

Chapter 14

John Cameron: Problems in Valladolid

The main reason for the bishops' desire to rid themselves of the Madrid property was, of course, the unsettled state of the country. The church in Spain and its property suffered a great deal during the forty years of Cameron's rectorate but the college itself continued to survive, unmolested, in Valladolid. The fact of its being a community of foreigners and the Spanish desire to avoid offending Britain contributed to this state of affairs. Only at the beginning of his rectorate and at the very end does Cameron have much to say about the difficult conditions which the community had to endure.

His early years as rector were contemporaneous with the regency of Queen Cristina and the first Carlist war. At the end of 1835 and the spring of 1836, there were officers billeted in the college. "Our streets resound almost every night with cries of murder. There is no hostile feeling towards the College."¹ But things had become somewhat worse at the end of the summer. The city was in a state of semi-siege; many churches, houses and other buildings had been demolished to facilitate defence measures, others had been turned into forts and strong points; deep ditches had been dug across the streets and there had been heavy exactions from individuals and groups, including the college, to help pay for the city's defence against the Carlists.²

"Persons and property, all is at the mercy of a military junta. I must also observe that our house is becoming the object of offence to the prevailing taste of the day. We have received on various occasions significant hints how little we are in favour. The College has repeatedly drawn insults upon the Collegians—not from a mob but from persons who pretend to education. Last week the students of the English College were hailed with a bullet fired from a group of genteelly dressed persons."³

During and after their unsuccessful attack on Madrid in the autumn of 1837, Valladolid was in fact occupied by the Carlists for a week, but no resistance was offered to them and, on their withdrawal, Cameron considered, rightly, that it would not be long until relatively peaceful conditions returned to the country.⁴

At about the time of the Carlist occupation in 1837, Valladolid had another visitor in the person of the redoubtable George Borrow, the "pedlar of Protestant bibles." In the course of his stay in the town, he paid a call on the college, which he found

"an old gloomy edifice, situated in a retired street. The rector was dressed in the habiliments of a Spanish ecclesiastic, a character which he was evidently ambitious of assuming. There was something dry and cold in his manner, and nothing of that generous warmth and eager hospitality which had so captivated me in the fine Irish rector of Salamanca; he was, however, civil and polite, and offered to show me the curiosities of the place. He evidently knew who I was, and on that account, was, perhaps, more reserved than he otherwise would have been: not a word passed between us on religious matters, which we seemed to avoid by common consent."⁵

A group of students had been expected in Valladolid from Blairs in 1836 but, because of the war and the prevailing anticlericalism, they had not come. Cameron now, however, late in 1837, considered

that conditions might have improved enough to warrant their coming —provided that a master accompanied them, since he was the only priest in the college.⁶ There were, in fact, only two students left in the college when, just before Christmas 1838, the new colony did arrive, ten of them, accompanied by James Clapperton, two years ordained and one of the priests who had previously been teaching them at Blairs.⁷

A year or so after their coming, Cameron was very worried about the financial state of the establishment. “Never was I so much afraid as I am at this moment of becoming a bankrupt. Contributions and taxes have pressed so heavily upon us, and the revenues of the College have fallen so low, that this year I have been obliged to live principally on borrowed money . . . For my part, I am resolved to carry on trade as long as I can get money on credit.”⁸ A year later, he was still expressing anxiety and speaking of the probability of his having to go into debt, an implicit admission, perhaps, that matters were not so bad as previously.⁹ In the years that followed, the college’s economic difficulties eased considerably.

James Clapperton remained for less than five years and, although he was soon described as vice-rector, he did not, according to the evidence, fit particularly well into the scheme of things. Cameron informed Bishop Scott that his assistant had notified him that he had come to Spain only on the understanding that he would teach neither philosophy nor theology. This meant that, as the boys advanced in their studies, all the teaching in these two subjects was going to fall on the rector’s shoulders. Moreover, Clapperton was alleged to have told the students, but not Cameron, that he had come to spend only three years in Spain.¹⁰ In fact, he left in October 1843, just after the arrival of John Cowie as his replacement and carrying with him, for Bishop Kyle, some bundles, hurriedly assembled, of documents from the college archives. Cowie, who had been vice-rector of the college in Rome for six years from 1835, was destined to remain with Cameron until the latter’s death thirty years later.

In these years, around the 1840s, the students were given a soup made with bread and oil for breakfast during the winter months, but in the summer they got eggs, milk or fruit. Their midday meal was a thick soup or stew, followed by a dish such as roast beef, pork, sausages, fish or omelette; and then cheese or fruit. Supper was the same, with the first course omitted. (It was not until 1895 that the custom of giving the students something at “teatime” was introduced, when the bishops ordered that coffee be provided for them.¹¹) There were four servants in the college: a housekeeper, a cook (both female), and two males—a porter and one who served at table and sold wine at the counter near the front door.¹²

