

## John Geddes: Bishop of Morocco

Bishop Grant, vicar apostolic of the Lowland District, died at the beginning of December 1778 and Hay, his coadjutor, automatically succeeded him. Not many months later, he was putting his thoughts into a letter addressed to his friend in Valladolid. "I hope it will be disapproved by none that I wish to divide my Charge with some other ... you may easily conjecture upon whom my choice will fall; besides a person properly qualified, it will certainly be of the highest consequence that he be one with whom I hope to be upon the most friendly footing and have an entire confidence in him and he in me. The one I have in view I am pretty certain is also the one in whom the wishes of all our Brethren will concur... I have communicated these things to you, not by way of asking your advice, because in this case I don't think I shall pay much regard to it..."<sup>1</sup> Geddes replied to his friend, begging not to be removed from Valladolid at least for two or three years, since he had so many irons at present in the fire; if, in the meantime, he cared to choose someone else as his coadjutor, nothing would please him more. He would, however, accept Hay's decision.<sup>2</sup>

Peter Grant wrote from Rome on 30th June that he had just heard the news that no doubt Geddes would already know, that he was the unanimous choice of the Scottish mission to be Hay's coadjutor; Grant added that it would be more convenient to have the consecration in Spain before returning to Scotland.<sup>3</sup> In August, after meeting the senior missionaries at Scalan, Hay wrote again to Geddes, saying that the general opinion among the clergy coincided with his own choice but that he had no objection to his remaining on in Spain for another year or so in order to complete his business there.<sup>4</sup> To Hay's suggestion that, nevertheless, he have himself

---

1. 21st May 1779. (*Scotichronicon*, p. 175.)

2. 28th June 1779 (Columba House 6-I.)

3. College archives 52/2/36.

4. *Scotichronicon*, pp. 177-178.

consecrated soon, Geddes demurred, since a bishop in Spain had to be encumbered with chaplains, pages and so on; he wanted to remain free of that kind of thing for as long as possible, but felt that, as a bishop-elect, he would have much of the standing of a consecrated bishop.<sup>5</sup> From Grant in Rome, Geddes heard that Pope Pius VI had, on 19th September, confirmed his nomination by the cardinals of Propaganda; the formal bulls nominating him Bishop of Morocco *in partibus infidelium* and coadjutor to Bishop Hay were issued on 30th September.<sup>6</sup>

Angus McGillivray, a boy who had been less than two years in the college, died in June 1779 and, since nothing had been explicitly settled between Geddes and the parish of San Esteban regarding funerals, "the Body was kept one Night in the College (the Collegians watching by turns), and was carried early in the morning to the Church [of San Esteban] in private. The Curate and his two Assistants performed the funeral Service, the English and Scotch being present."<sup>7</sup>

That same month, Charles III, after his offers to mediate between Britain on the one hand and France and the American colonies on the other had been contemptuously spurned by London, declared war on Britain. (Charles had hoped that, in the course of mediation, Britain would return Gibraltar peacefully.) This state of hostilities had little, if any, direct effect on the college. The ports were, of course, in a different category from the interior of the country and it has already been noted that Geddes' friend, Arthur Gordon, was sent inland, away from Cadiz. Similarly, sea communications between the two countries were disrupted and four new students who arrived in Valladolid in February 1780 (they included Alexander Cameron, who was eventually to follow his uncle of the same name and the master, John Gordon, as rector of the college) set off from Edinburgh in a Portuguese ship bound for Oporto.<sup>8</sup> They were eleven weeks at sea and finally came ashore at Vigo, from where they made their way to Oporto, arriving there on 20th January, "very sprightly yet very innocent."<sup>9</sup> The agent who met them had to buy new shoes for two of them. He obtained passports from the Spanish consul to allow them to be admitted to

5. 8th November 1779. (Columba House 6-I.) In the same letter, he mentions the hope he had and which was not to be realised, of establishing an academy for about fifty Spanish boys of noble families.

