CHAPTER ONE

In early nineteenth century Scotland the public statement of Christian beliefs known as the Westminster Confession of Faith was commonly read and learned in schools and homes along with the Shorter and the Longer Catechisms. Approved by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1647, the Confession stated, in Chapter Three, that "some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life" and "their number is so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished." This "elect unto glory" was chosen by God "before the foundation of the world was laid...without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him therunto".

> Wherefore they who are elected being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ; are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season; are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power through faith unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

In 1825 the Parish of Row near Helensburgh in the Firth of Clyde appointed a new minister, the Rev. John MacLeod Campbell. Campbell thought many of his parishioners were influenced by their notion of the Elect to see the Atonement as a kind of limited insurance policy drawn up for a predetermined number of policy holders: "instead of resting on the character of God as revealed in Christ, they looked upon the death of Christ as so much suffering - the purchase-money of heaven to a certain number, to whom it infallibly secured heaven." Christianity became a kind of distorted selfishness based on fear: "so long as the individual is uncertain of being the subject of love to his God, and is still without any sure hold of his personal safety in the prospect of eternity, it is in vain to attempt to induce him to serve God under the power of any purer motive than the desire to win God's love for himself, and so to secure his own happiness."

What each individual needed, Campbell believed, was to have "personal assurance" of God's love as something already given and constantly present, not as something to be won or to fear being withdrawn. But such assurance could not be "unless Christ had died for all, and unless the Gospel announced him as "the gift of God to every human being". The Atonement had to be understood as both universal and individually specific; Christ had not died for the generality of

"humanity" nor the exclusiveness of "the elect". He had died for each and every specific person alone, in that person's being: the love shown by Christ was presently and constantly available, throughout each person's existence. This forgiveness and love was not a thing to be owned, or achieved, but was a given state of being to be realised and acknowledged. Don't try to do good to win God's love; realise God's love and you will try to do good.

Campbell's preaching stirred up fervour. There were stories of local people on their deathbeds having strange powers and visions of "a new dawn" in the church. But the greatest stir came about with the publication in 1829 of the memoir of a young woman, Isabella Campbell, who had died of tuberculosis 2 years earlier in the farmhouse of Fernicarry at the head of the Gareloch. The author of the memoir was a friend of Campbell's, Rev Robert Storey, who as Isabella's minister had often visited Isabella with MacLeod Campbell during Isabella's last illness. The 482-page memoir *Peace in Believing* quickly went through several editions. It told how after the death of her father and her brother, Isabella had experienced religious doubts until before she died she found "peace in believing" through "personal assurance" of salvation. This she had described enthusiastically to her many bedside visitors, and the last moments of her life were described in the memoir like the passing of a beautiful saint: "she opened her eyes suddenly, and clasping her hands looked upwards with a look of such inconceivable transport as made many present exclaim, 'Surely God is here!'... Her whole countenance seemed to shine, and all present confessed they had never pictured to themselves an object half so lovely."

There had been constant prayer meetings round Isabella's deathbed led by her sister Mary. A visitor at the time of Isabella's death was struck by the attitude of Mary and her friends:

> I was with them for two or three days after she died, assisting to make their mournings, and truly I thought them most wonderful people. Instead of mourning, Miss Campbell and some of her friends who came to visit her, seemed to be rejoicing in spirit; and I actually heard them say that they thought it ought to be white, instead of black, that Mary should wear for her. Certainly they have no cause to mourn on her account, and it shews their want of selfishness, when they can rejoice in her happiness, instead of mourning their own loss. I was, indeed, sometimes almost ready to think that I had never been amongst real Christians before, and that I myself was only one in name. They can talk with such frequency of their rapturous feelings of joy which they experience, their faith seems to carry them so far, that when speaking of the joys of the heavenly world, one would think that faith is almost swallowed up in sight. When the name of Jesus is mentioned they are filled with rapture of love, and their love to one another seems to burn with fervency; and in a word, they seem to be altogether lifted above the world, and to live only for God.

Mary Campbell herself now became a focus of religious enthusiasm in the region. In becoming this she was helped on her way by another minister friend of Storey's who came on preaching tours in the region in 1828 and 1829. This minister was called Edward Irving.

