

# The Catholic Register.

"Truth is Catholic; proclaim it ever, and God will effect the rest."—BALMEZ.

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## THE SEE OF KINGSTON

### Difficulties In Its Foundation.

Bishop Macdonell and Cardinal Weld.

A Letter from Archbishop Cleary.

To the Editor of the Catholic Register.

DEAR SIR—Although busily engaged with the Pastoral Visitation of this Western division of my diocese, I feel it due to the venerable See of Kingston, which I unworthily occupy, that I should call attention to an error which



RIGHT REV. AND HON. ALEX. MACDONELL,  
FIRST BISHOP OF KINGSTON.

appears in the first column of the first page of your issue of ere yesterday. You state, "Cardinal Weld, at the time he was made a member of the Sacred College, was the coadjutor of Bishop Macdonell, the first prelate of Upper Canada." The error consists in the designation you give to the Right Rev. and Hon. Alexander Macdonell. He was never Bishop of Upper Canada, nor has any prelate possessed such a title at any time in the Catholic Church. No blame can attach to you for making this mistake, seeing that so well informed and accurate a writer as Cardinal Wiseman has slipped similarly by stating in his "Last Four Popes" (Pius VIII, Chap. III,) in reference to Mgr. Weld, "The Bishop Vicar-Apostolic of Upper Canada obtained his appointment as his coadjutor, and he received, accordingly, the Episcopal Consecration on the 6th of August, 1826." "Quandoque dormitat et bonus Homerus."

The following compendious narration will explain Bishop Macdonell's hierarchical status at the time of Mgr. Weld's appointment to be his coadjutor. So early as the 24th of Oct. 1789, the Right Rev. J. F. Hubert, Bishop of Quebec, opened negotiations with the Holy See for the dismemberment of his vast diocese, extending more than 4,500 miles in length, through which he had made a pastoral visitation that occupied ten years, and still left the work of visitation incomplete.

The correspondence, whereof I hold a copy in the Archives of the Palace in Kingston, is exceedingly interesting in many points of view and especially in regard of the political conditions that hampered the action of the Church in Great Britain and her dependencies at that time, as compared with the religious freedom we now happily enjoy under Her Most Gracious Majesty,

Queen Victoria. The several possible forms of diocesan dismemberment and now ecclesiastical distribution of the territory subject to the Bishop of Quebec were considered with most attentive and practical eye by the correspondents on both sides, the annus of the British Government being always prominent in the programme of every suggested solution of the question.

The last quarter of the eighteenth century was, indeed, a dark period in England's history. The revolting iniquities of the penal laws against the Catholic Religion were then enforced as barbarously in Great Britain and Ireland, as they had been in the days of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Anne. The fact of the existence of the venerable and saintly Cardinal Henry, Duke of York, was constantly alleged in Parliament and in the press as sufficient and imperative reason for stringently maintaining the laws of persecution against the Catholics on the assumption, forsooth, that this holy and aged Cardinal Bishop might possibly take to himself a wife and beget a son, who would be the third Jacobite Pretender to the British Crown. Despite the stipulations of the Treaty of Paris, guaranteeing to the Canadian Catholics the free exercise of their religion, Monsignor Hubert informed the Holy See that Catholicism here was barely "tolerated." Therefore, the formation of new dioceses, and the institution of Bishops in ordinary, could not, for a moment, be contemplated. The creation of Vicars Apostolic, subject directly and immediately to the Holy See, seemed almost equally impracticable, as well from ecclesiastical as from a political point of view. The plan that approved itself, most of all, to the mind of the Bishop of Quebec was the appointment of four coadjutors to himself, each to receive Episcopal Orders, and one of them to reside in Montreal, another in some part of Upper Canada, another in Nova Scotia, and another in some distant place in the North West regions. This method of providing for the spiritual care of the scattered Catholic populations in the distant parts of the Diocese of Quebec, although it would be, as the Bishop states, less disagreeable to the Civil Authorities, appeared to the Holy See more difficult of successful operation in the ecclesiastical order.

Monsignor Hubert died before the close of the eighteenth century, and the negotiations with Rome were resumed by his successors, Bishop Denant and Bishop Plessis, in turn. During the Episcopate of the latter zealous and learned prelate, the condition of public feeling on the part of the Government and people of Great Britain towards the Catholics underwent a salutary and felicitous change.

The Cardinal Duke of York, grandson of King James II., and brother of "Bonnie Prince Charlie," died in 1807, full of years and merits, leaving after him numerous monuments of his piety and princely munificence. His death was the extinction in the male line of the House of Stuart. The bugbear of a third Pretender and a new Civil War in favor of Jacobism vanished from the British mind on the day of the Cardinal's death.

The unswerving allegiance of the Canadian Catholics to the British Crown during the war with the United States in 1812 operated most forcibly

on the minds of English Statesmen at home, and of the King's representative Governors in Canada, for the mitigation of the spirit of hostility against our holy religion and its development and extension through the British North American Territories. The idea began to develop and gradually prevail, that England had political need of Canada for her defence against her Republican neighbor, and that the loyalty of the Canadian Catholics was her best assurance of safety.

