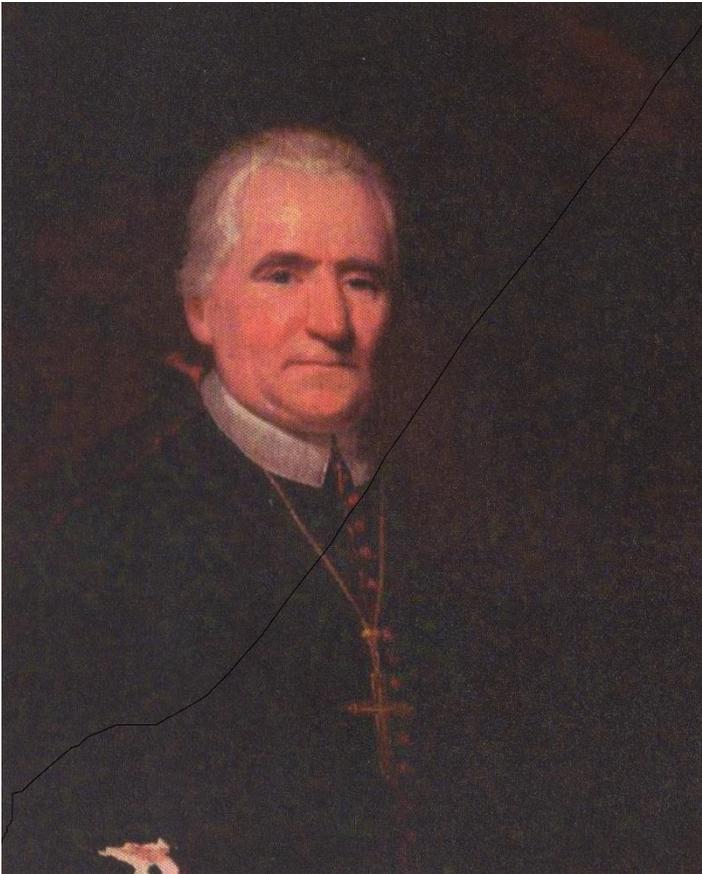




Bishop Alexander Paterson



Bishop Alexander Paterson (1766–1831)
Coadjutor Lowland District of Scotland 1816 – 1825
Vicar Apostolic Lowland District of Scotland 1825 – 1827
Vicar Apostolic Eastern District of Scotland 1827 - 1831

Alexander Paterson (1766–1831) was born at Pathhead, near Enzie in Banffshire, Scotland in March 1766. After entering the Seminary at Scalan, he travelled to France and entered the Scottish seminary at Douai where he was eventually ordained a priest in 1791 at the age of 25. He remained in France until the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1793 and returned to Scotland as Rev. Fr. Paterson at a time before the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 which dismantled legislation outlawing Catholicism and Catholic priests on pain of their death.

In Scotland he was stationed at Tombac, Banffshire and remained there for 19 years until 1812.

He was then transferred to Paisley in the Lowland District and after only 4 years his Bishop, Alexander Cameron, was seeking to appoint his own episcopal successor. After a period of consultation with the priests of the district, Rev Fr. Alexander Paterson was nominated to Rome.

He was appointed the Coadjutor Vicar Apostolic of the Lowland District of Scotland and Titular Bishop of Cybistra by the Holy See on 14th May 1816.

He was consecrated to the Episcopate on 18th August 1816 in Paisley. The principal consecrator was Bishop Alexander Cameron, and the principal co-consecrator was Bishop Aeneas Chisholm. On the retirement of Bishop Alexander Cameron on 20th August 1825, he automatically succeeded as the Vicar Apostolic of the Lowland District.

In 1826 he visited Rome for administrative reasons and was appointed a domestic chaplain to His Holiness the Pope by Leo XII.

On 13th February 1827, the Lowland District was split into two districts and renamed the Western and Eastern Districts, Bishop Paterson was appointed as the first vicar apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland.

He died suddenly in office whilst visiting Dundee, on the 30th October 1831, aged 65. After a funeral Mass on Tuesday the 8th November 1831 attended by Cardinal Latil, he was interred in the vaults of St Mary's Cathedral in Edinburgh.

