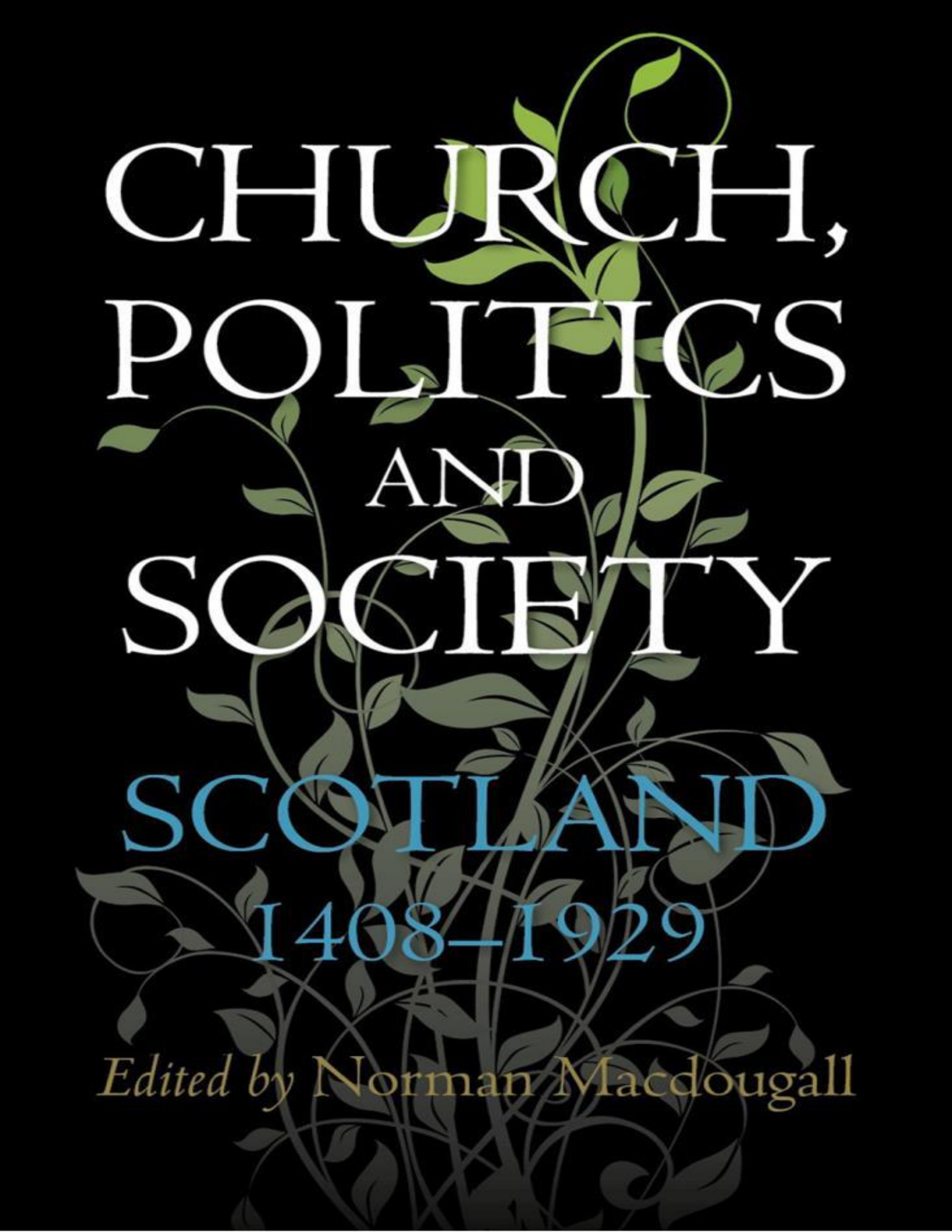


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CHURCH, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

SCOTLAND 1408–1929

Edited by Norman Macdougall

**Church, Politics
and Society:
Scotland 1408-1929**

Church, Politics and Society: Scotland 1408-1929

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JOHN DONALD PUBLISHERS LTD
EDINBURGH

This eBook was published in Great Britain in
2021 by John Donald, an imprint of Birlinn Ltd

Birlinn Ltd
West Newington House
10 Newington Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1QS

First published in Great Britain in 1983 by John
Donald

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eBook ISBN 978 1 78885 415 3

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The publishers gratefully acknowledge the
support of the Strathmartine Trust towards the
publication of this book



British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available on
request from the British Library.

