

Samuel Rutherford

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The memory of Samuel Rutherford will be ever fragrant in the minds of all who savour the spirituality of his letters. The fame of his name will also live on among those who appreciate our Presbyterian heritage, and prize our religious and civil liberties. Samuel Rutherford, renowned as “the saint of the Covenant”, was one of the greatest men that Scotland ever saw, whether considered as a preacher, theologian, devotional writer or political theorist.

A measure of the greatness of the man is that at least 16 of his works were published (most of them being large, scholarly tomes); his *Letters*, or at least selections from them, have been issued in at least 100 editions (80 of them in English, 19 in Dutch, four in German, one in French and one in Gaelic). No fewer than 37 biographies or biographical sketches of him have been published, those of Robert Gilmour, Andrew Thompson ⁽²⁾ and Marcus Loane being among the best, and *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions – The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* by John Coffey the most recent. In addition, Rutherford is the subject of several post-graduate theses and dissertations.

To many of his contemporaries, Rutherford was an altogether extraordinary person. James Urquhart, the aged minister of Kinloss in Morayshire, who lived on till after the Revolution, said as he looked back over his long life: “I have known many great and good ministers in this Church, but for such a piece of clay as Mr Rutherford was, I never knew one in Scotland like him to whom so many great gifts were given”.

By the grace of God, Samuel Rutherford spent and was spent in using those gifts to the glory of God and for the good of His Church, especially in Scotland. And his labours were blessed to the spiritual benefit of numerous souls in his beloved Anwoth and far beyond.

The times into which he was born. To help us in considering the tremendous impact Samuel Rutherford made on the religious and political life of Scotland, we must take a brief overview of the revolutionary times into which he was born in the year 1600. Forty years earlier the Scottish Parliament, under the guidance of John Knox, espoused the Reformed Faith as the national religion. When Mary Queen of Scots began to exercise her power as Scotland’s

monarch in the following year, 1561, she tried to revive the interests of Romanism, but her immoral conduct alienated the nation from her and led to her abdication six years later. Her infant son was proclaimed James VI of Scotland, but during his childhood the country was governed by regents. After James himself assumed the reins of government in 1578, the Court and Church engaged in a long and hard struggle over the right of the Church to govern her affairs independently of the civil powers. The king's aim was to eradicate Presbyterian church government and to control the Reformed Church and her General Assemblies by means of bishops.

One major response to the king's absolutist ambitions was the signing of the National Covenant in 1580, by which the Protestant leaders solemnly pledged themselves to support the Reformed doctrine and discipline. Four years later, the Court party being predominant, Parliament took away the independence of the Church by the Black Acts, which decreed that no church assembly was to be held without the King's consent and that all ministers were to acknowledge the bishops as their ecclesiastical superiors.

The tables were turned in 1592 when the Black Acts were repealed and Presbyterianism was re-established. Even the king himself, under the pressure of public opinion, now professed to be a true Presbyterian. When the National Covenant was renewed in 1596, a revival of religion ensued but this proved to be but the sunshine before the storm. James VI, who became also James I of England in 1603, used his increased power to give bishops a place of authority in the Church by the crafty strategy of requiring each Presbytery to have a perpetual Moderator. The existing Bishops were made Moderators of such Presbyteries as usually met at Episcopal seats. This introduction of "Perpetual Moderators" was one of the final steps in the King's plan to foist complete diocesan Episcopacy on the Church of Scotland. He also manipulated the General Assemblies of the Church, exiled the leading Presbyterians, and sought to make Scottish worship conform to the pattern of the Anglican Church by the notorious Articles of Perth of 1618 – in which year, of course, Samuel Rutherford was an 18-year-old student at Edinburgh University.

The days of his youth – 1600-1617. Rutherford was born in the parish of Nisbet, not far from the English border in the south east of Scotland. His father was evidently a gentleman farmer, and the family, says John Coffey, "was neither particularly poor nor especially distinguished". Rutherford was first educated in the grammar school in Jedburgh, where, as Andrew Thomson notes, the master "soon discovered in the farmer's son the signs of remarkable natural abilities, and year after year confirmed him in his belief that he was

dealing with a mind of no common order". Under the master's tuition Samuel Rutherford progressed to proficiency in Latin in preparation for university.

Nisbet was spiritually stagnant – a place where, as Rutherford said later, "Christ was scarce named, as touching any reality or power of godliness". However, young Rutherford sat under the ministry of the parish minister, David Calderwood, who was one of Scotland's most ardent Presbyterian polemicists in those early years of the century. When Calderwood was summoned before the King at St Andrews in 1617, he boldly defended Presbyterianism, which so enraged the King that he cried, "Away with him, away with him," following which Calderwood was deprived of his charge.

So Rutherford had the rare experience, as John Coffey says, "of hearing a true exponent of Andrew Melville's theory that the two kingdoms, Scotland and England, had the duty of asserting the independence of the Church from the crown, and the need of eschewing all popish ceremonies". Undoubtedly it was teaching which profoundly affected Rutherford and permanently shaped his thinking on the burning issues of that era.

His Edinburgh years. In 1617 Rutherford left his native Nisbet for Edinburgh, where he enrolled in the University – still a young and struggling college – having passed the long and very taxing Latin entrance examination. During his years in Edinburgh – first as an arts student, then a university teacher and later a divinity student – Samuel Rutherford was possibly acquainted with certain Presbyterian merchants in the city who led a group which was seeking actively to resist Episcopacy. "This radical party," says John Coffey, "was a remarkably close and coherent group, motivated by a clear and fervent vision of ecclesiastical renewal."

Two years after Rutherford graduated as a Master of Arts, he was appointed, at the age of 23, Professor, or Regent, of Humanity, having been recommended by the professors for "his eminent abilities of mind and virtuous disposition". In this position he had special responsibility for giving tuition in Latin language and literature.

