

The Baptismal Font.

THE mode of administering the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has varied from time to time and, in consequence, the vessel for holding the baptismal water has not always taken the same form. There seems little doubt that the first baptisms took place in the open air and were performed by affusion. The earliest evidence we have in fresco or sculpture shows the candidate standing in the water, while the baptiser pours water over his head. In a fresco in the cemetery of St Callistus, Rome (*circa* 200 A.D.) a nude boy is represented as standing in the water up to his ankles, while water is being poured over him. In time the running stream gave place to fonts of a kind and these appear at first to have been simply wooden tubs.⁽¹⁾ Pope Caius (283-296) is said to have baptised St Claudius *super pelvim ligneum*. In the Cathedral at Tournai, Belgium, there are some old tapestries showing three fonts, two of which are depicted as wooden tubs, showing both staves and hoops. Incidentally the figures therein are represented as sitting or kneeling. In Scotland, there is no evidence that fonts were used in the earlier days of the Celtic missionaries. There is every likelihood that baptisms like preachings took place in the open air and that many of the wells, which still bear the names of these early pioneers, were used for this purpose. Near the Church of St Monans, Fife, is a well still known as the "Christening Well". Probably in later days water would be drawn from it for the Sacrament. In the old parish of Killallan (now united to Houston) there is still to be seen beside St Fillan's chair (a huge boulder) a small cavity from which it is said the saint baptised his converts. It is also stated by tradition that a thousand years after the death of the saint, Covenanting ministers⁽²⁾ used the same cavity as a baptismal font.⁽³⁾

There is reason to believe that some of the baths or tanks which Celtic saints were said to have hewn out for themselves, and in which they spent whole nights in prayer immersed in water, were used as baptismal fonts. It is possible that the circular basin at Dunino, in Fife, may have been such a place and others are still to be seen outside some of the ancient chapels in the Western Islands. There is also one at Burghhead which may be Roman in origin being used later by an early missionary.

As time went on these tanks gave way to fonts shaped in some cases like tubs. An early example in Scotland is that of Portmoak on the shore of Loch Leven. The church to which it belonged was consecrated by Bishop de Bernham in 1243 and it is probable that the font was made before then.⁽⁴⁾ Although adult baptism had ceased before Norman times fonts continued to be made big enough to immerse a baby, though the "dipping" of the Sarum rite did not necessarily mean that the baby should be put under the water completely.⁽⁵⁾

Of Norman fonts in Scotland a few are still used for their sacred purpose. One of the finest is at Birnie, Morayshire, and it is probably older than the church in which

(1) The *Didache* says "if thou hast not running water, baptise in other water".

(2) Incidentally this shows that some covenanters had no objections to the use of stone fonts.

(3) Alexander Peden, probably the best known of all Covenanting ministers, is said to have baptised a number of children in Gareland Cleugh in Kirkconnel (Upper Nithsdale). The place where he did so seems to have been close to the site of another Celtic cell.

