Chapter I

THE CHURCH AT HADDINGTON

JANUARY 1546

1

It is difficult to say of any man when his real life begins. Youth may pack up for many journeys on which it never starts; middle age may walk out of the house one fine morning with no more than a knapsack. Does such a life begin on the high road, or in the lumber-room among the discarded suit-cases?

In such a matter, a man is not always the best judge of himself; but he is entitled to be heard with respect. There is no doubt what John Knox thought of his own life. It began on a frosty afternoon of January 1546—probably the 16th—in the parish church of Haddington town, in Lothian, seventeen miles from Edinburgh. Twenty years later he wrote down his recollections of that afternoon.

He was then probably in his thirty-third year, tutor to "some gentlemen's children" of those parts and living in the household of one of them, Hugh Douglas, laird of Longniddry. To that house, near the shore of Forth, had come, the Sunday evening before Christmas, December 17th, a certain preacher of the reformed religion, George Wishart by name. Knox may have met him in Leith a week earlier; he had certainly heard him preach that Sunday in the church of Inveresk, near Musselburgh; and from the moment of their meeting until this afternoon of the 16th he had been in close attendance on him.

He had never seen his like before, and he was not alone in that opinion. Some months ago, probably in the early spring, Wishart, recently returned to Scotland from a six years' exile in England and the Continent, had left his home town of Montrose, where he had been preaching, and had appeared in Dundee. Expelled from that

town, he had passed into Ayrshire; driven out of Ayr itself, he had preached in the village churches and in the fields; he had hastened back to Dundee on hearing that the plague was there; and then, after a sojourn at Montrose, had crossed Forth to Leith. Everywhere he had made an extraordinary impression. In order to understand that impression, we must look back for a moment at the events of the previous thirty years.

2

Scotland had been long astir with a new ferment, but the leaven had been political rather than religious. Many, it is true, had heard of Luther's doctrines; traders had brought news of them to the eastern towns; gentlemen's sons had studied in Paris and had caught the infection. As early as 1525 Parliament had legislated against the reading of heretical books. There had been some local preaching; a few heretics had been burned; a few scholars had fled, Wishart himself among them, accused of heresy for having taught the Greek Testament in the grammar school of Montrose. But in the country generally the infection of discontent came rather from England than from Germany. From England in old days had come the teaching of Wyclif; there was an old root of Lollardy in the west, especially in the district of Kyle in Ayrshire; and Lollardy had spoken a political language not yet forgotten. It had coupled the Pope's name with Antichrist, and had whispered ominously that "the unction of Kings ceased at the coming of Christ". And now England had shown how political power might be used against the claims of the Church. Prelates had been humbled and monasteries were being dissolved; while in Scotland men were still ruled in all their goings out and their comings in by a Church relatively even more wealthy, more politically powerful and more openly corrupt.

The clergy had long been a byword in Scotland, the butt of court satire and of village horseplay. But the raillery had been only half-serious. In a rough country, familiar with violence and coarse morals, the clerk was not expected to be much better than the layman. As were the people, so was the priest; as was the noble, so was the bishop—indeed, what were abbacies and bishoprics but common perquisites for the cadets or bastards of the nobility? And perhaps it

paid better to bribe them so; greed and ambition thus satisfied grew fat and sleepy; the Church at least was friendlier than the Castle; it allowed men to laugh in its face, and would even join in the laugh.

But of late these dumb dogs had begun to give themselves airs. The slaughter of Flodden had cut down the strength of the old governing class; the feud between the houses of Douglas and Hamilton during the minority of James V had weakened it still further. The bishops had slipped into the vacant places on the Council, and their advent had been marked by the beginning of persecutions. Patrick Hamilton, the proto-martyr, had been burnt at St. Andrews in 1528. James, his minority ended, had confirmed the churchmen's power by his quarrels with the chief families of the realm. He had driven the Douglases into the arms of the English; he had imprisoned Argyll. Following the traditional policy of Scotland, as his uncle Henry VIII moved further from Rome, he became more militantly orthodox. Three more heretics suffered at Edinburgh in 1534, after judgment by a court at which James himself was present *all clad in red.*

And the bishops who thus increasingly directed national policy were of even less reputable stock than in former days. Never had clerical morals been more loose; never, by the testimony of churchmen themselves, had benefices been distributed so openly "to satisfy the avarice of the world" than in the anarchy which followed Flodden. Simony and lechery ceased to be figures of fun when they set themselves up as governors of the realm and guardians of holy things. Contempt deepened into disgust and disgust into hatred. Scotsmen were not far from believing, in the words of an English ambassador in 1535, that their King was in the hands of "the Pope's pestilent creatures and very limbs of the devil."