Preface

THIS volume grew out of a two-year seminar programme organised jointly by the Departments of Ecclesiastical History and Scottish History at the University of St. Andrews, and held in St. John's House, the Centre for Advanced Historical Studies in the university, throughout sessions 1980-1982. Speakers with specialist interests were invited to contribute papers on the broad theme of 'Church and Society', and as a result of the interest generated by what they had to say, it was thought desirable to make all the papers available in book form. The present volume is the result, covering an enormous timespan from the birth of Bishop Kennedy around 1408 to the reunion of the Church of Scotland with most of the United Free Church in 1929. No effort has been made to produce a comprehensive survey of the development of the Scottish Church and the institutions associated with it; rather this volume is concerned with the careers of prominent individuals within the Church and with the response of the Scots to the challenge of the vast ecclesiastical changes in the five centuries under review. If its publication helps not only to stimulate interest, but also further research on the subject, then this book of essays will have served its purpose admirably.

The editor would like to thank all the contributors for their patience and cheerfulness in meeting the demands of converting the spoken into the written word within a fixed time limit; Professors J. K. Cameron and T. C. Smout for their skill, enthusiasm, and work in the planning and carrying through of the series; and the latter also for his generous assistance throughout the editing of this book.

Norman Macdougall
St. Andrews, 1983

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1

Bishop James Kennedy of St. Andrews: a reassessment of his political career

Norman Macdougall

JAMES KENNEDY was a major figure in the Scotland of his day. His virtues as a scholar, as a prominent papalist during the schism of the 1430s and 1440s, and perhaps above all as the energetic creator of St. Salvator's College in St. Andrews, have been covered at length, and very ably, by modern writers, above all Dr. R. G. Cant¹ and the late Dr. Annie Dunlop.² From their work emerges the picture of a man who combined scholarship and piety with efficient organisation of his diocese and his new college, a cosmopolitan figure of considerable significance. The bishop's achievements at St. Andrews have rightly earned him pride of place as the most outstanding man of his time in the burgh and the diocese over which he presided for a quarter of a century; and his reputation, in Fife at least, is secure.

Yet uncritical adulation of any public figure, however great his virtues, inevitably does truth a disservice, and in the century following Kennedy's death there grew up a

distorted view of the bishop as a statesman of incomparable ability whose saintliness inevitably led him to the right decisions, and whose qualities in the political sphere are beyond dispute. This area — the political arena in which Kennedy played a part in three reigns — requires closer examination; for it would appear that the bishop's role in national politics was not nearly as significant as he himself would have wished, nor was his political career as successful, or indeed commendable, as later writers have suggested.

Such a view is not, perhaps, wholly original. In 1974 Dr. Ranald Nicholson took a few side-swipes at Kennedy, especially at the bishop's acceptance of an English pension towards the end of his life.³ On the whole, however, modern writers — including Nicholson — have viewed the Bishop of St. Andrews favourably, setting him on a pedestal at least as high as the other great fifteenth-century ecclesiastical statesman, William Elphinstone of Aberdeen. Understandably the best press of all for Kennedy comes from his biographer, Dr. Annie Dunlop, whose *Life and Times of James Kennedy* is a formidable work of scholarship, quite indispensable to anyone working on fifteenth-century Scottish history. But Dr. Dunlop's book is much more a 'Times' than a 'Life' of Kennedy, indeed in parts of the work she loses sight of the bishop altogether and plunges into an extremely detailed description of the political events of the reign of James II. When her bishop does emerge he is often thrust into the forefront of political life simply because his biographer felt that he should have been there. How far can this wishful thinking be justified by the available evidence?