Irving had been an Edinburgh University divinity student at the same time as Storey, and when preaching in the Firth of Clyde he stayed in Storey's manse at Rosneath. Irving's own Church of Scotland parish was in London and in that city he had early acquired a formidable reputation as an orator. Soon after his arrival in 1823 his sermons had become fashionable with London society, and notable literary figures were amongst those who knew him and who praised his powers of public speaking. De Quincey called him "by many degrees, the greatest orator of his age", and Coleridge - whom Irving used to visit weekly at his home in Highgate - wrote "I hold that Edward Irving possesses more of the spirit and purpose of the first Reformers, that he has more of the Head and the Heart, the Life, the Unction, and the genial power of Martin Luther, than any man now alive." Some of the society and literary notables became disenchanted with Irving's growing involvement, from 1826, in interpreting the prophetic books of the Bible. But he remained able by his oratory still to attract large if no longer fashionable congregations. The same Greenock publisher who issued in 1829 Storey's *Peace in Believing* issued that same year a pamphlet by Irving called *The Nature and Use of the Gift of Tongues*. Irving preached that the "miraculous gifts" of speaking in unknown tongues, miraculous healing, and the ability to prophesy, were phenomena that would be restored to the Church on Christ's Second Coming. This, he told the huge crowds who attended his sermons, was an event soon to take place. The French Revolution could be interpreted as the opening of the Seventh Seal of Revelations. The days of the "latter rain" were at hand: Christ's second coming, and the founding of the New Jerusalem, could be expected in about 40 years.

Whereas Campbell had preached that Christ is presently available to every person throughout their existence, Irving preached that the Holy Spirit had been presently available to Christ on earth: it was this which had kept Christ's human nature sinless, and this which had enabled Christ to work miracles. This was the power of the Holy Spirit given to the Apostles at Pentecost as a gift to the Church, and only "the evil heart of unbelief" had caused the power subsequently to disappear. It followed that if the unbelief was to disappear, perhaps the gifts would. This at any rate was how his words were interpreted by Mary Campbell, who by the end of 1829 was in bed apparently suffering from the same illness which had killed her now locally famous sister. Irving later described how his preaching then affected Mary: "She came to see what for six or seven years I had been preaching in London, that all the works of Christ were done by the man

anointed with the Holy Ghost, and not by the God mixing himself up with the man... She straightway argued, if Jesus as a man in my nature spake and thus performed mighty works by the Holy Ghost, which he even promiseth to me, then ought I by the same nature, by the same Spirit, to do likewise 'the works which he did, and greater works than these'." On Sunday March 30th 1830 the prayer session round Mary's bed was interrupted:

> When, in the midst of their devotion, the Holy Ghost came with mighty power upon the sick woman ass he lay in her weakness, and constrained her to speak at great length, and with superhuman strength, in an unknown tongue, to the astonishment of all who heard, and to her own great edification and enjoyment in God.

The "gift of tongues" had come to Fernicarry, and within a week it had spread across the Firth of Clyde to Port Glasgow. In that town lived two of Mary's enthusiast friends, the shipbuilding brothers George and James MacDonald. Former members of Campbell's congregation, they had added Irving's millenialism to their store of beliefs, and taken to preaching in the open air themselves. But their house was also host to the ubiquitous tuberculosis, and their sister Margaret, like Mary Campbell across the water, was confined to her bed. When news of Mary's speaking in tongues came with the ferry from Rosneath, Margaret MacDonald launched into effusions of her own:

> She said, "There will be a mighty baptism of the spirit this day," and then she broke forth in a most marvellous setting forth of the wonderful works of God, and as if her own weakness had been altogether lost in the strength of the Holy Ghost, continued with little or no intermission for two or three hours, in mingled praise, prayer and exhortation. At dinner time James and George came home as usual, whom she then addressed at great length, concluding with a solemn prayer for James that he might at that time be endowed with the power of the Holy Ghost. Almost instantly James calmly said, "I have got it." He walked to the window and stood silent for a moment or two... He then with a step and manner of the most indescribable majesty, walked up to Margaret's bedside and addressed her in those words of the twentieth psalm, "arise and stand upright". He repeated the words, took her by the hand, and she arose.

James sent a letter over to Mary Campbell "commanding her in the name of the Lord to arise". Mary afterwards described how she felt reading James MacDonald's letter:

> As I read every word came home with power, and when I came to the command to arise, it came home with a power which no words can describe; it was felt to be indeed the voice of Christ; it was such a voice as could not be resisted; a mighty power was instantaneously exerted upon me; I felt as if I had been lifted from off

> the earth, and all my diseases taken from off me at the voice of Christ. I was verily made in a moment to stand upon my feet, leap and walk, sing and rejoice.

Across she came to the MacDonald's house in Port Glasgow. James and George themselves both shortly began speaking in the tongues during prayers, and within a short period the house had become "filled with people every day from all parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland." Not that everyone was impressed. A local minister accused Mary Campbell of being a hysteric who, having burst a blood vessel on her lung, had been pronounced healed and in good health by her doctor two weeks before her supposed "miraculous cure". Nor did he find the exhibitions of the "unknown tongues" any more convincing: "After a short silence, during which she kept her eyes fixed upwards, she commenced talking in unintelligible gibberish, and prayed that Christ would give to some of his members present, the gift of interpretation, that the precious words of the Spirit might not be lost, but that the church might be edified. She continued speaking her unknown tongue for a considerable time, but the gift of interpretation was not bestowed; although one young man stood for upwards of half an hour, motionless as a statue; with his eyes fixed intently upon the ceiling, as if he expected to see the Spirit burst through the roof."

