

An Archetype of Ecclesiastics.

Down—down—down !
With windlass, and chain, and cord,
For no step is hewn for foot of man
Into that deep gulf abhorr'd.

DOWN—down—down into the horrible dungeon of St Andrews Castle goes the body of George Wishart, the noblest, the gentlest, yet the most powerful of Scottish martyrs, to await

The chain, the stake, the gazing crowd,
The grim and torturing fire,

to which Cardinal David Beaton, the savagest and most notorious of Scottish ecclesiastics, has consigned him. Well has St Andrews, despite its memorable Castle by the sea and its venerable Cathedral, been called "the Metropolis of Darkness!" Many deeds and bloody have been perpetrated there—deeds at which the world grew pale, atrocities of the most shameful cruelty that called forth the most terrible retributions.

Consider the state of the Church in those days—that is, 400 years ago—and do you wonder that the nations of Europe revolted from the papal yoke? Behold even the places of worship themselves turned into market-places, and the pulpits made rostrums, from which the dissipated and worthless monks, like common huxterers at a country fair, vended their wares and sold their master's indulgences—nothing more nor less than mere slips of paper with a few badly scribbled promises—to the

highest bidder, cash down, of course, for which beneficence the Pope blotted out the purchaser's sins, with the assurance that Heaven's gates were always ajar for him, that there was no dark river of Eternity for him to cross, no Slough of Despond, and promised him, when he grew tired of the earthly world, a seat in the Heavenly, at the Creator's right hand! How could—really, how could anyone let such a chance slip by?

Epitomized, the story of Beaton is this.

In 1494 he was born—exactly a hundred years after the poeting of Scotland. His birthplace was the ancient mansion of Balfour, that used to stand on the bank of the river Orr, near Markinch. He was indisputably and illimitably renowned by descent: of "Bethune's noble line of Picardie," a family tracing its origin to a Robert Faissaux de Bethune of the tenth century. Younger son of John Beaton, the foundation of a brilliant fortune is laid for him as soon as he enters the world. For a while he is admirably educated at home under the watchful eye of his uncle James, Archbishop of Glasgow, and grows up an enthusiastic and energetic boy; far-seeing and penetrative for his age; willing to learn, and learning much.

Such is David Beaton when he goes up to the University of St Andrews, at fifteen—a singularly attractive lad in many ways; polite, perhaps artfully so, yet withal of rather pleasing address. But the young student, being ambitious and industrious, soon exhausts all the knowledge obtainable at St Andrews and Glasgow, and is accordingly sent by his uncle, in 1511, to the schools of Oxford and Paris, to study civil and canon law, but chiefly to bring him under the notice of the Regent Albany. The plan works well. David returns home, is made rector of Campsie. Albany is made to hear of the famous rural clergyman: sees him, and is struck with the extraordinariness of the young man—he is but twenty-four—the large, intelligent head, the powerful memory, the fluent and eloquent speech; sees in him, too, the making of as brilliant a politician as he is an ecclesiastic—sees all these things and determines to make a use of them.

Thenceforth Beaton's career is sparkling, dazzling, and he runs his race by leaps and bounds. Nothing seems to please him now. There appears to be no office vacant but he gets it. In 1519 the Scottish ambassador at the French court dies—Beaton secures his place; and when he comes back to Scotland five years afterwards, more cultivated and polished by French contagion,



CARDINAL DAVID BEATON.

certainly more pompous, more insinuating, yet openly more admirable, more diplomatic as a politician, his uncle who, in the meantime, has been appointed Primate, places on his head the mitre of the rich Abbey of Arbroath, and as Abbot does Beaton soon after sit in the Scottish Parliament.

There he attracts the attention of his sovereign, James V., throws all his heart and soul into matters relating to Church

and State, wins applause by apparently advancing the welfare of his country, while all the time he is strenuously furthering his own private ends, for his love of power and pelf, though sagaciously over-ruled, is immeasurable. Beyond all shadow of doubt, he is "the favoured one in the king's dominions." In 1528 the Red Tod, as James the Fifth was often nicknamed, raises him to the Lord Privy Sealship—makes him, in short, his chief counsellor; and in this new sphere he shines as if nature had designed him a ruler of men. The courtiers feel the weight of the comity and commandingness of their young but artfully able colleague, and give way to him; the clergy feel it; the king himself feels it, and Beaton wields the helm of affairs—civil, canonical—powerfully and dexterously. Five years later he visits the French court, avowedly to negotiate James's marriage with the Princess Magdalen; in reality, however, to supplicate the friendship and co-operation of Francis and the Pope in protecting the Catholic religion in Scotland. A lovely, fragile flower is brought over, but only endures our northern clime for scarcely two months, and Beaton is once more despatched to France to solicit the hand of Mary of Lorraine, daughter of the Duke of Guise, himself solemnizing the ceremony in St Andrews Cathedral in 1538.

But these missions are not without personal advantages to the rising ecclesiastic. How verily indeed does he go on improving each shining hour! Francis admires his firm, manly carriage, his vivacity, his inestimable zeal and worthiness as a diplomat, and displays his admiration of these virtuous traits by making him a Christmas present of the remunerative Bishopric of Mirepoix in Languedoc.

