

EXTRACTS FROM THE RECORDS OF THE PRESBYTERY.

At Pasley, December 30, 1696.

"This day Mr. Turner represented to the Presbytery the deplorable case of Christine Shaw, daughter to the laird of Bargarren, in the paroch of Erskine, who, since the beginning of September last, hath been under a very sore and unnatural-like distemper, frequently seized with strange fits, sometimes blind, sometimes deaf and dumb, the several parts of her body sometimes violently extended, and other times as violently contracted, and ordinarily much tormented in various parts of her body, which is attended with an unaccountable palpitation in those parts that are pained, and that those several weeks by past she hath degorged a considerable quantity of hair, folded up straw, unclean hay, wild-fowl-feathers, with divers kinds of bones of fowles and others, together with a number of coal cinders burning hot, candle grease, gravel-stones, etcetera, all which she puts forth during the forementioned fits, and in the intervals of them is in perfect health, wherein she gives an account of several persons, both men and women, that appears to her in her fits, tormenting her, all which began with her upon the back of one Kathrine Campbell, her cursing of her, and though her father hath called physicians of the best note to her during her trouble, yet their application of medicine to her hath proven ineffectual, either to better or worse, and that they are ready to declare that they look upon this distemper as *toto genere* preter-natural. All which was attested by the minister who, by the Presbytery's recommendation, had visited her in her trouble, upon all which Mr. Turner desired that the Presbytery would do what they judged convenient in such a juncture. The Presbytery being deeply sensible of the sad circumstances of that Damsel and family, does appoint the exercise of fasting and prayer to be continued as it is already set up by Mr. Turner in that family every tuesday, leaving it to him to call to his assistance whom he pleased, from time to time. And further, appoints Mr. Turner and Mr. Birsbane to repaire to Bargarren, friday next, there to take up a particular narrative of her whole trouble, of its rise and progress; and also appoints Mr. John Stirling and Mr. Andrew Turner to go to Edinburgh munday next, and to lay the whole affair before the Lords of his Maj.'s Privie Counsell, in order unto their obtaining a commission for putting those who are suspected to be her tormentors to a tryall, and in their way thitherward to go to Dr. Birsbane, and to entreat him to give a declaration of his sentiments of the foresaid trouble, in order to their more easy obtaining a Commission as said is.

At Pasley, February 3, 1697.

Anent the business of Witchcraft it was reported that the appointments anent the taking up of the narrative of Christine Shaw's trouble, and the going to Edinburgh were obeyed, and accordingly the Lords of his Majestie's Privie Counsell had granted a commission to my Lord Blantyre and some other gentlemen in the bounds for taking a precognition of that affair, who are to meet at Renfrew, the 5 instant. The Presbytery appoints Mrs. Symson, Turner, and Blackwell to wait upon the commission on the foresaid day; and the Pres-bytery further considering that the trouble of Bargarren's daughter continueth, therefore the Presbytery appoints thursday-come-eight days for a public day of humiliation and fasting, and Mrs. Hutcheson and Symson are appointed to joyn with Mr. Turner in that work, leaving it for them to call the next Presbytery as they shall find convenient.

At Pasley, February 17, 1697.

Reported that the fast was kept at Erskine according to appointment, by Mr. Hutcheson and Mr. Sympson joyning with Mr. Turner, who finding that the Commissioners had apprehended several persons delated by James and Thomas Lindsays, and Elizabeth Anderson, now confessant and accused by Christine Shaw as her tormentors, and that they were to sit at Renfrew to-morrow as their last meeting before their report to the Counsell. Therefore they had called the Presbytery this day that they might consider what was incumbent upon them at this juncture. The Presbytery approved of their being called, and finding that the Commission is to meet to-morrow at Renfrew, does adjourn thither to-morrow against ten of the clock.

At Renfrew, February 18, 1697.

