, and, maintaining her ground, was in a few years called into the ministry. In this she was much engaged for many years. She was a fluent speaker and very popular, particularly amongst those of other societies, who were much drawn to the meetings she attended, her character and the circumstances of her conviction

<sup>1</sup> She is said to have been alluded to by the poet in the lines in *Epilogue to the Satires* :

"A Simple Quaker or a Quaker's wife  
Outdo Llandaff in doctrine, yea in life."

A note explains that this refers to "a Mrs. Drummond, a preacher."

<sup>2</sup> *Traditions of Edinburgh*, vol. ii. p. 50.

<sup>3</sup> The board was placed in the entrance hall of the old Infirmary. It was headed, "Fraternity of Quakers, 1739." London Quarterly Meeting contributed £151 9s., Edinburgh, £15 15s., Dublin £59 14s. 8d., York £66 10s., Durham £20, Cumberland £20, Chester £12 2s., Devonshire £15 15s Northumberland £11 2s., In all £372 7s. 8d.

<sup>4</sup> Probably John Drummond, whose name occurs from 1734 to 1736 in Edinburgh Meeting records.

often exciting curiosity. One well qualified to judge says of her ministry, in 1739, 'She had some masculine, nervous expressions ; her periods are mostly regular and just ; did she not affect it, one might say she was eloquent.' She died at Edinburgh about the year 1772 ; but, during the latter years of her life, was not held in the same estimation that she had formerly been." Thus far George Crosfield.

The earliest notice of her in the Edinburgh Meeting records is in the minutes of the Quarterly Meeting for Twelfth Month, 1733, as follows :—

"The paper wrote by M. Drummond being read in the Meeting, friends Agree that it be sent to the 2nd days morning meeting at London for there Examination and approbation to be printed, as also some have agreed that her Letter to John Shaw, And the Last Paragraph of the Postscript only be sent with it, and that they soften & rectify Any expressions either in the paper or Letter ; and Charles Ormston, jr, is appointed to remit said papers to friends att London, And to send his Letter to friends att Edinburgh to read & consider before its sent."

In Third Month, 1734, the Morning Meeting, after careful examination, approved the paper, except that portion relating to John Shaw, and left it to Friends in Scotland to "doe therewith as they shall think fitt." Query, was it ever printed ?

May Drummond again presented her letter to John Shaw for the approbation of the Morning Meeting in 1735, under the title of "A Letter to a Preacher, dated Edinburgh the 25th 7 mo, 1733," and also two other papers, *viz.*, "An Epistle to y<sup>e</sup> People of Scotland, dated 28<sup>th</sup> 11 mo, 1732/3," and "An Epistle to such as seriously profess Christianity, dated Bush hill, 2<sup>d</sup> 6 mo., 1735," but the Minutes of the Meeting do not give the result of the application, except as regards the Bush Hill letter, which the author withdrew.

The letter to John Shaw, of South Leith, is still extant in MS. The following is the opening sentence :—

"Some days ago I uery little tho<sup>t</sup> of writing to thee ; but now I feel myself engaged to warn thee against preaching a flat contradiction to the express words of our Lord Jesus Christ, who says (Luke, 17th ch., 21 ver.), 'The

Kingdom of God is within you' ; and confidently, from the Pulpit, the 23<sup>rd</sup> of this month, denied the Light within, & blamed those who adhere to it."

A " P.S." to the letter runs :—

" Since from this pure Spirit alone proceeds salvation, is it not to be regretted that so many men are kept in pay to detract from its Power & Glory & persuade mankind not to adhere to it? The reason is plain; where this takes place, the Trade of preaching can be no more; but in obedience to the same Spirit, those who have received freely, give freely."<sup>5</sup>

In the following year she was travelling in the ministry in various parts of Scotland, and early in 1735 she was holding many great meetings in the west and south of England, in company with Thomas Story and others.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Story mentions the great crowds which assembled to see and hear her, " not always to her satisfaction; but," he adds, " the Children of this World will still gaze at the Servants of God, but neither believe nor practise what they preach, though in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Wisdom of Truth."

