

The Cathedral Church of Glasgow

GLASGOW Cathedral stands upon a site which has been held sacred for more than 1,500 years. As has been well said : "The cross was planted, and here was ground blessed for Christian burial by a Christian bishop, St. Ninian, while Iona was yet an unknown island among the western waves, while the promontory of St. Andrews was the haunt of the wild boar and the sea-mew, and only the smoke of a few heathen wigwams ascended from the Rock of Edinburgh." Beneath the floor of the Cathedral is the burial place of St. Kentigern, apostle and bishop of the early Celtic Church ; while on the banks of the Molendinar, the little stream which flows by the foot of the hill, the saint baptized his first converts to the Christian Faith. Little is known in detail of the life of Kentigern ("Chief Lord") or, as he is commonly known in the West of Scotland, Mungo ("Dear Friend"). A picture of the saint (probably fourteenth century) is to be seen on one of the pillars of St. Stephen's Chapel in Cologne Cathedral. The only extant biography we have of him was written five centuries after his death by Jocelin, a monk of Furness Abbey, at the end of the twelfth century. In that biography, moreover, as in all the medieval lives of the saints, fact and fiction are charmingly intertwined. The main outlines of the life and work of the great missionary bishop appear, however, fairly clear. His mother, Thenew (the corrupt form *Enoch* gives its name to St. Enoch's Square, in Glasgow) came of a pagan family ; she married a Christian, Owen, King of Strathclyde, but was disowned by her father. Tradition has it that she had to fly from her home in the Lothians and cross the Firth of Forth alone in a small boat. The boat was driven on to the beach near Culross, and her son was born on the windswept shore at a spot still marked by the remains of St. Mungo's Chapel. There, in Culross, the boy grew up under the charge of a saintly man of God, and underwent his training for the priesthood at the Celtic monastery.

After taking his departure from Culross, in the course of his journey Mungo came to Kernack (probably Carnock in the parish of St. Ninians, Stirlingshire) where he found a holy man, Fergus, at the point of death. Next morning the body was placed on a wagon, to which two untamed bulls were

yoked, being bidden to carry their burden to the place that the Lord had provided for it. The procession, which included Mungo and his companions, came by "a straight road" (doubtless the ancient route over the Campsie Fells) to "Cathures which is now called Glasgow", and halted at a cemetery which had long before been consecrated by St. Ninian. There the body of Fergus was buried at a spot now covered by "The Ile of Car Fergus", or Blacader's Aisle. Here St. Mungo founded his church, which he dedicated to the Holy Trinity. He was elected by the King and clergy of the region, with other Christians "albeit they were few in number", to be the shepherd and bishop of their souls, and was duly consecrated by a bishop brought from Ireland for the purpose. He determined to raise the spiritual life of the Christian community there, but met with such opposition after the accession of the apostate King Morken, that, after some fourteen years, in danger of his life, he turned his footsteps towards the south. He conducted a mission in Cumberland, visited St. David, and finally founded a small monastic community in Wales (St. Asaph's), where he lived and worked peacefully for about twenty years.

In the year 573 he was recalled by Rhydderch, the Christian King of Strathclyde. For a time he fixed his see at Hoddam in Dumfriesshire, but about 582 he returned to Glasgow. Thenceforward the life of Kentigern was one of ever-increasing activity, influence and achievement. His reputation for sanctity extended far and wide; so much so that St. Columba is said to have come on one occasion from Iona to visit him at Glasgow, and was welcomed with due honour and rejoicings, "three bands of singers" being sent out to greet the distinguished guest on the banks of the Molendinar. St. Mungo's own vast diocese extended from the Derwent to the Lennox, and he is believed to have organized no fewer than four great missions: (1) into Lanarkshire, Peebles-shire and the Lothians; (2) into Ayrshire, Nithsdale and the Stewartry; (3) into Perthshire, Forfarshire and Aberdeenshire; (4) towards Orkney, Norway and Iceland. Always he had his eye on further horizons, and seemed tireless in his longing and his labours to carry the light of the Christian Faith across the whole length and breadth of the land. Only in extreme old age did Mungo cease from his work, and, according to tradition, he departed this life on 13th January, 603, full of days and surrounded by affection and reverence. He was buried on the hillside above the banks of the little stream where he had baptized his first converts in Strathclyde.

