



Archbishop John Menzies Strain

Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland

&

First Archbishop and Metropolitan of the See of St Andrews and Edinburgh in the Restored Hierarchy of Scotland



John Menzies Strain was born in Edinburgh on the 8th of December 1810. He was the son of Hugh Strain who was a jeweller, and Cecilia m.s. McKenzie. He was baptised on the 9th December 1810 by Father Alex Badenoch. His Godfather was Mr Michael Strain and his Godmother was Mrs Kenneth McKenzie. He was educated at Edinburgh High School now the Royal High School of Edinburgh and subsequently at College of Aquhorties near Aberdeen, which was the Seminary College for candidates to the Catholic priesthood for the Lowland District of Scotland. (At that time Catholic Scotland was divided into two Vicariates the Lowland District and the Highland District.)

He left Aquhorties on the 8th May 1826 and went to Rome to further his studies at the Scots College and then towards the end of his period of seven years in Rome he attended the Missionary College of the Propaganda Fide from where he was ordained. It was whilst studying at the Propaganda College that he first met Vincenzo Luigi Pecci who was also in training for the priesthood and who would become the future Pope Leo XIII, one of the longest serving Popes in history.

He was ordained Sub Deacon and Deacon on the 9th June 1833 at the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano and was ordained later that day in the chapel of the College of the Propaganda Fide now the Gregorian University in Rome while still only 22 years old.

On returning to Scotland he served as a curate in Dumfries to his PP, Rev. Fr. Reid. After two years he was made Priest in charge of the Catholic Mission of Dalbeattie. He later became the Parish Priest of Dumfries in 1857. In 1859 he was asked to become Rector of Blairs College in Aberdeen which was then a Seminary College for boys and young men training for the priesthood.

Upon the death of his predecessor Bishop Gillis in 1864, he was nominated Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland and Titular Bishop of Abila Lysaniae by the Holy See on 2nd September 1864. His episcopal ordination took place in the Vatican on the 25th September 1864 where his principal consecrator was His Holiness Pope Pius IX and the principal co-consecrators were Cardinal Giuseppe Berardi and Archbishop François Marinelli.

In 1867 he was among the Bishops who attended the celebration of the centenary of St Peter at Rome. He was named 'Assistant at the Pontifical Throne' 17th June 1864.

The then Bishop Strain VA, worked for many years to persuade the Vatican that the normal system of Church governance should be restored to Scotland after the Protestant Reformation. On the 12th May 1877 Pope Pius IX gave an audience to Bishop Strain where he presented a formal petition for the restoration of the hierarchy. After a number of

further years of work by Bishop Strain, it was Pope Leo XIII, whom he had first met as a seminarian many years previously, who granted the Restoration of the Hierarchy to Scotland. Six dioceses were created in Scotland and diocesan Bishops were appointed. On the 4th March 1878 and Bishop Strain was translated to the Archbishopric of St Andrews and Edinburgh. Pope Leo XIII had decided that to inaugurate his new Pontificate, he would conclude the long process for Scotland and restore this ancient See once occupied by St Regulus and Turgot, by Cardinal Beaton and the martyred John Hamilton. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church in Scotland was to remain subject to the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide). It would ultimately take until 1908 to return Scotland fully to the common law of the Church.



During his nineteen years episcopate, he saw the number of clergy and missions increase during his tenure; many new schools were opened, and sixteen different orders of religious; comprising thirty-eight communities, both of men and women were introduced to his Archdiocese. Perhaps the finest example of this was the new Redemptorist Monastery established at Kinnoull.

New parish missions were opened at Kircaldy, Crofthead, Kilsyth, Dundee, Crieff, Alloa, Denny, Ballechain, Stonehaven, Davidson's Mains, Ratho, Selkirk, Dunbar, North Berwick, Loanhead and Penicuik.

New schools were opened for Catholic children all over the country with perhaps the best example of this being Marist Brothers school of St Joseph's at Dumfries.

