
A Note on James Wright and Andrew Lambie

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The ministerial career of Rev. James Wright (*c.* 1803-1878) has been covered in detail in two previous articles in this journal.¹ The purpose of this present note is to shed some further light on a matter of considerable importance in Wright's life: his fractious relationship with his fellow dissident from Seceder reunion, Rev. Andrew Lambie (*c.* 1800-1886). As outlined by MacWhirter, Wright and his colleague failed to consolidate their "Continuing" ecclesiastical body, after their refusal to enter the new Original Secession Synod in 1842. This failure centred around the departure of the Dundee group in 1849 from their mini-denomination, and their disagreement over the Presbytery minute recording this departure.² In later life (1867), Lambie alluded pointedly to the necessity of precision in the keeping of the records of Church courts.³

MacWhirter suggests that Lambie's separation from Wright in January 1850 was "probably the outcome of a long gathering spirit of disagreement on both sides".⁴ MacWhirter was presumably thinking of the events of the previous few years but, as we shall see in this note, the

¹ Archibald MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", *Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal (SRSHJ)*, Vol. 4 (2014), pp. 275-340; N. Campbell, "Rev. James Wright of Infirmary Street and Lauriston Street, Edinburgh", *SRSHJ*, Vol. 5 (2015), pp. 145-209.

² MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", pp. 287-290.

³ "To keep inviolate the channel of communication in the lawful agreement of words with things, is part of the sacred trust committed to the Church"; see A. Lambie, *The Bible; The World's Age; "Old Paths"; Divisive Courses* (C. G. Sidey, Perth, 1867), p. 120 and f.n. 78.

⁴ MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", p. 290.

distrust between them dated back to the 1820s, and it is remarkable that they ever formed a denomination together in the first place.

I. ANDREW LAMBIE'S RETRACTION OF 1872

From 1861 to 1874, Lambie was living in Bridgeton, Almondbank, outside Perth, and ministering to his old congregation there. In 1867 he published a 135-page collection of essays, already cited above, with the title *The Bible; The World's Age; "Old Paths"; Divisive Courses*. In one of the essays, on "The Judicial Law", he stated concerning the verse Romans 13:4 ("for he is the minister of God to thee for good") that, with regard to the people under him, the civil magistrate should be seeking "not immediately their spiritual good, but immediately the secular good of outward and common order".⁵ In saying this, he was echoing the *Original Secession Testimony* of 1827 – "the proper end of [civil government] is the promotion of the public good, to the glory of God, by preserving outward and common order" – which in turn was following the *Declaration and Defence of the Associate Presbytery's Principles Anent the Present Civil Government* of 1744 – "the public good of outward and common order in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with magistracy can propose in a sole respect unto that office".⁶ Thus Lambie's position was the standard one adopted by the Seceders in their ongoing dispute with the Reformed Presbyterians over the precise relationship between the civil magistrate and the Kingdom of Christ.⁷

In March 1871, however, Lambie and his congregation renewed the Covenants,⁸ and this seems to have induced him to give more minute examination to the *Original Secession Testimony* of 1827 than he had done before. Although he had subscribed the *Testimony* at his licensing in 1828 and his ordination in 1829, he now started to have doubts; and in

⁵ *The Bible; The World's Age; "Old Paths"; Divisive Courses*, pp. 27-35 (see p. 29).

⁶ *A Testimony to the Truths of Christ . . . Agreed to by the Associate Synod of Original Seceders, 18th May 1827* (Edinburgh, 1827), pp. 53-4; *Answers by the Associate Presbytery to . . . the Rev. Mr. Thomas Nairn . . . Together with a Declaration and Defence of the Associate Presbytery's Principles Anent the Present Civil Government* (Edinburgh, 1744), p. 71. See also Adam Gib, *The Present Truth: A Display of the Secession-Testimony* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1774), Vol. 1, pp. 311-3.

⁷ Behind this, of course, lay the question of the lawfulness or otherwise of acknowledging the Revolution Settlement of 1689-90.