The students began their long holidays towards the end of September. One full day of examinations preceded the exodus to Boecillo. In earlier times, a desire to protect the students from the summer heat had been given as the reason why the vacation was so late, but by now it seemed that there was another consideration: “Much would I desire to have our vacation transferred from the month of October to some other month, should matters be so arranged that we could carry on studies and superintend the vintage at the same time.”¹³ A glimpse at the students’ life at Boecillo during the holidays is given in an enthusiastic letter written by one of the students soon after his arrival at the college. Normally they had two hours’ study except on expedition days; on such occasions, after their return to Boecillo in the evening, they were allowed to play cards for small sums of money and to go to bed when they liked.¹⁴

In one of his letters to Bishop Murdoch in 1846, Cameron relates a bizarre experience that had befallen three of the students. They had been sent to be ordained to the priesthood and, the bishop being infirm, the ceremony was held in his private chapel with his young nephew as the sole assistant. At the offertory of the Mass, they noticed that the bishop poured wine and water into the same chalice which they had touched during the ordination rite. Since it thus seemed that the chalice had, at that point, been empty, doubts arose in their minds about the validity of their ordination. On their return to the college, they explained these doubts to the rector who immediately went to see the bishop. The latter made little of the matter and told Cameron not to preoccupy himself. That afternoon, Cameron had to go out and, when he returned, the three students informed him that, while he had been away, the bishop had been at the college and, calling them into the reliquary, had “re-ordained” them. However, everything was not yet right because, to avoid all publicity, only the bishop and the three students had been present and, as the light was bad and the print small, the bishop had held his book in one hand and a candle in the other all through the ceremony, including the moments at which he ought to have imposed his hands on the ordinands’ heads. Having heard this, Cameron decided that it was useless to try anything further in Valladolid and so he sent the three young men home, where they were once more conditionally re-ordained.¹⁵

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Cameron’s worries as rector were not limited to the Madrid property and its future. He had his troubles with the community also. In the first place, there was an inordinate incidence of serious illness among the students. All had escaped the very severe epidemic of cholera which devastated the city in 1834 and from which Tomasa, the college housekeeper, had succumbed.¹⁶ The rector himself was ill with typhus in 1839 and had to be given the last sacraments.¹⁷ From time to time he had to report that many of the boys had had long attacks of the ague or tertian fever. Six or seven were in this state during the winter of 1842-43 “owing to the immoderate eating of grapes.”¹⁸ Cameron too was very ill in 1845 and again in 1856, with a severe attack of the ague. On both occasions he was anointed.¹⁹ Much more serious than the ague was the fact that, of the ten who had come out with Clapperton in 1838, one died and five had to be invalided home. The reason, in most, if not all, cases, was tuberculosis. No doubt the fact that so many were ill at the one time was due partly to the infection having been passed from one to the other; but the students had to spend the winters, with their intense cold, without any heating in their rooms and, if mattresses got damp, when, for example, being transported to Boecillo, that was simply a discomfort that had to be accepted. Cameron seemed to be on the defensive when he wrote to his friend, Charles Gordon, on the subject of the high incidence of illness in the college:

“And what do you think is my rejoinder to all this? Only this, that with all my years and my cares and labours, I enjoy the same good health in Valladolid which you enjoy in Aberdeen; and that I do not see a single reason why a student in Valladolid, if he has given him a sound constitution, should not enjoy as good health as I do, and still better, provided he take ordinarily good care of it”²⁰

A more persistent malaise was that which manifested itself from time to time in a bad spirit among the students—unhappiness, unrest, disobedience. The first hint of trouble came in 1841 when Cameron wrote to Scotland to say that he had room for a few more students but that, if possible, they should be non-Blairtians since thus they would be “more docile and more easily trained to

discipline.”²¹ Nevertheless, when the group which arrived in Valladolid contained several non-Blairtians, there were complaints from the rector about untried boys being sent out, some of whom proved unsuitable and had to be sent home again, thus incurring expenses which could have been avoided by sending only Blairtians!

Not long afterwards, Bishop Carruthers had a letter from Cameron in which he confessed that the standards of discipline and studies were not as they should be; he therefore offered to place his resignation in the bishops’ hands and serve under a new rector.²² The offer, of course, was not accepted. Nonetheless, the bishops, with the exception of Murdoch, were indignant with Cameron and upset at events which occurred in the college four years later. The few survivors of the 1838 arrivals had been (doubtfully) ordained and had gone home in April 1846, leaving only four students in the college. Eight newcomers arrived in July but, of the twelve now in the college, two had already abandoned their studies when, on 9th November 1847, another three left for Scotland. Cameron wrote immediately to Bishop Kyle to explain that all three were noted for their pride, lack of piety, aversion to discipline, constant intrigues and animosity towards the *decano*; there had been some trifling new rules made in the college, but the trio, rather than submit, had decided to leave.²³ The *decano* in question, Alexander Munro, twenty-seven years old and a convert, reported that, with the three troublemakers gone, all who remained were content and happy, aware of their good fortune in being members of such a well-ordered community.²⁴ The three students put their side of the case to Bishop Kyle in a letter written from Boulogne on their way home. Denying that they were seditious or ill-intentioned as they knew would be alleged, they maintained that their only reason for leaving Valladolid was that they found it intolerable “that our stay in the seminary of Valladolid altogether depended upon the will and nod of one of our fellow-Collegians” and assured Kyle that they hoped to be allowed to continue their preparation for the priesthood in some other seminary.²⁵