During the centuries following the death of St. Mungo there was doubtless a succession of churches built near or upon the site of his grave ; simple structures of wood and wattle, no trace of which now remains. Nor have we any record of the long line of bishops who succeeded him and carried on his work in Strathclyde ; the first bishop of Glasgow who clearly emerges out of the mists of obscurity being Bishop John at the beginning of the twelfth century. The first Cathedral of stone was dedicated on 7th July, 1136, King David being present with his Court at the ceremony : this church apparently was destroyed by fire some years later. A new building, probably begun by his predecessor, was completed by Bishop Jocelin (1174-1199) in 1197. Of this church, only a single wall-shaft remains, resting upon a fragment of bench-table, near the south-west entrance to the Lower Church.

The Cathedral Church that we see today was begun by Bishop William de Bondington (1233-1258) who during his lifetime saw the completion both of the Quire and of the Lower Church. The Nave, although begun even earlier than Bondington's episcopate, was not completed until the very end of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth. Bishop Cameron, "The Magnificent" (1426-1446) finished the Chapter House, built the Sacristy above it, and erected the Consistory House and Library at the south-west corner of the Nave, now unhappily removed. The last of the builders, Archbishop Blacader (1483-1508) built the beautiful Aisle on the south side called by his name. The site, perched above the city, with the High Street leading up to it from the bridge is a fine one ; and the medieval builders knew how to make the most of it. To the east the ground falls rapidly to the little ravine in which the Molendinar burn once flowed clear and fresh. The steep slope gave the builder his opportunity ; and to the skill with which he seized it we owe the wonderful Lower Church with its forest of columns.

Like the other churches in Scotland, the Cathedral of Glasgow suffered certain attacks during the stormy days of the sixteenth century. During the years succeeding the Reformation all images were removed, the altars broken, and the chapels stripped of their furnishings ; but the fabric, fortunately, was never greatly damaged. Almost alone among the great churches of Scotland, it has never been roofless ; and the worship of God has been carried on within its walls continuously for more than seven hundred years. After the Reformation it entered upon a new period of its history, becoming the great Parish Church of Glasgow.

The most imposing view of the exterior is to be had from the south-eastern corner of the churchyard, allowing one to see the whole length of the church, some three hundred feet from east to west. The eastern half is really a two-storey building, the Quire being the upper storey. The Lower Church is entirely above the level of the ground ; and the entrances to it, with their porches, are charming examples of medieval doorways. The western facade of the Nave has suffered immeasurably by the ill-judged removal, in 1846 and 1848, of the two great towers which had adorned it since the fourteenth century.

On entering the Nave, one's first impression is of spacious dignity combined with almost austere simplicity of design, characteristic of most of the medieval Scottish churches. It is perhaps this simplicity that gives to the building a suggestion of greater size than it actually possesses : the total inside length is 283 feet, the width 61 feet 8 inches, the height 77 feet. An unusual feature of the plan is that the transepts do not project beyond the wall-line of the Nave. In pre-Reformation times there were altars at each of the fourteen pillars of the Nave, but of these no trace remains. They were dedicated to various saints, among others being, on the south side, St. John the Baptist, St. Nicholas, St. Kentigern, St. Cuthbert, St. Blase, St. Andrew, St. Thomas of Canterbury, St. Michael ; on the north side, St. Catherine (?), St. Ninian (?), St. Machar, All Saints, St. Christopher, St. Bridget (?). There are many monuments and memorial tablets, mostly of the nineteenth century. The only one of special interest is that of the Stewarts of Minto, in the South Aisle. Charles II fell in love with one of the daughters of the house. Although she refused to marry him, he set her likeness, as *Britannia*, on the copper coinage of the realm, where it remains to this day.

Entering by the low doorway in the Screen, one passes into the beautiful Ritual Quire built by Bishop de Bonington. The western half contained stalls for the high officers and canons. The Bishop's throne or *cathedra* occupied a position slightly to the east of the southern row of stalls. The magnificent east window with four lights is of particular beauty. The roof of the Quire is of oak and was erected in 1912. On the middle line of carved and coloured bosses are depicted scenes from the life of Christ ; the south line shows the miracles ; the north line various symbols of Christ. The vaulting of the side aisles is of stone, and bears many shields and ecclesiastical symbols carved on the bosses.

