

Samuel Rutherford and His Letters.

DURING the stern Covenanting Days, a race of godly warriors was born in the Church of Scotland; men who, "understanding the times," buckled on their armour and fought for the Faith, and for Liberty to hold that Faith, against ecclesiastical tyranny and oppression. Among these "men of renown" no name is more honoured, no memory more fragrant than that of Samuel Rutherford. The Church of Christ will indeed be poorer, if she ever allows herself to forget the nobility of Rutherford's character, or the literary and spiritual charm of his "Letters." I fear, however, that in our day Rutherford is not so well known as he deserves to be, and I am afraid his matchless correspondence is but little read. It is with the hope that I may stimulate some reader to study this good man's history and to read his famous "Letters" that I write this article.

Samuel Rutherford was born in the year 1600, in the Parish of Nisbet, near Jedburgh. His parents were respectable middle-class folk, and with true Scottish wisdom they gave their son a sound education, first at Jedburgh, from whence owing to his outstanding capabilities he entered the University of Edinburgh as a student in 1617. At the close of his fourth session he graduated Master of Arts, and only two years after "Maister Samuel Rutherford" was appointed Professor of Latin in the University. After honourable service in his "alma mater," the inhabitants of the rural Parish of Anwoth, near Gatehouse, invited him to become their Pastor. This invitation was largely the result of the strong recommendation of Gordon of Kenmure, whose wife, Lady Kenmure, became one of Rutherford's constant correspondents, and to whom many of his sublimest "Letters" were sent.

It must be remembered that long before the death of James I in 1625, the Scottish Church, though governed by bishops, was continually asserting its independence, and strongly inclined to a Presbyterian form of government! Rutherford's appointment to Anwoth in 1627 shows us how irregular and uncertain ecclesiastical affairs were in Scotland at that time, for he became the minister of that parish "without any engagement from the Bishop," yet

though irregular never was ministry more useful or more blessed. How certain honoured names are linked to certain places for all time, Augustine to Hippo, Baxter to Kidderminster, Herbert to Bemerton, Cowper to Olney, and Rutherford to Anwoth. This rustic Parish of Anwoth was brought into prominence and made familiar as a household word, by the fact that Rutherford ministered there for nine years. The ruins of the old church are still visited by occasional pilgrims, but no stone remains of Bush-o Bield, the Home in which so many sought out Rutherford for advice and instruction in spiritual matters.

What "seasons of refreshing" were granted within those church walls, "the hungry sheep looked up," and in this case were well fed; "saints were built up on their most holy faith," sinners were brought in penitence to Christ's feet, nor is this to be wondered at, for Rutherford's sermons were full of Christ, as revealed in all His attributes of grace and love.

It was the fame of these Anwoth sermons that is said to have drawn aside the learned and saintly Archbishop Ussher, when on his way from England to Armagh. The Archbishop arrived at Rutherford's manse in simple garb, and without announcing who he was, asked lodging for the night. There was, however, that in Ussher's manner and still more in his prayers (overheard by his host) which told Rutherford that his guest was not quite what he appeared to be, so at his wish Ussher revealed himself. On that memorable Sabbath morning the Archbishop occupied Rutherford's pulpit, and preached a striking sermon from the words "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Surely on that day Prelate and Presbyter "ascended together the Delectable Mountains, and breathed the bracing air of Immanuel's Land," to use Rutherford's own language. How differently would the turbulent history of those days of Scottish Church have read, had there been more bishops who showed the beautiful spirit of Ussher or of Leighton.

There is another story about Rutherford's ministry at Anwoth which we preachers of to-day may well remember. An English merchant visited Scotland and heard three famous Scottish presbyters, and thus described his experience. "At St. Andrew's I heard Blair, who showed me the majesty of God; at Irvine I heard Dickson, who revealed to me the sinfulness of my own heart;

at Anwoth I heard a little fair man, named Rutherford, and he showed me the loveliness of Christ."

The real secret of the extraordinary influence this man of God exercised was the undoubted fact that his "life was hid with Christ in God," his prayer-life, though not paraded before his people, was known to them all; and the victories he won in his own spiritual life, and the deep teaching he was able to give to his people were the result of those solitary hours of enraptured communion when Rutherford spoke face to face with his God, "as a man speaketh unto his friend."

He rose daily at a very early hour, and he was often seen, Bible in hand, pacing up and down a leafy avenue which to this day bears the name of "Rutherford's Walk." It might be supposed by those whose acquaintance with Rutherford is slight that he was very unpractical and transcendental in his method of life; but this is a great mistake. His days were busy, he was ever full of good works, he was generous in almsgiving, wise in counsel, always an enthusiast in the cause of religion, and (what is remarkable in those days) very rarely showing the spirit of the fanatic. At times he could write hard things, but in reading these we must remember that he was sorely provoked, and Christian polemics were often tainted then (as now) with a spirit of bitterness and intolerance; so even "the seraphic Rutherford" on rare occasions "spake unadvisedly with his lips." These sterner passages of his writings show us that he was not a man of weak character, who could only feed his flock on spiritual sweetmeats or sickly sentimentality. His "Sermons" and his "Letters" are so often couched in imagery and language that is almost Oriental in its richness and gorgeousness, and are so often full of emotional appeal that it is well to remember his strength of character, his readiness to suffer for the faith, his virility, his learning and his strong common sense, these latter characteristics checking and giving balance to the former. It was a Scotchman, a son of the sober, cultured, Northern Church, who frequently drew his similes and aspirations from the Canticles, and who loved to speak of his Saviour as "My Beloved," "the chiefest among ten thousand," and "the altogether lovely One." Such was the man who drew crowds to Anwoth's humble village church, and who gathered around him a congregation of enlightened and devoted souls.