6. College archives 23/9 and 52/2/37. The same letter mentioned that, to succeed John Macdonald, vicar apostolic of the Highland District, who had died four months previously, the choice of Alexander Macdonald, missionary at Barra, had also been confirmed, despite some last-minute efforts to have a namesake of his, the priest who had felt unable to go to Spain in 1769, chosen in his place.

7. *Memoirs*, p. 267.

8. John Thomson, Edinburgh, to Geddes, 25th October 1779. (College archives 51/1/10.)

9. Thomas Delany, Oporto (he was a professor of Greek), to Geddes, 31st January 1780. (*Ibid.*, 51/5/7.)

Spain and then forwarded them to Braganza *en route* for Valladolid, where they arrived on 11th February.

By now, Geddes was in a more sanguine mood regarding the community, or at least expressed himself so. The students "are certainly content and, I venture to say, they have reason to be so: we have got rid of those who gave us any Trouble. For almost this Twelvemonth past, I do not remember to have heard a disagreeable Word in the House, which I am the more thankful for, as I am sensible that, when that Spirit of Peace is once got established in a House, it may easily be long preserved, provided Care be taken to dismiss those who may begin to disturb it, without Delay."<sup>10</sup>

Alexander Macdonald, soon after his consecration at Scalán on 12th March 1780 by Bishop Hay (the only bishop in Scotland at that time), wrote to Valladolid: "I am pleased to hear that you are highly satisfied with your students at present, because I was greatly surprized at the so many miscarriages there hitherto."<sup>11</sup> Later that year Geddes commented, "We have now twelve Students, really excellent Boys, with whom I am so well pleased, that I am truly sorry to leave them."<sup>12</sup>

At the time of the arrival of the four students from Oporto, Geddes was in Madrid. He went there in December 1779 and did not return to the college until the following March. While in the capital he secured for himself from the Spanish court an annual pension for life of £100, payable from the revenues of the bishopric of Cuenca.<sup>13</sup> He was absent from Valladolid on two other occasions shortly afterwards: at the end of April, he was back in Madrid, where he met Sir John Dalrymple, the Scottish advocate and judge;<sup>14</sup> and at the end of July, he was at the palace of San Ildefonso in La Granja, near Segovia.<sup>15</sup>

During the months prior to his consecration, Geddes was involved in an unseemly and somewhat farcical row with the clergy of the church of San Esteban, next door to the college, and the Bishop of Valladolid. The latter was no longer Don Manuel Rubin de Celis, who had by this time been made Bishop of Cartagena,<sup>16</sup> but Don Antonio Joaquín de Soria, who had been Inquisitor of the Valladolid

10. To Peter Grant, Rome, 21st September 1779. (Columba House 6-I.)

11. 21st March 1780. (College archives 51/6/8.)

12. To Peter Grant, Rome, 2nd September 1780. (Columba House 6-K.)

13. He had hoped that the pension would be given to the Scottish mission in general, and not to himself personally, but this was impossible. (Geddes to Peter Grant, Rome, 2nd September 1780. *Ibid.*, 6-K.) In addition, Peter Grant informed him that Propaganda was to give him 100 Roman crowns (about £25) p.a., the usual allowance for a coadjutor bishop. (1st June 1780. College archives 52/2/41.)

14. Cf. college archives 51/2/82.

15. *The Innes Review*, vol. XVIII (1967), p. 45.

16. At Cartagena, he had a benefice of £13,000—£14,000 p.a. (Geddes to Bishop Hay, 15th March 1773. Columba House 6-B.)

Tribunal. The subject of the dispute was the contents of the reliquary in the college. It has already been noted that, since the *cédula* of 1771 had made over the reliquary to the Scots but had said nothing about the many relics it contained, the community had been allowed admittance to the reliquary in 1772, pending a decision about the relics and only on condition that Geddes "signed for" them. There had been trouble in 1775 when the priest of San Esteban had come to the college to try to get possession of the relics; although Geddes had refused to hand them over, he had, nevertheless, under protest, handed over the key which was kept by the bishop until, over a year later, the Extraordinary Council to whom Geddes had appealed decreed, somewhat ambiguously, that "the Relicks should remain on the Altar of the Scotch College;"<sup>17</sup> at that, the bishop returned the reliquary key to Geddes.