Bishop Kyle strongly favoured the students’ version of the affair. “Something must be wrong in the management of the house. . . .the Rector is supposed to be blinded by Munro... On speaking to them of the folly of leaving the house of their own accord, it came out that the *decano*, Munro, had previously threatened them with expulsion and expressly told them that a word from him would procure it... They tell me that several others in the College are on the eve of departure.”²⁶ And Bishop Carruthers was of the same strong opinion. “My impression decidedly is that this freemason Munro has been principally, if not entirely, the cause of the three fugitives leaving the College. I can easily understand how vexatious it must have been for sensitive lads to find themselves placed under the pretentious surveillance of this assuming Personage, marked by him as objects of Suspicion and at the mercy of every suggestion of him to the Rector.”²⁷ The three “fugitives” were admitted to Blairs and, although one soon left, the other two were ordained to the priesthood.

Indeed, these were not the only cases of students who left Valladolid and were then admitted to other seminaries. Except for the case of those who completed the normal studies in Spain and then went to Paris for a year for a “finishing course” at St.-Sulpice, Cameron thought the practice very disruptive of good discipline in the college and, on Bishop Murdoch’s suggestion, the bishops agreed to discontinue it.²⁸

In the summer of 1847, a second assistant had been sent to Valladolid—Andrew Smith. At first he gave satisfaction, teaching grammar, music and declamation,²⁹ but it was not long before Cameron began to complain. Smith seemed listless and without energy, lay in bed instead of getting up to say

Mass (except on feast days), would not hear confessions because he claimed that he knew no theology, sat at his piano most of the day, had no liking for discipline in himself and did nothing to encourage it in the students.³⁰ Relations between Cameron and Smith cannot have been altogether cordial; but Cowie, the vice-rector, did not think the rector above criticism: "He is a man that seems to take great credit to himself for making a mystery about everything and therefore I trouble him with no questions."³¹

Smith left to return to Scotland in 1851 and two years later Alexander Munro was appointed to the college staff. In the summer of that same year of 1853, John Cowie paid a visit to Scotland, taking with him another bundle of documents for Bishop Kyle (who wanted them in connection with his desire to sell the Madrid property).

During his visit to Spain in connection with the Madrid sale, Murdoch made some enquiries into the students' attitudes. In fact, he interviewed each of the students individually and gave them an opportunity to present their grievances and air their views. He found their complaints trivial and felt that there were no justifiable grounds for the discontent which still lingered on. "I have been a good deal astonished at the instances of indiscipline and arrogance on the part of the students here, that have been related to me since I came. I fear the Spanish atmosphere is infected and infectious, as the spirit of the country has found its way into seminaries, as well as other Institutions."³²

Some of the other bishops, Kyle in particular, thought that much of the blame must be shouldered by the rector and his assistants (Munro having by now returned to the college as a professor); some of the students had been found drinking and stealing and Kyle took exception to the suggestion by Munro that these faults were due to Blairs. On the contrary, they were caused by the negligence of the Valladolid superiors who were "totally incapacitated for having charge of a College", a view further exemplified by their not having even bothered to keep the bishops informed.³³

As a result of his investigations in the college, a new set of rules was signed and authorised by Bishop Murdoch in July 1859 on behalf of the vicars apostolic.³⁴ It follows the customary style of the time. Arrival and departure, study and prayer, holidays and ordination, relations within the community and contact with the outside world—all are dealt with in nine chapters of injunction and prohibition which cover most eventualities of the student's life. They rose at 6 (at 5, from Easter to September), had half an hour to wash and dress and tidy their beds, another thirty minutes for prayer and meditation, a similar period for spiritual reading, and then Mass. An hour or so of study preceded breakfast. From 10 until 12.45, there were classes; then the rosary, followed by dinner at 1 o'clock. There was recreation until 3 and then study and classes again (with a short break) until 7.30, except that "on the afternoons of vacant days, if the weather permit, they shall walk out, all in a body, at the time and to the place appointed by the Rector."³⁵ At 7.30 the litany of the saints was recited and their lives read; supper was at 8 o'clock, followed by recreation until prayers at 9 and lights out thirty minutes later.

