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THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF  
THE REVEREND JAMES GORDON,  
SENSUALIST, SPY, STRATEGIST (?)  
AND SOOTHSAYER

J. M. BULLOCH

BUCKIE: PRIVATELY PRINTED: 1911



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# THE REV. JAMES GORDON.

## I.—IN GLASS, COULL, AND THE CABRACH.

The Reverend James Gordon, deposed from the Kirks of Glass and Coull in turn; eloper and libertine: the defiant creator of a sort of Gretna Green in the wild Cabrach: State spy in Ireland: "reliever" (?) of Derry: and the possessor of second sight, exhibited in an extraordinary degree that spirit of rebellion which is historically associated with the great house of Gordon under all kinds of circumstances. His variant of it, however, might more properly be called wickedness rather than rebellion, because the ministerial life which he had chosen demanded a very different code of conduct. It was probably an instinctive preception of the difficulty of keeping within bounds that prevented the Gordons joining any kind of priesthood in the same numbers as they took, say, to soldiering. But the parish minister allowed nothing to stand in his way. He simply was himself, and, as that self was a peculiarly passionate and unruly entity, his adventures were remarkable.

Strange to say his story has never yet been told as a whole. For example, Hew Scott, in his laborious "Fasti," does not recognise the deposed minister of Glass and the drunken parson whom Coull had to get rid of a few years later as one and the same person; while he has not an idea that he is the Rev. James Gordon who ended his career in Cardross. The proceedings of the Synod of Moray, so carefully edited by Dr Cramond, suggest that he betook himself to Ireland. But is it only since the Historical MSS. Commission publication of the sixth volume of the Ormonde Papers, within the last few weeks, that we are able to follow up his subsequent career.

His origin is obscure. Bishop Hopkins of Derry, who ferretted out a good deal of his antecedents, says that Gordon claimed kinship with Sir George Gordon of Haddo, 1st Earl of Aberdeen—which would be interesting, seeing the part played in the modern history of Ireland by Lord Aberdeen of to-day. This statement may have been a deliberate falsehood, or it may have been made with the same simplicity as many people show when they tell one gaily that they belong to the “Jock-and-Tam” Gordons; which is about as instructive as if they said they were descended from Adam himself. Bishop Hopkins throws out another hint as to his origin when he says that Gordon “brought away a kinswoman of his who was his housekeeper.” This apparently refers to — Sivewright, his domestic servant, with whom he was guilty. Last of all, his taking a farm in the Cabrach suggests an origin there, though Soccoth, where he farmed, had belonged to his wife’s family, the Cairnborrow Gordons. His grave stone suggests that he was born in 1645.

His own career begins, so far as we can trace it at present, with his graduation at King’s College, Aberdeen, on April 30, 1663, though Scott (“Fasti,” iii., 523) identifies the minister of Coull with the graduate of July 19, 1666. Bishop Hopkins (“Ormonde Papers,” vi., 504) says he was “ordained by the Bishop of Moray, whose surname is Mackenzie.” He was elected minister of Glass prior to April 3, 1666; but he soon got into trouble. He had got engaged to “the sister of a gentleman who served the cure of Moville” in Donegal (“Ormonde Papers,” vi., 504). How he came to know an Irish lady at a time when Scots parish ministers were not great travellers is not clear, unless we believe that he was licensed in Ireland.

Bishop Hopkins tells that “before the day of the marriage came, he brought away the Laird of Carnborough’s [Cairnburrow’s] daughter and took up his residence in Londonderry.” She was Helen Gordon, daughter of John Gordon of Cairnburrow, and his elopement with her occurred before October 1, 1667, on which date he, as minister of

Glass, was summoned by the Synod of Moray for the "deed of rapt committed upon the person of Helen Gordon." On the same occasion Mr James Gordon, the minister of Knockando, was summoned for concurrence in the deed, but neither of them appeared (Cramond's "Synod of Moray," p. 137). From the evidence led on the following day, when Gordon was still absent, it appears that he had contracted a marriage "with a gentlewoman. The proclamation of their banns was past, a day indicated for solemnisation of their marriage. Three days before the day of the intended marriage he did secretly in the night tyme with some accomplice take away the said Helen Gordon to Ireland it is supposed" (Ibid., p. 138). The supposition is correct, for Bishop Hopkins, taking up the thread of the narrative, says he "took up his residence in Londonderry, where he was admitted by Bishop Mossom to preach in Clondermot Church." The Synod of Moray duly deposed him from Glass, and excommunicated him. Scott ("Fasti," iii., 198) gives the date as October 23, 1667, but Cramond ("Synod of Moray," 137) gives April 7, 1668.

Bishop Hopkins tells us that "upon the receipt of some letters he returned to Scotland, where, after having done public penance, he was married to the laird's daughter." This statement is amplified by Cramond, who says that on April 8, 1668, Gordon supplicated for a relaxing of the sentence of excommunication, and the case was referred to the sub-Synod of Moray, and a committee was appointed to confer with him. On May 6 he appeared before the Synod and confessed his fault with tears. He confesses he is married to Helen Gordon by mutual consent before witnesses. The Synod ordained the pair to separate, and commanded Gordon himself to appear in sackcloth in the kirks of Strathbogie, except Grange ("Synod of Moray," p. 138). He duly satisfied in sackcloth in most of the kirks—what a day that must have been for scoffers!—and was relaxed later on (Ibid., p. 140): but on April 5, 1670, he was declared for ever



incapable of bearing office "or the holie ministrie within the diocie of Moray" (Ibid., p. 146).

Gordon, however, was not yet "phased." He was a plausible rogue, and probably had some territorial influence at his back through his alliance with the Cairnburrow family. So he shifted into the jurisdiction of another Synod, and got the kirk of Coull, where Scott says ("Fasti," iii., 528) that he was admitted before April 26, 1671. Bishop Hopkins supplies the linking up information that he lived here "for several years, and had by his wife four or five children. But, being desirous of change, he brought away a kinswoman of his who was his housekeeper to Aberdeen, and his wife making her complaint to the Synod he was convicted and deposed" ("Ormonde Papers," vi., 504). Scott (iii., 528) dates this deposition at April 23, 1674. Gordon's crime being "swearing, drinking, striking, denying his own subscription, and lying."