BISHOP PATERSON

Was one of those distinguished ecclesiastics whom the mission owed to the Catholics of Enzie. He was born at Pathhead, in that country, in March, 1766. In his youth he spent a year of study at the Seminary of Scaln. At the age of thirteen he entered the College at Douai, and remained there till that house was broken up by the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1793. The great ability of which Mr. Paterson gave proof and the unexceptionable conduct which graced his early years won for him the favour of his seniors; and he was appointed sub-Principal of the College before he reached the end of the time usually allotted to study. On returning to Scotland he was stationed at Tombac, Banffshire, and remained there till 1812. In the remote district which became the scene of his labours, he was looked upon as nothing less than an oracle, by the Protestant as well as the Catholic community. More than this, he ever showed himself the friend and protector of the poor. In this relation he was powerful, and accomplished much good, having great influence with the Duke of Gordon and other local proprietors.

Paisley, where missionary duty was onerous in the extreme, was his next mission. He had been there only four years when he was nominated Bishop of Cybistra and coadjutor, with right of succession to Bishop Cameron. The consecration took place at Paisley. The French Revolutionists, not satisfied with breaking up the Scotch Colleges at Paris and Douai, seized and confiscated all the properties connected with them. It was hoped that under the rule of a more regular government those properties might, in a great measure, be recovered. Here was a field for the diplomatic ability of the learned Bishop. In the year 1821, accordingly, he repaired to Paris and commenced the difficult work of negotiation. He was vigorously opposed by a board consisting of both French and Irish members. But with all their ingenuity and cunning contrivances, they were no match for the skill and diplomatic power of the Bishop. They were completely baffled; and the greatest success possible in the circumstances was achieved on behalf of the mission. All the confiscated property of the Scotch Colleges in France that had not been sold under Revolutionary Governments was recovered. On the same occasion the Bishop bestowed his efforts in regaining for the Irish College its confiscated property, and with the like success.

Bishop Paterson conceived the happy idea of uniting the two Colleges of the Highlands and the Lowlands, in order that there might be one thoroughly efficient College. He lost no time in taking measures for carrying out this laudable design, and he was cordially and ably seconded by the late John Menzies, Esquire, of Pitfodels. This Catholic gentleman liberally presented the fine estate of Blairs, in Kincardineshire, six hundred acres in extent and beautifully situated on the right bank of the river Dee, six miles from Aberdeen. The mansion house was enlarged and adapted for the purposes of a College. There remained only to transfer to it the establishments of Lismore and Aquorties. This was happily done; and a Seminary for all Scotland was at once in full operation. It was prosperous at its commencement; and it continues to prosper. Two Bishops and an Archbishop have already sprung from the ranks of its alumni, together with others who have won distinction in their ecclesiastical career.

It is said to be an evil to multiply princes. But this saying does not apply to the princes of the Church, who are the shepherds of the flock, appointed to guard them and lead them into wholesome pastures. The more they are multiplied, therefore, the better are the sheep of the fold protected and sustained by the salutary food of sound doctrine. Such considerations as well as the actual necessities of the mission called for the presence in Scotland of a third Bishop. With this end in view, the country was divided into three missionary districts. These divisions were termed, respectively, the Eastern, Western and Northern Vicariates Apostolic.

In 1826 the Bishop visited Rome in order to obtain Papal sanction for this arrangement and the appointment of a Bishop. In February, 1828, he succeeded the deceased Bishop Cameron as Vicar-Apostolic of the Lowland district. In September of the same year he consecrated the Rev. Andrew Scott, who became Vicar-Apostolic of the Western district in succession to Bishop McDonald, the Rev. James Kyle appointed Vicar-Apostolic of the Northern district, and reserved for himself the Eastern and not least important division of the country. On occasion of his visit to Rome he was appointed a domestic chaplain to His Holiness the Pope.

