

Chapter 8

Alexander Cameron I: Rector

John Geddes had ceased to be rector of the college on 1st November 1780, having spent ten years in the position. His successor, Alexander Cameron, was to be rector for nearly twice as long.

Cameron was born at Auchindryne, near Braemar, on 28th July 1747 (O.S.), the son of James Cameron and Marjory (or Helen) McIntosh. He was a grandnephew of Thomas Brockie, the priest for many years in the Cabrach, and was sent to live with him before, at the age of twelve, going to Scalan. There he spent four years, the last two under the tutelage of John Geddes, who had been sent to take charge of the little seminary in 1762. He went to the Scots College, Rome, in the autumn of 1764, travelling via Burntisland, Dunkirk, Paris, Marseilles and Leghorn, and reaching the Eternal City on 23rd December.

During his seven years in Rome, Alexander Cameron is said to have received the favours of the Cardinal Duke of York, in recognition of the loyalty of the clan to the Stuart cause and of the services his father had rendered in the risings of 1715 and 1745. It is also said that he excelled in his studies and was therefore subjected to considerable pressure (which he resisted) to join the Society of Jesus. Due to the great need for priests in Scotland, he was called home a year or so early, having been ordained on 2nd February 1772, and was appointed to be priest in charge of the mission at Strathavon in the south of Banffshire. When the Society of Jesus, which had charge of the college in Rome, was suppressed there in 1773, there was some talk of sending Cameron, young though he was, to be rector of the Scots College; but the proposal was not implemented and the post was given, for some years, to Italian secular priests. Cameron therefore remained at Strathavon until he left for Valladolid in the summer of 1780. He was just thirty-three and had been a priest for eight years.

When Cameron took over from Geddes late in 1781,¹ he had John Gordon and John Macdonald as his assistants, and there were twelve students, of whom four had been in Valladolid for less than a year. By then, the community was fairly well established and the patterns of life were set. The changes, innovations and variety that had characterised the previous decade were naturally no longer necessary. Nor is there any need, therefore, that this narrative should continue to attempt to give a fairly minute and chronological account of life in the college. While such a method is permissible and even advisable for the important years of Geddes' rectorate, it is hardly feasible or even tolerable for every succeeding year. Instead, it seems better to deal with the story of the college, period by period or rectorate by rectorate, picking out for special consideration some of the more important aspects of each period, but without neglecting mention of outstanding individual events.

At Geddes' departure, the property in Valladolid consisted of the present main north-south wing of the college, the small garden, the large *patio* or *corral*, and the church. All of this was only a part of what had been the Jesuit college of San Ambrosio; the remainder had not been given to the Scots by the *cédulas* of 1771 and 1778. It consisted of two sections: the "New Part" which, according to the

original plan, was to have been assigned to the Scots and where, since, there had been established the "*Reales Estudios*", and a middle section which united the new part to the part occupied by the Scots. This middle section had lain empty since the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 and, in 1780, while he was still rector, Geddes had petitioned the Extraordinary Council to command that it and the sizable patio or garden behind it be incorporated in the college; it would be very useful to have it since the numbers in the college were increasing and moreover, lying empty and untended, the fabric was deteriorating. In due course, the Council asked for the views of the city governor on the request ² and received a favourable reply.³ The Cámara therefore acceded to the petition ⁴ and a royal *cédula* was signed on 25th May 1783, giving the middle section of the old college of San Ambrosio and the garden behind to the Scots. (Appendix II C.) The rector took formal possession on 21st June of the same year.⁵ The newly acquired section was made into classrooms and rooms for some students and for one of the masters; a library was constructed by knocking down the wall between two of the rooms.⁶

The rector had one last territorial ambition in Valladolid. Just inside the back gate of the college grounds (where the present small door opens on to the Calle José-María Lacort), there was the Pozo de la Nieve, a dry well or small pit in which snow was preserved in a frozen state and sold to the public, especially in the summer. Cameron petitioned to have this well given to the college and thus avoid the inconvenience of the public entering the grounds, but his request was turned down. The *Junta* or corporation of Valladolid later offered to sell him the well, valued at 12,000 *reals*, but Cameron refused. Finally, it came into the possession of the college in 1801 when it was bought from the city by Don Manuel Palacios García, an advocate, and handed over by him as a gift to the college, partly because it was of little use and partly also in recognition of the favours he had received from John Gordon, by then rector of the college.⁷ With its acquisition, the college came into possession of all the ground and property which it still has today.

Alexander Cameron's main contribution to the material advancement of the community, however, is to be found not in Valladolid but in Boecillo,⁸ a village eight miles to the south of the city and on the River Duero. In the spring of 1787, he had begun to buy vineyards in the vicinity of the village, and indeed he made further purchases of land with a certain amount of regularity for the next five or six years.⁹ These vineyards were bought by Cameron in his own name ¹⁰ and, in fact, until 1941 the Boecillo lands were the personal property of the rector, passed on by him in his will to his successor, although it seems to have been understood that it was the college which profited from the sale of the wine that the vineyards produced. This income, though not of tremendous importance in comparison with the income from the Madrid rents and other sources, was at times most useful and welcome, in spite of being subject to considerable fluctuations from year to year.