Even, then, however, his career of trouble to the Church was not checked. Hopkins briefly says that he took "a farm of lands in the Highlands, where he continued until his wife died." That simple statement gives little idea of the annoyance he caused. What he did was to betake himself to the Cabrach—then and for long after a wild Back-o'-beyond, out of touch with the rest of the country—settling on the farm of Soccoth, which, as I have noted, had been held by a younger member of the Cairnburrow family. His farm became a sort of fortress for him, from which he hurled defiance at the Presbytery of Alford for some several years, and at which he set up a kind of Gretna Green, baptising children who were brought to him and marrying couples who sought his aid.

The hide and seek pursuit of him by the Presbytery of Alford, which lasted between October 31, 1677, and April 13, 1681, when he vanished from the countryside, is almost incredible. On Dec. 19, 1677, Mr Robert Robertson, who had "supplied" the Cabrach, then without a regular minister, reported to the Presbytery that he had charged Gordon



“verballie” to appear before it to answer the charge whether he “doth baptize and marrie, he being deposed and prohibited to do so.” Gordon put in no appearance; “wherfor Mr Patrick Copland being ordained to supplie next, his servant is to carrie literall summons to the said Mr James to the next dyet Januarie 16, 1678” (“Exercise of Alford,” 288). Of course, Gordon flouted the “summonds,” and so Mr William Burnet, the next minister to “supply” the Cabrach was intrusted with a similar task. Gordon once again declined to appear. The task was then assigned to Mr William Thomson and then to the Moderator himself, and Gordon put in an appearance on April 10, 1678. the Synod of Moray having complained about him on April 9, 1678. He denied “flatlie” that he had married couples, particularly one Donald M’Lachlan and Christian Cruickshank. Christian, who was present at the meeting, “did on the other hand, confidentlie averr that she was married by him, offering to verifie the same on her knees by oath, in presence of the Presbytrie; which the same Donald appearing a little after did confirme, offering the selfsame evidence. This being done in the presence of the said James Gordon, he persevered in his deniall, and did not decline to give his oath in the verie contrarie, if the Presbyterie would accept it; but because the case was doubtful and not ordinarie”—you see how clever Gordon was—it was referred to the Bishop and Synod for advice (“Exercise of Alford,” p 92).

Nothing seems to have come of it at all, until the minister of the Cabrach intervened on April 9, 1679, charging Gordon with exercising the “ministerial function” in his parish. He was appointed to “cause summoned him litera scripta” (Ibid., 304); but had to admit later on that “he had no officer to render the summons.” Gordon was then cited from the pulpit, but put in no appearance, on July 30, being then summoned a second time. This time he thought better of it—or perhaps he wanted a little holiday—and appeared before the Presbytery on October

1, 1679 (Ibid. 306). He was charged in particular with having baptised a child "begotn betwix the Thomas Gordon and — Burgess, in the parish of Cabrach, and of celebrating marriage to William Ferror and Elizabeth Melvin, citizens in Aberdeen. But the said James obstinatlie denyed the first, and that he had not baptized anie child of late, and refused to give any account of the second till probation should be led against him, alleging that he had been illegalie deposed, adding further, that, if the Lord Bishop would see him him payed of the just expense he had been at in repairing the Kirk of Coull, he should find sureties that he should never presume upon any part of the Ministeriall office till he should be lawfullie called thereto; but, if otherwise, he should not spare to provyde for himself by that same means—with some other wild and unseemlie expressions unworthie to be recorded here."

He was summoned to reappear, but when the day, November 12, came round, the minister of the Cabrach presented an excuse on his behalf on the ground that Mrs Gordon was lately dead, and that Gordon's affairs were "in such disorder that he could not come abroad" (Ibid. 307). The Presbytery, while accepting the situation for the moment, determined to get witnesses to prove the case against him at their next meeting. So they summoned John Stuart, William M'William, John Broune in Cabrach, and Michael Dunbar in Glenbucket, to prove the Ferror-Melvin marriage ceremony.

At first (Dec. 3) the witnesses put in no appearance (Ibid. 308); and when they did appear (Dec. 31), a new difficulty arose. Gordon was "interrogat whether he could object anie thing in law against these witnesses that would render them incapable of hearing testimonie." The rogue was quick with his answer: "they did all bearr him deadlie malice, and therefor requyred their oathes de calumnia, which, when the moderator offered to tender to the said persons, they obstinately refused it, and the brethren

were suspicious that the witnesses were suborned by the said Mr James in the matter. After they were removed it was thought fit they should be further put to it, to declare upon oath whether they were ingenuous in what they had said, or were suborned by the said Mr James, and, being called in so to do, they flatlie refused to obey. Upon this they were convict of disingenuitie, and contempt of the discipline of the Church. Wherefor the minister of Cabrach is ordered to discipline them, and to give them the first admonition betwixt and the next meeting."