This clerical rule had culminated some seven years before Knox's story opens. In those years it had shown itself not only tyrannical but incompetent. It had set itself to play an old game with a new purpose. It was the game of the French alliance which had brought James IV to his death at Flodden; but now, as never before, it was played for European stakes, for Francis I against Charles V, and above all for Rome against Luther.

And, once again, the game had not prospered. The year 1538, the

year of Wishart's flight, had seen James V's second marriage to a French princess, this time to Mary of Guise; and with her had come from France the negotiator of the marriage, David Beaton, Abbot of Arbroath and Bishop of Mirepoix in Languedoc, type of Scottish nepotism and product of French education, Primate-designate of St. Andrew in succession to a dying uncle and Cardinal by intercession of the French King. Since then, Scottish policy had slipped more and more into French ways, into heresy-hunting and war with England. Four years of that policy had brought shame, the rout of Solway Moss and the death of James; another sixteen months had ended in disaster, an English fleet in the Forth, Edinburgh burnt, Lothian devastated.

That had been in May 1544. The next year, the year of Wishart's preaching, began better, with a brilliant victory over the English Warden of the Middle Marches at Ancrum Moor near Jedburgh. But it was a barren victory, a prelude to new calamities, as the victory of Haddonrig in 1542 had been the prelude to Solway Moss. In August came a French fleet and, while Wishart was comforting the plague-stricken outside the East Port of Dundee, a joint French and Scottish army set out for England, only to beat an ignominious retreat four days after crossing the Border. That winter, when Wishart was at Longniddry, the country was still full of French stragglers, begging and starving. Next month the English had struck back; five market towns and 243 villages had been destroyed, and all the great abbeys of the Border from Melrose to Coldingham had been sacked.

These outrages bred hatred of England, but what could be said of the ecclesiastical politicians who had brought Scotland to this pass? James had let them have their way in his last years; now they had pushed aside the Queen Mother and brought the Regent Arran to heel, half Protestant though he was. Had James known peace in his last years, since the burning of heretics at Edinburgh and Glasgow in 1539? Had not his French marriage been cursed by the death of both his sons? And had not these new troubles followed closely on the new executions for heresy at Perth in January 1544? What had Scotland to do with this feud between Beaton and Henry VIII, between the priest and the heretic? Well might the women of Edin-

burgh cry, as they watched their homes go up in flame, "Woe worth the Cardinal."

3

To a people thus emotionally shaken, thus politically pre-occupied, Wishart came like a revelation. There is no need to idealize him. He was no hero but a middle-aged man, as age was reckoned in those days (he was almost exactly Knox's contemporary), for whom the world had hitherto been too strong, a scholar more at home in the classroom than in the pulpit. After his flight from Scotland, he had tried his hand at preaching in the west of England, but, when charged with heresy, he had recanted and "burnt his faggot" at Bristol. After some travel on the Continent he had settled down at Cambridge, where one of his pupils remembered him as "courteous, lowly, lovely, glad to teach, desirous to learn"—a student, in short, of the quiet school of Colet and More, strayed by mischance into these violent forties of the century. Yet he was no mere scholarly recluse. The same pupil said of him that "he taught with great modesty and gravity, so that some of his people thought him severe and would have slain him." And when he wrenched himself back to the Scotland from which he had fled and to the public preaching in which he had failed, there was at least enough of the stern prophet in him to put him in touch with the rough discontents of his hearers.

He had steeled himself to a dangerous adventure, and the iron had entered into his soul. Knox remembered afterwards with relish how he had denounced two friars as *sergeants of Satan*, and with awe how he had foretold God's judgment on the careless people of Haddington. There was something more in such language than moral fervour, such fervour as inspired Latimer's sermons against English landlordism or Colet's against "hunting and hawking" bishops. Wishart was setting a prophetic fashion from which Scotland was to suffer much in years to come. And he also set the fashion of political alliances, from which Scotland was to suffer still more. True, he would have no violence. "It is the word of peace that God sends by me," he told those who would have forced their way into an Ayrshire church which had been closed against him, "the blood of no

man shall be shed this day for the preaching of it." But violence was brewing round him, and he was the half-conscious focus of it. As we shall see, he was keeping questionable company and cannot, perhaps, have been wholly ignorant that some of those with whom he sang psalms had their daggers half unsheathed.

