CHAPTER FOUR

SWITZERLAND: GENEVA
(1569–1574)

The Academy of Geneva

In late 1569 Melville assessed the political and social instability of France created by the wars of religion and, with no foreseeable end to the conflict, determined to travel to Switzerland where he hoped to find a more suitable environment to pursue his studies. While there is little evidence to suggest that Geneva was Melville’s next logical stop, it is not difficult to see how his previous humanistic studies in Scotland and France, as well as his early Protestant influences, might converge in his own formation leading him to Geneva and the study of theology. Although La Rochelle as a primary political and military center for the national Reformed movement was much closer and more convenient than distant Geneva, it could not offer either the social stability or the academic opportunities available in the Swiss city. Protestant England remained an option for the young humanist, but Melville during these early years never seems to have been greatly attracted to either Oxford or Cambridge, preferring instead the continental universities of Paris and Poitiers as well as those newer institutions which led the way in promoting the New Learning of the Renaissance in the sixteenth century, such as the Collège Royal (1530) and the Academy of Geneva (1559). Just as Geneva was a

2 John Durkan and James Kirk, The University of Glasgow 1451–1577 (Glasgow, 1977), 269–270.
city of refuge for Protestants, such as Joseph Scaliger three years later, following the horrific events of the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre in 1572, so in 1569 in the midst of France’s bloody civil war Melville traveled to Geneva in search of a safe environment for further study. Like Lambert Daneau who had been attracted to the Academy in 1560 because “it offered the purest source of that celestial doctrine” and embodied “one of the richest markets of commerce in humanist literature,” Melville, aware of the Academy’s humanistic character and intent upon pursuing a theological course of study, resided in Geneva for five years “during the quhilk tyme his cheiff studie was Divinitie.”

To study at the Genevan Academy from an intellectual and religious standpoint was compelling, appealing to Melville’s humanist sentiments as well as his Protestant sensibilities. From the very beginning, Calvin’s Academy bore the humanistic imprint of its founder and most influential voice. He was assisted early on by one of his most trusted associates and fellow humanist Pierre Viret, who aided the reformer in recruiting faculty and planning the curriculum. Just as Viret had recruited Christian humanists such as Mathurin Cordier in 1545 and Theodore Beza among others in 1549 to serve on the faculty at the Academy of Lausanne, so he aided Calvin in attracting some of the leading humanists to constitute the first faculty of the Academy of Geneva.

Melville later attacked the English universities in his poem Anti-Tami-Cami-Categoria (1604) due to their opposition to the Millenary Petition and their role in the Episcopal controversy, he, nevertheless, expressed his sincere admiration for both seats of learning and during his visits to both universities developed an appreciation for William Whittaker, John Rainolds, George Carleton, and Thomas Savile.


7 Melville, JMAD, 42.

