

inherited the buildings, a cadaver without a soul, a college without students despite its elevation to the status of a *collège royal* in 1764. Among possessions abandoned by the Jesuits in their hasty departure was a First Folio of Shakespeare.

2018 was a good year for Chambers and O'Connor. This is their second collection of proceedings and articles with a similar theme. The first, *Forming Catholic Communities: Irish, Scots and English College Networks in Europe, 1568–1918* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), was reviewed by Clare L. Carroll in this journal (5, no. 3 [2018]: 487–89). May we hope for a hat trick?

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Victor Houliston, Ginevra Crosignani, and Thomas M. McCoog, S.J., eds.

The Correspondence and Unpublished Papers of Robert Persons, SJ, Volume 1: 1574–1588, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2017. Pp. xx + 730. Hb, \$115.

As the editors of this volume acknowledge, Robert Persons's (1546–1610) reputation has suffered by his being forever linked to Edmund Campion (1540–81) and their joint mission to England in 1580. Against a portrayal of Campion as the saintly, heroic martyr, Persons has been seen as the arch plotter, a Machiavellian political schemer, the darkness to Campion's light. Unquestionably, Persons was—and remains—a controversial character. Yet, as *The Correspondence and Unpublished Papers of Robert Persons, SJ*, makes abundantly clear, this should not distract from the fact that he was an important figure in early modern Europe, his correspondence ranging from the political and the polemical, to the ecclesiastical and the pastoral.

Robert Persons was born in Somerset, England in 1546. A fellow at Balliol College, Oxford, he was expelled in 1574 for his religious views. Travelling to Europe for a career in medicine, his life was changed when he undertook the Spiritual Exercises at Padua. He subsequently entered the Society of Jesus in 1575, was ordained a priest in 1578, and acted as superior of the first Jesuit mission to England in 1580. His time in England lasted only fourteen months, the authorities' frenzied crack down on the Catholic missionary enterprise forcing him to flee to France, where he became increasingly involved with the Guise faction and the emerging Catholic League. In 1585 he moved to Rome to

undertake his tertianship and advise on English matters, which is where this volume leaves him.

Directed by Victor Houlston, who also acts as chief editor, this is the first fruit of the Robert Persons Correspondence project. It is the first of a projected three volumes, and updates, enlarges, and corrects the collection of Persons's correspondence tententiously edited by Leo Hicks, S.J., for the Catholic Record Society in 1942. The editors reproduce all the letters known to have been penned by Persons from 1574 to 1588 in the original languages, plus provide translations from the Latin, Italian and Spanish. They also go a step further by including surviving letters to Persons, and entries for those that are missing, but are referred to in the surviving texts. Of this missing correspondence, the editors acknowledge that there is a great deal: for example, few letters engaged with pastoral matters have been found, plus it is clear that correspondence was more regular with, for example, the Jesuit missionaries in Scandinavia, Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) and William Good (1527–1586), than survival rates would attest.

To deal first with the elephant in the room: Persons and his politics. What clearly emerges in this volume is that Persons was involved in political actions against the English State, most notably in his support of the Spanish Armada of 1588. Whilst this is not surprising to most scholars of the field, it supplements the work of Thomas McCoog, S.J., to definitively end some of the historiographical debate entered into by the late historian Francis Edwards, S.J. Two further points on Persons's political activity are worth making in light of this volume. Firstly, the letters of the Jesuit superior general, Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), regularly seek to dissuade Persons from political involvement, particularly with the Guise in France. Secondly—and perhaps more important—the opening section of letters from Persons's time on the English Mission 1580–81 perhaps explains why he became so convinced that military intervention was the only remedy to what he viewed as England's disease. The sense of optimism is palpable in Persons's letters, allowing historians to appreciate the excited agitation that this new missionary enterprise generated, which in itself helps further explain the repressive reaction of the English authorities. Persons's near-euphoria gradually gives way to the shock of persecution and its grim reality, particularly following the torture and execution of his companion, Campion. Indeed, Acquaviva seems to have been equally shocked by the actions of the English state and the letters between Persons and the Superior General show the former fighting to keep the English Jesuit mission alive, Acquaviva understandably uneasy about risking the lives of more Jesuits. Though it is the job of a biographer to delve into motivations, one nevertheless gets the sense that Persons reacted to this trauma by deciding that the English

authorities could only be dealt with through regime change. This is evident in his speedy involvement in plans to place Mary, Queen of Scots (1542–87) on the English throne.

For all that, the letters also show Persons as part of the global Society of Jesus, something easy to forget for his strategic focus on England. For example, in 1582 Acquaviva planned to send Persons to meet with the Spanish superior in an effort to allay concerns about demands by Spanish Jesuits for greater autonomy and special privileges. The correspondence also shows the frustrations involved in early modern letter networks. With a letter taking roughly a month to travel from France or Belgium to Rome, there was often confusion as missives crossed each other on the journey. To account for losses, particularly as wars broke out, Persons often sent duplicates. Nor was all of Persons's correspondence private: though he wrote to Acquaviva on strategic matters, a high proportion of his writing to Alfonso Agazzari (1549–1602), rector at the English College in Rome, was designed for circulation, giving news particularly of the persecution in England. Though England was not a Jesuit province, these letters to Agazzari formed the basis of an annual report to be circulated to the global Society. Equally, Persons's correspondence also provides details of events in his host countries, whether France, the Low Countries or Spain.

The wealth of material in this opening volume of Persons's correspondence is hugely significant and the editors are to be congratulated on their achievement. One surprising aspect to emerge is how quickly after the 1580 English Jesuit Mission's launch did the united front of English Catholicism start to fracture, with factions quickly emerging. This foreshadows the periods covered in the project's planned future volumes, when Persons became truly embroiled in disagreements about the future of English Catholicism, his own person becoming a lightning rod for dissent. These decades saw Persons really hit his stride in shaping English Catholic affairs, prompting one to wonder just how many pages these subsequent volumes are going to require.

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