

John Geddes: A Mission Accepted

As well as the Scots College in Madrid, there were other British seminaries in Spain at the time of the suppression of the Jesuits. The English had colleges in Madrid, Seville and Valladolid; the Irish at Salamanca, Seville, Compostela and Alcalá de Henares. All were administered by Jesuits and, after the expulsion of the Society from Spain, the English and Irish bishops lost little time in initiating the necessary efforts to safeguard their nations' properties. The Scots, on the other hand, were so dilatory that their college was nearly irretrievably lost.

With the expulsion of the Society at the beginning of April 1767, a special sub-committee of the Council of Castile (the supreme advisory body of the kingdom for domestic affairs) was established to deal with all matters connected with the Society and its houses. It met most mornings, immediately after the ordinary session of the full Council. This sub-committee had six or seven members and was known as the Extraordinary Council. Through it, Dr. O'Rian, an Irish priest delegated by his hierarchy, soon recovered the colleges of his nation; but furthermore, he received the Extraordinary Council's consent that the Scots College in Madrid should be united with, and incorporated in, the Irish College in Alcalá on the specious grounds that, since there were so few Catholics in Scotland, no students could be expected; and that, anyway, most of the priests working in Scotland were Irish. As a result, the house furnishings, the sacred vessels and the vestments which were stored in the Scots College were taken to Alcalá, along with a chest of money collected, in rents, from the tenants in the Scots' property. No Spaniard or Irishman informed anyone in Scotland about these decisions and developments.

The English bishops had also acted swiftly with regard to their Spanish property. In May 1767, the month after the expulsion, Bishop Challoner, Vicar Apostolic of the London District, presented a memorial on the subject to the Spanish ambassador in London and, early the following year, the English bishops sent one of their

priests, Philip Perry, a doctor of the Sorbonne, to Spain as their representative. His mission was soon successful, at least in the sense that the College of St. Alban in Valladolid began to function again as a seminary under his rectorship, while St. George's College in Madrid was sold and the proceeds dedicated to the Valladolid college.¹ But more important from the Scottish point of view, Dr. Perry was to play an invaluable part in the successful recovery of the Scots' property.

On his way to Spain, he had passed through Douai and Paris and had been asked by Robert Grant and John Gordon, the principals of the Scots Colleges of those places, to look into the matter of the Scottish property in Madrid, a commission which he was kind enough to carry out. The first news to reach Scotland of the possibilities in Madrid came in a letter from Principal Gordon in Paris, written on 27th March 1768 and addressed to George Hay, recently become priest in charge of the mission at Edinburgh: "...I now write to you on a subject of a different nature which, if well managed, may turn out to greater advantage to you than anything that has happened in my time...". After describing how the English had been quick to claim their Spanish property, Gordon urged that the Scots bishops should send a similar emissary at once and warned that they should also be prepared to send a superior and some students at a later date; in the meantime, they should make Dr. Perry their procurator in Spain.²

Hay received Gordon's letter on 6th April and wrote next day to Bishop Grant, Vicar Apostolic of the Lowland District, to tell him that Perry thought that the Scots had an excellent claim in Spain to colleges in Madrid and Seville, whose income was of the order of £1,000 per annum.³ (The suggestion that there had been a Scots College in Seville was erroneous, as was discovered later; the Madrid net income, derived from the rents and various extraneous sources, was roughly 63,000 *reals* a year, which, at the prevailing exchange rate of ninety *reals* to a pound sterling, was about £700.)⁴ From Aberdeen, Bishop Grant replied on 21st April to say that the bishops were to meet soon at Preshome and would discuss the Spanish question; but, as for sending out a superior and students, "we will be also much puzzled and in some degree nonplussed if the Donns in Spain insist on our planting a new colony among them, considering our extreme scarcity of hands".⁵

Bishop Grant and Bishop Hugh Macdonald, Vicar Apostolic of

1. After generations of effort and much litigation, the Spanish government in 1963 finally paid the English College in Valladolid compensation for the confiscated property in Seville.
2. Scottish Catholic Archives, Columba House, Edinburgh: letter rack 5-M.
3. *Id.*, *ibid.*
4. College archives 19/109. At the time, £1 sterling was worth about 90 *reals*; about ten years later, £1 was worth 100 *reals*.
5. Columba House 5-M.



