

A notable anniversary

By Rev. Prof. A Loughridge

The year 1763 was one of outstanding importance for Covenanters in Ireland. For more than a century they had consisted of scattered groups or societies in different parts of Ulster. Great men had helped them to maintain their witness. Alexander Peden, the prophet of the Covenanters, had visited them from time to time in County Antrim. David Houston had ministered to them in Counties Antrim and Down for more than twenty years till his death in 1696. John McMillan, the only Covenanting minister in Scotland for thirty-seven years, had encouraged them by visits in 1707 and 1715. Alexander Marshall and Thomas Nairn in 1745 had given them their first taste of organisation by arranging to have them placed under the care of the newly formed Scottish Reformed Presbytery. John Cameron had preached faithfully from 1752 to 1755 in North Antrim.

It was a great day for them in 1757 when they welcomed William Martin, the first minister to be ordained among them. For six years he laboured alone, first in every part of Ulster, and after 1760 in County Antrim with his headquarters at Kellswater. Now in 1763, his hands are strengthened by the ordination of his young friend, Matthew Lynn. Immediately after the ordination, the first Irish Reformed Presbytery was set up. The Covenanting Church has thus enjoyed two centuries of organised existence as a Church in Ireland. We thank God for that fact, and pay our tribute tonight to the character and ministry of Matthew Lynn.

1. He was a good Covenanter. He was born in 1731 in Corkermain, near Cairncastle, County Antrim, the son of godly parents of farming stock and Scottish extraction. It is likely that his home on the east coast of Antrim was an open door for Irish and Scottish Covenanters as they travelled to and fro between Ireland and Scotland. His godly character and zeal for the Covenanted cause led to his appointment in his early twenties to the office of the eldership in the Antrim congregation.
2. He was a good student. In 1757 he entered Glasgow University and graduated in 1760. In his student days he showed exceptional gifts as a writer and organiser, and held the position, unusual for a student, of clerk of the Scottish Reformed Presbytery. Many of the special declarations of the Scottish Church at this time were penned by him at the request of Presbytery.

3. He was a good minister of the Word. Licensed at Carnaughts, near Kellswater, in 1761, after training by the Scottish ministers, he preached far and wide in Ulster for two years as an itinerant evangelist. He was called to be the minister of the newly formed Bannside congregation, and was ordained at The Vow in 1763. There were no church buildings within the area of his congregation, which covered the most of County Derry, and his ministry was exercised mainly in the open air. His fine physique and commanding presence and personality combined to make him an outstanding open-air preacher, and many societies were formed under his leadership.
4. He was a good soldier of Jesus Christ. He had to face many difficulties in his travels. Early in his ministry he was in conflict with the Presbyterian Church, charged with performing a clandestine marriage at Bovevagh for a young Presbyterian minister whose bride had not the consent of her parents. The Sub-Synod of Derry found him guilty, his own Presbytery, assisted by commissioners from Scotland, found him innocent. He and his Presbytery were vindicated years later, when a dying man at Dungiven confessed that he had been paid the sum of six guineas to impersonate the minister of Bannside. He migrated to America in 1773 where he was instrumental, with Alexander Dobbin and John Cuthbertson, in forming the first American Reformed Presbytery in 1774. He continued his pioneer work for the church there, and in one of his many travels, sustained a severe injury through falling from his horse. He died in 1800.

We honour his memory and thank God for his faithful witness. The congregations of Drimbolg, Garvagh, Ballylaggan and Limavady are today a shining memorial to his ministry. We rejoice in the ministry of following the faith of our fathers in witnessing for Christ's Crown and Covenant.

Reproduced from *The Covenanter* of July 1763, pp 138-9.

The following is from W. M. Glasgow's *History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in America*, pp 564-67.

MATTHEW LINN

Son of Matthew Linn, was born at Corkermaine, near Cairn Castle, County Antrim, Ireland, August 10, 1731. He was of Scotch parentage and a tiller of the soil. Brought up in the strictest manner by a Covenanter parentage, he received a careful religious training, and the elements of an education in the schools of that vicinity and under private instructors. In the spring of 1757, he was ordained a ruling elder, and the same fall entered the University of Glasgow, Scotland, where he graduated in 1760. He studied theology with the ministers of the Presbytery, and was licensed by the Reformed Presbytery of Scotland, July 16, 1761. He was ordained at the organization of the Reformed Presbytery of Ireland, at Vow, and installed pastor of the societies of Bannside, Limavady and Aghadowey, County Londonderry, Ireland, August 21, 1763. After ten years of labor in his native country, he was appointed to accompany Rev. Alexander Dobbin as a Missionary to America, and arrived in New Castle, Delaware, December 13, 1773. He, with Revs. John Cuthbertson and Alexander Dobbin, organized the Reformed Presbytery of America, at Paxtang, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, March 10, 1774, at which time he was assigned to preach to the Churches of Paxtang, Dauphin County, and Stoney Ridge, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania. He abandoned the Covenanted cause and went into the Associate Reformed Church at its formation, November 1, 1782. In 1783, he removed to Franklin County, Pennsylvania, where he became pastor of the united congregations of Green Castle, Chambersburg, West Conococheague and the Great Cove. In 1797, he was thrown from his horse, and was so seriously injured that he became unfit for ministerial duty, and resigned his charges, March 13, 1798. He died from a disease brought on by his injuries, at his home near Green Castle, Franklin County, Pennsylvania, April 21, 1800, and was buried in the old graveyard at Brown's Mills. He married a cousin of Robert Fulton, of steamboat fame, Miss Jennett Fulton, of County Antrim, Ireland, in 1769. He was large and corpulent in person, comely in his appearance, and winning in his manners. He was a laborious student all his life. He was an eloquent speaker, and large audiences had their attention astonishingly riveted for hours, while with marked ability he unfolded the truths of the gospel. In private life he was an ornament to the Christian religion, and recommended the doctrines he so powerfully preached by the silent energy of an eminently holy and exemplary life.