Here we encounter an immediate problem, namely that Kennedy — like many other major fifteenth-century figures

— lacks a contemporary biographer, so that his reputation is based largely on the narratives of sixteenth-century chroniclers — John Major, Bishop John Lesley, Robert Lindsay of Pittscottie, and George Buchanan. For the reign of James II, and the early years of the minority of James III — the ‘essential’ Kennedy period — there exists only one contemporary narrative, the so-called ‘Auchinleck Chronicle’ some fifteen folios of the Asloan manuscript, which sketchily covers the period 1420 to 1461 in at least two separate series of entries. Entitled ‘ane schort memorial of the Scottis corniklis for addicoune’ — presumably for addition to the *Scotichronicon* — these curious fragments, frequently separated by gaps and incomplete at the end, nevertheless provide an extended treatment of the political events of James II’s reign, and a precise detailing — including the keeperships of the principal royal castles — of those who held power during the early minority of his son.⁴ Yet in the entire ‘chronicle’ there is only a single reference to Bishop Kennedy. Under the date 1445, the writer describes ‘ane richt gret herschipe’ made in Kennedy’s Fife lands by the Earl of Crawford, James Livingston, and the Ogilvies, and goes on to say: ‘Incontinent eftir, bischope James Kennedy cursit solempnitlie with myter and staf, buke and candill contynually a yere and Interdytit all the placis quhar thir personis ware’. The curse was apparently effective, for within a year Crawford was mortally wounded in a fight with Huntly at Arbroath, and he died within eight days. After Crawford’s death, the chronicler continues, no-one could risk burying him because of the bishop’s curse, and the earl’s body lay for four days until Kennedy sent the prior of St. Andrews to lift the interdict.⁵

Thus in the entire contemporary historical literature of the period — admittedly very scanty⁶ — Kennedy is remembered only for the power of his curse. This is slender evidence on which to build a career for the man who would eventually be remembered as the greatest ecclesiastical statesman of his day, the wise counsellor of James II who played a vital part in crushing the Black Douglases in the 1450s and was the natural choice as head of the government in the early 1460s. For it is not until the early sixteenth century that Kennedy's supposed key role in Scottish politics of the 'fifties and 'sixties is given extended treatment.

The starting point for any discussion of this sixteenth-century legend must be John Major's *History of Greater Britain*, published in 1521.⁷ Although Scottish events are not Major's main concern, he has a great deal to say about the Bishop of St. Andrews. He mentions St. Andrews university and Kennedy as its first real benefactor, founding a college 'small indeed, but fair to look at and of good endowment'.⁸ He describes Kennedy's translation from Dunkeld to St. Andrews in 1440, and then moves on to the events of the 'fifties and 'sixties. In the crisis following James II's murder of William, eighth earl of Douglas, at Stirling, Kennedy plays a vital role. According to Major, 'by the wise measures of James Kennedy, Archbishop (sic) of St. Andrews, who was cousin to the King, the King was victorious . . . for Scotland, as I see, the earl of Douglas was too powerful: he had thirty or forty thousand fighting men ever ready to answer his call . . . It is related by many that from the beginning of his reign James the Second felt the burden of the Douglas power so strongly that he had it in mind to desert his kingdom of Scotland; but by the wise counsel of James Kennedy and the active help of this

prelate he was enabled to form a loftier purpose. Kennedy so carried things that the earl of Angus, a Douglas by name, and his brother on the mother's side, and most of the other brothers of earl Douglas, were brought over to the side of the King'.⁹

Thereafter Major passes on at once to further moralising on the perils of exalting great houses like the Black Douglasses; but he has already said enough to establish Kennedy's position as James II's right-hand man, winning over the opposition and so helping to crush the Earl of Douglas. The assumption throughout is that the Douglasses posed a vital threat to the king and were at one stage stronger than him in the armed support which they could muster. In the interests of accuracy, it should be said at once that Kennedy was not archbishop, that the Earl of Angus needed no winning over to the royal side as he was a royal supporter throughout, and that Kennedy certainly did not bring over to the king the other brothers of Douglas, one of whom was killed in battle against the royal forces, and two of whom were executed. The conclusion must be that Major had little detailed information about the events or the personalities of the 1450s, and that he was following a tradition established some time between that period and his own — a point to which we must return.

