

GEORGE BUCHANAN

Who amongst the Clan Buchanan has not heard of George Buchanan?
Not many I would hazard a guess.

George was born at Killearn in 1506 the 5th son of Thomas Buchanan of Drummikill and Moss and his wife Agnes Heriot daughter of James Heriot of Trabourn - or Trabrown.

Georges father died at an early age, and Agnes raised her family under difficult conditions.

George was an apt scholar and he was supported in his studies by his mothers brother, who supported the budding scholar in his studies in Paris. He went to Paris in 1520 -the year in which Luther electrified Europe by burning the Pope's Bull: in which Magellan sailed through the straits bearing his name.

The boy of fourteen was thrown into the seething cauldron of Parisian student life, and we have good reason to believe that he was not housed in one of the many colleges or pensionates or student boarding houses which were open to the sons of wealthy men, and to those alone. He must have done what perhaps the majority of his fellow-students did then - hired a small garret room at exorbitant rent in one of the many streets which clustered round the Place Maubert, or in the Rue d' Ecosse near the college of Ste. Barbe.

George rose early as he began his studies at six o'clock, and one can imagine this 14 year old boy lighting his lantern, washing (perhaps not too frequently) and slinging his strap holding his pen and ink-bottle around his neck, tucking the case which held his precious paper under his arm, then descending to the streets below, and wending his way through the filth of the streets to one of the many classrooms belonging to the German Nation (from 1252 on to 1792 the University of Paris was organised in seven orders or corporations - the three 'superior' Faculties of Theology, Law, and Medicine, and the four Nations which made the faculty of Arts. The Nations were, France, Germany, and Normandy or Picardy. At the head of each of the these faculties was a Dean and at the head of each Nation a Procurator. Students from Scotland and England belonged to the German Nation) The room would have been small with rushes or straw for a carpet, pupils sat on their heels and wrote on their knees.

George would have survived on bread, no doubt concealing his food until he arrived back at his garret: for some of the older students lived by robbing the smaller younger students of their meagre viands. One small student has left on record that he was so frequently pillaged that he was days without food and often chased dogs if he saw them carrying a bone. Life was hard, the environment so demoralising that only the strong were able to survive it. Feebleness, physical or moral was death. It is no wonder therefore that two years of such vile conditions broke George's health, and as well his studies were interrupted by the death of his uncle and the subsequent cessation of his financial support.

What had he gained for these years of hardship? He had spent almost all his time in mastering the art of making Latin verses, partly under compulsion and partly, he tells us, because he liked it.

That was the net result of two years of hardship and seperation from his family in Scotland.

However two years of hardship had imbued in him a sense of scholarship - that hardest of taskmasters - had claimed him. What matter semi-starvation, cold, dirt, stench, if one could learn the secrets of the style of the great poets of antiquity, and experience the joy of being able to imitate the cadence of their verses? These two years in Paris fixed George's fate. He was drawn to the scholars life and to the New Learning which was then challenging the old.

There is nothing to tell us wether George Buchanan this rather curious Scotish youth would have ever heard or thought about the writings of Luther which had reached Paris in the early months Of 1519, and were being eagerly read by all who had any pretensions to learning; but he could scarcely have missed seing the sarcastic pamphlet against the theologians of the Sorbonne, being hawked about the streets of the student quarter - in spite of legal prohibition in the year 1521.

On his return to Scotland he took part in the disastrous expedition of the Duke of Albany - merely it seems to see what war was like. His curiosity cost him a severe illness.

On his recovery, he went to St. Andrews but the budding young scholar who had tasted the New Learning in Paris, had nothing but contempt for the scholastic prelections of John Mair, who at that period was supposed to shed a lustre on his native land, and who is now remembered by the epigram of Buchanan.

A year later he was back in Paris - this time as a burar at the Scots College, which gave him lodging and food. The accomodation and food in such a small college - were poor and he was probably in no better position than during his earlier visit. It is said that Scottish students cultivate the muses on a little oatmeal. George Buchanan's fare was somewhat less wholesome - mouldy bread - unsavoury fish, and red vinegar dignified by the name of wine.

Despite these physical hardships he soon made his mark, and graduated in 1528. Next year he was selected to be one of the regents at Ste. Barbe, the most renowned college in Paris. Our young Scot was fairly launched on his career.

The promotion from scholar to teacher did not ensure an easier life. The college gave him lodging and food; for the rest he was dependant on the fees of his pupils.

