

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE MONASTERY AND COLLEGE OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT.

CHAPTER IV.

FURTHER PROGRESS.

ST. GREGORY'S, both as a monastery and a college, had now gone through seventy years existence from the priorship of Father Augustine Bradshaw, commencing in 1611, till the death of the good Father Stapleton in 1680. These years, as we have seen, were years of successful struggle and of steady progress. "Men of renown" were found amongst its members, and to one or two of these we will allude. Almost coincidently with Father Benedict Stapleton was clothed Father Serenus Cressy, the well-known author of the early church history of Britain, or as he calls it "Brittany." Like Father Leander Jones, a Sto. Martino, he was one of the "Oxford Converts." He was known in the world by his christian names, Hugh Paulinus, was a native of Wakefield in Yorkshire, went to study at the university of Oxford, where he became a Fellow of Merton college in the year 1626. He took orders in the Church of England, was appointed chaplain to the noted and unfortunate Lord Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, and afterwards to Lord Viscount Falkland. He was promoted to the deanery of Leighlin in Ireland, and to a prebendary stall in Windsor. He thus had many links associating him with the established church.

Whilst he was chaplain to viscount Falkland, he happened to meet a Benedictine monk of St. Gregory's, Father Cuthbert Fursden, a most edifying religious man. Cressy was greatly impressed by him; and his acquaintance, as he always stated, was the first step towards his conversion, which followed subsequently. Upon becoming a catholic he renounced as a matter of course his ecclesiastical dignities and preferments, and left England. His reason for doing so is stated thus by himself in the first chapter of his most able controversial work, *Exomologesis*, in which he records the motives of his conversion to catholic unity. "It was in the month of June in the year of our Lord 1644, that those most

unnatural bloody dissensions in Great Britain, universally spread through all the provinces of that unhappy kingdom, constrained me (not so much to avoid any personal danger, as out of the horror to be a spectator of such inhuman tragedies as were everywhere daily acted) to forsake my native country, to recreate myself with a voluntary exile, and to follow the conduct of the merciful hand of God, which provided for me not only an opportunity and convenience of subsisting in foreign countries, but likewise means of diverting in some measure my mind from the sad remembrance of the miseries I left behind me; and by a retreat there into places less frequented by passengers, of withdrawing mine ears from being wounded with fresh relations of new bloodshed and massacres." This was not very long after the execution of his former patron Lord Strafford, an event which must have vividly affected him. In his travels the kind hand of Providence led him to Douai, and he joined the community at St. Gregory's in the year 1645, and at his clothing took the name of Serenus. For some years he resided as a conventual at Douai, and then in accordance with the great object of the English Benedictine congregation, came back to his native country in obedience to his vow to serve on the mission. He was associated for some time with other Benedictine fathers who, under the superintendence of Father Benedict Stapleton, were appointed to minister in the royal chapel in Somerset House, where the queen of Charles II., the princess Catherine of Portugal, resided. We find him afterwards serving as chaplain to Richard Caryl, Esq., at East Grinstead, and there he died the death of the just, universally esteemed and regretted, at the age of 68 on the 10th day of August in the year of our Lord 1674.

The principal works of this father are his "*Exomologesis*, or faithful narration of the occasion and motives of the Conversion unto Catholique Unity of Paulin de Cressy, lately Dean of Laghlin &c., in Ireland, and Prebend of Windsore in England," a controversial work of great value. It is to a certain extent an *Apologia pro vita sua*; for in it he states the working of his own mind: what had been his prejudices and his ignorance as to catholic faith and practice: what course of reading he adopted in his investigation of the claims of the Roman church on his obedience: how he had, after giving up all allegiance to the church of England, examined the claims of the eastern churches, the Abyssinians, the Eutychians, the Nestorians, the Jacobites and others. "Thus like Noah's dove" he says, "wearying myself with flying up and down,