After the death of James II, according to Major, 'the king was a child, and the whole government of Scotland was then in the hands of James Kennedy, archbishop of St. Andrews'.¹⁰ As we shall see, this statement is untrue; Kennedy was not head of the new government, but abroad when it was formed. Major's remark, however, reflects a tradition of the bishop's importance in his last years, a tradition also to be found in his obituary of Kennedy, which is worth quoting at length: 'In the year one thousand four

hundred and sixty-six died James Kennedy, and he was buried in that college of St. Salvator at St. Andrews which he himself had reared and richly endowed. I have found among our fellow-countrymen no man who rendered more signal public service than this prelate. It was by the wise means of his devising and the skill with which he put them into practice that earl Douglas, the most powerful of our Scottish nobles, was brought to nought. In his time, too, the whole kingdom enjoyed tranquillity, and the truce with the English king was kept inviolate. Besides St. Andrews he held no benefice — unless it was that of Pitten weem, which amounted to no more than 80 pieces of gold. Yet did he build at his own charges, and richly endow it, a college at St. Andrews . . . In addition, he built a huge and very powerful ship, and likewise for himself he prepared a splendid tomb, so that many men are apt to put the question on which of those three things he had spent the most. Two points in this man's conduct I cannot bring myself to praise: to wit, that along with such a bishopric he should have held a benefice in commendam, even though it was a slender one; nor do I approve of the costliness of his tomb'.¹¹

There are two separate strands in this obituary — Kennedy at St. Andrews, his college, ship, tomb, and commend, about which Major has broadly accurate information, and Kennedy as a national figure, about which he clearly knows very little at all. However, his aim was not primarily to describe accurately the events of James II's overthrow of the Black Douglasses, but to point a moral about the dangers of the overmighty subject. For Major, writing between 1517 and 1521 and dedicating his history to the young James V, the Black Douglasses were the classic fifteenth-century case of a noble family with so much power

that the crown's position was menaced, a family moreover which, although crushed by 1455, forfeited and exiled, continued to support English intrigues against Scotland for the next thirty years. Furthermore, as Major was writing during the protracted and uncertain minority of James V, the theme of the overmighty subject was a very relevant one. He makes oblique references to the dynastic ambitions of the Governor, John, duke of Albany;¹² and he was no doubt impressed by the unstable personal and political career of the queen mother, Margaret Tudor. There was a natural tendency for Major's work to reflect the problems of his own time, and this is nowhere more apparent than when he discusses the 1460s in Scotland. This period, viewed with more than half-a-century of hindsight, had apparently all the political elements which would be familiar to Scots during James V's youth — a royal minority, faction at court, and a dubious queen mother, Mary of Gueldres.

This last element — the role of Mary of Gueldres in the early 1460s — provides us with a clue to the motivation behind at least some of the Kennedy legend. Queen mothers have rarely been popular historical figures, and in terms of propaganda which can be mounted against them, they are exceedingly vulnerable simply because of their sex. Thus Major, who was clearly aware of Kennedy's control of the young James III at the end of the bishop's life, and who knew that Kennedy and Mary of Gueldres had been rivals in the early 1460s, also absorbed a tradition, nowhere enshrined in writing until the late fifteenth century in the annals of William Worcester,¹³ that the queen mother had taken lovers after her husband's death. As Major describes it, Mary of Gueldres had 'dealt lewdly' with Adam Hepburn of Hailes, a married man, and he was