It says must for the power of the Church that this threat brought two of the witnesses, John Stuart and William M'William, to their senses, for on promising to appear they were not admonished. At the next meeting of the Presbytery they took the oath de calumnia, and admitted that they saw Gordon celebrate the marriage to William Ferrar and Elizabeth Melvin in Aberdeen, and the said John had subscribed witness to a paper, in which Mr James acknowledged his marrying of the aforesaid persons. At a subsequent meeting of the Presbytery on March 17, 1680 (*Ibid.*, 310) the Glenbucket witness, Michael Dunbar, also took the oath and swore to the same thing. So Gordon himself was cited to appear before the Bishop and Synod of Aberdeen. The Presbytery, however, was so doubtful of its quarry, that in April 21 it resolved (*Ibid.*, p. 311) that "no excuse be taken of the hands of such brethren as shall be absent from the Presbyteries, although their excuse be otherwayes relevant, if they neglect anie account of their referrs which are depending before the Presbytrie; and one Presbytrie appoint their next meeting to be at the kirk of such a brother as is ordinarie absent, and who sends no account of his severall referrs." On the same day the Presbytery took the law into its own hands, deciding that Gordon should be sentenced to the Lesser Excommunication; and, "if against such a time as be prefixed by the Presbytrie of Alfoord, he doe not submit himselfe to the discipline of the Church, and remove the scandall he has

given, that thereafter the Greater Sentence of Excommunication be pronounced against him, and that he be cited *litera scripta* to appear befor the Presbytrie of Alfoord to hear and see himselfe decerned to be forthwith sentenced as said is; and if he compeare, that the certification above expressed be intimat unto him; and in like manner that he be assured that, if he doe not give sufficient surtie for his carriage in time coming and that he shall no wayes intrude upon anie pairte of the ministeriall function, his carriage will be represented to the civil majistrat for restraining him. And it is recommended to Mr Thomas Garden, moderator of the Presbytrie of Alfoord, with the very first convenience after, that the said Mr James is cited to compeir befor the Presbytrie as said is, that he repaire to the Kirk of Cabrach upon a Lord's day and pronounce said sentence of the Lesser Excommunication against the said Mr James, and intimat to the congregation the certification above expressed."

These were brave words, but Gordon was by no means done: and the Presbytery must have felt very silly when at its meeting on June 9, 1680, the minister of the Cabrach reported (*Ibid.*, 314) that "no man would undertake to cite Mr James Gordon in Soccoch, for that he threatened violence to any who should presume to be officier in his affair." So the poor minister was ordered to give him "a publick citation from pulpit, betwixt and the next meeting."

This citation had no more effect than its predecessors: so the moderator himself was commanded to go to the Cabrach and pronounce the Lesser Excommunication. This scheme also broke down, for at a meeting of the Presbytery on Aug. 18, 1680 (*Ibid.*, 317) the moderator reported that Gordon, apparently a little afraid, as becomes the truculent spirit, had met him at Clatt "and offered sufficient suretie, that he should both satisfie for whatsoever scandall he had already given by intruding himselfe upon the ministeriall calling, and for his good deportment for the future, and that in order to this he

had appointed to meet (at Whytlumbs) the said Mr James, who was to bring his sureties to the forsaid place, for the effect above mentioned." The Presbytery, still doubtful of its man, appointed the minister of Auchindoir, "in the expeding hereof," and meantime prohibited all persons from having recourse to Gordon for baptism or marriage.

Once again the whole scheme came to nothing, for at the Presbytery meeting on Sept. 15 the moderator had to report (Ibid., 318) that the appointment was "frustrate through the neglect of the said Mr James and his sureties, who had not come to the place appointed till three o'clock in the afternoon, and that he had appointed with him again at the same place, and should give account of the issue therof at the Synod."

At another meeting on Oct. 14 (Ibid., 319) it was reported that the sentence of Lesser Excommunication had not been pronounced: therefore the former order was renewed. Not only so, but it was also stated that Gordon "doth as yet continue to marrie persons disorderlie: therefor it is appointed that the matter be examined, and that the said Mr James be requyred to remove the frequent scandals he hath given by his intrusion on the holie ministrie, and in caise of his refusall, that a process be carried on against him, in order to the Great Excommunication. As also it is appointed that all such persons as pretend to have been married by the said Mr James be processsed in the severall congregations where they live, as colhabiting together in uncleanness, except they instruct their marriage by witnesses." On January 5, 1681, the moderator reported (Ibid., 320) that he had pronounced the sentence of Lesser Excommunication; but, as an offset to the minister of the Cabrach, that Gordon "had joyned in ane irregular marriage William Milne in Cabrach, and — Gordon in Gartlie; moreover, that he had privately confessed to his fornication with — Sive-wright, his domestic servant."

The storminess of the weather prevented a process being served on Gordon, and on Feb. 23, 1681, it was reported (Ibid., 321)

that he had removed out of the parish towards the South; while on April 13 it was stated that as a parting shot, while "on his journey towards Ireland," he had married William Milne to a woman in the parish of Gartly. The Presbytery must have heaved a sigh of relief when the minister of the Cabrach told it that there was "little hopes" of Gordon's return "to this country" (*Ibid.*, 324).

So ended the tortuous hunt of this aggravating ecclesiastical sportsman. His career in Ireland which followed was even more rascally.

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## II.—AS A SPY IN IRELAND.

When Gordon said good-bye to his little fortress farm in the Cabrach, laughing in the face of the Presbyteries and the Synods which had harassed him for fourteen years, he was by no means at the end of his tether, though, so far as our north country data are concerned, he might have journeyed off the map instead of to the south. It is only by the publication of documents in the possession of the Marquis of Ormonde at Kilkenny Castle that we know his subsequent career. He did not go to Ireland in the first instance. Bishop Hopkins tells us that he first "went to England, but, finding no encouragement there, came the second time to Ireland."

On his way south he had come across Bishop Paterson, of Edinburgh, who introduced him to the Duke of Ormonde, the Viceroy of Ireland, by a letter dated at Edinburgh Nov. 16, 1682. The Bishop either did not know, or did not wish to know, Gordon's career, for he wrote ("Ormonde Papers," 1st ser., i., 55):—"The bearer, Mr James Gordon, being put into the order of priesthood by the Bishop of Murray, did some years ago [it was really only after April, 1681] repair to London, where, falling unluckily acquainted with some non-conformist preachers, was inticed to joyne into their societie, and, being by them invited to Ireland, hath for these two yeares past preached among them neere Derry."

Bishop Hopkins tells us that having got "no encouragement in England," and having, in crossing to Ireland, "failed to obtain a recommendation to serve the cure of Dungiven, he went to the parish of Bovevagh [Londonderry] where there was a meeting house long unfrequented, and there became a Presbyterian minister.