In the story of the college, however, the name "Boecillo" means far more than vineyards. As far back as 1771, Geddes had recognised how valuable a house in the country would be for the community, but it was Cameron who, in addition to purchasing lands in the Boecillo district, was also responsible for the construction of the country house in the same area. In one of his infrequent letters, he informed Bishop Geddes that he had bought some vineyards earlier that year and "I think now of getting a country house, which I find absolutely necessary for the health of the Lads".¹¹ About this time, he presented a memorial to the king explaining that the community needed a house in the country where the students might rest after their studies, escape from the heat of the city and, if ill, recover their health in pleasant surroundings. He further suggested that His Majesty might be willing

to give the Scots a small pine-wood, part of the estate called El Abrojo, which had been a royal park for centuries and a favourite place of retreat for Ferdinand and Isabel. It is situated on the north bank of the Duero, opposite Boecillo. The request was submitted for his comments to an official in Valladolid and he declared himself in favour of the concession being made.¹² Presumably, however, the request was rejected because nothing more is heard of that particular proposal.

Three years later, the *ayuntamiento* or corporation of Boecillo gave Cameron one *obrada* (something over an acre) of its land, so that he might build a house and a wine-cellar thereon, with enough room also for a courtyard behind the house and a small open space in front of it.¹³ At first, payment was to be by a mortgage but after several years and protracted negotiations, John Gordon extinguished the debt in 1802 by giving to the Boecillo authorities two *obradas* of land beside the river, below the site of the house.¹⁴

Construction of the house was slow, due partly to the extra expenses consequent on the arrival of six new students in 1794 and partly to the difficult times through which the country was passing and the disastrous campaigns waged against France from March 1793 onwards. Certainly, the house was partially habitable by 1795, as a student in ill health spent some weeks there in that year.¹⁵ By the summer of 1796, the house was nearly finished,¹⁶ and, early in 1798, all that it lacked were some doors and windows.¹⁷ By that time, Cameron had been nominated coadjutor to Bishop Hay and John Gordon knew that he was to be the next rector. During Cameron's rectorate, therefore, the community was not able to reap the benefit of his efforts at Boecillo but the house that he built remains to this day not greatly changed from its original state and a monument to his sagacity and foresight.

It is a simple, solid construction of three floors and an attic, with earthen walls of great thickness which keep the temperature at a pleasant level even in the hottest weather. In addition to the public rooms (refectory, kitchen, library, recreation room) on the ground floor and the quarters for priests, staff and visitors, there are seventeen other bedrooms and, in the attic, a dormitory of cubicles; this last is not used nowadays. Over the years, a new chapel was added as an extension to the house, as well as a home for the *cachicán* (the employee in charge of the vineyards) and his family; the building was given an exterior facing of brick in the early years of this century and, a few years later, this, in its turn, was covered by whitewashed plaster; and, of course, the interior of the house has been repaired and slightly modified from time to time. Built by Cameron as his personal property, successive rectors were the owners of the house until, in 1941, the rector of that time sold both it and all the lands at Boecillo to the college for a nominal sum."¹⁸

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When Cameron became rector on 1st November 1780, there were twelve students in the college, a number which rose to sixteen before the end of the month. This number was maintained for a year or two but then fell somewhat so that, for the next fifteen years of his rectorate until 1797, the number of Scots boys in the college fluctuated between fifteen and nine. In fact, during the whole period of Cameron's rectorate, a total of only twenty students came from Scotland and usually there were gaps of four, five or six years between the incoming groups. These low numbers and the infrequency with which groups arrived at the college may be attributed not so much to the absence of candidates as to Cameron's refusal to take them. His letters occasionally contain injunctions to the bishops that they should not send any more students in the meantime and, from 1789 on,

steeply rising prices in Spain are given as the main reason.¹⁹ The expenses incurred by building the new house at Boecillo were also adduced to the great annoyance of Hay, who thought that trifling and temporary debts should not stand in the way of providing priests for Scotland as quickly as possible.²⁰

Although the number of students who came to the college while Cameron was rector was disappointingly low, the percentage of those ordained was higher than it had been in the time of Bishop Geddes. Of the thirty-three students (twelve already there when Cameron took over, twenty-one²¹ who arrived later), twenty-four became priests, two died while still students and only seven left before ordination.

In the first year or two of Cameron's rectorship, he occasionally complained of the need for another priest-teacher; so also did John Gordon, the vice-rector. There was, of course, another member of the staff, John Macdonald, but, because of ill health, he was not capable of shouldering his proper share of the work. On 1st June 1781, Cameron informed Bishop Hay that he himself was teaching fairly constantly each day, as well as undertaking the spiritual care or direction of ten or twelve of the students; Gordon was teaching the philosophy class and one of the classes in grammar, and Macdonald had the humanities class. In addition, two of the philosophy students had also to take the other classes in grammar.²²

A few months later, Lachlan McIntosh, one of the theologians, wrote to Geddes that he and his classmate, Angus Macdonald, had no teacher; this, however, they reckoned to be more an advantage than a lack, since "the subjects that are most necessary to our purpose require more the being methodically laid up and remembered than any subtile explications upon them... We read together and give an account mentally of the contents, then deliver the whole at the end of any subject to each other by turns from the pulpit by way of discourse."²³

Early the following year, Cameron, writing to Hay, who was then on a visit to Rome, showed some impatience with Macdonald: too young when first made a master (in 1776) and delicate in health, he took only one class, either by habit or because of his weak constitution; moreover, this class was, "perhaps not entirely without reason, diffident of his knowledge".²⁴ Macdonald kept a horse, on which he went riding for the sake of his health. That summer of 1782, he went to the seaside since "the Doctor said the Biscay air might be of service to his health."²⁵ Cameron had hoped that Hay would recall Macdonald to Scotland in 1783, but in the event he did not depart until the following year.

