

JOHN BARCLAY OF CRUDEN.

John Barclay, the friend of Baillie Alexander Skene, of Newtyle, and translator of Arthur Johnston's Latin Epigrams on the Royal Burghs of Scotland, was born in the year 1652. He was a descendant of the Barclays of Towie; was educated at King's College; began his ministerial career as parson of Monquhitter, from whence he was translated in 1678, while in his twenty-eighth year, to the parish of Cruden. Shortly after his settlement there, he began to be reputed as a bit of a poet, two poems of his having been published with the Rev. John Menzies' "Sermon on the Death of Sir Alex. Fraser of Doores", in 1681. This same year his troubles began by the enforcement of the Test Act, passed by the Estates at Edinburgh in July. By this Act, which, along with the abolition of the forty-shillings franchise, was part of a series of movements by the king to break the Presbyterian power in Scotland, all persons in authority, whether civil, ecclesiastical, or military, were bound to assert the king's supremacy, their renunciation of the covenant, their affirmation of the doctrine of passive obedience, and their disclaiming any intention to alter the civil or ecclesiastical establishments. This vile Act was resisted by most of the Presbyterians, and was also strongly objected to by many of the Episcopal clergy themselves, as many as seventy of the latter, according to Burnet, choosing rather to resign their livings than swear away their consciences and their liberties. Many of the more patriotic spirits left the country and took refuge on the Continent, and the enforcement of the Act continued for years the main weapon of the persecutors. Barclay, among many others, scrupled about

taking the Test, and was, as a matter of course, suspended; but having seen sufficient reasons for swallowing the pill, he conformed, and was next year reinstated in his kirk. He is said to have written a volume of "Poems and Spiritual Songs", which we have never seen. In 1685, his translation of Johnston's Epigrams appeared in his friend Skene's "Succinct Survey of the Famous City of Aberdeen", but it was not till 1689 that he gave to the world the poem, by virtue of which he claims our notice among the bards of Bon-Accord. That work, which, from a book-hunter's point of view is extremely valuable, because extremely rare, is a thin, small quarto production of the Aberdeen press, entitled "A Description of the Roman Catholick Church, Wherein the Pretensions of its Head, the Manners of his Court, the Principles and Doctrines, the Worship and Service, the Religious Orders and Houses, the Designs and Practices of that Church, are represented in a Vision. By John Barclay, Minister at Cruden. Written in the year 1679. Printed in the year 1689". It is dedicated to "John, Earle of Erroll, Lord Hay and Slains, Great Constable of Scotland, and Ladie Anna, Countess of Erroll". It was reprinted at Edinburgh in 1741, but the reprint is as rarely to be met with now as is the original. In an epistle to the reader, the author ends thus:—"If there be anything in it that may be offensive to the severest modestie, I shall be ready (upon conviction) to acknowledge my faultiness therein, but for my little extravagancies that may be found here I hope thy censure will be gentle, for if any sort of men have reason to expect some charitable allowance for escapes, it can hardly be deny'd to a dreaming poet." The poem opens thus:—

I find I'm haunted with a busie mind,  
 Swift as the Clouds, unstable as the Wind,  
 It sometimes gets it wings and soars aloft,  
 Anon it steeps into delights more soft,  
 It's sometimes serious, and it's sometimes vain,  
 Sometimes its thoughts do please, and sometimes pain;  
 On while they'r dark, and then they clear again;  
 Sometimes they'r cheerfull, sometimes they are sad;  
 They'r sometimes good, and often they e bad;  
 Sometimes my self, my self's their only heam,  
 Sometimes, they grasp at more than Caesar's claim:

They bring forth Joy, they nowrish fear,  
 They Towers into the Air do rear,  
 All things do seem within their Sphear :  
     O what a wandering thing's the Mind !  
     What contrares are there combin'd !  
     How shal't be held, or where confin'd ?  
     O what a Web's a busie Thought !  
     Where is it made ? whence is it brought !  
     How is it warpt ? how is it wrought ?