"At the writer's first coming, which was in September, 1681, he was desired by Bishop Ward to obtain Captain Edward Cary's assistance to send Mr Gordon to gaol; but he was not taken, as Bishop Ward died soon afterwards. Mr Gordon continued there all the winter, and married one Boyd's daughter of the parish of Drumcose; but since was impeached of the crimes by some of his own hearers, particularly by one Robert M'Clenaghan, and was turned out of the Presbytery of Coleraine. The informers of all, until his residence at Bovevagh, are Mr Adam Read, Mr Lesk (who for many miscarriages was turned out by the writer of a curacy in Raphoe and also of one in Derry, and shelters himself in Dublin, where he is in mighty vogue for a preacher, like another curate who was discharged by the writer for drunkenness and betook himself to the city where the great beast cherished and hid the less), and Robert Ross of Art o' Kelly."

It was apparently at this crisis that he took a trip across to Scotland, though Bishop Paterson puts a very different complexion on the affair. In the same letter to Ormonde he says ("Ormonde Papers," 1st ses., i., 55):

"Being recovered into a just sence of his error and abhorrence of the schism carried on by these non-conformists he hath of his own accord come over hither [to Edinburgh] to discover to my Lord Chancellor of Scotland [the 1st Earl of Aberdeen] and to me several important matters which he is ready to impart to your lordship.

"I am, therefore, desired by his lordship to recommend the bearer to your lordship's favour and encouragement, soe he may be connived at to continue in his former way of preaching among these people that he may be the more enabled to discover their in-



triques and dangerous methods for rending the Church and disturbing the Government.

"What discoveries he may make to your lordship concerning the ill designs or actings of that dangerous party, I know your lordship's wisdom will manage to the best advantage of the Church, and of his Majesty's Government. Transmit hither to mee what your lordship shall think fitt and convenient of these discoveries for the public interest of Church and State in this kingdom.

"My lord, tho' I have not the honour to be known to your lordship, yet could I not avoyd thus to trouble you with what I had in command from my Lord Chancellor, who presents his humble service to your lordship, especially it being of soe important concerne to the interest of both Churches, and therefore I doubt not to your lordship's pardon."

On December 12, 1682, Bishop Hopkins wrote to Ormonde from Londonderry ("Ormonde Papers," 1st series, i., 56):—

"I make bold once more to trouble your Grace with an inclosure [not quoted]. It is a copy of a letter which I received yesterday. I have largely discoursed with the gentleman [Gordon?] who brought it, concerning the contents of it, who tells me he hath every good cause to believe that there is a dangerous design now driving on between the fanatics of Ireland and their brethren in Scotland and England; that they have had large collections from several of their Conventicles for the redemption of Christian slaves; but that the money hath been transmitted to London to buy armes, in hopes to deliver themselves from the slavery of law and government. He tells me likewise that he hath been credibly informed by some of the party that the next Spring they expect a ship well loaden with these comodities at Portaferry in the County of Down, or some where thereabout.

"In comparing all circumstances, the only thing that amused me is why he should first goe to Scotland to reveal a conspiracy here in Ireland, and not apply himself to the State here. If your grace shall think it of concern to send for him, perhaps he may give a satis-

factory account of that and several other particulars. I perceive he is a person very indigent, but if my Lord Deputy [Ormonde's son, the Earl of Arran] and your grace command his attendance, I will take care to furnish him for his journey."

Ormonde seems to have replied not to Hopkins, but to the Archbishop of Armagh (Michael Boyle, 1609-1702), who wrote to Hopkins on Dec. 16, 1682 (*Ibid.*, vi., 495):—

"It is his Excellency's [the Lord Deputy's] opinion that you continue your informer [Gordon] in the same post as he now stands with 'he Nonconformists, by which he will be the better enabled to make discoveries to your lordship of their daily practices and designs; and, because the world is full of counterfeits and cheats, you are likewise desired to make the best inspection that you can into the credit and reputation of his person. In short, if he performs his duty well, he will certainly be rewarded by the Government for his good service; if otherwise, it is very fit he should be detected and discovered as soon as with conveniency it may be done.

"Your lordship in your letter gave some hint of your suspicion by his applying first into Scotland. I must confess that I am not satisfied therewith, though perhaps that might have been done because he was ignorant of doing better."

The Bishop obeyed the Archbishop's commands, writing to his grace on Dec. 22, 1682 (*Ibid.*, vi., 500):—

"Upon the receipt of your grace's letter, I immediately sent for Mr Gordon, who by the next day came to me, and I find, by discoursing him upon the heads of those two paragraphs your grace was pleased to inclose, that your grace did most rightly conjecture he was the man who gave those several informations to the Lord Chancellor of Scotland. For, speaking with him of all the particularities both of persons and circumstances mentioned in them, he avowed that he knew them all to be true as I related them, and that he had informed his lordship so at his being there.

"I then demanded why he had not first made his discovery to the State of this Kingdom: to which he answered that, having the honour to be related to the Lord Chancellor and known to the Bishop of Edinburgh, he thought it prudent first to address himself to them, that by their letters and recommendations he might gain the more credit to himse'f in this business from the State here.

"He again told me that he was credibly informed that considerable sums of money collected in their various meetings upon pretence of redeeming slaves and other good purposes are designed for the buying of arms and ammunition; that three ships are bound for London or Holland to fetch this holy ware; that they are contrived with false decks to their holds in which these goods are stowed, and which, to avoid all suspicion and search, are to be covered over with ballast. He seems very serious in his discourse, and deeply concerned for the imminent hazard of the Kingdom; and says it is impossible to prevent a revolution if some speedy course be not taken to break their Presbyteries and the intelligence they hold one with another, with Scotland, England, and Holland, for that in these meetings their designs are formed and communicated by fit agents and missionaries to the rest of the party.

