

Newmilns Weavers and the American Civil War.

By R. M. Paterson.

During the American Civil War influential sections of opinion in this country either favoured the South or proclaimed a policy of neutrality. But throughout the country, larger or smaller coteries from the "London Emancipation Society" to what the "Glasgow Herald" called "her small sister at Newmilns," were vocal in their support of Lincoln and the Emancipation of the Slaves.

In Newmilns there existed an Anti-Slavery Society which met at intervals in the Black Bull Hall, and sent resolutions of sympathy and support to Lincoln and his Government, in spite of the fact that the local weavers were being hard hit by the blockade of the southern cotton ports. The French Huguenot refugee strain and the Covenanting tradition of their forefathers probably contributed to the independence of judgment of these valley weavers. Unfortunately the Minute Book of the Society has been lost, and neither private nor public enquiries have been of value in tracing it. Oral tradition holds that, as an expression of appreciation, Abraham Lincoln eventually sent an American Flag; there is no doubt whatever that an American flag arrived in the community during the Civil War, at the hands of a Mr. John Brooks, a coloured gentleman.

The "Glasgow Herald," whose policy was neutrality, had some fun at the expense of the Society on the receipt of the flag. Here are some comments from one of its leaders in December, 1864:—"If our readers should not happen to know what Newmilns is or where it is, we do not mind confiding to them that Newmilns is one of the most remarkable villages in Ayrshire. . . . The Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society had a great gala day a few months ago, on the occasion of its being presented with an American Flag; and when the stars and stripes were unfurled, the flow of oratory and the shouts of enthusiasm would have done Mr. Lincoln's heart good to have heard. The Society rose up as one man, or perhaps as half-a-dozen altogether, and planted the Yankee banner either on the church steeple or on the lock-up house—we forget which—where it fluttered in the breeze for a few hours, and might well have given rise to the supposition that the village had just sworn allegiance to the Federal President and the Federal Constitution. . . ." The "Glasgow Herald," however, on this issue was not on the side of the angels.

On all Ceremonial occasions in the Burgh, as for example the Trades Races, this Lincoln flag was brought forth in company with the "Blue Blanket," that had seen service at Drumclog.

Twenty years after the Civil War, the "Kilmarnock Standard" recorded a great franchise demonstration at Kilmarnock in 1884, in which contingents gathered from "a' the airts" in Ayrshire. It mentions the creditable muster of 600 men from Newmilns, "Beside a flag of '31," says the Standard, "with the words 'Reform, good laws, cheap government'," there was another that attracted more attention although few may have known its history. It was a national flag of the United States, presented to a townsman during the American Civil War by President Lincoln."

This townsman, John Donald, was a remarkable character, a "village Hampden," who was born in 1804 and died in his 89th year. He took a leading part in the 1832 agitation for reform, he signed the address of Newmilns men inviting William Cobbett to what the latter described as "this little and most beautifully situated manufacturing town." Cobbett comments on "the cleverness, the great talent displayed by the gentleman (a very young man) who presented it to me," and John Donald was probably this young man. He was a friend of the unfortunate Lady Flora Hastings, the poetess, and found in Norman Macleod, in his first charge at Loudoun, not only an ardent controversialist but also an admirable lecturer on geology. He was a local leader in the Chartist agitation and, with Cobden, he believed the Crimean War was a "crime." But his finest hour was during the American Civil War when he was the driving force of the Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society, and to him is reputed to have come the famous flag. Unfortunately, in spite of enquiries in every direction, all efforts to trace this flag have failed.

A historical pageant was planned this year, 1949, and one of the tableaux dealt with the presentation of the American flag by Abraham Lincoln to John Donald. Although unable to find any minute book or correspondence, the writer discovered from a document in Glasgow University Library that Congress, in 1863, sent a request to Lincoln that he transmit to them copies of all communications from working men abroad for their records.

A letter to the Librarian of Congress, Washington, brought a reply that there was no trace of a message from Newmilns in their records, but that further examination would be made in the National Archives. To our pleasure we received eventually a letter which indicated that one message had been traced. It had been received in December, 1864, and accompanying it was a despatch from the American Ambassador in London, Charles Francis Adams, along with a reply from the Secretary of State, William H. Seward

Photostats of the message were offered and were gladly accepted. Here are the respective messages :—

(1)

Letter from U.S. Minister in London to U.S. Secretary of State transmitting addresses from working men and requesting instructions.

No. 835.

Legation of the United States,
London, 16th December, 1864.

SIR,

I have the honour to transmit an address of the Emancipation Society of London to the President, which was presented to me by a large and respectable deputation that waited upon me yesterday. A copy of **The Star** of this morning which contains a report of the proceedings is likewise sent. I am not without serious doubts of the expediency of this sort of thing, and should have no objection to receiving general instructions which might be used as authority for the Minister to decline to receive deputations. As it is, I do not like to take the responsibility of appearing churlish to those who have laboured so earnestly and so successfully to maintain friendly relations between the two countries. I can imagine cases in which a minister might find himself much embarrassed by the manifestation of less kindly sentiment.