LA NOVENA
DEL GLORIOSO APOSTOL
DE LAS INDIAS
SAN FRANCISCO XAVIER,
DE LA COMPANIA DE JESUS,

QUE CON REVERENTES CULTOS DE LOS NUEVE COROS DE LOS ANGELES celebran sus Devotos en el Colegio Seminario de Escoceses, de la Compañia de Jesus de esta Corte, implorando, por la intercesion de este Glorioso Apostol, la Paz universal, y buenos sucesos de esta Monarquia.

EMPIEZA EL LUNES QUATRO DE MARZO DE ESTE AÑO DE 1765.

PRUDICARAN LOS ORADORES SIGUIENTES.

Lunes 4. <i>Angelus</i>	El P. Luis Lafarte, Prefecto de la Congregacion de Nuestra Señora del Buen Consejo de la Compañia de Jesus.
Martes 5. <i>Archangelus</i> ..	El P. Bernardo Blok, Predicador del Colegio Imperial.
Miércoles 6. <i>Principales</i> ..	El P. Cosme Leon de Selva, Rector de dicho Colegio.
Jueves 7. <i>Patres</i>	El P. Diego Cuevas, Prefecto de la Buena Muerte en la Casa Professa.
Viernes 8. <i>Pitres</i>	El P. Francisco Real, Predicador del Colegio Imperial.
Sabado 9. <i>Demociones</i> ..	El P. Diego Quintanilla, Predicador de la Casa Professa.
Domingo 10. <i>Troni</i> ...	El P. Diego Luján, Doctrinero de la Buena Muerte del Colegio Imperial.
Lunes 11. <i>Quarunies</i> ...	El P. Pedro Thomas Torrabia, del Colegio Imperial.
Martes 12. <i>Serafines</i> ...	El P. Pedro Serrano, Predicador de la Casa del Noviciado de la Compañia de Jesus.

Todas las tardes, antes del sermón, se explicará la Doctrina Christiana, la que se comenzará a las tres y media, y continuará a las quatro, que se empezará el Sermón, y despues se ofrecerá la Novena, y por la noche se dirá un Oficio.

Todos los fieles que hicieren la Novena y visitaren nuestra Iglesia, haciendo oracion por la intencion del Papa Benedicto XIV. que hizo la concesion, y en uno de los tres ultimos dias, a su eleccion, confesando, y comulgando, ganarán Indulgencia penaria.

El Martes 19. de Marzo, día de San Joseph, será la Comunión en dicha Iglesia para ganar los dos Jubileos, uno de presente, y otro para la hora de la muerte, que están concedidos por la asistencia a la explicacion de la Doctrina Christiana.

HAN DE TENER LA BULADA DE LA SANTA CRUZADA.



THE SCOTS COLLEGE, MADRID

Since the time of the college's transfer to Valladolid in 1771, the Madrid property had been let as houses and shops. This photograph, which shows the main façade in the Calle Jacometrezo (centre) and the side of the building in the Calle Chinchilla (right), was taken shortly before the property was demolished in 1920.



This photograph, probably taken about 1900, shows, in the foreground, the so-called "New Part" of the college of San Ambrosio. It was destroyed by fire in 1927, but earlier had been a barracks. The Scots College, which can be seen between the "New Part" and the church of San Esteban (now the Santuario Nacional), was originally due to be located here. The ornate baroque portal, saved from the fire, is now in the grounds of the Colegio de Santa Cruz in Valladolid.

the Highland District, duly met at Preshome in July and despatched letters to the Spanish ambassador in London, to Dr. Perry empowering him to act in their name, and to the rectors in Douai and Paris encouraging them to do all that they could to have the management of the Madrid college restored. A postscript to the letter to Grant in Douai added that, although there was a desperate shortage of priests in Scotland, they were willing, if it were necessary, to spare one to be sent to Spain. The bishops had been encouraged to envisage the possible adoption of this last measure by the man who, the previous December, had arrived to be priest in charge of Preshome, where the bishops were meeting. It was he, John Geddes, who was destined to be the principal human agent in the recovery of the college.

