

## **Andrew Melville**

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When John Knox passed away Scotland, no doubt, lost its greatest defender of the Protestant religion and many would bewail his removal as a calamity of the first magnitude, but the Cause of Christ is not dependent on the integrity and abilities of men although He condescends to use men as polished shafts in His hand to fulfil His purpose. This was very evident at the time of the Reformation.

The subject of this sketch was the son of Richard Melville, the proprietor of the estate of Baldovy, about a mile to the south-west of Montrose, and was the youngest of nine sons. He was born in 1545, about three years after Knox publicly professed the Reformed faith. When Andrew Melville was two years old, he lost his father, who fell at the Battle of Pinkie. Shortly afterwards he lost his mother, and was left a helpless orphan at an early age, but the Lord manifested Himself as the orphan's help, and made use of his eldest brother, Richard, who had succeeded to the estate and his like-minded wife, to take care of the orphan, and to minister to his needs.

Richard, perceiving that his youngest brother was of a weakly constitution and that he had a taste for learning, sent him to the grammar-school of Montrose, where he made some progress in Latin a language in which at a later date, he became so proficient. Through the instrumentality of John Erskine of Dun, a Greek school was established in Montrose and Andrew Melville took full advantage of the opportunity. The teacher of this school was a learned Frenchman, and Melville availed himself of the opportunity of acquiring a more perfect knowledge of French. From Montrose he went to the University of St. Andrews where he studied logic, rhetoric, ethics, and physics, studying the text books in the original Greek, which evoked the admiration of his professor, for they were only acquainted with a Latin translation. When Melville left the University of St. Andrews, he had the character of being "the best philosopher, poet, and Grecian of any young master of the land."

After leaving the University he decided to complete his education on the Continent. At the age of nineteen years he left his native country and began his studies in the University of Paris, which, at the time he entered it, was in its most prosperous state. In this University he made great proficiency in all the

branches of education taught there, and in 1566 he entered the University of Poitiers where he became one of the regents, in which situation he remained for three years until the civil war between the Protestants and the Roman Catholics broke out. Poitiers was besieged by the Protestant Admiral Coligny, and defended by the Duke of Guise.

After the siege was raised Melville left France and went to Geneva, for the prosecution of his theological studies. On arrival at Geneva he was through the influence of Beza, appointed to the Chair of Humanity in the Academy, which at that time was vacant. Here, with true literary ardour, he availed himself of the opportunity of attending on the lectures of men who were among the foremost in Europe from the point of view of learning. It was here that he made progress in Oriental literature for which he was afterwards famous. Melville was strongly drawn to Theodor Beza, who was at the time Professor of Divinity in the Academy and a minister of the city, and a close intimacy sprang up between them. Here he also made the acquaintance of many of the learned men of the age, especially after the massacre of the Protestants on St. Bartholomew's Day, 1572. Following on that massacre those who escaped the dagger of the murderer took refuge in Geneva.

Melville was destined, however, to play an important part in the religious and educational life of Scotland, and, through the solicitations of relatives and acquaintances, he returned to his native land in 1574. He was not long permitted to enjoy a life of ease with his relatives in Baldov. Theodore Beza had written to the General Assembly, which met in August after he arrived in Scotland, informing them of his qualifications. Shortly afterwards he was appointed Principal of Glasgow University which, at the time, was in a languishing condition. It had practically no funds, and there were only two regents, and very few scholars.

By the time that Melville finished his second session in Glasgow, his fame had spread throughout the kingdom, students came from all quarters to hear his lectures, and the class-rooms which had so lately been empty could not contain the numbers who sought admission. Along with his other duties it was required of the Principal to preach on Sabbath in Govan. In the first General Assembly after Melville became Principal of Glasgow University he sat as a member, in virtue of the fact that he was minister of Govan and a professor of divinity, and became a member of a Committee appointed to draw up a form

of ecclesiastical policy which would be in accordance with the Word of God and the state of the country.

At the next Assembly, which was in the following August, he stated, at some length, his own views as to the un-scriptural-ness of Episcopacy. The Assembly accepted the Report of this Committee and formally abolished the episcopal office. Another fruit of the labours of this Committee was the production of the Second Book of Discipline, which entered upon matters which were left out by the First Book of Discipline. As a result of the Second Book of Discipline the episcopal office was abolished and it was enacted that the government of the Church was to be in the hands of pastors and elders. For his share in this work Melville suffered a good deal from the hatred of those whose aim was to set up prelacy.