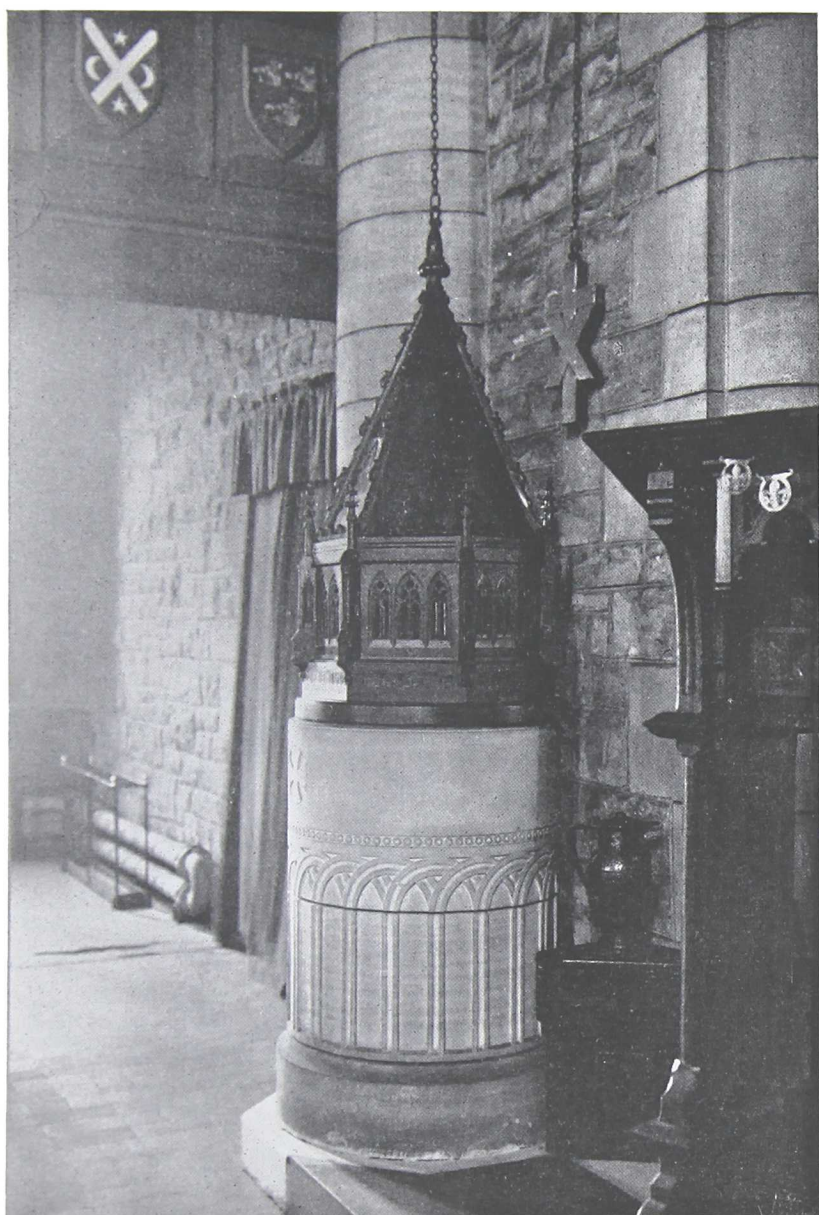
(4) The writer was one of a small party of ministers who discovered this font in a farm beside the site of the old church. It was being used for a feeding trough. It is now preserved at the manse of the neighbouring parish of Cleish.

(5) One of the oldest representations of a baptismal ceremony in England shows Richard Beauchamp, afterwards Earl of Warwick, being baptised by a Bishop. The Earl was born in 1389, but the drawing was made about a hundred years later. The font is too shallow to allow of the immersion of the baby, who is being held over the font stark naked and the water is not by any means up to the brim. The two male sponsors, King Richard II. and the Bishop of Lichfield, stand beside the font, the former having his hand on the baby's head.

Pageant of the Birth, Life and Death of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, K.G., 1389-1439. Edited by Viscount Dillon and W. H. St John Hope.



THE FONT, ST. CUTHBERT'S PARISH CHURCH, EDINBURGH.



THE FONT, ST. LEONARD'S CHURCH, DUNFERMLINE.
(Showing cover, counterpoise and laver. All four were made locally.)

it sits. The upper part is a semi-hemispherical stone basin with portions cut off vertically like a cushion cap. There is no drain, but the staple holes for the cover are still visible. These may have been made a considerable time after the font itself. The stalk on which the basin rests is quite modern, having been gifted by members of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society.

Another fine example is at Linton, in Roxburghshire. It probably dates from the end of the 12th or the beginning of the 13th century. It is of massive form and for some time did duty in the local blacksmith's shop. Then it was used as a flower-pot at the house of the Laird, where all the flowers put in it were said to have died. It was returned to the church in 1868 by Robert Ker Eliot, then patron of the benefice. Another font of about the same date is in Whithorn Church, where it was rescued from the Town Hall in which it had been used for mixing "whitening". The font at Polwarth is probably to be dated about the same period.