* * *

John Geddes was born on 29th August 1735 (O. S.), the son of John Geddes and Marjory Burgess.⁶ His father was a small and obscure tenant-farmer or farmworker at Corridoun on the Gordon estate of Letterfourie in the Enzie of Banffshire. In 1742, the boy had become a pupil in the parish school at Rathven and had begun to study Latin; at this time, he lived with his mother's uncle during the week and returned home at weekends but, by the following Easter, he had left the school and been brought home, in order to thwart a scheme, of which we know nothing, to make him a Protestant.⁷ For the next five years he was taught by a succession of masters in various small schools, except for some months in 1745-46 when, following Culloden and the resultant upset state of the country, he was kept at home. His father died of consumption in August 1747 and the boy himself caught smallpox, but recovered. During the winter of 1748-49, he and five other boys were taken under his wing by Alexander Godsmann, recently arrived as priest in Preshome, and under his gentle direction he studied Latin and French and made progress in the piety which had already been noticed by many. He made his first Holy Communion on Candlemas Day, 1749, and was confirmed in September of the same year.

He hoped to be admitted to the seminary at Scalan but instead was told that he was being sent to the Scots College in Rome. Godsmann got him and an older companion (William Guthrie, who was also going to the college in Rome) passages on the ship "Rothiemay" which was lying off Buckie at the time and was bound

6. There were other children in the family since, in 1778, Geddes sent greetings from Spain to three sisters and a brother, all married with families; the brother lived at Corridoun. (Memo. for George Mathison, about to return to Scotland; Columba House 6-G.)

7. Details of Geddes' early life and of his years in Scotland after his return from Valladolid are taken not only from the biographical note and the Life of Bishop Hay in *Scotchchronicon* but also from William James Anderson, art. "The Autobiographical Notes of Bishop John Geddes," *The Innes Review*, vol. XVIII (1967), pp. 36-57.

for Leghorn with a cargo of fish. They sailed from Peterhead on 1st October 1749 (O. S.) and reached Leghorn on the following 17th January (N. S.). The voyage was long and stormy and not uneventful, the two young Scotsmen being much impressed, when they went ashore on reaching Gibraltar, by the first Catholic church of any size that either had ever seen and by a High Mass which they attended at Minorca (then in British hands). After some days in Leghorn, they made their way, via Pisa, Siena and Viterbo, to Rome, where they arrived on 30th January, sixteen weeks after leaving Scotland.

Geddes was a student in the college in Rome for almost ten years, during the rectorship of the Italian Jesuit, Lorenzo Alticozzi, an enlightened and capable man, especially when compared with some of his predecessors and successors. Benedict XIV was Pope and Rome was enjoying an era of splendour, contentment and prosperity.

George Hay, six years older than Geddes, arrived at the college in September 1751, a year and eight months after Geddes and Guthrie. Geddes had already taken the mission oath in July 1750 and had received tonsure and the minor orders, but the two future bishops were, in the years that followed, very close friends, in the same classes of rhetoric, philosophy and, later, divinity which they attended daily in the Collegio Romano. Naturally, they got to know each other's character intimately.

One incident that Geddes recalled, years later in a letter to his friend, is of no consequence in itself but shows that, even in such minor matters, seminaries have not changed greatly with the centuries. He had been appointed *decano* (senior student) in 1753 and "I remember, in the year 1755, F. Alticozzi thought it unnecessary to carry out Parmesan cheese for us to the country. What a noise did not this occasion? And you, my dear friend, and Mr. Guthrie were not among the last to insist that I should go to the Rector, to remonstrate against this infringement of our rights. The task was to me disagreeable — the reception I met with was something rough".⁸

Geddes' student days were not without their crosses. His mother died in January 1753. At Easter 1758, he himself took ill, spitting blood and with pains in his chest. Although he was fairly well again before he left Rome, he suffered similar occasional pains for the next ten or twelve years and was not entirely free of them until he left for Spain.

He was ordained to the priesthood on 18th March 1759 in the domestic chapel of Cardinal Spinelli, the Protector of the college and of the Scottish mission, offered his first Mass on the feast of the Annunciation a week later and, in company with Hay and

8. Geddes to Bishop Hay, 5th February 1783, (printed in *Scotichronicon*, p. 224).

Guthrie, left for home on 20th April of the same year. They embarked in Rome itself, sailed down the Tiber and had a very rough voyage to Leghorn, during which all were seasick. They continued to Nice by another ship and, on this part of their journey, were captured by an English privateer on suspicion of carrying French goods, released after three or four days, but then held in quarantine for sixteen days before being allowed to land in Nice. They went to Avignon by chaise and from there (except for the section from Lyons to Chalons, which they travelled by "diligence boat") they walked to Paris.