⁸ MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", p. 291.

February 1872, he and his elder, David Henry, placed a lengthy and rather strange advertisement in a newspaper announcing that they no longer agreed with the view on the civil magistrate expressed above. Under the title of "The Ends of Magistracy", the advertisement began as follows:

The subscribers consider it due to the Secession Testimony and to truth to state that they do not assent to the following proposition occurring in the Associate Presbytery's *Answers to Mr Nairn*, namely, "The public good of outward and common order in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with magistracy can propose in a sole respect unto that office:" which clearly means that this is the only end in respect to men. Nor do they assent to the proposition in the same paragraph, that "There ought not to be any exercise thereof towards its end, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles." They reckon these propositions inconsistent with the Secession Testimony, and with the paper in which they occur.

"Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn—and he will heal us; he hath smitten—and he will bind us up."—
Hos vi. 1.

THE ENDS OF MAGISTRACY.

The SUBSCRIBERS consider it due to the Secession Testimony and to truth to state that they do not assent to the following proposition occurring in the Associate Presbytery's *Answers to Mr Nairn*, namely, "The public good of outward and common order in all reasonable society, unto the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with Magistracy can propose, in a sole respect unto that office;" which clearly means that this is the only end in respect to men. Nor do they assent to the proposition in the same paragraph, that "There ought not to be any exercise thereof towards its end, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles." They reckon these propositions inconsistent with the Secession Testimony, and with the paper in which they occur.

ANDREW LAMBIE, Minister,
DAVID HENRY, Elder,
to Remnant of Original Seceders.

The former of these regrets that he published in 1867, in reference to the text referred to in the above, viz., Rom. xiii. 4, "The minister of God to thee for good," the following words, "not immediately their spiritual good, but immediately the secular good of outward and common order." For the good mentioned in that verse is good generally, not any one kind of good only. It is all the good that is involved in the nation's blessing itself in Christ, and glorying "in Him," and bringing its "glory and honour" into the holy city; for the magistrate is the mouth and hand of the nation in its doing so. Secular welfare and common order, then, though in some respects special ends, are neither the only, nor the only immediate, ends of the Magistrate's office; and these can be permanently attained only by the infinitely higher immediate ends of the office being intended and aimed at, the nation in its acts walking "in the light of" the holy city. "A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment scattereth away ALL evil with his eyes,"—Prov. xx. 8; that is, by authority being there, compare verse 26th. In the words of verse 8th, Erastianism, Ecclesiastical Supremacy, and cruel intolerance are unquestionably included. But cruel is simple toleration of high-handed sinning in open contempt of the true God; as is legal toleration of any error or sin whatsoever. And when toleration is indirectly given to infamous violation of outward and common order itself, in a guilty land, "the measure of the fathers" must be rapidly filling up. A. L.
Bridgton, Almond Bank, 8th February 1872.

MR WATCHMAN, will you give us your opinion as to Church and State, and where is C. S. A.?
SPERO.

THE CHURCH AT EDINBURGH:
MEETING AT No. 11, JOHNSTON TERRACE.
TO-MORROW, 9th Feb.—On The Name, Honour, Presence, and Power of "THE LORD THE SPIRIT."
AFTERNOON, at 4 pt. 2.—Is our Semi-annual Meeting, attending to the Ordinance of Washing the Disciples' Feet.
THIRD DAY, NOON (Tuesday).—PRAYER; particularly on "Woman Suffrage."
LOUISA P. C. CLEMENS.

DOES THE GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF THE CHURCH...