In his poem "**On the woes of teachers of the humanities in Paris**" decidedly autobiographical, he depicts the hardship of his self-chosen lot. After studies prolonged far into the night, the tired young regent flung himself into bed only to be wakened by the college watcher announcing that it was four o'clock, at five the college bell sounded and teacher and students gathered in a bare room to commence a fresh day of study.

Then his worst trials began. The students were tired and sleepy, and who can blame them? What cared they for the sublime passages of Virgil or Horace. They like young people to this day - yawned and yawned; one contemplated a great hole in his stockings, another a hole in his boots, whilst a third was writing letters home instead of taking notes; The teacher lost patience, his formidable rod came into play and the inattention gave way to groans and sobs.

Mass followed, and after Mass an insufficient meal. Classes were resumed and the earlier scenes were repeated. Then a scanty supper and the weary teacher began his night work again.

The picture is perhaps overdrawn, as during this period George found time to make the acquaintance of many distinguished Humanists, such as Budé, and he had leisure enough to pen biting epigrams on the enemies of the New Learning.

Whatever his lot we are told that the young Scot revolutionised the teaching of the college and through it that of the University. He discarded the antiquated Latin grammar of Alexander de Villedieu, adopted the grammar of Linacre, the English Humanist, translated it into Latin, and made it his text-book. He became one of the leading classical scholars in Paris.

Humanism, had been growing in Paris during the fifteen years between Buchanan's first coming, and his appointment as regent of the college of Ste. Barbe. The then King of France - Francis de Valois - had cherished a dream of creating a great Humanist College which would be a seat for the New Learning, and be to France what the medieval University of Paris had been for the old. Erasmus was to be its head, and he was expected to gather round him the flower of European scholarship. Budé the greatest Humanist France had produced, had drafted the scheme, and Marguerite of Navarre, the king's sister and patroness of struggling students, and reformers, had done her best to keep her brother up to the mark.

In 1530 a beginning was made. College, in the sense of buildings, there were none; but a band of distinguished scholars was collected who were variously called "the royal lecturers."

The readers of the King in the University, or more simply, "professors in the University."

The first chairs established were those of Greek and Hebrew; then followed Latin and Mathematics and several others. The year 1530 therefore marks an era in French scholarship.

Between 1530 and 1547 around 15 new appointments were made to the ranks of these "royal professors" almost all of whom were Frenchman, all about the same age, and all imbued with the spirit of free enquiry. They made the institution what it was meant to be an association of teachers all inspired with the thought of intellectual progress, insisting on freeing knowledge from the traditions of the medieval church, bending all their energies to display the intellectual treasures of antiquity to the present and to future generations.

The class-rooms of these "royal professors" were open to all well conducted students who desired to learn more than they were taught in the old colleges.

The great printing house of the Estiennes was affiliated by the King to the new royal college - and Robert Estienne's book-shop in the street St. Jean de Beauvais became the meeting place of scholars. The shop was often graced by the presence of the gentle and learned Queen of Navarre. Francis I himself frequently visited his favourite printer and bought grandees of the Court in his train. Buchanan, reserved Scot as he was must have often visited this club of learned men - his epigrams show that he knew some of them - and the great printer and publisher, who once kept the King waiting whilst he corrected a precious proof sheet, would have been delighted to welcome every one with a rising reputation for scholarship.

The foundation of the Royal College and far reaching consequences as it was looked upon - by the conservative minds of the old University - as a challenge to the teachings of the time.

The University was dominated by its theological faculty, the Sorbonne, (in 1253 Robert Sorbonne, chaplain to St. Louis, King of France founded a college which afterwards gave its name to the Faculty of Theology) and the Sorbonne was ruled by Noel Bede, a fanatical Schoolman as pitiless as he was fearless. Bede knew his power and was not afraid to use it in things great or small. He ruled the old University of Paris, which for two and a half centuries had been the last court of appeal for every intellectual question, and had frequently resisted the decisions of both the Pope and King. He could count for the most part on the support of that conservative body, the Parlement of Paris, and in addition he could count on the backing of the ablest of the King's ministers, the Chancellor - Duprat - who hated all learning and every project of reform. Moreover he could command the fanaticism of the larger portion of the students and citizens of Paris.

He was narrowminded, conscientious, fearless - the forerunner of the those leaders of the Catholic League who, half a century later, preferred to convulse the kingdom in a civil war rather than admit the claims of Henry IV to the throne of France.

