

## CHAPTER XV

### A LAMP OF LEARNING—II

THE contribution made to Christian scholarship and education by the Celtic Church in Ireland in the heyday of its splendour well entitled it to be known as 'The Lamp of the West.' During the sixth and seventh centuries, when a liberal culture was discouraged on the Continent, it flourished in Ireland exceedingly, and a standard of education was reached there which a few Continental schools may have equalled but which none excelled.

The cultural attainments of the great Celtic monasteries in Ireland became world famous, and their names are bright and shining lights to this day in the story of Christian scholarship and evangelism. Clonard was founded in 520, Moville in 540, Clonmacnoise about 544, Clonfert in 556 or 557, and Banchor about 558.

The smallest of these had about fifty scholars each, and the largest (Clonard) is credibly said to have had no fewer than three thousand. They were great missionary centres as well as great seats of learning, and they sent forth a stream of scholars and missionaries all over Europe.

In them Latin was a living and a spoken language, and the study of Greek and Hebrew was also cultivated for the proper understanding of Scripture. In its study and knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, and also of the Latin classics and of astronomy, in its adoption of a textbook of secular education, and in its use of dialectics in theological discussion, the Celtic Church was educa-

tionally in advance of its Roman sister on the Continent. The study of Scripture, however, was its main concern, and the transcribing of Scripture its crowning glory. Surviving specimens of missals and psalters, with their illuminated lettering, transcribed by the students of those ancient Celtic monasteries, reveal a technical skill and a quality of artistic beauty which only cultured minds as well as deft and delicate hands could achieve. With such attainments in scholarship, art, and religious devotion we can understand how during those darkened centuries the Celtic Church in Ireland came to be called 'The Lamp of the West.'

It was from this lamp that there was first kindled in Scotland that passion for learning which, inflamed afresh by the Renaissance and the Reformation, in due time gave her a foremost place in education among the nations of the world. Of all the great scholars, evangelists, and missionary statesmen trained and sent forth by the Irish Celtic Church, St. Columba stands pre-eminent. His monastery at Iona, with its school and other features planned on the Irish model, became famous throughout Christendom. In particular it set up a standard of education and scholarship in the Scottish Church which persisted long after Iona had passed away and the Columban tradition had become only a dim reflection of its pristine splendour, tenaciously lingering on in a few surviving religious centres.

We have only glimpses of the subjects and methods of educational study and discipline in Iona, but these reveal the supreme importance attached to learning and the zealous devotion with which it was pursued. St. Columba himself was an eager and assiduous student of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments being available in the Vulgate translation ; and Bible study

in the Latin tongue formed the foundation of the curriculum. A very practical part of this study consisted in transcribing the Scriptures. With St. Columba himself this work was a passion. He is said to have transcribed with his own hand no fewer than three hundred copies of the New Testament, and so skilful did he become that his manuscripts were masterpieces of beauty and accuracy. So exact was his knowledge and so keen his eye that he could detect in a moment the slightest slip in the work of his pupils ; and so celebrated did the school become for its work in this department that learned Irish scholars applied to Iona for assistants.

The writings of the early Church Fathers had also a place in the regular curriculum, as well as the secular textbooks and the Latin classical literature commonly used in Irish colleges and schools. It was a studious and disciplined life, and much of its discipline took the form of regular religious exercises, and the due and reverent observance of the ordinances of the Faith. Singing was ever a conspicuous feature of worship, and was encouraged and fostered by St. Columba, himself the possessor of a glorious speaking and singing voice. A poet also, with the deep feeling, the glowing imagination, and the religious ardour of the Celtic spirit at its best, he compiled a book of hymns for the week's services, and trained a body of singers (cantores) to lead the brethren in their devotions. Nor was manual instruction omitted. In a self-contained and self-supporting community knowledge of all kinds of handicrafts and skill in their application were essential to its well-being and to the successful prosecution of its main enterprise ; and so in Iona, as in all monastic institutions, the brethren were trained in farming and gardening, masonry and carpentry, weaving and

leather work, with the additional accomplishments of boat-building, fishing, and sailing the western seas.