One of the most interesting of Scottish fonts and one which is still to be seen at the spot where it was first placed, is in the ruined kirk of Southdean. Cut from one block of stone the upper part is octagonal in shape, being slightly narrower at the top than at the bottom. The base is circular and is about ten inches high. On the surface of the rim there are two small sinkings which contained the fastenings of the cover. Another font which never left the church where it was first placed and which, unlike the one at Southdean, is still in use, is that at Aberdour, Fife. When the debris was being cleared out of the church previous to its restoration some twenty years ago, the old font was discovered sitting close to the west wall. It was badly broken at the top and is now fitted with a silver basin. Quite a number of mediaeval fonts were octagonal in shape. This is said to have been due to the fact that there were eight persons in Noah's Ark, the Flood being regarded as a symbol of baptism, in that it is the instrument of death to the old man and of safety to those who are in God's appointed Ark.⁽¹⁾

Some of these stone fonts were ornamented with carving. That from the Chapel of St Maelrubha, Skye, and now in the Antiquarian Museum, Edinburgh, is round, cut out of horneblende gneiss, and has no drain. It is beautifully sculptured in high relief, the figures being placed at equal distances dividing it into four panels. The four figures are (1) Our Lord on the Cross; (2) St Michael slaying the dragon; (3) A Bishop with mitre and staff; (4) The Blessed Mother and Child. The font was carried away from its original location by a party of fishermen. It was deposited in a Roman Catholic chapel in South Uist and was later handed over to the Museum by the priest-in-charge.

Another finely carved font is at Meikle, Perthshire. Formerly in the parish church, it found its way to the manse garden. Fully a hundred years ago Sir George Kinloch got the loan of it for the baptism of his son. He retained it and when the Episcopalians opened a chapel in Meikle he handed it over to them, a transaction which to the ordinary man would seem to be dishonest. This font has been described as "one of the best specimens of an old font now remaining in Scotland". It is octagonal and each of the sides contains an arch with carved crockets, the angles being marked with small buttresses ending in pinnacles. In each panel is a bas relief with the following emblems of the Passion: (1) The Crucifixion; (2) The Seamless Robe, two scourges and three dice; (3) The Resurrection; (4) The Empty Cross and Crown of Thorns; (5) The Five Wounds; (6) The Pillar of Scourging, surmounted by a cock and with a rope twisted round the pillar; (7) The Ladder, spear and sponge arranged saltire-wise; (8) The Three Nails and hammer. It has been doubted whether this font is of Scottish workmanship.⁽²⁾

A somewhat similar font was that of Kinkell Church, Aberdeenshire. The font was taken from the ruined church and lay for a long time in a local garden, the pro-

⁽¹⁾ It is much more likely that it was found more easy to decorate the flat faces than the round bowl. Probably the explanation came later.

⁽²⁾ The font formerly stood in Restennet Priory and was probably in use there until 1591 when the Priory ceased to be the Parish Church of Forfar. It is now in St Margaret's Episcopal Church, Carse Barracks, near Forfar. The pedestal bears an inscription to the effect that it was presented "by the Proprietors" in 1907. It is probably not of earlier date than the 15th century. It is considerably battered.

prietor of which handed it over to St John's Episcopal Church, Aberdeen. All that remains is the granite bowl, octagonal in shape, and ornamented with the following carvings:—(1) I. H. S. with a celestial crown; (2) M. with crown; (3) The Five Wounds; (4) The Heart pierced with a sword; (5) A Rose with four ornaments placed saltire-wise; (6) The initials of Alexander Galloway, Parson of Kinkell.

Another fine font of similar type, but rather badly broken, stands in the Church of Fowlis Easter along with other relics of mediaeval times. It is three feet in height and two feet in diameter, and on each face is cut in low relief a scene from the Life of Christ: (1) His Baptism; (2) His Arrest; (3) Ecce Homo; (4) The Scourging; (5) He bears the Cross; (6) His Crucifixion; (7) His Resurrection; (8) He leads the Fathers out of Limbo. At Friars Carse, some seven miles north of Dumfries, may be seen a number of fonts which were "collected" by Robert Riddell, the friend of Robert Burns. One of them is the old font of Morton, in Nithsdale. Riddell carried it away from the churchyard as he did several others. This one is made of the red sandstone of the district and has an interesting series of crosses and shields carved on its sides. It is perhaps the only Scots specimen which has the basin octagonal.⁽¹⁾

Quite a number of fonts are ornamented with coats of arms. One of the Riddell collection was the old font of Mouswald. It bears the arms of the Torthorwald of Torthorwald family, which ended in an heiress in the days of Robert the Bruce.