The regime during the five weeks spent at Boecillo in late September and during October was relaxed considerably. Rising time was at 6.30, there were fewer communal religious exercises, study lasted only for two hours and there were no classes. Each day the students had to go out walking for at least an hour and a half after breakfast and dinner, but with the provisos that they did not "go into villages nor cross rivers, nor remove from the house further than a league . . . [nor] purchase

wine, spirits, milk, eatables or any such thing, nor accept of them if offered . . . [nor] carry grapes nor any kind of fruit to the house.”³⁶

As well as these rules for the community, Bishop Murdoch also proposed that the students should have a distinctive uniform (including a cloak and a *beca*), that Benediction and other devotional practices should be introduced into the curriculum and that the professors’ rooms should be decently furnished.³⁷

The departure rate in the college continued to be high; of the thirty-six students who arrived at the college between 1849 and 1862, no fewer than twenty-five left before receiving orders. The reasons were various—some went voluntarily, others were expelled, some had to leave because of ill health, a few, according to the rector, feigned illness and left. Among these last was the *decano* of 1860 whom Cameron thought had decided to return to Scotland. However, he went only as far as Santander and, having been joined by one the maids in the college, he was there united to her in matrimony.³⁸

Alexander Munro left Valladolid in 1861³⁹ and it was not until 1865 that a replacement arrived. Cameron had to report some “unrest” among the students in 1863 when, due to this lack of a teacher, it was planned to unite a class of five students with the class behind them.⁴⁰ The following year however, harmony had been restored. By this time, the rector was 73 and anxious to give up teaching, after having had fifty-one continuous years at it. For most of them, he had been teaching theology (using Collet as his textbook at first and, in the late 1840s, having changed to Perrone for dogmatic theology and St. Alphonsus Liguori for moral).⁴¹ Aeneas Chisholm, the priest at Beaulieu, had been proposed for Valladolid and had signified his willingness to go, provided that he were to teach only classics and not philosophy or theology.⁴² But Chisholm later expressed reluctance and Bishop Murdoch was able to announce that “I have got for you another professor, who certainly is not indolent nor affected in his gait or dress, and does not sport a beard. It is the Rev. David McDonald of Blairs . . .”⁴³

The railway between Valladolid and the French frontier had been opened in 1864 and, in September of the following year, McDonald, who had travelled via Paris, met a colony of ten new students at Bordeaux, whither they had sailed from Glasgow, and accompanied them by train to Valladolid. They had a day’s rest in the college and then the eleven walked to Boecillo to join the rest of the community. Four days later, McDonald felt able to give his first impressions of his new home:

“Neither the college in town nor the villa are any great shakes... It is to me absolutely astonishing how the Boecillans could ever give the reins so far to their poetic fancy as they seem mostly all to have come to do in praising this place... I certainly cannot say I am pleased with my change and that I am at all happy here... I have seen the Rector twice or thrice for a few minutes; he never comes to the country-house unless he bring out the *monjas* [nuns] or some friends on a visit for a play . . . Mr. Cowie is a nice quiet gentleman but no great company; so that I expect soon to be a hermit . . . From my short experience here, I am not at all astonished at the unwillingness displayed by the old collegians to come back here.”⁴⁴

When the community was back in Valladolid and settled down to another year’s work, McDonald, who was teaching philosophy and classics (Cowie having taken over theology from Cameron), remained unimpressed. The rector was kindly and as fresh as a man of fifty, but was seen only at

dinner because he spent the rest of the day alone or with friends or nuns.⁴⁵ To Kyle, he wrote of “our very independent Rector” and appealed to him to try to have his and Cowie’s living conditions improved—their rooms were without heating, armchair or rug for the tiles.⁴⁶

McDonald’s early impressions of the students are revealing. He missed “that spirit of submission, humility and punctuality which I would expect in an ecclesiastical community... It is not so much in greatness of faults, which are often trivial, as the spirit, that does not please me.”⁴⁷ Cameron, on the other hand, reported that perfect harmony reigned among the students, although they were not particularly scrupulous about the observance of the rules, while the 1865 group had brought with them some books which he had felt bound to confiscate; one student, for instance, had with him the Comedies of Aristophanes.⁴⁸

In later letters to Bishop Strain, McDonald developed the point he had earlier made. He noted that the Valladolid college “as a rule receives only the tails of classes from Blairs, while Dr. Grant of Rome rides off triumphant with the brightest students.” Understandable though the practice might be, since Valladolid could offer only a very superficial course of studies, it was also a humiliation and did not do the college reputation any good.⁴⁹

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After having been vice-rector for seventeen years, John Cameron was rector for forty. At the start, as has been noted, he had no assistants at all and had to undertake the teaching himself, as well as the administration. James Clapperton was with him from 1838 until 1843, but it is only with the arrival of John Cowie as vice-rector in the latter year that one sees Cameron begin to develop other activities and interests apart from the administration and his classes. Himself “a very accomplished musician”, he encouraged the students’ musical talents and, in 1844, the college choir could be accompanied by two flautists, a violinist and a clarinetist; the following year, some of the students embarked on the construction of an organ.⁵⁰

Cameron was very ill in that year and, despite a visit to a spa in northern Spain, had to be anointed. But a couple of years later, he was contemplating a visit to Scotland, Bishop Kyle being anxious to have in his possession many more of the documents of the college archives. “Would Your Lordship be displeased that I myself were the bearer? The thing is not impossible, even now that all notion of travelling so far should be out of my head; but it will not be most assuredly to please myself, but to please others. For my own pleasure, sooner would I undertake a pilgrimage on foot to the Holy City. I will not say, however, that circumstances may not occur to overcome my repugnance.”⁵¹ This from a man whose mother was still alive in Scotland and whom he had not seen for over thirty years. Until about that time, the normal means of travel between Valladolid and Scotland had been by sea from or to a northern Spanish port and by diligence (or even mule) in Spain. But the students who arrived in that year came overland via Paris. Cameron’s projected journey to Scotland, however, did not take place.