Column in the North British Advertiser of 10th February 1872, in which appeared Lambie and Henry's advertisement.

the proposition in the same paragraph, that "There ought not to be any exercise thereof towards its end, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles." They reckon these propositions inconsistent with the Secession Testimony, and with

the paper in which they occur. [Signed] Andrew Lambie, Minister; David Henry, elder, to Remnant of Original Seceders.⁹

The advertisement continues with an even longer paragraph, signed only by Lambie, which apologises for, and argues against, his statement in the 1867 essay quoted above. Proverbs 20:8 (“A king that sitteth on the throne of judgment scattereth away all evil with his eyes”) is advanced in support of the contention that the civil magistrate should oppose “Erastianism, Ecclesiastical Supremacy and cruel Intolerance”; and the advertisement brands as “cruel” the “simple toleration of high-handed sinning in open contempt of the true God; as is legal toleration of any error or sin whatsoever”.

At this stage Lambie was still ostensibly defending the 1827 *Testimony*, but soon afterwards he abandoned this position and published a long list of errors and infelicities that he had found in it. Rather surprisingly, he persuaded the Kirk Session of Almondbank to endorse his list;¹⁰ and even more surprisingly he persuaded the group who had left the ministry of James Wright in Edinburgh in December 1873 to constitute their new congregation on the basis of the 1827 *Testimony* as modified by his list.¹¹

II. JAMES WRIGHT'S RESPONSE

Wright at first took no notice of Lambie's advertised retraction (as far as we have seen), but this changed at the beginning of 1874 when Lambie unexpectedly became pastor to those who had just left Wright's ministry at the end of the previous year. Wright's notebook for that time contains three entries on the subject.

The first is a short note which simply states: “Mr. Lambie's and his elder's Declaration against O.S. Testimony = Cameronianism. Wilson

⁹ *North British Advertiser*, 10th February 1872. The advertisement's attempt to drive a wedge between the 1827 *Testimony* and the 1744 *Answers to Nairn* is puzzling because the 1827 *Testimony* cites the *Answers to Nairn* in support of its position. Another puzzle, of a different sort, is that David Henry is stated to be an elder, whereas MacWhirter says that he was elected an elder on 12th July 1876; see “The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History”, p. 292.

¹⁰ MacWhirter, “The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History”, p. 292.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 326. See also *Appendix, containing Notes on the Testimony, 1827* (Edinburgh and Perth, 1874), pp. 1-9.

of Perth against ‘Plain Reasons’”.¹² The work, *Plain Reasons*, was a Cameronian publication which appeared in 1731 and was attributed to Andrew Clarkson. William Wilson of Perth’s main work was his *Defence of Reformation-Principles*, published in 1739, in reply to John Currie’s *Essay on Separation* (1738). In the preface to his *Defence*, Wilson states that a great part of Currie’s *Essay* “is laid against a book called *Plain Reasons etc.*, a book in which the Seceding Brethren have no manner of concern. As I have not read it for several years bypast, so I am not to take any manner of notice of what our author advances about it.”¹³ In his sequel, *A Continuation of the Defence*, published in the year of his death (1741), Wilson still makes no mention of *Plain Reasons*, and anything he may have written in reply to it must have dated from the early or mid 1730s. We are not aware of any such reply, however, and we are not sure what answer to *Plain Reasons* James Wright had in mind.

In a second note, Wright observes that Lambie’s “Declaration” was “against the Testimony of Original Seceders”, and against “Mr. Lambie’s Ordination Oath: Question 11 Formula”.¹⁴ He also asks, given that Mr. Lambie “regrets publishing the opposite in 1867”, “what security” there now is “against another change?”. He concludes by stating that Lambie has “*ipso facto*, ceased to be an Original Seceder and cut himself off from that body”.¹⁵

The most interesting note, however, is the third one which Wright entitles “Former history of Mr. Lambie”. He then lists the following items, which will be discussed in the next section:

I. In U.P. Synod as student of Divinity. II. His father’s and his own conduct to Mr. M’Derment, Auchinleck: church door locked at first sacrament: new keys from Cumnock (Prof. Paxton). III. I objected to his return before Ayr Presbytery at Kilwinning, before I would take licence. IV. His conduct at Pitcairngreen before marriage at Perth Presbytery. V. Conduct about Mr. Beattie

¹² MS. *Notebook*, commences “General Notebook, Nov. 1857”.