Thomas Chalkley, also, alludes to May Drummond at this period<sup>7</sup>:—" While I was in and about London [in the year 1735], I was at eighteen meetings in that great City, at two of which I was with May Drummond, a virtuous young woman, who hath a good Gift in the Ministry, and had a gracious Opportunity of declaring her Convincement to our noble Queen Caroline (our great King George's royal Consort). The kind Treatment, and good Reception, she had with the Queen, spread so in City and Country, that many Thousands flocked to hear her, and more of the Gentry and Nobility than ever was known before to our Meetings. I had some private Conversation with her, which put me in mind of the Apostle's Exhortation, where he adviseth the primitive Christians that their Words be few and savoury, and that they should be seasoned with Grace, for this great Reason, that they might administer Grace to the

<sup>5</sup> From a smoothed copy in D. (Robson MSS.)

<sup>6</sup> Story's *Journal*, pp. 714, 719, 720; Summers's *Memories of Jordans and the Chalfonts*, 1895, p. 243.

<sup>7</sup> *Journal*, 1751, p. 279.

Hearers ; and truly I thought there was the Influence of Grace in her Conduct and Conversation, whom I pray God to preserve in Christ to the End." Thomas Story alludes to " her ready Wit, enlightened by the Truth," and to the understanding and fortitude with which she was furnished, so that neither " the Subtelties, Contrivances nor Frowns " of her relations were able to hurt her.

The interview with Queen Caroline is thus described in a letter from M. D. to William Miller :—<sup>8</sup>

" I have been with the Queen at her desire ; I got as kind a reception & in as affable a manner as thy Wife could have given me. I was in her dressing Room one hour, one quarter, & two Minutes, nobody being present but the Dutchess of Dorset, the two eldest Princesses, her Dresser, and Pitt, Thomas Jackson & his wife, other two Ladies & myself. The Door was shut. We had a very solemn time, and in no place I was ever in had I more freedom to declare the Eternal Truth. The Queen was tendered to a great degree, & expressed her satisfaction to us & afterwards to others."

An address given by May Drummond in the Meeting House at Salisbury in 1737 gave rise to some correspondence in the *Salisbury Journal*, reprinted later.

A newspaper correspondent, quoted in *Quakeriana*,<sup>9</sup> writes :—

" Bristol, October 4. The Honourable Mrs. Drummond's several Discourses in the Quakers' Meeting has been so much talk'd of, that great numbers of different Persuasions continue their Curiosity to hear her. The Throngs of People have been so great that several Supporters have been added to the Gallery, to prevent any Accident by its falling. On Monday there was a particular Meeting for the young Ladies only, when she exhorted them in such an affectionate and moving Manner, as drew Tears from the general Part of her tender Communicants ; and herself was so struck with the Effect her Exhortation had over them, that she wept during most of the Time it held."

<sup>8</sup> From a smoothed copy in D. (Robson MSS.) William Miller was the son of " the Patriarch," and father of the William Miller alluded to later.

<sup>9</sup> Vol. i. (1894), p. 106.

The following letter<sup>10</sup> was addressed to Joshua Toft, Hareyate, nr. Leek. Toft Chorley, grandson of Joshua Toft, has written on the letter, "About the year 1769, I saw M. Drummond at Sheffield Meeting. She then appeared to be 70 years of age, with strong masculine features and aspect resembling many of the natives of Scotland. Her ministry was not then fully approved of by Friends. T.C." The same writer adds, "It does not appear what notice was taken of this letter, but Jos<sup>a</sup> Toft was engaged in religious service elsewhere ab<sup>t</sup> the time above ment<sup>d</sup>."

"from London, the 1 of the 2 Month, 1740.

"Estemed freend.

"I have often thoght of wreeting to thee since I had a personal acquaintance with thee, but it has so hapned that this is the first tim I have atemped to begin a letter to thee. My Conseren to Vesit the County of Kent has been of along Continouance; that County is not much visited by such as can by there Description of the holy one make the Vision plane. Fewe Profesing oure uay Live in it, and those who do are not well aquented with the Life hid with god in Christ Jesus. For that reson I wish for Instremental helpe on that Journay, and non woud better shout me then thy self, if owre great master Consern thee to go, and Open thy uay in the Cource of his providence. Pray Let me have thy thoghts of it as soon after this Letter reches thy hands as thou can. I could wish Isaac Moss would be thy Companion if thou Determin to go, and that we begun Owre Journay from London about 2 weeks hence, that Owre Visit might be Compleated befor the yearly meeting in this Place. When I have thy ansure, pleas to Derect it to the house of Alexander forbes, Marchant, London.