This font was in 1929 replaced in the church to which it belonged, a new pedestal being provided. Riddell also had the font of Dunscore, his own Parish Church, which had the shield of Kirkpatrick of Closeburn on it; but this font has now disappeared.

At Newbattle there is preserved a fine octagonal font which was discovered near there in 1873. It has on its sides the shields of (1) Ramsay; (2) Margaret of England, wife of James IV.; (3) Magdalene of France, wife of James V.; (4) King of Scots; (5) Mary of Lorraine, second wife of James V.; (6) Edward Schewall, Abbot of Newbattle, 1526. The other two shields are blank. It has been alleged that this font was used at the baptism of Mary Queen of Scots; but this is doubtful.

The finest of all Scottish heraldic fonts, if not indeed the finest of all the mediaeval fonts left in Scotland, is that of Inverkeithing, Fife. Tradition alleges that it was made for the baptism of David, Duke of Rothesay. As the arms of his father and of his mother appear on it, there is something to be said for the tradition. The font is complete with both pedestal and bowl. The former lay for a long time in the churchyard, its nature being quite unknown. In 1806 the bowl was discovered underneath the tower of the church and the two parts were put together again, after being parted probably from the time of the Reformation. The font is hexagonal in shape and has on each side a shield held by an angel. There is doubt as to some of the families represented by the shields, a doubt intensified by the fact that the colours on the coats which were visible in 1806 have now disappeared. There is, however, no doubt as to the first three: (1) King of Scots; (2) Queen Annabella Drummond; (3) Stewart. Another fine example of what may be termed the heraldic font remains in Seton Chapel, East Lothian. It is emblazoned with the arms of Sinclair, Seton, Campbell, and others. Fonts with a single shield are to be found at Muckersey and Selkirk.

In England quite a number of octagonal stone fonts survive, having the "seven sacraments" represented on the panels, the eighth panel usually being filled with a scriptural subject. Not a single fragment of such a font remains in Scotland, though it is quite probable that some would be in use in this country. Perhaps some of the scenes portrayed, e.g., the Mass, Extreme Unction or Confirmation, were so repugnant to the Reformation party that they had the fonts containing them destroyed. Then a few fonts are to be found in England having on them the signs of the Zodiac, but again no trace of any such is to be found in this country. It is possible that such fonts never existed in Scotland; but if they did, they might, in 1560, be regarded as bearing heathen symbols and so broken.

⁽¹⁾ Another unique font is at Killin, Perthshire. It is septagonal, the only known Scots one of this shape.

About a hundred stone mediaeval fonts are known to survive in Scotland, many of them still in use. The parish of Stenton is in the position of having two, it having had churches both at Pitcox and Stenton. The font of the latter was found buried beneath the floor of the church. It was removed to the Laird's garden, but at the suggestion of the Duke of Teck, father of Queen Mary, it was replaced beside the ruined church from which it had been taken. It should now be restored to its sacred use in the new church, built *circa* 1829. The other font does duty as a water trough, at what is called the "Wishing Well". It, too, should be placed in more fitting surroundings.

Occasionally one finds that what is considered to be a font is really a piscina, a holy water stoup or even a mortar for domestic use.⁽¹⁾ The oldest "font" in use in the Church of Scotland is, if the "Irishism" be pardoned, not a font at all, although it had an ecclesiastical origin. In St Conal's Church at Kirkconnel, Upper Nithsdale, the socket of a Celtic cross which was found in the parish by a former minister is now fitted with a baptismal basin. The socket was probably carved over a thousand years ago.