They stayed over two weeks in the French capital, where they changed from the purple soutanes which they were still wearing to new clothes; (their luggage had been lost between Avignon and Lyons). They visited St. Denis, where they saw the royal tombs, the body of St. Louis and the crown jewels. Another day, they went to Versailles; the king was not there, but they saw the queen on her way to Mass, and several of the royal children, and were fortunate enough to witness the famous fountains in operation.

When they resumed their journey, they walked all the way, via Douai (where they stayed for five days), to Ghent. During this long journey through France they ran the constant risk of arrest, since Britain and France were at war. At last, they took a coach to Rotterdam and sailed in a ship which, though bound for Leith, was blown over to the north coast of the Firth of Forth and anchored off Buckhaven in Fife. This suited the three young men as they thus escaped the rigorous examination which would have been made at Leith and which might have led to their discovery as priests. As it was, they made their way without trouble to the Forth ferry and finally reached Edinburgh on 16th August, after a journey of almost exactly four months.

The trio remained almost a week in the capital before Geddes and Guthrie set out for the north. They walked to Aberdeen, which they reached in three days, and then went on to Preshome, where they presented themselves to their bishop, Alexander Smith, at that time engaged on making his annual tour through the northern parts of his District.⁹ Geddes was left for a few weeks in his own country in the Enzie, where he was able to renew friendships and revisit old haunts. He then set out, at the beginning of October 1759, for his

9. The Lowland District covered the whole country with the exception of the Gaelic-speaking areas of the north and west but its Catholics were to be found mainly in the counties of Banff and Moray and the western part of Aberdeenshire, with small congregations also at Aberdeen and Edinburgh and a few other places. Most of the seminary students of the Lowland District were from Banff and Moray (especially Glenlivet and the Enzie). Apart from the Chisholms from Strathglass, those of the Highland District were, for the most part, Macdonalds from Uist, Barra and what is now western Inverness-shire. The result of all this was that many of the priests and seminarians were acquainted with each other's families and backgrounds and were, indeed, often related to one another.

first assignment, the mission of the Cabrach, a wild and remote upland district on the Banffshire-Aberdeenshire border and which bore the engaging nickname of Siberia.

The priest's residence was in the hamlet of Shenval and, as his fellow-occupant of the house, Geddes had Hugh Macdonald, the aged and infirm bishop of the Highland District who had publicly supported the rising in 1745 and so for years had lived in Shenval in prudent seclusion, far from his District and the danger of arrest. For a short while in 1761 the bishop's nephew, John Macdonald, was also in residence at Shenval, as he used the house to make a retreat before being consecrated bishop at Preshome on 27th September as his uncle's coadjutor. Life at Shenval was reckoned to be harder than in any other mission of the Lowland District; not only was the area very inhospitable, but Geddes had charge of four other parishes there in addition to Shenval and had to try to be in a different one each Sunday. Early in 1762 he had a severe recurrence of his chest pains and was spitting blood; Hay, who had studied medicine before his conversion to Catholicism, went to the aid of his friend and prescribed blood-letting, after which Geddes felt considerably better.

Geddes was very happy at Shenval and had had remarkable success in his work, due, in the words of James Grant, Bishop Smith's coadjutor, to "his fervent zeal, unwearied activity and, much more, the uncommon sweetness of his temper and his exemplary life. ...Notwithstanding the universal regret of all that knew him, both Catholics and Protestants, who, in spite of their prejudices against his principles, esteemed and loved him,"¹⁰ he had to leave the Cabrach at the beginning of September 1762. His new assignment was one of special responsibility. The little seminary at Scalan in Glenlivet, founded in 1717 by James Gordon, Vicar Apostolic of Scotland, had lately fallen on evil days due, in large measure, to the incompetence of the superior and, this person having been dismissed, Geddes was given the task of restoring it to the desired standard. He was five years there and, during this time, about twenty boys came under his direction, including those who were to be the next two rectors at Valladolid after Geddes himself.