It is highly possible that his organisation of the more fanatical students furnished the beginnings of a still more formidable association. In the years that George Buchanan was teaching at Ste. Barbe, a Spanish student much older than his fellows, haunted the classrooms of the colleges and could be seen limping along the streets of the students quarter. He spoke little answering in monosyllables to most questions, but went about watchfully observant of everything and everyone in the city.

His name was Inigo de Recalde de Loyola, who became the founder of the Society of Jesus under the name of Ignatius Loyola.

The founding of the Royal College in 1530 was the beginning of a long struggle which gradually developed into the religious wars which convulsed France for half a century. Men had to take sides. George Buchanan did not hesitate as many of his biting epigrams against the obscurantists of the Sorbonne testifies. After three years of drudgery in the College of Ste. Barbe he left to become tutor and guardian to the young earl of Cassilis. This move led to his return to Scotland and to his introduction to the court of James V. His name twice appears in the accounts of the King's Treasurer as receiving so many ells of "Pareis blak" to make a gown and other liveries becoming a scholar.

At this time, incited, it is said, by his royal master, he wrote a long and trenchantly sarcastic poem against the Franciscans. Such an attack upon this ancient, venerable, and one must say, at the time rather degenerate order placed him in a position, where not even royal favour could protect him, that he had to flee Scotland and in due time he reappears in his beloved Paris.

This time it was no city of refuge for George. Cardinal Beaton had determined to revenge the Franciscans by the punishment of the daring satirist. He was in Paris as the ambassador from Scotland, and the Scotchish alliance meant a great deal to France at that time. Buchanan betook himself quietly to Bordeaux, where his intimate friend André de Gouvéa was at the head of a college where the New Learning was cultivated with enthusiasm. A chair of Latin was found for the Scots Humanist, and he spent some happy and prolific years there.

It was this connection with Gouvéa which led to George Buchanan's disastrous expedition to Portugal. The King of Portugal, John III., desirous to introduce the New Learning into his country, proposed to restore the old and sadly decayed University of Coimbra, and invited Gouvéa to undertake the task. Gouvéa collected a band of scholars in whom he trusted, and took them with him to Portugal. Buchanan was naturally included in this group. He must have had some concern about the move when he thought about the power of the monks in Portugal.

André de Gouvéa died about the end of 1547, and Georg Buchanan's troubles began soon afterwards. He along with other professors in the Coimbra College, were seized and conveyed to Lisbon where they were bought before the Inquisition.

The commission from the Records of the Inquisition indicate that it commenced on October 17 1549. The inquest actually began on November 22 and the last witness was examined on December 21 1549. Six months later (June 27 1550) the report of the depositions was forwarded to the Inquisitor General who laid it before the Supreme Council.

The commission were required to make inquiries about all the professors at Coimbra; their depositions refer to three only, Buchanan and two Portuguese, Joam da Costa, Principal since the death of Gouvéa, and Diogo de Tieves.

A trial was ordered and it is from these records attested by the name of Buchanan, signed in his handwriting, that our knowledge of his treatment comes.

The names of the accusers were not revealed - standard practice by the Inquisition - but the records make it clear that neither Cardinal Beaton, nor the Franciscans, nor the Jesuits had anything to do with the accusations. The Society of Jesus did eventually obtain control of the College of Coimbra, but not till five years after Buchanan's trial. His fellow prisoner believed that the real accuser was Diogo Gouvéa, uncle of Andre, who had been deposed from the office of Principal to make room for his nephew and the new professors.

The evidence appears to justify their suspicions that private malice set in motion the machinery of the Holy Office.

The depositions against George declared that he was "badly disposed to the faith," "that he "was of the sect of Luther," and had made jokes about the usages of the Church, these and other more serious accusations formed the bases of the case against George Buchanan

It must be remembered that at this time George Buchanan had never seriously studied the religious question which was disturbing Europe. He had maintained the position of most of the Humanists, and was content to represent himself as a faithful son of the medieval Church, but felt himself at liberty to criticise its abuses.

From this point of view the answers he made to the questions based upon the depositions appear to be singularly straightforward, prudent, and courageous.

He avowed that he had had doubts, that he had been attracted to certain Luteran doctrines, that his mind had waivered more than once: he admitted that he had written against the Franciscans, and gave reasons for doing so: he declared that he had never consorted with Jews in Scotland (adding with a touch of sarcasam that there were no Jews in his country) ; and in the end he professed himself willing to submit to the Church.