Perhaps no more interesting or significant development in the history of the Archdiocese was when the translation of a relic of St Andrew, patron saint of Scotland and co-patron of the Archdiocese, was once more returned to Scotland after the Protestant Reformation when a previous relic of the saint had been destroyed. Archbishop Strain petitioned the Archbishop of Amalfi for a relic from the tomb of the Apostle. The Archbishop of Amalfi most graciously acceded to the request and a large portion of the shoulder blade of the Saint was given to Bishop Rigg, a Scottish Bishop, who was then in Rome. He faithfully delivered the precious relic still sealed to Archbishop Strain in Edinburgh. The relic was placed in a shrine gifted by the Marquess of Bute and a High Pontifical Mass was

celebrated on 30th November 1879. This relic resides to this day in the National Shrine of St Andrew within the cathedral.

In the summer of 1883 Archbishop Strain arrived in Rome and was struck with paralysis – most likely a stroke. After a brief audience with the Pope, his old student friend, Leo XIII, he left Rome and returned safely to Edinburgh. Upon arrival in Edinburgh he exclaimed *'Thank God, I am at last at home – to die!'*

He had just passed the 50th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood and preparations were underway at the Cathedral for a celebratory Mass to mark the event when on 2nd July about 3pm he was struck down by another stroke. With Monsignor Smith and Father Donlevy immediately at his side, he was absolved and anointed and just as the sacred rite was finished, he passed away, retaining consciousness to the last of the prayers.

He died in Edinburgh on 2nd July 1883, aged 72 in the 50th year of his priesthood. His funeral took place the following Friday and his remains were interred within the vault of his own Cathedral.



The National Scottish Shrine of St Andrew at St Mary's Cathedral Edinburgh.

The shrine contains 2 relics of St Andrew. The first was given as a gift from the Archbishop of Amalfi to Archbishop Strain in 1879. The second was given to the newly created Scottish Cardinal Gordon Joseph Gray (the first resident Scottish Cardinal in 400 years) by Pope Paul VI in 1969.

Death of Archbishop Strain

(from the Weekly Register, 7th July 1883.)



John Strain was born at Edinburgh on the 8th December 1810. He was educated at Edinburgh High School and afterwards at the Catholic College of Aquhorties, Aberdeenshire completing his studies by seven years residence at Scots College Rome, where he was a fellow student of the present Holy Father. (Pope Leo XIII). He was ordained Sub-deacon and Deacon at St John Lateran on the 9th June 1833 and on the same day received priest's orders in the Chapel of the Propaganda, though only 22 years of age. Later in the year he returned to Scotland and in December was appointed curate to the Rev W Reid of Dumfries. Two years later he was removed to the sole charge of the mission at Dalbeattie which included the greater part of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbrightshire, having congregations at Kirkcudbright and Gatehouse as well as Balbeattie and smaller stations in other parts of the country. In 1857 he received the charge of the mission at Dumfries and in 1859 was appointed President of St Mary's College Blairs, near Aberdeen. On the death of Bishop Gillis in 1864 he was nominated Vicar Apostolic of the Eastern District of Scotland and consecrated to the titular See of Abila by His Holiness Pope Pius IX on the 25th September. In 1867 he was among the Bishops who attended the celebration of the centenary of St Peter at Rome. He was named

Assistant at the Pontifical Throne 17th June 1864. The question of the restoration of the hierarchy in Scotland had been for many years under consideration at Rome but it was not until 1877 that the difficulties attending that important step were overcome. On the 12th May 1877 Pope Pius IX gave an audience to the deputation from Scotland, headed by Bishop Strain when a formal petition was presented for the restoration of the hierarchy and the necessary steps were taken without delay, but it was reserved for Leo XIII to gratify the wishes of the Scottish Catholics the long wished for boon. The Apostolic letters, by which the hierarchy was restored, were issued on the 4th March 1878 and Bishop Strain was translated to the Archbishopric of St Andrews and Edinburgh.

