

REV. HECTOR MACPHAIL of RESOLIS.

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AMONG the noted ministers of Christ who laboured in Ross-shire, a highly honourable place has been given to Hector Macphail, Resolis. He entered on the solemn work of the ministry an unconverted man; but a great change came over him, and his labours were acknowledged in a signal manner by his Master, whom he so devotedly served. "He was perhaps one of the most deeply exercised Christians of his time," says Mr. Sage, "and minutely conversant with the depths of Satan, on the one hand, and the unsearchable riches of Christ, on the other" (*Memorabilia Domestica*, 1st edit., 355).

Mr Hector Macphail was a native of Inverness. He was licensed by the Presbytery of Inverness, 20th December, 1746, and ordained at Resolis, 22nd September of the following year by the Presbytery of Chanonry. At the time of Mr. Macphail's induction there were two churches in the parish where services were conducted, viz., at Cullicudden and Kirkmichael. At one time these were separate parishes, but on their union the minister resided at Cullicudden. The heritors, owing to the ruinous condition of the manses, decided to erect a church and manse at the western extremity of the old parish of Kirkmichael, called Resolis (Gaelic, *Ruigh-sholuis*, the bright slope).

Mr. Macphail's first wife was a daughter of the worthy Rev. John Balfour of Nigg. She had been one of Mr. Porteous of Kilmuir's hearers, and had benefited by his preaching. "Feeling painfully the difference," says Dr. Kennedy, "between her husband's doctrine and that to which she had been accustomed, she told him, on a Sabbath morning soon after their marriage, that her soul was starving, and that, as all must give place to her care for its welfare, she had resolved to go on that day across to Kilmuir. He offered no opposition; he even accompanied her to the ferry. It was a sad journey the pious wife took that day, to Kilmuir,

Arriving at the manse before the hour for beginning the service in church, Mr. Porteous was not a little surprised to see her, and on meeting her asked very anxiously why she had come. She told him that, as her soul was famished at Resolis, she was compelled to come for the bread of life to the place where she had been wont to receive it. Mr. Porteous retired to his study, and, on rejoining her said, "If I am not greatly deceived, you will not long have the

same reason for leaving Resolis, for I expect that the Lord will soon give you, by the hand of your husband, the 'very, finest of the wheat'" (*Days of the Fathers in Ross-shire, 5th edit., p. 47*).

The sequel to this, extraordinary incident, as narrated by Dr. Kennedy, was the awakening of Mr. MacPhail's conscience to his unfitness for the work of the ministry. He passed through deep convictions; which-extended over a period of several years. So unprofitable as a servant did he appear in his own eyes that he determined to resign his charge. In order to carry out his intention he sent for Rev. James Fraser, Alness, to preach in a week day in his church, and it was proposed that Mr. Fraser would make the intimation of his resignation to the congregation at the end of the service. During the preaching of Mr. Fraser's sermon light came to the distressed minister, and a desire was awakened in his heart to preach Christ to perishing sinners.

Next day he, full of his new-found joy, escorted Mr Fraser to Alness Ferry, and on his way back he called at the house of one of his elders, who had been an earnest pleader at the throne of grace for his minister. "What news. to-day, Mr. Macphail," was the elder's salutation. "Good news," replied the minister; "Hector Macphail is not to preach to you anymore." "Oh, I expected other news than that," said the elder, "for I don't reckon that to, be good news." "Hector Macphail is not to preach anymore," said the minister explaining, "but the Spirit of the Lord is to preach to you through him.", "Oh, that is good news, indeed," cried the elder in his joy.

With the new sense of responsibility awakened within him, Mr. Macphail lost no opportunity of speaking about eternal matters with those with whom he came in contact. The story the kitchen maid, to whom he taught the prayer "show me myself," and afterwards "shew me thyself," is well known, as is also the story of Luke Heywood's conversion. It happened that while Mr. Macphail, on one occasion, was waiting for the boat to take him across the Fort George to the Black Isle side a soldier entered a butcher's shop; and asked the price of a leg of mutton. The shop man quoted his price, whereupon the soldier; with an oath, exclaimed he would never give so much for it, but, notwithstanding, he purchased the piece of mutton. On coming out Mr. Macphail, in a gentle manner, asked what he paid for the joint. The soldier mentioned the price. "Oh, you paid much more than that for it," said Mr. Macphail. "I did not," replied the soldier with some heat. "But you did," said the minister; you gave yourself, soul and body, for it, for did you not say, 'May Satan take me if I give