That Melville could not be swerved from his faithfulness to the word of God or the government, of the Church, by bribery, flattery, or the fear of man, is apparent from his reply to the Regent Morton when the latter found fault with certain things which the General Assembly did, and in a threatening voice said, "There will never be quietness in this country till half-a-dozen of you be hanged or banished the country." Melville's spirited reply was, "Tush, sir, threaten your courtiers after that manner. It is the same to me whether I rot in the air or in the ground. The earth is the Lord's. I have been ready to give my life where it would not have been so well expended, at the pleasure of my God. I have lived out of your country ten years as well as in it. Let God be glorified; it will not be in your power to hang or exile His truth."

In 1580 we find that Melville was translated from Glasgow to be Principal of St. Andrews University to the great regret of those who had the good of the former University at heart. To St. Andrews he was accompanied by his nephew, James Melville, who was appointed Professor of Oriental Languages. He had many difficulties to contend with at the beginning of his career in St. Andrews, but by the end of two years those who had been his most bitter opponents became his warmest friends.

When matters had settled down in the University of St. Andrews, Melville was called forth to defend the liberties of the Church. Through Roman Catholic intrigue, King James VI was influenced by several Papists who had found a place in the Court, with the result that the Reformed faith was in imminent danger. Those who were about the King succeeded in restoring Episcopacy. By way of commencing their scheme they offered the vacant See of Glasgow to

Robert Montgomery, minister of Stirling. After accepting it he was summoned to the bar of the General Assembly for having accepted that which the Assembly had condemned.

Though the Royal authority was interposed on his behalf the Assembly proceeded to deal with the case, and Melville stood forth and presented a libel against him consisting of fifteen articles. The Assembly remitted the process to the Presbytery of Stirling with instructions to them to report their decision to the Synod of Lothian, requiring that Synod to sentence him, if found guilty, according to the laws of the Church.

They also prohibited Montgomery from leaving Stirling and enter into the bishopric of Glasgow. The result was that the ministers of Glasgow refused to install Montgomery and the Synod of Lothian, which proceeded to act on the instructions of the Assembly, were summoned before the Privy Council. They appeared but declined the authority of the Council in ecclesiastical matters.

The following year Melville was chosen Moderator of the Assembly, and though a messenger-at-arms charged the Moderator and the Assembly, under pain of rebellion to desist from the prosecution of Montgomery, they, however, ratified the sentence of the Presbytery of Stirling and declared that Montgomery had incurred the censure of deposition and excommunication. Upon this a war began between the Court and the Church in which Melville stood out as the faithful champion of religious liberty.

His outspokenness, in his Assembly sermon, brought him into collision with the King and his Court. On 15<sup>th</sup> February 1584 he received a charge to appear before the Privy Council on the following Monday to answer for "seditious and treasonable speeches" in a sermon preached on a Fast day a month previous to the citation. He readily appeared and gave a pretty full account of that sermon, but his enemies were determined to put him to death. He was sentenced to be imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle, and it was well-known that he would come out from there to the scaffold. He, himself, decided, on flight and arrived safely in Berwick where he was out of reach of the Scottish Privy Council. Thus was driven into exile the most learned man in the kingdom, and the ablest champion of the Church's liberties. From Berwick, he made his way to London where he was instrumental in overturning many of the plans put forward to ruin the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.

After an absence of twenty months Melville returned to Scotland, and at once set about to have the liberties of the Church restored. After a good deal of time had been spent he was restored to his place in the New College. In June 1592 Presbytery was again legally established in Scotland, and General Assemblies, Synods, Presbyteries, and Kirk Sessions were ratified. The observance of Easter and Christmas was abolished along with some Acts favouring Popery. However, there were influences at work which had as their aim the overthrowing of the Protestant religion and the Presbyterian government of the Church of Scotland.

Jesuits and trafficking priests were working everywhere and King James favoured them so much that the whole kingdom was in danger of being brought to ruin. As a true patriot and one who had the Cause of Christ at heart more than anything else, Melville was a prominent figure in championing that Cause, and this involved him in many a battle with the King. His plainness of speech was far from being relished by his Majesty, so that James was determined that Melville should be debarred from any consultations between the Commissioners of the Church and the King, but Melville was not to be overawed by the expressed desires of the King.

