

July 27th

Memory verse:

The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven:

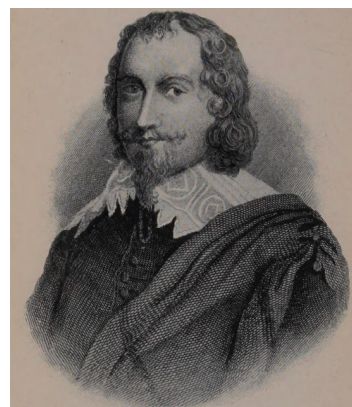
the lightnings lightened the world:

the earth trembled and shook. Psalm 77:18

Today's lesson will appeal especially to those who enjoy words – whether English, Scottish or Welsh! Have some paper and a pen or pencil handy to jot down some answers or ideas of your own. First though, the story of a Scottish hero. If you look up the highlighted places as you read you can follow his travels – voluntary or enforced – in your atlas.

A story from Scotland¹

Everyone has heard of Robert the Bruce and his famous spider. We learned about him last month.² Today is the anniversary of the death of one of his descendants, another Bruce of much later times who not only shaped Scotland's history just as much as his ancestor but was also a fearless preacher of the gospel. Robert Bruce (1554-1631), successor to John Knox,³ died on 27th July 1631 after a long life of service to his country and his God.



As a young student, Bruce heard John Knox preach and he studied under Andrew Melville another of Scotland's great Reformation leaders. Both these men had a great influence on his life.

Robert Bruce was well connected. Not only was he descended from *the* Robert the Bruce but his mother was a great granddaughter of James I of Scotland⁴ and his aunt, was a maid to Mary, Queen of Scots. He was well educated with the intention that he would enter the Scottish legal profession. But his life underwent a startling and radical change in August 1581. Here is how he described it in his own words:

...it pleased God, in the year 1581, in the month of August, in the last night thereof, being in the place of **Airth** lying in a room, called the new loft chamber, in the very night while I lay, to smite me inwardly and judicially in my conscience and to present all my sins before me, in such sort that He omitted not a circumstance, but made my conscience to see time, place, and persons as vividly as in the hour I did them. He made the devil to accuse me so audibly that I heard his voice, as vividly as ever I heard anything, not being asleep but waking. So far as he spake true, my conscience bare him record, and testified against me very clearly. But when he came to be a false accuser and laid things to my charge which I had never done, then my conscience failed him and would not testify with him. But in those things which were true, my conscience condemned me and the condemner tormented me, and made me feel the wrath of God pressing me down, as it were, to the lowest hell. Yea, I was so fearfully and extremely tormented that I would have been content to have been cast into a cauldron of hot melted lead, to have had my soul relieved of that insupportable weight. Always so far as he spoke true, I confessed, restored God to His glory, and craved God's mercy for the merits of Christ; yea appealed sore to His mercy purchased to me by the blood, death and passion of Christ. This Court of Justice holden [held] upon my soul turned (of the bottomless mercy of God) to a Court of mercy to me, for that same night, 'ere the day dawned, or the sun rose,

1 Information from D. C. Macnicol, *Master Robert Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1907) and other sources.

2 See lesson for 19th July.

3 See the lesson for 2nd May.

4 This is not the same king as James I of England but an earlier Scottish monarch. James I of England was also James VI of Scotland!

He restrained these furies and these outcries of my justly accusing conscience and enabled me to rise in the morning.

God dealt with the student lawyer in a manner perfectly fitted to his understanding and after this experience he dedicated himself to preaching the majesty of God, speaking to the consciences of his hearers in a way that was striking for its great solemnity.

Bruce's mother was bitterly angry that he was going to renounce his legal career and return to St Andrews to study again – this time under Andrew Melville – to be a preacher. She was a Roman Catholic and in her fury she demanded that Bruce renounce a substantial part of his inheritance. He did this joyfully giving up also his fine clothes and even his beloved horse.

Bruce was a shy man and so preaching did not come to him naturally. At St Andrews the students had to preach regularly in front of the “class”. Bruce couldn't do this at all at first so Melville allowed him to preach instead to a small group of friends, which was gradually enlarged until he was preaching to the whole class. From the very beginning it was obvious that God had given him a special gift for preaching.

The most famous church in Scotland at this time was St Giles, the High Kirk of Edinburgh, the King's kirk. Bruce's preaching was so notable that as soon as he had finished at St Andrews, he was appointed to St Giles. Bruce had reservations about this as he knew that there would be problems for him preaching to the king. He was not given to flattery and neither could he hold his tongue when something needed to be said. However when told by the General Assembly that he was to go to St Giles he went at and once began preaching and administering the communion service although he had not been ordained⁵ to do so.