¹³ W. Wilson, *Defence of the Reformation-Principles of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1739), p. xv.

¹⁴ Question 11 of the Formula asked: “Are you satisfied with, and do you purpose to adhere unto, and maintain, the principles about the present Civil Government, which are declared and maintained in the Associate Presbytery’s Answers to Mr. Nairn’s Reasons of Dissent, with the Defence thereto subjoined?”, *Act for Renewing Our Covenants . . . by the Associate Synod of Original Seceders* (Edinburgh, 1828), pp. 27-8.

¹⁵ MS. *Notebook*, commences “General Notebook, Nov. 1857”.

Mr. Lambie's & his elders Declaration against O. S. Testimony = ^{Canon} Cameron
 Mission of Perth against "Plain Reasons":
 From N. B. Introduction of 10th Feb 1872.

This Declaration - I. Is against the Test. of O. Seiders. II. Against Mr. L^o
 ordination oath: Quest. XI. ^{with dispute - subjoined} Formuld = III. Respects publishing the opposite in
 1857: = What security against another change? IV. Has ipso facto come to
 be "O. Seider" & cut himself off from that body.

Former history of Mr. Lambie = I. In N. P. Synod as student of Divinity.
 II. His father's & his own conduct to Mr. Mc. Diment, Auchincloch: church door
 locked at first Sacrament: new keys from Cumrach (Presb. - Pactor). III. Jobsted
 to his return before Syn. Presb. at Kilsivony, before would take license:
 IV. His conduct in Kilsivony before Marriage at Perth Presb. V. Conduct about
 Mr. Nestie appointed by Synod to preach at Almona Bank = in be all sabbath &
 VI. Conduct at Sacrament about bread lifting without consulting with his Session or
 Presbytery - (Jus. - Congregation went to Lord's table). VII. His & John Angus' dissent
 = against Magistrates' power circa Secra: objections to any Action Discourse on Ps. 72:17

Notes on Lectures (evenings) II. Tim. II. 13 "If we believe not yet he abideth
 faithful: he cannot deny himself". Sermon preached on Unbelief from above text
 in Old Greyfriars Church (Par. Dr. Wallace) on March 15th 1874 - (Seaborn, Kilsivony)
 I delivered first Lecture on above on Sat. 29th March, 1874.

Done. —

appointed by Synod to preach at Almondbank – in bed all Sabbath etc. VI. Conduct at sacrament about bread lifting without consulting with his Session or Presbytery (few in his congregation went to Lord's Table). VII. His and John Angus' [??] against Magistrate's power *circa sacra*: objections to my Action Discourse on Ps. 72:17.

III. "FORMER HISTORY OF MR. LAMBIE"

Lambie was from the village of Auchinleck in Ayrshire. The Secession congregation there dated back to the 1730s and had sided with the Anti-Burghers at the Breach of 1747. The first minister, Robert Smith, had been ordained in 1763, resigning through reasons of old-age in 1809, and the second minister, Robert Crawford, was ordained in 1811 and resigned in 1813. The third minister, Peter M'Derment, had been ordained in 1816. He refused, however, to participate in the union of 1820 between the New Light Burghers and Anti-Burghers (which brought the United Secession Church into being), and in May 1821 he took part in the formation of the conservative Synod of Protestors. This led to a division in his congregation which, according to Robert Small, was settled amicably with part remaining with M'Derment in the church building, and part holding separate services for a while and ultimately joining the Cumnock United Secession congregation which met only a mile away.¹⁶ Wright's comment, however, shows that Lambie and his father supported the United Secession party and introduced a sour note by locking the church door against M'Derment at the first communion after the division.

In 1822, Lambie entered the United Secession Divinity Hall,¹⁷ but on 3rd December 1827 he joined the Original Secession Church (to which Wright already belonged) which had come into existence in May of that year through the union of the Synod of Protestors with those from an earlier Anti-Burgher split. At his appearance before the Original Secession Ayr Presbytery, Lambie stated "that his former conduct in

¹⁶ R. Small, *History of the Congregations of the United Presbyterian Church from 1733 to 1900* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1904), Vol. 2, pp. 325-6.