Of those engaged in teaching the chief was the Ferleighinn, Reader and chief Scribe and usually also Librarian, with charge of the books and manuscripts. The office of Ferleighinn was invested with a dignity which indicates the high place assigned to education ; and there are records which go to show that some of these men of scholarly gift were not only teachers and transcribers but authors in their own right. Next to the Ferleighinn was the Anmchara—soul-friend or confessor—to whom the brethren came not only to unburden their souls but to seek advice and guidance, to propound their doubts and difficulties and to discuss knotty points in their studies with a measure of familiarity and freedom. Finally there was the Disertach, who had charge of the huts or cells in lonely parts of the island, to which the brethren retired for meditation and prayer. These periods of retreat were doubtless to some extent voluntary, but they were also part of the regular spiritual discipline of the monastery ; and the Disertach in charge of these solitary shrines and of those who resorted to them was probably an expert in the technique of contemplation, a factor of the highest value in the culture of the spiritual life.

We can picture the ' scologs ' or pupils, then, in Iona and in all the Columban schools, gathering round the Ferleighinn to hear him read, and to receive instruction in Bible-study and in other branches of sacred and secular learning ; or sitting before their writing-boards in the scriptorium plying quill and brush in transcribing missals and copies of the Scriptures. In Iona itself their ambition would be fired by the master-pieces of St. Columba, as they watched him at work

through the open door of the ' little hut ' which was his own study or workroom, or as he inspected their efforts or worked along with them in the scriptorium. The scologs who attended the Columban schools were not always or only the novices and other members of the community. Sometimes they were the sons of chiefs who came to be educated, sometimes pilgrims who were attracted by the fame of the school, and sometimes even vassals and attendants who rendered some form of humble service. Converts, too, with a view to baptism and church membership, would require to be taught at least the rudiments of the Faith ; and the more promising of these would be encouraged to continue their studies as likely candidates for the offices of the Church.

The full significance of this picture lies in the fact that in an amazingly short time similar schools of Christian learning were founded over a large part of North Britain and far beyond its southern border. Columban missionaries carried their zeal for scholarship, as well as for the Gospel, deep into Northumbria and as far south as the Thames. Wherever a Columban settlement was established it became a centre of education on the same lines as the school at Iona. Even before St. Columba's death the country north of the Forth and Clyde, and the Western Isles, were studded with these settlements. The highest number at which they have been estimated is three hundred, but, even if that be an exaggeration, they were sufficiently numerous, throughout the period of the Danish invasions, to keep the fires of the Faith, however damped down, alight on their altars, and the light of Christian learning, however dim, shining here and there in a darkened land.

When the darkness lifted towards the end of the tenth century the Scottish Church (*Ecclesia Scoticana*), with an episcopal form of government, had been in existence for over a hundred years ; but it had developed from the Columban Church, and continued to maintain the characteristic forms of Columban practice and piety. Reference has already been made (*vide* Chapter VII) to the contribution of the Keledei or Culdees to the emergence of the parish system. As heirs of the Columban or Celtic tradition, and occupying many of the original Columban settlements, they carried on the ministry of worship, education, and evangelism characteristic of the Columban order. With them, as in the Celtic Church generally, the work of education had a central place. In the *Metrical Rule of the Keledei*, preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, and ascribed to St. Carthach of Lismore, who died in 636, 'labour for the illiterate, guided by pious clerics,' is set down as one of their regular duties ; and there is other evidence that methodical instruction was given, and improvements effected by them in educational method and practice. In addition to writing in Latin, for example, writing in the vernacular also came into vogue, and preaching in the vernacular seems to have been common. Old books of the Picts and charters in the Scottish idiom also afford evidence of an advance in educational method, and suggest that education itself was being popularized. The famous *Book of Deer*, written not later than the ninth century, has been overwritten with Gaelic records belonging to the end of the eleventh century, but gives evidence that at the close of the Culdee period both Gaelic and Latin were the official languages of the Culdee monks of Buchan ; and the so-called 'Culdee Library of St. Serf's,' at

St. Andrews, dating from about 1150, even although it may not have been originally a Culdee collection, indicates the kind of education given by the Church at that date.