But if he set these fashions, he set another in which lay the secret of his power. He was the first to bring to Scotland the word that had already changed Europe. True, he had had forerunners, notably Patrick Hamilton, a gentler and more pastoral spirit, whose little manual of the new faith became a popular textbook of the Reformation in England and Scotland, under the familiar title of *Patrick's Places*. But in Wishart's mouth the word was no longer, as it had been in Hamilton's, an appeal to private devotion; it became a public proclamation.

And it was the proclamation, not of a new theology, but of a new freedom. To him, as to the fathers of the Reformation, the rediscovery of the New Testament had been quite literally a deliverance. "Justification by faith" was an experience before it became a dogma. As the Middle Ages closed, a darkness settled upon Europe; upon the polity of Christendom, the darkness of pestilence internecine war, Asiatic invasion and ecclesiastical schism; upon the soul of the individual Christian the darkness of a sense of guilt and failure. God's judgments were in the earth, and the old Church which had mediated between man's sin and God's wrath had lost its authority. And then, in this darkness, the simplest thing in the world had happened—and the most incredible. Suddenly, the prison door had swung on its hinges. "I felt," said Luther of his own experience, "as if the doors had opened to me and I had entered into Paradise."

This sense of unimagined liberty was soon to fade—that is the tragedy of Knox's own life and the lives of nearly all his contemporaries. But to Wishart it was fresh, fresh as it had been to Colet nearly fifty years before when he lectured at Oxford on the Epistle to the Romans, fresh as to Luther lecturing on the same text twenty years later, fresh as it had still been only five years ago to Calvin himself when he wrote the French version of his *Institutio*. Wishart was rapt by the vision of it, and his hearers felt the spell. Indeed, in these months he was "fey". There was something more about him now

than personal charm; there was the "infinite charity" which, in Renan's phrase, is "the fruit of a great tension of soul."

Such freshness could come only from overwhelming personal experience, but the power of Wishart's preaching may have owed something to its form as well as to its content. Patrick Hamilton had learned his message at the university of Marburg from Luther's associates, but Wishart had gone to another school. In his European travels he seems to have visited the Swiss churches and he had translated their first Confession, that of 1536. He was thus the first to bring to Scotland a version of the Reformation which was to appeal more powerfully to the Scottish mind, as indeed to the mind of all western Europe, than either the "low temperatures" of the Lutheran church or the prudent compromises of Anglicanism.

Each of the world's great ages of emancipation has had its own language, and all such language soon grows stale to the taste. It is as difficult for us today to read the sermons of the sixteenth century as to understand why Wordsworth found it "very heaven" to be young in the first years of the French Revolution. Yet even today few of us can read the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans without catching fire, as Colet did, at its "ardour of spirit and grandeur of language." It was on this master-text of the Reformation that Wishart first preached in Dundee; is it difficult to imagine its effect on men, disillusioned with the world and with themselves, who heard it for the first time in their own tongue? Here was no programme of liberation, but the conviction of freedom already won, the glorious liberty of the children of God. This freedom was within the grasp of every Christian. To assert it was not only his right but his duty, for it had been won for him by his Saviour's blood. Who should lay anything to the charge of God's elect? To men thus freely loved, thus imperiously called to a divine communion, what were the anathemas of any cleric, of Beaton and his friars at St. Andrews, smelling out heresy, or of the "petty priest" of the parish, "cursing" for his unpaid tithe? What, indeed, to them was all the sacrificial ceremonial of the Mass, the external ritual of confession and absolution, the promise of pardons in return for money or outward observance? They had no need of such things; for them there could henceforward be no condemnation; they were, as

Calvin boldly proclaimed, "enfranchised and immune from the power of all men.

4

So Wishart preached, and so Ayr and Dundee believed. Yet one has no sooner set these words down than one must qualify them. To write of the Reformation is to oscillate perpetually between climax and anticlimax, to take flight into the blue only to be dragged back to political earth.

So, certainly, many of the common people believed, as they listened to Wishart's preaching; so, too, at least in part, did Knox come to believe as he went about with him in these December and January days. What he had believed before, we do not know. We know only that he was in priest's orders and had been not without favour in the ecclesiastical world, for he had been appointed apostolic notary and had plied that lawyer's trade along with his tutoring. In the legal documents that he attested, he described himself, as late as March 1543, as "a servant of the holy altar," but it seems unlikely that he had ever had a cure of souls; more probably, he served a small chapel at Samuelston, three miles from Haddington, where he had pupils before he went to Longniddry. Neither he nor any of his contemporaries has told us anything of these years, nor in what state of mind Wishart found him. Probably he thought much as others thought in the little circle in which he lived.