quick to point the moral: 'Now, I say that this woman was herein exceeding careless, for she should rather have taken a lord who had no wife, or the heir of some lord; and she thus acted more wickedly than did the wife of James the First'.¹⁴ It seems probable that the sixteenth-century chroniclers, drawing on oral tradition for their information about the activities of queen mothers following their husbands' deaths, confused the two women. Joan Beaufort, daughter of the Earl of Somerset, died in Dunbar castle, the keeper of which was Adam Hepburn of Hailes, in 1445; Mary of Gueldres died only eighteen years later, and later rumours named her *lovers* as the Duke of Somerset and Adam Hepburn of Hailes, at Dunbar castle.¹⁵ If such a confusion did exist, and the chroniclers' censures are directed against the wrong queen mother, then the claims that Mary of Gueldres was a wilful woman endangering the minority government by her low amours, restrained only by the good Bishop Kennedy, cannot be sustained, and the modern historian requires to look very closely, not at the queen mother, but at the political motives of the bishop.¹⁶ In the early sixteenth century, John Major had no such problems; and the good — and indeed justified — opinions of Kennedy which had come down to him because of the bishop's work at St. Andrews were merely reinforced by the apparent instability of the queen mother, a situation with which Major was very familiar in his own day. What Major therefore established, or at least confirmed, in his *History* was the legend of Kennedy as the principal supporter of James II against the Black Douglasses, and as the upholder of good government committed to him after the death of that king because of the vagaries of the queen mother, Mary of Gueldres.

Once established, the Kennedy legend grew at some speed during the sixteenth century. In his vernacular history, completed by about 1568,¹⁷ Bishop John Lesley enlarges on Major's theme of the dangers of the overmighty subject, and makes much of the struggle between James II and the Black Douglasses in the early 1450s. He claims that after the assassination of the eighth earl by the king in February 1452, the Black Douglas opposition was so strong that the king 'wes determinit to haif left the realme, and to haif passit in Fraunce by sey, were not that bischop James Kennedy of St. Androis causit him to tarrye, upoun the hoip he had of the assistance of the Erle of Huntlye principallie, quhome he had persuadit to convene ane army furthe of the northe partis, and com forduart to the south for the Kingis relief'. There duly followed the battle of Brechin in May 1452, when Huntly as the royalist general defeated Crawford, the ally of the Black Douglasses. But Lesley then turns immediately to describe the final confrontation between James II and the new earl of Douglas and his supporters, whom he credits with an army of 30,000, greatly outnumbering the royal force. King James, however, did not despair but, 'encouraged be the prudent and wise counsell of the bischop of Sainct Androis, sent a herrald to the Erle of Douglas, and required him to scale his army and submit himself to the King, or ellis that he wald gif him battell the nixt daye.'¹⁸ There follows Lesley's description of the defection to the royal faction of the principal Douglas supporters, and praise of James II for avoiding civil war — a remarkable verdict on a man who started it no less than three times in five years.¹⁹ Lesley's final comment on the fall of the Douglasses once again stresses Kennedy's involvement. 'The King,' he writes, 'using the advice of his

kinsman James Kennedy' — at this point upgraded to archbishop — 'compassed his purpose in the ende, dispatching out of the waie all theis as he any waies mistrusted; of quhilk nomber namely war the Douglas, whose puissance and auctorite (not without cause) he ever suspected'. Lesley concludes by repeating almost verbatim Major's words on the subject of James II's desire to flee the realm, his being restrained by Kennedy, and Kennedy's bringing over to the royal side the Earl of Angus; and he follows Major exactly in passing on to a homily on the dangers of the overmighty subject.²⁰

However, when he moves on to consider the opening of the reign of James III, Lesley has some new information, for instead of simply accepting Kennedy as head of the government, he claims that there was a council of regency which included, apart from Kennedy himself, the queen mother, the Bishop of Glasgow, and the Earls of Angus, Huntly, Argyll, and Orkney. He is, however, quick to assert Kennedy's supremacy within this group by remarking that 'during the tyme that B. James Kennedy leivit, [the council] aggreit weill on the gouvernement of the realme, bot nocht so weill eftir his deceis'.²¹ Lesley's obituary of Kennedy follows, with the bishop dying about a year late on 10 May 1466, and described as 'noble, wise, and godly'. By Kennedy's advice, in this account, James II had 'subduit the Erle of Douglas and his faction, and keipit guide peace with Ingland'. Lesley concludes with conventional praise of Kennedy's college, his ship, and his tomb, and speculation as to which of the three cost the most.²²

Thus Lesley's account, though fuller than that of Major — as might be expected of a man who had access not only to printed parliamentary records but also consulted diplomatic material and monastic cartularies — does not

substantially extend the Kennedy legend. The two additions to it are his claim that Kennedy was responsible for bringing the Earl of Huntly over to James II's side in 1452, and the statement that the bishop kept a firm peace with England.