I likewise transmit two other Addresses of the same kind which have been put into my hands within a few days. I am also notified of the existence of another from the working men which will not be probably prepared for transmission until next week.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES FRANCIS ADAMS.

Enclosures.

1. Address, London Emancipation Society.
2. The Morning Star, 16 Dec. '64.
3. Address from Newmilns, Scotland.
4. Address from Working men of So. London.

Hon. Wm. H. Seward,
Secretary of State,
Washington, D.C.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C. RECORD GROUP
NO. 59, GENERAL RECORDS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE. Diplo-
matic Despatches, Great Britain, Volume 88, November 25, 1864—
March 23, 1865.

(2)

Reply from U.S. Secretary of State to U.S. Minister in London.

No. 1215, Charles F. Adams, Esq. Department of State,
Washington, 31st Dec., 1864.

SIR,

Your dispatch of the 16th of December, No. 835, has been received.

The Emancipation Society of London have anticipated the definitive process of the national election in their congratulatory address to the President. But he thinks that this circumstance would not justify him in assuming the results of a re-election before it is constitutionally declared in Congress. You will please make this explanation to the Society, together with an assurance that the President is profoundly moved by the sentiments of good will towards him and towards our country which they have expressed.

You will make a similar answer to the Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society.

I suppose it hardly necessary to repeat on this occasion the instructions given early in your mission that whatever papers are sent from this Department or your Legation to any portion of the British people, might first be made known to Earl Russell.

Your reply to the delegates of the Emancipation Society was just and felicitous.

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

(Sgd.) WILLIAM H. SEWARD.

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES, WASHINGTON, D.C. RECORD GROUP
NO. 59, GENERAL RECORDS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE. Diplo-
matic Instructions, Great Britain, Volume 19, September 2, 1863—
December, 31, 1864.

**Minute of Meeting of NEWMILNS ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY
forwarded to the American Ambassador, London, for trans-
mission to Abraham Lincoln, President of America.**

According to the Previous Arrangements a Meeting of this Society took place in Black Bull Hall upon Friday, 25th November, 1864, for the purpose of receiving two volumes of correspondence between the American Government and all other Governments from October,

1862, till August, 1864, presented to them by Mr. Underwood, late American Consul in Glasgow, for the manly, humane and sympathising manner in which the Society had expressed its feelings on behalf of the downtrodden slaves and for the restoration of the American Union. . . .

The Chair was occupied by the President, Mr. Matthew Pollock, who opened the proceedings by stating that the meeting had two objects in view, one for receiving Mr. Underwood's handsome testimonial, the other to express our gratitude to the true Republicans of America for the triumphant manner in which they had once again placed Abraham Lincoln upon the most honourable, and the most exalted pinnacle of political glory in the world. How mortifying must it be to the aristocracy of this country to see a man from the working class raised to such a position!—an aristocracy which has viewed the American Republic with the same eye as Milton's devil viewed the Garden of Eden when he scanned this world in its infancy, causing his fallen and worthless angels to cry "Break the Blockade of Heaven, and crush this newly formed Republic on earth." Yes, ever since the days of Billie Pitt down to the present day, they have all along been viewing the American Republic with the same feelings as Satan did, with envy and malice causing the "Times" Newspaper and the worthless Satellites who moved around it to cry "Break the Blockade, recognise and support a power which declares the Head Corner Stone of their building to be human Slavery." But alas, how futile the hopes and wishes have been, in not finding Abraham Lincoln an Adam to eat the apple. No, he is not an Adam, but Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, whose name will be handed down to posterity by the echoes of one generation after another, until the oppressors of Mankind shall vanish from the face of the earth, amidst the execration of a Noble and patriotic people.

Mr. John Brooks to whom Mr. Underwood entrusted the two volumes for presentation rose and after delivering an able address presented One Volume to the Members of the Society and the other to the President. . . .

Mr. John Donald then rose and returned thanks to Mr. Underwood for his handsome testimonial bestowed as a token of his esteem for our sympathy on behalf of the slaves and the restoration of the American Union, and after a short and suitable address moved the following resolution. . . . "That we, the members of this Society, tender our sincere thanks to Mr. Underwood, late American Consul in Glasgow, for his condescension in noticing our humble efforts on behalf of his bleeding country, struggling for the freedom of the slaves, and in returning to his native home may he enjoy the blessings of peace, the restoration of the union, with universal Liberty is our earnest prayer."

Mr. Alex. Pollock, Teacher, Stewarton, gave a very impressive address contrasting Slavery with Christianity. . . .

Mr. Daniel McArthur followed with a number of very touching and entertaining anecdotes connected with Slavery. . . .