But after nine years, the happy ministerial bond between this remarkable Pastor and his very interesting people was to be severed. A new bishop, one Sydserf, had lately been appointed over the Diocese of Galloway; and he, arrogant and overbearing, looked with a jealous eye on the good work that Rutherford had accomplished. So Sydserf summoned him to appear before the High Commission Court at Wigtown on a charge of Nonconformity, and there deprived him of his ministerial office. Not satisfied with this, the Bishop summoned him to appear at the High Commission Court in Edinburgh, charging him with treason and with having written a book against Arminianism. As a result of this persecution, Rutherford was deposed from his charge, forbidden to officiate in any part of Scotland, and sent to Aberdeen (Aug. 16, 1636) to be confined there during the king's pleasure. In the grey northern city he was an exile, no pulpit was open to him, and all looked askance at him as "a banished minister." The Arminian divines challenged him to controversy, but they found that he was more than a match for them in argument; and though silenced as to preaching his pen was unusually busy during the sad eighteen months spent as the Lord's prisoner far from his "beloved Anwoth"! Many of his famous "Letters" were written during this period of enforced silence, and in writing these he was unconsciously ministering to a far larger congregation than his "little flock" among the mountains of Galloway, nay, through those golden pages he ministers still. Dr. Andrew Thomson, in his interesting memoir, to which I am much indebted, says: "Rutherford's Master sent him into exile to write letters." "When Rutherford was banished to Aberdeen and forbidden to preach, his writing-desk was perhaps the most effective and widely resounding pulpit in Christendom."

It is interesting to notice how much of earth's noblest literature has reached us in the form of epistolary correspondence. How thankful we are for St. Paul's Epistles, the Church has feasted on those wondrous pages from his day to our own; they are as fresh and living to-day as when they were first read in the churches to which they were sent. Again, how the Church of a much later date has been enriched by Newton's "Cardiphonia" and Cowper's "Letters"; these heart breathings of two devoted Christian men can never perish, they have made their authors "immortal." In Eng-

land, I fear the Letters of Samuel Rutherford are not as well known as these, yet they are full of pathos and beauty. "Rutherford's Letters," says Richard Cecil, "is one of my classics," and this book was the guide and comfort of such holy men as Dr. Duff, and Robert Murray McCheyne. I am sure that the clergy of to-day would not only find much food for thought in these "almost inspired pages," but they would meet with one who could lead them, and teach them how to lead others to what their author spoke of as "Immanuel's high and blessed land."

There are 365 Letters extant, 220 being written during Rutherford's exile, some of these latter being dated from "My King's Palace." They were addressed to various individuals, among these being holy women such as Lady Kenmure, Lady Boyd, or Marion McNaught; others who received these priceless letters were devoted ministers such as George Gillespie or William Guthrie. One Letter of amazing interest is addressed to the disturbed parishioners of Kilmacolm, and another to prisoners for Christ's sake in the Castle of Edinburgh. Occasionally one meets with a Scotticism or some obsolete English word, but in spite of such small blemishes the Letters are matchless in their wisdom, and quite remarkable for the depth of their spirituality and devotion to the Person of Christ. Rutherford in his Letters shows a wonderful insight into the causes of spiritual disease, his diagnosis is correct, his use of the knife unflinching, and his tenderness in binding up broken hearts quite Christlike. He could write to John Gordon of Cardoness and rebuke him severely for his sins of passion and extravagance; he could, with masterly skill, charm away the depression of soul that clouded the spiritual life of his friend Robert Gordon of Knockbrenn; and he could weep with Mistress Gillespie, when sorrows saddened her home, with a true and delicate sympathy. It has been beautifully said that "The smell of myrrh and cassia has never departed from these 'Letters,'" indeed, we may add that the Church is filled with their fragrance wherever this famous correspondence is known and loved. At the end of eighteen months and at his own responsibility, Rutherford returned to his beloved Anwoth, and we find him on March 1, 1638, in the Old Greyfriar's Church in Edinburgh stepping forward "with look inspired" to sign the National Covenant of Scotland. At this crisis Rutherford felt it his duty to remain away from Anwoth for a time, to help on

this great movement against an unbearable tyranny, and indeed it was only for a short period that he was able to return to his charge, as his Divine Master showed him clearly that He needed his services in a wider field. The General Assembly was on the look out for men of tried gifts and eminence to work in large towns, and St. Andrew's urged the Commissioners to appoint Rutherford to the vacant chair of theology in St. Mary's College. This position with considerable reluctance he undertook and was installed in the chair (once occupied by Andrew Melville) in October, 1639. Soon after we find Rutherford summoned to Westminster to assist in drawing up that great Confession of Faith, and those famous catechisms, which to this day are the standards of belief in the Presbyterian Churches.