For the most part, little is known of this period, although there is no doubt that, with ever-increasing experience, he supervised the spiritual and intellectual training of the boys in the conscientious, prudent and humane manner that he was to use later in Spain. Towards the end of his years in charge of Scalan there occurred the most noteworthy event of his rectorship—in the summer and autumn of 1767, he supervised the construction of a new and larger building (the house that may be visited today). Progress was so rapid that the community was able to take up residence in the new

10. *Scotichronicon*, p. 45.

house by the end of November. But, on 15th December (and because the seminary was now considered to have been securely re-established), he was asked to leave Scalan in order to be priest in charge of the mission at Preshome. This was the position which Hay had held since soon after his return to Scotland in 1759 and from which he had recently departed to be priest in charge of his native city of Edinburgh. Because of its pleasant situation, its compactness and yet its considerable number of Catholics, Preshome was thought one of the best stations in the country. There, John Geddes arrived in mid-December, 1767; and there he was drawn into the Spanish affair by the arrival at his house, in the following summer, of Bishops Grant and Macdonald to deliberate on the matter.

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To return, therefore, to the thread of the story. The two bishops, it will be remembered, sent letters to the Spanish ambassador in London, as well as to Perry in Spain, Gordon in Paris and Grant in Douai. The letter to the ambassador was composed by John Geddes and his cousin, Alexander Geddes, who happened to be on a visit to Preshome at the time.¹¹ In his reply, the ambassador asked the bishops for a formal petition for the restoration of the college, which he would transmit to His Catholic Majesty, King Charles III. This petition was drawn up and despatched to London but, whether by misfortune or as Geddes suspected possible, by malice, it failed to reach Madrid. Hearing nothing further from the ambassador and not knowing that their petition had disappeared *en route*, the bishops unfortunately allowed the matter to drift and took no further positive steps until the following year.

John Geddes at least, however, continued to discuss the problem in his correspondence. In a letter to his bishop, James Grant, written on 16th August of the same year, 1768, he said:

"I see well the difficulty in sending any body to Spain. I believe the Westerns [i.e., those of the Highland District] will not readily grant us Mr. McDonnell; but though they did, there would be some objections. Perhaps even though the Spaniards should demand that the Revenues be spent in their Kingdom, yet they may allow us some respite and allow the money to be sent hither or to Douay at

11. John Geddes, *Memoirs of the Translation of the Scotch College from Madrid to Valladolid*, no. 12.

This manuscript (College archives 54/13) of 235 quarto pages, completed on 14th September 1780, gives a full account of the events leading to the appointment of Geddes as the agent and rector in Spain and of his negotiations in Madrid for the recovery of the property; it also deals with various aspects of college life between 1771 and 1780. It is therefore the principal source for this history of the college for the period from 1768 to 1780. It will be cited as *Memoirs*.

least for some years, or at least to be kept in Spain waiting our use, until we can send somebody."¹²

When the three bishops of Scotland met at Scalán in May of the following year for the consecration of George Hay as Grant's coadjutor, the Spanish question was discussed, and particularly the difficulty of finding someone who could be sent to Madrid as their agent. It was felt that it would be more suitable to send a priest of the Highland District since the rectors in both Paris and Douai belonged to the Lowland. The problem, however, was that the Highland District not only had a considerably greater number of Catholics than the Lowland District, but also had less than half the number of priests. Geddes states: "There were also some other Transactions regarding these Matters of which we treat, that were carried on in the last six or seven months of 1769, of which the Writer of these Memoirs must own he is almost ignorant, as he had nothing to do in them at the time...B. Hay was the Person who had the principal Management of whatever was then done."¹³

One proposal was to appoint, as agent in Spain, James Lesly who, with the bishops' permission, had been out of Scotland since 1746 and was by now a canon of Courtrai in Flanders; but since he pleaded great reluctance due to his age (he was approaching seventy) and his existing commitments, that project was dropped.¹⁴ Hay was presumably also in contact with Robert Grant, the principal at Douai, because, in the autumn of 1769, he (Grant) was in London for a short while, met the Spanish ambassador and sent word that the latter had instructions from his government to pay the travelling expenses to Spain of a rector and two masters for the Scots College. (It must be assumed that, by now, the lost petition had turned up, but its purpose seems to have been misunderstood by the Spaniards.¹⁵)

Meanwhile, Dr. Perry, in Spain, remained most anxious to help yet more and more frustrated by the Scots' delay in sending someone. Their agent "must make all haste possibly he can, before things go further, for they have gone already far enough to create very great, if not insuperable, difficulties."¹⁶ Again, writing to a correspondent in London, he said:

"...This may convince you how necessary it is to urge the Scots by all possible means to send their agent out of hand and to give him wings, if possible, to fly hither, before any distraction of their

12. Columba House 5-M.

13. *Memoirs*, no. 18.