The Presbytery considering what was incumbent upon them at this juncture did, at the desire of the Commissioners, think meet to wait upon them at their enquiries and examinations, and to deal with the consciences of the suspected, now prison-ers, to see if they could be brought to a confession, which was done accordingly; and after meeting together, and finding BargalTen was desired by the Commissioners to go on with their report, which was to be put in the hand of Sir John Mmnavell to present to the Counsell, did think fit that one of our number should go in company with Bargarren, and accordingly did appoint Mr. Thomas Blackwell, and, failing him, Mr. Robert Taylor, to go in to Edinburgh and to represent to the said Sir John Maxwell, and, with his concurrence, to His Majestie's Advocate and other Lords of His Majestie's Privie Counsell, the *lamentable condition* of this part of the country, upon the account of the great number that are delated by some that have confessed, and of the many *murders* and other *malefices* that in all probability are perpetrated by them, and to entreat their compassion in granting a Commission for putting these persons to a tryall, and for bringing the same to an effectual and speedy issue. And that they would order some way for maintaining those of them that have nothing of their own till the tryall be complete, or so long as they shall be detained in prison. And the three confessants, viz., Elizabeth Anderson, James and Thomas Lindsays, the Presbytery thought fit, upon the desire of the said Commissioners for enquiry, that they should be severally kepted by turns in the houses of the ministers of the Presbytery, and that they may have opportunity to instruct and deal with their consciences in the meantime, till further course be taken with them by authority.

At Pasley, March 17, 1697.

The Presbytery this day considering that upon the giving in of the Commission's report, appointed for taking a precognition of the business of witchcraft, the Lords of His Majesties' Privie Counsell had granted a Commission for putting those who are incarcerate or suspected to a tryall, and that those commissionat are to meet to-morrow at Renfrew: therefore the Presbytery appoints Mrs. Pat. Sympson, Dav. Brown, Jo. Stirling, Andrew Turner, Tho. Blackwell to wait upon their Lordships' day day and place forsd.

At Paslay, March 24, 1697.

The Presbytery, considering the great rage of Satan in this corner of the land, and, particularly, the continued trouble of Bargarren's daughter, which is a great evidence of the Lord's displeasure, being provoked by the sins of the land (expressed as the cause of our former publick fasts), so to let Satan loose among us: therefore the Presbytery judged it very necessary to set apart a day of solemn humiliation and fasting, that we may humble ourselves under God's hand, and wrestle with God in prayer that He may restrain Satan's rage, and relieve that poor afflicted damsell and that family from their present distress, and that the Lord would break in upon the hearts of these poor obdured wretches that are indited, that they may freely confess, to the glory of God and the rescuing of their own souls out of the hands of Satan, and that the Lord would conduct and clear their way that are to be upon the tryall, in order to the giving of Satan's kingdom an effectually stroke: therefore the Presbytery appoints thursday-come-eight-days to be religiously and solemnly observed, upon the accounts fore-said, in all the congregations within their bounds, and the same to be intimate the Sabbath preceding. The Presbytery also appoints the wholl members to deal with those who are indited, as they shall have occasion, in order unto their being brought to a confession.

At Irvine, April 6, 1697.

The Presbytery considering that the Commissioners of Witchcraft are to meet again, April 13, at Pasley, and the Presbytery considering how requisite it would be to have a sermon before them at their down sitting upon such an occasion, and being informed also that the same is desired and expected by those concerned in the tryalls; therefore the Presbytery appoints their clerk to write and send an express to Mr. Hutcheson, signifying that the Presbytery hath appointed and seriously recommended to him to preach before the Commissioners at Pasley, Aprile 13.

The Presbytery appoints their Moderator to apply to the Synod that they would appoint some of the grave and experienced brethren in the several Presbyteries to join with this Presbytery of Pasley during the time of the tryall for assisting and advising with them in anything incumbent upon them at this juncture.

At Pasley, Apr. 13, 1697.

Reported that application had been made to the Synod for appointing some experienced brethren to join with this Presbytery, and according to their appointment were present - Mrs. Will. Dunlop, J. Brown, Ro. Wylie, Pa. Warner, J. Wilson, Ro. Wallace, J. o. Ritchie, Tho. Linning, with several brethren of the neighbouring Presbyteries.

Mr. Hutcheson preached before the Commissioners according to appointment on Ex. xxii. 18. The meeting, at the desire of the Commissioners, appoints Will. Dunlop, Ja. Brown, Pa. Warner, Ro. Wylie, Jo. Wilson, Tho. Linning, Ja. Hutcheson, Pa. Sympson, And. Turner, Ja. Birsbane, to wait upon their Lordships, and to know their desires to this meeting; and further recommended it to them to deal with the consciences of those on whom the insensible marks are found, in order to their being brought to confession, as they shall, with the Commissioners, concert the method of the same.

At Pasley, Apr. 14, 1697.