When we turn to the *Historie* of Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, completed in 1579, we find that the author lives up to his reputation as the most colourful and least accurate of the sixteenth-century chroniclers.²³ Naming John Major as one of his sources, Pitscottie provides us with two already familiar themes, namely Kennedy's vital assistance to James II during the Black Douglas crisis of the 1450s, and his heading of the government in the early 1460s. In the former case, he describes a large rebel army, far larger indeed than the king's, confronting James II 'to caus him ather to fecht or flie out of Scotland ...' The king in despair sailed to St. Andrews to ask for Kennedy's counsel, and the bishop, whom Pitscottie assures us was 'ane wyss and godlie man', suggested that James II should have dinner while he went off to his oratory to pray for the king 'and the common weill of this cuntrie'.²⁴ James II ate and Kennedy prayed, and then the king himself was set to praying for victory over the Earl of Douglas, 'lykas he had done befor of him and his predececessouris quhan thay oppressit the common weill of the cuntrie' — a reference no doubt to God's assistance in James II's assassination of the eighth earl in 1452.²⁵ Some of the Pitscottie manuscripts²⁶ here interpolate the tale of the sheath of arrows. Kennedy took the king to his study where James's bow and arrows were conveniently lying, handed him a number of arrows strongly bound together and invited him to break them over his knee. When the king protested that this was impossible, Kennedy took the arrows one by one,

proceeded to break each of them separately, then pointed out the obvious moral — that James II could not break his enemies when they were gathered together in strength, but might well do so if he tackled them one at a time. In practical terms, Kennedy's advice to the king in Pitscottie's account was to grant remissions to all those in arms against him if they would come over to his side. The bishop's contribution to this enterprise was to bring over James Hamilton, described as 'principall captaine to the Erle of Douglas at this time'.²⁷ Thus another small strand was added to the Kennedy legend. In Major's account, the bishop was responsible for bringing over the Earl of Angus to the royal side; in Lesley, it was Huntly *and* Angus; and in Pitscottie it becomes Hamilton.

When he comes to deal with the minority of James III, Pitscottie dispenses with the complexities of Lesley's councils of regency, and simply tells us: 'In this time Bischope James Kennedie hes the gyding of the king and his consall in good wntie and peace quhairbe the common weill florischit greatlie'. He also credits Kennedy with organising a fifteen years' truce with England, though as he remarks with refreshing candour, 'the spetiall cause of tranqulietie and peace in Scotland was because the Inglischemen had civell weiris amang thame selffis'.²⁸ Thereafter it remains only for Pitscottie to follow the Major-Lesley line in describing Kennedy's three main achievements — his college, his ship, and his tomb — and to throw in a tentative cost of at least £10,000 sterling for each, before passing on to the bishop's obituary. His virtues are extolled at length; he was godly and wise, and learned in many sciences; he made quarterly visitations of every parish kirk in his diocese; he insisted on a large proportion of church resources being used for relief of the poor; and

he kept parsons and vicars in their churches, preaching and ministering to the sick.²⁹ Thus Pitscottie, inventing his ideal churchman in the late sixteenth century, allots all his virtues to Bishop Kennedy, and turns a man whose concern for, and work in, his diocese is well known, into a kind of ecclesiastical superman.