14. *Ibid.*, no. 19.

15. H. Tichbourne Blount (London) to Philip Perry, 17th October 1769: "The Spanish Ambassador here has signified to the Scotch that their petition is granted and that their house at Madrid is united to the Irish house of Alcalá, &c. In consequence of wch Mr. Grant of Doway has been here and has agreed with the said Ambassador to send an Agent to Spain to transact their affairs." (English College, Valladolid, archives E. 2; transcript 2/52.)

16. To Bishop Talbot, 13th November 1769. (College archives 19/1.)

effects be brought about, at least as many wings a good postchaise carries. Neither let the good Scotch prelates suffer themselves to be imposed on either by their own fears or others' misrepresentations, as if their game were not worth their pursuit. ... and lest they might be induced to think I go upon hearsay and guesswork, I have been this morning at the Office where the evaluations of the College temporalities of the Kingdom are registered, and there read with my own eyes that their sole College of Madrid (for the state of Seville was not drawn out) amounts to no less than sixty-six thousand and odd reals, that is to say, better than six hundred pounds annual rent. This, no doubt, if well managed, would procure a great remedy to their necessitous circumstances. Therefore let them not loiter away what God and the king are ready to put into their hands. Let them not neglect any means I suggested, nor any other which their own interest can invent, but let the agent come off forthwith, for God knows what intriguing may produce."¹⁷

Towards the end of 1769, when it was assumed that Lesly would not go to Spain, Bishop John Macdonald, coadjutor in the Highland District, went to Moidart in order to offer the commission to Alexander Macdonell (or Macdonald) of Scothouse, who had been ordained in Rome two years previously.¹⁸ However, he firmly refused, despite all attempts at persuasion, since his mother was a Protestant; "he constantly answered that the thought of leaving his mother *nelle fauci del Diavolo* shocked him that he could not get over it and that it was his opinion, if he should leave her in that Situation, it would turn his head."¹⁹ To Bishop Hay's particular annoyance, several months were lost during this unsuccessful effort to find a Highland priest to undertake the mission. The blame probably lay with Bishop Hugh Macdonald who, by this time around seventy years old, had failed to capture a sense of urgency and did not answer Hay's letters requesting information. It was, in fact, only about this time, late in 1769, that news reached Scotland of the order effecting the incorporation of the Scots College with that of the Irish in Alcalá.²⁰

The two Highland bishops now asked their Lowland colleagues to nominate a priest for the task in Spain. Geddes, writing to Hay on 28th January 1770, lamented the delay since, not only could someone have been sent a year previously, but it now seemed that there were no plans to select a substitute for Macdonell. At the same time, he suspected what was about to happen. "As for myself, if I should be thought on for that purpose, from our old principles and

17. 11th January 1770, quoted in letter of John Gordon, Paris, to ? Bishop Hay. (Ibid., 52/3/1).

18. In 1779, a movement, especially among the younger clergy, to have him nominated vicar apostolic of the Highland District after the death of Bishop John Macdonald failed. (Cf. *ibid.* 52/2/37.)

19. Bishop Macdonald to Geddes, 5th February 1770. (Ibid., 51/6/9.)

20. *Ibid.*, 19/10.

from what I wrote you before, you will not doubt of my endeavouring to be in the '*santa indifferenza*' which alone can give peace." He confessed that he would find it hard to part from his flock; besides, his health might not be good enough to withstand the rigours of the climate and he had no knowledge at all of the language or the customs of the country. "But one 'Go' from Superiors unsolicited should make all easy."²¹