Hay had not helped Cameron's equability by lamenting the shortage of priests in Scotland and not only refusing to send a new master but also enquiring whether he (the rector) could spare John Gordon and put one of the older students (Andrew Dawson) in his place as a master. Cameron's reply was unequivocal: "In this house we have experience, and dearly bought too, to prove the Rector must be well seconded. I affirm, because I know it, that the mission would at this day have several worthy subjects who are, I fear, lost to themselves as well as to us, had this house been properly supplied with superiors. The arguments in favour of student masters are more specious than solid, though I acknowledge that, where there are many, one or two may be found every way proper. I propose keeping Chisholm because he is in every way more to my mind than Mr. McDonald, of whose doing well in the mission, I have not the least doubt."²⁶

Macdonald returned to Scotland in 1784, leaving suddenly and without heeding Gordon's request that he wait until Cameron return from a trip to Madrid.²⁷ Delicate constitution notwithstanding, he lived until he was eighty-two. In his place, Cameron duly put Angus (or Aeneas) Chisholm (the future Vicar Apostolic of the Highland District), who had recently finished his studies at the college and been ordained a priest. When Chisholm left at the end of 1786 to become prefect of studies at Douai, he was replaced in his turn by Thomas Bagnall, who arrived from that college early in 1787 as a subdeacon, was made a priest and took over the teaching duties vacated by Chisholm.

Alexander Cameron introduced a new element into the life of the college or, rather, reintroduced a custom that had also obtained when the college was located in Madrid. Despite the provisions of the charter of foundation that the students should all be Scots, he began admitting Spanish boys, although not as aspirants to the priesthood. It is true that the parents of these boys paid fees and thus provided the college with some useful income, but the principal reason for the practice lay rather in the rector's reluctance to disappoint or offend friends and benefactors of the college.

The first Spanish boy to be admitted by Cameron was a grandson of Campomanes, the person who had done more than anyone else to facilitate the success of Geddes' mission in Madrid. The boy entered as a student in October 1784, aged eight or nine and with the reputation of being very talented,²⁸ although Cameron, in letters afterwards, was less complimentary in his comments: admittedly smart, he had little application;²⁹ "a little rascal."³⁰ A couple of years later the nephews, aged five and seven, of the Treasurer General of Spain came to the college; "they were sent me in a way which admitted of no resistance, by orders of the Princess of Asturias" [the wife of the heir to the throne].³¹ Several other Spanish boys were admitted in the later years of Cameron's time in Valladolid, including another grandson of Campomanes and Miguelito and Gasparito Sobrevilla, the two young sons of the college's administrator in Madrid.

Cameron himself usually looked after their classes, in such subjects as English, French and arithmetic.³² Not surprisingly, he found the Spanish boys' presence in the college somewhat undesirable on the whole. "I never should receive any in that way, were I not obliged: there are many inconveniences."³³ At the same time, it was a sign of the esteem in which the college, or perhaps rather Cameron, was held that the sons of such prominent and well-to-do families should have been sent to the college and, despite the rector's confession of the inconveniences involved, Gordon for one thought that he spoiled them and allowed them too much liberty.³⁴

Cameron was much impressed by the way in which the Church thrived and religion prospered in Portugal and he urged the Scottish bishops to consider seriously the possibility of emulating the English by asking the Portuguese court to establish a Scots college in Lisbon.³⁵ Hay was cool to the suggestion, because of the shortage of priests even for existing commitments, and, by 1795, Cameron wrote the last word on the project: "I proposed the plan as, in my opinion, very possible: I was answered in a way that made me think no more of the affair: and some friends informed me the capital defect of the project was its being mine."³⁶

Although Cameron was not nearly as gregarious a person as Geddes and almost boasted of having few friends and of being very seldom outside the college, both he and Gordon - took a prominent part in the activities of the Royal Economic Society of Valladolid. This was one of many similar societies inaugurated in Spain for the material betterment of the country after the settlement in 1783 of the war with Britain (from whom Spain regained Minorca, but not, despite the long and

strenuous blockade, Gibraltar). The Valladolid society, which was founded in 1784, debated and experimented with various schemes to bring more prosperity to the city and district, including ones for producing oil by crushing pineapples³⁷ and for improving the surface of the roads.³⁸ By 1790, Gordon was admitting that the society's members had lost much of their earlier enthusiasm,³⁹ but he, at least, continued to take a lively interest in its proceedings and in 1802 was appointed its second director, the local bishop being the first.⁴⁰

In February 1788, there occurred in Valladolid a natural disaster, the like of which no one could recall. After several days of continuous and torrential rain, the River Esgueva, normally little more than a stream that dried up in the heat of summer, burst its banks and caused very serious flooding over a considerable area of the town. It so happened that the students had constructed a rowing boat for themselves and this they carried to the scene of the floods. They launched the boat in the Calle de los Francos, which, according to Gordon, was flooded to a depth of six feet and which, by coincidence, was the very street in which the college would have been situated, had Geddes bought the Duke of Alba's house. The *Diario Pinciano*, a weekly newspaper then being published in Valladolid, gives this account of the rescue operations carried out by the Scots:

"Dr. Alexander Cameron, the Rector of the Royal Scots College, arrived, accompanied by his Vice-Rector, masters and students, carrying a boat on their shoulders. The Rector himself got into the boat and rescued more than a dozen families in the immediate vicinity, exposing himself to very serious dangers while doing so. One house, for example, collapsed as soon as the people had been taken from it and put in the boat. This worthy priest, who had just finished offering the sacrifice of the Mass when he received the news, did not hesitate to go at once from the altar to sacrifice his own life on the altar of paternal charity, thus deserving not only the demonstration of gratitude of those whom he rescued and those who watched with admiration, but also the effusive thanks of the Royal Economic Society of which he is a member and which, at its meeting of Friday 29th, ordered its appreciation to be recorded in its minutes."⁴¹

The same periodical, in a later issue, recounted the story of one of the incidents which took place during the rescue operations. In one area particularly threatened, all had abandoned their houses except an elderly couple who were deaf to all entreaties to leave. Seeing the Scots' boat nearby, a Capuchin called it over "in order that they might approach the home in question, get in by the balcony and bring them out forcibly. The Scots could not get close enough in their boat because of the strength of the current; but jumping out and linking hands, with the water up to their waists and the Rector leading them, they managed to reach the door where the old man was still far from keen to leave his house. The Rector told one of the students to go up on to the balcony to try to persuade them, but to no avail. The Scots made another attempt, but again without success. The waters were still rising, houses all around were collapsing, the neighbours were shouting their entreaties, but still the old man and his wife would not leave." Eventually, others simply took the couple and carried them out forcibly. As they were leaving, the old man revealed the explanation of his obstinacy — under a pile of coal in a corner of the room was a sack, full of money.⁴²

The community acquired a certain measure of kudos because of its exploits during the flood and, when the city authorities received an official letter from Count Floridablanca expressing the king's sympathy for the losses sustained and his admiration of the rescue work performed, the college was among the groups singled out for special mention: "...Having been fully informed of what took place,

His Majesty commands me to express his most sincere thanks to you and likewise charges you to thank, in his Royal Name, those who in their various ways have contributed to the relief of the populace, especially the Governor and Magistrates, the Police, the Colonel of the Militia and the students of the Scots College.”⁴³

Writing (in Spanish) to Chisholm, who had left the college a year or so before, John Gordon commented: “Little did poor Maceachrin [he had returned to Scotland the previous August and was to become the first bishop of Prince Edward Island], when he built the boat, envisage how famous it would one day become.”⁴⁴

During the years of Cameron’s rectorship, the college continued to receive its income from the Madrid property without any great crises, political or constructional, having to be surmounted. The property was divided into three sections, called the *Casa Grande* (in the Calle de la Salud and on the corner of the Calle de Jacometrezo), the *Casa Chica* (in the Calle de la Salud) and the *Casa Nueva* (in the Calle de Jacometrezo and Calle Chinchilla), this last being the section which had been used as a college until renovated and transformed into houses by Geddes. Each section had several tenants, the *Casa Grande* producing most income and the *Casa Chica* least. The college’s other sources of income, including the important pension on the see of Cadiz, were also collected by the Madrid administrator with a fair amount of regularity. In 1782, the administrator, Don Miguel Mathias de Sobrevilla, wrote to Cameron in some anxiety to say that the Cadiz pension had been re-allocated to the college for fourteen years in 1764 on the petition of the Jesuit rector of the time, that a new application was already four years overdue and that, although the pension had been paid up to the present, it would be lost if a petition were not presented at once.⁴⁵ The pension was, in fact, extended for a further period of fourteen years in 1783.

Cameron did not make his first visit to Madrid until May 1784, but he sent the vice-rector thither at Easter of the previous year and Gordon was able to avert a threat by the city authorities to turn the older part of the Scots property into a hospice for the poor or a barracks.⁴⁶ Sobrevilla died on 1st September 1785 and, to succeed him, Cameron appointed Gaspar Antonio de Iruegas, his widow’s brother and nephew of his (Sobrevilla’s) business partner, Baltassar Iruegas. Several more years passed before Cameron went back again to Madrid. He mentioned, in a letter of 1787 to Geddes, that he had not written for a long time as he had always been expecting to go to Madrid and had delayed writing so as to be able to give him the news from there;⁴⁷ and in 1795, María Angela de Iruegas, Sobrevilla’s widow, sending bed linen for her two boys who were pupils in the college, complained to Cameron that it was many years since she had seen him.⁴⁸

Neither during Geddes’ stay in Spain nor during the first decade of Cameron’s do political events seem to have affected the college to any great extent. Even a state of war with Britain left the college and the community unmolested. In 1788, however, Charles III died and was succeeded by Charles IV whose reign was characterised by weakness, misrule, a lower moral tone and steady decline from the level of prosperity which had been achieved in the latter years of his father’s reign. Concurrently, that sequence of events was taking place north of the Pyrenees which was eventually to bring about the downfall and disappearance of the new Spanish king, the ruin of the country and, inevitably in the circumstances, the near-extinction of the college. Right from the start of the new reign, Cameron and Gordon showed alarm about the steep rise in prices that was taking place, the resultant misery and poverty affecting the whole country, and the difficulties which the college was

experiencing.⁴⁹ Gordon added: “Our papers have never mentioned the disturbances of France and every precaution has been taken to hinder people from speaking of them. Our Inquisition is actually employed in gathering up any papers that have made their way into the kingdom relative to them.”⁵⁰

