

M E M O I R.

Since the religious revolution of the sixteenth century, to no man has the Catholic Church in Scotland been so much indebted as to Bishop Hay. He is pre-eminently her bishop of the last three hundred years.

He appeared at a time when the prospects of religion in this country were the most gloomy — when Catholic interests and Catholic hopes had sunk to the lowest point. At present it is difficult, if not impossible, fully to realise what was then the position of Catholics in Scotland. The systematic work of depression which had been carried on for years by the grinding operation of the penal laws, seemed to be completed by the disastrous rising in favour of the Stuarts in 1745. With their cause all the Catholic families of wealth and influence in the kingdom had identified themselves, and the result was widespread ruin.

The Catholic body was left crushed and dispirited. Many fled to seek an asylum in foreign countries; and those who still clung to their native land were, with few exceptions, stripped of everything.

In their poverty and sufferings it was difficult for them even to retain their faith. They were without churches, and almost without pastors to minister to their spiritual wants or to impart instruction; and consequently, not only individuals but many entire families fell away from their religion. In this trying crisis, the zeal, energy, and apostolic labours of a single, unpretending, but truly great prelate, contributed materially to the preservation of the faith. Indeed he may be justly said to have gathered together and consolidated the scattered fragments of the ancient Church in Scotland, for much of what she now possesses is the result of his wise and vigorous administration.

The Right Rev. Dr George Hay was born at Edinburgh, August 24, 1729. He was the only son of Mr James Hay, a non-juring Episcopalian, who had been put in irons and sentenced to banishment for his adherence to the Stuarts in 1715. From his mother he received early religious impressions, and by her was taught the practice of night and morning prayer, a circumstance to which he looked back with gratitude in later life. Being destined for the medical profession, in his sixteenth year he entered the Edinburgh University, then rising to the zenith of its fame. There he rapidly distinguished himself in his studies; and some of his fellow-students, themselves eminent, afterwards declared that had he persevered, he would have stood at the head of his profession. But his medical studies were interrupted, and finally abandoned.

The Highland army, under Prince Charles Stuart, entered Edinburgh on the 17th September 1745, and found many of the citizens secretly disposed to favour them. Mr George Lauder, Mr Hay's professor, was an enthusiast in the cause, and many of his pupils were animated by the same spirit. He was appointed chief surgeon to the Prince's army, and, in a few days, was called to attend the wounded on the field of Prestonpans. Mr Hay, who had been educated in the political principles of his family, willingly accompanied his professor, and followed the fortunes of the army in its march into England.

On its retreat, his health being broken by exposure and fatigue, he was unable to proceed

beyond Crieff, and therefore returned to Edinburgh in February 1746. As he had served not in a military but purely professional capacity, assisting indiscriminately the sick and wounded of both armies, he hoped he would be put to no trouble. He was soon undeceived, however, for he was first committed to Edinburgh Castle for three months, and thence removed to London along with other prisoners implicated in the same cause. In London his captivity was not a rigorous one, but twelve months elapsed before his liberation under the Habeas Corpus Act in June 1747.

For himself he had no longer any cause of apprehension, but fearing lest he might be cited in evidence against some of the unfortunate adherents of the Stuarts, he retired to the seat of Sir Walter Montgomery, a relative in Ayrshire. As soon as all danger of this seemed past, he returned to Edinburgh and resumed his medical studies. Other important matters, however, now occupied his thoughts. Naturally he was of a serious cast of mind, and this had been strengthened by early training. But that he had no Catholic tendencies is sufficiently evident from the fact, that in the fervour of youth he had bound himself by a double vow to read a portion of the Bible daily, and to do his utmost to extirpate Popery from his native country. In London, however, he had chanced to hear the doctrines of the Catholic Church explained by an English gentleman, in a manner which excited his surprise; and in his retreat in Ayrshire he had fallen upon a well-known little work, *A Papist represented and misrepresented, or a twofold character of Popery*. Doubts were excited in his mind, and Air Hay was not of a character to set aside doubts upon an important subject without due investigation.