But that is to say that he thought, not only as a religious convert, but as a political partisan. For his circle was a queer one. It was a circle of very active politicians. To them, as to the western lairds who had welcomed Wishart to their houses in Ayrshire, the evangelist's presence meant not only a new religious experience, but a new and much-needed political opportunity. And to many of them it was the political opportunity that mattered most. They were all, no doubt, in Knox's own words, *earnest professors of Christ Jesus*; he certainly was so himself; but they were also Scots gentlemen of their time, bred to the partisan traditions of their class. At their best those traditions were a blend of national patriotism with family and feudal loyalties; at their worst they almost deserved the name given to them by a recent Scottish historian, the name of "gangsterism."

To the "labourers to burgh and land"—the artisans and tradesmen of Dundee or the farmers of Ayrshire—the preaching of such men as Wishart might mean a new freedom; but to the great earls and to the "barons" or country gentlemen, too free already from any sense of subjection to authority, it meant a new political purpose in their life of chronic unrest. It gave the "gangsters" a new justification for violence; it gave the "patriots" a new law to take into their own hands.

Eventually, this new political impulse was to create a nation out of an aristocratic anarchy, but at the moment of Wishart's appearance the impulse had gone wrong. The patriots had compromised themselves; the gangsters had been driven underground. In order to understand this, it is necessary to consider a little more closely the events of the preceding three years. In those years the anarchs had begun to group themselves under standards which the modern mind can recognize; but they were, as yet, unused to this new warfare. For the first time Scottish history had begun to grow coherent; in the shifting medley of feud and intrigue we begin to discern a conflict of policies and an alignment of parties; but the new pattern had hardly formed itself before it dissolved.

This crystallization dates from the death of James V on 14th December 1542; its precipitating cause was the project of a marriage between his infant daughter and the heir to the throne of England, the baby Mary Queen of Scots and the future Edward VI. This project seemed, for the moment, to rally round it all sections of lay opinion in Scotland, and it coincided with what bade fair to be a religious revolution. The Earl of Arran, head of the house of Hamilton, cousin of the late King and heir presumptive to the throne, became regent. Cardinal Beaton was first set aside, then arrested. Arran was strongly inclined to the reformed doctrines. Two preachers of those doctrines were his chaplains. In March 1543, Parliament authorized the reading of the Bible in a translation to be approved, but the public did not wait for the appearance of this hypothetical version. *Then*, says Knox, *might have been seen the Bible lying upon almost every gentleman's table. The New Testament was borne about in many hands. Some that, perchance, had never read ten sentences in it had it most common in their hand; they would clap their*

familiars on the cheek with it and say "this has laid hid under my bed-foot these ten years." Possibly Knox's own convictions date from this time; according to one account, he had his "first taste of the truth" from one of Arran's chaplains.

But this hey-day of friendship with England and of religious freedom was to last a bare six months. The dream was shattered, partly by the anxieties of Henry VIII's position, but mainly by his tyrant temper. He would not be content with a marriage treaty; the infant queen must be delivered into his keeping. There was sound reason for that. Marriage treaties were notoriously made only to be broken, and this baby was nearly the most dangerous person in Europe. After Henry's own children—an ailing boy and two daughters whose legitimacy he himself had done his best to impugn —she was heir to the throne of England. She could not safely be left in the hands of a French mother and a wayward aristocracy, to become a pawn in the politics of the Continent.

But Henry must needs go further. He must be recognized as lord superior of the kingdom of Scotland, the fortresses of the country must be surrendered to him. To secure these demands he sought to form an English party out of the Scottish refugees and captives in London. The Earl of Angus and been long in exile there with his brother Sir George Douglas; he was Henry's brother-in-law, having married his sister Margaret, widow of James IV and grandmother of the infant Queen of Scots. Both brothers had fought on the English side at Haddonrig only six months before and had narrowly escaped capture in that disaster. The Earls of Glencairn and Cassilis, with the Lords Maxwell, Somerville and Oliphant, had just been taken prisoners at Solway Moss. These men, especially Cassilis and Glencairn, with Glencairn's heir Kilmaurs, were the natural leaders of a Protestant party friendly to England. But Henry must needs bind them, as a condition of their release, to support, not the policy of an equal union with England, towards which all the best minds in Scotland had long been moving, but a policy of surrender to England, repugnant, now as ever, to the national feeling of all Scotsmen. This was to discredit their party from the outset. Instead of a national party it became a faction in English pay, "assured Scots" in the disdainful phrase of English officials.