A fortnight later, on 10th February, the anticipated news arrived at Preshome. Geddes received two letters that day. Bishop Grant wrote from Aberdeen to tell him to prepare since orders to leave for Spain would probably soon be sent to him. From Edinburgh, Bishop Hay wrote: "You will by this time know Mr. Siniten's [Bishop Grant's] resolutions about who is to be sent. I own I was rather for Mr. Reid" [the priest at Strathavon who was transferred to Preshome when Geddes left]. With modesty, Geddes, in his *Memoirs*,²² does not mention Hay's reason for having preferred Reid — he "would not be so much missed as Mr. Geddes."²³ Geddes replied to Bishop Grant the day after having received these letters; in a very matter of fact way, he describes his missionary travels of the previous week in the Portsoy area; after one and a half pages of this, he expresses his willingness to go to Spain if he is ordered to, and then proceeds to discuss the possible successors who might follow him in Preshome.²⁴

On 13th February he received another letter from Bishop Grant telling him to come as soon as possible to Aberdeen, from where he would proceed to Spain. And so he left Preshome on the afternoon of Thursday 15th and, since his mission was to be kept as secret as possible to prevent the Irish getting to know of the Scots' plans to recover their property, he went without being able to bid farewell to anyone except his cousin, Alexander, who was to take temporary charge of the Preshome mission. He left a few letters to be delivered after his departure. One which is preserved discloses only that "I go to ramble a little through the world; you will hear more of it afterwards."²⁵

Geddes got to Aberdeen on 17th February and spent two nights with Bishop Grant, who furnished him with an official letter designating him "Rector of the Scotch College in Madrid."²⁶ Just as he was about to leave for the south, a farcical element was suddenly and unexpectedly introduced into the whole scheme: a letter was delivered to Bishop Grant and it turned out to be from Lesly of Courtrai, announcing that he had, after all, decided to

21. Columba House 5-0.

22. *Memoirs*, no. 23.

23. Bishop Hay to Geddes. (*Scotchchronicon*, p. 70.)

24. Columba House 5-0.

25. Geddes to John Reid, Findhorn. (*Ibid.*, 5-0.)

26. College archives 19/5.

accede to the request to go to Spain but, as he intended to travel by London, he would await the bishops' orders there. After a brief discussion with Grant, Geddes decided to proceed with his journey, especially as Lesly had stipulated in his letter that he would be able to afford only a few months on the Spanish affair. From Hay, with whom he stayed three days in Edinburgh, he received two documents in French: one, a letter to the King of Spain, composed in the names of the bishops and all the Catholics of Scotland, and asking his Catholic Majesty to revoke the order uniting the Scots and Irish Colleges;²⁷ the other, signed by Hay in the name of the bishops and priests, and giving Geddes "*plein pouvoir d'agir pour nous et en notre nom en tout ce que regarde nos affaires dans tous les Royaumes de sa Majesté Catholique.*"²⁸

Hay managed to find Geddes two travelling companions, to save the cost of hiring the post-chaise for himself alone. They were a young lieutenant recently returned from two years in France for his "improvement" and a young lady on her way to Bath for her health. In a letter from London, which he reached on 2nd March, Geddes remarked that they had turned out to be agreeable companions, that he had been appointed keeper of their common purse and that, on the journey, he had been able to recite his breviary, to read and to pray.²⁹

In London, he had a meeting with Lesly who, fortunately, was happy to forget about the mission to Spain and to return to Flanders at once, even refusing to wait until Geddes could accompany him across the Channel.³⁰ Geddes presented himself at Bishop Challoner's house, where he was received with great kindness by Challoner and by his coadjutor, Bishop Talbot. The former wrote out for him, in his own hand, a letter in Latin recommending him to all whom he should meet on his journey, "*praesertim vero omnibus in Hispania Ecclesiarum Praelatis et regni proceribus.*"³¹ Talbot took him to the Spanish ambassador who surprised Geddes by asking him where the two masters were who ought to be accompanying him; Geddes and Talbot replied that it seemed unnecessary to send masters before the college was re-established. The ambassador also said that, according to his information from Madrid, the latest plan was to settle the three British Colleges, one in each of the three chief university cities: the English at Valladolid, the Irish at Salamanca and the Scots at Alcalá. In Geddes' rejoinder to this, there appears the first hint of what eventually happened—the transfer of the Scots College from Madrid to Valladolid: "the Scotch were to petition their being placed at Valladolid, as a cheaper place than

27. *Ibid.*, 19/10.