However, within two years he resigned in rather perplexing circumstances – a fact that has generated much discussion. The most satisfactory summing up of the situation is given, I believe, by Andrew Thompson in his *Life of Samuel Rutherford*. Rutherford, says Thompson, "entered on the married state [with a Miss Eupham Hamilton], and some indiscretion or irregularity connected with the formation of this union appears to have produced so much irritation and

unpleasantness between himself and his colleagues, that from a sense of discomfort, or wounded feeling, or self-displeasure, he demitted his charge. That the offence, whatever it was, could not have been one of much gravity, or fitted to leave a permanent stain upon his character, seems beyond doubt, both from the testimony of continued confidence with which his demission was received, and yet more from the fact that, in the future conflicts of parties in which he afterwards intermingled, when scandals are so often raised from their graves to do the work of faction, no reference appears to have ever been made to this, by his most relentless adversaries."

His Conversion. The exact time of Samuel Rutherford's conversion is unknown, but it is presumed by some of his biographers that it was in 1625, the year in which he resigned his professorship. They base that on certain parts of his letters. "Like a fool, as I was," he wrote to Robert Stuart, son of the Provost of Ayr, "I suffered my sun to be high in the heaven, and near afternoon, before ever I took the gate by the end." To another young man he wrote, "I had stood sure if I had in my youth borrowed Christ to be my bottom: but he that beareth his own weight to heaven shall not fail to slip and sink".

However, Faith Cook, in her excellent book *Samuel Rutherford and His Friends*, thinks that another of Rutherford's letters strongly suggests 1624 as the year of his conversion. Writing from Aberdeen in 1638 to Robert Gordon of Knockbrex, he says, "Christ hath been keeping something these 14 years from me, that I have now gotten in my heavy days . . . even . . . fresh joys . . . from the fairest face of Christ my Lord".

Another writer, James Clark, in his booklet *The Life and Works of Samuel Rutherford*, gives an even earlier date. "The time of Rutherford's conversion is not known precisely," he says, "but was probably in 1620, judging from his letter (no 61) to Lady Kenmure in July 1636." There he speaks of his banishment as "that honour that I have prayed for these 16 years".

In any case, Samuel Rutherford in early manhood was brought under conviction of sin, a fact to which he probably alludes in a letter to Alexander Gordon. "I knew a man", he wrote, "who wondered to see any in this life laugh or sport." Having then received the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, he experienced that wonderful deliverance of which he afterwards said, in writing to Lady Busbie, "O but Christ hath a saving eye! Salvation is in His eyelids! When He first looked on me, I was saved; it cost Him but a look to make hell quit of me!"

Rutherford was now led to study for the ministry. He commenced his two-year divinity course in 1625 under Andrew Ramsey, Professor of Divinity in Edinburgh. Not long after Rutherford was licensed to preach the gospel, he was ordained as the minister of the rural parish of Anwoth in Galloway. As Andrew Thomson comments, "What a ministry of power and blessing did that act initiate! What a centre of influence in the cause of pure and earnest religion, and of the crown rights of Christ, did that little Galloway hamlet become!" His settlement there was at the initiative of Sir John Gordon of Kenmure (afterwards Viscount Kenmure). Through his advice, the people of Anwoth invited Samuel Rutherford to become their spiritual teacher, and the Bishop of Galloway, Lamb to name, was induced to consent tacitly to the laying of presbyterial hands upon Rutherford. So Rutherford, now 27, and his young wife Eupham entered Bushy Beild, the Anwoth manse which had formerly been a manor house.

Some visitors to the ivy-clad ruins of Rutherford's church in Anwoth are surprised by two things: the smallness of the building and the isolation of the beautiful spot. They wonder at the greatest preacher in Scotland in his day labouring for nine years in an obscure part of the country, among a people sparsely scattered over a wide area. But a bond had been forged between the soul of Samuel Rutherford and his Anwoth flock that remained intact to the end of his days – a fact that is beautifully brought out by Mrs Cousin's verse, based on Rutherford's own words:

Fair Anwoth by the Solway,
To me thou still art dear.
Ev'n from the verge of heaven
I drop for thee a tear.
O, if one soul from Anwoth
Meet me at God's right hand,
My heaven will be two heavens
In Immanuel's land.

In the past, Anwoth had benefited indirectly from the ministry of the renowned John Welsh, son-in-law of John Knox, who laboured in neighbouring Kirkcudbright with apostolic zeal until 1600. Another famous minister of the time, John Livingstone, remarked that those Christians in the area who had been the fruits of Welsh's ministry found Rutherford to be "a great strengthener of them all". Their high estimate of Rutherford's preaching is shown by the fact that most of his published sermons, carefully taken down by

appreciative hearers, were preached in and around Anwoth during his nine years there.

He was not long settled in Anwoth when he experienced sorrow upon sorrow in his family. Both his children died in infancy. His wife Eupham became seriously ill. "My wife's disease increaseth daily, to her great torment and pain night and day," he wrote to a friend. "She has not been in God's house since our communion, neither out of her bed. . . . She sleeps none, but cries as a woman travailing in birth." She died in 1630 after suffering greatly for more than a year. With humble submission to the divine will he wrote to a friend, "The Lord hath done it; blessed be His name". Five years later, his mother, who was living with him, passed away. He himself fell ill with a recurring fever and was forced to curtail his work greatly for three or four months. No doubt, his painful experiences and deep sorrows enabled him to enter, with the tenderest sympathy, into the griefs and sorrows of his friends and flock – as indeed his letters show.