The row in 1780 was to prove much more serious and bitter. On the Wednesday of Holy Week, Geddes was asked if he would lend some of the relics to adorn the altar of repose in San Esteban. When he refused, the bishop was brought into the quarrel and he sent a notary to the college to demand the key of the reliquary. Again Geddes refused, despite threats that the door would be broken open. Geddes and Gordon went that afternoon to the episcopal palace and had a painful meeting with the bishop, "who seemed to be a good deal displeas'd ... and becoming still more warm, said that he would go and make the reliquary be broken open; that Mr. Geddes thought something of himself; but that he would let him know that he treated with the Bishop of Valladolid, with more to that purpose. Mr. Geddes, by God's help, kept himself..."<sup>18</sup> They finally agreed on a compromise—that the relics would be given on loan for a few days. Thirteen or fourteen relics were borrowed, on a written and signed promise that they would be returned on Holy Saturday. They were not, of course; nor were they during the following week despite written reminders from Geddes. He had no alternative but to appeal again to the Extraordinary Council and, with Campomanes' help, he obtained a declaration in his favour in July. But, in the meantime, the parish priest and major-domo of San Esteban had started a lawsuit in the local courts to be given possession of all the relics. When the court was informed of the decree of the Extraordinary Council, it gave judgment, with costs, against the appellants,<sup>19</sup> who finally returned the relics on 18th September but with some of the seals deliberately broken and with a great show of animosity towards Geddes and accusations against him of hypocrisy and of falsehoods. The major-domo then locked the reliquary door and removed the key. The bishop intervened, demanding that all present themselves before him. "Highly indignant, he spoke to the rector as if he were a

17. College archives 19/127; and *Memoirs*, no. 292.

18. *Memoirs*, nos. 295-296.

19. College archives 19/128-139; and *Memoirs*, nos. 290-304.

dreadful criminal and allowed the others to treat him like a swindler, taking any number of liberties and in a manner and tone of voice that it is impossible to describe."<sup>20</sup> The next day, the bishop was somewhat apologetic but Geddes went back to the civil authorities and, with their aid, eventually had the key restored to him on 24th October. The parish priest and the major-domo afterwards repented of their treatment of Geddes. Some time later, the former was deprived of his benefice by the bishop and lodged in a religious house, suspected of being insane. In his misfortune, the only friend he had was the rector of the college, who also did what he could to help the family of the major-domo when, in 1789, that official committed suicide by cutting his throat.<sup>21</sup> It was through the rector's influence, in fact, that the major-domo's son-in-law was appointed to the chair of experimental philosophy in the University of Valladolid.<sup>22</sup>

Since very soon after hearing, in the summer of 1779, that he would have to leave Valladolid, Geddes had been considering the choice of his successor. The obvious person was the vice-rector but, writing to the latter's cousin, Peter Grant, he confessed:

"Our Friend Mr. Gordon has become so scrupulous that, notwithstanding his other good Qualities, I am afraid he will never be fit to be Rector... I am afraid the Distemper is constitutive and will not consequently be easily cured... I have done all I could to get this disagreeable Circumstance concealed, but now I find it had been discovered by several Persons here and B. Hay has learned it from our young Missionaries who have gone home within this Twelvemonth."<sup>23</sup> And to Hay, he wrote:

"Had you known him sufficiently, I am sure you would never have sent him hither, because an irresolute confused Person is little fit to direct and form young Missionaries... on one Occasion he signified that Mr. Alex<sup>r</sup> Cameron, his old Companion, would be the Person most agreeable to him. Mr. Macdonald tells me that the Students likewise, Highlanders and Lowlanders, have been expressing among themselves their Wishes that the same Mr. Cameron may come, in case I be called home."<sup>24</sup>

Cameron was duly nominated in May 1780 but, in spite of several pleas from Geddes that he should come out at once to learn the rector's duties, he did not arrive until 24th September, in the midst of all the upset about the relics. Having sailed from Glasgow on 17th August in a Portuguese vessel, he had landed near Ponte-

20. College archives 19/139: an account of the quarrel, written in 1785, probably by Alexander Cameron I; also *ibid.*, 39/45: Geddes' drafts of letters of September and October 1780.