The French revolution of 1830 caused the students of the Scotch mission who were pursuing their studies at Paris to return home. Bishop Paterson, regardless of personal danger, proceeded to Paris in September of the same year, in order to save if it were possible the college funds belonging to, the Scotch mission from alienation. His success was great, beyond all expectation; so much so that he obtained from the existing- Government the same management of the funds in question that he had exercised under the reign of Charles X. In consequence of this arrangement the students were enabled to return to Paris and recommence their studies.

During the last three years of his life the Bishop resided chiefly at Edinburgh. Notwithstanding the various occupations that necessarily claimed his time, he was able to keep the Church in good repair and even add to its decorations. The cause of education had its due share of attention. None understood better how advantageous sound education was to the Catholics of his charge and the rising Church of his country. At the period of his untimely death he was engaged in devising measures for the improvement of the Catholic schools and establishing them in a state of greater efficiency and respectability.

The final deliverance of the Catholics of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland from almost all the remaining legal disabilities took place during the pontificate of Bishop Paterson. [Ed - The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829.] The "Catholic Emancipation Bill," as it was called, passed through both Houses of Parliament and received the Royal Assent, after having surmounted all the difficulties that were thrown in its; way, by the still existing bigotry of the country. It was at last conceded to the fears, rather than granted by the liberality and good will of Parliament. The words of the Duke of Wellington leave no doubt as to this unpleasant historical fact. In moving the second reading of the bill, in the House of Lords, the Duke of Wellington said: *"My Lords, I am one of those who have probably passed a longer period of my life engaged in war than most men, and principally, I may say, in civil war; and I must say this, that if I could avoid by any sacrifice whatever, even one month of civil war in the country to which I am attached, I would sacrifice my life in order to do it. I say there is nothing that destroys property and prosperity and demoralizes character to the degree that civil war does; by it the hand of man is raised against his neighbour, against his brother and against his father; the servant betrays his master, and the whole scene ends in confusion and devastation. Yet, my lords, this is the resource to which we must have looked, these are the means to which we must have applied in order to have put an end to this state of things if we had not made the option of bringing forward the measures for which I hold myself responsible."*

The eminent statesman, Sir Robert Peel, in his memoirs, corroborates the testimony of the immortal Wellington, *"I can with truth affirm, as I do solemnly affirm in the presence of Almighty God, to whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, that in advising and promoting the measures of 1829, I was swayed by no fear except the fear of public calamity, and that I acted throughout on a deep conviction that those measures were not only conducive to the general welfare but that they had become imperatively necessary in order to avert from interests which had a special claim upon my support, the interests of the Church and of institutions connected with the Church an imminent and increasing danger."*

The great change, with its accompanying circumstances, must now be recorded. On Friday, 28th October, 1831, Bishop Paterson left Edinburgh for Dundee, in order to conduct the services in the latter city on occasion of a contribution being raised towards the funds of the Infirmary of that place. On the following Sunday the Bishop celebrated and preached after Mass. The Church was crowded, many respectable Protestants being present. The Bishop's dignified appearance in his gorgeous episcopal robes, together with his earnest words, produced a most favourable impression. His text was from that passage of the prophet psalmist; *"Blessed is he who considereth the poor; the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble"* He made a powerful appeal to the feeling of his audience in favour of the excellent Institution in behalf of which he was preaching. Speaking of the liberality which distinguished the management of this Institution, he said: "Thanks to the liberal enactments of our Legislature the day has now gone by when it was enquired of our suffering fellow-brethren, whether they were Protestant or Catholic." In another part of his sermon, as if anticipating what was so soon to happen, he said: *"Let not your hearts be deluded by the love of that wealth which perisheth, let not your eyes be dazzled by the glittering of gold or silver. All these shall soon pass away. You and I shall soon have to appear before the tribunal"*

of the Sovereign Judge to give an account of the use which we have made of the mammon of this world ; and nothing shall remain except what we shall have employed in relieving the miseries of the distressed." Towards the close of his discourse, which was about three-quarters of an hour in length, his voice began to falter. Nevertheless, he was able to conclude with a glowing eulogium of the Infirmary, and insisted on the necessity of contributing towards the relief and comfort of those, who, though now laid on a bed of sickness, had perhaps seen better days, and withdrew from the pulpit a little after one o'clock. On entering the vestry, he complained of a violent pain in his head, and a few moments later he exclaimed : "*Oh God, I am dying. Oh God, have mercy on my soul*". In five minutes more, he was speechless. A physician was speedily called, who bled him profusely; but the bleeding gave him no relief. The Sacraments of the dying were then administered ; and at twenty minutes past four o'clock he expired, thus departing to his reward, whilst humanely and charitably labouring to promote the relief of the poor and afflicted.