In the end Buchanan was sentenced to make full abjuration of his errors, and to be imprioned in the monastery of St. Bento at the pleasure of the Inquisitor General. During his confinement he solacee himself with translating the Psalm into Latin verse. After a detention of about seven months the Cardinal Prince permitted him to leave the monastery on condition that he did not quit the town of Lisbon, and on the last day of February (1552) he was set completely at liberty. He left Portugal on a Cretan ship which took him to England.

Between the date of his release from Portugal and his settlement in Scotland, Buchanan was in France, sometimes as regent in one of the colleges in Paris, sometimes tutor and private secretary in the household of Marshal de Brissac.

Hitherto George had been simply a Humanist, ccontent to live and die a member of the medieval Church, although he knew and feralessly satirised its many abuses. During the last five years of his life in France he set himself seriously to consider the great religious problem of his age, in order to determine what side he ought to take. Slowly, he decided that he must throw in his lot with the reformation party.

It is worth while to notice his surroundings when he came to this momentous resolution.

Francis I. had alternately favoured and persecuted the French reformers - now receiving them at his court, and then joining, and encouraging mad persecutions in superstitious terror. His policy became more repressive towards the end of his reign. His son Henry II - from the first - set himself to stamp out reuthlessly the new religion. The *Chambre Ardente* was instituted for the purpose. The prisons were soon full of the accused. The Conciergerie, where water oozed through the walls of the cells built below the level of the river Seine, and the *Grand Chatêlet* whose dungeons were so small that the wretched inmate could neither stand upright nor lie at full length, were the most dreaded. Few were acquitted; almost all, once arrested suffered torture and then death. This saanguinary severity produced a reaction.

We hear of municipal magistrated intervening to protect their Protestant fellow-citizens from the ecclesiastical courts; of town's police conniving at the escape of heretics; of a procurator at law suspended from his office for such connivances; and of civil courts which could not be persuaded to pass more than nominal sentences. All of this and more was the background within which George Buchanan came to take his stance on the side of the oppressed. He was only one of many who during these years of persecution declared for the reformation.

It is also of interest to know just what was the reformation movement?

French Protestantism had been changing since 1540. It was no longer a Christian mysticism supplemented by careful study of the Scriptures; it had advanced beyond the stage of individual followers of Luther and Zwingli; it had become united, presenting a solid phalanx to its foes; it had rallied around a manifesto, which was at once a completed scheme of doctrine, a prescribed mode of worship, and a code of morals; it had found a leader who was both a master and a commander-in-chief. It was to the theology of Calvin, then firing the hearts of oppressed nations that George Buchanan gave himself. When he returned to his native country in 1561 he attached himslf to the reformed party in Scotland.

In Scotland George Buchanan attained at once a position of dignity and consideration he had never previously reached. He became a favourite at Court, read with Queen Mary, and under the spell of that fascinating woman, one of the fairest flowers of the French Renaissance, addressed to her some of his best verses.

The death of Darnley changed admiration into detestation. He believed rightly or wrongly, with the majority of his nation at the time, that the Queen had murdered her husband, and his advanced political principals did not allow him to think that queenship ought to be pleaded as an excuse for such a crime. He wrote the famous "*Detectio*", wherein the proofs of her guilt were outlined with outstanding and remorseless skill.

He was one of the commissioners sent by the rulers of the nation to England to defend their conduct in deposing and imprisoning their Queen. He was made, a little later, one of the tutors to the young King. He became a Director in Chancery, and Keeper of the Privy Seal.

Scotland was proud of his learning, of the fact that in every land where the New Learning had penetrated, her distinguished son was acknowledged to stand in the first rank of men of letters.

He served Scotland in an extraordinary and selfless manner, and when his time came, the country laid him to rest in the burying-place at Greyfriars church Edinburgh.

How best are we to estimate George Buchanan's genius, and what place are we to assign to this remarkable Scotsman?

He distinguished himself in three different departments.

He was a great teacher -

He was a great poet -

and perhaps above all

He was a great political thinker

We are told that as a young teacher, an unknown regent of St. Barbe that he revolutionised the teaching of his college, and through it and gradually, the classical teaching among the numerous colleges of the whole University of Paris. He discarded the old cumbrous methods of teaching latinity which were in use, and he incurred the wrath of the dignitaries by his insistence. His edition of the Latin grammar of Linacre is more than a translation. One need but compare it with rival publications of the time to appreciate its simplicity and thoroughness. The effects of his influence may be seen for more than a century in the traditions of teaching in France and England. His Latin version of the Psalms long held its place as a model for Latin versification. Books survive to this day which contain collections of George Buchanan's choicest phrases, made for the benefit of young scholars. He was a great teacher and he loved his work. Barely a year before his death he was found teaching.