Administering the communion service is a solemn thing and Bruce did not feel equal to the task when he first came to St Giles. In Scotland at communion everyone sits round the communion table. If the congregation is too large for them all to sit down together, they take turns table by table until all have participated. One Sunday, one of the other ministers who was serving at the table asked Bruce to sit beside him. Several groups of people came up and took communion. Then this minister suddenly got up and went out. Shortly afterwards, a message came saying he was not going to come back. Bruce thought he might have been taken ill but in fact he had gone out deliberately to prompt Bruce to take over! Everyone looked at Bruce and he had to carry on the service.

Every Sunday Bruce now had to preach with the king sitting in front of him. King James VI of Scotland was only a young man yet he had an exaggerated idea of his own importance. He would talk all through the service and even interrupted the preacher with his own questions which were pompous and often quite silly. Eventually Bruce could stand this no longer. He stopped preaching. He looked at the King and said: “When the lion roars all the beasts of the forest are silent. When the King of Kings is speaking, earth's petty princes keep silent.”

Despite this, Bruce and the King got on well at first. James, extravagant with praise (and blame), said that he was worth a quarter of his kingdom. He put Bruce in charge in Edinburgh whenever he went elsewhere. Then everything changed. The Earl of Gowrie was murdered. The Earl himself was suspected to have been in a plot against the king and it was rumoured that the king himself had therefore had him killed. The king wanted that rumour put down so he ordered that a proclamation saying he had had nothing to do with it should be read in all the churches up and down Scotland.

Bruce did not want to be told what to say in the pulpit by anyone except his master, Jesus Christ. He sent to James telling him that he (James) was the King and had his ambassadors to represent him

⁵ Ordination is a special service which recognises the minister officially in his position.

and give out his messages. However, he (Bruce) was in the service of another king – he was an ambassador of king Jesus. James was very angry. He had Bruce banished to **Inverness**.

Look in your atlas and find Inverness. How far is it from **Edinburgh**? Imagine what it would be like in the days when transport was by horse over unpaved roads through the wild and remote **Cairngorms**. You can see the terrain in the picture and also if you look carefully, a modern road on the right – which was not there in Bruce's day. Poor Bruce felt as if he was being sent into the desert. His friends gathered to bid him farewell and to escort him a little way on his journey. It happened that his horse was brought out last and so he was last to mount. As the other riders swept past him they noticed that as he was putting his foot in the stirrup he stopped, and stood with his eyes fixed towards heaven. He remained in this posture for about a quarter of an hour and so one of his companions went back to see what had happened. “What were you doing?” he asked Bruce....



I was receiving my commission from my Master, my charge to go to Inverness, and He gave it to me Himself, before I set my foot in the stirrup. Thither I go to sow a seed that shall not be rooted out for many days.⁶

He endured this banishment twice from the king, from 1605 to 1613 and from 1622 to 1624 but he carried out his “commission” abundantly and the seed sown grew and flourished.



In Inverness Bruce's life was very hard. He was harassed by the Town Council of Inverness. Local ministers opposed him. He could not even find anywhere to live at first as no one would take him in or rent him a house. Once someone even tried to kill him by shooting at him. Why ever had God sent such an excellent preacher to such a terrible and remote place? There was a good reason.

Bruce began preaching in his own house on Sundays and on Wednesday evenings. Then other places became available to him. People began coming to hear him from all over eastern **Inverness-shire**; they began crossing from **Sutherland** and **Easter Ross** by the **Kessock Ferry**, at first a few and then hundreds. A gospel work flourished in that area that still echoes on today.

In 1624 Bruce's daughter got married and Bruce was given permission to leave Inverness and travel south for the wedding. When James VI died the following year the new king, Charles I, allowed him to remain in his own house at **Kinnaird**. He was no longer allowed to preach in St Giles but instead he preached all over Scotland at conventicles – meetings of doubtful legality which were held in the open or in private houses. Here he found that young and old alike wanted to hear him. Men who were to form the leadership of the Scottish church in the next generation like Alexander Henderson who we will meet next month⁷ and also a band of Scottish ladies, often quite well-to-do, regarded him as their spiritual guide. These all learned to live prayerful lives of devotion to God's

⁶ D. C, Macnicol, *Master Robert Bruce* (Edinburgh, 1907) p. 229.