21. *Ibid.*, 19/139.

22. Alexander Cameron I to Geddes, 29th July 1790. (Columba House 7-R.)

23. 25th July 1779. (*Ibid.*, 6-I.)

24. 27th July 1779. (*Ibid.*, 6-I.)

vedra in north-west Spain, had visited Compostela and then made his way to Valladolid by mule, finding the inns *en route* not at all to his taste: "ill-lighted, ill-floored and bad chairs, worse tables, no windows, no curtains to the beds."<sup>25</sup>

He further displeased Geddes by declining an invitation to accompany him on his journey to Madrid or even on his round of farewell visits in Valladolid. Geddes had thought that these would have been good opportunities to introduce his successor to his friends and patrons, but Cameron was not keen to play the role of "an awkward Pupil" being taken around by the "most beloved man in the world."<sup>26</sup>

Cameron was the bearer of the amendments proposed by Bishops Hay and Macdonald to the book of rules submitted by Geddes for their approval.<sup>27</sup> The bishops were fairly critical on several heads. In general, they considered that Geddes' composition was too vague in many respects. In place of the long reasoned introduction, they wanted only a few lines stating the necessity of having rules and of observing them. Likewise, the chapter on discipline in general had to be less exhortatory and must insist on obedience, the alternative being expulsion; while the chapter on piety they found far too indefinite. It had to be clearly stated that there was, to be a half-hour's meditation each day, thirty minutes' spiritual reading, and a visit to the Blessed Sacrament; and that all had to be present at the daily community Mass and to go to confession and Holy Communion at least once a fortnight.

The bishops did not quarrel with Geddes' rule that the "long vacancy" should last from mid-August until 1st October,<sup>28</sup> but, whereas he had added that, during those weeks, they might gainfully but voluntarily apply themselves to "some amusing, yet useful Branch of Learning,"<sup>29</sup> the bishops thought that the masters should be often with the students so that they could keep them in mind of the subjects they had studied during the previous year.

Two years after he succeeded Geddes, Cameron was to tell Bishop Hay that some of the students had at first been very critical of the amended version of the rules,<sup>30</sup> and there is little doubt that the criticism arose because of the amendments to the seventh chapter, dealing with particular points of discipline. Here, the régime was made more severe in more ways than one; for example, where Geddes had forbidden students to enter each other's rooms except to visit the sick or with the rector's permission, to be renewed

25. Cameron's notes during the journey. (Ibid., 6-K.)

26. Alexander Cameron I to Geddes, 26th March 1781. (Ibid., 6-L.)

27. These amendments, in tattered condition, are in the college archives, 49/33.

28. In Cameron's time, this was changed to the period from 29th September to 29th October.

29. Chap. VI, para. 13.

30. 6th January 1782. (Columba House 6-N.)

at least each month,<sup>31</sup> the bishops forbade the practice except with express permission;<sup>32</sup> where Geddes had allowed the younger students to go out in threes and the older ones in pairs,<sup>33</sup> the bishops laid down that all had to go out together, the only exceptions being those in Holy Orders or soon to leave the college, who might go in threes;<sup>34</sup> and where Geddes had allowed the boys to receive students of the English College in their rooms without permission and others with permission, as well as to visit people's homes (with his permission),<sup>35</sup> the bishops enacted that the students were not to keep company with seculars or allow them in their rooms (and if, in exceptional cases, a student received an invitation from a family in the town, permission might be granted for the visit, provided one of the superiors accompanied him).<sup>36</sup>

Geddes formally handed over to Cameron on 1st November 1780 and left for Madrid. Having been offered the use of the church of the Salesian convent of the Visitation ("Las Salesas Reales")<sup>37</sup> through the good offices of Mother Campbell, who had been superior of the community, he was ordained a bishop there on St. Andrew's day along with two others (the Bishops of Almeria and Seo de Urgel) by D. Francisco Lorenzana, Archbishop of Toledo. It was the custom for a nobleman to act as patron for a new bishop on these occasions and to help out with expenses. Geddes had asked the Duke of Alba (whose property in Valladolid it had originally been planned to buy) to do him the honour but he regretted his inability.<sup>38</sup> Instead,