His own generation was prodigal of its praise of his poetry. It was declared by leading critics of that period that Latin literature had reached its climax in Buchanan's verses, and that George Buchanan was the foremost poet of his age.

It must be remembered that at this time cultered men and women everywhere read, wrote and spoke Latin. It was a time when the power acquired over Latin and Greek would be used to mould and enrich with all the graces and style and expression the languages of modern Europe. Buchanan used Latin, especially Latin verse, and used it in a way that none excelled. His poems were read in every country of Europe. The editions of his Psalms were innumerable. His Psalter was the work which spread his fame most widely. Its popularity was not to be wondered at, as it fed the two great passions of the age - religion and a zeal for the classics.

Buchanan's version of the Psalms in some way gratified a cosmopolitan audience and were known and sung throughout Europe. Dainty editions of his collected poems were found everywhere, and men and women of culture in all lands hailed him as the first poet of his age.

Perhaps the two most important of Buchanan's works are the **Baptist** and his celebrated **De Jure Regni apud Scotos**. Both written in Latin and translated by succeeding generations.

In both of these works George Buchanan clearly states that the people have inalienable rights - including as a last resort, the sacred right of insurrection. This at a time when the divine right of kings to govern was considered the norm.

He holds up to question this right of Kings, and states that kingship is based upon a mutual recognition of the rights of the people and the rights of the sovereign. He holds up to scorn and wrath of his audiences the sentiments now accepted and understood by the populace, and are now political commonplace - but anything but commonplace when he uttered them, that kings are answerable to the people and rule only at the will of the people.

It is not to be wondered that **De Jure Regni** was solemnly condemned by the Scots Parliament (1584) and that its translations and circulation were prohibited by the Privy Council of 1664 and that in 1683 the University of Oxford had it publicly burnt in front of their schools.

Such actions seldom suppress , but rather tend to give the offending book a greatly increased life. So it was with **De Jure Regni** - translations were published and were used by people bent on securing constitutional liberties and freedom from autocratic oppression. One such publication appeared, translated into Dutch, in 1598 during the crisis of the fight between Maurice of Orange

and Philip II of Spain and reappeared in 1680. at the time of the succession of James II. A third, in German, in 1821 manifested the peoples discontent of the German speaking nations at the reactionary governments which followed the overthrow of Napoleon.

The **Baptistes** was translated into many European languages. It was written we are informed by George Buchanan with his mind full of the tyranny of Henry VIII in the judicial murder if of Sir Thomas More.

What are we to think of George Buchanan the man? Apart from his learning and skills in Latin, poetry, and politics, we have little to go on. His portraits survive - and these display a strong kindly face. Few of his innumerable letters have survived, but those that do disclose his sense of humour and kindness. Those who came in contact with him were impressed by his strength of character. Beza, who after Calvin was considered the greatest Reformer in Europe, spoke of George Buchanan as a great man, greater than himself. When asked to alter some sentences in his History- lest he offend the King - he replied "**Tell me, man giff I have tauld the treuthe?**" The reply was "**yis Sir, I think sa**". To which answer George replied - "**Then i'll byd his fead and all his Kin's**"

The sixteenth century bought three great gifts to Scoland, and the country would be much the poorer had it missed any of them.

All came out of France -

The Reformation lived in John Knox.

The Renaissance which revelled in the ideas of a brilliant but decadent Rome with its love of painting, architecture, and scupture and joy in living was bought to Scotland by Mary Stuart.

Erudition, which bought back to life the thoughts of classical antiquity and was to mould modern literature was disclosed to the young Scotsman of his generation by George Buchanan.

Yet when all is said, perhaps the greatest gift he gave to Scotland - was himself - a genuine Scot to the marrow of his bones, who had attained an almost unique position among the learned men of Europe, by his native abilities, but also by his unwearied industry, by the undaunted way in which he confronted poverty, danger, and continual disappointments.

To say that he stamped his image on generations of his countryman is little enough.

Note: This article is a prece of the first chapter of the book about George Buchanan - his life and works - published in 1907 by James Maclehose and Sons - publishers to the University of Glasgow. The title of the book is **George Buchanan - Glasgow Quatercentenary Studies 1906**. The chapter is writtten by T.M. Lindsay.