As the surest means of obtaining correct information regarding the Catholic faith, he resolved to apply to a Catholic priest, and accordingly obtained an introduction to Sir Alexander Seaton, the Jesuit missionary, then resident in Edinburgh. From him he received the information and explanation he desired, and after a lengthened course of instruction was received into the Catholic Church. On the Feast of St Thomas, 21st December 1749, he made his first communion with extraordinary fervour — a fervour in which he happily persevered to the end of his long and useful life.

Mr Hay, in embracing the Catholic faith, had no idea of relinquishing the medical profession. On the contrary, he continued to prosecute his studies with his characteristic vigour, became a member of the Royal Medical Society, and took a lively interest in everything becoming his position. He soon discovered, however, that his prospects of success in life must be materially injured by his change of religion. By the penal laws he was debarred from graduating in the University, and from obtaining the diploma of the Royal College of Surgeons. These restrictions naturally excited a desire of leaving Scotland, and of retiring to some foreign country where he might enjoy liberty of conscience and have the prospect of rising in his profession. With this view he accepted the appointment of surgeon on board a trading-vessel chartered for the Mediterranean.

While in London making the necessary arrangements for his departure, he was introduced to the illustrious Bishop Challoner, who was himself a convert, and could therefore sympathise with the young Scotch surgeon, driven from his home by the intolerant laws of his country. The Bishop soon discovered his genuine worth. He admired his vigorous intellect, sound judgment, and depth of religious feeling, and was probably in no small degree instrumental in leading Mr Hay to devote himself to the service of God and his neighbour in the ecclesiastical state. Certain it is that the acquaintance of these two remarkable men at this time led to their being afterwards united in the bonds of the closest friendship. At a later period they entered into a pious compact, that on the death of either, the survivor should offer up the holy sacrifice three times every week for the repose of his soul; and this engagement Dr Hay fulfilled with

scrupulous fidelity for nearly a quarter of a century after the decease of his esteemed friend.

But whatever was the advice given by Dr Challoner at this time, or whatever effect it may have had upon Mr Hay's mind, he was not a person to decide hastily in such an important matter. He took full time for mature deliberation, proceeded to the Mediterranean, completed his engagement there, and it was not till the 10th September 1751 that he entered the Scotch College in Rome — nearly two years after he had embraced the Catholic faith. There he found only nine students, but that little band contained no less than four persons who were afterwards well known by their services to religion — the Rev. William Guthrie, Bishop Geddes, Bishop John M Donald, and Cardinal Erskine.

In Rome he spent eight years in the study of philosophy and theology, and his progress is well attested by the valuable works with which he afterwards favoured the world. But his chief care during his college life was to sanctify himself, by the exact and fervent discharge of all his religious duties. Having completed his course of studies in the Scotch College, he was ordained priest, and immediately set out for the scene of his future labours, accompanied by the Rev. Messrs John Geddes and William Guthrie. They travelled through France and embarked at Dunkirk; but knowing that the greatest vigilance was exercised by the British Government to prevent the ingress of Catholic priests, they avoided the principal ports, and landed at Burntisland on the eve of the Assumption, 1759. Next day they presented themselves to Bishop Smith at Edinburgh, and Mr Hay was appointed to assist Bishop Grant, coadjutor in the important mission of Preshome, Banffshire. Here he began his missionary career, and laboured for eight years with untiring zeal in the work of the ministry — preaching, administering the sacraments, and promoting ever}pious practice among the faithful.

On the death of Bishop Smith, in 1767, Mr Hay was appointed to accompany Bishop Grant, now Vicar Apostolic, to Edinburgh, to arrange the papers of the deceased prelate. This he executed to the satisfaction of all concerned, discharging at the same time the duties of procurator of the mission, and serving the congregation.

Bishop Grant, whose constitution had been shattered by rigorous confinement in the prison of Inverness, soon perceived that his increasing infirmities rendered the nomination of a coadjutor and successor necessary, and he felt no hesitation in making his selection. The piety, learning, and ability of Mr Hay recommended him as the person eminently qualified for the arduous and difficult position. Bishop Grant therefore procured his appointment, and, assisted by Drs Hugh and John M'Donald, consecrated him Bishop of Daulia (*in partibus*) at Scalan on Trinity Sunday, the 19th May 1769.

