

MEMOIR

OF

ALEXANDER McLEOD, D.D.

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BY

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

Dr. McLeod's Birth—Early Education—Until his arrival in the United States.

How few, comparatively, of the thoughts, words, and actions of human beings are worthy of being recorded! The history of ninety-nine out of the hundred of our race may be announced in the single laconic sentence of the compound of the celebrated Indian philosopher: "They were born; they were miserable; and they died." With what a useless—nay, pernicious—chaotic mass would the magazine of memory, and the annals of history, be crowded and lumbered, if everything was remembered and recorded! It is true, we often regret the treachery of our memories, and complain of the scantiness and the imperfection of our his-

torical annals; yet it might fairly be questioned whether these very deficiencies should not demand gratitude rather than regret. If the knowledge of many valuable facts is lost in remote antiquity, an incomparably greater portion of useless and uninteresting materials has been happily buried in the same grave of oblivion. How often do we find the history of those denominated the great and the illustrious of the earth consisting principally of a catalogue of crimes! Yet they have been lauded to the skies. So true is it, that "One murder makes a villain: a million, a hero." Yet, blessed be God, there are many agreeable exceptions to this gloomy picture. There are some verdant spots in this vast moral waste—some pleasant oases in this parched desert—where the weary traveller may find shelter and repose, and on which the imagination lingers with peculiar delight. While humanity recoils at the recital of the horrid deeds of blood which emblazon the escutcheon of an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Tamerlane, the heart heaves with delight, and the eye beams with joy in perusing the history of a Thompson or a Hall, a Livingston or a Mason, a Romeyn or a McLeod.

The delineation of the prominent features of the characters of distinguished individuals possesses various advantages above the portraiture of general history. How the multitude of motley groups crowded into the picture, often distract the attention and mar the distinctness and permanency of the impression! Biography, from the individuality of its nature, concentrates the scattered rays, collects them into a focal point, furnishes models more available for formation of character, and presents a larger stock of useful material for mental improvement. It brings into notice, and shows in bolder relief, the more interesting traits of

domestic character which may engage the attention of youth, and call forth their sympathies, more powerfully, or at least more profitably, than the more brilliant displays of splendid groups, which, in a general pageant, may pass in review, and dazzle for a moment, without improving either head or heart. Thus, virtue and moral worth become embodied in an amiable individual, diffuse a charming radiance around them, and insensibly attract attention, excite admiration, and inspire a holy ardor after similar attainments.

The pride of ancestry, unaccompanied with personal worth, is a vain and pernicious passion: puffing up the mind with a foolish conceit, it prevents improvement, and generates supercilious behavior. Nevertheless, it is both just and honorable to cherish the memory of virtuous parentage. Every virtuous man, were it possible for him to have it at his own option, would prefer descent from the great, the wise, and the good, to a mean, vicious, and infamous extraction. There is reason for this choice. It seems to be a part of our constitution, though we cannot account for the fact, that children usually partake of the temper, and other more prominent features of the parental character. This fact is too obvious to be disputed. The sentiments and habits imbibed and formed in early life depend much upon the family in which we were brought up, and they contribute, in no small degree, to the formation of future character. What an assemblage of powerful motives, stimulating to virtuous conduct, will the acknowledged worth and unsullied reputation of a revered father present to a generous mind! The offspring of pious parents have, moreover, the promise of divine protection; and God, in the ordinary course of his providence, accompanies with his blessing the

children of tears and prayers, recommended by the saints to his grace and mercy. The subject of this memoir, it is believed, cherished, and was justified in cherishing, that grateful disposition which he uniformly indulged at the recollection of his parentage.

The McLEOD CLAN, or *Family*, are of *Danish* origin. Early in the twelfth century, one of the ancestors, of the name of *Leodius*, in the reign of King William, was appointed by the King of Denmark to the government of some islands on the coast of Scotland, then in the possession of that prince. His descendants were denominated, in the Celtic tongue, MAC LEODS, *i.e.*, sons or descendants of *Leodius*. And hence the family of that name so numerous in the Western Isles of Scotland.

