

**THE LORD RECTORS
OF THE UNIVERSITIES
OF ABERDEEN**

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The Lord Rectors of the Universities of Aberdeen by J. Malcolm Bulloch

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J. MALCOLM BULLOCH

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THE
LORD RECTORS

OF THE
UNIVERSITIES OF ABERDEEN

BY

John
J. MALCOLM BULLOCH, M.A.

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ABERDEEN
D. WYLLIE & SON
1890

NOTE.

The nucleus of this sketch appeared as the Rectorial Number of *Alma Mater*, Aberdeen University magazine, November 26th, 1890. The first part, dealing with the Rectorship up till 1860, as the period in which the students lost and regained their right to elect the Rector, has been completely rewritten, and very much extended. The other parts have also been enlarged. The lists of Rectors—the first two of which appear for the first time in a correct form—are the work of Mr. P. J. Anderson, LL.B., who has rendered incalculable service in the whole sketch.

J. M. B.

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INTRODUCTORY.

THE Lord Rectorship in the four Scotch Universities—and more especially the mode of election in use in the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow, known as voting by Nations—is one of the most ancient academic institutions extant. It connects the Scotch University system with the twelfth century, forming a most striking link with the great French and Italian models on which that system is based. The Scotch Universities have gradually veered, and are even now veering further, from these models; but the Rectorship remains. During its history in Scotland, extending over four centuries, it too has changed. At times it has run the risk of losing its original significance, but to-day—speaking for Aberdeen University—it is nearer the model on which it is based than ever it has been before.

The original conception of the Rectorship was imbued with the democratic spirit on which the Italian and French Universities were formed. By that spirit the students had something to say in the government of the University. At first they did so by the overwhelming power of the Nations into which they were divided, according to their nationality. Gradually, the head of the Nations, the Rector, took up a more decided attitude, found his way into the professoriate, and became one of the highest officials in the University.

The Scotch Universities adopted the French and Italian system almost *in toto*, the Rectorship with it ; but that office was adopted only in theory. The Rector was still at the head of the University, but he represented studentdom no longer, inasmuch as he now was elected by the Professors. The rights of the students were not in all cases recognised till the passing of the Universities Act of 1858. The restoration, however, applied solely to the mere election. The Rectorship has since been a pure sinecure, the Rector being chosen almost invariably for his political or literary distinction. The blame, in this case, attaches to the students alone, who have nullified their rights, inasmuch as the Rectors have nearly always been absentees, seldom taking an active part in the University, their function being marked only by the delivery of an Address—the very function ignored by all Charters, Acts, and historic precedents.

The Rectorial Election in Aberdeen University in 1890 is a remarkable one from various points of view. It is the first election under the new Act of 1889. Then the students, for the time being at anyrate, have abandoned the system of the absentee Rector, and returned to the original conception of the Rector as a working official. It was high time that the original idea had been resuscitated, for under the Scotch Universities Act of 1889 the representation of students on the University Court, now the most important governing body in the University, has been reduced from one-third to one-seventh. Thus, now, if ever, the Rector, if he is really to be the spokesman of the undergraduates, should be a working official ; and, as head of the University Court, he gives

the students an important place in the government of the University. A further power has been conceded to the students in the provision that the Rector may consult them in Representative Council as to his Assessor. From this restored standpoint, therefore, it is very interesting to take a survey of the Rectorship in this University from its foundation.

The Rectorship will be found to divide itself naturally into three distinct periods, based on Acts of Parliament. These are—

(1.) Before 1860—The election of separate Rectors for King's College, 1494, and Marischal College, 1593.

(2.) 1860-1890—The elections in the united Colleges.

(3.) The election under the Scotch Universities Act of 1889.