George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, published in 1582, provides us with the final sixteenth-century flowering of the Kennedy legend.³⁰ In contrast with earlier writers, Buchanan is not at all concerned about the problem of the Douglasses in the 1450s, and his remarks about the period are vague in the extreme. To solve the difficulty that 'the royal power was too weak to oppose the conspiracies of the wicked', Kennedy is credited with suggesting to James II that he should summon an assembly of the estates to Edinburgh. Shortly afterwards Buchanan describes the touching scene in which the Earl of Crawford, Douglas's ally, donned penitential garb, and in tears begged forgiveness of Kennedy and the king for his rebellion.³¹ Apart from this set piece, there is no further reference to the Black Douglas crisis and Kennedy's supposed major role in supporting the king throughout. Instead Buchanan passes quickly on to the minority of James III, during which we are informed that 'James Kennedy, archbishop of St. Andrews . . . then surpassed all others in Scotland, both in authority and reputation'.³² Having made this claim, Buchanan almost immediately denies it by indicating that Kennedy was in fact a leader of faction in the first parliament of the new reign. Edinburgh's Royal Mile apparently divided the opposing parties, with Kennedy and his supporters in Holyrood and the queen mother, Mary of Gueldres, in Edinburgh castle. According to Buchanan, on the third day of the dispute the queen

mother emerged from the castle with her followers and had herself publicly proclaimed tutoress to the king and regent of the kingdom. Kennedy then appeared from Holyrood and made a speech at the market cross condemning the queen's faction, whereupon a fight between the two parties ensued, with the Bishops of Galloway, Glasgow and Dunblane finally intervening to plead for a month's truce.³³

Buchanan's version of events was treated with contempt as early as the late eighteenth century, when Pinkerton remarked that many of his tales about the period were pure fabrication. But the great humanist continued to have his defenders, and as late as 1827 Aikman could still say that Buchanan's 'stern, unbending integrity' invariably inspired him to write the truth.³⁴ The remainder of the story, however, makes it clear that this was not Buchanan's purpose at all, and indeed supplies us with his motivation. The month's truce between the factions having expired, according to Buchanan there followed a public debate in which Mary of Gueldres briefly put her case for retaining control of her son, whereupon Kennedy delivered himself of an enormous oration, the main purport of which was to condemn the government of women. We may be fairly sure that, although Mary of Gueldres is named, Mary Queen of Scots was Buchanan's target, and he puts into Kennedy's mouth the argument that government by women was against nature and the ancient law, citing such unlikely precedents as the crimes of the Saxon queen Ethelburgh to prove his point. Those who support a woman as head of state, according to Kennedy/Buchanan, threaten 'to destroy the whole frame of our government, established on the best laws and institutions when they desire us to approve of female rule, for which our ancestors had not even a name'.³⁵

In spite of pages of similar inflated rhetoric, Kennedy did not apparently make his point, for the outcome of the crisis, according to Buchanan, was the establishment of a council of regency of which the queen mother was a member.³⁶ Buchanan adds to this catalogue of contradictions and political infighting by going on to claim that 'the affairs of Scotland were administered with so much justice and tranquillity, that the oldest man alive never recollected any time of greater security, or more settled peace, chiefly owing to the wisdom and prudence of James Kennedy, who then ruled the court'.³⁷ Not surprisingly, the bishop receives a marvellous press from Buchanan in his obituary. The nation had lost 'a public parent', who 'exceeded in liberality all the bishops who have gone before, and all who have succeeded him, even to this day, although he possessed no great ecclesiastical revenue'. He is indeed praised for not collecting benefices to increase his wealth, 'that what was basely grasped by avarice, might be more vilely spent in luxury'. Somewhat inconsistently Buchanan then extols Kennedy for his magnificent and costly tomb, and ends by pointing a moral — that 'after he, who was the constant censor of morals, was removed, public discipline began to decay by degrees, and becoming corrupted, dragged nearly all that was virtuous along with it'.³⁸

It is abundantly clear from all this that Buchanan, in spite of his lavish praise of Kennedy's virtues, had very little detailed information about the bishop. He says next to nothing about the Black Douglas crisis, does not know the name of Kennedy's St. Andrews foundation, and does not mention his ship. It follows that he did not draw directly on the earlier sixteenth-century histories of Major and Lesley, but was concerned above all to inveigh against the government of women in his own day. Thus, early in the

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