"My Love is to all your famely and freends and I am, with sincer Esteme and Propor respect,

"Thy freend,



<sup>10</sup> From the original in D. (Crosfield MSS.)

The following interesting estimate of her character, when at the height of her popularity, is given in a letter from William Cookworthy, of Plymouth, to Richard Hingston, of Penryn:—<sup>11</sup>

“ Plymouth, Augt. 1, 1744.

“ Dear Richard.

“I delayed my answer to thine of the 23rd ultimo, till I had seen & heard May Drummond, that I might give thee my full thoughts of her, which I am now prepared for ; having heard her several times at Kingsbridge & Plymouth, & having, besides, made occasions to be pretty much in her company, which may enable me to judge of her in her private capacity as a woman, as well as in her public one of a Preacher. She appears then, to me, as one of a surprising genius ; her apprehension being quick, lively, penetrating, & distinct to great nicety. Not the smallest relations escape her ; nor is she less exact in determining their weight & proportion ;—a great connoisseur of the human heart in all its emotions, passions, and foibles:—her own, open, generous, tender, and humane ; and as it apparently accompanies her understanding, it makes her conversation an exact harmony of the powers of thought & sentiment in the utmost propriety of subordination. I had forgotten her person, which seems contrived to enforce and embellish Truth ; her face & gesture conveying to the mind, by the eye, all those fine turns of thought which are too delicate for the expression of language.

“ This, to me, appears to be her true character in private life. To this account add her principles, & thou wilt have near a complete idea of her as a preacher. By mistake, I said principles ; for, by her own account, she owns but this one :—That God is the fountain of all light, knowledge, information, & influence ; and that in proportion as this principle is believed in, attended, & adhered to, in the various economy of human thoughts & actions, mankind become happy. This principle she describes as our Friends have constantly done ; but

<sup>11</sup> By the kind favour of Theodore Compton. Extracts from the letter are printed in his memoir of William Cookworthy, 1895, pp. 13, 14. Kingsbridge M.M. allowed William Cookworthy 11s. for “ a *double horse* to carry M. Drummond to Looe.”

carries her observation on it further than usual, by tracing it down to the minutiae of conduct, in every instance of action in which we are interested ; which she asserts to be in all, none being to be held indifferent ; being of opinion with Dr. Young

That noughts' a trifle ;  
Drops make the ocean ; moments make the year,  
And trifles, life.

“ Having said so much in her favour, I will tell thee with much openness, what I seem to see amiss in her. In her private character, *nothing*. As a preacher, her style is rather too learned, and some of her epithets rather swell too much. There is something, too, in the management & tone of her voice, when she exerts it, a little theatrical. She resembles Milton in being too free with technical words. But I really believe all this to be owing to her education, & not to any affectation or want of simplicity. She has a perfect acquaintance with the world, being what is called thorough well-bred.”

WILLIAM F. MILLER.

*To be concluded.*

### Accident to Ann Parsons, 1668.

Uppon Consideration Had of y<sup>e</sup> case of Ann Parsons, who lately in a Journey about her outward occassions fell from her Horse & broke her Arm, & otherwise much bruised her self—

It is ordered by this Meeting that Forty shillings be forthwith advanced & given Her towards her present relieffe, & for payment of y<sup>e</sup> Bonesetter ; & y<sup>t</sup> John Shaw be desired to give Her y<sup>e</sup> same accordingly : who haueing instantly at y<sup>e</sup> request of this Meeting disbursed y<sup>e</sup> same, Wee do hereby recommend it to y<sup>e</sup> quarterly Mens Meeting now approaching to take care y<sup>t</sup> y<sup>e</sup> said John Shaw be reimbursed y<sup>e</sup> said 40s (so by him advanced as aforesaid) with all convenient Speed.

Horsham M.M. (Sussex), 14th of Eighth Month, 1668.