"In conclusion, I told him it was his Excellency's pleasure he should continue in the station he was in before, and if he observed anything of importance, should speedily communicate it, to which I added your grace's promise of an ample reward; to which his answer was that he would obey his Excellency's order, though his desire was to testify his loyalty by a thorough and professed conformity; that the separate congregation to which he preached was very poor, though numerous, and that he had little or nothing to subsist on. I gave him the best encouragement I could by assuring him his services would not fail of a suitable reward, and added somewhat which he better than good words. If there may be any small pension allowed for secret services, your

Grace may be pleased to consider whether those he hopes to do may deserve the settling one upon him.

"I shall observe your Grace's commands in getting the best account I can of this person's former demeanour, and hope to make my inquiries so cautious as shortly to be able to send your Grace his character without raising the least suspicion in those who gave it."

These inquiries very quickly made the Bishop aware of the fact that Gordon was none other than the rascal whom he had been requested in September, 1681, to have arrested. He apparently, however, had not seen Gordon at that time. But on Dec. 26 (1682), he had discovered his man, writing the letter about his antecedents, which I have already quoted (*Ibid.*, vi., 304). His intuitions were now fully corroborated, for he continues in this note to the Archbishop:—

"The writer humbly craves directions. Perhaps the old proverb of setting a knave to catch a knave may be no ill policy. Only, he fears that Gordon intends to make himself by this new trade; and, though the writer verily believes the Dissenters' designs are desperate and rebellious, yet cannot think they should communicate much to a person ejected by themselves."

Closer acquaintance with Gordon only served to confirm the Bishop's suspicions. On Jan. 9, 1682-3, he wrote (*Ibid.*, vi., 507):—

"I perceive he is a mere juggler, and all his design is to be admitted into our church, being shamefully cast out of theirs. The fellow is so infamous among his own party that to [back] up himself he hath not spared to own publicly that he is allowed by authority to preach with conformity. I was yesterday told of it by one who challenged me with neglect for suffering such a villain to preach, hated by his own party and unfit to be owned by any. I was silent to that reproof, but this day told Gordon that he had done very indiscreetly to talk of any allowance or connivance for the keeping up his conventicle, and had thereby rendered himself incapable of trust among those whose

pernicious designs he pretended to disclose. He freely owned that he thought no man was more hated by that party than himself, but he endeavoured to palliate it by telling me it was so, only since he had applied himself to me. I convinced him of the nonsense and folly of that pretension by telling him of some passages of his life, for which he was rejected by them long before, and that, if any of that party knew of any conference between him and me, it was only by his own rash discovery.

"In fine, my Lord, I cannot think him a fit man for our purpose, for I cannot find that he can really prove what he affirms; and for future services he hath rendered himself utterly incapable. And perhaps, to handle such a tool would only smut the hand that toucheth it. Yet, since greater services cannot be expected from him here, if your Grace shall judge that what he hath already said may be useful for the safety of the kingdom, I humbly renew my address that he may be sent for to Dublin and there more strictly examined: at least, that the Lord Chancellor of Scotland and the Lord Bishop of Edinburgh may know their intelligence and recommendation is not slighted here."

The true politician was less troubled about Gordon's credentials than the Bishop had been. Thus, the Viceroy of Ireland (the Duke of Ormonde) wrote from St. James's Square, London, on January 9, 1682-3, to his son, the Earl of Arran, who was acting as deputy for him (*Ibid.*, vi., 509):—

"Our Scotch informer is certainly a rascal and frames his intelligence for his profit. Yet, if there must be conventicles, it is better a man of his immorality should be their guide than a more faultless man, so that he ought to be connived at and a little money cast away upon him."

Bishop Hopkins was very ill at ease over the employment of Gordon, for he again wrote to the Archbishop on January 16, (*Ibid.*, vi., 512):—

"I am ashamed that I must once more trouble your Grace with the story of Mr Gordon; but the next day after my last to

your Grace, I received a letter from him, which I make bold to enclose, though I fear your Grace will find some difficulty in reading the hand and understanding the lingua. And for mine own part, I mortally fear that I shall shortly be accused of discouraging the King's evidence.

"But I assure your Grace that all this great consternation that is upon his mind proceeds only from this, that when he was last with me, which was upon the 9th of this month, towards the closing of our discourse, he began to boast what notable services he may do if he were owned by public authority. I told him I thought that was the only way to render him unserviceable, and that the methods laid down by My Lord Chancellor of Scotland and the Lord Bishop of Edinburgh were vastly different from his proposals.

"Yet he still persisted that by all means this must be done for him, or else, he could do nothing considerable: and at last it came out that some cure in the Church must be provided.

"That was no surprise to me, for I had expected it before; nay, to deal ingenuously with your Grace, I had, before I heard anything of his ill character, promised him that as the State would certainly take notice of his good service, so, being a clergyman, the Church would receive him to a comfortable settlement. But when I perceived he still insisted upon encouragement, and an ecclesiastical settlement, I told him that I was lately informed the Presbytery had ejected him for notorious crimes; which, though I did not fully believe in all their circumstances, yet, as it would render him unserviceable to take any cure as an allowed minister, so it would be a grievous reproach to us to receive a person who lay under such scandals. But if he could by any due course make them appear to be mere slanders, I would, with the first conveniency, endeavour to provide for his more comfortable subsistence, and desired him in the meantime to do what service he could for the public.

"Upon this, he went off very discontented, and the next day sent me this discontented enclosed.

"I beg your Grace's directions what to do farther; and humbly again supplicate that he may be sent for to Dublin. I will not spoil any of his future discoveries, for I verily think he hath got already as much of the counsels as ever he will be acquainted with.

"I lately spoke with the governor, Mr Philips, and asked him if he knew such and such a person, his neighbour. He told me he did, and, withal, that he threatened some of the people in those parts to give information against them. I, therefore, judge it utterly vain to expect more from him than he can now disclose."