28. *Ibid.*, 19/8.

29. *Columba House S-P.*

30. Lesly died, aged about 80, at Courtrai on 6th September 1779.

31. College archives 19/15.

Alcalá and more adapted to the Constitution of the Natives of a northern Climate."³² Though somewhat disconcerted by the answers he had received, the ambassador gave Geddes a passport (made out for "*Dn. Juan Geddes, Rector del Colegio de Escoceses de Alcalá, con dos maestros para el mismo*")³³ and a letter of introduction to the Marquis of Grimaldo who was first secretary of state at the time. Since he had been told that there would be a rector and two masters going to Madrid, the ambassador insisted that Geddes take sufficient money to pay for the journeys of three travellers (500 *pesos*, equivalent to 7,500 *reals* or £83.6.6d); so, what Geddes had left when he got to Madrid he was able to use for his maintenance there.

He left London on 7th March and, after crossing from Dover to Calais ("the wind being almost contrary and very boisterous"),³⁴ he hired a horse to St. Omer where he spent a night as a guest in the English College there. He stopped at the Scots College in Douai where, by good fortune, Principal Grant was able to give him a copy of the original charter of foundation of the Madrid college, which he could study, thus preparing himself for his mission in the Spanish capital. On 14th March he was at the Scots College in Paris where he wanted to gain the superiors' confidence because he had heard that they felt slighted that a priest educated in Paris was not being sent to Valladolid, especially as a former student of Rome (Robert Grant) had been appointed principal at Douai. Principal Gordon in Paris had been acting as an enthusiastic mediator between Scotland and Perry, encouraging the latter in his holding operation, sending to Scotland copies of Perry's letters imploring that a Scots agent be sent to Madrid, and passing on to Perry what news he had of the moves to appoint an agent.³⁵ To show that he had no prejudice against Paris, Geddes asked if they would be willing, at the appropriate moment, to send him the two masters he would need. The principal promised that at least he would send John Gordon, his nephew and still a student, and Geddes accepted this offer, though with misgivings since he had been advised that Henry Innes was a much better prospect.

He set out from Paris on 17th March, armed with a letter of introduction from Principal Gordon³⁶ and a French passport signed by Louis XV.³⁷ Travelling by Orleans, Tours, Poitiers, Angoulême,

32. *Memoirs*, no. 29. At a later stage in the *Memoirs* (no. 45), Geddes simply says that Valladolid "had been represented to their [i. e., the Scottish clergy's] Bishops as the properest place for it [the College]."

33. College archives 19/17.

34. *Memoirs*, no. 32.

35. College archives 19/1-4.7.13.21.23.

36. *Ibid.*, 19/20.

37. *Ibid.*, 19/19. On the back of this document, Geddes has left to posterity the following subtraction:

$$\begin{array}{r} 20,482.7 \\ 13,000.0 \\ \hline 6,482.7 \end{array}$$

Bordeaux and Bayonne, he reached Pamplona on 4th April, from there being able to announce to Perry that "I got over the Pyrenees yesterday much more easily than I had imagined and arrived here this day about noon. I have already got a Companion to go with me in a chaise, we have made our bargain and tomorrow we set out. Hence I believe it will be Good Friday before I can throw myself into your Arms."³⁸

In fact, it was Holy Saturday, 14th April 1770, before he reached journey's end. In accordance with a suggestion which Perry had made in a letter to Paris that Geddes had seen, he made for the "Fonda de San Sebastián", but he did not have to wait there long before Perry arrived and conducted Geddes to private lodgings that he had taken for him.³⁹ The journey had lasted exactly two months. During it, Geddes had been careful to disclose his destination and purpose only to those who had to know, and had tried, in the places he had passed through, to avoid, as much as possible, meeting his acquaintances, since their curiosity would only have been aroused. "The Reason for this Secrecy was lest the Jesuites, who had shown themselves so averse from the Scotch Clergy's getting Possession of the College at Douai, or the Irish, who were so much interested in his not succeeding, might not learn what he was going about, nor have it in their Power to throw obstacles in his way."⁴⁰ Principal Gordon in Paris had even expressed fears of a kidnapping attempt.

38. *Ibid.*, 19/22.

39. The address was: Calle de las Huertas, no. 5, room 3.

40. *Memoirs*, no. 35.