The patriotic and vigorous action of the Reverend Alexander Macdonell, then Parish Priest of St. Raphael's in Glengarry, and subsequently first Bishop of Kingston, who raised two regiments of Scotch Fencibles from amongst his own people, and led them forward, and cheered them on by his presence and bravery in several battles with the enemy in Eastern Ontario, profoundly touched the hearts of statesmen in the Foreign Office in London and in the Governor General's citadel in Quebec, so much so that, in token of high appreciation, he received from the King a pension for life, which was afterwards doubled, and then quadrupled, and made hereditary in perpetuity to his successors in office after he had become Bishop of Kingston.

Another element of reconciliation between the Protestant mind of England and the Catholic population was the remarkable exhibition of steadfast allegiance of the Irish Catholic soldiers to the British Crown throughout the long series of Napoleonic wars in Europe. When British supremacy was in danger, the Catholics did not allow their spirit to yield to the sense grievous wrong inflicted on them through hatred for their religion by the government under whose flag they fought. They took their lives in their hands, and marched bravely against England's foes, and shed their blood profusely on countless fields of battle, remembering only their duty to God and their King. The Duke of Wellington frequently bore testimony to their heroism and fidelity, and on one occasion related how, in a critical moment of the fight, he turned an Irish regiment resting on the battle field and awaiting his orders, and with the free and friendly words, "Up, boys, and at them," fired their souls with enthusiasm in their advance against the enemy and won the fortunes of the day. Impossible that the hard crust of sectarian bigotry should continue to withstand the influence of arguments such as these in the appeal for conciliation and peace to Catholic consciences.

But of all the facts that concurred to bring about a kindly disposition of the English Court and Cabinet and the masses of the people towards the persecuted Catholics, none was more effective than the action of the great and glorious Pope, Pius VII., who ruled the destinies of the Universal Church in those most troublesome times. When Napoleon Buonaparte had overturned thrones and constitutions all round him, as children demolish castles of sand, and trampled the nations of Europe under his iron heel, and England was almost the sole kingdom that dared to oppose him in his career of universal subjugation, he formed a project, styled the Continental System, for the overthrow of the British power among the nations and the destruction of social peace

within the Kingdom by the annihilation of her commerce, which would mean cessation of her industries, and consequently starvation, sedition and revolution. He had effectually terrorized the European monarchies generally into acceptance of his decree to exclude British goods, and all British commerce from their ports and cities of trade. But when he presented his decree to the Sovereign Pontiff, the weakest of all monarchs in a military point of view, and demanded that he should close the ports of Civita Vecchia and Ancona against the importation of British goods, he was met by a firm and absolute refusal. Hence the rupture between the Emperor and the Pope, which, with other causes and pretexts concurring, culminated in the terrible tragedy of the violent seizure of the Holy Pontiff's person and his transportation with pitiless cruelty and indignity to the fortress of Savona, where he was incarcerated for five long years, without liberty of communication with the outer world or with the departments of ecclesiastical government, and without interchange of a word of sympathy with his dearest friends. This unexampled ill-treatment of the gentle, high-souled Pope, Pius VII., the patience and fortitude with which he endured it, and, above all, the sublime example he thus gave to the world, to princes and peoples, of his unflinching assertion of justice and right in opposition to the despotic will of the most powerful military commander the world had known from the days of Attila the Goth, gave to the Chief of the Catholic Church and his religion a moral and social elevation in the minds of all men, surpassing the glory of all military conquests, and distinguishing him and his office as the central pillar of social order, the living principle of true conservatism and stability of the peace and prosperity of public life in Europe. Thenceforth a spirit of reverential regard animated the English people towards the unarmed monarch of the Vatican, and amity and courtesy governed the relations of the British Government with him.

This providential confluence of conciliatory forces supplied a most favorable opportunity to Monsignor Plessis, Bishop of Quebec, for the execution of his project of the territorial division of his diocese. Correspondence with the Foreign office in London and with the Governor-General in Canada became more easy and friendly, and, to make a long story short, it came to pass after thirty years of negotiation and struggle with difficulties, chiefly political, that the good Bishop aided most powerfully by the truly noble Earl of Bathurst, the Secretary for the Colonies, effected his scheme in chief part by the creation, with the British Government's consent, of two Apostolic Vicariates in the extreme East of British America, whose rules were to receive Episcopal Consecration, and the appointment of his Vicar General, Reverend Alexander Macdonell, to the special charge of Upper Canada, with the character and dignity of Episcopal Orders, for the more effectual discharge of his pastoral duties in this extensive region. The Bull of Pope Pius VII., constituting the Reverend Alexander Macdonell, Mgr. Plessis' Vicar General, Bishop of Rheims, i. p. i., is dated 12th January, 1819, and it de-