In the absence of definite and detailed information, it can only be conjectured, but with a high degree of certainty, that, when the Celtic Church was reformed by Queen Margaret and her sons, and gradually became Romanized, such education as had hitherto been provided in the Culdee settlements was continued. Between 1100 and 1150 nine of the principal Culdee centres became episcopal sees, where the need of education, if only for the efficient staffing of the fast-developing Church, would be greatly increased. In addition, during the next hundred years a hundred monasteries at least were founded and richly endowed, forming a network which covered the whole land. As every monastery was an educational centre, some providing training only for their own novices but others lay instruction as well, and as they all vied with each other in seeking their own aggrandizement, the facilities for education were greatly increased. Indeed, so lavish was the provision made for them that both the episcopal and the parochial development of the Church was stunted and retarded. In every parish, however, at least catechetical instruction would be given; and, as schools were also carried on in some parish churches, the opportunities for learning during that period had become more widely available.

The effect of this enhanced educational activity was revealed in course of time in the numbers of Scottish students who went to pursue their studies in English and Continental universities. Not only must they have been sufficiently grounded to take advantage of these

studies, but the love of learning must have been sufficiently strong to move them to undertake this adventure, as many of them did, on the slenderest resources. Only by begging their way, and by engaging in any kind of employment, however humble, by which they could earn an honest penny, did a considerable proportion of them achieve their ambition.

By the middle of the thirteenth century their numbers at Oxford University must have been considerable, as at that time turbulent Scottish students were giving trouble to the authorities. About 1263 John Balliol provided an endowment for the maintenance of 'certain poor scholars of the House of Balliol'; and in 1282 his widow, the Lady Devorgilla, founded a house to be a settled lodging for Scottish students. This Scottish foundation afterwards developed into Balliol College, which maintains a strong Scottish connection to this day. In 1365 no fewer than eighty-one Scottish students received passports or safe-conducts entitling them to study at Oxford. The special attraction of Oxford at that time may have been the fame of John Wyclif the Reformer, who became Master of Balliol in 1360. Under his influence Oxford 'seethed with Lollardy'; and as the Scottish students adhered to the *factio borealis* which supported his views, they must have brought back with them to Scotland the first spores of the Reformation.

A similar evidence of the presence of Scottish students even further afield is the foundation in 1325 of the Scots College at Paris University. Bishop David of Moray, in order to maintain students from his own diocese at this Continental seat of learning, which at that time was rapidly springing into fame, purchased lands in the suburbs of Paris, the revenues from which went to

provide bursaries for the 'Moray loons' of that far-off day. That such provision was made for the students from one Scottish diocese, and that not one of the most populous or important, is significant of their numbers; and that the Scots College grew into a famous seat of learning, producing no less brilliant and eminent a scholar than Duns Scotus, bears eloquent testimony to the distinction which it attained.

It was not private donors alone, however, like the Lady Devorgilla, nor churchmen keen on education like the good Bishop David, who thus furthered the interests of Scottish students abroad. The parish churches of Scotland were laid under contribution for the same end; and if there were fewer parish schools than there might otherwise have been, and if many parishes had to go even without religious ordinances, the sacrifices which they were called upon to make were perhaps not altogether in vain. Parish revenues were always the prey of the more powerful ecclesiastical authorities, and during the fourteenth century they were appropriated on a large scale to secure a university education for students in training for the Church.

The Rector of Douglas, for example, was allowed to draw the stipend while he studied for three years at a university. A medical graduate and scholar of theology at the University of Paris was maintained by the emoluments of a canonry in Glasgow Cathedral and the benefice of a neighbouring parish. Another student at Paris also drew a double stipend, as vicar both of Musselburgh and of Rosemarkie. Not only did individuals petition for such benefices to enable them to prosecute their university studies, but universities themselves made similar applications for their students as a matter of course. In a single year, 1378,

the Universities of Paris, Montpellier, and Orleans applied between them for the livings of no fewer than twenty-seven Scottish parishes, a figure which indicates how widespread the practice was, and how penalizing to Scottish parochial life both on its religious and on its educational side.

This fact, together with the numbers of Scottish students who had to seek a university education either in England or on the Continent, may have had its own weight in moving Scottish churchmen to aspire to a university of their own. In addition the first faint stirrings of the Renaissance, which had by this time reached Scotland, and the religious awakening under Wyclif in England which had come even nearer home with its rousing challenge to the doctrine as well as the practice of the Church, must have emphasized the necessity of a higher standard as well as a completer system of education. Church questions were being fiercely agitated at Oxford, with Scottish students taking an active share in the controversy. Henry Wardlaw was a student at Oxford at this time, and when he became Bishop of St. Andrews in 1402 set himself forthwith to organize education there on university lines. St. Andrews had long been the chief school of Scottish learning, and towards 1400 was in possession of special educational resources, members even of the royal family being enrolled as pupils from time to time. By 1413 permission was granted by the Pope 'to found a university of study for the faculties of theology, canon and civil law, medicine, and the liberal arts'; and so the first of the Scottish Universities came into being. Modelled on the University of Paris, it was enlarged and enriched in equipment during the next century and a quarter by the erection of three additional colleges—St. Sal-

vator's, St. Leonard's, and St. Mary's—each with its constitution, its officials, its teachers, and its curriculum defined.