Year after year, he spent and was spent for Christ among the people he faithfully pastored, as he prayed and preached, studied and wrote, visited and catechised. "My soul was taken up," he wrote, "when others were sleeping, how to have Christ betrothed with a bride in that part of the land." To another he said, "There I wrestled with the angel and prevailed. Wood, trees, meadows and hills are my witnesses that I drew on a fair match between Christ and Anwoth." "While he was at Anwoth," says John Livingstone, "he was the instrument of much good among a poor, ignorant people, many of whom he brought to a knowledge and practice of religion." Robert MacWard, his close friend, stated that he laboured night and day, and that the people of the whole region around Anwoth were to him his particular flock, and they regarded themselves as such. When there was a proposal in 1631 to have him translated to another parish, he wrote to Marion M'Naught, "The great Master Gardener, in a wonderful providence, with His own hand planted me here, and here I will abide till the great Master of the vineyard think fit to transplant me."

In the same year as his wife died he was summoned to appear before the Court of High Commission in Edinburgh for nonconformity to the Perth Articles, but for various reasons the case did not proceed. J G Vos explains in his book *The Scottish Covenanters*: "In 1609 two Courts of High Commission were erected, one in Glasgow and the other in St Andrews. The purpose of these courts was to enable the Bishops to enforce the powers which had been placed in their hands. Later the two courts were combined into a single tribunal with both civil and ecclesiastical powers. This court was not authorised

by any Act of Parliament, but only by the royal prerogative. No appeal could be taken from its decision. This move of King James was a piece of high-handed tyranny over the liberties, estates and even the consciences of his subjects.”

The Perth Articles, to which Rutherford refused to conform, were devised by King James VI to impose Episcopalian worship ceremonies on the Scottish Church. They authorised kneeling at the Lord’s Supper, the observance of private communion and baptism, confirmation by bishops, and the celebration of holy days such as Christmas and Easter.

The fact that Rutherford refused to conform to these Articles is confirmed, for example, by one of his pastoral letters written later from Aberdeen, in which he says, “Remember that I forewarned you . . . that ye should forbear the receiving of the Lord’s Supper except according to the form that I delivered it to you, according to the example of Christ our Lord, that is, that ye should sit as banqueters at one table with our King and eat and drink and divide the elements one to another. . . And that crossing [making the sign of the cross] in baptism was unlawful, and against Christ’s ordinance. And that no day besides the Sabbath (which is of His own appointment) should be kept holy, and sanctified with preaching and the public worship of God, for the memory of Christ’s birth, death, resurrection and ascension, seeing such days so observed are unlawful will-worship, and not warranted in Christ’s Word.”

Charles I, who succeeded to the thrones of England and Scotland in 1625, pursued his father’s anti-Presbyterian policy with renewed vigour, spurred on by Archbishop Laud. It was inevitable that faithful Samuel Rutherford would sooner or later become the object of his persecuting zeal.

When Thomas Sydserff, a proud and intolerant man, succeeded Lamb as Bishop of Galloway in 1634, he zealously set about enforcing conformity to the Episcopal ceremonies. “I expect”, wrote Rutherford to Lady Kenmure, “our new prelate shall try my sitting; I hang by a thread, but it is (if I may speak so) of Christ’s spinning.” Not surprisingly, Rutherford was brought before the Court of High Commission in Edinburgh. “The most part of the bishops,” he wrote to Marion M’Naught, “when I came in, looked more astonished than I, and heard me with silence.” He was under trial for three days on a charge of non-conformity, but other matters were also taken up by the Court. “The Chancellor and the rest tempted me with questions,” he wrote, “nothing belonging to my summons, which I wholly declined, notwithstanding of his threats. My newly printed book against Arminians was one challenge; not Lording the prelates [that is, not addressing them as ‘My Lord’] was another.”

Some of the bishops in fact spoke in support of him, and he had a good friend on the High Commission in the person of young Lord Lorne (later the renowned Marquis of Argyle). “He hath done as much as was within the compass of his power”, said Rutherford. “God gave me favour in his eyes.”

The “newly printed book” to which Rutherford refers was his learned work, *Exercitationes Apologeticae Pro Divina Gratia (A Defence of Divine Grace)*. James Clark, in *The Life and Works of Samuel Rutherford*, sums up the treatise: “In the first part, Samuel Rutherford discourses upon the divine decrees, how they are from eternity and immutable, absolute and unconditional, and refutes the Arminian error that God’s decrees depend upon His foreknowledge of events occurring in time. In the second part, he shows the sovereignty of the divine will, how God’s good pleasure cannot be frustrated and that God does not permit anything which He does not will. In this section he annihilates the heretical writings of Dr Thomas Jackson, Dean of Peterborough, whom Rutherford describes as ‘a wicked Arminian’. In the third part, he proves from Scripture the omnipotence of the divine will over man’s will and that God’s grace is saving and irresistible.”

The Commission alleged that the work reflected upon the Church of Scotland, but “the truth was,” says John Howie in his *Scots Worthies*, “the argument of that book did cut the sinews of Arminianism, and galled the Episcopal clergy to the very quick; and so Bishop Sydserff could endure him no longer”.

Although Rutherford had a measure of sympathy from some members of the High Commission, the bishop’s will prevailed. On 27 July 1636, sentence was finally pronounced on the Lord’s faithful servant: he was forbidden to exercise any part of his ministry within Scotland and ordered to confine himself within the city of Aberdeen, during the King’s pleasure.

His Aberdeen exile. Rutherford’s reaction on being sentenced to banishment in Aberdeen was actually one of joy. He wrote to Lady Kenmure, “That honour that I have prayed for these 16 years, with submission to my Lord’s will, my kind Lord hath now bestowed upon me, even to suffer for my royal and princely King Jesus and the freedom of the kingdom that His Father hath given Him”. To another he wrote, “I soon go to my King’s palace in Aberdeen. Tongue and pen and wit cannot express my joy.” To yet another he said, “I know Christ shall make Aberdeen my garden of delights”.

Sorrow, however, was mingled with his gladness. It grieved him much that his mouth was stopped indefinitely from preaching Christ, and that he would be

separated from his beloved people in Anwoth. "Sweet, sweet and easy is the cross of my Lord," he wrote to Gordon of Earlston. "Only the remembrance of my fair days with Christ in Anwoth, and of my dear flock (whose case is my heart's sorrow) is vinegar to my sugared wine. Yet both sweet and sour feed my soul."