Declining any minute investigation of the ramifications of the genealogical tree, we find the father of the subject of the present memoir was the Rev. Neil McLeod, of St. Kilda, nearly related to the Dunvegan family, the chief of the clan; and his mother, Margaret McLean, daughter of the Rev. Mr. Archibald McLean, of Bunessan. In the parish in which the latter gentleman had been pastor, Mr. Neil McLeod succeeded him, and married the daughter of his venerable predecessor. Mr. N. McLeod had been well known in the Northern Highland Islands, as an amiable man, and an elegant scholar. He had endeavored successfully to introduce into the island of Skye, a taste for classic literature; and many of the neighboring gentlemen long cherished his memory with esteem and affection. His children often met in Europe and America many a friend on account of their father; and on his account they neither had ever cause to blush, nor received of any man a frown.

In the island of Mull, in which his parish lay, this respectable clergyman lived in the hearts of his own people, and of all his brethren. Here he enjoyed whatever was calculated to rejoice and delight a pure and unsophisticated mind. His situation at Ardchrisinish, a small farm on the southwest coast of the island, was healthy and romantic. This farm he rented from the Duke of Argyle, and it constituted the southern boundary of the district called Borlas. Here Alexander was born, on the 12th Of June, 1774.

The house was a neat cottage, with three comfortable rooms on the lower floor. Built upon a gentle declivity at the foot of a small hill, it was almost surrounded with extensive fields and meadows. This ground was the neck of that lofty promontory which stood opposite to Burgh, and formed the southern shore of the mouth of Loch Levin, a noble arm of the Atlantic, which rolled its majestic waves for several miles into the heart of the island.

From the front of the house you could enjoy a full view of this inland sea, and of the fishermen's boats with which it abounded. Its scanty level banks were covered with verdure, and revealed occasionally from behind the tufts of trees, the neat habitations of the neighboring gentlemen. Upon the northern shore the high and dark heathery hills rose suddenly behind the cultivated fields, and in sullen grandeur seemed to frown contempt upon the puny monuments of human industry. Behind these hills Benmore raised its head far above them. This is the highest mountain in Mull. And even in the heat of summer the snow remains unmelted on its summit. "While a boy," says Doctor McLeod—these are his own words—"fatigued with play, and melting under the scorching sun, I have contem-

plated the snow on the top of Benmore, and imagined myself cooled and refreshed.”

The prospect to the east, if less sublime, was not less charming. A regular range of sloping hills, covered with heath, extended as far as the eye could reach, and afforded nourishment for large flocks of sheep and of goats; the latter of which might be seen among the rocks which constituted the boundary between the Highlands and the level fields below. Across these fields, three-quarters of a mile from the house, and over a steep, black, flinty rock, one thousand feet in perpendicular height, a rivulet of mountain water poured down rapidly into a basin, which itself had formed in the rock, at the base, and gently meandered among the surrounding pastures.

Essan Dhu, as the stream was called, when pouring down this lofty precipice, had its waters tossed up in the air, like pillars of smoke, by the northwest wind which commonly blows up the coast, and forms one of the most elegant cascades that ever delighted the eye of man. The promontory of Ardchrisinish terminated in steep rocks, which bade defiance to the roaring billows which continually rolled against them, and was capped by Tormore, a round hill, whose sides were decorated with the drapery of the birch, the hazel, and the oak.

In this romantic spot, the Rev. Mr. Niel McLeod, often studied those pathetic discourses which instructed and melted his numerous audience. The simple manners and sincere friendship of the peasantry afforded him much amusement and pleasure; and the elegant and polished conversation of several genteel families in the neighborhood, with whom he lived on terms of intimacy, afforded occasional entertainment and recreation after severe studies. He enjoyed the

friendship and correspondence of the celebrated Dr. Blair, and others of the most learned and eminent of his fellow laborers in the ministry of the church of Scotland. Foreigners often visited his family and were always welcomed at his hospitable board.