Reported that those appointed to wait upon the Commissioners obeyed accordingly. The meeting considering the necessity of their representing unto the Commissioners their thoughts with respect unto this present affair, and specially of the circumstances of severals delated and suspected within the bounds, does therefore appoint Mrs. Sympson, Wyllie, and Dunlop to put the same in form against the next meeting, in order to its being represented to the Commissioners, and appoints all the brethren to give information of the particular circumstances of such persons in their respective paroches unto those appointed to draw the representation.

The meeting this day considering that the revising of the narrative of Christine Shaw's trouble was recommended unto them by the Synod, therefore they appoint: Mr. Turner to cause transcribe four copies, and to send one to Principill Dunlop and Mr. Ja. Brown, another to Mr. Balantyne, another to Mr. W, and another to Mr. Wilson, allowing them to advise with any of the brethren of their respective presbyteries in the revising thereof, appointing them ere they leave to meet and appoint time and place of their next meeting that they may compare their animadversions, and put the wholl relation in a suteable dress.

The meeting considering that the Synod had recommended them to think upon the expediency of having a fast day, on this occasion through the Presbyteries of the Synod, as it had been in the Presbytery of Paisley, as they should find it consistent with the dyets and issue of the Commission; and the meeting finding that the Commission is to be adjourned for some time does judge it expedient and necessary, that betwixt and the next meeting of the Commission there be a fast day throwout the whole bounds of the Synod, leaving it to the particular presbytery to concert their own days to be observed, and if their ordinary meeting fall not in timeously that they call a Presbytery *pro re nata* and appoint Mr. Warner, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Dav. Brown to draw up some causes of the same against the next meeting.

The meeting appoints all the members that are not upon the forementioned committees to meet to-morrow, at seven o'clock in the morning, for prayer at the Presbytery House, and adjourns till to-morrow after rising of the Commission.

At Pasley, Apr. 15, 1697.

Reported that the representation of the circumstances of the bounds was given in and approven, and put in the hands of the Commissioners.

Mr. Wilson produced the causes of a fast to be kept throwout the bounds of the Synod which were read and approven, and the clerk of Pasley Presbytery appointed to send copies thereof to the severall Presbyteries.

The meeting for prayer observed according to appointment.

The meeting finding that the Commissioners have adjourned till the 11th of May, and had ordered some of the pannels to the Tolbooth of Renfrew, others of them to Glasgow, and the rest to stay at Pasley, does therefore appoint Mr. Da. Brown, Mr. Ja. Stirlie, Mr. Tho. Blackwell frequently to wait upon and deal with the consciences of those that are in Pasley, and Mrs. Symson and Turner with those at Renfrew, leaving it to these five minrs., when

they meet to advise with the Shireff anent the disposall of the three confessants, leaving it to the minrs. of Glasgow to converse with such of the prisoners as shall be there, and adjourns this meeting till the tenth day of May.

At Pasley, May 10, 1697.

The meeting appoints Mr. Macdowell, Mr. Turner, and Mr. Blackwell to spend some time this night and to-morrow morning in conversing with the prisoners in the Tolbooth of Pasley, and Mr. Taylor and Mr. Pasley with those in Ren-frew.

This day it was reported that those appointed to revise the narrative had obeyed, and their thoughts and animadversions thereupon being this day produced and compared; the whole thereof was committed to Mr. Sympson, Mr. Turner, and Mr. Blackwell, to draw up the whole relation *in mundo*.

It having been formerly recommended to Mr. Jo. Wilson by this meeting to draw up a preface to be prefixt to the narrative which was this day produced, read, and approven, and left in Mr. Turner's hands. The meeting resolving to wait on the Commissioners and their dyets, and to converse with the prisoners as they had access, did leave it to the Presbytery of Paisley to meet themselves, or to call the whole meeting as they found cause.

At Pasley, May 19, 1697.

Mrs. M'Dowell, Da. Brown, Ja. Stirlin, are appointed as frequently as they possibly can to converse with the seven persons that are condemned to die for witchcraft. Mr. Pa. Symson and Mr. Da. Brown are appointed to have each of them a lecture in the Tolbooth to those that are condemned, upon June 9, the day preceding their execution.

At Pasley, June 9, 1697.

Mr. Symson preacht this day in the Tolbooth to the condemned persons, on 2 Timothy, ii. 25, 26, and also Mr. Brown on 1 Tim. i. 16, according to appointment.

The Presbytery did appoint the whole members to spend some time this night with the condemned persons who are to dy to-morrow, and did allot to each one or two of the brethren one of the sentenced persons, to be dealt with by them, and waited upon to the Fire.

Extracts are taken from 'A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire' published 1877