In the Parish of Irongray, Galloway, there are still to be seen the "Communion Stones" where the Covenanters had a large communion in 1678 and perhaps at other times. These are actually "tables" formed of stones, now grass covered, at which the communicants sat down as they would have done at tables in a church or churchyard. At one end of the tables is a pile of stones some four feet high, whereon the sacred elements were placed, an interesting example of what might be called a stone altar. A few yards from this there used to be a large oval stone having two cavities deep enough to admit the arm to the elbow and which, according to tradition, held the water for baptism.⁽²⁾ It is possible that this was originally a mediaeval font, some of which had, in addition to a basin for the water, a smaller receptacle for holding the chrism with which the newly baptised child was anointed. The fact, however, that both cavities here were of a similar depth seems to rule out that explanation. It is possible that the stone was, like the one at Kirkconnel, originally a socket for a cross. About a hundred years ago it was removed by a neighbouring farmer to his house, where it was used as a domestic washing basin by his servants. It seems to have disappeared.

According to the Book of Discipline every church was to have a "basin for baptisms", and it may be that this was taken in some quarters as meaning that stone fonts were no longer to be employed; though, as we have seen, some such continued *in situ* until modern days, and there was no reason why "stone basins" should be excluded. Winzet, that able defender of the Roman Church, alleges that the Reformers "wappit" (broke) the ancient fonts and there is little reason to doubt that in some cases this was done. What were regarded as "superstitious figures" carved on them may have led to their destruction. Again, the ministers of Reformed congregations were supposed to baptise children "in face of the congregation" and, as the old position of the font was at or near the door, this may have been regarded as an unsuitable place for it. At the same time this difficulty would not be so pronounced then as it would be now, for in those days there were no fixed seats in churches.

All mediaeval fonts had not been made of stone. A number formed of lead are still preserved in England,⁽³⁾ and one of wood is said to exist in Denbighshire. The Synodal Statutes of the Diocese of Aberdeen in the 13th century insisted that every baptismal church⁽⁴⁾ should be provided with a "suitable stone or wooden font".

(1) At the western end of the site of the Bell Kirk, a mediaeval chapel near the border line belonging to Jedburgh Abbey, is a large hollowed stone "which some local authorities hold to be the original font, others regarding it as an old millstone or mortar in which corn was ground." Mack. *The Border Line*, p. 190. There can be little doubt that the latter view is correct.

(2) It is evident that in this strongly Covenanting district there was no suggestion that the use of a stone font was in any way "popish".

(3) Six lead fonts, all apparently made from the same mould, are to be found in Gloucestershire. English statutes state that the font should be *lapideum vel aliud*.

(4) As a general rule only Parish Churches were allowed to have fonts, but sometimes by special permission other places of worship might be allowed to have one. The ancient fonts had to be provided by the parishioners.

Where the latter material was used there must have been a lead lining or a basin fitted to hold the water. There was a fine font of brass in the Abbey of Holyrood, which was used at the baptism of a number of royal babies. It had been presented to the Abbey Church by Abbot Robert Bellenden, who also gave some bells and a golden chalice. The font was carried away to England by Sir Robert Lee in 1543 and was presented by him to the Abbey of St Albans. An inscription was there put upon it to the effect that, while it had been reserved for the use of the Royal Family in Scotland, it was here for the Commons of England. During the Commonwealth period it was melted down by one, Hickman, a local Justice of the Peace. The same fate met the golden font which was sent to Scotland by Queen Elizabeth for the baptism of the Prince, afterwards King James VI. It was used by Archbishop Hamilton at the baptism in the Chapel Royal but not long afterwards was melted down to provide funds for his mother's army. Dundrennan Abbey is said to have possessed a silver basin for baptisms and among the possessions of the Abbey of Lindores in 1530 were "ane bassyng of silver wyth ii lawers" (lavers) which may have been used for the same purpose.⁽¹⁾ It is possible, therefore, that the Reformers, in making the change from stone font to basin, if indeed they did so, were simply continuing a custom which had already begun.⁽²⁾

