

MY MEMORIES OF SCOTLAND*

A. M. GORDON

ANYONE speaking to a Saint Andrew's Society has a wide choice of subjects. He might try to describe the beauty of Scottish scenery, both Highland and Lowland. He might speak of the various races—ethnic groups as the ultra-scientific say—that make up the population of Scotland. He might delve into church history and tell how Saint Ninian in the year 397 founded the Christian Church in what is now Scotland; how Ninian and his disciples carried the gospel through south, east and north; and how in the year 563 Saint Columba and his band landed in Iona and preached in the western Highlands and islands. He might extol the courage of the Scottish people as fighters, and deplore the feuds that they had among themselves. He might describe modern industries in Scotland, the iron-works and shipping and ship-building of Glasgow and the Clyde, the coal-mining of Lanark and Fifeshire, the jute and marmalade—making of Dundee, the fishing of Aberdeen. He might give instances of Scottish humor. He might read or recite the prose or verse of Scottish writers. He might attempt to sing the Scottish songs in broad Scots, or in Gaelic. He might speak of the part that Scotsmen and their descendants are playing in the present war. Or he might let himself go in the effort to do justice to the greatness, the goodness, and the glory, of the land of our fathers. But if he was wise, he would bear in mind the comment of a cynical Englishman, that of all the needless prayers ever offered the most needless was the prayer of the Scot,—“Lord gie us a guid conceit o' ourselves.”

With your permission, I shall follow in part the line that I followed on Saint Andrew's Day two years ago in Saint John, and say a little about the Scottish Universities. I choose this topic because I had both Arts and Divinity in the University of Edinburgh. If you care to ask any questions I shall gladly try to answer them.

* * * * *

Of the four Scottish Universities, those of Saint Andrews, Glasgow and Aberdeen were founded before the Reformation. Thirty-three years ago Saint Andrew's University, the oldest of the four, celebrated its 500th Anniversary. Edinburgh University alone was founded after the Reformation.

* An address to St. Andrew's Society, Fredericton, on St. Andrew's Day, 1944.

All four differ in several ways from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and in some ways from those in Canada. There are not proctors prowling the streets to see that a student is in his quarters by a certain hour in the evening. If a man wants to go to the dogs or to the devil, he is free to do so. There is no official to stop him. In my time there were few residences for students. Most of us lived in lodgings or "digs". We rented our room or rooms from the landlady, and she gave us whatever food we wanted or could pay for. One could live well on a total of 20 shillings a week. Many men lived on less than that. Some had lived on very much less. In the Faculty of Arts, Edinburgh, the first Monday in February was, and I suppose still is, a holiday, called "Meal Monday", because it was originally given to allow students to go home and renew their supply of oatmeal. For a couple of sessions I lived alone. After that I found it more convenient to live with three other men. The four of us rented a flat from the landlady, and she catered for us. We had our meals together. Two of us used one sitting room and a double bedroom. The other two used the other sitting room and the other double bedroom. In my last year in Divinity I lived most agreeably with eleven other men in the newly established Divinity Residence in George Square.

A medical student living near me one session was an ardent golfer. Golf interested him more than medicine. He played the round of 18 holes on the Braid Hills almost every work-day. Then the spring examinations grew near. If he failed in them, he was afraid to face his father. What was he to do? By a happy accident he sprained his right thumb a week before examinations were to begin. Now he could not write his papers. Hurrah! But, without his knowledge, a fellow-student petitioned the Senate to allow him to dictate his answers. Two days before the examinations he received the official permission. You can imagine how he felt about it.

Another little incident, which happened before my time, shows how ready students are to help one another. One evening a man—rightly or wrongly a male student was always called a man—attended a smoking concert. Either the tobacco was too strong for him or he smoked too much, for at the end of the entertainment he could neither find his way to his "digs", nor go there under his own steam. Two obliging fellow students undertook to assist him. They did not want to encounter the wrath of the landlady. So they conceived the brilliant plan of standing him up against the door, ringing the bell, and then

vanishing. The idea was that when the landlady opened the door, their friend would fall flat on the floor and she could see him to his bed. But somehow they could not make him stand up against the door. They tried, but he always fell down. The night was dark. The policeman on the beat heard the repeated flop-flop. Guided by the sound, he went to investigate. When he turned his bull's eye on the trio, he found that the two would-be helpers had all the time been trying to stand their friend on his head!