Spain’s relations with Britain at this time were fairly friendly. Charles IV had, in 1790, appealed for French help to press his claims against Britain but, his request having been met with the counter-suggestion of a completely revised treaty between the two Bourbon powers, he deemed it more prudent to avoid this and simply come to terms with Britain, which he did by the Treaty of the Escorial of 12th October 1790. Early in 1793 Spain went to war with France which, by then, had become unambiguously a threat to all the monarchies of Europe. The principal pretext for Spain’s declaration of war was its desire to defend and uphold religion and the rights of the Catholic Church in particular, which the enactments of the French National Assembly (and especially the Civil Constitution of the Clergy) seemed so obviously to cast aside. The ensuing war was a disastrous one for Spain, whose invasion of Roussillon soon turned into a retreat, with the French occupying the Basque country, Navarre and northern Catalonia before the Treaty of San Ildefonso in the summer of 1795 mercifully brought hostilities to a close.

Naturally a great many of the thousands of priests and religious who fled from France in 1790 and later years made their way to Spain and about a dozen of them were given refuge in the college in Valladolid. One, Joseph Vincent D’Arret, who was vicar general of the diocese of Auch and a doctor of divinity of the Sorbonne, actually was a master in the college for a time after Thomas Bagnall had gone back to Scotland, and taught the theologians.⁵⁰

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Comparisons between Alexander Cameron and John Geddes were and are inevitable, particularly as the two were, in some obvious respects, so different from one another. Bishop Geddes had been gone only a month when Gordon, the vice-rector, was writing to a priest—friend in Scotland that the new rector’s “predecessor was much esteemed and beloved in this country. He [Cameron] also when he gets time to look about and when he has once reconnoitred the ground on which he stands, will, I make no doubt, gain friends and Protectors... His unacquaintance with the manners of the country and his little knowledge of the language has hindered him hitherto from beginning properly to act as Rector. Were I to whisper anything into your ear, I would tell you that I suppose his administration will in some things be better and in others worse than that of Mr. Geddes.”⁵²

Cameron, in fact, was much less gregarious and sociable than Geddes and never did “gain friends and Protectors” to anything like the same extent. “I have few acquaintances and seldom visit them,” he told his predecessor in 1784;⁵³ and “I depend very little on the sincerity and purity of intention of most nominal friends, for which reason I am nowise solicitous to form acquaintances: I believe less so every day.”⁵⁴ The second of these letters was written during his first visit to Madrid where he spent the summer of 1784 and where he at last got to know Campomanes. This brought him another important connection a year or two later—the new Bishop of Valladolid, (Dr. Manuel Joaquín Morón, 1785-1801), who “owes all to Campomanes: immediately upon his arrival here, about a fortnight ago, he sent for me and my little collegian [Campomanes’ grandson, who had entered the college when Cameron returned from Madrid in 1784]; two days thereafter he sent us an invitation to dine with him and he paid us a visit, which he said should not be the last, yesterday.”⁵⁵ Later that

year, one of the students remarked that the bishop was often in the college and that the rector often visited the bishop.⁵⁶

While in Madrid, Cameron had gone to see another of Geddes' friends, the Scottish nun at the Visitation convent: "I saw Mrs. Campbell and her daughter, but did not like them."⁵⁷ Later, when Geddes expressed the hope that Cameron would recommend him to his benefactress's prayers, the rector drily answered: "I am persuaded Mrs. Campbell prays for you and I scarce think I shall interrupt her, as you desire me to say nothing else to her."⁵⁸

In a letter of 1790 to his old rector, Gordon remarked that he felt the reason why the Scots superiors were well esteemed in Valladolid and regarded as cultivators of knowledge and good taste was that they kept so much to themselves and did not go out a great deal.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Cameron did have acquaintances and connections and there is a note of his, written to Geddes in 1785, asking for five pinchbeck watches, to cost about five or six guineas apiece and to be sent out with a batch of new students so that they could be presented to friends of the college; the watches "must be sewn into the pockets of the boys, lest they spoil them in winding them up, or otherwise."⁶⁰

In his letters to Bishop Hay, to whom, in the early years of his rectorate at least, he sometimes wrote, Cameron indulged in some quite severe criticism of his predecessor. At the end of 1781, he wrote: "Nor can I come to your opinion and Mr. Geddes', as to the propriety of my being Spiritual Father and Rector at the same time: I am nay very much surprised Mr. Geddes should think so: I think we have no instance of any such thing in any well-regulated house: and the Confessor ought certainly to be a man—not a boy who had just finished his studies. But let all be overlooked since it cannot be helped."⁶¹ No one can deny the rightness of these remarks by Cameron but, a month later, he made much more serious criticisms about Geddes: his many outside interests, while no doubt useful to the college, had also meant that there had been no proper care taken of matters in the community; "hence the source of disorder... When touched by passion, there were several who scrupled not to contradict him and even upbraid him publicly... Disputes have been so high in public recreation that they have brought the tears from his eyes. Mr. Gordon was scandalized: if he gave up hearing confessions, I do not think it should be entirely laid to the account of his scruples."⁶² As has been seen, Geddes had expressed himself as fairly happy with the state of the community during his later years as rector, but Cameron deemed it necessary to disabuse Hay: "You know you told me this house was clean purged of all Poison when Jo. Gordon left it.⁶³ I wished it might be so; but soon I was far from believing it... My fears and suspicions I now find to have been too well grounded and just.., the enemy has sowed tares and they have grown up; but there is good seed ... this College is not, and much less has it been, what it was represented in Scotland."⁶⁴