In 1859 Bishop Murdoch found Cameron, at 68, in excellent physical shape. “Dⁿ Juan is quite fresh and blooming. Were it not for the interim loss of his teeth—he has not one—he would really look young. His health at present is very good. He appears to be exceedingly esteemed by all classes, at any rate of the good.”⁵² The following year the rector had a holiday near Santander (where, according to Cowie, he enjoyed himself taking mineral baths and indulging in his hobby of

astronomy, since a total eclipse of the sun would be visible there).⁵³ Before going, he had had the façade of the college in Valladolid repaired in accordance with Bishop Murdoch's suggestion, now that it had been decided that the college should not be abandoned, even when (or, rather, if) Madrid was sold. At this time, with twenty-two rent-paying families in the Madrid property, the college's economic state seemed fairly prosperous;⁵⁴ even so, the repairs in Valladolid were costly since the whole façade, which was of earth and was leaning off the straight, had to be removed to a depth of several feet and a new one of brick put in its place.⁵⁵ Part of the roof above the façade had also to be renewed, a small tower at the north-east corner was removed, the windows were arranged more symmetrically and the interior walls changed to make better use of the space available.⁵⁶

Although the sale of Boecillo wine brought very little income to the college, the rents from Madrid continued to be satisfactory and Cameron was able, after having completed repairs in Madrid and the renovation of the Valladolid façade, to embark in 1862 on further extensive improvements in the interior of the college. A narrow staircase near the front door was removed, the library was transferred from the top floor to its present location and five student's rooms constructed where it had previously been; moreover, four large rooms were divided, each into two rooms; new flooring, doors and windows were installed, other doors and windows repaired; some of the reconstructed rooms were narrower than before, so the bed recesses were removed, but in that case the beds had curtains hung around them.⁵⁷ The interior repairs and improvements continued, off and on, until 1865; the remainder of the rooms had new doors and windows put in; new back stairs were constructed; and the refectory and all the corridors were painted or distempered; the roof was also repaired. The total cost of all the work done in the college since 1860 was more than 170,000 *reals* (about £1,700).⁵⁸

Another of John Cameron's occupations was the spiritual direction of nuns and others. Writing to Bishop Murdoch in Spanish (as was his wont), he was quite sardonic about the matter:

"You know the great talent I possess for ingratiating myself with the *beatas* [church-frequenting women]. I make myself a *beato* like them and thus am the keeper of their consciences. I have laid my traps with such cunning that I now have about sixty regular penitents, twenty men and forty women. Old, deaf and lame, I am well aware that it is time to free myself of this burden, but I do not know how to resist appeals and tears."⁵⁹

Among his penitents were the rector of the university, the Countess of Campomanes and the nuns of the Visitation convent (all of high birth and one the daughter of the Countess of Canterac).

In the years after David McDonald's arrival in 1865, there occurred the crisis for the college when it seemed that the Madrid house would be expropriated in virtue of the 1855 decree of disamortisation and only the queen's intervention saved the day for the college. During this time, conditions were steadily becoming worse in Spain and it came as no great surprise when a military revolution brought about the flight and abdication of Isabel in the autumn of 1868. Further groups of students had arrived in Valladolid in the autumns of 1866 and 1867 (David McDonald had sent word to Scot land that he would be grateful if the latter brought out for his use five pounds of snuff, which they could conceal in their pockets when passing the frontier⁶⁰); but the following year Cameron, foreseeing that "famine and political convulsions" were imminent, wrote to advise that no students should come until further notice.⁶¹

Shortly after the departure of the queen and at the beginning of the two years' search for a new monarch, he expressed his views of the situation:

"Hitherto we have suffered little in this house from the revolution, which has overturned everything in this country, except in as far as we must feel deeply what is passing around us. You will have learned from the Catholic newspapers the antireligious, antisocial Character which the revolution has assumed... Arms have been given to the lowest ruffians, who are under the direction of the mitsonic lodges and who are the terror of the peaceable inhabitants."

The property of religious orders had been seized and nuns turned out of their convents. Civil war seemed imminent and the college would "share in the common calamity."⁶²

Calamity did await the college, but of a totally unexpected kind. On the afternoon of 27th October 1869, a violent fire occurred in the adjoining parish church of St. Stephen and continued all night, reducing the church to a shell. The fire engines, such as they were, took two hours to arrive after the alarm was raised. In the prevailing excitement,

"unfortunately all the inlets of our house were thrown open before the sentinels were placed and a disorderly multitude of more than 1,000 persons, many of whom remained during the night, who besides impeding the workmen and dreadfully annoying us, did incalculable damage to the roof of the College. There was no access to the burning church except through our house over the roof."