A small company of Anwoth friends accompanied him all the way to Aberdeen, and it was with heavy hearts they bade him farewell and turned their faces towards home. They left him in Aberdeen, it is said, "with great regret at the want of such a pastor, so holy, learned and modest".

"I am by God's mercy come now to Aberdeen," he wrote to Robert Gordon in September 1636, "and settled in an honest man's house. . . . I find the townsmen cold and dry in their kindness, yet I find a lodging in the heart of many strangers. . . . Now, my dear brother, forget not me, the prisoner of Christ, for I see very few here who kindly fear God." "Northern love is cold," he wrote to another, "but Christ and I will bear it." "I find folks here kind to me," he told Lady Kenmure, "but in the night and under their breath." Faith Cook expresses his new situation well in her verses in *Grace in Winter*:

A borrowed house, a borrowed bed,
A fire, though not my own;
My sorrows these, but greater far
This grief my heart has known:
A scattered flock beyond my reach
And silent lips that long to preach.
My heaviness is mixed with joy,
For love has cast my chain;
His consolations swallow up
My tale of short-lived pain.
Then let my sufferings preach His name,
A silenced tongue His love proclaim!

The ecclesiastical and university authorities gave "the banished minister", as he was known in the town, the coldest reception of all – and little wonder, for Aberdeen was a centre of support for Archbishop Laud. "They regarded Rutherford with much suspicion," says Robert Gilmour in his biography, *Samuel Rutherford – A Study*, "and their aversion increased as he grew in favour with the people." It was not long before controversy arose. Dr Robert Barron, Professor of Divinity in Marischal College, and a rank Arminian in doctrine, was a determined opponent of such men as Samuel Rutherford

and David Dickson, and he relished the opportunity to engage Rutherford in debate. Rutherford wrote to George Gillespie, "I am here troubled with the disputes of the great doctors (especially with Dr B) in ceremonial and Arminian controversies, for all are corrupt here; but, I thank God, with no detriment to the truth, or discredit to my profession. So, then, I see that Christ can triumph in a weaker man nor I; and who can be more weak? But His grace is sufficient for me." If Barron – "the Goliath of his party", as Andrew Thompson described him – and his learned colleagues counted on an easy victory they were soon disillusioned. "Dr Barron hath often disputed with me," wrote Rutherford to William Dalgleish, his predecessor at Anwoth, "especially about Arminian controversies, and for the ceremonies. Three yokings laid him by, and I have not been troubled with him since."

However, the greatest trial endured by Rutherford was his "dumb Sabbaths". "My closed mouth, my dumb Sabbaths," he wrote to the Provost of Ayr, "the memory of my communion with Christ, in many, many fair days in Anwoth, hath almost broken my faith in two halves." To another he wrote, "My dumb Sabbaths burden my heart, and make it bleed". To yet another, "My dumb Sabbaths are like a stone tied to a bird's foot."

Samuel Rutherford's letters. Although his silenced tongue could not preach the gospel, his pen was exceedingly active on behalf of his "kingly King", whom he highly extolled in those wonderful letters he wrote during his banishment. How precious to their recipients were the epistles he sent from his "King's palace" in Aberdeen. But more than the actual recipients – Marion M'Naught, Robert Gordon, Lady Kenmure, Colonel Gilbert Ker, the cousins William and James Guthrie, and many others – derived benefit from them. Just as the writings of Bunyan, which came from his prison in Bedford in the 1660s, have helped many Christians heavenward since then, so the letters of Samuel Rutherford, which issued from his confinement in the north from September 1636 to June 1638, have consoled and fortified multitudes of the Lord's people in the succeeding three and a half centuries. Indeed, some people were so helped by them that they began to gather them together, and had "whole books full of them", says John Row the historian (writing at least 18 years before the letters were first published). Of the 365 letters in Bonar's edition, 220 were written from Aberdeen. "Paradoxical as it may seem," Gilmour says, "Rutherford lives by a book which he never wrote as a book at all – by a collection of letters written with no further intention than to edify or comfort his correspondents. It is by these that he, being dead, yet speaks so forcibly to so many hearts."

Some critics have focused on what they see as faults in his letters, but, says Marcus Loane in his *Makers of Religious Freedom*, “The faults in his letters are of minor account when we bear in mind the surpassing excellence of their merits; their grandeur outweighs their mistakes, and they have brought strength and comfort in verbal music to a thousand souls”. “His *Letters*, with all their faults, which are those of the age,” says Thomas M’Crie in *The Story of the Scottish Church*, “have excellences which must be felt to the end of time. ‘Hold off the Bible’ [that is, apart from the Bible], said Richard Baxter, ‘such a book the world never saw the like.’” “So far as I know,” says James Walker, in his *The Theology and Theologians of Scotland*, written 130 years ago, “they are the only letters two centuries old which are still a practical reality in the religious life of Scotland, England and America.” Spurgeon exclaimed, “What a wealth of spiritual ravishment we have here! Rutherford is beyond all praise of men. Like a strong-winged eagle he soars into the highest heaven and with unblenched [unflinching] eye he looks into the mystery of love divine.”

Some readers have found it profitable to trace a particular topic through his letters – for example, his concern for the spiritual welfare of young people. With some young friends he communicated directly. “I exhort you in the Lord”, he wrote to young Grizzel Fullerton, “to seek your one good thing, Mary’s good part that shall not be taken away from you. Learn the way, as your dear mother hath done before you, to knock at Christ’s door. Many an alms of mercy hath Christ given to her, and He hath abundance behind [remaining] for you.” To others he sent faithful and affectionate advices through their parents. “I desire your children to seek the Lord”, he wrote to John Gordon of Cardoness. “Desire them from me, to be requested, for Christ’s sake, to be blessed and happy, and to come and take Christ, and all things with Him.” Andrew Bonar said of Rutherford, “He had a heart for the young of all classes, so that he could say of two children of one of his correspondents, ‘I pray for them by name’”.

