

**PRE-REFORMATION SCHOLARS IN
SCOTLAND IN THE XVITH CENTURY:
THEIR WRITINGS AND
THEIR PUBLIC SERVICES: WITH A
BIBLIOGRAPHY AND A LIST OF
GRADUATES FROM 1500 TO 1560**

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Pre-reformation scholars in Scotland in the XVIth century: their writings and their public services: with a bibliography and a list of graduates from 1500 to 1560 by W. Forbes-Leith

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W. FORBES-LEITH

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Pre-Reformation Scholars in Scotland in the XVIth Century

Their Writings and their Public Services

With a Bibliography and a List of Graduates from
1500 to 1560

By

W. Forbes-Leith, S.J.

"A list of the Scottish scholars driven from the land
at the Reformation for their attachment to the Roman
Catholic faith would form an exceedingly interesting
chapter of Scottish literary history."

SIR WILLIAM HAMILTON,
Discussions on Philosophy.

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CALIFORNIA

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INTRODUCTION

"THE Church in Scotland in the generations before the Reformation has been generally pictured as the blackest spot in Christendom;"¹ people sat in darkness while spiritual and intellectual stupor settled upon the Church.² It should, however, be borne in mind that no evidence has been adduced to prove this, and Mr. T. Brewer warns the student of this period of history that he will misunderstand it, if he starts his inquiry by regarding the Reformation as the creation of light to illuminate a previous period of darkness.³

The Scottish clergy were widely dispersed. They were seated for many centuries in the richest and fairest estates of Scotland, for which they were indebted both to the liberality of the people and to their own skill, perseverance, and industry. That in so large a body of men, discreditable members were to be found is likely enough. After years of anarchy and destructive wars, ignorant and unworthy men did find their way into the Church. That the ignorance of the Scottish clergy was either so crass or so general as some writers would have us believe is contrary to all analogy, and may be proved to be unsupported by impartial and contemporary evidence.

Let us confine our inquiry to the last decades of the existence of the ancient Church of Scotland from 1500 to 1560.

¹ "A picture in colours not all sombre could be painted." Herkless, *Hist. of Archbishops of St. Andrews*, i. 181.

² A. Lang, *Life of Knox*.

³ T. S. Brewer, *Henry VIII.*, vol. ii. p. 468.

From the outset we observe that higher education in Scotland was identified with the Catholic Church. It was so from the earliest ages. To deny such tradition would be hardly possible where four universities are of Catholic institution.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century Scotland was educationally well equipped. We have documentary evidence that grammar schools existed in connection with most of the cathedrals, abbeys, collegiate churches, principal burghs, and even in towns which have since sunk into obscurity. The schools of Montrose and Dumbarton, Perth and Aberdeen, were of some repute.¹ Grammar schools were instituted in such numbers that an Act of Parliament (1496) could make it, and did make it, compulsory for all persons of a certain social position to send their eldest sons to them, the object obviously being that the proprietors of the country should all be men of culture.²

"There is indeed excellent reason for believing that, with the exception of the Netherlands, no country in Europe was better provided than Scotland with schools for what was then primary and secondary education."³

That these various provisions for the education, not only of the clergy but also of the laity, met the educational needs of the time as far as circumstances would allow is the verdict of all historians, who view without prejudice the educational career of the Catholic Church.⁴

The natural result was an intellectual expansion which forms an epoch in Scottish history. "There is no more brilliant period in the history of Scotland than the quarter of a century during which James IV, occupied the throne."⁵

These evidences of the progress of the nation in James's reign are borne out by a report on Scotland prepared by

¹J. Grant, *Hist. of the Burgh Schools of Scotland*. Edgar, *Hist. of Education in Scotland*.

²Act of 1496.

³Hume Brown, *Life of Buchanan*, p. 12.

⁴Lord Bute, *Rectorial Address, St. Andrews, 1893*.

⁵Hume Brown, *Hist. of Scotland*, p. 305. T. H. Millar, *Hist. of Scottish Literature*, p. 46. Skelton, *Maitland of Lethington*, vol. i. p. 140.

the Spanish agent, de Ayala, which is confirmed by other reports of distinguished contemporaries.

The great scholar, Father James Tyrie, so much admired by Buchanan, referring to this period, says: "At this time there was in Scotland a considerable number of scholars well versed not only in scholastic theology but in the works of the Fathers, and indeed in every department of antiquity."¹

Thomas Bouchier, D.D., of Magdalen College, Oxford, and Doctor of the Sorbonne, says of the Scottish clergy: "It is wonderful how many men of learning and piety Scotland has produced. It is not necessary to enumerate the illustrious men whom the Scottish Church has produced either in former or in more recent times, for their names are too well known to need to be recorded here, and the troubles of their own country, by dispersing them into so many foreign lands, have made their virtues and their learning only the more widely known. It is a common remark that these men display not only the rarest piety, but acuteness of intellect truly wonderful, and literary knowledge which is beyond all praise."²

The English Ambassador, Sir R. Sadleir, who was so well acquainted with Scotland, was forced to admit that "the Churchmen were the only capable persons in the country to whom the government could be prudently entrusted. He hath met a great number of noblemen and gentlemen that be well given to the verity of Christ's Word and doctrine, but the noblemen be young. I see none among them that hath any such agility of wit, gravity, learning and experience, to take in hand the direction of things. So that the King is of force driven to use the bishops and clergy as ministers of the realm. They be the men of wit and policy; they be never out of the King's ear."³

The evidence of contemporary writers is confirmed by the *Bibliography of Pre-Reformation Scholars* and by the *List of Masters of Arts*. Both present in the most

¹ Report upon the State of Scotland, J. Stevenson, S.J., *Nau's Memoirs*.

² T. Bouchier, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Paris, 1582, p. 278.

³ Skelton, *Maitland of Lethington*, vol. i. p. 186.