The Archbishop (as he told Ormonde in January 23) replied to the Bishop in this way (*Ibid.*, vi., 517):—

"That Mr Gordon's letter was chiefly a complaint against some injuries which he apprehended had been done him; to which his lordship had given him a return very proper for that business; but that what he wrote about his discoveries and services were only general suggestions, and therefore was much short of what particular information he had formerly given to the Lord Chancellor of Scotland and to the Bishop of Edinburgh; and, if he could not make out the truth of any of those things which he had already informed (which yet he hath not done in any degree) there was little reason to depend upon any further expectations. However, if his lordship, upon further discourse with him, should suppose him capable of doing service, I know no reason but that his lordship may forbear taking any notice of his conventicle preaching, since many of that irregular kind in those parts of the country do it without the least allowance or toleration."

On January 25 Arran wrote to his father, Ormonde, from Dublin (*Ibid.*, vi., 516):—

"The person you mention, setting his religion aside, would be the improperest man in the world to be employed under you."



Then came a letter from the Archbishop to Ormonde on January 30 about the Bishop's eagerness that Gordon should go to Dublin to justify the information he gave to the Lord Chancellor of Scotland and the Bishop of Edinburgh. He adds (*Ibid.*, vi., 525):—

“Lest that varlet—for I doubt he is such—should inform them in Scotland that their intelligence (which was sent to the Lord Deputy of Ireland) should not be thought worth inquiring into, my Lord Deputy hath thought fit to order me to write to the Bishop of Derry that Gordon may have leave to come to Dublin, to make good, if he can, what he hath informed about the northern designs for inquietness.”

On February 3, 1682-3, Ormonde wrote to the Archbishop (*Ibid.*, vi., 525) that Gordon's history and character are such “that I cannot imagine any sort of use can be made of him, but that he be left to his vagabond course of life till it brings him to the natural end it leads to. Yet I think he ought to be left at the same liberty others take to gather and preach to a conventicle. It may be fit the Chancellor of Scotland and the Bishop of Edinburgh should know what figure he makes in the north of Ireland, which I shall take care to acquaint the Secretary of Scotland with.”

The last glimpse we get of Gordon in this connection is in a letter which Lord Arran wrote from Dublin to his father, the Duke of Ormonde, on Feb. 24, 1682-3 (*Ibid.*, vi., 535):

“Our Scotch informer has been privately in town and proves such a man as I expected. At his desire he is returned among his brethren and promises to make great discoveries: but I believe getting money is what he aims at.”

Whether he did may any discoveries or not is for the present unknown. The probability is that he did not, for no one trusted him.





## III.—HIS RETURN TO SCOTLAND.

The "natural end" of his wickedness, which the Duke of Ormonde suggested for Gordon, did not overtake him; for, greatly as it may disappoint the moralists, wrong doing is not always punished in this world: it is merely the invariable rule in melodrama. As a matter of fact, Gordon went out with flying colours, for he died in a cloud of sanctity (and mystery) as parish minister of Cardross, in Dumbartonshire. He did this largely by claiming the gift of second sight, which impressed his fellow-ministers so much that they handed down his story to Robert Wodrow, the ecclesiastical historian, who was so amazed by it all that he devotes several pages in his "Analecta" to the subject.

It is to Wodrow that we are indebted for our knowledge of the last ten years of Gordon's life. After the date of Lord Arran's letter of February 24, 1682-3, we find nothing about Gordon in the annals of Ireland. It is probable that he spent all the time in the conventicle near Derry, at which Arran left him. Wodrow—repeating an "account" which he heard from the Rev. Robert M'Auley (who got it from Gordon himself) on March 8, 1703, nearly ten years after Gordon's death—says ("Analecta," i., 43):—

"That he was licensed in Ireland, and preached under King James's liberty near to Derry, and was very acceptable to the people there; who met together and laid down a comfortable fund for him and built a meeting house and were going to build him a dwelling house and began to build, and brought him out to view it. Mr Gordon diswaded them from building of it, which they took to proceed from modesty, or some fault in the shape, contrivance, or situation of the house: therefore, they entreated him to be free, and tell them what displeased him in it. He told them he had not fault to the house at all, but still diswaded them from building it. When they pressed him to give

his reason why they should not go on, at length he told them that that house would not stand a year and a half. However, they went on, and within less than a year Derry was besieged, and that house was the first that was razed by the Irishes.

"He preached likewise there that shortly Ireland would be a desolation; and, when asked why he was so positive, he kept in general, and told he had good grounds for what he said. After he came over to Scotland, he told both this accmpts to Mr [John] Richy, minister at Kilpatrick, and he asked him why he was soe positive. He told him that now the thing had come to passe and he would freely give him his reason. He said he had set apart two dayes for a private fast, and at the close of the work, he had a voice from heaven 'within a year and a half Ireland shall be a desolation!' and that was the ground he went on."

Gordon went across to Scotland for good—Scott ("Fasti," ii., 350) says he accepted the call at Cardross, in Dumbartonshire in July 29, 1690. However or whenever he came, it is certain he gained the ear of his contemporaries, who either did not know, or else ignored, his previous conduct. To such an extent did he "begeister" them that he got them to believe that it was he who relieved Derry from its siege. There is not a scrap of other evidence to show that he did so; yet Wodrow felt so convinced of the story that he gave two versions of it. But it came to Wodrow in a roundabout way. "The accmpt Mr Gordon gave to several of the elders or [the Laird of] Cardross," from whom Rev. Archibald Wallace, his successor, heard it and told it to the Rev. John Smith, who passed it on to the credulous Wodrow on January 17, 1708. He told ("Analecta" i., 125) that when Derry was besieged he took a leading part in the defence. On Monday, Dec. 3, Lord Mount Alexander received an anonymous letter apprising him of the Irish rising which was to take effect on the following Sunday, and a copy of the letter reached Derry on Dec. 6. The town was daily expecting the regiment of the Earl

of Antrim, and was in a quandary whether to admit it or not. On Dec. 7, it made its appearance before the walls. While the authorities were discussing the situation, the famous "Thirteen Apprentice Boys," on the advice of Gordon and two of the city council, boldly ran to the gates and shut out the "redshanks," who were within sixty yards of them. His old "friend" Hopkins (Bishop of Derry) strenuously opposed this move, and left the city for Raphoe, eventually seeking safety in his native England.