To most readers, three topics stand out in his letters: (1) his love to, and desire for, Christ; (2) his devoted concern for the cause of Christ, especially in Scotland; and (3) his profound sympathy with those burdened by trouble and sorrow. To a Mrs Craig who had lost her young son by drowning, he wrote, “There is no way of quieting the mind, and of silencing the heart of a mother, but godly submission. The readiest way for peace and consolation to clay vessels is, that it is a stroke of the Potter and Former of all things. And since the holy Lord hath loosed the grip, when it was fastened sure on your part, I know that your light, and I hope that your heart also, will yield. It is not safe to

be pulling and drawing with the omnipotent Lord. Let the pull go with Him, for He is strong; and say, 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven'."

"It was his own frequent journey at the side of wife or mother, son or daughter, to the dark and troubled waters of death, that gave him such superb skill in words of consolation," says Marcus Loane. "He never wrote in finer vein than when he wrote for the comfort of the bereaved. It was as though all the springs of pity in his own heart found a spontaneous outlet in true fellow-feeling with those who mourned. . . . It was out of the depth of his own heart that a noble sentence in one of his sermons was wrung: 'I know', he said, 'there is a true sorrow that is without tears; and I know there is a real sorrow that is beyond tears'."

Although no stranger to such sorrow, he also knew, even in the very midst of his griefs, the joy and peace that comes to the soul in having communion with the blessed Beloved of the Church. "I cannot but write to my friends that Christ hath trysted me in Aberdeen", he wrote to Lady Kenmure, "and my adversaries have sent me here to be feasted with love banquets with my royal, high, high and princely Lord Jesus." "None is so kind as my only royal King and Master, whose cross is my garland," he wrote to Alexander Colville. "The king dineth with His prisoner, and his spikenard casteth a smell. He hath led me up to such a pitch and nick of joyful communion with Himself, as I never knew before. When I look back to by-gones, I judge myself to have been a child at ABC with Christ. Worthy sir, pardon me, I dare not conceal it from you." But even when he did not have such times of spiritual elevation and delight, he could bless God for even the yearning for Christ which filled his heart. "I have little of Christ in this prison but groanings, and longings, and desires," he wrote on one occasion. "All my stock of Christ is some hunger for Him, and yet I cannot but say that I am rich in that."

The last of his known Aberdeen letters was written on 11 June 1638. Evidently it was soon after this date that he was able to return to his "fair Anwoth by the Solway".

Removal to St Andrews. The year 1638 was memorable for the Church in Scotland, not least because the National Covenant was renewed, being signed in Edinburgh on February 28 with great solemnity and joy. During the previous year, the King had sought to mould the Church fully into an Episcopalian pattern by enforcing the Five Articles of Perth. This generated much popular opposition and stirred up the people to be resolute in their resistance to Arminianism, Popery and despotism. "The peculiarity of the struggle of 1638,"

says Gilmour, “is that the Church then stood for the nation. Striving to secure her own spiritual independence, the Church really fought at the same time for the civil liberties of Scotland.” The King was constrained, or rather compelled, to allow a free General Assembly of the Church.

Samuel Rutherford had returned from Aberdeen to Anwoth after the National Covenant was renewed and was one of the commissioners to that famous Assembly, which met in Glasgow on November 21. The Assembly lost no time in re-establishing Presbyterianism and re-asserting the spiritual independence of the Church. That Assembly also considered the request of the town of St Andrews that Rutherford be appointed Professor of Divinity at St Mary’s College and referred it to a Commission of the Kirk. Rutherford was most reluctant to be moved from Anwoth for he could not bear the prospect of having more of the “dumb Sabbaths” he had to endure in Aberdeen. “I trust in God this Assembly will never take me from my pastoral charge,” he said, “for there is a woe unto me if I preach not the gospel, and I know not who can go betwixt me and that woe.”

To the dismay of his flock, the next year’s Assembly, on the recommendation of the Commission, did decide to move Rutherford to St Andrews. However, it also met his desire to continue preaching by making him a colleague of Robert Blair in the town pulpit. Rutherford was obliged to yield to the collective decision of his brethren, but his feelings are clear from what he wrote to Lady Kenmure: “My removal from my flock is so heavy to me that it maketh my life a burden to me, I had never such a longing for death. The Lord help and hold up sad clay.”

The Lord did indeed hear and help His servant. As Marcus Loane says, Rutherford “was henceforth to stand with the foremost men of the day in their efforts to guide the Church aright, and his hands were to help in replacing the crown on Christ’s brow in Scotland”. Although St Andrews University was “the oldest and most brilliant seat of learning in the kingdom”, it was far from being spiritually and morally healthy. M’Ward said that it “was the very nursery of all superstition in worship, and error in doctrine, and the sink of all profanity in conversation among the students”. But for the next 20 years Samuel Rutherford exercised a tremendous influence on the students, and thus on the future ministry of the Kirk. As Howie graphically puts it: “God did so signally second his servant’s indefatigable pains, both in teaching in the schools and in preaching in the congregation, that it became forthwith a Lebanon out of which were taken cedars for building the house of the Lord throughout the whole land”.

In 1640, after ten years as a widower, Samuel Rutherford married Jean McMath, a woman who was evidently fitted for such a husband. She was described as “a woman of great worth and piety”. One person who knew them both said, “I never knew any among men exceed him, nor any among women exceed her”. Before he went south to the Westminster Assembly, three children were born to them, but two of them died in infancy.