In compliance with the wish of the deceased Bishop's friends, his remains were conveyed to Edinburgh, with the purpose of being laid at rest in his own church. An apartment of the Episcopal residence was appropriately prepared ; and there, according to the rites of the Church, the body lay for some time, arrayed in pontifical robes with mitre, cross, ring and crosier. Among the numbers who came to pay a last tribute of respect to the departed were the ex-King, Charles X., and the Royal Family of France. The funeral service was performed in St. Mary's Church ; and so great was the desire to be present that it was found necessary to issue tickets of admission. His Eminence Cardinal Latil and the Right Rev. Bishops Scott and Kyle participated in the solemn obsequies. The Rev. William Reid, assisted by the Rev. John Murdoch, afterwards Bishop in the West, and the Rev. James McKay, who died lately at a very advanced age, celebrated the Mass of Requiem. The Rev. Alex. Badenoch, with the fine feeling for which he was remarkable, delivered an appropriate funeral discourse ; and when all the ceremonies prescribed by the Ritual were concluded, the body was reverently consigned to its final resting place. It is but justice to Bishop Paterson to say that he assiduously employed his abilities, which were of a high, if not perhaps of the very highest order, in promoting the good of the Church and the welfare of his fellow-Catholics. He was of the strictest principle, and never swerved from what he believed to be true and just. He generally formed his resolutions with exquisite judgment and carried them out, not unfrequently in the face of formidable opposition, with unflinching firmness. His negotiations in regard to the Scotch property in France, which proved so successful, showed that he was possessed in no small degree of diplomatic skill. At home the simplicity of his life, his kindly manners and truly apostolic character, gave him an influence which, nothing could resist. He was an enemy to controversial disputation, which seldom results in conviction, but, on the contrary, widens the breaches already unhappily existing between Christians. Such discussions are scarcely ever conducted with that coolness and regard to charity, which alone could render them useful and instructive. Hence, the venerable Bishop believed that they militated against that mutual forbearance and good-will among all classes and denominations which he constantly preached.

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Died on Sunday October 30th at Dundee, very suddenly, the Rt. Rev. Alexander Paterson, DD Bishop of Cybistra and Vicar Apostolic of the Easter District of Scotland. The funeral Obsequies of this lamented prelate took place on Tuesday, November 8th in the Catholic Chapel of Edinburgh according to the forms of the Roman ritual. The ceremony was grand and imposing. About 11 o'clock AM a numerous train of Clergy, among them whom we recognised Cardinal Latil, Bishops Kyle and Scott and the learned Abbé Dubios, entered the Chapel from the vestry on the gospel side of the Altar preceded by the usual attendants, all habited in their respective dresses.

On a platform immediately before the altar was placed the coffin , containing the mortal remains of the deceased, surmounted with his mitre and crosier and the other emblems of episcopal dignity.

Several escutcheons of various devices were attached to the front of the gallery, pulpit, etc which were hung with black cloth.

Mass was celebrated by the Rev Mr. Reid of Dumfries, formerly the senior pastor of the Catholic congregation of this city, assisted by the Rev Mr Murdoch as Deacon and Rev. Mr. McKay as sub-deacon.

After Mass the Rev Mr Badenoch delivered a short but well suited discourse, in which he gave a concise account of the Bishop's life and referring to the suddenness of his death, made a most appropriate allusion to the pestilential scourge which has reached our shores, in order to awaken the minds of his auditors, the necessity of always being prepared for death.

The remains of the late Prelate were then deposited in a vault on the epistle side of the altar within the sanctuary with the accustomed formalities. The choir was very deficient. The Chapel was pretty crowded and we observed several Protestants of distinction present.

St. Patrick's, Kilsyth