On Dec. 9, Antrim was surprised on being confronted by a party of horse under the command of Gordon and Alderman Tompkins. Antrim retreated, but soon returned with reinforcements to besiege the city.

Like Hopkins, Gordon also left the city, but his aim, it has been suggested, was to obtain help for the garrison. He says he was at Greenock when the news of the great stress of the garrison at Derry—it was not relieved till July, 1689—reached him and spurred him to action. We are indebted to Wodrow ("Analecta" i., 125) for this link in the story:—

Mr John Smith gives me this further account of Mr James Gordon, which he had from his successor, Mr A. Wallace.

That Mr Gordon in the time of the siege of Derry was at Greenock and fell under great impressions of the hazard and danger they were in; and resolves to go and see. He gets a boat and goes to Derry Lough where Major Kirk [really Major General Perev Kirke, 1646?-1691, who had been specially sent with a squadron from England to relieve the defenders] was lying with provisions; but either would not (as many say) or could not get up for the crossboom or chain the besiegers had fixed.

He [Gordon] goes aboard one of the English ships [the Mountjoy, commanded by] Captain Brauny [Micaiah Brown-ing],—whether he was acquainted with him or not the relater does not know—and abused him for not venturing up the lough when the city was in so much

strait. The captain laid the fault on Kirk, and desired Mr Gordon to be silent, for Kirk stormed extraordinarily and said he would hang Mr Gordon. He [Gordon] went straight to him [Kirke] and Kirk made him very welcome, and asked how he was. Mr Gordon told him he said he would hang him! Kirk took him to his cabin and challenged him for his opprobrious language and for his calling them cowards. Mr Gordon told him he had said so, for the design (or plan for relieving the city) was easy: Kirk said it was impossible.

Mr Gordon called for paper and said he would draught it for him (which he was able to do from having been a minister of Glendermot, and personally acquainted with the locality). When Kirk saw Mr Gordon's skill he said—"Aye, but who will venture?" "I will venture for one," says Mr Gordon, "and Captain Brouney said he would venture as another." And so Kirk yielded and commissioned them.

The Captain's ship went up first and broke the boom in the lough and the captain was killed: and yet the ship got through and came up to the town and was the means of relief to it. This account Mr Gordon gave to several of the elders of Cardross, from whom Mr Wallace had it.

Gordon did such a lot in his career to vitiate any belief in his veracity—in his old age he, euphemistically, saw visions—that one might be inclined to doubt this statement. But Wodrow heard it from other sources ("Analecta," ii., 108):—

"Mr John Richy confirms to me all the accounts set down anent Mr James Gordon. He came to Mr A. Gordon and told him he behoved to go to Derry and would not be put off: that the commander of the ship to which he went was one Brown, who entertained him as a chaplain under the notice of a Protestant minister: that he allowed him to pray and expound Scripture some days in his ship: that in his doctrine he reproved

them for lying idle and feasting while their brethren were perishing: that Kirk had hanged some for making a meeting some days before: that he [Kirk] came aboard Brown's ship and called for that school-master he heard was reflecting on his management: that Mr Gordon briskly told him that he was a minister and knew the country, laid down the scheme, directed a fort to be kept in play with one ship till another broke the boom, and Brown was shot just as the boom was broke. However, the ship got through and came up to Derry: that Mr Gordon stayed with Kirk in his ship as a hostage till the experiment was tried and was willing to undergo any punishment be pleased if it did not succeed."

There is a voluminous literature on the siege of Derry, but beyond this story in Wodrow there is not an atom of corroboration: Gordon's name is not even as much as mentioned. Macaulay long ago dismissed Wodrow's statement. "I am inclined to think," he says, "that Kirk was more likely to be influenced by the peremptory order of Schomberg than by the elated eloquence of a whole synod of Presbyterian divines."

Scott notes ("Fasti," ii., 350) that Gordon was called to Cardross in May, 1690, and accepted the call on July 29; and that he was a member of the General Assembly of January, 1692. There is no evidence that he returned to his early libertinism, but he could not fail to play the imposter a little, even though it was in the harmless way of a soothsayer. Wodrow gives examples of this. Thus, on one occasion, he was travelling to Edinburgh with Mr Ritchie, the minister of Kilpatrick, and they lodged at Falkirk. At the door of their inn Gordon saw a strange man. He looked "very steadily" at him, and found he was the chaplain of some soldiers who were in the town. When asked why he had stared at the man, he declared he knew he was one of the greatest libertines in the kingdom. When they returned from Edinburgh he found that that man was under the scandal of adultery. To those of us who know Gordon's own career—



which the simple Mr Wodrow apparently did not—this discovery does not seem so wonderful. It was a case of an old knave recognising a new knave (*"Analecta"* ii., 108).

On another occasion, when he was in Glasgow, a woman brought him her only son. The lad, who was upwards of twenty, seemed to be in a "decay." Gordon immediately said to the mother:—"Woman, your son is a fool; that woman will not take him; go to him and lay aside all these thoughts." It transpired that the lad had been jilted.

A man in Cardross came to him with a child to baptise. Gordon looked at the fellow "stern" and said:—"That child is not yours, but another man's; I will not baptise"—he had not been so particular in the old days in the Cabrach: "go home and tell your wife so much from me." The man did so, and the woman confessed (*"Analecta"* ii., 148).

He used to preach from curious texts. Thus at an ordination he chose the words, "The priest's windows shall be towards the north," as if he had a hankering for his northern home after all his adventures in the "arenas of the south." Wodrow goes on to say (*"Analecta"* i., 43) that "in several sermons he said it would not be very long ere Scotland would be desolation." At another time, speaking of the Curates, he said:—"As for that order, I daresay God will never honour them soe far as to make them a scourge again to the land!" He said, if he wer to preach against set formes of prayer, he would chuse that text 'Thou shalt not eat of a cuckou,' 'because,' sayes he, 'shee remnis [rhymes?] still over the same thing.' He was preaching upon one of the monethly fasts, about the [year] 1692, and ther had been a great meeting of the Jacobites at Balamahaugh, wher they had geen drinking King James's health. Some of them wer his hearers and came to mock. He had this expression: 'Weel, this is a fast day, say you; we should mind our poor abdicated Prince!' Poor Prince, my soul, my soul pities him! Weel, what shall we doe for our poor Prince? Some of you will whoor for him; some of

you will drink for him; some of you will swear for him! Is that all you can doe for your Prince, cowardly rogues? God be thanked, we have neither a praying people, nor a fighting people to deal with!"