The most striking architectural feature of this part of the church is the square east end, with its ambulatory and four chapels beyond the high altar. These, counting from north to south, were dedicated respectively to St. Ninian, St. Martin, St. James the Greater, and SS. Stephen and Lawrence. They are now used as a single chapel. In the south-east corner of the last-named is a *piscina*. The characteristic seventeenth century tomb in this chapel is that of Archbishop James Law (1615-1632), which has recently been repainted and decorated.

The fine old pulpit was made for use in the lower church about 1600, and is a pleasing example of Scottish craftsmanship of that period. Among those who preached from it was one of the most fervent and courageous of the Covenanters, Donald Cargill, who was eventually put to death at the Grassmarket in Edinburgh, for conscience' sake. On the side of the pulpit can be seen an old hour-glass, such as was used in most Scottish churches in former days, to indicate to the preacher the time permitted for his sermon. The sand in this one takes thirty-eight minutes to run down !

Directly to the south of the Chancel is a pew provided and furnished for use by members of the Royal Family when attending Divine Service in the Cathedral. One of the two armchairs shows the Arms of Her Majesty the Queen ; the other the initial of His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. The pews in the Quire, installed in the middle of the nineteenth century, are made of oak brought from Loch Lomondside. In 1957 it was decided to re-fashion the pews, which at that time were narrow, upright and uncomfortable. This reconstruction was duly carried out, and added greatly both to the appearance and comfort of the seats. In order to make the project financially possible, many well-known institutions and public bodies throughout the city gave generous help. In recognition of this generosity, small plaques are affixed to the end of the pews, depicting the coats of arms and mottoes of the respective institutions who contributed towards the expense of the work. These plaques, coloured and gilded, are not only decorative in themselves, but constitute a visible link of association between the Mother Church of the City and bodies representative of many aspects of its life.

The Sacristy, a dignified and lofty apartment, dates from the fifteenth century. On the capital of the centre pillar are the arms of King James IV and of Bishop Cameron, the builder, whose shield is also seen above the fireplace. On

the south wall is a memorial to the Bishops, Archbishops and Ministers of Glasgow, from 1115 up to the present day. The oak door is the only original one left in the church: the leaden bullets embedded in the timber speaking of stormy scenes and times! The splendidly carved Royal Coat of Arms in this room, which was made about 1810, probably hung on the front of the small gallery at the west end of the Quire, which at one time accommodated the Lord Provost and Magistrates, and contained "The Kings' Seat".

The Lower Church

Built during the episcopate of Bishop de Bondington and designed by some unknown architect of genius, the Lower Church, often miscalled the Crypt, is a particularly fine example of the first pointed style of Gothic, and is one of the chief glories of medieval Scottish architecture. With its twenty-seven lancet windows, its galaxy of pillars symmetrically disposed yet skilfully varied in design, its mystery of light and shadow, it is a veritable forest carved in stone. The length is 123 feet 3 inches, and the breadth is 61 feet 8 inches. In the centre, on a slightly raised platform and within four slender pillars, stood the Shrine of St. Mungo, patron saint of Glasgow, whose grave lies beneath its floor and in honour of whom the Cathedral is dedicated. To this sacred spot thousands of pilgrims made their way in medieval times. Indeed, in 1451, the Pope decreed that it should be esteemed as meritorious to make a pilgrimage to Glasgow Cathedral as to Rome itself. Unfortunately no trace of the shrine and furnishings now remains; but the chapel itself is still in regular use. Immediately west of St. Mungo's Tomb are two ancient stone coffins, one of which is carved with a thirteenth century cross.

The Chapel of the Blessed Virgin, under the High Altar, is notable for the marvellous beauty of the vaulting and sculptured bosses. Carved on the vaulting of the north aisle are four portraits, which are taken to be the likenesses of Bishop de Bondington: King Alexander II; a child, afterwards King Alexander III; and a lady, probably Isabella de Valoniis, a generous benefactress of the Cathedral. Also in the north aisle, marked by a brass tablet, is the grave of Edward Irving, the famous preacher. The memorial window in the wall above depicts John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness.

At a still lower level at the east end is the Chapel of the Four Altars, corresponding to those in the Upper Church.