A few of the older silver basins belonging to the Church of Scotland still survive. The oldest is probably that belonging to St John's Church, Perth, dating from 1591. Trinity College Church, Edinburgh, has one which dates from 1633-34. The latter bears the words "I indeed have baptized you with water but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost. Marke 1, 8". In the possession of the Old Kirk, Edinburgh, is a splendid basin and laver, the former having the text, St Matthew XXVIII. 19-20, engraved in full. These vessels came into the possession of the Old Kirk in 1728; but they belong to a much earlier period, bearing as they do the London hall-mark for the year 1602-3. They are decorated with repoussé and flat chased work and there is little doubt that they were originally used for the secular purpose of guests washing their hands at table after dinner. At St Andrews are a splendid laver and basin which are of special interest in that they were presented to the Church in 1675 by Archbishop Sharp and bear his name and arms. Both are still in use. Perhaps the finest silver baptismal basin in the possession of a congregation of the Church of Scotland is that belonging to the Lowland Church, Campbelltown. This basin is over twenty inches in diameter and has three flat rims, each a little lower than the other. On the two outer rims there are texts of Scripture, while on the innermost are the words "THE BAPTIZEM OF WATER THE BAPTIZEM OF THE SPIRIT THE BAPTIZEM OF BLOOD". This fine baptismal vessel went astray at one time and was accidentally discovered doing duty as the cover of a herring barrel at the manse.

Many interesting old pewter basins are still in the possession of the Church of Scotland, though there has been too great a tendency to discard these when new silver ones were obtained. The writer was once asked to examine a collection of 18th century pewter which was being offered for sale in an auction room in a Scottish county town. In the collection were four baptismal basins bearing the names of the parishes to which they had belonged. He communicated with the ministers of these parishes and three of the basins went back to where they had come from. In the case of the fourth no notice was taken, and some months later he saw the basin and laver in question in the shop of a dealer in antiques. Again he wrote the ministers (the charge was a collegiate one); but again his letters were left unanswered. These baptismal basins were often placed in a ring affixed to the pulpit and in some cases this ring can still be seen, though no longer used for its original purpose.⁽³⁾ The old

⁽¹⁾ In 1480 James Guthry, Abbot of Kinloss, being in need of money sold a silver ewer and basin belonging to the Abbey. These may have been baptismal vessels. They were afterwards in the possession of the Abbey of Dunfermline.

⁽²⁾ The stone fonts, which had been removed from the churches in Geneva, were brought back with the consent, if not by command, of Calvin.

⁽³⁾ Though basins were in use the word "Font" still remained, as for example in the 47th Paraphrase "When to the sacred font we came".

pulpit of Elgin which dates from the second episcopacy has still its twisted iron rod by which the basin was supported.⁽¹⁾

Ecclesiastical "purists" condemn the practice of putting a basin in a stone font. To do so, however, does not appear to differ in principle from the mediaeval one of putting a lead lining into the font and this as we know was often done. No Scottish Church ordinance forbids such a use of a basin. In England many attempts have been made to put an end to the practice but it still goes on.

Practically every Scottish Church has a baptismal font or basin of some kind, though some of these were originally made for other purposes.⁽²⁾ In one Church known to the writer a rose bowl is used, and in another a somewhat "flashy" piece of electroplate, originally meant for a table decoration, has been pressed into service. So far as is known no Scottish Church possesses an earthenware font (though soup plates and bowls are known to have been used to hold the baptismal water); but such are still in use in some churches in England. That well known firm of potters, "Wedgwood", it is said, actually put their wares on the market for this purpose and certainly "Wedgwood" fonts are not unknown south of the Tweed.

When the new Church of Dunfermline was erected on the site of the ancient chancel in 1824 the pulpit was placed in the centre of the east end. On the floor level on either side of it was placed a desk or "box" of somewhat similar design, but much smaller. One of these was used by the Precentor, the other was used for Baptisms. A painting of the interior of the church, as it was about sixty years ago, shows that the basin was supported by a ring on the outside of the second "box". A towel was laid over the side and apparently the Minister had to ascend one or two steps to reach the interior. It is to be regretted that this quaint survival was removed some fifty years ago when the new pulpit was erected.