Cameron was even more explicit in a letter to John Thomson, the Scottish clergy's agent in Rome: "I thank God I have reason to flatter myself I have got over my greatest difficulties here. There is now some discipline and a spirit of religion and study in some degree... I have not been to Madrid as yet... Mr. Geddes went frequently thither and stayed months—many of the Boys did not go to the Sacraments all that time, &c, &c, &c..."⁶⁵

In view of such strictures, Cameron had hardly a right to be surprised if Geddes appeared somewhat offended, but he disclaimed any lessening of their friendship: "those who infer a driness betwixt us, from my writing to you so seldom, are bad logicians."⁶⁶ But it was John Gordon who made the sensible and healing observation: "The greatest part of superiors are all zeal in the beginning: time

and unforeseen difficulties make them cool in many of their favourite projects: when they take time to look about them, they find that they were too rash in condemning the remissness of their predecessors: experience shows them that they took only a partial view of things.”⁶⁷

When one recalls the hundreds of letters which Geddes wrote to Scotland (to say nothing of the thousands more to various other correspondents), the contrast between this and the extremely modest output which Cameron achieved during his twenty years in Spain is very marked indeed. The year 1782 was the high point of Cameron’s efforts in writing to Scotland—he despatched about a dozen letters there. Such a high figure was not attained again and, from 1787 onwards, it is hard to find any letters at all from him. “A letter from him ought to be considered a great favour, as he is loath to write,” commented John Gordon to Thomas Bagnall, the former master who was by then back in Scotland.⁶⁸ The same Bagnall was owed a considerable sum of money by the college and, having been promised its early repayment, he had taken on a loan for his father. This occurred about 1795 and, during the following years, he wrote several times to Cameron but his letters were not even answered. When Cameron left Spain in 1802, the money remained unpaid.⁶⁹ “I know the character of Bp. Cameron too well to think that any person could induce him to act otherwise than as he chose,” was Bagnall’s bitter comment.⁷⁰

This type of behaviour by Cameron and the long periods during which he did not write to the Scottish bishops may perhaps be explained, to some extent, by the state of his health, about which he usually complained in the letters which he did write. Even at the start of 1783, he admitted: “My health has not been good for several months past—none but myself knows how ill I have been—and I am not well.”⁷¹ And to the same correspondent two years later, he again complained of ill health: “my stomach and head kill me.”⁷² The account he gave about his health to Bishop Geddes in 1787 was somewhat alarming: “I suffer from time to time not a little from my old headaches, my breast, my belly, and not infrequently in my mind from a thousand different things, past, present and to come; and after all I think myself at least a dozen years younger than I should have been had I not come to Spain...”⁷³ In 1796, when Cameron had given up correspondence altogether for several years, Gordon reported that he, Cameron, had enjoyed improved health for some time but that once more it had deteriorated, he was able to say Mass only on Sundays and holidays, and that, when fit, he taught the three Spanish boys then in the college.⁷⁴

Notes for Chapter 8

1. His formal appointment by Charles III is dated 16th January 1781. (College archives 67/1.)
2. *Ibid.*, 19/104.
3. *Ibid.*, 19/105.
4. *Ibid.*, 19/106.
5. *Ibid.*, 30/12. This is the part of the college that fronts the Calle del Salvador (now, del Santuario), and the garden which extends behind it to the Calle José-María Lacort.
6. *Ibid.*, 19/108.
7. *Ibid.*, 19/107.108.108a; 60/1/32.
8. In early documents, the name often appears as Buecillo, Buezillo and even Vuezillo.

9. *Ibid.*, 26/1, 29/10. Some of the vineyards are still in the college's possession, while some have been exchanged for other land in the course of the years. Further land has been bought near Boecillo at irregular intervals since then, especially in the period 1814-22.

10. He raised a loan of 17,000 *reals* in 1787, using the vineyards as security. (College archives 2/10.) The loan was redeemed by Gordon in 1805.

11. 18th October 1787. (Columba House 7-K.) The students did have fresh air and exercise during days spent with the English students at their riverside estate. 'On playdays the Collegians used frequently to meet and amuse themselves either at ball-playing or in making excursions on the river... That *ribera* was the place where they used to assemble in order to bathe.' (Account of relations between the two colleges since 1780, by Alexander Cameron II. College archives 22/21.)

12. Letter of D. Pedro de Chaber to Count Floridablanca, 13th September 1788. (*Ibid.*, 29/7.)

13. Cf. *ibid.*, 26/1/19: Deed of cession of 24th August 1791.

14. *Ibid.*, 26/1/19.

