

A SCOTS QUATER-CENTENARY:

ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, ST. ANDREWS, 1537-1937

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ST. MARY'S COLLEGE! A Protestant college with that name? And in Presbyterian Scotland? Yea, verily. The name precipitates a question the answer to which sends us back to pre-Reformation days. For St. Mary's College, St. Andrews, this year completes four hundred years of theological teaching in the interests of Protestantism and Presbyterianism, an object entirely contrary to the wishes of its founders. It took two Papal Bulls and the efforts of three high dignitaries of the Roman Catholic Church to effect its foundation. The process of foundation occupied the years 1537 to 1553, and then seven years later the storm of the Reformation broke over Scotland. If one place more than another in Scotland could be designated the storm-centre of the Reformation, that place was St. Andrews; and one of the two centres of disturbance in St. Andrews was St. Mary's College. So the college whose quater-centenary is being celebrated this year played no little part in a movement which completely changed the subsequent history of Scotland, and the effects of which are felt to-day all over the British Empire.

The University of St. Andrews, the oldest and the smallest of the four universities of Scotland, was founded by Bishop Wardlaw in 1411. It comprised the two colleges of St. Salvator's or the Old College, founded in 1450, and St. Leonard's, founded in 1512. St. Mary's College, or as it was called for a long time the New College, was founded in 1537. In that year Archbishop James Beaton applied to Pope Paul III for permission to build a college for the two-fold purpose of "sowing something on earth by means of which he might enjoy felicity in heaven," and of increasing the scope and influence of the Catholic Church by men of light and learning. He promised that the dedication of the college would be under the Invocation of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. Not only theology, but canon and civil law, medicine, physics and similar subjects would be taught. In order to endow the college, he set apart the revenues of two churches in his diocese, along with other annual monies. The building was scarcely begun when the Archbishop died, so the carrying on of the project fell to his nephew, the famous Cardinal David Beaton,

the arch-enemy of John Knox and the man who was responsible for the martyrdom of George Wishart. Cardinal Beaton, however, was apparently not so enthusiastic in the matter of founding the college as his uncle had been. But he added the revenues of a third church, and demolished some old buildings. Then his work came to an abrupt stop when, as a reprisal for the death of Wishart, he was himself murdered in 1546. The task of completing the foundation of the college fell to John Hamilton, the last Archbishop of St. Andrews, who received another Papal Bull from Julius III in 1553, and added the revenues of a fourth church. He doubled the membership of the college, bringing it up to thirty-six (twenty-four of whom were students), and saw to it that his kinsmen were well represented both on the staff and amongst the student body.

With the college at last completed, it looked as if the purpose for which it came into being would be amply fulfilled. But the Reformation had now reached Scotland, and Protestantism was established by law in 1560. In 1571, too, Archbishop Hamilton himself suffered death at the hands of the common hangman at Stirling. And what of the infant college of St. Mary's during these stormy times? It was conceived in the spirit of Catholicism, and born in the atmosphere of the old Faith, but it was cradled in the new. Intended to be a bulwark of the Roman Faith in Scotland, it became instead a nursery of Protestantism and a training-ground of young and ardent Reformers. In the year 1579 it was definitely set apart for the teaching of Theology only, and a new course of study was outlined. The Bible became the chief text-book, and in the four years of the course (i.e., after Arts or Philosophy had been pursued at the other colleges) the Old Testament had to be read in Hebrew and Chaldaic, and the New Testament in Syriac and Greek. Further, ample time was to be devoted to Biblical exegesis and disputation.

Such was the prescribed course, which was exactly half as long as that demanded by the Roman Church, and it was fully carried out when Andrew Melville left the Principalship of Glasgow University to take over the Principalship of St. Mary's in which he had once been a student. Melville was one of the outstanding figures of the time. He had already served his apprenticeship in "cleaning-up" Glasgow University, and had assisted in the reconstruction of Aberdeen University, so he was ready for the work of reform that awaited him at St. Mary's. He applied himself to his task with energy and enthusiasm. For the Scottish Reformers were not slow to realise the value of education not

only in the universities but throughout the realm. "The democratic ideas of Presbyterianism, enforced by the practical necessity of trusting in the people" says Lindsay in his great work, *The History of the Reformation*, "made the Scotch Reformers pay great attention to education. All the leaders of the Reformation, whether in Germany, France or Holland, had felt the importance of enlightening the commonalty; but perhaps Scotland and Holland were the two countries where the attempt was the most successful." Melville made his influence felt almost immediately. Students were attracted to his college by his ability and his personality. Here is what one of them, his own nephew, James Melville, says in his "Diary":

Regents and scholars fell to the Languages, studeit thair Artes for the right use, and perusit Aristotle in his awin langage; so that *certatim et serio* they became bathe philosophers and theologes and acknawlegit a wonderfull transportation out of darknes into light.

But what impressed the students of St. Mary's and men far beyond the academic precincts of St. Andrews was Melville's superlative courage. It needed no ordinary courage for a man to pluck his king by the sleeve and call him "God's silly vassal". Not an inappropriate designation of him who was called "the wisest fool in Christendom!" And when the same king attempted to browbeat a deputation of Presbyterian divines whom he had summoned to Falkland Palace, Melville administered to him a rebuke which has become proverbial:

Sir, I tell you there are two kings in Scotland. There is King James, the Head of the Commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the Head of the Church, whose subject James the Sixth is, and in whose Kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member.