and finding no rest for the sole of my foot, I was at last forced to return into the Ark, seeing that there was no other way to escape drowning left me." He proceeds afterwards to examine Chillingworth's objections, which he answers very clearly and fully. In the 76th and last chapter he answers two personal objections that were made against him, of inconstancy and ingratitude. In answer to the first charge he quotes very appositely St. Augustine, who speaks of certain persons, "who, whilst they are afraid to be reprehended for a short time here for inconstancy, are not afraid to be damned for eternity." And again he cites the same holy Doctor: "As it is a laudable thing not to be removed from a true opinion, so it is a blamable thing to persist in a false one," p. 650. We all know how in these our times the eminent writer of *Apologia* has had to defend himself against similar charges. With regard to the charge of ingratitude he says: "this objection wounds me in the point of honesty; for I am charged with ingratitude for leaving a church, wherein I had been bred, and received more than ordinary favours, in the time of her persecution and affliction. If I had, following the example of many, passed over from the persecuted party to the persecutors, there might have been some ground of an ill suspicion; but it was far from that, that I made choice of a church whose only fate both in war in peace is persecution &c." This work is in the Downside library. On the title page it states: *Printed at Paris, Ann. Dom. 1647.* Father Cressy was at that time a conventual at St. Gregory's, and probably went to Paris to superintend the press.

Another most important work of a totally different character, was published by him in the year 1657. This is the valuable and immortal work which he calls *Sancta Sophia*, being an epitome of the spiritual writings of the holy Father Augustine Baker. Whoever has had the opportunity of reading the numerous manuscripts of Father Baker, must at once see what patience industry and mystical knowledge were required in preparing this epitome. In a dedicatory letter to Father Lawrence Reyner, president-general of the English Benedictine congregation, he states that he had accomplished his task in obedience to the president's command. Not obedience only, he adds, but gratitude was a motive which urged him on his labour of love; for it was to these instructions he attributed, as he states in that letter, the hastening of his conversion to the faith, and his call to join the Order of St. Benedict. It was from upwards of forty

treatises of Father Baker that the compilation was made. Many of these treatises still exist: some at Downside, some at the convent of Stanbrook, to whose predecessors at Cambrai Father Baker was Chaplain: some at St. Benedict's Priory, Colwich, and a few in private collections. Father Cressy dates his dedication to Father Reyner: "From my cell in the convent of Gregory's in Douai, this 21st July, 1657." This work had become very scarce, and a few years ago a copy was advertised in a second-hand catalogue for the price of four guineas. The work is now accessible to all, as an edition was published in the year 1876, by the Right Rev Dr. Sweeney, now Provincial of Canterbury.

The *Church History of Brittany*, to which we have already alluded, is, perhaps, his best known work, and affords another evidence of the indefatigable industry of Father Cressy. There is extant in print only the first volume, a large and formidable looking folio, which may be seen at Downside and in many well-furnished libraries. The second volume was prepared for the press, but was never printed. It existed in manuscript in the library of St. Gregory's at Douai, till the time of the great French revolution, and at the plundering of the monastery was supposed to have been destroyed. But the manuscript has not long since been discovered in the public City-library at Douai, where there are to be seen many thousands of volumes which once graced the shelves of the library of St. Gregory's. Father Cressy wrote several other minor works of considerable importance, but scarcely known at present.

From this digression we may now return to the priory of St. Gregory's. We have stated in our notice of the good prior, Father Benedict Stapleton, how, whilst he was still holding the office of prior, he was especially invited over to England by King Charles II, to be chaplain to his newly married bride, the princess Catherine of Portugal. He was succeeded in the office of prior by Father JOSEPH FRERE, who had held the office of prior previously from 1633 to 1641. Father Frere spent the whole of his religious life in his monastery, and died at the very advanced age of 97 on the 10th day of January, 1694. His second priorship lasted from 1662 to 1666, one quadriennium. In 1666 Fr. GODRIC BLOUNT was appointed prior. He was of a genuine old catholic family of Fawley in Berkshire, a family well deserving notice from the good, useful, and edifying members it has supplied in defence of the faith and in the service of the church. Unfortunately his tenure of office was very short, lasting only about one year,

for he died in the year after his election, in the year 1667, on the 12th September, in the 50th year of his age. He was a most generous benefactor to the nuns of Cambrai (now at Stanbrook); and in a time of great distress obtained leave from his superiors to give them considerable pecuniary help.