15. Letter of John Gordon to Thomas Bagnall, 27th May 1795. (Columba House 8-G.)

16. Letter of John Gordon to Paul Macpherson, Rome, 1st August 1796. (*Ibid.*, 8-H.)

17. Letter of John Gordon to Thomas Bagnall, 27th January 1798. (*Ibid.*, 8-J.)

18. College archives 26/2. This practice was continued so that the property would not be seized in virtue of the many laws of the last century which decreed the confiscation of property belonging to religious institutions

19. E.g., Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 29th July 1790. (Columba House 7.R.)

20. Bishop Hay to Bishop Geddes, 30th September 1790, cited in *Scotichronicon*, p. 306.

21. Twenty from Scotland, one (Lachlan McIntosh) from Madeira or Canary Is. (See fn 23, below.)

22. Columba House 6-L.

When the students received all their instruction in the college itself, as they did until 1910, it was necessary that they should come out in sizable groups rather than in ones and twos each year, since thus the task of the teaching staff would have been multiplied to an impossible degree.

23. 1st October 1781. (*Ibid.*, 6.M.)

McIntosh had come to the college in 1771, given up his studies in 1778 and gone to Corunna for a while. Despite Geddes' recommendations that he should return to the college, he had, in poverty and unhappiness, sailed to the Canary Islands (or Madeira) early in 1779 but finally, after a severe illness and a couple of providential escapes from death, had returned to the peninsula, walked from Lisbon to the Spanish frontier and then had just enough money to hire a carriage to Valladolid, where he was re-admitted to the college early in 1781. He became a priest and worked in Glengairn, Aberdeenshire, for over sixty years. (Cf. *The Innes Review*, VII (1956), pp. 11-23 and 87-100: "Catholic Glengairn in the Early Nineteenth Century.")

In 1826, there came to the college, as a student, Alexander G. Grant, whose father was McIntosh's second cousin. Fifty years later, this student, by then married and settled in Montreal, began a correspondence with the rector of the time, David McDonald, and, in his letter of 26th June 1888, he adds some details to the McIntosh story which may, or may not, be correct. According to Grant, McIntosh left the college in 1778 because he had won a lottery, while, on his return in 1781, he arrived barefoot, rang the bell and was discovered at the front door, waiting on his knees to be received by the rector. (Grant's letters are in the archives of the Diocese of Argyll and the Isles.)

24. 6th January 1782. (Columba House 6-N.)

25. Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 16th August 1782. (*Ibid.*, 6-O.)

26. To Bishop Hay, 16th April 1784. (Ibid., 6-S.)

27. John Gordon to Bishop Geddes, 12th July 1784. (Ibid., 6-T.)

28. Miguel Mathias de Sobrevilla, from Olmedo, to Cameron, 30th October 1784. (College archives 60/1/30.)

29. Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 26th February 1786. (Columba House 7-G.)

30. Id., 29th July 1790. (Ibid., 7-R.)

31. Id., 18th October 1787. (Ibid., 7-K.)

32. One of the boys took lessons in religion, geography, French, English, Latin and, during the summer months, dancing. (Diego de Tricio y Naxera to Cameron, 3rd October 1794. College archives 60/7/8.) The senior students assisted Cameron in teaching the Spanish boys and one at least, the rector's nephew, also gave classes outside the college (in Hebrew, Greek, English, mathematics and geography) to some teachers and civil servants. (Ibid., 22/9/7.)

33. To Bishop Geddes, 26th February 1786. (Columba House 7-G.)

34. John Gordon to Thomas Bagnall, Kirkconnel, 28th January 1798. (Ibid., 8-J.)

It was, in fact, due to his desire and need to impress Campomanes that, some months after the statesman's grandson came to the college, Cameron arranged a public demonstration of the attainments in Latin, Greek and Hebrew of some of the brighter Scots boys (John Davidson, Alexander Cameron II, William Reid, John MacDougal and Allan Macdonald). Campomanes had expressly asked for the function to be held, nor had Cameron any great qualms about putting the students on show. "All understand Greek tolerably well: most of them read Homer with as great ease as Virgil. Allan McDonald and Cameron will give us some of their own poetical and prose compositions in the three languages." (To John Thomson, Rome, 5th June 1785. Ibid., 7-D.)

He returned to the subject in his next letter to Thomson: some of the students "made a public display of their Latin, Greek and Hebrew knowledge on 8 August. Their theses were printed [college archives 41/17]; the dedication I made to Campomanes' son. We should meet with little encouragement here, were it not that they think that we study and have pretty good taste." (26th February 1786. Columba House 7-G.) The prologue and vote of thanks were proposed by Campomanes' grandson. The Latin foreword of the published programme is sycophantic in the extreme and Cameron knew that he had been indulging in a certain amount of window-dressing for the Spaniards' edification, since the same letter to Thomson carried the news of the arrival from Scotland of a student, William Rattray, aged 22 "and, *inter nos*, bred a saddler... a convert of Mr. Geddes who knows not a word of Latin: I shall do what I can for him and hope that he may turn out well though I cannot applaud good Mr. Marroch's [Geddes'] zeal in sending him."

The subject of these mortified remarks gives some glimpses of the students' lives in a letter to his patron in which enthusiasm and candour more than compensate for the indifferent spelling and syntax: "We are frequently with the English on Thursday afternoons in their Rabera who have likewise made a boat of late assisted in some things by our Carpenter, Mr. McCarchan [McEachran]... Mr Chisim is our Master, whom we like very much; after the Grammar we studied J. Caesar's Comments on his Gallick war... Mr. Cameron says we are soon to begin Greek Grammar." (To Bishop Geddes, 16th July 1786. Ibid., 7-J.)