The Earl of Huntly, one of the Popish lords who supported these Jesuits, having returned to Scotland, sent his offer of submission to the King for himself and his associates. James convened an extraordinary meeting of the Privy Council and invited some of the ministers, who were considered more pliable than the rest, to attend to give their advice. Melville, though not invited, decided to attend as one of the Commissioners of the General Assembly.

The King ordered him to depart, but, pleading the public commission which he had, he refused. When he entered along with the other ministers the King demanded what authority he had to be there. His reply was, "Sir, I have a call from Christ and His Church, who have a special interest in this convention; and I charge you and your estates, in their name, that you favour not their enemies, nor go about to make citizens of those who have traitorously sought to betray their country to the cruel Spaniard to the overthrow of Christ's kingdom."

Though ordered to remove, his speech emboldened the other ministers to resist, though unsuccessfully, the proposals of the Court. As a sequel to what the Privy Council did, the General Assembly sent a deputation to the King, but found that he was determined to have his own way. It was on this occasion

that Andrew Melville addressed to him the memorable words which, in point of freedom, the like of them never greeted royal ears from a loyal subject.

"Sir, we will always humbly reverence your Majesty in public; but since we have this occasion to be with your Majesty in private, and since you are brought to extreme danger both of your life and crown, and along with you the country and the Church of God are like to go to wreck, for not telling you the truth and giving you faithful counsel, we must discharge our duty or else be traitors both to Christ and, you. Therefore, Sir, as diverse times before I have told you, there are two kings and two kingdoms in Scotland; there is King James, the head of this commonwealth, and there is Christ Jesus, the King of the Church, whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. Sir, those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over His Church have power and authority from Him to govern His spiritual kingdom both jointly and severally; the which no Christian king or prince should control and discharge, but fortify and assist; other-wise they are not faithful subjects of Christ and members of His church ... Sir, when you were in your swaddling-clothes, Christ Jesus reigned freely in this land in spite of all His enemies: His officers and ministers convened and assembled for the ruling and welfare of His church, which was ever for your welfare, defence and preservation, when these same enemies were seeking your destruction and cutting off ..."

During the delivery of this confounding speech His Majesty became calmer and at the close of it gave many promises to the Church which were never fulfilled. From this time on, Melville was engaged in a continuous battle with the Court over the liberties of the Church of Scotland. In 1603 King James succeeded to the throne of England, but his enmity against Andrew Melville did not abate with his residential distance from the scene of that strife which he occasioned. For their adherence to the rights of the Church, eight ministers were banished to the extremities of the Highlands, to the Western Isles, Orkney, and Shetland, and other six were imprisoned for fourteen months in the Castle of Blackness, and then banished to France. At the Parliament held in Perth in August 1606, Andrew Melville appeared before them, on the authority of the Presbytery of St. Andrews, to co-operate with the members of other Presbyteries to see that the Church suffered no injury at that meeting from the Estates.

Being told that the Bishops would be restored to the place they had a hundred years ago, the ministers prepared a protest, signed by forty-two of which

Melville's name was the first. This was the last appearance which he was permitted to make in his native country. Melville received a letter from the King, commanding him to repair to London before the 15<sup>th</sup> September. Similar letters were addressed to seven other ministers. The ostensible reason given was to treat with His Majesty and others concerning such things as would tend to settle the peace of the Church.

In order to conform them to the worship of the Church of England they were obliged to hear some of the Bishops preach. This had not the desired effect. Melville composed verses, which came into the hands of the King, on the idolatrous nature of the Anglican worship, with the result that he was kept a close prisoner, and was at last sent to the Tower, where the other ministers had no access to him, and where he suffered the greatest privations.

The rigors of his confinement were somewhat abated in 1608 when he was removed to a more airy compartment, and allowed the use of writing material. In 1611 he was released from the Tower, at the instance of the Duke of Bouillon, who secured his services for the University of Sedan, in France. There is not much information as to his work in the University of Sedan, or about himself, personally, except what may be gleaned in his letters to his nephew, James Melville. He died at Sedan in 1622, at the advanced age of seventy-seven years, an exile from his native land, and a martyr to the tyranny of King James VI, but a constant upholder of the Church of Scotland in its doctrine, government, and mode of worship.