"the Duke of Hizar, one of the finest Grandees of Arragon [he was also heir apparent to the Count of Aranda] is to be Godfather, as it is called, to your Friend on this Occasion, in his own Name or in that of his Brother-in-law, the Count of Montijo, who is with the King at the Escorial. Both of them are very exemplary Noblemen and the Countess of Montijo is a favourite Disciple of our Friend, Mrs. Campbell's."<sup>39</sup>

After the ceremony, he dined in the duke's house, receiving from him a ring and pectoral cross. A few days later, on 4th December, the duke presented him in audience to Charles III. This was the

31. Chap. VII, para. 5.

32. Chap. VII, no. 2.

33. Chap. VII, para. 7.

34. Chap. VII, no. 7. In cases of necessity, the minimum was to be two students accompanied by one of the masters (chap. VII, no. 5).

35. Chap. VII, para. 12 and para. 23.

36. Chap. VII, no. 6. In addition to Geddes' rules and the bishops' amendments, three other rule books, undated but of the period shortly after 1780, are in the college archives (49/29-31). They follow substantially the Geddes rules as amended, but with some additions, variations and extra prohibitions. One of the books is in Cameron's hand, another in John Gordon's, but amended by Cameron.

37. It is a large church, built 1750-58, in a richly ornamented baroque style. In it, is the tomb of Ferdinand VI (d. 1759). It is now the parish church of S. Barbara.

38. Duke of Alba and Berwick, Paris, to Geddes, 14th January 1780. (College archives 51/8/17.)

39. Geddes to Bishop Hay, 10th November 1780. (Columba House 6-K.)

first time that Geddes had been received by the king, although the latter was well acquainted with him and with his business. Indeed, as Geddes himself relates, he had been told by the Minister of Finance two years previously that His Majesty "knows of you very well, and has spoken of you to me several Times; and you may be assured he wishes well to you."<sup>40</sup> The Archbishop of Toledo also treated him with consideration; not only had he offered to perform the ordination and thus remove Geddes' anxiety on that score, but he had the new bishop at his table several times and made him a present of a topaz ring which he himself had long worn.<sup>41</sup>

Geddes left Madrid on 18th December, got back to Valladolid a few days before Christmas and remained in the college for a couple of months, "settling accounts and doing other such things."<sup>42</sup> He left Valladolid on 23rd February 1781, stayed a day in Palencia and another in Burgos, finding the bishops of both cities very civil, and then went to Bilbao, where he spent a week as the guest of Mr. Lynch-Killikelly, partner in the firm of Lynch, Killikelly and Morony. Instead of going home by ship (which was considered too dangerous at that time), he continued by land, calling at Loyola. He was accompanied from Bilbao to the frontier by his Irish friends, Messrs. Lynch-Killikelly and Morony, who paid all the expenses.<sup>43</sup> He then took a chaise, alone, from Bayonne to Paris, where he spent ten days. At Douai, he ordained two of the Scots students to the diaconate.<sup>44</sup> He was in London for seventeen days in May before journeying north to Edinburgh.

It would be superfluous to attempt a long assessment of John Geddes' work in Spain. He succeeded brilliantly in achieving what he was sent to do: despite the many instances of obstruction and dilatoriness with which he had to contend, he recovered all the property of the college and established the community at Valladolid in conditions much superior to anything it had had at Madrid. As the second founder of the college, he therefore enjoyed unqualified success.

As its first rector in Valladolid, one may perhaps have reservations. It is true that the material that he was sent at first was very unsuitable; his assistant turned out to be mentally unbalanced and some of the students had probably, before their arrival, lost any desire for the priesthood that they might once have had. Statistics can be used to prove all manner of conclusions but, for what

40. *Memoirs*, no. 222.

41. Geddes to Peter Grant, Rome, 11th December 1780. (Columba House 6-K.)

42. *The Innas Review*, vol. XVIII (1967), p. 45.