Two modern fonts of unusual types may be mentioned. That in St Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, is a statue of a kneeling angel holding a shell for the baptismal water. It is of Caen stone and was carved by the well known Scottish sculptor, John Rhind. It sits in the Albany aisle, having been placed there after the restoration of the Cathedral. In St Cuthbert's Church, Edinburgh, is the largest font possessed by any congregation of the Church of Scotland, and the most elaborate. It was presented to the congregation in 1908 by Professor Hunter Stewart in memory of his wife. It is an adaptation of the hexagonal font in the Cathedral of Siena, designed by Jacopo della Quercia in the fifteenth century. One of the panels is filled with a bronze relief of the lady to whose memory the font is dedicated. Above the font proper is the figure of Mother and Child, the original of which is attributed to Michael Angelo and may be seen in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, in Bruges. The introduction of this font, it may be said, led to a case in the Church Courts; but the General Assembly declined to interfere in any way with it, though a leading minister of one of the smaller denominations declared publicly that it was enough to make angels weep.

A font, like every other article of ecclesiastical furnishing, should be designed for the place it is to occupy and, if possible, should be made of local stone. Even when specially designed, mistakes will happen. The writer knows of an octagonal stone font on which the front panel is filled with the Divine monogram I. H. S.; the others with the monograms of the minister and trustees. Comment is needless.

In most Scottish churches the font stands at or near the chancel; but there are some, where, following ancient custom, it is placed at or near the "most patent door of the Church", to quote another enactment.

LAVERS.

Reference has been made to lavers, which were vessels in which the water for the purpose of baptism was brought to the font. "Lavoiris" as well as "Basines" had to be provided by the parishioners (heritors), according to the Act of Parliament

⁽¹⁾ In some churches, *e.g.*, St Cuthbert's, Edinburgh, the parent had to carry the child up the pulpit steps. In others the ring was on a lower level—sometimes on the Precentors' Lectern, and the minister left the pulpit to administer the Sacrament.

⁽²⁾ During his service in the army the writer used a communion cup as a baptismal basin.

in 1617. Queen Elizabeth presented a laver, made of rock crystal with silver mounts, to the Regent Mar for the baptism of one of his children. This laver, made in Edinburgh, 1565-7, is still in existence. Gillespie's words, "a basin and laver set out before a pulpit are signs of baptism to be ministered", indicate that then (*circa* 1637) the use of the laver was common. The late Dr Thomas Burns thought that the introduction of the laver was due to the "strong prelatie forces" in the Church, but he was wrong.⁽¹⁾ The Anglican Church knows nothing of lavers in our sense of the word.⁽²⁾ It is worthy of note that in the Westminster Directory "pouring" precedes "sprinkling" as a method of applying the water in the Sacrament. Most of the lavers now in the possession of the Church of Scotland date from the post-Revolution period when Presbyterian sentiment was specially strong. The laver at Kingsbarns (1705) has a small cover on the spout, so that only a trickle of water could fall on the child's head. That of Trinity College, Edinburgh (1633-4) has a larger aperture; but this too seems to have been used to pour the water on the infant. Another type had the lid perforated like a pepper box and the water was sprinkled through this. Other lavers, however, appear to have been used to bring the water into the Church. Probably this was deliberately poured out "in face of the congregation", perhaps as a means of helping "to improve our baptism especially . . . when we are present at the administration of it to others". (Larger Catechism). Most present day lavers are used in this way. Many of the modern ones in Scotland are of "mass manufacture", although in the Church of St Leonard, Dunfermline, there is a fine specimen made of hammered copper by one of the elders.

Vessels which might have been termed lavers and which were used for a similar purpose existed in the mediaeval church. In a book *Liber Cathecuminum*, published at Venice in 1555, there is an interesting illustration showing a baptism. The priest in his surplice is pouring the water out of a vessel, which looks like a rather deep saucer, on to the head of the child which is being held over the font by one of the sponsors (a man). Among the MSS in the British Museum will be found illustrations of lavers shaped like vases, saucers, and shallow cups. These were in use in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. The Archbishop of St Andrews seems to have used something of this nature at the baptism of Prince (afterwards King) James, in the Chapel Royal in 1566.