From that day the whole burden of the Vicariate may be said to have devolved on him; for the Vicar Apostolic, no longer able to perform the duties of his office, transferred all his faculties to his coadjutor. Henceforth Bishop Hay becomes more properly a subject of history than of biography, for a full account of his life would necessarily embrace all the important events connected with the Catholic Church in Scotland during his long episcopate.

Bishop Hay was unremitting in his attention to his flock, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, and giving instructions almost continuously. Preaching he regarded as the indispensable duty of every pastor of souls; and he himself was most assiduous in that duty. He spoke in a plain, familiar, and unaffected style; and his discourses, enriched with a variety of texts from Holy Scripture, were admirably calculated to convince the understanding and to gain the heart. His edifying example stimulated the zeal of the clergy under his charge, and his frequent Pastorals enlightened and directed them in the discharge of their duties.

To the general interests of his extensive Vicariate Dr Hay gave the most vigilant attention, visiting the various missions and corresponding frequently with his clergy. But his active charity did not rest there; he published the first English Catholic version of the Holy Scriptures printed in Scotland, and made incredible exertions to supply the faithful with pious and instructive books. He composed several excellent works in defence of religion, and entered with ardour into all the measures, then in agitation, for the repeal of the penal laws against Catholics. To attend to such a multiplicity of affairs must have necessitated a rigorous disposition of time, but the regularity of Dr Hay's life enabled him to utilise every moment. He rose very early, made an hour's meditation, recited Prime, Tierce, Sext, and None; then prepared himself, by long and fervent acts of devotion, for saying Mass; heard another, if possible; and concluded his morning exercises with spiritual reading, from the best ascetic writers. The day he devoted to business, and in the evening recited the Divine Office. At eight o'clock he retired for an hour's contemplation before the blessed Sacrament; and after supper and evening prayers, resumed his studies till midnight, when he usually retired to rest. The life of this holy bishop was a finished model of that humility and self-denial which he so strenuously inculcated in his writings.

Yet Bishop Hay was always cheerful and agreeable. His virtue had nothing in it gloomy or morose, for, though severe to himself, he was ever condescending and tender to others. Conformity to the will of God was his favourite virtue and the subject of his daily meditation. Hence arose that resignation to all the appointments of Divine Providence which no accident seemed capable of disturbing, and that meekness which the most injurious treatment could not arouse to resentment. To aid others in acquiring this virtue of conformity, he made a collection of the different passages of Scripture in which it is enforced; and he used to comment on them with singular delight and devotion. The serenity of his mind was truly marvellous. Once only — on learning that His Holiness, Pius VI., was a prisoner in the hands of the French Revolutionists — was it observed to give way, and then but for a short time. He retired to his oratory, and there, in presence of the blessed Sacrament, soon regained his usual placid resignation. His peace rested on God, and nothing earthly could permanently disturb it. It may readily be supposed that the claims of the poor were not disregarded by such a man as Bishop Hay. They received due attention at his hands. In the frequent visitation of his Vicariate he distributed liberal alms, and gave medical advice to the sick poor who could not procure a physician.

Not long after his promotion to the episcopate, the Catholics in the island of Uist were subjected to a cruel persecution. One of the principal proprietors of the island, wishing to eradicate the ancient faith, served notice of ejectment upon all the Catholics on his estate, leaving them the choice of apostasy or eviction. The poor people at once adopted the only alternative which conscience allowed, and were ruthlessly driven from their homes. The misery of the persecuted and suffering islanders aroused the active sympathy of Bishop Hay. He made a powerful and successful appeal on their behalf to the charity of the Catholics of Great Britain, and by this means enabled them to cross over to North America. They were accompanied in their forced exile by Mr Macdonald of Glenaladale, who sold his property in Scotland, and generously devoted himself to the protection of his poor countrymen. Thus commenced that system of emigration which eventually depopulated many parts of the Highlands, and laid the foundation of a powerful and prosperous Catholic colony in North America. The brave exiles transmitted their faith to their descendants, and taught them to revere the memory of their benefactor. Bishop Hay.