And now Beaton has been spending a considerable portion of his time in France, being, in fact, much attached to it—it is his ancestral land, you remember—and becomes deeply versed in Italian and French politics, becomes "more, indeed, of a Frenchman and a servant of the Guises than of a Scotsman." Yet so it is, unhappily for himself, for his church and his

country, whose welfare he has all along endeavoured to identify with his own success in the spurious, subtile system of foreign politics.

When he returns to Scotland, he is appointed colleague to his uncle. The latter is growing old, is infirm and indolent; his nephew, on the other hand, is in the prime of life and vigorous and daring. Pope Paul III. is nothing loth to observe these signs, and, taking the tide at the flood, hastens to encourage one who seems so discreetly resolute yet actively sincere in his devotion to papacy, by raising him to the cardinalate. And when his uncle dies in the following year, the cardinal succeeds him as Archbishop of St Andrews and Primate of Scotland.

Hitherto, Beaton's career has been one of the most licentious profligacy. Think of it!—think of the duplicity of this remarkable man, a genuinely honest, earnest, apostolical man, some writers would have us believe, yet a profligate spending even his priesthood in concubinage. Up to this time he has concerned himself principally with managing his own affairs; now he begins a vigorous persecution of the Scottish reformers, repairs to St Andrews with such a pomp and splendour as the inhabitants of the cathedral city have never beheld—still only

“ a cumbrous load,
Disguising oft the wretch of human kind
Studied in arts of hell, in wickedness refined.”

There he lays before his first great ecclesiastical council his schemes for the defence of the Church, and his plans for the extirpation of the Protestants: and he is determined to carry the King himself into this bold enterprise. James has promised to meet “his brother of England” in a conference at York: the arrangements are complete, but Beaton suddenly interdicts and commands—he never persuades, oh no, no! not he—his royal master to forego the conference and prepare for war. On him, too, must fall the blame of the ignominious defeat of the Scots at Solway Moss in 1542—an event which

breaks the king's heart, and momentarily interrupts the harmony of the cardinal's ere-this unchecquered career.

In this way did it happen, and herein we witness the avarice, the unscrupulousness, the detestable ambition of the man. Rumour has it that Beaton poisoned his sovereign, but this, no doubt, is a malicious slander: certain it is, however, that he suborned a priest to forge a will, purporting to be the king's last testament, appointing him regent of the country. The document is rejected by the nobility, many of whom, along with the Earl of Arran who has been appointed governor, are unfeignedly supporters of the Reformation or English party.

Beaten in this game the wily prelate pours forth, in retaliation, from his adamantine throat tongues of living flame, for the purpose of rousing the populace to oppose the friendship with England, a Protestant country. But here again, the Scottish estates are beforehand with him; when he enters the Convention in 1543 he is seized and thrown into prison to put a restraint upon his tongue. Even then, however, he is not cast down. His temperament may be cold and repellant to his warders, but if accomplishments and blandishments, if unscrupulousness and cunning—and he is brimful of all of these—will in any way procure him his liberty, be sure he will soon get it. And, strange to say, somehow or other—no one really knows how—he is released, and with lightning-like rapidity soars higher than ever. The Queen-Dowager becks and bows to him as a menial to a master; the Regent Arran, who the one day proclaims him a rebel, is glad to go down on his knees and crave absolution from him the next.

But he does not stop here. Nothing will please him but to be regent, if not in name, at least in all but name. He covets the Chancellorship of the realm, and Gawain Dunbar, who has held it and discharged its duties faithfully for seventeen years, is forced to relinquish it, so that Beaton may get it. Nor does he stop here! Before him dangles the ladder of Canonicity—every rundle of which is filled but the highest. That empty

rung becomes a perpetual eyesore to him. Shall he essay it? Why not? He possesses ambition enough for it—in scholarly attainments he is without doubt excellently well fitted for it. It is the darling wish of his heart, and he requests—nay, commands Arran to solicit for him at Rome, and in 1544 he receives his crowning glory by being endowed with the authority of *Legate à latere*, or Vice-Pope in Scotland.

This new office places him beyond the reach of the law: he becomes the supreme judge—the Grand Inquisitor—and such is his jurisdiction over life that he can either kill or keep alive, a power which he exercises with an unstinting hand.

For a month or so he plays the rôle of the honest judge, finds that Christianity is labouring under two evils, the obtrusion of the Protestant faith which is growing apace, and the depravity and corruptions of the clergy; but the relentlessness and vigour with which he urges on the persecution of the Reformers overshadows all the good intentions he may have had for rooting out the immorality of the priests. He looks like a man adapted in every way for strife, more often a conqueror than the reverse, strongly passionate, correspondingly fearless; and so, with an ardour which nothing can abate, and a despotism that will brook no opposition, he carries on his untiring, pitiless sport of heresy-hunting.