A mob had also burst into the college church and, possibly under the impression that it was in danger, had carried off all that could be removed. "The tabernacle which was gilt, with a great deal of curious carving, was smashed under the feet of some who clambered up to reach the statue of the B. Virgin and titular saint... The plate and all the articles of value have been recovered, some of them considerably damaged..."⁶³ Things, of course, could have been worse. As Cowie observed, "The old *Colegio* ran no little risk and perhaps owes its safety to the thickness of its old mud walls."⁶⁴

"The year of misfortunes" was how Cameron described 1869⁶⁵ and, as well as the fire, there was also serious trouble regarding the students' health. In the period of ten weeks prior to the fire, three of the boys had died, two of tuberculosis and the other of typhus.

A letter from the rector to Archbishop Eyre, written in June 1870, gives the impression of a man who had lost his zest for life and work. After all, he was now seventy-nine years old and had been rector for almost forty of them. He felt that the only justification for Boecillo, and a doubtful one at that, was as a place of recreation for the students, since the vineyards "occasion us a great deal of vexation and trouble, but add very little to our income; "⁶⁶ the Madrid property was in constant danger of confiscation and therefore the sooner it was sold the better; and he himself, with his advanced years, was, by the common law of nature, no longer fit for the responsible position he held.⁶⁷

Little had been made of Cameron's sacerdotal golden jubilee in 1864 and even less was made of the first centenary of the establishment of the college in Valladolid, an anniversary that occurred on 31st May 1871

"Yesterday we celebrated the first centenary of this college [at Valladolid] . . . At one time it was thought that some of the old students would have come to visit their Alma Mater on such an

occasion, but I suppose their numerous occupations on the Mission and the trouble and expense of so long a journey have deprived us of the pleasure of seeing any of them. Yet I know that many of them are much attached to the old house where they finished their studies.”⁶⁸

In spite of deaths and departures, the students at this time were fairly numerous. In the summer of 1871 there were seventeen, but Cameron was anxious that this number should be increased to about two dozen, although only on condition that another priest were also sent. In expectation of the increase, he had the loft or garret at Boecillo fitted out as a dormitory.⁶⁹

Archbishop Eyre was in the habit of expressing his wishes to Cameron in a business-like, not to say peremptory, manner, far different from the affectionate and almost deferential tone which Bishop Murdoch had always adopted. Since the gross annual income from Madrid was around £1,400 which, after expenses there, left about £1,000 for the college and since the annual cost per student was about £30, this meant, wrote the archbishop, that there was an annual surplus of about £500 in Valladolid. He therefore told Cameron that he should either send this home, where it could be used in other seminaries, or take more students; and, since it was impossible to spare any priests from Scotland, he should try to engage an extra teacher locally.⁷⁰ In fact, nine students were sent out in June 1872 and without an extra professor, despite the efforts of McDonald, home on holiday in Scotland after his health had broken down.⁷¹

That summer, John Cameron had left Spain for the one and only time during his sixty years in Valladolid, when he went on pilgrimage to Lourdes. In December of the same year, a cold developed into a catarrhal fever and he had to receive the last sacraments, although he soon recovered. He was by now almost blind and had received permission from Rome to say daily the votive Mass of our Lady and to substitute the rosary for his breviary.⁷² Cowie was negotiating with Dr. Munro on Cameron’s behalf to transfer £2,000 to Scotland, since conditions were so unsettled in Spain that investments were in jeopardy; the plan was to lend it to the Western District at 4½% interest and repayable on six months’ notice, for the purpose of building a new school attached to St. Andrew’s mission in Glasgow.⁷³

At last the vicars apostolic consented to Cameron’s retirement and so, on 1st November 1873, he resigned the office that he had held for forty years. The bishops ordered that he be paid an annual pension of £20 (leaving it to Cowie’s discretion to give him more), but the old man would take only £10.⁷⁴ He continued to live in the college that had been his home for almost sixty years, becoming noticeably frailer. In March 1875, he stopped joining the community for dinner in the refectory as he could no longer distinguish between different things on the table. He continued to offer Mass, being helped by one of the other priests but, at the beginning of December, he had to give that up also.⁷⁵ When able, he was present at the community Mass. In January 1876, Cowie reported that Cameron’s sight was so bad “that by some optical illusion he imagines that he sees hobgoblins and precipices etc. etc. in his way. Otherwise he is in good health.”⁷⁶

On 14th February, “not being seen at 7 o’clock yesterday morning in the reliquary where he was wont to assist at Mass, the servant went to his room and found him lying on the floor at the window,”⁷⁷ “almost frozen with cold, his forehead and his knees bleeding.”⁷⁸ Although he could give no clear account of what had happened, it is probable that he had fainted and had been lying, exposed to the cold, for about an hour and a half. He did not realise that he was on the floor and could not understand why he was unable to find the blankets. The doctor diagnosed bronchitis and

congestion of the lungs and said that he was in a critical state. He received the last sacraments and, as the day wore on, his condition worsened.