## ON RELIGION.

Religion (thought I) is the way to Rest,  
 Religion is the choise that's surely best,  
     It raiseth no commotions to infest,  
 It stills the noise of Passions and of Rage,  
 And turbulent Affections doth asswage.  
     It cooleth youth, it's comforts warm old-age :  
     But lo again my thoughts did range,  
 This lovely thing it's shape did seem to change,  
 In many Formes it did to me appear,  
 And many various Garbs I saw it wear,  
 I saw it fight in Fields, and making Warres,  
 I heard it scold in Schools, and raising Jarres :  
 A thousand different parties cry'd lo here  
 Thou'lt find the thing, should be to thee most dear ;  
     Whom shall I hear ? Where shall I go ?  
     What shall I chuse ? What shall I do ?  
     I'm puzled and amazed too.  
 I love Religion and I would her serve,  
 But while I seek Her, fear from Her to swerve.

## THE RECLUSE VIEW OF LIFE.

It's easy when a man's in solitude,  
 To slight the gaudy world, to conclude  
 That all its pomps and Riches are but lies,  
 An heap of gilded worthless vanities ;  
 And to contemn the flatt'ring breath of fame,  
 The foolish whistlings of an honour'd name,  
 And hate that wild ambition, which with force  
 Doth ride, and spur us, like unruly horse ;  
 And these imperious lusts, which often cause  
 Men break all bonds, and trample on all Lawes ;  
     But things we at a distance can despise,  
     When they approach us, do bewitch our eyes,  
     And charm our hearts ; so strong's the snare ;  
     So weak our mind, so faint our care,  
     So soon our resolutions do impair,  
 That were intangled e're we are aware.

After cogitating in the manner of the above, the poet falls asleep, and very soon finds himself among

Roving Fancies, Horrid Sights,  
Dismall Places, Uncouth Wights,  
Which put me in a wondrous plight.

The Roman Catholic Church, personified as a beautiful woman, appears to him, and undertakes to show him all the workings of that organisation, as per title page of the poem. We care not to follow him through all, but will give a few examples of his broad homely style of viewing and expressing things:—

HIS INTERVIEW WITH THE POPE.

At last I modestly did say, Great Sir,  
If Greater Titles I do not bestow  
On you, I hope your Clemencie you'l show,  
For that's the greatest title that I know

Due unto men below:

Fellow (said he), thou should have called me  
*A God on Earth*, for no less will I be;  
*I am Christ's Vicar*, and who dare say less  
To me, then, *May it please your Holiness?*  
I as a wretched Heretick should thee use;  
But Ignorance shall thee this once excuse.

I would I were away (thought I);  
I fear hee'l force to blaspheme, or dy.  
I spoke no more, untill he gave commaund,  
And bids me boldly propose my demand:  
For now I'm in my *Sacred Chair* (said he),  
All's *Oracles* that now does flow from me:  
The thing (said I) which I would gladly know,  
Is, Who did this great power on you bestow?  
Some will deny't, and some perhaps will flout it,  
And how shall I convince one who doth doubt it.  
I do not (said He) things uncertain boast  
I have convinced many to their cost  
Of my great power; But would thou know its spring:  
I from Saint Peter, he from Christ did bring  
This privilege; and did thou never read  
That Christ bid him, His sheep, His lambs go feed!  
Is not this in the Bible? Ah, said I,  
Upon that Book I dare not set mine eye,  
Lest it pervert me into Heresy:  
It's true (said He) it's dangerous for thee;  
But yet, thou sees, this text doth speak for me,  
Hear, I'll expound it now infallible.

