

## SEVENTEENTH CENTURY SCOTTISH CATHOLICS

OUR ignorance of the fortunes of Catholics in the Scotland of the Commonwealth period is for the most part utterly abysmal. Happily, Major Hay has been busy with the manuscripts and other historical documents in Blairs College, with the result that now we may really know a good deal of what happened in the years that immediately followed the execution of Charles I. It is 'a story of courageous struggle against cunningly-devised persecution'; of gallant adventure for Catholic clergy, regular and secular, with disappointments and hardships, hopes and fears, and the inevitable quarrels and mistakes.

The Scottish Jesuits of this period 'come to life again, with their virtues and defects, with their likes and dislikes; they are real men of Scotland, not phantoms from a hagiological romance.'

Father John Seton, S.J., for instance, seeking to rally Catholics to the standard of Montrose (which work, no doubt, 'was contrary to the rule of the society'), and keeping his mission secret, 'not only from his enemies, but from his fellow-Jesuits in Paris.' Howbeit the good fathers were not undisturbed by the mysterious comings and goings of this intrepid priest, whose fate it was to die of fever in the Scots College in Madrid.

Not from Montrose and Charles II came relief to Scottish Catholics suffering under the persecution of fanatical Covenanters, but from the Lord Protector. 'One of the paradoxes of seventeenth century history is the appearance of Cromwell in Scotland as saviour

<sup>1</sup> The Blairs Papers (1603-1660) by M. V. Hay. (Sands; 15/- net.)

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of the Catholics' (but then outside Ireland Cromwell was never a persecutor of Catholics. Few are the martyrs in England during the Commonwealth years compared with the number put to death in the reigns of the first three Stuarts). Dunbar broke the power and influence of the Covenanters, and Cromwell's English army of occupation stopped the policy of extermination. 'Our evils would grow more if Cromwell were removed,' was the opinion of the Scottish Jesuits.

Cromwell, who remains the 'Usurper' in much of the Catholic correspondence, not only gave orders for the release of the secular priest, Mr. Ballantyne, Prefect of the Scottish Mission, who was arrested on his way to France and kept in prison in London for more than a year, 'but sent him three score pounds sterling to bring him into France.' Mr. Ballantyne returned to Scotland to die (he was only forty-three) in 1661, and was buried in the cathedral church at Elgin. 'The funeral was attended by the magistrates and citizens of the town, as likewise by many country gentlemen who, though protestants, were happy to give that last token of their esteem and respect for the deceased.'

It was William Ballantyne who in Rome converted John Walker, author of *The Presbyteries Triall*. Mr. Walker returned a secular priest, a 'determined and resourceful missionary,' and an exceedingly able controversialist, of whom we learn something from these Blairs Papers and desire to learn more.

The writings of Mr. Walker are full of information concerning the strange manifestations of contemporary presbyterianism—notably the refusal to allow the Lord's Prayer or the Gloria Patri in public worship. 'A minister in Galloway did glory that he had banished out of his parish two idols—to wit, Our Father, etc., and God of all glory and peace, which was a short grace that was said ordinarily after meat.' Another

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case was in Angus, 'for while the people were singing at the conclusion of a psalm, Glory to the Father and to the Son, etc., they were presently interrupted by their minister, who cried aloud, 'No more glory to the Father, no more glory,' etc., which accident rendered the presbyterians very ridiculous to the old protestants.'

The objection to the Lord's Prayer as savouring of 'popery' is also noted elsewhere at that time: 'set forms of prayers in public began to be dishaunted by all; and such as used them were looked upon as not spiritual enough, or as not well affected to the work of reformation. The Lord's Prayer likewise began to grow out of fashion as being a set form.'

Mr. Walker quotes Tertullian against these high fliers as one who 'said well of our Lord's Prayer that it was short in words but large in sense; so the contrary may be said not unjustly of the presbyterians' extemporary prayers; that were very large in words but very short of sense.'

After twenty-five years on the Scottish mission this devoted priest, with health gone, went back to Rome, where, but for a loan from Father William Leslie, S.J., Rector of the Scots College, his poverty would have been even more acute. There Mr. John Walker died in 1679, 'poor, friendless and unnoticed.' Two years before, he had been reduced to borrowing money from Father Leslie for shorts and stockings 'whereof he hath great need.'

There were difficulties, of course, between seculars and regulars in that heroic time in Scotland; but Major Hay quite rightly denies that the discord proved any serious hindrance to the revival of Catholicism. 'Such secret jealousies and petty rivalries as are revealed in private letters were not allowed to appear on active service. Under the stress of war, or persecution such as the Catholics endured, minor dissensions and dif-

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ferences slip out of sight.' Mr. Ballantyne noted that seculars and Jesuits 'worked together in harmony and good understanding. Nevertheless, the friction was considerable, both in Paris and Rome; Major Hay, who should know, decides that 'there must be something in the temperament of Scotsmen which makes it difficult for them to keep religious peace.'

In addition to affairs in Scotland, there is a good deal of matter concerning the Scots Colleges abroad—at Douai, Paris, Rome and Madrid. Father Hugh Semple, S.J., having been twenty years in Spain had 'ceased to take much interest in Scotland or in the welfare of the College (in Madrid), where he held the two posts of rector and procurator. He was absorbed in his favourite study of mathematics.' Only one priest was sent to the Scottish Mission during all Father Semple's rectorship.

When Father Semple died, in 1654, his successor, Father Adam Gordon, who came from Cults in the neighbourhood of Strathbogie, couldn't get on with the Spaniards at all.

But the rest of the story, with a multitude of other things, tragic and comic, sorrowful and entertaining, including Father Robert Gall's letter, with the account of Charles II lying concealed in London, after Worcester, and so getting a sight of Cromwell's triumphant entry, must be read in these vital Blairs Papers.

The book is admirably edited and arranged, the illustrations are well chosen. It is a volume of high importance to all students of the period, and of profound interest to all lovers of the history of the ebb and flow of Faith in Scotland.

JOSEPH CLAYTON.