⁷ See the lesson for 19th August (Yet to come). If you will be on holiday on that date you could read Henderson's fascinating story today.

service from his example. Great times of blessing followed with many people coming to faith in Jesus Christ at the crowded and heartfelt meetings. A generation was being nurtured ready for the crucial era of the Scottish Covenantors about who we will read in the lesson about Henderson.

But Bruce was now a very old man. He came down to breakfast one morning as usual and enjoyed an egg, his younger daughter being with him. Suddenly he cried out: "Hold, daughter, hold; my Master calleth me." He asked that the large house Bible should be brought but his sight failed, and he could not read. He asked for the eighth chapter of Romans to be found for him and he repeated the last two verses of that chapter, which speak of the Christian's unbreakable union with the love of God through Jesus Christ. Then he said "Set my finger on these words. God be with you, my children. I have breakfasted with you, and shall sup with my Lord Jesus this night. I die believing in these words."

Work with words

Bruce's sermons were delivered in language that the people around him could understand. He did not speak Latin and he did not make eloquent and learned-sounding discourses. Because he was a Scot, preaching to Scots, his sermons included many Scottish dialect words that make them quite difficult for us to understand today if we are English. He was not afraid to use bold figures of speech referring to the "teeth of the soul" for instance when talking of faith which takes hold of Christ. He was a master of this language and loved to be plain and direct – hamely (homely) he called it.

What would you make of the Scottish words below which are taken from Robert Bruce's sermons? Jot your guess down beside each word or on a piece of paper if you cannot print the lesson. If you don't know, make something up! Answers are on the last page of today's lesson.

1. daunton _____

2. kythe _____

3. throombes _____

4. leisum _____

5. bachill _____

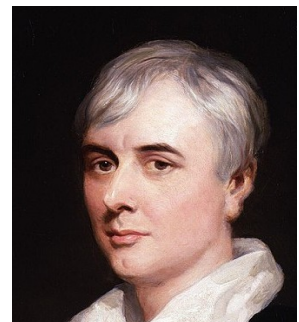
6. spunks _____

7. fash _____

8. speir _____

A legend to read, a book to look out for and something to find out⁸

George Borrow (1803-1881) was a writer and traveller, a lover of the countryside and a friend of the gypsies. He had a gift for languages and by the time he was eighteen he could understand Latin, Portuguese, Greek, Hebrew, German, Danish, Italian and Spanish. He taught himself Welsh by reading Milton's *Paradise Lost* twice through in that language – at least that's how he says he did it but he was the sort of person who often exaggerated! Borrow developed a life long interest in the origin of words.



⁸ Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today?* Book 2 available on the *Mothers' Companion* flashdrive <https://motherscompanion.weebly.com/>

He took to tramping the roads, often with the gypsies, in his early twenties but later turned his love of travel to good account, journeying abroad selling Bibles and writing books about his experiences. Older children may enjoy his *The Bible in Spain* which recounts his adventures in that country while in the employment of the British and Foreign Bible Society. This book was a huge success during Borrow's life time and with it he finally gained the literary prestige he had always felt he deserved.

On **July 27th** 1854, he set out into Wales, travelling the length of the land armed with a stout umbrella which he used as a walking stick – when it was not raining. Afterwards he wrote of the places he saw, the people he met and the tales they told him, in a book called *Wild Wales*. One of the tales he heard and recounted in his book is the famous legend of Beddgelert which can be found in today's optional resources files.

The legend is supposed to account for the origin of the place name Beddgelert for *Bedd* is a grave in Welsh and *Gelert* is a name. Beddgelert therefore means Gelert's grave. But who was Gelert? George Borrow thought he knew but I am afraid in this instance he was mistaken. The delightful, if sad, tale that he recounts is known to have been made up by a local hotel keeper, keen to drum up tourist business. Interestingly, the real Gelert is most likely to have been a Christian missionary in early times who laboured and died in the Beddgelert valley. What is the origin of the name of the town or village where you live? Do some research of your own and find out.

A poem to read – and learn



Today marks the birth of Thomas Campbell (1777 – 1844) author of “Ye Mariners of England”⁹ and other poems. I have included one of his poems in today's optional resources files with some more work on words that will help you understand the poem. If you began a poetry memorisation programme on 5th January (if not look at that lesson and begin one now) you could include it.



Answers:

1. to frighten
2. show, make known
3. thrum, a term from weaving meaning a short length of waste thread
4. lawful
5. spoiled, distorted
6. sparks
7. anger

Don't be surprised if you couldn't guess these! I hope you made up some interesting definitions of your own.

9 See the lesson for 19th December. (Yet to come.)