But Melville's outspokenness cost him his citizenship in his native land, for he was banished to the continent and died in Sedan, a Professor of Divinity, in his seventy-seventh year. It was he who fought and won the battle of Presbyterianism *versus* Episcopacy in Scotland. And McCrie's estimate of him still holds good, viz: that next to Knox, Scotland owes a greater debt to Melville than to any other individual.

Another doughty champion of Presbyterianism also became Principal of St. Mary's College in the person of Samuel Rutherford, not quite so commanding nor so courageous perhaps as Andrew Melville, but one whose name and fame were known throughout the land. While minister of Anwoth on the Solway, he wrote a treatise

against Arminianism entitled *Exercitationes Apologeticae*, which led to his banishment to Aberdeen. There he wrote most of his well-known "Letters", (still a classic in the realm of religious autobiography), private documents of an intensely religious nature to personal friends and never intended for publication. In 1643 he was appointed one of the eight Commissioners from Scotland to the famous Westminster Assembly of Divines, and while in London he wrote *Lex Rex* which, though it elicited a gibe from Milton, won for him a name as an authority on constitutional law. In 1647 he was appointed Principal of St. Mary's (he had already been two years there as Professor of Divinity), an office which he adorned. But it is perhaps as a preacher more than as a theologian or a controversialist that Rutherford was best known. "I went to St. Andrews", said an English merchant, "and there heard a little fair man; and he showed me the loveliness of Christ." And here is the pen-portrait of another contemporary: "he had a *skreigh* (screech) that I never heard the like. . . Many a time I thought he would have flown out the pulpit when he came to speak of Jesus Christ." Rutherford, too, barely missed martyrdom. His book, *Lex Rex*, produced such an effect on Charles II that he ordered that all copies of it should be burned at the Mercat Cross of Edinburgh and at the gate of the New College in St. Andrews. He was also deprived of his offices, and summoned to appear before Parliament on a charge of high treason. But when the messenger arrived, Rutherford was on his deathbed and sent back this reply:

Tell them that sent you that I have got summons already before a superior judge and judicatory, and I behove to answer my first summons; and ere your day come, I will be where few kings and great folks go.

Rutherford was one of those who signed the *Solemn League and Covenant*. He signed it again in St. Andrews in 1648, and this latter document may still be seen in the University Library there. It runs thus: "The subscription of the students of the New College, the masters going before. . . Samuel Rutherford, Principal, A. Colvill and James Wood, Professors of Divinity." Rutherford and Wood, two great teachers who kept their student habits to the end—Rutherford who rose so early and Wood who studied so late that, as Dr. Hay Fleming puts it, "they often met, the one going to his study, the other to his bed!"

Other great men occupied the professorial chairs of St. Mary's or filled the office of Principal, notably John Tulloch (at whose feet sat Edward Caird and Robert Story) in the 19th century, who

became Principal at the early age of thirty-one. He, also, brought lustre to St. Mary's by his work in Church and State, especially by his efforts in the cause of public education and by introducing a new spirit of reasonableness into the narrow unprogressiveness of the Theology of his time.

The contribution of St. Mary's College to Scotland, then, has been the two-fold part it played, first in the days of the Reformation on the side of Protestantism, and later on in defence of Presbyterianism. Further, during the four centuries of its existence St. Mary's has continued to send out year by year a stream of well-trained men for the ministry of the Church of Scotland at home and abroad. To-day, with an enlarged constituency, and with a full complement of Principal and six young and efficient Professors, drawn from both of the negotiating Churches that came together in the great Union of 1929, St. Mary's stands as one of the four Theological Colleges of the Church of Scotland, fully and finely equipped to render service in behalf of the oldest of all the sciences.

The college buildings have undergone alteration and modification during the four centuries, but externally they stand to-day very much as they stood a hundred years ago. On the outer, weather-worn walls may still be seen the arms and initials of founders and former Principals. On the mantelpiece of the College Hall may be seen the initials of the three founders:

"J. B. . . . D. B. . . . J. H. . . . 1537-1553"

And there also may be seen choice old furniture, pewter and silver plate, and the paintings of men who guided the destiny of the college in olden days. At the top of the building in a fine state of preservation is a "prophet's chamber", with praying-room, bed-recess and wardrobe complete, showing the rude quarters occupied by a student of three or four centuries ago. Also in the green quadrangle, beside an evergreen oak and an ancient sundial, stands a graceful hawthorn tree called "Mary's Thorn". Romantic Scots believe it was planted by the ill-starred Mary, Queen of Scots, who had considerable association with St. Andrews. Actually, there is no record of its age. But in spite of having been uprooted by a storm and nearly ravaged by disease, "Mary's Thorn" blooms to-day as fresh and fair as ever, a happy symbol of the college that has withstood the storm and stress of four centuries. For both college and tree we pray: "*Floreat in Saecula!*"