43. "I was well pleased to leave Spain on very good Terms with all the Irish there that I had Occasion to treat with: even they who were in the Beginning our greatest Antagonists have this long Time shown themselves our Friends." (Geddes to Peter Grant, Rome, 29th April 1781. Columba House 6-L.)

44. *Viz.*, James Young and Donald Macdonald.



the figures are worth, nine of the fifteen students who formed the community in 1771 later left without being ordained; but, of the seventeen others who came later on during Geddes' tenure of office, only five left. This may only mean that, as time went on, Geddes became a better rector; it may even mean that, had he stayed on, more than five might have left.

One must also bear in mind that Geddes was criticised, not only by some of those who had been in the college and perhaps were prejudiced against him, but also by Bishop Macdonald, who gave the reasons he had for complaint. Briefly, the bishop thought that Geddes was not sufficiently strict. But, even in those days, surely a rector was not expected to be a tyrant. If Geddes had faults as a rector, they were the deficiencies of his character—humane, sensitive, mild-tempered, genial, sociable, tolerant and obliging; and therefore easy-going rather than forceful, less single-minded, less demanding, less authoritative, less orderly. On one occasion in 1783, Bishop Hay wanted to stop the boys in seminaries being given any pocket money; Geddes dissuaded him from this course by recalling their own student days together in Rome and by appealing to the greater experience he himself had. What he added might have been the ideal to which he tried to conform in Valladolid: "The secret lies in condescending without spoiling and in curbing without causing discontent, which are pernicious in the highest degree to piety and learning."<sup>45</sup>

Geddes is such an attractive personality and achieved so much in Spain, but always *suaviter in modo*, that it is sympathy rather than blame that his misfortunes evince. If it is a compliment to make the remark, his ideas and the manner in which he carried them out would not look at all out of place in the seminaries of today.

\* \* \*

Following his ten years in Spain, John Geddes was a bishop for twenty years. Until 1793 he was based on Edinburgh where, in addition to his work as procurator and official correspondent for the whole Scottish mission, he was priest in charge of the Edinburgh mission and had to make occasional trips to visit the tiny numbers of Catholics in Glasgow and in the southern counties of Scotland. For the first ten years, he carried out these duties unassisted. Even so, he found time to acquire the friendship of many of the leading (and, naturally, non-Catholic) citizens of the capital, frequently meeting them on both cultural and also social occasions. Obviously Geddes enjoyed having these friendships but he did a great deal of good, gaining the respect and affection of many who, hitherto,

45. 5th February 1783. (*Scotichronicon*, p. 224).

had been at best indifferent to the Catholic Church, and so helping to break down barriers of ignorance and bigotry. Hay, of course, did not agree with such conduct and he frequently complained to Geddes that, not only did such contacts with the world ill-become a clergyman, but that his work was suffering—letters not answered, mistakes made in the accounts, duties not properly carried out, and so on. There may also be an element of truth in the criticism that Geddes was inclined to be something of a snob; writing to Hay on one occasion regarding the acceptance in seminaries of boys who were of humble origin (as he himself was), he asserted that experience had taught him that such boys frequently had disadvantages, such as “a littleness of mind, a timidity of temper, a vulgarity of sentiment, and too often the grossness of vice.”<sup>46</sup>

Bishop Geddes' Edinburgh friendships led to his meeting Robert Burns at a supper party. Geddes was sufficiently impressed by the abilities of “an excellent poet started up in Ayrshire” to have the Scots Colleges at Valladolid, Douai and Paris, as well as the monasteries at Ratisbon and Würzburg, put on the subscription list for the first Edinburgh edition of the poet's works (1787), while Burns, who had been much attracted by the bishop, borrowed Geddes' own copy and, in his own hand, transcribed another thirteen poems on the flyleaves.<sup>47</sup> The copy of the Edinburgh edition which Geddes bought for the college in Valladolid is still in the library there,<sup>48</sup> with the inscription, by Geddes, on the flyleaf: “For the Scotch College at Valladolid.”