By Sheep and Lambs all Men are understood,  
 Kings, Subjects, Churchmen, Laymen, Bad and Good;  
 To Feed them, is a word, will comprehend  
 As much as thou can think or I intend:  
 First, it imports that I must rule them all,  
 And they must Trust me, and obey my call,  
 They'r not right Sheep, if they once think they'r free  
 To question mine Infallibilitie:  
 If Emperours or Kings shall disobey  
 These ram's-horns, then, its just that I should fray;  
 Then, all their Fleeces do to me belong,  
 And though my Sheirs goe neer I do no wrong;  
 Yea, I may some not only Fleece, but Flay,  
 And what's not fit to live may justly Slay;  
 Such as I please I Wedders may create,  
 This warrants well the Clergies Celibate;  
 And, to conclude, for thou shalt not be vex't  
 With all that may be said from this on Text,  
 If any do deny the power I claim  
 I may send out my Dogs to worry them.

## WHAT THE POPE CAN DO.

I can make Saints, I can make Kings,  
 I can make Him who made all things,  
 I can give others power to make him,  
 And give to thee the privilege to take him;  
 Blood I can make of Wine, and Flesh of Bread,  
 When I have but a very few words said;  
 I squeeze the living to releive the dead;  
     I hallow all things with my words,  
     I hallow Helmets, hallow Swords,  
     I hallow Trees, I hallow Stones,  
     I hallow dry and rotten Bones.  
     I hallow Meddalls, hallow Oyle,  
     I hallow Water, hallow Soyle,  
     I hallow Salt, I hallow Cells,  
     I hallow Kirks, I hallow Bells;  
     So strong and mighty are my spells,  
     That I with very little adoe  
     Could hallow *Brothell*-Houses too.

## A PRIEST CELEBRATING MASS.

Sometimes He stood,  
 Sometimes He bow'd,  
 Now mumbled, then spoke aloud,  
 He crossed once, he crossed twice,  
 Then at a Bend, he crossed thrice ;

Uncouth were the mouths he made,  
 Uncouth were the words he said,  
 He often crienged, and he kiss't,  
 And turning next, the people bles't ;  
 He turn'd his face, he turn'd his back,  
 We understood not what he spake,  
 But saw him toss'd to every Art  
 Thus Antikly he act'd his part.

## PURGATORY.

There is fire, and there is smoake,  
 There noysome heats, and vaporus choake ;  
 There poor Souls are sadly toyled,  
 Some, in seething Caldrons boyled.  
 Some, in frying pans are broyled,  
 Some, on spits are rost alive,  
 Some, the Fiends with scourges drive,  
 Some, in streams of Brimston ly  
 There they shreek, and there they cry,  
 Thus they suffer, thus they dye,  
 They'r confined into that Cage,  
 Some, a year, and some an Age,  
 Some for many Ages space  
 Stay into that dismall place.

## A BAPTISM

When to that preaching we had listened,  
 A Child is brought him, to be Christened ;  
 Thrice did he blow into the Infant's face,  
 As if his Breath could have conveyed Grace ;  
 Some dreadful Charming words, he then did say,  
 Meaning thereby to drive the Devill away ;  
 As if the pain'd and new delivered Mother  
 Had born a Child, and ugly Devill together ;  
 With Holy Oyle the Babe he did besmear,  
 And Hallowed Garments, put on him to wear ;  
 Then Holy Salt was put into his Mouth,  
 Sure (thought I) that will breed the Child a drouth :  
 A Holy Candle's then put in his hand,  
 The use whereof I did not understand ;  
 And last of all, the priest did think it fit,  
 Gently to stroke the Child with what he spit.

## THEIR LEARNING.

My Guide, displeas'd was to see that I  
 So narrowly did into all things pry ;