* * * * *

I find it hard to realize that I entered Edinburgh University as long ago as the autumn of 1892. Before that time every candidate for the degree of Master of Arts was required to take seven fixed subjects, divided into three groups. The first group consisted of Latin and Greek, the second of Mathematics and Physics (called Natural Philosophy), the third of Logic and Metaphysics, Moral Philosophy and English. In arranging the curriculum, the motto of the Universities evidently was *Non Multa, sed Multum*,—not a smattering of many subjects, but the knowledge of a few. A student usually took one group every year, and gave all his time of study to it.

If I remember rightly, it was in 1892 that the "New Regulations" for the Scottish Universities came into force. They allowed a fairly wide choice of Arts subjects, but there must be seven in all. Like many other students, I kept to the old seven. The pass classes, as contrasted with the honour classes, were large, anywhere from 120 to 160 men. With classes of that size the lecture system, not the tutorial system, was the only one possible. A student seldom had anyone to coach him. He must swim or sink. If he could not swim, he sank. There were no life savers to plunge in and save him. The professor did not attempt to cover in class all the work set for the degree. Even if a man was foolish enough to take down in shorthand all the professor said, he would find out that he still had to do the greater part of the necessary reading for himself. There was no spoon feeding. In Latin and Greek, for instance, perhaps a third of the books set for the degree would be read in class, and some books read in class were not among those set for the degree.

A student attended classes for two, or at most three, hours a day. But he had to spend far more time than that in private reading and study, if he was to make a decent showing in class, and finally to get his degree. The professor of one of the old

seven Arts subjects seldom knew more than a few of his students personally. For Divinity it was different, because the classes were very much smaller. It would be an exaggeration to say that between the Arts and Medical professor and the bulk of his students there was a great gulf fixed. But certainly there was not the intimacy that happily exists in many Canadian colleges.

Robert Louis Stevenson in *An Edinburgh Eleven* gives an inimitable picture of the professors of the old seven Arts subjects as they were in his day. Four of them still flourished in my time. Chrystal, in Mathematics, was a wonder. He spent the greater part of the hour writing on the blackboard, back to the class. Yet he kept perfect order.

Stevenson tells the familiar story of the man who dropped a marble in his class room. It rolled down slowly, step by step, until it stopped at Chrystal's feet. Then Chrystal turned to the class, and said "Will the gentleman at the end of the second back bench, who dropped the marble, come and pick it up?" While going on with the demonstration, he had counted the steps. The shame-faced gentleman came and retrieved his marble. Whether this incident happened or not, it may quite well have happened. No man took liberties with Chrystal.

Tait, in Natural Philosophy, was the most lucid lecturer I ever heard. No experiment in Physics ever failed. Tait made everything so clear that to some men it seemed almost childishly simple. But somehow the simplicity vanished when they tried to read "T and T"—Thomson and Tait's *Elements of Natural Philosophy*, for themselves. If that book—"The student's first glimpse of Hades" Stevenson called it—contained merely the elements, what must the full size "Treatise" be?

Calderwood, in Moral Philosophy, had his own way of teaching. Although I liked his subject, I don't think that his way of teaching was equal to that of the other philosophical professor, Andrew Seth.

Masson, in English Literature, was easily the most popular of the Arts professors. His class, held at 4 p.m., was the one to which students took visitors to show them what a Scottish University was like. We all know Masson's high standing as a scholar and writer. No one thought of criticizing him for repeating the same lectures year after year. Some men found that it saved them the trouble of taking notes, because they were lucky enough to possess the notes taken—it was said—by their fathers. Masson achieved the impossible. He gave his lectures

with as much vim and fire as if he had just written them. One day, when we knew that he was to lecture on Ben Jonson, we arranged beforehand that we should all join him in reciting the words carved on Ben Jonson's tombstone in Westminster Abbey. So when he came to the inscription we all chanted in unison with him "O Rare Ben Jonson". Far from being offended, as some people might have been, Masson beamed on us, and then, when the applause died down, went on with his lecture.

It was a treat to hear him recite poetry. Every year he would recite Mark Antony's oration on Julius Caesar. When he came to the words, "I am no orator, as Brutus is," he would stop and explain "Gentlemen, that is consummate oratory." The applause that followed was deafening.