5

It would be wearisome to recount the moves and countermoves of the next few months; but a short summary may serve to introduce on our stage some of the men who were subsequently to play a leading part in Knox's life.

This English and Protestant party found ranged against it a party which, though for the moment definitely Catholic, contained men who later turned against the Catholic Church and who, even at this time, represented the instinct of national independence rather than any love of Beaton or the French connection. It was a formidable combination: the Earl of Argyll outweighted Cassilis, Glencairn and Maxwell in the west; the Earls of Huntly and Moray dominated the north; the Earl of Bothwell, with the Homes, the Scotts and the Kers, were too strong for the Douglases on the Border. Between these two parties stood the Regent, a weak man of good intentions, and the Queen Mother, at that time a popular figure, with all the prestige of recent widowhood and not yet identified in the public mind with the French policies of the Cardinal.

Gradually Henry VIII's tactics drove these two towards the Catholic party. Beaton regained his liberty and began to resume control. He summoned from France Matthew Stewart, Earl of Lennox, the next heir to the throne after Arran, and a potential rival claimant. His coming reinforced the Catholic party, who proceeded to seize the Queen and Queen Mother at Linlithgow and transport them to Stirling. Arran began to take alarm. At his ear now stood his half-brother, John Hamilton, Abbot of Paisley, also newly returned from France, a man who had been thought to have some leanings towards Church reform, but who shared his family's strange capacity for disappointing the expectations of its friends. Arran was a patriot, but the throne was too great a prize to be ignored, and only a baby's uncertain life stood in his way to it; it would be folly to forfeit it to Lennox by taking sides with a group of English pensioners against priests and nobles who could claim, for the moment at least, to be the guardians both of royalty and of the national interest. And if the Queen of Scots did not marry the heir

to the throne of England, why should she not marry the heir to the house of Hamilton?

There followed a *dénouement* characteristic of the quick-change possibilities of Scottish politics. On 1st July 1543, the marriage treaty with England was concluded at Greenwich, without humiliating conditions but not without new secret understandings between Henry and his "assured Scots." On August 25th it was ratified by Arran and a convention of nobles at Holyrood. Yet on September 3rd, Arran was reconciled with Beaton and rode with him to Stirling; there he denounced the treaty and abjured his heresies at the altar of the Franciscan Convent; and on the 9th the baby Queen was crowned. In the following December, Parliament passed a new Act against "damnable opinions contrary to the faith and laws of Holy Kirk," and on 26th January 1544, four men were hanged and a woman drowned as heretics at Perth.

In the twenty-eight months which elapsed between the scene at Stirling and the arrival of Wishart at Longniddry, the English and Protestant party had gradually disintegrated. Lennox, it is true, turned his coat and joined them; but he was merely playing for a crown and was as ready to take Henry for a partner as Beaton. His adherence temporarily added to the party's power but not to its respectability. Even with this reinforcement, its leaders were too weak for an appeal to arms, except as auxiliaries to an invading army from England. Before that army could arrive, the Douglases, Somerville and Maxwell had all been arrested; when it did arrive in May 1544, the expedition degenerated into a mere raid. By the time that Glencairn had gathered five hundred spears in the west, it was already in retreat to Berwick, burning and slaying as it went. Glencairn's small force was easily crushed. After the horrors of that invasion, it became increasingly difficult for any Scotsman to identify himself with England. Glencairn and Cassilis were more or less reconciled to the Regent, though they continued to correspond with the English Court. Lennox alone persisted in open adherence to the cause of England; but he, who had till recently been almost a Frenchman, was henceforward to all intents and purposes an Englishman, newly married to Henry's niece, Lady Margaret Douglas, and about to become the father of that other Henry, Lord Darnley, in whom his

designs on the Scottish crown were to be so ironically fulfilled. But this marriage did little to strengthen the ties that bound the Douglases to England. In the winter of 1544–45, Henry succeeded for a time in alienating even his brother-in-law. Seeing his lands ravaged by English raids, Angus called out his forces on the Border and was mainly responsible for inflicting on the English the disaster of Ancrum Moor in February 1545.

After that, some moves were made in the spring and summer of 1545 to reconstitute the old coalition. While Angus's horsemen were riding down the English fugitives at Ancrum, Cassilis went to London and returned in April as Henry's ambassador, with proposals for peace and a renewal of the marriage treaty. When these terms were summarily rejected by a convention of the nobility, there was coming and going between Cassilis and the English authorities at Berwick; correspondence passed; an English agent visited him in June; Cassilis even went so far, in one letter. as to broach the idea of assassinating Beaton. Whether he knew it or not, that was an old story. Such a plot had been hatching for more than a year, as we shall see in a moment. But the negotiations hung fire; mutual distrust kept them vague; the Earls obviously did not feel that the time was ripe.