Rutherford’s work at the Westminster Assembly: After four years in St Andrews, Samuel Rutherford was given another enormous task – that of Scottish Commissioner (along with Alexander Henderson, Robert Baillie, George Gillespie and others) to the Westminster Assembly in London in 1643. Rutherford remained in the city for four years and during that time he not only took a prominent part in the Assembly’s debates on theology and Church polity but also preached before the Long Parliament and published five major books.

Rutherford took his wife and remaining child with him to London, and in 1645 another child – a daughter – was added to the family. But heavy sorrow became their lot again when the two children died. Marcus Loane notes: “There is a pathetic reference to this sorrow in one of his letters: ‘I had but two children, and both are dead since I came hither’”. More children were born in later years, but only one, their daughter Agnes, survived.

The influence which Rutherford and his Scottish colleagues exercised in the Westminster Assembly, says John Coffey, “was out of all proportion to their numbers”. J G Vos says, “The Westminster Assembly itself really belongs to English rather than to Scottish Church history, yet the Church of Scotland cooperated in the enterprise at the time, and the work of the Assembly has had far greater permanent effects in Scotland than in England. The chief doctrinal standards of all branches of Scottish Presbyterianism down to the present day were formulated by the Westminster Assembly of Divines.”

“Rutherford gave of his best in this Assembly,” says Gilmour; “his work has been described as ‘the supreme conscious effort’ of his life-time.” He deemed himself quite unworthy of the honour of being, as he put it, “a mason to lay the foundation for many generations, and to build the waste places of Zion”. “Mr Henderson, Mr Rutherford, and Mr Gillespie,” said Robert Baillie, their fellow Commissioner, “all three spoke exceedingly well, with arguments unanswerable.” It is said that Rutherford’s vast store of learning and his great ability in expressing himself “compelled men to hear him with the deepest respect”. In the debates on church order, government and authority, some of the most decisive contributions came from the Scottish Commissioners. “Had

not God sent Mr Henderson, Mr Rutherford and Mr Gillespie among them,” wrote Baillie, “I see not that ever they could agree on any settled [church] government.” While Gillespie made one of the most memorable contributions to the debate, it was Rutherford who, of all the Scottish Commissioners, made the most lasting impression on the other members of the Assembly.

When Rutherford left London it was with the prayerful good wishes of the other Westminster divines sounding in his ears. The Assembly minutes for 9 November 1647, record that “Mr Rutherford took his leave of the Assembly. The Prolocutor, by order of the Assembly, in the name of the Assembly, gave him thanks for the great assistance he hath afforded to this Assembly in his constant attendance upon the debates of it”. He was the last of the Scottish Commissioners to leave, and when he did, the English Divines wrote to the Church of Scotland: “We can not but restore him with ample testimony of his learning, godliness, faithfulness and diligence, and we humbly pray the Father of spirits to increase the number of such burning and shining lights among you”.

During his four years at the Westminster Assembly, Rutherford, as we noted already, wrote five volumes, almost 600 pages long on average. These were: *The Due Right of Presbyteries*; *Lex Rex*, or, *The Law and the Prince*; *The Trial and Triumph of Faith*; *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*; and *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself*. He also published two sermons of more than 60 pages each.

His renowned work, *Lex Rex*: When Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* came off the press, it caused a great stir in London and beyond. He wrote it in response to a 1644 work by John Maxwell, formerly Bishop of Ross, entitled, *The Sacred and Royal Prerogative of Christian Kings*, which defended absolute monarchy. The basic premise of *Lex Rex* is that the king is not above the law, but subject to it. Rutherford’s aim was to demonstrate that “all civil power is immediately from God in its root”, and that “power is a birthright of the people borrowed [by a ruler] from them”. In cases of gross oppression and unlimited prerogative, said Rutherford, parliament has an authority superior to the king. Therefore, in extreme circumstances, the people may reasonably and constitutionally resume that power which they had reposed in the hands of their sovereign.

Altogether, says Loane, “it provides us with a fine statement of the principles and policies of Puritan government. It was well-knit with a convincing argument and great dialectical ability, bound and clamped with the iron bands of proof from Scripture and a mass of syllogisms. . . . The king is the highest

servant of the state, but is a servant always; absolute power would be both irrational and unnatural.”

Of course, these ideas were not new. John Macleod, in his book, *Scottish Theology*, points out that “the tradition of Scottish Reformed teaching in regard to the obedience that the people owed to the civil power was to the effect that the power of the king is restricted and that his authority has bounds within which it ought to be kept. . . . Of this teaching, the best-known document that there had been so far was Buchanan’s *De jure regni apud Scotos*” (*On the Right of Kingship among the Scots*).

An indication of the sensation caused by Rutherford’s book is found in a statement by Bishop Guthrie. Every member of the General Assembly, he said, “had in his hand that book lately published by Mr Samuel Rutherford, which was so idolized, that whereas Buchanan’s treatise was looked upon as an oracle, this coming forth, [Buchanan’s] was slighted as not anti-monarchical enough, and Rutherford’s *Lex Rex* only thought authentic”. “It is reported,” says Howie, “that when King Charles the First saw *Lex Rex*, he said it would scarcely ever get an answer; nor did it ever get any, except what the Parliament gave it in 1661, when they caused it to be burned at the cross in Edinburgh by the hands of the hangman.”

Rutherford’s fame spread far and wide. On his return to St Andrews from London in 1647 he was appointed Principal of St Mary’s College. Other universities offered him professorships, but he remained in St Andrews. The chair of Divinity at Harderwyck in the Netherlands was offered to him in 1648 but he declined it; and in 1649 he refused the chair of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. Then in 1651 he twice declined an invitation to succeed Charles de Matius in the chair of Divinity at Utrecht. In that same year he became the Rector of St Andrews University

Protesters and Resolutioners schism. Another notable event which affected Rutherford in 1651 (the year when he became rector of St Andrews University) was the schism between the ecclesiastical parties known as the Resolutioners and the Protesters. It was a controversy, says Gilmour, “that estranged his dearest friends, broke his heart, and almost shattered the Kirk of Scotland to pieces”.