Mr. Andrew Wallace next in a very interesting manner enumerated the different measures adopted by President Lincoln for the extinction of Slavery and the Preservation of the Union.

The Chairman then proposed the following resolution "That this meeting, being deeply impressed with the importance of the late Presidential election in America cannot allow their exultations to pass without giving vent to their feelings by congratulating the true Republicans of America for the splendid victory they have achieved for the whole human race by re-electing Abraham Lincoln—the man from the people, with the people, and for the people—whose honesty of purpose, uprightness in judgement, unflinching performance of his duty, aided by the new stream of Republican life that has flowed into both Senate and Congress from the late elections, will enable him to bring this unjust and unholy war to an honourable, a just, and a lasting Peace. . . ."

Resolved "That the foregoing be signed by the President and a copy be forwarded to the Honourable Charles Francis Adams, American Ambassador, London, and to be transmitted to Abraham Lincoln, President of America, and another to Mr. Underwood, late American Consulate, Glasgow. . . ."

The business of the meeting being over, a vote of thanks was given to the President for his conduct in the chair. . . .

The meeting being composed of both sexes, they agreeably refreshed themselves, after which Mr. Thomas Campbell, jun., opened the after-programme by singing "Callum O' Glen," the rest of the evening being spent in song and sentiment from both sexes, giving to all great satisfaction.

(Sgd.) MATTHEW POLLOCK, *President*.

Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society,
December 12th, 1864.

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matic Despatches, Great Britain, Volume 88, November 25, 1864—
March 23, 1865.

As we should expect, Lincoln's assassination was not allowed to pass unremarked. The Author is indebted to Mr. Dayle C. McDonough, American Consul in Glasgow, for tracing the following resolution in the American Diplomatic Correspondence.

Text of resolution passed at a meeting held by the Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society, Newmilns, May 5, 1865, taken from page 302 of Appendix to Diplomatic Correspondence of 1865 on the subject of The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln, late President of the United States of America, and the attempted assassination of William H. Seward, Secretary of State, and Frederick W. Seward, Assistant Secretary, on the evening of the 14th of April, 1865.

"In public meeting assembled it was unanimously resolved to present the following unto the honourable Andrew Johnson, President of the United States of America :

"Honoured Sir : We, the members of the Newmilns Anti-Slavery Society, having early espoused the side of humanity in the great struggle going on in your beloved country for the emancipation of mankind from bondage—a bondage which made the humane of every land shudder to contemplate—proud as we were over him who undertook the task to grapple with this gigantic evil, what are we to think, or how can we express our feelings, when we know that he who was the appointed instrument to erase from the land of America the accursed blot which had so long stained your honored and will-be respected flag, and he who with calmness, fortitude, and dignified mercy, held in the one hand the palm of victory, in the other the olive-branch, crying peace ! peace ! being struck down and deprived of life by the assassin's hand, when on the very verge of seeing his long-wished-for desire successfully consummated ; and, honored sir, in our lamentations over the sad event, may we be permitted to congratulate you, upon the knowledge we have, through the honorable Mr. Adams, the American Ambassador, London, and Mr. Stodart, Glasgow, of the high attainments you possess for the important office you have been so unexpectedly called upon to fill. We therefore tender unto you, and along with you our sincere sympathy for the bereaved widow of the late honoured and respected President, Abraham Lincoln, acknowledging our gratitude to God for the miraculous preservation of the honorable Mr. Seward and family ; and while we mourn, along with every true friend of humanity, the unparalleled event that has befallen your country, and although the horizon seemed dark for a time after such a calamity, we are again hopeful when we see the sun emerging from behind the cloud in your own likeness, supported by General Grant and the gallant army—Farragut and the navy—the patriotic people of America, and all who stood

forward so nobly in time of need in defence of those institutions for the good of mankind contained in the glorious republic of America, all deserving and receiving our best thanks.

"Signed in behalf of the meeting :

MATTHEW POLLOCK, *President.*

ALEXANDER DYKES, *Secretary.*

"Resolved, that the foregoing be forwarded to the honorable Charles Francis Adam, American Ambassador, London, for transmission to the honorable Andrew Johnson, President United States of America.

M.P.
A.D."

It only remains to record that in preparation for Civic Week, May, 1949, a letter was sent to Mr. Lewis Douglas giving all available information and asking if it were possible to forge again the link between the United States and this small community by presenting us with an American Flag. The letter was forwarded to Washington with a warm recommendation, and eventually we were informed that a flag would be presented. This actually took place at Downiesburn Park, Newmilns, on Saturday, May 28th, 1949. Mr. Lewis Douglas, American Ambassador, had hoped to hand it over, but a fishing accident compelled him to cancel arrangements, and it was handed over by the American Consul in Glasgow, Mr. Dayle C. McDonough, to the Newmilns Civic Week Committee. This Committee have handed over the American flag for safe custody to the Town Council.