About a year before his death, which Irving ("Book of Dumbartonshire," ii., 363) says occurred in 1693, the Session of Cardross met in his chambers about ordinary business. Gordon walked up and down the room pensively, and at last said:—"Gentlemen, you must think upon another minister." They said nothing, but next day sent a deputation to him, only to find him in perfect health. He told him that he had gained a strong impulse on his spirit at the time that he was no longer to preach to them. At the end of the week he fell into a "lanquishing distemper" ("Analecta" ii., 124-6).

Wodrow describes his end at greater length elsewhere in his "Analecta" (i., 43):—

"Mr Gordon was very remarkable at his death as well as in his life. He fell under a lingering sickness, and keepled his bed severall moneths before his death. In this time, all his parishioners that came to see him (and those that came not he sent for them) he exorted; and, though but a short time in the parish, yet he spoke soe closse to their case, gave them soe suitable directions, hitt upon their humours, inclinations, and tempers, and the present case of their souls, as was ane admiration to all, and to the saving of some, particularly the young laird of Ferm, who had been loose and fallen in to fornication severall times; he soe riped up his sore and awakened him that he reformed, and the work of awakening continued near a year after Mr Gordon's death, after which he calmed and greu lesse serious, but never immorall; yet, within a very little, Mr Gordon's seed sprang up, and the work began again and he is now [1703] a solide settled Christian.

"He had a particular respect for young Ardoch, whose studyes and humour lay much in the same road with Mr Gordon's, that is to the mathematicks and mechanicks.

Mr Gordon still called him his 'son, and ordered him to cary his head to the grave. This gentleman Mr Gordon caused kneel down befor his bedside and he laid his hands upon him, and solemnly dedicated him to the Lord; and, lyke dying Jacob, blessed him with all the blessings above and beneath in a very singular manner. In all these, he was soe affecting and extraordinary that it not only left deep impressions on the severall persons he spoke to, but feu wer present in the room with dry eyes or unconcerned hearts."

It is not clear who "young Ardoch" was. It would be interesting if it were Sir Henry Stirling of Ardoch, 3rd bart., for he married the daughter of Admiral Thomas Gordon, the Governor of Kronstadt, but Sir Henry was only five years of age when Gordon died. Wodrow elsewhere seems to contradict himself, for he says that Gordon "made some graceless gentlemen in the parish pray beside him, such as old Ardoch" ("Analecta" i., 126). This may well have been Sir William Stirling of Ardoch, who died in 1702.

Gordon died on May 16, 1693, in the forty-eighth year of his age, according to his tombstone in Cardross Churchyard. The Rev. William Maxwell, now parish minister of Cardross, tells me (March 4, 1911) that the inscription is almost quite illegible. Twenty years ago, after great difficulty, he managed to decipher it, with the exception of one or two words, as follows:—

D. JAC GORDONI CADROSIE MINISTRI  
MEMORIE  
DEBELLATRICIS CECIDIT GORDONIUS  
ICTU  
MORTIS ET HOC TUMULO FABRICA  
CLARA JACET  
SUBLIME PARTES MRA COMPREHEN-  
DERE PLURA  
QUAM SINT NATURÆ DEXTERITATE  
PROBAT

MAGNANIMUSQUE BONIS AVIDUS SED  
LAUDIBUS LENTUS

NEC LATUIT DOCTUM SUMMA MINERVA  
VIRUM

GAUDIA — VITÆ RAPUERE SUPERNÆ  
PALMÆ OPTATA DIU CLARA TROPHÆA  
CANIT

JUNII CALENDIS XVII ÆTATIS 48 1693

The Rev. Stephen Ree, to whom I submitted this reading, says the inscription is beyond him as it stands. He gives, however, a rough indication of the meaning of three of the elegiac couplets:—

“Dedicated to the memory of James Gordon,  
minister of Cardross.

Gordon has fallen by the stroke of conquer-  
ing death, and under this tombstone  
he lies, a man of distinction.

- - - - -  
- - - - -

High-souled he was, eager for the good but  
careless about praise, nor did his high  
natural genius excel his learning.

The joys of the heavenly life have carried  
him away: he celebrates the long-wished  
for glorious fruits of victory.

16 May 1693, the 48th year of his age.”

It is very unfortunate that the Cardross session records prior to 1800 have been lost, and the Presbytery records contain nothing about Gordon, except that he was “ane Irish Minister.” Consequently I do not know anything about his descendants. He may, however, have been represented by the Rev. James Gordon (1693-1791) of the Parish of Antrea, Londonderry, who, in the course of his 60 years curacy of the parish, had baptised 6436 children, and who was the father of the Rev. James Bentley Gordon (1750-1819), the historian of Ireland.

According to the account of James Bentley Gordon, prefixed with a portrait, to his "Historical and Geographical Memoir of the North American Continent" (Dublin: 1820, pp. 116—305), the Rev. James Gordon of Neve Hall was "a younger branch of the ducal family of Gordon, by the then Earls of Huntly, who, having adhered to the reign of the Stuarts, shared their misfortunes, and the residue are now mostly scattered through Scotland and Jamaica." Although James Bentley Gordon was "fully alive to the great value of family respectability to society at large, and considered it a great stimulus—an additional incentive to honourable conduct in life, — he notwithstanding never boasted of his:" which is a pity for genealogists of to-day.

[THE END.]

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"Banffshire Advertiser," Buckie.