Amongst the believers though the "tongues" were at first thought to be genuine though unknown earthly languages, a gift from God to enable missionary work to be done abroad without the chore of language-learning. This was Irving's own opinion when word of the Port Glasgow happenings reached him in London. Nor was his friend Coleridge, initially, among the sceptics. A visiting American recorded his reaction to Irving's showing him an account sent him of the Port Glasgow events:

> "I make no question but that it is the work of the HOLY SPIRIT, and a foretaste of that spiritual power which is to be poured forth on the reviving Church of Scotland... Was not the case the same in the apostles' days? Doth not St Paul indicate the fact when he says, "He that speaketh in an unknown tongue, speaketh not unto men but unto GOD, for no man understandeth him; howbeit in his spirit he speaketh mysteries".[see 1 Cor. 14:2] And is not the whole of St Paul's argument in the 14th Chapter of 1stCorinthians, founded upon the supposition that the saints then spoke in tongues which no man understood?"... These events," said he, "in my opinion, are nothing less than the outpouring of the Spirit, promised in all ages to the Church, and long withheld from the deadness of its faith."

Irving and his congregation at the National Scotch Church, Regent Square, began to pray for the "manifestations of the gifts" to be bestowed in London. They did not come quickly, but finally the morning service before a congregation of 2,000 on Sunday October 30th 1831, a witness reported, "was very

unexpectedly interrupted by the well-known voice of one of the sisters, who, finding she was unable to restrain herself, and respecting the regulation of the Church, rushed into the vestry, and gave vent to utterance; whilst another, as I understand, from the same impulse, ran down the side aisle and out of the church, through the principal door. The sudden, doleful, and unintelligible sounds, being heard by all the congregation, produced the utmost confusion". In succeeding weeks services threatened to become uncontrollable as more and more people, especially women, found themselves "in the power". Commonly a loud outburst of incomprehensible speech would be followed by exclamations and exhortations of a Biblically phrased character, taken by others as translation of what had gone before.

There was a problem with all this regarding the owners of Regent Square Church, which was the official place of worship for the Royal Caledonian Asylum, an asylum for the orphaned and indigent children of Scottish servicemen and marines in London but not entitled to parochial relief. The children had a reserved place in the church gallery each week, and the trust deeds owned by the Asylum specified that church worship be "according to the doctrines, forms of worship and mode of discipline of the Established Church of Scotland." The *Times* was amongst those who repeatedly attacked the goings-on, calling the behaviour "a disgrace at once to European reason and human civilisation". It campaigned for the trustees to remove Irving from his pulpit, and on May 2nd 1832 the Presbytery of London ruled that he had "rendered himself unfit to remain the minister of the National Scotch Church aforesaid, and ought to be removed therefrom in pursuance of the conditions of the trust-deed of the said church."

About 800 of the Regent Square congregation moved on with Irving, settling after a few months in premises in Newman Street, off Oxford Street. The following year the Church of Scotland - that "Babylonian confederacy" as Irving now called it- removed him altogether from Church of Scotland ministry. MacLeod Campbell had already been expelled in 1831. In Irving's opinion the clergy who made up the contemporary Church of Scotland lacked the spiritual integrity of their Reformation forefathers: "The gifts of the Spirit for the office are not looked for by the Presbyters, but certificates of professors, and petty attainments in literature and science". The events in Port Glasgow and London had been an attempt to restore the church to the days of its early apostlehood. Welcoming the first news of the miraculous events at Fernicarry and Port Glasgow, Irving wrote: "I believe that the day of carpenters and fishermen is come again, and the day of masters in arts and doctors in divinity is gone by."

But the new church which developed round Irving's expelled congregation moved quickly from its Scottish Presbyterian origins. Free of its Scottish context, it was taken over by ex-Anglicans, prosperous founding members of a group with