The background to that unhappy division was that Scotland, appalled by the execution of Charles I, crowned Charles II as king in 1651 – after he had subscribed the Covenants and promised to establish Presbyterianism in the

nation. The Scottish army had been purged already, by the Act of Classes, of those who were known as *malignants* (that is, enemies to the Covenants and Reformed religion). But because of the defeat by Cromwell at Dunbar in the previous year, the Act of Classes was repealed and the Royalist malignants were again allowed a place in the army and the government. The General Assembly of the Church framed certain "Public Resolutions" for the admission of Royalists to places of trust and power, declaring that "in this case of so real and ardent necessity, we cannot be against the raising of all fencible persons in the land, and permitting them to fight against this enemy for defence of the kingdom . . .". In the event, the measure was to no avail, for the army was defeated again by Cromwell at Worcester later that year, and Charles fled to the continent.

After the Church had passed the Resolutions, 22 ministers, with Rutherford at their head, tabled a Protest in the Assembly in which they remonstrated against the validity of that Assembly and protested against the Resolutions as contrary to the Word of God and the Covenant. When the Assembly was reconstituted in Dundee, it deposed three of the Protesters, or Remonstrants: James Guthrie, Patrick Gillespie and James Simson. They suspended another, James Nasmith of Hamilton, and called on presbyteries and synods to censure all signatories to the Protest. Although the Protesters were very much in the minority in the courts of the Church, their cause, as Gilmour rightly observes, "was the cause of the common people".

The contention between the two parties was sharp and bitter. Rutherford himself, as the leading Protester, wrote and spoke with great warmth on this burning issue. However, he sadly deplored the schism. "One day when he was preaching in Edinburgh," says Woodrow, "after dwelling for some time on the differences of the day, he broke out with: 'Woe is unto us for these sad divisions that make us lose the fair scent of the Rose of Sharon', and then he went on commending Christ, going over all his precious styles and titles about a quarter of an hour; upon which the laird of Glanderston said, 'Ay, now you are right; hold you there'."

There is no doubt, as J A Wylie writes in an introduction to *The Scots Worthies*, that "this division in the ranks of the Covenanters paved the way for the triumph of Charles and the downfall of the Presbyterian establishment". Too late, some of the Resolutioners perceived their credulity, and the correctness of the Protesters' predictions. After the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the overturning of the Second Reformation by the 1661 Act Recissory, one

Resolutioner, James Wood, confessed: "Alas, alas, I see now the Remonstrants [the Protesters] were in the right; the Resolutions have ruined us!"

Rutherford's last days and death. Samuel Rutherford was taken away almost a decade before he reached the allotted span of three score years and ten. His health evidently began to fail in his mid-fifties. No doubt there were times when he desired to be with Christ, which is far better, but his immediate concern was for the Church of Christ in Scotland in her riven and hard-pressed state. "It's much selfishness," he wrote to Lady Ralston, "to make post haste to be in the land of rest when a storm of persecution is rising for Christ." And in 1659, as he approached 60, he wrote to Lady Kenmure, "I was lately knocking at death's gate, yet could I not get in, but was sent back for a time. It is well if I could yet do any service to Him." Eighteen months later he was gone to that land of rest.

"He died in 1661," writes M'Crie in his *Story of the Scottish Church*, "shortly after his book *Lex Rex* was burned by the hangman at Edinburgh, and at the gates of the new college of St Andrews . . . He departed just in time to avoid an ignominious death; for though everybody knew he was dying, the council had with impotent malice summoned him to appear before them at Edinburgh on a charge of high treason. When the citation came, he said, 'Tell them I have got a summons already before a superior judge and judicatory, and I behove to answer my first summons; and ere your day arrive, I will be where few kings and great folks come'.

"When they returned and reported that he was dying, the Parliament, with a few dissenting voices, voted that he should not be allowed to die in the college. Upon this Lord Burleigh said, 'Ye have voted that honest man out of his college, but ye cannot vote him out of heaven'."

Samuel Rutherford did not die as the martyrs died. Yet, as Howie says, "Surely he was a martyr both in his own design and resolution, and in the design and determination of men". "My tabernacle is weak," he said on his deathbed, "and I would think it a more glorious way of going hence, to lay down my life for the cause at the cross of Edinburgh or St Andrews – but I submit to my Master's will."

With ardent longing did the dying contender for the faith yearn for heaven, vehemently desiring to see the King in His beauty. "O, when shall the night be gone," he cried, "the shadows flee away, and the morning of that long, long

day, without cloud or night, dawn?" He frequently repeated: "O for arms to embrace Him, O for a well-tuned harp!"

"During the time of his last sickness," says Howie, "he uttered many savoury speeches, and often broke out in a kind of sacred rapture, exalting and commending the Lord Jesus, especially when his end drew near." When Robert Blair asked him what he now thought of Christ, he replied, "I shall live and adore Him. Glory, glory to my . . . Redeemer for ever!" When a remark was made about his work for God, he said: "I disclaim all; the port I would be in at is redemption and forgiveness of sin through His blood".

As he longed for his Lord to receive him to Himself, he was heard saying, "I shall shine; I shall see Him as He is. I shall see Him reign, and all the fair company with Him, and I shall have my large share. Mine eyes shall see my Redeemer, and no other for me." Then he added, "This seems to be a wide [excessive] word; but it's no fancy nor delusion; it's true, it's true!"

On the evening before he died, he said, "This night will close the door, and fasten my anchor; and I shall go away in a sleep by five in the morning". "And thus it happened," says Alexander Smellie, "for at that hour on the morning of March 29, God hid Samuel Rutherford with Himself from the wrangling and cruelty of wicked men." The last words which he was heard to breathe were: "Glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's Land!" One biographer says, "It was as though a glimpse of the distant mountains and the kingly glory were flashed before his eyes". "And thus," says Howie, "the renowned eagle took its flight into the mountains of spices."