¹⁷ D. Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church* (Edinburgh, 1886), p. 562. Wright's reference to Lambie's being a "U.P." student is an anachronism because the United Presbyterian Church was not formed until 1847 when the United Secession Church amalgamated with the Relief Church.

leaving our communion had not proceeded from conviction that our principles were wrong, but from inattention to the question, and that his offering himself for communion with us was the result of much consideration and conviction, and a desire to appear for the Reformation cause as witnessed for by us".¹⁸ Wright's note above shows that sometime between 3rd December 1827 and his own licensing on 9th June 1828, Wright put in a formal objection to the Presbytery regarding their receiving of Lambie. Thus from the very beginning Wright had had doubts about the soundness of Lambie's principles. Wright himself had become a Divinity student with the Synod of Protestors in 1824.

Lambie was two or three years older than Wright, and he was licensed on 11th March 1828 and ordained to the Pitcairngreen charge outside Perth on 29th April 1829. Wright was ordained to the Coupar Angus charge, about fifteen miles away, on 3rd February 1830. Of Lambie's marriage, to which Wright refers, we know nothing; but there was at least one daughter, who was teaching with her father in Almondbank in the 1860s.¹⁹ Equally, we know nothing about why Mr. Beattie – presumably James Beattie of Balmullo in Fife²⁰ – should have been appointed to preach in Almondbank. Possibly it was on account of the financial difficulties that the Almondbank congregation are said to have faced in September 1838.²¹

Wright's reference to the lifting of the bread at the Lord's Supper is of interest because of its connection with the "Lifter Controversy" of the 1780s. This was very much an Ayrshire controversy in its origin with David Smyton of Kilmaurs being a "Lifter" and James Robertson of Kilmarnock a "non-Lifter".²² Robert Smith of Auchinleck was probably also a "non-Lifter", in practice if not in principle.²³ The lifting of the bread before the prayer to set it apart for a holy use at communion was

¹⁸ Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church*, p. 125.

¹⁹ MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", p. 291. Lambie had a son-in-law, Charles Martin, who was librarian at Edinburgh University, *ibid.*, pp. 312-3.

²⁰ James Beattie (1796-1887) had preached at Lambie's ordination. He was Original Secession minister of Balmullo in Fife, joining the Free Church with most of his congregation in 1852. He is best known for his *History of the Church of Scotland during the Commonwealth* (1842). See Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church*, pp. 261, 416.

²¹ Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church*, p. 416.

²² Hugh Watt, "David Smyton and the Lifters", *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, Vol. 13 (1957), pp. 38-63 (see p. 43).

²³ *ibid.*, p. 44.

common among the Anti-Burghers, according to Hugh Watt, but it does not seem to have been the practice at Pitcairngreen. Lambie decided to change this, probably for the Pitcairngreen communion in the spring of 1849, and he asked Wright, who was due to assist him, to employ that mode of administration. Wright, however, refused, and eventually declined to assist at the communion; and this was one of the factors that contributed to their separation. Wright says that few members of the congregation went to the Lord's Table at that communion, but Lambie maintained that it was at most one or two that did not come forward for tokens.²⁴

The controversy between Lambie and Wright ramified, and at a subsequent communion in Edinburgh, probably also in 1849, "Mr. Wright, in the action sermon, used language such as that the writer [Lambie] in fencing the table considered it his duty, in stating a point of our profession, to do so in terms somewhat at variance with his".²⁵ This sermon may have been the "Action Discourse on Ps. 72:17" to which Wright refers in his note. John Angus was one of Wright's elders who left him in 1873 and joined Lambie, only to leave Lambie again in 1879.²⁶