Those were days of acute controversy, and multitudes were signing "The Solemn League and Covenant," fighting for liberty against a Prelacy that was lordly and tyrannical rather than fatherly and spiritual, and in all these rational and religious battles Rutherford bore a conspicuous part, his learning and his skill in argument being of great value to his cause. One of the Scotch Commissioners who sat with him at Westminster, Robert Baillie, wrote thus of his friend's work: "Mr. Samuel, for the great parts God has given him, and special acquaintance with the question, is very necessary, here at Westminster." For four years (1643-1647) Rutherford took an active part in the important deliberations of the Assembly, and even found time to write books during those busy days. In two of these, "The Trial and Triumph of Faith," and "Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself," we find our author in his happiest vein; but in "Free Disputation" he showed the spirit of the partizan. It was during his residence at Westminster that he produced his well-known book "Lex Rex," a very able defence of constitutional government and a reply to a most unreasonable pamphlet by the ex-Bishop of Ross (Maxwell) on the Divine Right of Kings.

Domestic sorrow fell upon his home during these busy years, for he lost two children, and in a letter to Mistress Taylor, a friend who was bereaved in like manner, he shows that controversy had not dulled or injured his devotional life. Thus he comforts this bereaved woman: "The Good Husbandman may pluck His roses, and gather His lilies at Midsummer, and in the beginning of

the first summer months. And He may transplant young trees out of the lower ground to the higher, where they may have far more free air. What is that to you or to me?"

In 1647 Rutherford was elected to the Principalship of the New College in St. Andrew's, and not long after he was chosen Rector of the same University. Tempting invitations reached him from Harderwyck and Utrecht, but he preferred to remain in his beloved Scotland.

Darker days were, however, in store for this man of God. Soon after the Restoration of Charles II (Jan. 1, 1661) the Scottish Parliament invested the king with arbitrary authority and swept away all the legal sanctions for the freedom of the Scottish Church. The spirit of persecution stalked through the land, and so well known a man as Rutherford could hardly expect to escape. First his book "Lex Rex" was burned by the common hangman in Edinburgh, and after that at St. Andrew's; next he was denuded of all his dignities and offices in the University and also deprived of his pastorate, and he was in addition to all these indignities summoned to appear before Parliament on a charge of high treason. These repeated worries and sorrows seriously affected Rutherford's health, and when this last bitter summons was served upon him, he was too ill to rise from his bed. "With something like prophetic strain," he replied to the insolent demand with these calm and dignified words: "I have received a summons already from a superior Judge and judicatory, and ere your day arrives I shall be where few kings and great folks come."

Often in his "Letters" he had spoken of his death as being his hour of triumph and release, and now "his desire to depart and to be with Christ" was about to be granted. He had in his "Letters" written thus of "Death," "O Happy, Blessed Death, that golden bridge, laid over by Christ my Lord, betwixt Time's clay banks and Heaven's shore." "The Spirit and the Bride say, Come." "What would I not give to have Time, that lieth betwixt, taken out of the way that my Beloved and I might meet; I would look now through the door of the New Jerusalem, and see Christ's Face, my begun-Heaven, till that longed-for day shall dawn." So when "the sands of time were sinking" very low, Rutherford's hope did not fail, the Christ Who had been so "precious" in life, was increasingly "precious" as he walked with Him through the

shadowy Valley. Once he was heard to say, like a mariner tired after a long and stormy voyage, "The Port I would be in at is Redemption, and Salvation through His Blood." Several times he murmured "O for a well-tuned harp," as tho' he already heard the Choir Celestial, and longed to join in the Heavenly Song. On the afternoon of his last day on earth he said, "This night will close the door and fasten my anchor within the veil, I shall go away in sleep by five in the morning." The prophecy was a true one, and at the dawn on March 29, 1661, at the age of 61 the happy soul of Samuel Rutherford took its flight, his last words (familiarized to us in Mrs. Cousin's beautiful hymn) being, "Glory—Glory dwelleth in Immanuel's Land."

I have stood by Rutherford's grave in the ancient Cathedral churchyard at St. Andrew's; all that is mortal of the writer of the immortal Letters, lies beneath the old Tower of the Chapel of St. Regulus. In after years, and by his own request, the dust of the holy Halyburton was laid at Rutherford's side. From that peaceful and sacred spot Rutherford's voice seems still to address his ministerial brethren, in words he once used when charging the ministers of his own day, "Preach for Christ"; "Pray for Christ"; "Do all for Christ"; "Beware of men pleasing"; and by many such words "He being dead yet speaketh."

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