Geddes had a great liking for walking. He found it healthy, cheap and enjoyable since not only did it give him time for thought and prayer but he could stop whenever he wished to see anything that caught his attention. The missionary tours which he undertook were therefore usually done on foot. Hay tended to complain that his coadjutor spent too much time on these tours, especially as the numbers of Catholics whom he encountered were very small indeed. In June and July of 1790, he made his longest walk—all the way from Glasgow to the Orkneys (where he visited two ladies whom he had converted to the faith in Edinburgh) and then back to Scalán, a total of between five and six hundred miles.

Late in the following year, he undertook a visitation of the colleges at Douai and Paris. Both colleges were in serious danger from the worsening political conditions in France; moreover, relations between the Paris college and the Scottish mission were most unsatisfactory, Principal Gordon refusing to acknowledge any dependence on the latter.

46. 21st March 1787. (Ibid., p. 268.)

47. James Darragh, art. “The Geddes Burns”, *St. Peter's College Magazine*, Cardross, vol. XVIII, no. 71 (1948), pp. 123-131.

48. College library M. N. 2.15.

When he got back to Edinburgh in the early summer of 1792, Geddes could no longer ignore the "rheumatism" which he had first noticed some years previously but which was now becoming unmistakably worse. By November of that year, he was finding difficulty in saying Mass and in writing. Paul Macpherson, who had come to assist him at Edinburgh in 1791, was doing his correspondence. In the following July (1793), Hay, who had been living at Scalan, and Geddes changed places, in the hope that the country air and the peacefulness of Glenlivet might prove beneficial, but the stiffness in his limbs became inexorably worse. He could hardly hold a spoon or a handkerchief, he needed assistance to dress, and turning the pages of a breviary became an almost impossible task. He had vested on 29th September (or 5th/6th October?) and had given a short talk to the people before beginning Mass (as the custom was) when he felt so weak that it was impossible for him to continue. He never offered Mass again.

Dreading the damp and cold of winter in Scalan, he was moved to Aberdeen at the end of October and, although at first he managed downstairs occasionally, he was latterly completely bedridden. He was staying in the priest's house, cared for by his nephew, John Gordon, who had been a student at Valladolid from 1774 to 1778 and who had been ordained in Edinburgh by him in 1784—the only priest Geddes ordained. John Gordon's brother, Charles, came to the house in June 1794 and, after ordination the following summer, stayed on to assist his elder brother in his work in the Aberdeen mission and in looking after their uncle.

Geddes' personal finances were in a bad state. When he arrived in Aberdeen in 1793, he had debts of £900 which he was unable to meet, due, to some extent at least, to the fact that his pension from the Spanish court was several years in arrears.<sup>49</sup> He signed a deed making over all his property and income to Hay, who took upon himself his coadjutor's debts and made him an annual allowance of £24. At the time of his death, Geddes' debts had been reduced to £150 since some, but not all, of the arrears of his Spanish pension had been paid.

At first in Aberdeen, he seemed to be holding his own; he had a good appetite (and, in fact, due to enforced inactivity, became quite stout). His mind remained clear until the end, but he suffered increasingly severe pain and gradually the paralysis spread throughout his body, his appetite disappeared and even speech became nearly impossible.

---

49. In the postscript of a letter to Valladolid, dated 20th October 1790, the college's administrator in Madrid wrote: "I have had a letter from the Most Illustrious Geddes by the latest post. He complains that I have not answered several letters but even more of the lack of money, since the Bishop of Cuenca... owes more than three years and does not pay; nevertheless, I shall send him 18,000 *reals* tomorrow." (College archives 60/3/96.)

He died at 5 o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, 11th February 1799, aged 64. He was buried the following Friday in the little Aberdeen churchyard of Our Lady of the Snows,<sup>50</sup> which today is adjoined by the grounds of Crombie and Johnston Halls of Residence of the University of Aberdeen, opposite and a few yards south of King's College. His earthly remains share a grave with those of Bishop Grant (whose death in 1778 led to his becoming a bishop), his two nephews, John and Charles Gordon, and another priest, Charles Fraser. May his noble soul rest in peace.

---

50. Cf. University Library, King's College, Aberdeen, ref. 2387, box V.