* * * * *

Women students entered the Scottish Universities along with the "New Regulations". At first there were few—none but the pick of the girls' schools. It was said that the first bevy of them had been escorted by chaperones, but when the chaperones found that the men were quite harmless, they allowed the girls to come by themselves.

At that time the Scottish Universities were not matrimonial agencies, whatever they may be now. Some of those first women students, eager seekers after truth, might be described as "bluestockings". That was not true of them all, but certainly the pure desire for learning was what drew the first women students. It must have needed no little determination for one lone woman to attend the Greek class along with 140 men.

The women students attended the same Arts classes as the men. Otherwise the two sexes were as separate as if they had lived on different planets. The women—we never referred to them as girls—had their own front bench in the class room. They came in by themselves and went out by themselves. No one ever saw a man and a woman talking to each other in class room or quadrangle. The women had their own separate reading-room in the library; and they had their own exclusive debating society. It was rumored that one evening, in solemn conclave, they debated the question, "What can we do to elevate the tone of the men students?" To our regret, we never heard or saw any result.

* * * * *

The Divinity Faculties of the Church of Scotland were, and still are, an integral part of the Universities.

In my time the outstanding man in Divinity at Edinburgh University was Professor Robert Flint. Kennedy in Hebrew was a thorough scholar, an excellent teacher and a valued friend. Whatever the other two Divinity professors may have known, we did not learn very much from them. But I remember that one of them on our class certificates describes a fellow student named Wallace and me as "attractive students". The only explanation that we could find for this unusual epithet was that we have been careful to call at his house after being there one evening at dinner.

Every year in Divinity we had to submit a homily, a lecture or a popular sermon to Flint, and afterward to give it or part of it in class. Flint then made his comment. "A good useful discourse," was fairly high praise. Divinity students went now and then to country parishes, to speak on behalf of the Students' Missionary Society. Occasionally on Sunday a student preached in the "mission" in the Pleasance. It often happened that his whole stock-in-trade consisted of one or two sermons, for even Divinity students seldom preached. A fellow student of my father's at Glasgow University once did the unusual and went to preach in a country parish. After the regular morning service, he learned to his horror that an afternoon service would be held two hours later. He had only the one sermon. He had no time to prepare another. Most men would have been "stumped". Not so this man. In the afternoon, beginning he said, "I understand that some people thought that my sermon this morning was not quite sound. It would be very serious for me to be accused of heresy. So, if you will allow me, I shall repeat my morning sermon, and you can judge for yourself." The people listened with all their ears, but detected no heresy, and the resourceful student got away with it.

Every autumn, before the University Session began, we were examined by Presbytery. This examination, partly oral, partly written, was no mere form. One needed three or four weeks of study to prepare for it.

After we had finished the prescribed courses of study in Arts and Divinity, six or seven years in all, we appeared before the Presbytery for license. Every student had to submit what was most appropriately termed a "Trial Sermon". Then he was called on to deliver it. When he was half or less than half-way through, the Moderator would rise and ask, "Does any member of the Presbytery wish to hear any more?" No one wished to

hear any more, so the Moderator would turn to the candidate and say, "Thank you Mr.———. That will do." After that ordeal, if the Presbytery was satisfied with the candidate's character and attainments, he was licensed to preach, and was enrolled in the Church as a probationer. Usually a probationer served at least a couple of years as an assistant, before he was called to a parish and ordained.

From what I have said you might infer that student life in Scotland was "all work and no play". It was not so. I was fortunate in having many hospitable friends in Edinburgh, and I spent many a pleasant evening with them. Among the professors, Seth and Kennedy were the kindest of hosts. In the University itself, the election by the students, every third year, of the Lord Rector, was the occasion for a keen contest and lots of fun. But there was not the social life in Edinburgh University that there was in the smaller University of St. Andrews, or that there is in many Canadian Colleges and Universities. Students' dances, as far as I ever heard, were unknown.

The winter session lasted from October until April. In some subjects there was a summer session, lasting a couple of months. But students in Arts and Divinity were not required to attend. Few of them were able to get what is called "gainful employment" in summer. The result was that most of them were left free to spend the summer months as they saw fit.

I could talk to you for an hour about the delightful holidays that I spent with relatives and friends, and about trips that I made in the Highlands and Lowlands, by boat, rail or bicycle, or on foot, during the summer months. But time fails me.

Again, gentlemen, I thank you for inviting me to speak and for hearing me so patiently.