Another prior who succeeded Father Godric Blount, was Father William HITCHCOCK. He was a man of great eminence. He held the office with intervals of retirement, for the space of eighteen years. He lived to a great age, and even at the age of 82 was appointed to the priorship of St. Edmund's at Paris, where a strong hand was required owing to some relaxation of discipline. He held several other offices of dignity in the congregation, and died in his own monastery of St. Gregory's, on the 10th of August, 1711.

We find at this time another good old genuine catholic name filling the priorship: Father AUGUSTINE HOWARD, of the family of Corby in Cumberland, who assumed office in the year 1677. After four years had elapsed, he came over to serve on the English mission. When James II. ascended the throne in 1685, Father Howard was appointed superior of the Benedictine community, which served the royal chapel at the palace of St James. It is a fact worthy of record that in that same year 1685, the seventeenth general chapter of the congregation was held in that palace. King James always manifested the highest esteem for the Fathers of the order; and after his forced exile into France, whilst he was residing at St. Germain's, he more than once made an eight days spiritual retreat in the monastery of the English Benedictines at St. Edmund's in Paris, in the chapel of which same monastery he was buried. Father Augustine Howard held for a quadriennium the office of president-general, and also for two quadrienniums that of provincial of Canterbury. He lived to a very advanced age, dying August 26th 1718, a jubilarian, in the 56th year of his religious profession.

Shortly before the priorship of Father Howard, there was professed at St. Gregory's a monk of considerable eminence, PHILIP ELLIS, called in religion Michael. He does not seem to have held any chapter-office in the congregation, but was a good and useful missionary. He was appointed by king James one of the royal chaplains and preachers. In 1688, when pope Innocent XI. increased the number of vicars apostolic in England from one to four, Father Michael Ellis was named the first vicar apostolic of the western district. He was consecrated with the title of Bishop of Aureliopolis *in partibus infidelium*, on the 6th of

May 1688 at St. James', where the Benedictines were then established, being at the time only 36 years of age. In this same year, on the breaking out of the Revolution, which resulted in the expulsion of king James II. from his throne, Bishop Ellis was seized and imprisoned. He was soon set at liberty, but was obliged to leave England. He remained for some time with his exiled monarch at St. Germain's and afterwards went to Rome. He obtained leave to resign his appointment in England, and was appointed to the see of Segni in Italy. In this diocese he laboured with great zeal, both with regard to synodical work, and in his seminary to which he was especially devoted. He died Nov. 16th, 1726, at the age of 74. Bishop Ellis was an eminent preacher, and there are now extant, and are to be seen in the Downside library, some six or seven sermons, which he preached, some at Windsor and some in London, not long before his consecration.

Bishop Ellis is the first bishop that St. Gregory's has afforded to the church. We shall see, as we move on in our history, that it has pleased Almighty God to choose from this monastery many others to discharge the pontifical office in the church. To some of these, the Venerable Archbishop Polding of Sydney, Bishop Morris of the Mauritius, and Bishop Brown of Newport and Menevia, the Downside Review has already called attention. Others will be noticed in due course.

THE GREGORIAN MARTYRS.

No. III.

FATHER PHILIP POWEL.

"I WAS born in Brecknockshire, was educated at the school at Abergavenny, and at sixteen years of age was sent by my parents to London, to apply myself to the law, where I remained betwixt three and four years; then I went to Doway, to the Monastery of St. Gregory, of the Order of St. Benedict, and amongst them I received the habit of St. Benedict, when I was about twenty years of age. There I studied and when I was at the age of twenty-four I took holy orders, and was made a Roman Catholic priest; and at the age of twenty-eight I was sent into my country by my