that price for it' If this should take place, what an awful eternity should await you." The soldier paid little attention at the time to what had been so fitly said to him, but afterwards the faithful warning began to trouble his conscience. The same evening he came to the shop where he had purchased the mutton, and enquired about the gentleman who had spoken to him and where he resided. On learning he was the minister of Resolis he immediately crossed the ferry, reaching the manse about midnight. The soldier was shewn into the study, and in great excitement of mind informed Mr. Macphail of his great concern. The minister addressed to him such words as might be helpful to one in such a state. The work of grace so wonderfully begun was carried on according to the promise, and Luke Heywood became a true follower of the Lord Jesus.

Mr. Macphail was sorely tried at times, and though his faith did not fail, yet of him it could be said, as of another, that it was a helpless hand that to Christ's cross was clinging. Mr. Sage says of his faith that it "took its rise from a sense of utter helplessness of help in man to save, and it made its way to 'that which is within the veil' through, the darkness of unbelief, and in the face of Satan's deepest devices to ensnare and deceive" (*Memorabilia Domestica*, p. 353).

On his death, as he was passing through the valley of the shadow of death, his hope of heaven grew very dim. While the conflict was being waged, he fell asleep, and in the following dream, so beautifully worded by Dr. Kennedy, he received encouragement. "He dreamt," says the Doctor, "that he was waiting, lonely and despairing, outside the walls of the New Jerusalem. Seeing the gate closed, and none near to help him and none in sight to cry to for help, he had just lain down to die, when he heard sounds as of a company approaching the city. - Venturing to look up from the dust where he lay, he recognised Noah, Abraham and all the patriarchs. As they drew, near the gate flew open, a glorious company from within came forth to meet them, and, in the midst of shouts of triumph, they entered. The gate again closed, and again he is left alone and hopeless. But soon he, hears the noise of another company approaching. As they pass he recognises Moses, Aaron, Samuel, David, and all the prophets, a glorious and numerous band. Again, the gate is thrown open; 'an abundant entrance' given, and, again he is left outside, and feels more disconsolate than ever -: A third company is heard approaching, composed of the Apostles and all the earliest Christians. They enter the city amidst rejoicing like the rest, and he, with less hope than ever, is still outside the gate. A fourth company, now appears. Luther and Knox are at the head of those who form it.

They pass by like those who went before, are admitted into the city, and leave him alone and despairing without. Quite close to him now comes a fifth company. He recognises in it some of his friends and acquaintances who had died in the Lord; but though their shining skirts touch him as they pass, he could not venture to arise and join them. Again he sees the gate open and close; and now, at last, he, lays himself quite, down to die. But he hears the footstep of a solitary pilgrim coming exactly to the place where he lies. Looking up, he recognises Manasseh. Summoning all his strength, he takes hold of his skirt as he moves slowly toward the city, and, creeping on behind him, he knows the gate has opened by the light of the city's glory shining on his face; and just as he thought he heard the sound of the gate closing behind him; he suddenly awoke. The lesson. of this dream was presented to him thereafter in the sweet words of Paul, 'This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief' "*(Days of the Father's in Ross-shire, 5th edit., pp. 50-51).*

In his last illness he was visited by his catechist, Thomas Holm. On being asked by the catechist if he had any hopes of being restored to health, the minister replied that he had such a hope founded on the words, "I will go down with thee into Egypt, and I will surely bring thee up again" (Gen: xlv. 4)... "That passage contains good news for you, Mr. Macphail," said the catechist, "but sad news for the parish of Resolis, and for this part of the country. God went with Jacob to Egypt, and continued with him there, but it was only his bones that were brought back from Egypt." "Thomas," replied Mr. Macphail, "you were ever ahead of me, and you are ahead of me in your view of the passage. That is the Lord's mind in the verse" (*Religious Life in Ross, p. 292*). He died on the 23rd January, 1774, in his 58th year, and the 28th of his ministry. His tombstone at the churchyard of Cullicudden bears the following inscription: - "Here lies the body of the holy man of God and faithful minister of Jesus Christ; Mr. Hector Macphail; minister of the gospel in this parish, who died, 23rd January, 1774, aged fifty-eight years.