These, counting from north to south, were dedicated respectively to St. Nicholas, SS. Peter and Paul, St. Andrew and St. John the Evangelist. One of these has recently been furnished as a Chapel for members of the nursing profession. On the north wall of the Chapel of St. Andrew is a recumbent stone effigy of Bishop Robert Wischart (1271-1316), patriot, ecclesiastic and statesman. One of the most striking figures of his time, he consistently supported the national cause against Edward I and the English. "When Robert the Bruce, friendless and a fugitive, raised the war cry of Scotland, Bishop Wischart took his side. He absolved him from the sacrilegious slaughter of Cumyn in Greyfriars Church, Dumfries, prepared the robes and royal banner for his coronation, and himself at Scone set the crown on the new king's head. Wischart both preached and fought against Edward. Captured at last in 1306 in the Castle of Cupar, which he held against the English, he remained a prisoner until the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, growing blind during his captivity. He survived his liberation only two years, died on 26th November 1316, and was buried in his own Cathedral at Glasgow." In the south wall of the Chapel of St. John the Evangelist is "St. Mungo's Well". The window above (by Clayton and Bell) depicts the baptism of King Roderick's child by St. Mungo. There is a *piscina* on the top of the north wall, which served both this and the adjoining chapel.

The Chapter House, begun by Bishop William de Boundington in the thirteenth century, was not completed until early in the fifteenth. The doorway, with its elaborate carving, is perhaps the most beautiful in the church. The Dean's seat shows the arms of Bishop William Lauder (1408-1425) on the canopy; the inscription reading: WILMS : FUDAT : ISTUT : CAPILM : DEI : "William Founded this Chapter House in honour of God". During the episcopate of Bishop Cameron the number of Canons of Glasgow was increased to thirty-two, making the Chapter the largest in Scotland.

Blacader's or Fergus Aisle

This under-croft or aisle is said to occupy the site of the small grave-yard consecrated at the beginning of the fifth century by St. Ninian. The curiously crude carving in the vault over the north pier depicts a human figure lying on a cart, surrounded by the inscription: "This is ye Ile of Car Fergus". The lower part of the walls seems to have been erected at the same time as the Quire; but as it now stands the chapel was built during the primacy of Archbishop

Blacader, whose coat of arms is sculptured on some of the ceiling bosses. It formed the first part of a building scheme, in which the extension of the south transept was contemplated but never completed. The ceiling displays one of the finest collections in Scotland of carved bosses, and well illustrates the variety of design and conception of the medieval craftsman. After the Reformation this aisle was the usual burying-place for the clergy of the Cathedral! Blacader's Aisle was the latest addition to the Cathedral Church, which had been in process of construction for more than three hundred years: successive prelates added to its dignity and beauty in their several generations. As we contemplate the work of those ancient builders, whether in the magnificence of its conception as a whole or in its perfection of detail, we seem to see, as it were embodied in stone, their reverence for Almighty God, their devotion to the Christian Faith; and their love of the craft in which, with primitive tools, they yet succeeded in producing a church, massive in strength and rich in beauty, which has stood for more than seven hundred years, and may yet echo to the sounds of praise and prayer for many centuries to come.

The Windows

There is no medieval glass left in the Cathedral: a few fragments found among the rubble in the floor of the Lower Church can be seen in the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, a scheme was set on foot, under the auspices of the Lord Provost and a large and representative Committee, to reglaze the whole church. The response was greater than might have been expected, and most of the leading families in the surrounding counties and many of the best known and most eminent citizens offered to present windows. The next step was to discover where the best workmanship was to be found, and after careful enquiries the conclusion was reached that the finest stained-glass at that time was being made at Munich. Designs were commissioned, a scheme of subjects was prepared and orders were placed. Within less than fifteen years the new glass was installed in almost every window in the Cathedral Church, quire, nave, chapels, sacristy, chapter-house and lower church. In the great majority of the windows the lower panels contained the coats of arms of the donors, forming an extremely interesting heraldic collection. The glass was the best procurable at that time, and was much admired. The colours were rich and strong, and in some

cases the craftsmanship was impressive ; but both taste and craftsmanship in the making of stained-glass was unfortunately at that period of somewhat inferior quality. With the passing of the years some of the paint faded and the leading became loose. The glass also had the effect of excluding light from the church, thus creating a dim and almost melancholy atmosphere.

During the first quarter of the present century there began a welcome revival in the art of stained-glass, one of the chief figures being a Scotsman, Douglas Strachan. In 1937 it was decided that some of the newer and finer stained-glass should be erected in the Cathedral. Descendants of the original donors generously agreed to acquiesce in the project, and several new donors came forward with offers of help.