6

It was at this moment that Wishart appeared in Ayrshire. He probably did not go there uninvited; at any rate he found a strong group of gentlemen ready to receive him: Lockharts of Bar, Campbells of Kinyeancleuch and Chalmers of Gadgirth. John Rough, one of Arran's former chaplains, had already been preaching in the districts of Kyle and Cunningham and had revived their old Lollard traditions. This group had the patronage of the Earls; Glencairn came to Ayr to support Wishart against the Bishop of Glasgow; Cassilis was probably in communication with him.

The balance of political forces being what it was, wise men would not have presumed on this patronage. It was one thing for the Earls to support Wishart in their home country, and quite another to risk an open challenge to the Regent and the Cardinal. Yet this was pre-

cisely the risk which these lairds of Kyle were anxious to take. They saw in Wishart an invaluable political card. They proposed to play him, and they chose as their occasion the meeting of a Church Council to be held at Edinburgh on January 13th. After he had left them on his return to Dundee, they sent word to him that they would meet him at the capital and they led him to believe that Cassilis would come with them. It was to keep this tryst that Wishart had crossed Forth; it was for this tryst that he was waiting at the house of Longniddry.

And there he found himself in even more dangerously political company than in Ayrshire. It was a company at least on the border line of gangsterdom. It consisted mainly of three families: Douglas of Longniddry, Cockburn of Ormiston and Crichton of Brunstone. All were of the "English party," anti-clericals, haters of the French, known enemies of Cardinal Beaton. For more than eighteen months Crichton had been deep in a plot, instigated by Henry VIII, for Beaton's murder. How far the others were dipped in the same plot we do not know, but one of Crichton's letters to Henry had been written from Cockburn's house only two months before, and there can be little doubt that Douglas shared the politics of his family. Angus and Sir George Douglas were his cousins; and Sir George, who was in Lothian at this moment and had issued a public defiance to the Cardinal after Wishart's sermon at Inveresk, had been one of the originators of the assassination plot. These men had friends throughout the countryside round Haddington, and Haddington was a key point between Edinburgh and the Border. For months Beaton had seen in Wishart a dangerous firebrand, and here he was smouldering in the heart of the most inflammable material in Scotland. Happily for the Cardinal, the most powerful man in those parts was for the moment his friend—Patrick Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, father of a more famous son. To him he had sent word to stamp out the fire.

It is no wonder that Wishart's association with such men should have aroused the suspicion of historians. Some have even identified him with a man of the same name, who had acted as a go-between in the assassination plot itself. This identification was never more than a guess, and is now usually discredited. But it is not only modern

historians who have disliked his political connections. They were disliked by some of his more sober friends at the time.

There were sober heads even among the Lothian lairds. There was, for instance, David Forres, afterwards General of the Mint, with whom Wishart stayed his first night at Haddington; there was old Sir James Sandilands of Calder, Cockburn's father-in-law. Crichton had mentioned Sandilands, among others, in one of his plotting letters, but had probably taken his name in vain. But the real centre of the reforming movement, as the future was to show, was neither here nor in Ayrshire, but beyond Forth where Wishart began his preaching. In Fife, in Angus and Mearns, and in Perth, there were hot-heads enough among the anti-clerical families, Lesleys, Kirkcaldys and Melvilles, not to mention that dark figure, Patrick Master of Ruthven, one of those ruffians of genius about whom the men of the times whispered strange stories—in Renaissance Italy, tales of poison and nameless immoralities; in Scotland, rumours of wizardry and Satanism. But some of the older men of these families had had distinguished records of public service under James V: Sir James Kirkcaldy of Grange had been High Treasurer, Sir John Melville of Raith, Captain of Dunbar Castle, and the Earl of Rothes, head of the house of Lesley, a Lord of Council. And in the background of the group stood two quite exceptional men: Henry Balnaves of Halhill, a travelled scholar and eminent lawyer, Secretary of State and Commissioner for the peace with England in 1543, now a Senator of the College of Justice; and John Erskine of Dun, the most attractive figure of these dark times, first introducer (it is said) of Greek studies into Scotland and founder of Wishart's school at Montrose, sincere Christian and wise counsellor, *mild and sweet natured*, the only man who could claim, in after years, to have been equally respected both by Knox and by Mary Queen of Scots. And Erskine had strongly dissuaded Wishart from crossing into Lothian. He probably distrusted the men with whom he would consort there; he certainly disapproved the errand which took him thither.