which Irving had been connected in his interpretation of the Prophetic Books since 1826. A whole new church structure was laid down by these ex-Anglicans speaking "in the power"; and as Irving never claimed to speak so himself, the Holy Spirit had to be obeyed. One of the first effects was to eliminate the practice of inspired declamation from the women in the congregation. The women were put at the bottom of a structure of command in which at the top were "apostles", then the "angel" or minister, then presbyters or elders, then deacons. Women could only rise as high as deaconesses for "the visiting of solitary females", but women speaking in the tongues - the most noticeable feature of the millenarian movement in London and Port Glasgow - were now to be discouraged. That was the job of the "apostles" at the top. As for the women: "it was declared that although the Lord would direct His apostles through them, or through infants even, whenever it might please Him to do so, still it was not His will or way, and only to the dishonour of the man so to use them". It was also "declared" that if any woman "has had, or imagines she has had, revelations or spiritual experiences of any kind", interpretation of this should be referred up the structure as far as the apostles if need be, and the reply could be passed back down through the hierarchy; "and even were its result to be the infliction of some ecclesiastical censure, the sisterly deaconess would be at her side to share and soften it." In other words the women had to shut up and stop setting the pace, or leave. Many did. The men were in charge now, with Corinthians 1 14:34 - "let your women keep silence in churches" - as validation. Irving himself remained as minister - technically, as "angel" - to his congregation in London, though now under the "Apostles" in the rank of decision making and tongues-interpretation.

The new hierarchy did not go down well with the fraternal congregations on the Firth of Clyde, where the MacDonalds had hired a private chapel in Greenock. Neither they nor MacLeod Campbell would have anything to do with the two leading "apostles" of the new church when they came north to attempt a fusion of forces. However a London-approved church did finally open in Greenock under the care of "angel" Walter Tait, a former Church of Scotland minister in Edinburgh. The church opened on August 31st 1834, and the *Greenock Telegraph* carried a report:

> On such an occasion it was naturally expected that some of the peculiarities of their form of worship would be manifested; accordingly in a few seconds after Mr Tait entered the pulpit for the forenoon service, Mrs Provan, a very respectable member of the congregation, cried out, in an awfully shrill and vehement voice, "This is the place! This is the house of God, and the gate of heaven! Enter in ye people, and rejoice!" etc. etc. The sounds were so very unearthly and astounding, that it was only those who were very near her that understood the words. There was, however, no exhibition of the "unknown tongues"; which we believe will ultimately form no part of their creed.

Then Irving, though now ill, travelled north to Greenock himself. The local newspaper again reported on October 25th, albeit misspelling his name:

> Mr Irvine, the great unknown tongue apostle, arrived at Greenock on Tuesday from Liverpool, via the Glasgow steamer, and has taken up residence among the disciples in the west for a time. The Rev. gentleman looks tolerably well, although still having the appearance of indisposition about him. It is anticipated that Mr. I. will take part in the worship of the church lately planted at Greenock. This sect are increasing slowly in numbers while the Campbellites, under the auspices of Mr MacDonald, are decreasing by division on different points of doctrine. It appears now that Mr Tait by his labours will be able, with the assistance of the London Society, to keep a stronghold for the Irvinites in the west of Scotland. Several of his disciples from the metropolis have visited Greenock since the foundation of the church there, and are zealous in preaching their peculiar tenets on the high-ways and bye-ways.

Irving moved on to Glasgow, from where he wrote a letter expressing guilt at having left behind his congregation with many of whom he evidently retained a special bond: "Oftentimes I think it is the Lord's gentle hand, breaking that bond by degree between me and my flock, which threatened to grow up into a kind of necessity, and even to pass over into idolatry. O how I love them! how I am thankful to them! how I am laden with their benefits! And I am sure that their love to me is stronger than my love to them, and I do see it is of the great goodness and tenderness of God to take order that such affection should be stayed from passing over into unholiness; and that he hath done us a great favour to put us so far asunder, and for such a time, that we might try our hearts, and prove ourselves that our mutual love is in the Lord."

One follower of Irving not separated by his return north was a dressmaker from Port Glasgow who married in London in January 1834 and returned later in the year to her native town. The extent of her millenial enthusiasm was evidenced in a letter written to her future sister-in-law on December 16th 1831, at the height of the controversy in London:

> Dear Ann, I am very happy to hear you are so well and comfortable, as far as visable things are concerned, every blissing should be receved as from the hand of God - I have little to say about myself - but at this time I am wandering about in Sheepskins and goatSkins and in Dens and Caves of the Earth, My dear Ann I am anxious to lay up treasures where moth or rust cannot enter, and at this moment I am called onto forsack all for Christ - and I am happy for he maks me to rejoice in suffering and I believe this is the jerusalem that I am commanded to stay in, till the comforter be sent and we have not waited in vain for the drops are falling but soon there shall be a plentyfull shower for the Lord is coming to water his weary hineratance, oh Ann I cannot tell the life and light that I feel in the midst of trouble

> ---- I should be glade to see your face in the flesh, and that you might be a partaker of my joy. do not think I mean not what I say for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh adeiu S. Kennedy burn this scrall it is not fit to be seen by any but you S Kennedy

But Sarah did not see much of Irving in his new ministry north of the border, for he died on December 7th and was buried in the grounds of Glasgow Cathedral. Two weeks before Irving's death, on Sunday November 23rd, Sarah gave birth to a boy in Port Glasgow. The baby was given his father's name, and the following February James Thomson was baptised.