Bishop Hay first appeared as an author in 1771, in a spirited detection of the errors contained in a sermon published by a celebrated Presbyterian minister of Aberdeen. This was followed by his Letters on Usury and Interest, in which he throws much light on a difficult subject, and reconciles the practice of taking interest with the doctrine of the Scriptures. The dispute upon

the subject of miracles between Dr Middleton and his antagonists, induced Bishop Hay to write his *Scripture Doctrine of Miracles Displayed*, which is, perhaps, the best work that has appeared on that difficult and important subject. Not long after, his *Sincere, Devout, and Pious Christian* were successively laid before the public, and were received with much favour. The Catholic Bishops of Ireland bestowed on them the highest encomiums, and strongly recommended them to the use of the faithful. The reputation of Dr Hay as an author was now established, and the most distinguished prelates in both kingdoms entered into correspondence with him. The British Government having at length evinced a disposition to repeal some of the most oppressive of the penal laws which had so long been a disgrace to the legislature. Bishop Hay seized the favourable moment to procure some relief for the Catholics of Scotland, who felt even more heavily than their brethren in England and Ireland the iron rod of persecution. The fanatics, all over Scotland, immediately took alarm. Declarations and Resolutions were everywhere published against the mitigation of the penal statutes. The press teemed with misrepresentations and calumnies, the pulpits resounded with furious invectives against Catholics. The popular fury was especially directed against the Bishop, and a day was fixed for burning the chapel and house which he had lately built in Chalmers' Close, High Street. Handbills were distributed inviting all to aid in the good work, as it was impiously termed; and at length, on the 2d of February 1779, the mob assembled, and, with the assistance of five hundred sailors from Leith, proceeded to their work of destruction. Repeated applications were made to the Lord Provost for protection against the rioters, but he was deaf to all entreaties. The Duke of Buccleuch, and some other officers, fired with indignation at such daring excesses, hastened, with a few troops, to the spot, seized the most forward of the incendiaries, and would have dispersed the mob, but the authorities positively refused to allow him to proceed, and the work of destruction went on. The chapel and house were soon reduced to ashes, and the rabble then spread themselves over the city, burning and destroying everything belonging to Catholics which came in their way. At this crisis Bishop Hay arrived from London, and, unaware of the state of matters, proceeded on his way home. The unusual crowd in the street, however, soon attracted his attention, and addressing a woman whom he met near the foot of Blackfriars Wynd, he asked her what it meant. " Oh, sir," she replied, " we are burning the Popish chapel, and we only wish we had the Bishop to throw him into the fire." — (Abbe Macpherson's Hist, of Scott. Missions.) The Bishop prudently turned aside, and found an asylum in the Castle, where a number of his flock had taken refuge.

The next morning the mob plundered the chapel-house in Blackfriars Wynd, and attempted to destroy the residence of Principal Robertson, who had courageously opposed their lawless proceedings on the previous day.

After a few days Bishop Hay returned to London, and, through the interest of Mr Burke and other influential friends in Parliament, succeeded in obtaining some indemnification for the sufferers in the riot. The erection of another chapel and chapel-house in Edinburgh, however, was retarded for many years. Dr Hay deemed it prudent to continue in his humble dwelling in Blackfriars Wynd, and to use the upper floor as a chapel. It was not till 1814 that St Mary's, Broughton Street, was built by his successor, Bishop Cameron.

Upon the death of Bishop Grant in 1778, Bishop Hay became Vicar Apostolic, and selected the Rev. John Geddes, his college companion, a clergyman of distinguished merit, as coadjutor.

The Scotch College at Rome had, for some years, been in a very unsatisfactory state. Those intrusted with the administration of it, after the suppression of the Jesuits, had given occasion to many complaints. Repeated remonstrances proved ineffectual, and at length Bishop Hay resolved to go in person and lay the case before His Holiness. His desire to have the Statuta

Missionis approved and printed furnished a pretext for the journey, and he set out for Italy in the summer of 1781. Passing through Germany, he visited the Scotch Benedictine monasteries at Wurtsburg and Ratisbon, and arrived in Rome about the middle of October. Cardinal Antonelli, Prefect of Propaganda, received him with marked distinction, and soon after he was admitted to a private audience of the Holy Father. His great object was to get national superiors placed in the Scotch College. After repeated conferences on the subject with Albani, Cardinal Protector of Scotland, he obtained his consent to the immediate admission of a member of the Scotch mission, with a promise that in a little time the entire administration should be placed in his hands. Many years elapsed, however, before the desired change was effected.