With a powerful band of licentious prelates and bloodhound supporters he harries the eastern shires; at Perth visits five heretics with “Jethart justice”—killing them first and sitting in trial upon them afterwards—and drives many of the most influential citizens out of the town, confiscating their estates to replenish his own private exchequer, and thereby systematically enriching himself at the expense of the nation. Thence he storms through Forfarshire, and men’s hearts shrivel and their blood stands still as the scorching blast of his tyrannic rage passes; seizes Rogers, a black friar, in Dundee, and hurls him into the dungeon of St Andrews Castle; and then—to contemplate, with fiendish pleasure, his horrible work, and prepare

his plans for the future, repairs to Arbroath, where he leads his life of libertinism and watches with eagle eye the proceedings of the revivalists. Informers he has everywhere: his foes are detected and seized, as it were, before they are conscious of it, and once within the grasp of his terrible talons no power of earth can save them.

While in the Mearns, news is brought to him that George Wishart, the backbone of the Protestant party, is in East Lothian waging the religious warfare. Thither he hastens with all speed, captures Wishart—a runaway thief they call him—and casts him, too, into the rock-hewn dungeon of St Andrews. Beaton asks the Regent to send a commission of laymen to act along with the prelates in the trial—how shamefully two-faced he is!—but the Regent will have nothing whatever to do with it, and the Vice-Pope, gnashing with rage for being dictated to, goes to the very extremity of his papal jurisdiction and condemns the gentle preacher to be burned at the stake. Once more the godly man, full of faith and power, is hurried back to his dismal cell, where the only sound that breaks the stillness is

“The stormy wave,
As it beats against the rock
With a faint and distant shock.”

In the morning, while the Cardinal and his bishops are drinking and feasting and making merry, while the people gather with anxious and awe-stricken faces round the fateful spot, while the workmen pile up the fagots before the castle gate, George Wishart, the most concerned individual in the whole city, is quietly dispensing Scotland's primal Protestant communion to a band of faithful adherents. And now all is ready,—the “most godly, learned, and noble” of Scottish martyrs is led forth lamb-like to the slaughter and tied to the stake,—the fire crackles, and the long-tongued, torturing flames shoot up and curve round his body as if unwilling to

touch it,—the populace gazes upon the ghastly spectacle with bated breath and glistening eye, when suddenly, amid the dumbness of the multitude, there is heard from the mass of smoke and flame the voice of the patient sufferer as he beholds the cruel, inhuman monster lolling in all his pomp and pride on the battlements of the castle, and gloating over the dreadful, yet to him delightful, scene, and the crowd strains every nerve to catch the prophetic warning—“He who now looks so proudly out upon me from yonder lofty place shall ere long be ignominiously cast down.”

The bloodthirsty deed is done, the crowds disperse and return to their wonted occupations. But the blood of Wishart cries aloud for vengeance, and Beaton’s “inhumanity to man” is destined to work him bitter woe. A storm brews, and gathering force as the days increase, begins to howl tempestuously: men—high and low—murmur dark things among themselves, openly and secretly; some even talk of assassination, and the Cardinal, perceiving the ominously lowering storm, begins to fortify his castle. Bold, resolute, unrelenting fragment of diabolism, the Mene, Tekel, Upharsin of thy career is fast approaching. Thy days are numbered, found wanting—prepare!

On the 29th of May 1546, the tempest bursts. A band of fearless, determined men, headed by the Leslies and Kirkcaldy of Grange, actuated by private wrongs and saturated with revenge for the innocent blood of Wishart, break into the castle while the workmen are busy with the defences. Soon they reach the Cardinal’s room and command him to open the door; but not till they fire it does he comply: and when the conspirators rush in they find an abject and pitiable morsel of anguish and despair, groaning, “I am a priest; I am a priest. Fie! fie! all—all is gone.” Leslie and Carmichael are instant for his life, but Melville restrains them, and, presenting his weapon close to the prelate’s heart, says—“Repent thee of thy former wicked life, but especially of the shedding of the blood of that notable

instrument of God, Mr George Wishart, which we are sent to avenge." Beaton pleads—pleads in vain; and the assassins despatch him, and he who

“ Had reigned so long and so triumphantly,
Is in the dust thrown down so dolefully.”

Only yesterday he was ruling Scotland with a rod of iron—now lies he there, with none to do him reverence. His body is salted, and, in fulfilment of Wishart's dying prophecy, cast without ceremony into the dungeon of the sea-tower where the martyr passed many a dreary hour, and the touch of whose sacred feet has made the spot for ever holy ground.

Just a word in conclusion! Taken all in all, Scotland has perhaps produced no greater man—not a great statesman, and far less a patriot, for he neglected the permanent welfare of his country altogether to the entirety of his own, and yet great in many respects: indisputably the archetype of ecclesiastics: talented—politically, socially, scholarly, but allowing his talents to run away with his better judgment: self-interested, enormously so: possessing a relentless strength of purpose, and as tyrannical as cruel; proud, ambitious—the monopoliser of every station in Church and State: one-eyed, cunning, unscrupulous: despicably though openly immoral, and unpardonably so, because head of the Church: not much of a hypocrite, but the most brilliant and unfathomable incarnation of genius, good and bad, this country has ever produced.

