

King's College Chapel, Aberdeen.

THE University of Aberdeen is fortunate in having had from the beginning a Chapel entirely worthy of such an institution.

Bishop William Elphinstone, the founder of King's College as of much else that has blessed Aberdeen, took very seriously his responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the people of his diocese, who were then admittedly "unlettered, ignorant, and almost barbarian"; and he sought particularly by erecting a University to train suitable clergy. The Bull of Pope Alexander VI. sanctioning the scheme was issued in 1494; Hector Boece was in office as the first Principal by 1500; and the necessary buildings were erected by September, 1505.

The most interesting part of the original College is the Church, with its bell-tower to the south-west, surmounted by an imperial crown, and containing thirteen bells. The tower is almost 100 feet high, and is supported, as is the whole Chapel, by stout buttresses. The door-ways are round-headed, but with a very flat arch. Round-headed also is the large four-light west window, and one of the windows on the north side; but the others are pointed. The north wall has six bays, with five windows, four of these with heavy central mullions. There is a three-sided apse with a large window in each bay. The south wall has always been somewhat of a mystery. The four bays west of the apse have only small clerestory windows, the lower part of the wall having no lights, as if some building were planned to stand here, as indeed was soon the case. The church is built of sandstone from Moray.

Very great changes have taken place in the external features of the Chapel in the course of the centuries. The crown was blown down in 1633, and replaced by one of slightly different design which still stands, and which is the most distinctive feature of the College, adding considerably to the picturesqueness of the structure and being undoubtedly what has caught the imagination of successive generations of students. The flesche, or small spire, erected about 1662, has interesting panels with designs after George Pyper who belonged to Aberdeen's most famous period, the thirties



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of the 17th century, when in arts and crafts, in the academic and in the spiritual, the city reached a remarkably high standard. The south wall has been faced with granite some time in the 18th century, and has a number of old coats of arms imbedded in it. Much of the stone work of the Chapel has been renewed ; several of the windows have been considerably modified ; and practically all the glass is modern, most of it now the characteristic work of Douglas Strachan.

The interior of the Chapel has also undergone repeated alteration. In its original arrangement it consisted of an apse, a choir of two squares and a nave of the same size, the choir and nave being separated by a solid oaken screen with richly carved central door, and with a loft above. The screen has been moved, and has been much altered, especially towards the nave. Fortunately the door and also the dark-stained oak stalls of the choir with their canopies and subsellia remain ; and this woodwork is the chief glory of the Chapel to-day.

The original furnishings must have been as splendid as anything in the neighbourhood. Boece's account must be quoted. " There is a church floored with polished and squared stones, with windows, fine carved work, seats for the use of the priests, and benches for the boys, made with wonderful art ; marble altars, images of the saints, statues and pictures gilt with gold ; chairs of brass ; hangings and carpets to cover the walls and floor, that the whole might appear more splendid. It is also magnificently decorated with much other precious furniture. The furnishings used for sacred functions consist of fifteen robes of cloth of gold, known as copes, chasubles, and tunics ; and twenty-eight of a rough texture. All these were embroidered with a warp of golden threads, and had likenesses of the saints woven into them, the colours used being scarlet, purple and blue. . . . There were also a crucifix, two candlesticks, the same number of censers, an incense boat, six altarcruets, eight chalices, a textuary, two monstrances for holding the host, in which the body of Christ is carried round to be worshipped by the people, another of the same two cubits high of incredibly fine workmanship. Besides these, were a finger-basin, a receptacle for water, a vessel for carrying round the holy water along with a sprinkler. All these were of gold and silver. There were also several cambric cloths, embroidered with gold and various figures, and others of the finest white linen, inwoven with flowers of

various colour. With these the altars are covered in time of service. There, too, is a casket of cypress-wood set with pearls and jewels, and of beautiful workmanship. In it are kept for worship the venerable relics of the saints set in gold and silver."