35. To Bishop Geddes, 15th March 1784. (Ibid., 6-S.)

36. Cameron to Thomas Bagnall, Edinburgh, 11th March 1795. (Ibid., 8-G.)

37. Cameron to John Thomson, Rome, 5th June 1785. (Ibid., 7-D.)

38. John Gordon to Bishop Geddes, 17th August 1786. (Ibid., 7-H.)

From time to time, prizes were awarded to members of the public who put forward suggestions that would improve the living conditions or contribute to the prosperity of the district. In 1788, for example, there were prizes offered to anyone who discovered a coal seam near the city, to the person who grew the best cauliflowers and artichokes, or who made the finest woollen stockings or a pair of boots most like those imported from England. In addition, there was a special gold

medal for the person who devised the best scheme for inducing the women of Valladolid not to go out to work in the fields during the summer—a practice very detrimental to their housework and the care of their families.

39. To Bishop Geddes, 5th April 1790. (Ibid., 7-S.)

40. Alexander Cameron II to Bishop Cameron, 26th November 1802. (Ibid., 8-O.) According to the same correspondent, his uncle also had been elected president of the Society for a term. (College archives 22/16/7.)

41. *Diario Pinciano*, no. 6, 1st March 1788, p. 51. (Facsimile reproduction, ed. Narciso Alonso Cortés, for Academia de Bellas Artes de Valladolid, 1933 vol, II.)

42. Ibid., no. 13, 19th April 1788, pp. 114-116.

43. Ibid., no. 8, 15th March 1788, p. 77; and college archives 22/8/4.

44. 4th December 1788. (Columba House 7-N.)

It is said that the boat “remained on the college grounds for many years until appropriated by the Municipal Council, who feared it might be made use of to bring contraband goods into the town,” (John C. Macmillan, *The Early History of the Church in Prince Edward Island*, 1905, p- 55,)

45. 8th June 1782. (College archives 60/1/13.)

46. Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 25th July 1783. (Columba House 6-P.)

47. 18th October 1787. (Ibid., 7-K.)

48. 10th October 1795. (College archives 60/2/5.)

49. John Gordon to Bishop Geddes, 16th November 1789. (Columba House 7-Q.) Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 29th July 1790. (Ibid., 7-R.)

50. Ibid., 7-Q.

As well as such vigilance in politico-religious matters, the Inquisition still had also the in Valladolid: “On Sunday, 27th ult., in the parish church of St. Peter, the Tribunal of the Holy Inquisition of Valladolid held an *Autillo* or solemn publication of the trial and sentence of a person, a native of Damascus and recent convert, who had been found guilty of having been rebaptised and of having committed other offences against our Faith; after he had abjured his errors, he was solemnly absolved from censure according to the customary rites and was condemned to four years’ banishment from Palencia and other places where he had lived, as well as from Madrid and all royal lands; this, after having completed spiritual exercises under the direction of a competent catechist and spent several months in a house of penance, dressed in penitential attire.” (No. 15, pp. 134-135.)

51. Cameron to Thomas Bagnall, Edinburgh, 11th March 1796. (Columba House 8-G.) When one of the students died in 1795, there were upwards of eighty French priests at the funeral Mass in the college chapel.

52. To William Reid, Aberdeen, 22nd March 1781. (Ibid., 6-L.)

53. 15th March 1784. (Ibid., 6-S.)

54. Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 1st July 1784. (Ibid., 6-S.)

55. Id. to id., 26th February 1786. (Ibid., 7-G.)

56. William Rattray to Bishop Geddes, 16th July 1786. (Ibid., 7-J.)

57. To Bishop Geddes, 5th November 1784. (Ibid., 6-S.)

58. 18th October 1787. (Ibid., 7-K.)

59. 5th April 1790. (Ibid., 7-S.)
60. 23rd May 1785. (Ibid., 7-D.)
61. 1st December 1781. (Ibid., 6-L.)
62. To Bishop Hay, 6th January 1782. (Ibid., 6-N.)
63. Viz., the first John Gordon, who left in 1774.
64. 3rd May 1782. (Ibid., 6-N.) At the time of these letters, Cameron was also trying to exculpate himself from blame in the departure from the college of Hay's nephew, Joseph Hendrie.
65. 11th January 1783. (Ibid., 6-P.)
66. 25th July 1783. (Ibid., 6-P.)
67. To Bishop Geddes, 17th August 1786. (Ibid., 7-H.)
68. 27th May 1795. (Ibid., 8-G.)
69. Cf. John Gordon to Thomas Bagnall, 22nd December 1799, (ibid., 8-K); and 7th February 1802, (ibid., 8-P); Thomas Bagnall to Bishop Cameron, 29th August 1802, (ibid., 8-O).
70. Thomas Bagnall to John Gordon, 25th July 1799. (Ibid., 8-K.)
71. To John Thomson, Rome, 11th January 1783. (Ibid., 6-O.)
72. 5th June 1785. (Ibid., 7-D.)
73. Cameron to Bishop Geddes, 18th October 1787. (Ibid., 7-K.)
74. To Thomas Bagnall, Kirkconnel, 19th August 1796. (Ibid., 8-H.)