There is nothing in Scots Church law to forbid such use, though the rubric in the Book of Common Order instructs the minister to "take water in his hand and lay it on the child's forehead". The Westminster Directory, as we have seen, speaks of "pouring", as does the Confession of Faith, and this indicates that the water may be poured out of some vessel.⁽³⁾ Shells are sometimes used for this purpose. In one instance known to the writer the minister uses a small silver vessel, a replica of the early ecclesiastical wine strainer found in the hoard at Traprain Law. It is at once convenient and fitting.

FONT COVERS.

The origin of the Font Cover, unlike that of the Font, presents no difficulties. The ancient custom in this country was to hallow the water and allow it to remain in the font for a considerable time. Unfortunately, it was believed that such baptismal water might be used for black magic and, in consequence, it was sometimes carried away. Accordingly in the 13th century regulations were made to the effect that such fonts were to have covers and that these covers were to have locks. A statute of Bishop David de Bernham (1242) decreed that the "fonts were to be under safe keeping, locks and keys being provided lest some overbold hand may reach forth to them to the commission of abominable and unspeakable acts". The importance attached to this protection of the baptismal water is shown by the fact that in 1527

(1) No one could imagine George Gillespie having any sympathy with "strong prelatie forces".

(2) Micklethwaite, *Ornaments of the Rubric*, states definitely that there is no evidence of the use of any vessel for the affusion of the water by the priest in the Anglican Church.

(3) Are we to find the reason for this insistence on "pouring" in the views of the Scottish Commissioners to the Westminster Assembly? All of them must have known of the Scottish use of lavers.

the priest at Kilmaronock⁽¹⁾ was put in possession of the benefice by the delivery to him, amongst other things, of the key of the font, *seram fontis*.

At first these covers were only flat lids fastened by bar and staple. Some of the existing fonts show where the hinges were sunk in the stone, but, so far as the writer is aware, not a single ancient font cover survives in Scotland, though two or three still remain in England. At Ford, Sussex, for example, the old cover with its padlock still remains and is kept locked. The earliest reference to an actual cover in these islands dates from 1323-4 and refers to the cord by which the cover was swung clear of the font. As time went on many elaborate font covers were constructed and became striking features of the interiors of the churches. In recent days in Scotland quite a number of churches have obtained fonts with covers. These latter are usually flat boards, sometimes with an iron handle affixed to the cover by two iron plates in the form of a cross. At Linton the cover was made out of the wood of an ancient pear tree which for centuries stood in the manse garden. At Hillhead Church there is an elaborate cover octagonal in design. That in St Leonard's Church, Dunfermline, is septagonal in shape. The underpart is pierced with seven windows reproducing the designs of the windows in seven Scottish abbeys. On the seven panels above there are emblems of the Holy Trinity and of the Three Persons therein.

FONT CLOTHS.

At one time font cloths were used to put over the cover, probably with the object of preventing dust from getting into the water. These appear to have come into use about the end of the 15th or beginning of the 16th century. A reference to one such as a "painted cloth" indicates that in some cases these were decorated. Not one is known to survive.

PRIVATE FONTS.

The law of the Church of Scotland, going further than that of either England or Rome, absolutely forbids baptism except "in face of the congregation". Private baptism is, however, common, perhaps too common, in the Scottish Church, though it seems to be on the decrease. Some ministers, who only baptise outside the church in cases of grave necessity, use a private font for that purpose. According to Canon Law any vessel used in baptism outside the church became the possession of the church, showing in what a regard anything used for a sacred purpose was held. One private font known to the writer is a replica on a very small scale of that in the famous Baptistry at Milan. The late Dr Dearmer condemned such a use of a "toy font". The proper vessel according to him was that used for washing the "Altar" linen. In Scotland this would probably mean a domestic washing tub!

WILLIAM McMILLAN.

(1) On the shore of Loch Lomond.