

Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900, Volume 55 — Sydserff, Thomas

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SYDSERFF, THOMAS (1581–1663), bishop of Galloway, born in 1581, was the eldest son of James Sydserrf, merchant, Edinburgh. He was educated at Edinburgh University, and graduated M.A. on 22 Feb. 1602. His first charge was St. Giles, Edinburgh, to which he was admitted on 30 May 1611; but when the city was reconstituted ecclesiastically in 1626 he was translated to Trinity College church. He was present at the meeting of bishops and other ministers held at Holyrood on 30 June 1633 to discuss the introduction of the English prayer-book. Sydserrf strongly advocated the measure, and in 1634 was made dean of Edinburgh. In that year he was removed to the new or high church, Edinburgh. This position he held for a few months only, for on the recommendation of Archbishop Laud he was promoted to the bishopric of Brechin, and consecrated on 29 July 1634. On 21 Oct. 1634 he was admitted burgess of Dundee ‘for his services to the Commonweal,’ and on the same day was nominated a member of the court of high commission. He exercised his powers with some rigour, and in 1637 had high words with Lord Lorne in consequence of sentencing one of his followers to fine and imprisonment. His appointment to the see of Galloway was signed by Charles I on 30 Aug. 1635, and he was installed in November following. The active part which he took in the establishment of prelacy and his intimacy with Laud made him a mark for the violence of the presbyterians. His efforts to introduce the service-book made him extremely unpopular. At Stirling in February 1638 he was attacked by

a presbyterian mob, and only through the intervention of the magistrates escaped severe injury. A few days afterwards he was thrice assaulted in the streets of Falkirk, Dalkeith, and Edinburgh. On 13 Dec. 1638 he was formally deposed and excommunicated by the general assembly. After his deposition Sydserff joined Charles I, and was with him at the camp at Newcastle in 1645. The overthrow of the royalists necessitated his retirement into private life, and he remained in seclusion until after the Restoration. When episcopacy was re-established in Scotland he was promoted to the bishopric of Orkney in 1661, being the only survivor of the bishops deposed in 1638. He died at Edinburgh on 29 Sept. 1663. He married, on 27 April 1614, Rachel, daughter of John Byers, an Edinburgh magistrate. By her he had four sons and four daughters. One of the sons was Thomas Sydserff, a popular dramatist, and the compiler of 'Mercurius Caledonius,' the first newspaper printed in Scotland. Keith describes the bishop as 'a learned and worthy prelate,' and Bishop Burnet alludes to him (under the name of 'Saintserf') in complimentary terms in his 'History of his own Time.' His name appears several times in the presbyterian lampoons of the period (see MAIDMENT, *Book of Scottish Pasquils*).

[Keith's Cat. of Bishops, pp. 136, 167; Cat. of Edinb. Graduates, p. 19; Scott's Fasti Eccl. Scot. i. 8, 19, 31, 777, iii. 459, 889; Gardiner's Hist. of Engl.; Notes and Queries, 3rd ser. vii.; Millar's Eminent Burgesses of Dundee, p. 154.]

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