“Poor Mr. Cameron quite calm, peaceful and resigned. There were a great many calls . . . All during the night he was troubled with difficulty of breathing . . . He was very resigned and always joined in prayers, acts of faith etc., ejaculations which I suggested... At 5¼ morning I said Mass for him and then threw myself on bed, for I had been with him all night. About 7¾ m. I was called. He wished rosary (sorrowful myst.) to be said and evidently was drawing nigh his end . . . At 8 the whole community was present saying the rosary . . . in ten minutes time he was already in eternity (R.I.P.) To nearly the last he was conscious.”⁷⁹ He was five days short of his eighty-fifth birthday.

The college church was very crowded for his funeral Mass at 9 the following day and, later, the coffin was carried to the city cemetery by the Scots and then the English students and finally, as was the custom, by men from the poorhouse (Casa de Beneficencia), accompanied by a group of musicians. His was the first burial in the joint grave that Cowie and the English rector had purchased the previous summer, at a total cost of 6,000 reals, shared between the two colleges.⁸⁰

In his will, made three years earlier, Cameron had asked that a large number of Masses be offered for the repose of his soul and had left gifts of money and pictures to half a dozen convents, two hundred *reals* each to five students soon to leave for the mission, a snuff-box to the college’s administrator in Madrid and a waste paper basket to the rector of the English College in Valladolid.⁸¹ The residue, which amounted to about £800, he left to the college and Cowie hoped that he would soon be able to send to Scotland that part of it (£300) which had not been transferred the previous year.⁸²

Notes for Chapter 14

1. John Cameron to Bishop Carruthers, 9th April 1836. (Preshome archives.)
2. Cameron to Charles Gordon, Aberdeen 2nd September 1836. (Columba House, unclassified.)
3. Copy of letter of Cameron to Bishop Carruthers, 7th February 1837, sent by latter to Bishop Murdoch, 2nd March 1837. (Argyll archives.)
4. To Bishop Kyle, 2nd November 1837. (Columba House, unclassified.)
5. George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, 1846, p. 124.
6. To Bishop Kyle, 2nd November 1837. (Columba House, unclassified.)
7. Kyle had planned to send Charles Gordon to help Cameron three years earlier, but the proposal was not implemented. (Bishop Kyle to Bishop Scott, 13th November 1835. Argyll archives.)
8. To Charles Gordon, Aberdeen, 4th October 1839. (Columba House, unclassified.) At this time, the English College ceased to be able to support its students and they were sent home. (Registers of the English College at Valladolid, p. 232.)
9. To Charles Gordon, Aberdeen, 1st January 1841. (Columba House, unclassified.)
10. Cameron to Bishop Scott, 31st August 1841. (Argyll archives.)
11. The Ambrosian (Valladolid), 8th December 1896, p. 17.
12. College archives A/14.

13. Cameron to Bishop Kyle, 19th February 1844. (Columba House, unclassified.)

At the time, Cameron was teaching theology but felt that, during the vintage in October, his presence was required at Boecillo.

14. Charles Gordon, to William Stewart, Preshome, 14th October 1834. (Columba House, unclassified.)

15. Cameron to Bishop Murdoch, 18th April 1846. (Argyll archives.)

This letter begins: "Much honoured and much loved disciple;" and ends: "Finally I prostrate myself at your feet and crave you piously to shed your apostolical blessing upon the naked bald cranium of . . . your most loving and most obedient humble servant, John Cameron'. In his letters to Cameron, his old vice-rector, the bishop always used terms of respect and affection.

16. Charles Gordon to William Stewart, Preshome, 14th October 1834. (Columba House. unclassified.)

17. College archives A/14.

18. Cameron to Charles Gordon, Aberdeen, 16th April 1843. (Columba House, unclassified.)

19. See college archives A/15.

20. 18th February 1844. (Columba House, unclassified.)

21. To Bishop Scott, 31st August 1841. (Argyll archives.)

22. Bishop Carruthers to Bishop Scott, 5th March 1842. (Ibid.)

23. 9th November 1847. (Preshome archives.)

24. To — ?, 16th November 1847. (Ibid.)

25. 19th November 1847. (Ibid.)

26. Bishop Kyle to Bishop Murdoch, 27th November 1847. (Argyll archives.) Another four students left within the next four months.

27. To Bishop Kyle, 1st December 1847. (Preshome archives.)

28. Bishop Murdoch to Cameron, 19th October 1859. (College archives 64/1/7.)

29. Cameron to Bishop Kyle, 10th September 1847. (Preshome archives.)

30. Id. to Bishop Murdoch, 29th August 1848 and 24th April 1849. (Argyll archives.)

During Smith's first twelve months in Valladolid, eight students, including the three "fugitives", left the college before completing their course. In 1848, some students returned to the English College and the younger ones received their classes in the Scots College. (*Registers of the English College at Valladolid*, p. lxxviii.)