There were three altars in pre-Reformation times ; and recently a massive altar slab was disinterred and set in position under the east window. The tomb of Elphinstone was on the first step to the high altar. On it we are told, rested his effigy " robed in his pontificals, with two angels holding candlesticks by his head, and two servants at his feet bearing an inscription graven in brass ". Below this were representations of the three theological and the three cardinal virtues and contemplation, with various insignia borne by angelic figures. There was long a desire to restore the founder's tomb to some of its original splendour, and a fund was raised. When completed the new tomb, though an elaborate and artistic creation based upon the above description, proved much too large for the proper site ; and since 1931 it has occupied the centre of the nave. Within the Chapel are also the graves of Hector Boece and of the youthful but celebrated Henry Scougall, author of " *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* ".

At the Reformation Principal Anderson and the students were able to prevent any damage by a Protestant-minded mob. As elsewhere, however, most of the treasures disappeared, not necessarily into Protestant hands. The early Covenanting period was more serious for deliberate destruction by church authorities ; and William Guild, Principal of King's College, was quite a distinguished iconoclast, and at the College was responsible for taking down the organ case in 1642. Much unfortunate alteration took place at various dates until the later 19th century ; but recently a more enlightened policy has prevailed, and the Chapel has been greatly improved. All that has lately been done has had the advantage of being supervised by Dr William Kelly, than whom there could be no adviser of better taste or wider experience.

The present pulpit is a composite work, some of the panels being ancient, and its design betrays that it was made for St. Machar's Cathedral, where it fitted against one of the pillars. Recently the pulpit has been altered to harmonise with new unstained panelling in the apse, two new double prayer desks, and new doors to the Chapel. Effective modern electric lighting has lately been introduced. The organ is placed

in the rood-screen loft, where are also the seats for the choir. The body of the Chapel is seated with chairs. Amongst the treasures of the Chapel may be mentioned an extremely beautiful almsdish presented not long ago by the designer, Dr J. Cromar Watt, and two rather interesting silver beaker cups used at Communion, which have been in the possession of the University since 1643, when they were presented by two German students.

In post-Reformation times the Chapel for a time ceased to be employed for religious worship. The students attended service in the parish kirk, St. Machar's, where a loft was assigned to them. Principal Guild attempted to have a weekly service in the Chapel for the public, but people did not come and he abandoned the idea. At the beginning of the 18th century King's College was a Jacobite stronghold, and Episcopalian services were held in the Chapel until it was closed for worship by order of the Lord Advocate. Principal Chalmers regarded it as one of his duties to preach to the masters and students, and he did so for a time from 1720 every Monday in the Chapel. The Chapel, however, was mainly used for functions of another sort. Graduation Ceremonies took place there. It was also the regular meeting place of the Synod of Aberdeen. Occasionally it witnessed the funeral service of a professor. The nave was actually employed as the University Library for nearly a hundred years, the walls being completely covered with shelves. Only the erection of the present Library buildings in 1873 put an end to this. From 1852 till 1863 the class of Divinity under Professor Macpherson was taught in the Chapel.

Before this time, however, there had been a beginning with regular Sunday services. In 1823 there became available a legacy from the Rev. Alexander Murray of Philadelphia, a Doctor of Divinity of King's College, for the purpose of providing Sunday lectures in the Chapel. He expressed the view that "in this unprejudiced, critical age it were to be wished that this famous seminary would agree upon a form of public prayer and worship with or without responses and instrumental music, to be read at these lectures, as is common in all other countries, to move the youth to the greater solemnity and order". The students consequently ceased to have the old association with St. Machar's. Services at which the preacher was either one of the Professors or some distinguished Divine from elsewhere were for long held during the Winter Session, and

latterly they have been extended to the Summer. Now under the Chapel Committee of the Senatus services are held on some twenty-five Sundays in the year, with occasional special services in addition. At the Sunday services, the praise is led by a suitably vested student choir, the lessons are read by some member of the staff or by students, men or women, and the collection is taken by students. College Prayers have for some years been conducted in the Chapel on five mornings in the week by one of the Divinity Professors. The Chapel is further in great demand for services in connection with the marriage of graduates.

The University is very proud of its ancient Chapel, with its constant reminder that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom".

G. D. HENDERSON.