Certain principles were felt to be important in the carrying out of the new scheme. One of these principles was that, in the case of a very large church like Glasgow Cathedral, it would be both selfish and short-sighted for one generation to reglaze all the principal windows, thus leaving no opportunity for succeeding generations to make their own distinctive contribution. For this reason, the decision was made that a number of the windows should be filled simply with clear glass. A further principle accepted was that in the mother church of the largest city in Scotland the new windows should include as representative a collection as possible of stained-glass made by contemporary artists of the first rank. A third principle was that the new windows should let as much light as possible into the church.

The projected scheme of new glass, begun in 1938 and delayed by the inevitable difficulties and frustrations of war-time, has now been completed, thanks to the help of many generous donors : and as a result the work of no fewer than eleven distinguished contemporary artists, Scottish and English, can now be seen.

Perhaps it may be asked : has a Cathedral or Mother Church still any significant part to play in a great modern industrial city such as Glasgow, and in a Presbyterian system of church government ? The answer is undoubtedly in the affirmative. It is true that since the Reformation Glasgow Cathedral has been no longer the " seat " of a bishop, as in medieval times. Yet in many ways it has been able, and still is able, to maintain its ancient role and carry out some of the most valuable of its former functions. This is perhaps symbolically illustrated by the fact that for four hundred years the Minister of the Cathedral has also been known as " The

Minister of Glasgow ". More than that, although a constitutionally formed congregation, with its own Kirk Session and communicants' roll, worship regularly within its walls, yet in a very real sense the Cathedral is also the spiritual centre for the whole city. On the Sunday after the Municipal Elections each year, for example, the Lord Provost, the Magistrates and Town Councillors come to be " kirked " at Divine Service, and to ask for the guidance and blessing of God in their civic responsibilities. Similarly, on another Sunday, the officials of the fourteen ancient Crafts of the Trades House come to re-dedicate themselves and their talents. Throughout the year, groups of all kinds, Freemasons, Rotary Clubs, Nurses, Youth Fellowships, Woman's Guild Branches, industrial workers, attend special services. Parties of school children are taken round the Church and told something of its history ; their visits concluding with a brief act of worship in one of the chapels. On occasions of national or civic rejoicing or disaster, it is to the Cathedral that the people naturally come, from all parts of the city, to join in prayer and to find comfort and inspiration. In a very real sense, the great old church, even as a building, visibly symbolizes the central part which the Christian Faith has played generation after generation in the life of the community, and silently speaks of the prayers, the aspirations and the spiritual longings of countless men and women through the centuries. This sense of continuity in Christian tradition, belief and worship is of very high value in an age which is often tempted to disparage the past.

When possible a great church, with endowments at its disposal and contacts with generous friends and patrons, should also give encouragement to artists and craftsmen, whether in stained-glass, wood, wrought iron, weaving, or embroidery. In this way something practical can be done to bring to an end the arid period of misunderstanding which, peculiarly in Scotland, for so long has separated the arts and artists from the Church. Nor must it be forgotten that a Cathedral Church should be expected, through its Sunday and weekday services, to set a pattern of Divine Worship and provide a standard of religious music which cannot be found, and indeed would not be suitable, in the average parish church. The great festivals of the Christian Year can be celebrated with special magnificence. Liturgical experiments, moreover, can be more easily carried out. Distinguished representatives of other Communions, or those engaged in social and evangelical activities of special interest

may be invited to preach. And where there are three or four clergy, as there ought to be, in such a church, it is possible to hold Daily Services at whatever hour is found most suitable in the particular circumstances. The late Wilfred Emery, Master of the Music at Glasgow for some twenty-five years, founded a *Cathedral Choral Society*. Drawing members from all over the city, it gives usually two Recitals of outstanding distinction each year, and has made a notable contribution to the musical and cultural life of the whole community. At other times, distinguished musicians from other countries are invited to come and give recitals on the great organ. One such memorable day was the occasion when Dr. Albert Schweitzer gave a recital of Bach.

In these and in many other ways the Mother Church of a city or large town can both provide spiritual leadership and also afford opportunities for that peculiarly effective modern form of evangelism: the gathering of different groups, professional, industrial, artistic, athletic, for common worship. For, in spite of certain contemporary attacks on traditional religious observances and customs, it is above all when men and women come together to worship and pray in one place that the barriers between secular and sacred are found to be illusory; and the worshippers gain not only new glimpses of the splendour and the loving kindness of God, but also new insights into the meaning and the possibilities of ordinary life, in its heights and its depths.

NEVILLE DAVIDSON