31. To Bishop Kyle, 31st December 1849. (Preshome archives.)

32. To Id., 11th June and 11th July 1859. (Ibid.)

33. Bishop Smith, coadjutor, western District, to Bishop Murdoch, 7th March 1858. (Argyll archives.)

34. College archives 30/23.

35. Chapter IV, no. 8.

36. College archives 30/23, appendix.

37. Bishop Murdoch to Cameron, 19th October 1859. (Ibid., 64/1/7.)
38. In 1862, there was another episcopal visitor, Bishop Gillis of the Eastern District. His mission was to try to discover whether the relics of St. Margaret, patroness of Scotland, were in the Escorial and, if so, whether they might be given back to Scotland. He had to return home somewhat disappointed and disillusioned after a frustrating time; but at least he did manage to acquire a portion of the shoulder bone of the saint.
39. While on the teaching staff of the college, Munro published *Calvinism in its Relations to Scripture and Reason* (Glasgow, 1856) — a work of controversy.
40. To Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 10th August 1863. (Argyll archives.)
41. Cameron to Bishop Kyle, 12th June 1854. (Preshome archives.)
42. Aeneas Chisholm to Bishop Kyle, 3rd March 1865. (Ibid.)
43. To Cameron, 11th August 1865. (College archives 64/1/16.)
44. To Bishop Strain, 1st October 1865. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh archives, C 7, p. 242.)
45. To Id., 27th November 1865. (Ibid., p. 243.)
46. Bishop Kyle to Bishop Murdoch, 19th November 1865. (Argyll archives.)
47. To Bishop Strain, 22nd November 1866. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh archives, C 7, p. 245.)
48. To Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 28th October 1865. (Argyll archives.)
49. 11th January and 11th March 1867. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh archives, C 7, pp. 246 and 247.)
50. Alexander Munro, Valladolid, to Charles Gordon, Aberdeen, — February 1844 and 12th February 1845. (Columba House, unclassified.)
51. 10th September 1847. (Preshome archives.)
52. To Bishop Kyle, 11th June 1859. (Ibid.)
53. To John Strain, Dalbeattie, 21st July 1860. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh archives, C 7, p. 231.)
54. He had just spent 135,350 *reals* purchasing government stock whose nominal value was 400,000 *reals*.
55. To Bishop Murdoch, 22nd May and 15th June 1860. (Argyll archives.) Glasgow, 19th October 1862. (Argyll archives.)
56. College archives A/15.
57. Ibid., A/15. Also, Cameron to Bishop Murdoch, 28th July 1862, and to Alexander Munro.
58. College archives A/15.
59. 5th August 1861. (Argyll archives.)
60. To Very Rev. Peter Joseph Grant, Blairs, 19th August 1867. (Columba House, unclassified.)
61. To id., 14th June 1868. (Ibid., unclassified.)
62. To id., 29th November 1868. (Ibid., unclassified.)
63. Cameron to Bishop Strain, 3rd November 1869. (St. Andrews and Edinburgh archives, C 7, p. 214.)
64. Rough draft of letter to Rev. Donald Macintosh, Blairs, 2nd January 1871. (College archives 64/6/7.)

65. Ibid., A/15, p. 187.

66. Ibid., A/15. In fact, the vintages of 1866-68 were so poor that, after expenses had been met, the college actually lost money.

67. 23rd June 1870. (Glasgow archives, loc. cit.)

It was at this time that the Scottish bishops decreed that, in future, the rectors of the foreign colleges would apply directly to them and not to the rector of Blairs, when they wanted further recruits. (Archbishop Eyre, Rome, to Cameron, 4th June 1870. College archives 64/1/24. David McDonald to Very Rev. Peter Joseph Grant, Blairs, 25th June 1870. Columba House, unclassified.)

68. John Cowie, rough draft of letter to Mrs. O'Neill. (College archives 64/6/7.)

69. Ibid., A/15; and John Cowie to Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 9th September 1871. (Glasgow archives.)

In this letter, the writer mentions that he and "Fr. David" have given up taking snuff. This is an early example in the Valladolid correspondence of the title "Father" beginning to replace that of "Mr." in the case of priests. The latter title continued to be used until about the turn of the century. The first use of the former in the correspondence occurs in 1864 when Rev. William Stopani, a former student, wrote to "Father Cameron" and asked after "my dear Father Cowie". (College archives 64/2/16.)

70. To Cameron, 16th August 1871. (Ibid., 64/1/26.)

71. John Cowie to Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 22nd July 1872. (Glasgow archives, loc. cit.) David McDonald, in Glasgow, to Very Rev. Peter Joseph Grant, Blairs, 7th October 1872. (Columba House, unclassified.)

72. College archives 20/22.24.

73. John Cowie to Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 4th March 1873. (Glasgow archives, loc. cit.)

74. College archives 59/4: Diary of David McDonald.

75. Ibid.

76. To Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 24th January 1876. (Glasgow archives, loc. cit.)

77. John Cowie to Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 15th February 1876. (Ibid., loc. cit.)

78. College archives 59/4: Diary of David McDonald.

79. Ibid., 59/4: Diary of David McDonald.

80. Ibid., A/15.

81. Ibid., 27/4.

82. John Cowie to Alexander Munro, Glasgow, 26th June 1876. (Glasgow archives, loc. cit.)