The founding of St. Andrews University was a notable event for Scotland and for Scottish education, and the occasion was celebrated with a dignity and splendour which signalized its national and historic importance. The opening day was hailed 'by the ringing of bells from the steeples and the tumultuous joy of all classes of the inhabitants.' Church dignitaries in their richest canonicals, accompanied by no fewer than four hundred clerics besides novices and lay-brothers, and escorted by an immense concourse of spectators, moved in procession to the cathedral, where they gave thanks to God in gratitude and adoration; and when High Mass had been celebrated the remainder of the day was devoted to mirth and festivity. It is a glowing and colourful picture, and it bears the stamp of that genuine enthusiasm for learning which was characteristic of the age; but it should not be forgotten that it was also the incandescence of that tiny flame of scholarship which had been kindled in a humble Celtic shrine hundreds of years before.

The founding of Glasgow University by Bishop Turnbull in 1450 on the model of the University of Bologna, and of Aberdeen University by Bishop Elphinstone in 1494, with a constitution which copied that of Glasgow, provided two other landmarks in a century which shines out above all others in its achievements for Scottish education. Both of these university seats had already been centres of a stirring intellectual life and a contagious educational activity. There were well-established schools in Glasgow and its neighbourhood—at Paisley, Renfrew, Dumbarton, and Ayr. It

was at Dumbarton that George Buchanan, Scotland's finest scholar of the Renaissance, received his first inspiration to learning; while the schools of Aberdeen were outstanding even at that time, with scholars to their credit such as Barbour and Fordoun who had already made their name in literature. Similar schools at Dundee, Perth, Dumfries, and Peebles suggest a fairly widespread system in the larger towns. Perth grammar school at the end of the fifteenth century is said to have been attended by over three hundred boys. Collegiate churches, too, forty of which had been erected within the century, provided 'sang schules' for their boy choristers, at which they received instruction in subjects other than music. Even 'dame-schools' were to be found in Edinburgh.

All this signifies an intellectual awakening which was spreading rapidly, and finding suitable means of expression. Perhaps the most significant feature in the situation was the active and energetic share taken by laymen in educational development. There were few burghs of any importance which did not have schools of their own, mostly of the grammar-school type, built and maintained by the burgesses themselves. The Church supplied the teachers, all of whom were clerics, whose appointment and control it kept in its own hands. On this point there was a conflict, entirely natural in the circumstances, between the Church and the burghs, which agitated long and unavailingly for the management of their own schools. It was only when education was taken over by the Reformers, and organized by them on popular lines and on a national scale, that laymen as such were given a share in educational administration.

Before passing to the educational ideals and achieve-

ments of the Reformers, and notably to the place in their educational system of the parish church and the parish school, one significant fact deserves to be recorded, which sums up and rounds off the service which the old Church rendered to Scottish education. By an Act of Parliament in 1496 it was ordained, under a penalty of £20, that 'all barons and freeholders of substance should send their eldest sons at the age of eight or nine to the grammar schools, till they be completely founded and have perfect Latin, and thereafter for three years to the schools of art and law.' True, this Act applied only to the eldest sons of the nobility and gentry; but it affords further evidence of what on other grounds we have seen to be probable, namely, that a fairly high standard of education had been established, and was available, if only to the more privileged classes, on a nation-wide scale.

That in itself was no mean achievement, and if it be true, as Dr. Thomas Chalmers held, that no mightier accession could be made to the Christian good of a country than a Christianized university, the pre-Reformation Church in Scotland, in this respect at least, served the nation well. A Church which, despite its lamentable moral and spiritual record founded three out of the four Scottish universities and produced men of the intellectual eminence of Hector Boece, John Major, and George Buchanan, not to speak of the Reformers themselves, achieved in the field of Christian culture a record of which it need not be ashamed.