IV. SOME REFLECTIONS

Lambie's public actions seem to have been marked, sadly, by a frequent lack of prudence and judgment. From his locking of the church door in 1821, to his refusal to join the union of 1842, to his attempts to enforce the practice of "lifting" at his communion in 1849, to his separation from Wright over the veracity of a Presbytery minute in 1850, to his publication of his *Reasons* for separating from Wright, which consisted of a host of relative trivialities, to the sale of his church to meet debts in 1853,²⁷ to his public retraction of 1872, to his imposing of his views on the 1827 *Testimony* on his new Edinburgh congregation in 1874, only for them to become unhappy with these views in 1876,²⁸ to his violent

²⁴ A. Lambie, *Address to the Associate Congregation of Original Seceders at Pitcairngreen showing the Reasons for his Withdrawment from Communion with the Rev. James Wright, Edinburgh* (Perth, 1851), p. 12.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁶ MacWhirter, "The Last Anti-Burghers: A Footnote to Secession History", p. 308.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 290.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 306.

opposition to the holding of congregational meetings for discussion of financial matters²⁹ – all the way through there is a vein of rashness and folly. MacWhirter does not give the details, but Lambie's final split in 1879 was because one of his elders (probably his son-in-law) had been libelled by two members of the congregation for maintaining that a statement in the *First Book of Discipline* may have been "a slip".³⁰ This was held to be contrary to the elder's ordination vows. The Kirk Session received the libel, and found it relevant and the libelled party worthy of censure. Lambie, as Moderator, refused to pronounce the sentence; and at the next meeting he declared that he could no longer act as Moderator, upon which he withdrew, soon afterwards publishing an account of his reasons.³¹ By this time he was about eighty years of age, and this was his third ecclesiastical separation in thirty-seven years.

The *Appendix* which Lambie imposed on his new Edinburgh congregation in 1874 reads, in many places, more like a list of proposed amendments to a draft document than like something suitable for the solemnity of public covenanting. For example:

We would leave out the first sentence of the Illustrations of Proposition third, and the word "Accordingly" that follows it, as seeming to be at variance with the doctrine just stated. For the same reason, in the second sentence of the Illustration of Proposition fourth, we would use the words "shown that", instead of the words "stated in what sense"; and would leave out the words "although under a different consideration"; and instead of "that object" would say "these objects".³²

After nine pages criticising the *Testimony*, there are then three or more pages justifying Lambie's 1850 separation from Wright, as if this were a matter of abiding importance for the whole Church.³³ It is surprising that the people who had left Wright were prepared to submit to this in 1874, and not surprising that they had become uneasy about it by 1876.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p. 306.

³⁰ The statement from the *First Book of Discipline* seems to have been that the Deacons were to distribute the money "as by the ministers and kirk shall be appointed"; see J. K. Cameron (ed.), *The First Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 178. The libellers and others in the congregation were arguing that the reference to the "kirk" justified their congregational meetings to discuss financial matters.

³¹ See A. Lambie, *Letter to Remnant of Original Seceders* (Edinburgh, 1879), pp. 5-8.

³² *Appendix, containing Notes on the Testimony, 1827*, p. 6.

³³ *ibid.*, p. 9ff.

Lambie must have had considerable powers of persuasion, but it is a pity that he ever became involved in all these lesser issues which entangled and blighted so much of his ministry. David Scott, who presumably knew him personally, described him as “guileless and unobtrusive”,³⁴ but there seems also to have been a reluctance on his part to submit to the decisions of Church courts or to respect the opinions of others. His *Reasons* for separating from Wright in 1850 show that they had mutual misunderstandings on almost every subject they touched, and it is a wonder that they ever formed “The Associate Presbytery of Original Seceders” or that it lasted as long as it did. The lessons to be learned from Lambie’s unusual ministerial career would seem to be those of Christian forbearance; of not allowing lesser matters to jeopardise the work of the Gospel; and of submitting to Church courts and awaiting the events of Providence, rather than precipitately taking matters into one’s own hands by way of separation.

³⁴ Scott, *Annals and Statistics of the Original Secession Church*, p. 563.