Some little Touch of Learning She did find  
 I had, and therefore to divert my mind,  
 Desir'd that now I would Her Schools go view,  
 The Shops of Learning (said She) would me shew ;  
 I lyk't the motion and alledg't that She  
 No greater favour could procure to me.  
 This sight at first did give me great content  
 I thought I was into myne Element;  
 Men of Prodigious Learning, I saw there,  
 Prodigious heaps of Books lay everywhere;  
 I saw some writing Volumes (I confess),  
 Which I did judge would overload the Press;  
 Some scrap'd out lines, some rent out leaves of Books,  
 Which pleased them not (as I thought by their looks).  
 What mean't that Havock I conceived not,  
 They said *They Purged What The Fathers wrote,*  
 Because in many things, they well did see  
 Their Books inclyn'd to favour Heresie :  
 Some took Old Parchment and did write on it,  
 In Antique letters, what they judged fit,  
 I asked, What they wrote? It was (they said)  
*Grave Old Traditions, new come in their head,*  
 And by these saddled Parchments, men would see  
 These were the Doctrines of Antiquitie :  
 For whatsoe'r the present Church doth hold  
 Must be beleev'd to be very old  
 I did admire their Wit, but could not be  
 Well satisfied with their Honestie.

The above extracts will enable our readers to judge somewhat of the matter and manner of this curious old work, which, written in times when Papal tendencies were in the ascendant, had to lie beside the author for ten years, until the advent of William of Orange brought such changes about as allowed him with comparative safety to risk its publication. How it was received, we have no means of knowing, but can easily suppose that it fitted well into the outburst of public indignation which vented its venom in demolishing the Papal paraphernalia of the Chapel Royal at Holyrood, in destroying the college and library of the Jesuits, and other wanton excesses, both in Edinburgh and other places throughout Scotland. We may judge of the reaction among the populace from a scene which took place about this time in Aberdeen, a description of which is preserved in Dr. David

Laing's "Fugitive Poetry of the Sixteenth Century". The students of the Marischal College, resolving to celebrate the accession of William to the throne, organised a burlesque Pope's procession, which, in some of the scenes, puts one in mind of parts of Lyndsay's "Satire of the Three Estates". Having first written to the magistrates declaring that their design was not "tumultuary", and that they did not intend to "injure the persons or goods of any", the procession started from the college gate at four o'clock in the afternoon. First came a company of men carrying links, six abreast, then the janitor of the college, with the college mace, followed by six judges in scarlet robes. Next a band of music, consisting of four fifers; then, in succession, four priests, four Jesuits, four Popish bishops, and four cardinals, all in their robes; then a Jesuit in a richly-embroidered robe, carrying a huge cross. Last of all came the Pope, dressed in full pontificals, his triple crown on his head, his keys on his arm, and distributing pardons and indulgences as the procession moved along. On arriving at the Market Cross, the Pope takes up his position on a stage, and a dialogue ensues between him and a cardinal, setting forth the pretensions usually attributed to His Holiness, and announcing unutterable woes on all heretics. Then Father Peter, the confessor of the ex-king, enters on the scene and presents a letter, understood to convey the news of the changes which had taken place in London. On hearing this the Pope faints, and the devil comes to his assistance. All this is received with the greatest glee by the people, but the subsequent part of the programme is hailed with even greater delight. The Pope, recovering a little, begins to vomit "plots, daggers, indulgences, and the blood of the martyrs", the devil all the while holding his head. Then the devil, in doggerel rhyme, tries to comfort him, and advises him to take refuge with the French king. This the Pope objects to as derogatory to his dignity, and his Satanic majesty, losing patience with him, tries to throw him into a fire. A fair trial is, however, demanded, and His Holiness is accordingly arraigned before the judges and charged with high treason against Omnipotence. He is found guilty, and sentenced to be burned to ashes, his blood to be attainted, and his honours to be blotted out of all records. The procession is



then re-formed, the execution carried into effect, and the spectators entertained with fireworks and other divertisements. After this the Trinity bell—which belonged, it is said, to the only church in Scotland taken from the Protestants and given to the Catholics, wherein they actually had their service—was rung all night. Such was a comparatively innocent demonstration compared with what took place in other parts of Scotland. Indeed, so strong was the feeling against Roman Catholicism in 1689 in Scotland, that William had to issue a proclamation against attacks on the persons and property of its communion; so that, on the whole, we may safely infer that the parson of Cruden laid his “Vision” before a public sufficiently biased to be fully appreciative. Whatever contemporary honours may have flowed to him in his quiet northern home, he certainly did not live long to enjoy them, having died in 1691, aged about 39. His name appears as a contributor of £20 towards repairing the buildings of King’s College in 1688, which, with the reputation of having been a very eccentric divine, a good classical scholar, and, says Sir Samuel Forbes, “a very good man and a good preacher”, is about the sum total of all that has been handed down to us anent the young minister of Cruden.