The islands of Staffa and Iona attracted every summer parties of pleasure and distinguished characters from every part of Europe; who increased and varied the social enjoyment of those families, which, always remarkable for hospitality lived in this part of the country. Dr. Samuel Johnson, in his tour through the Hebrides, visited Mull also, and was introduced by Sir Allan McLean to Ardchrinish. Notwithstanding his stubborn prejudices of sectarian and national bigotry, against Scottish men and Presbyterians, the tourist was constrained to bear testimony to the distinguished merits of Mr. Niel McLeod. "We were," says he, "entertained by Mr. McLeod, a minister that lives upon the coast, whose elegance of conversation and strength of judgment would make him conspicuous in places of greater celebrity." In another connection, Dr. Johnson is represented as calling him the "clearest-headed man in the Highlands."

Mrs. McLeod was a woman of fine mind, solid sense, and fervent piety. She brought her husband twelve children, of whom four died in infancy. The remaining eight, four sons and as many daughters, lived to be men and women. It was the care and great concern of their parents to educate them in habits of industry and virtue. Tutors were maintained in the family, and their children were constantly under their inspection. Alexander, the subject of these memoirs, was the youngest son, except one, and only five years of age, when his father was called away from a weeping flock and

family, to the joys of a blessed immortality. His mind was uncommonly acute, vigorous, and thoughtful; his sensibility keen and lively; and all his passions strong and active. He was, from earliest infancy, ardent, ambitious, and enterprising. His constitution was naturally vigorous, but had often received severe strokes. From the time he began to walk until he arrived at maturity, he was scarcely three months at a time without disease or accidental injuries, to which his activity and enterprise had exposed and subjected him; and yet he had not completed his sixth year, before he could repeat the Latin Grammar. The character of his mind, and the frequency of his indisposition, rendered him the darling of his father, and after his death, Mrs. McLeod appeared to have transferred to Alexander the affection for the father, in addition to that which she felt for the son. She watched over his boyish days with the tenderest solicitude. He was remarkably a child of prayer, and had been devoted to the ministry of the gospel from his birth; and of this object, amidst all the vicissitudes of his early life, he never once lost sight.

The power of his passions appeared at an early period; and he did not long enjoy the benefit of paternal wisdom and experience for their government and direction. The death of his father was indeed an irreparable loss to his family, but particularly to Alexander. He felt it poignantly; he was solemn and thoughtful in the last moments of his father's illness; and when his decease was announced to his weeping family, this little boy was upon his knees in prayer.

He followed the corpse to the grave unnoticed among an immense crowd of sincere mourners, until the coffin was laid in the tomb, when he attracted the attention of all, by a gust of passionate grief, which caused the blood to burst from his

nostrils so profusely, that his strength was soon exhausted. He was then only five years of age.

To the formation of his mind, meanwhile, his mother paid the most sedulous attention. She was aware of the delicacy and the difficulty of the task; but duty and inclination loudly called for her efforts. From that time forward she kept him under the strictest discipline; but blended with its rigor and vigilance the tenderest and most manifest affection. She never corrected without explaining the nature and tendency of the fault committed, and reasoning upon the painfulness and the necessity of the punishment. To this she joined formal prayer for a blessing upon the rod of chastisement. The following is an extract from a letter written by Col. McLeod, military commandant in the north of Ireland, in the town of Belfast, brother to the late Dr. McLeod: "From early infancy," says Col. McLeod, "my brother was fond of study; and while I was engaged in boisterous and sometimes dangerous sports, he would be picking up scraps and leaves of books, and putting them together in the most bizarre forms, and thus amusing his mother and sisters. He seldom joined for any length of time in outdoor amusements. He had a most retentive memory, and as far as ever I can recollect, he was eager to become a minister of the gospel; and even when of tender age, when he once formed a resolution, it was not easy to get it set aside. He never would join in shooting, or fishing, or racing. One particular trait of his character—and that never varied—was his absolute and perfect confidence that God would never forsake him, and was all-sufficient to provide for him."