The truth is that, in this January of 1546, the inner group of gentlemen in Lothian to whom Wishart had unwarily committed himself were the last irreconcilable remnants of their party, quite unable to see how weak their position was. We can judge from Knox's

recollections of these years, as they appear in his *History of the Scottish Reformation*, how "die-hard" was the atmosphere in which he then lived. These men had never forgiven Arran's apostasy; they had almost rejoiced in the barbarities of the English invasion, wrought at their very doors; they could see no hope for their country or for their religion save in the English alliance. They alone, or at least one among them, kept the fires of treason and conspiracy burning in the region between Edinburgh and Berwick. Hoping for help from the western Earls, they had seized on the opportunity offered by Wishart's tryst with the Ayrshire gentry. In Wishart's eyes, the purpose of the tryst might be innocent enough. For months he had gone in danger of his life, of assassination or of secret arrest by Beaton's agents; and with his life was bound up the message which he had come to preach. There was only one way to save both: to challenge the bishops to hear him publicly. It would be seen then whether his enemies dared arrest him in the light of day, with his followers round him. Such demonstrations were to become the familiar tactics of the Scottish Reformation, and none was to use them more boldly or more successfully than Knox himself. But it was with very different hopes that the Red Douglases and the plotter at Brunstone looked forward to a sudden gathering of the gentry of both Ayrshire and Lothian at the seat of government.

Their difficulty was that Wishart would not play the waiting game. He would not lie hid. Four miles from Longniddry was the church of Tranent, and there he insisted on preaching. But even that would not content him; he must preach at Haddington itself, *where it was supposed the greatest confluence of people should be, both by reason of the town and of the country adjacent.* Eventually he had his way; and so we come back to the parish church of Haddington on this afternoon of January 16th.

7

As he waited for his congregation that afternoon, Wishart was troubled. It was the second day of his preaching and something was evidently wrong. There had been no *confluence*. Afterwards men thought that the good people of Haddington must have been

warned by Bothwell to stay away. In the forenoon of the day before there had been a *reasonable audience, and yet nothing in comparison of that which used to be in that church*; in the afternoon the congregation had been *so slender that many wondered.* The next morning the attendance had been no better; and now, this afternoon, it might well be worse.

At this moment a letter was put into Wishart's hands. The gentlemen of Ayrshire excused themselves; they could not keep the tryst. This was the end; of late he had felt Beaton's toils closing round him and had lived in the shadow of death; now he was left to face his fate alone. He called for Knox, showed him the letter, exclaimed that he wearied of the world, for he saw that men began to weary of God. Knox was unresponsive, almost shocked, *wondering that he desired to keep any purpose before sermon, for that was never his accustomed use before.* He remonstrated, would leave the preacher to his meditation, took the letter and withdrew.

But not out of sight. For more than half an hour he watched Wishart pacing up and down behind the high altar. He had never seen him in this mood. True, he had been often melancholy; in all his sermons he had foretold *the shortness of the time he had to travail, and his death, the day whereof he said approached nearer than any would believe.* But it had been the melancholy of resignation. He had already passed through his Gethsemane; those who had been with him beyond Forth had told a strange tale of a night passed in secret agony when he thought none saw him. It was different now. He was thrown off his balance; *his very countenance and visage declared the grief and alteration of his mind.*

At length he came down to the pulpit and saw before him only a few hearers. He forgot the sermon he had announced. Passionately, disconnectedly, for an hour and a half he warned Haddington of the wrath to come; then, with a brief return to the discourse he had intended to deliver, he closed the service and went out. The end of the scene must be told in Knox's own words.

Departing from the town of Haddington, he took his good night as it were for ever, of all his acquaintance, especially from Hugh Douglas of Longniddry. John Knox pressing to have gone with the said Master George, he said, "Nay, return to your bairns and God bless you. One is

sufficient for one sacrifice." And so he caused a two-handed sword (which commonly was carried with the said Master George) to be taken from the said John Knox, who, albeit unwillingly, obeyed and returned with Hugh Douglas of Longniddry. Master George, having to accompany him the laird of Ormiston, John Sandilands of Calder younger, the laird of Brunston and others, with their servants, passed upon foot (for it was a vehement frost) to Ormiston.

The party was walking into a trap. Within a mile of the house of Ormiston was Elphinstone Tower, and there Beaton himself was staying, with a guard of horse. That night, before midnight, Wishart was arrested by Bothwell in person; an hour or two later the Cardinal's guard surrounded the house and took Cockburn and Sandilands also. Crichton slipped out and escaped. Six weeks later, on March 1st, Wishart was arraigned for heresy at St. Andrews and burnt in the presence of the Cardinal.