The “Vision” has been described, by a very judicious critic, “as a vigorous attack upon the superstitious practices of the Church of Rome, more distinguished by sense than good poetry”. That this judgment is true, in so far as it goes, we would never for a moment deny—but we do not think it is the whole truth. For we have found in the reading of Barclay an amount of dry, pawky humour, veins of sly, quaint, caricature, broad satirical “asides”, as relishable to us now-a-days as its passages of “sense”, and compensating considerably for any lack of “good poetry” which may be brought to its charge. Judging the poem, apart from its theological or party character, we aver that it is a most curious, interesting, and witty production; and, reading between the lines, it is not a very difficult matter to paint an ideal picture of the youthful minister, at once loveable and full of those bright humorous tints which have not seldom been characteristic of the writings of the better class of the Scotch clergy. Broad and liberal in his ideas, he sees not the utility of making himself miserable over

every trifle that smells of unorthodoxy to the "unco guid". He looks on church government as a purely human institution, and, as long as human observances do not clash with what he considers the divine part of religion, he is content to let everyone think for himself. But woe to essential error when it is presented to that eye of his which, with its humorous twinkle, can split an incongruity so well; and, alas for human absurdity, which he so often annihilates with the most unlikely colloquialism or countryside proverbial saying. No doubt his poem as a whole is a very rugged and somewhat unequal performance; it is often prosaic, extravagant, tedious, and inflated; but these imperfections we are disposed both to forgive and forget for the sake of the many happy touches which unexpectedly crop up, displaying a quality of humour redolent of the Buchan air. For example, when he is shown the priests:—

Some of them Preaching in the streets did walk,  
 Some often of their Extasies did talk;  
 And some their bread by Begging only got,  
 That idle sort of life, I liked not:  
 Such lustie fellows as these are (I said)  
 Should rather by their labour earn their Bread,  
 When this I spake, She did a little loure,  
 Saying, they begged to relieve the poor,  
 Much (says She) get they; but doe little eat,  
 I know not (said I) *But they'r like their meat.*

Again, when he speaks of the regenerating effects of the Lenten fastings, the recipe runs:—

For change of heart, *prescribe them change of dish.*

And, again, when he observes a number of the faithful praying to the Virgin Mary, he observes:—

Many much themselves ore-shot,  
 They called her *Lady*, yet her Sex forgot:  
 For when they kneel'd, they gravely did accost Her,  
 First with an *Ave*, then a *Pater Noster*?

It is not always, however, what is said so much as what is suggested that makes such pithy phrases as "Squeezing the living to relieve the dead", his description of the purging of the fathers, and other such items, tell. Here, for instance, is a couple of capital lines. He is looking at the pictures, &c.,

inside a cathedral, and, coming on a Mount Calvary scene, exclaims:—

Lo ! here's the place in which my Lord was slain, -  
*Or else I'm sure He's murdered here again.*

But apart from all this, Barclay's verses give, in so far at least as our local muse is concerned, the first indications that other fields than those of godly ballads and spiritual experiences were once more to be occupied by the song spirit. The turning of the tide begins with him, and, great though the ebb had been, we will yet see that we were soon to enjoy a full flow. It is something to find, even in the crude descriptions of the "Vision," a departure, however slight, from the subjective religiosity of his immediate predecessors, and a step in the direction of the semi-satirical, which attained its full power in the Jacobite poetry of 1715. This element in our poetry had lain in abeyance since the days of Sir David Lyndsay; but, under the keen party spirit slowly developed from the religio-political movements of James II.'s reign, it was once more to let loose its pent-up power, with no small beneficial result to the poetry of our countryside.

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