After a stay of six months at Rome, Bishop Hay returned to Scotland. Soon after his arrival, the illness and subsequent death of the Rev. Andrew Dawson obliged him to remove to Scalan. Here, in addition to the work of the mission, he superintended the cultivation of the farm attached to the Seminary, composed small treatises for the use of the students, and taught them the elements of literature. His leisure moments he devoted to the study of metaphysics, for which he had a special predilection, and made a compendium of Reid's Inquiry into the Human Mind. From this congenial employment he was recalled,

by the illness of Bishop Geddes, to resume his former functions in Edinburgh, where affairs of vital importance soon absorbed his whole attention.

By the destruction of the Scotch Missionary Colleges on the Continent, the prospect of future labourers in the ministry was destroyed. This calamity was deeply felt by Bishop Hay, but it did not shake his confidence in God. With his usual energy he applied himself to remedy the evil, and though possessed of very slender means, began to build a new Seminary at Aquhorties. Thither, on its completion in 1799, he removed the students from Scalan, and laid the foundation of an establishment which afterwards supplied Scotland with many distinguished priests.

All hope of the recovery of Bishop Geddes being now at an end, Dr Hay was obliged to nominate another coadjutor, and after mature deliberation he made choice of the Rev. Alexander Cameron. From personal acquaintance with this gentleman, he had formed a high idea of his virtue and talents; and that idea had been confirmed by the ability which Mr Cameron had displayed in the government of the Scotch College in Spain. The appointment gave general satisfaction, and Dr Hay applied to Rome for the Papal Briefs. On the 13th of August 1797 he informed Mr Cameron himself of his promotion, conjuring him to hasten to his assistance, and to relieve him of a burden which he was no longer able to support. The distracted state of the Continent, however, prevented Bishop Cameron, for a considerable time, from undertaking his journey; but at length, tranquillity being restored by the peace of Amiens, he embarked for Scotland.

On the 20th of August 1802, Mr Cameron arrived in Edinburgh; and Bishop Hay, following the example of his predecessor, Bishop Grant, immediately imparted to him complete faculties to govern the Vicariate. It was, indeed, his anxious wish to be entirely freed from the responsibility of his charge; but this being a case specially reserved to the Holy See, he could not resign without the express permission of the Holy Father. Cardinal Antonelli, to whom he had, long before, intimated his desire, positively refused to countenance any application of the kind, and insisted, in the name of the Sacred Congregation, that he should continue to govern the Mission while he had strength to do so. Indeed it was only a few years before his death, when mental and bodily prostration rendered it impossible for him any longer to superintend the

affairs of the Vicariate, that His Holiness could be prevailed upon to accept his resignation.

The zeal and prudence of his coadjutor, however, did much to lessen the burden of responsibility on Dr Hay, and to reconcile him to his position. He had unbounded confidence in Dr Cameron, and he, on his part, did nothing without the advice and consent of his superior.

At length he was relieved of his charge, and he retired to the Seminary at Aquhorties to prepare for death. Here he devoted himself to prayer and pious reading until his mental faculties began to give way. The intense study and continual mortification of his long and active life had worn him out, and he sank, literally exhausted by labour, into a second childhood. In this state, rendered still more affecting by the loss of speech from paralysis, he continued for nearly two years, enjoying, in other respects, comparatively good health. At last a severe illness exhausted his remaining strength, and he gradually sank till his death, on the 15th of October 1811, in the eighty-third year of his age, and forty-third of his episcopal dignity.

The influence which Bishop Hay had so long exercised in the cause of religion did not die with him. It has been perpetuated and extended by his writings. Nor is this surprising when we consider their character and spirit. The study of the Holy Scriptures was the comfort and the solace of his life; and his writings show how copiously he drew from that sacred source. Indeed, in perusing them we forget the individual and see before us only a saintly prelate filled with the thought of God and His Divine truth, teaching and exhorting through the Scriptures. The more we examine his works, the more clearly do we see how appropriately they bear their unpretending, but expressive, title — *The Sincere, Devout, and Pious Christian, instructed in the faith of Christ from the Written Word.*