His latter end was peace in great measure. That wonderful deathbed scene is beautifully captured by Mrs A R Cousins:

"They summoned me before them
But there I may not come,
My Lord says, 'Come up hither'.
My Lord says, 'Welcome home!'
My kingly King, at His white throne,
My presence doth command,
Where glory, glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's Land."

Samuel Rutherford's mortal remains were laid to rest in the grounds of St Andrews Cathedral, there to await the morning of the resurrection. As John

Macleod notes in his *Scottish Theology*: “At the foot of the ruined wall of the Cathedral of St Andrews there are two graves side by side, where lie buried two of the brightest ornaments of Scottish Evangelical Christianity, Samuel Rutherford and Thomas Halyburton”. Truly, Samuel Rutherford was “a burning and a shining light” in the Church of Christ, and through his instrumentality many who were in darkness were brought to be children of light. He departed to enjoy the reward of such good and faithful servants, for it is written, “They that turn many to righteousness [shall shine] as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:3).

A final look back. In conclusion, how shall we sum up Samuel Rutherford’s character and the contribution he made to the spiritual and temporal welfare of Scotland? We cannot but echo words on his tombstone in St Andrews:

“What tongue, what pen, or skill of men
Can famous Rutherford commend!”

Numerous assessments have been made of him, some hyper-critical and denunciatory, displaying an obvious lack of spiritual understanding. A few have gone to the opposite extreme and have been quite uncritical and adulatory. Any balanced assessment – and there are many of these – must conclude that, mentally and spiritually, he was a colossus and that Scotland in her long history has rarely seen his like.

We shall glance for a moment at his appearance. Samuel Rutherford was small of stature and very fair and had, as Woodrow says, “two quick eyes”. His movements were brisk and energetic and, whether he was walking or preaching, it was observed that “he held ay his face upward and heavenward”. The only surviving portrait of Rutherford shows, as Coffey expresses it, “his face plump, his features prominent and his gaze intense but enigmatic”. In the pulpit he was very energetic and his hands were never still for a moment. He preached with a shrill voice – “a kind of screech”, said Woodrow, but he was “one of the most moving and affectionate preachers in his time or perhaps in any age of the Church”. Woodrow also recorded that one hearer “many times thought Mr Rutherford would have flown out of the pulpit when he came to speak of Christ, the Rose of Sharon”.

Samuel Rutherford possessed a giant intellect, had tremendous force of character and was blessed with vast stores of mental and physical energy. Above everything he was a man who lived very near to God, who gave his all so that his Divine King would have the pre-eminence in all things, and that the

Church of Christ, especially in Scotland, would flourish as the garden of the Lord. In his work as pastor, preacher, professor of divinity, principal of the university and protagonist for the faith, he was the very epitome of diligence, faithfulness, and persistence.

Some have wondered how two such diverse books, *Lex Rex* and his *Letters*, could come from one person. Marcus Loane says, "That the same man should have been the author of both volumes is the final proof that he was a man of no common mental stature, with rare powers of original thought and accomplishment. He was in fact so far from an unrelated dualism that we are more likely to be correct if we conclude that he was 'a very much greater man than even his most sympathetic critics are prepared to allow'." Gilmour notes that Taylor Innes, in an essay on Rutherford, makes the interesting observation that "the contrast between Rutherford in his letters and Rutherford in his other books was not nearly so visible to the men of his own time – it was bridged over by the Rutherford of his sermons".

Like every great and godly man in the history of the Church, Samuel Rutherford was not without his frailties. Being of a most ardent disposition, he spoke and acted on occasions with excessive warmth. "He was usually mild and gentle," says Alexander Morton in his *Galloway and the Covenanters*, "but when roused, his zeal oft outran his discretion." On one occasion, when interviews had been conducted for the appointment of a regent in the College, the choice was reduced to two men of equal ability – an unnamed acquaintance of Rutherford and a Mr Jameson. It was decided therefore to make the final choice by casting lots. Principal Howie engaged in prayer, the lot was cast, and the appointment fell to Mr Jameson. "Mr Rutherford," we are told, "was extremely stormy at this, and says, 'Sirs, the prayer was not right gone about, and therefore the determination is not to be sisted upon'. And without any more [ado] he rises up and prays himself, and the lot was casten over again, and it fell on Mr Jameson again. This perfectly confounded Mr Rutherford, and no doubt let him see his rashness and error, and immediately he turned to Mr Jameson and said, 'Sir, put on your gown; you have a better right to it than I have to mine'."

While Rutherford had his detractors, he was not only a man greatly beloved by God but also by the godly in Scotland. Among his contemporaries, he had a quite extraordinary reputation. Woodrow says that those who knew him did not know whether to admire him most for his profound scholarship, his skill in debate, or his wonderful preaching. Thomas M'Crie notes: "Rutherford was the most popular preacher of his day, but it is not so generally known that he was

as much distinguished for his learning and metaphysical attainments as for his eloquence and devotion". James Urquhart, the old minister of Kinloss, said, "I never knew one in Scotland like him to whom so many great gifts were given. He seemed to be always praying, always preaching, always visiting the sick, always teaching in the schools, always writing treatises, always reading and studying."

Many link his name first and foremost with his letters. Others, however, remember him especially as a Mr Valiant for the Truth who contended especially for the crown rights of the Redeemer, and thus for the precious liberties, religious and civil, which we yet enjoy. As Gilmour says, "Rutherford is more than a name or a memory, however fragrant. He was a maker of history too, a man of strenuous action, one of those great churchmen who have done so much to shape the destinies of Scotland." In that work he was faithful unto death and at last was given the crown of life by His kingly King. These further lines on his gravestone aptly sum up his life and labours:

"For Zion's King, and Zion's cause,
And Scotland's covenanted laws,
Most constantly he did contend,
Until his time was at an end".