He is one of the many figures of history of whom we know too little to write an epitaph. He may have been just a *blessed martyr of God*, or he may have been dipped deep in treason. But is it fanciful to see him as a symbolic figure, moving against the background of European events? In the one year given to him, his preaching had shown Scotland what she had missed, his political entanglements had warned her of what was to come.

It was a year of peace between the nations. In June 1544, the Emperor had made a truce with the Turks; in September the Treaty of Crépy had closed, for the moment, the long war between Hapsburg and Valois, with Tudor England playing a shifting part between them, which had devastated western Europe for a generation. But these rulers had little thought of peace; they were using their breathing space to marshal their forces for a different struggle. Their political rivalries had sheltered the first generation of reformers; now that shelter was to be withdrawn. In April 1545, as Wishart was setting out on his missionary journey, the French soldiery had swept into the villages of the Waldensian heretics along the valley of the Durance, wiping out a whole population with fire and sword. On December 13th, when he was hiding at Leith, the long delayed General Council of the Catholic Church had been opened by the Papal Legates in the little Tyrolean town of Trent. On February

18th, eleven days before his execution, Martin Luther had died at Eisleben, with the tramp of the Emperor's armies in his ears, gathering for war against the Protestant princes of Germany.

The first phase of the Reformation was over, the phase that Scotland had never known, when, in spite of all the childish violence of kings and sectaries, it seemed for a moment that men might turn and listen to a new word from God. The second phase had opened, the phase into which Scotland was to enter unprepared, the years that were to see the nations align themselves and the sects harden as, amid a rising clamour of pulpiteering and persecution, Christendom plunged towards the Wars of Religion.

8

We have dwelt on this episode because it must do duty for those researches into early life and training which are the pre-occupation of most biographers. Of Knox's personal history before he met Wishart we know, apart from the facts already mentioned, literally nothing except that his mother was a Sinclair; that on both his father's and his mother's side his forbears had been tenants of the Bothwells *and some had died under their standards*; that he was born either in or near Haddington, possibly in the parish of Morham, about the year 1513; and that he had studied for some time at one of the universities, probably St. Andrews, but had apparently left it without a Master's degree.

Of his personal appearance we do know something; it was as undistinguished as his station in life or his career. Rather below the middle height; broad shoulders; black hair and beard, the beard at this time short and rather sparse; narrowish forehead; grey-blue eyes deep set beneath ridged brows and above full ruddyish cheeks; long nose, long mouth, full lips, the upper somewhat thicker than the lower; a dour countenance, but not unkindly nor untouched by humour—the description might serve for any Lowland farmer. He was a man of the people; among his own people he had lived, preferring to return from the university to the small corner of country where he had been born; among them he was like to die, an obscure dominie, law-trained and legal-minded, clear-sighted and hard-

headed within the narrow limits of his vision and his experience, but with little scholarship beyond good grammar-school latinity, uninspired and lacking either talent or inclination to play any public part.

Destiny came to him with Wishart, but still not a manifest destiny. This father of the Scottish Reformation had, in fact, one hidden talent and one obvious qualification for popular leadership. He was a born preacher in days when the pulpit was the main instrument of political as well as religious propaganda; and he was a typical Scot, thinking the thoughts and speaking the language of his countrymen. Yet sixteen months were to pass before he found his vocation; then he was to preach no more than a sermon or two before passing into exile; not until he was forty-one was his voice to be heard again in Scotland, and then only for a few months; not until he was forty-five was he to come home finally to do, in the last thirteen years of his life, the work for which his name is remembered in history.

But to the day of his death he remembered Wishart, certainly as a political warning. He was *a man of such graces as before him were never heard within this realm, yea, and are rare yet to be found in any man; singularly learned, as well in godly knowledge as in all honest humane science.* But he was also a man who had fatally misjudged the ripeness of an opportunity; and Knox, one thinks, never forgot that lesson. He was to use political alliances as Wishart had not dreamed of using them, but he was careful never to trust himself to them until they were strong enough to be effective. When his time came, he showed all Wishart's courage; but he knew how to bide his time, even under the suspicion of faint-heartedness. In this, too, his education began with Wishart; but it was to be finished in the hard school of personal experience. For at his first entrance into public life he was to be involved abruptly in a failure even more spectacular than Wishart's, and a failure due to exactly the same mistake, aggravated by every circumstance of violent folly.