Archbishop Strain was remarkable for the quiet and unobtrusive way in which the duties to this high office were discharged. A priest of pure and simple purpose and life, he brought to the performance of his duties from the earliest years of his ministerial life a zeal and an earnestness and an activity which won for him the respect and affection of those with whom he had to do, whether as a priest on the mission, as Rector of Blairs College, or as a bishop. His elevation to the Metropolitan See of Edinburgh in 1878 was a source of much satisfaction to his flock, who celebrated his return home by presenting him with a beautiful set of vestments and a pastoral staff and cross as well as a purse of sovereigns. For appearing in public, except in the discharge of actual episcopal functions, the Archbishop had little taste; but he made one exception and the Edinburgh United Industrial School never failed to receive his support on the platform when its cause was pressed on the notice of the charitable from year to year. His best memorial will be found in the district in which he was connected as a priest and bishop. The administration of his great parish, and afterwards the Eastern Vicariate, was laborious; the wants to be supplied being great and the means of supplying them far from sufficient. These difficulties were, however, overcome by Bishop Strain and he had the happiness of witnessing many new missions and stations and of several religious houses as well as the establishment of schools where needed. What won for the Archbishop the respect and esteem, not alone of his people, but that of those who differed from him most widely on theological questions, was the fact that his zeal for the spread of religion, his energy in the discharge of every duty, his increasing activity and great capacity for work were combined with a buoyant and genial temperament and rare moderation and humility of character. Had Archbishop Strain been a man of a different character, observed a contemporary, "there would have been no Catholic hierarchy in Scotland today and he would not have been Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh."

The Most Reverend John Strain

(from the Catholic Fireside.)

Fifty-three years ago, two youths, destined to play an important part in the history of the Church in Scotland, were prosecuting their studies in the renowned schools of the Gregorian University, or Roman College. Differing but a few months in age, they were kept apart for some time by diversity of the branches to which they applied themselves; but ere long they were sitting side by side in the theology hall at the famous prelections of Patrizz and Perrone. Last year they were once more brought together in Rome, but under widely different circumstances; the one led thither by an event which had plunged the Catholics of the world into grief – the death of Pius the IX; the other on a mission touching the vital interests of the Scottish Church. The lapse of a half century from the time that they first met had brought about great changes in Scotland. The laity as well as the clergy had increased probably fivefold; instead of a few places of worship, separated by wide intervals, the country was dotted over with churches and chapels; sixteen different orders of religious; men and women, comprising thirty eight communities had been planted where before not a single house of regulars was to be found; and the time seem to have come at last when the normal organisation of the Church might well be introduced. And now one of those students has just been elevated to the chair of St Peter and had decreed to inaugurate his Pontificate by restoring the Church in Scotland to its place in the hierarchical order, and to raise the companion of his youth to the See once occupied by St Regulus and Turgot, by Cardinal Beaton and the martyred John Hamilton.

The Most Reverend John Strain was born in Edinburgh on the 8th December 1810. He made his first classical studies in the High School of that city, which was then and for three centuries before, the most celebrated educational establishment in Scotland and had numbered amongst its pupils, Walter Scott, Brougham Jeffrey and a host of others distinguished in every walk of life. Having early invinced a strong desire to embrace the ecclesiastical state, he was admitted in 1820 to the College of Aquhorties, the seminary for the Lowland Vicariate. After spending six years there in the study of the classics, he went to the Scots College in Rome and during the six following years the classes in the Roman College. His clear and vigorous intellect enabled him to profit to the full by the lectures of the eminent Jesuit professors who filled its chairs. Towards the end of his course the Scots college was closing owing to the death of the Rector and the students were transferred by order of the Cardinal Protector to the great Missionary College of Propaganda. A few months subsequently, on the 9th June 1833 Mr Strain was ordained priest at the early age of twenty-two and a half, and shortly afterwards he returned to Scotland.

The Funeral of Archbishop Strain

(From the Catholic Times, 13th July 1883)

The funeral of the late Archbishop Strain, which took place on Friday last, was an impressive and solemn service being held within the pro-Cathedral Broughton Street, Edinburgh. In the Cathedral were displayed many signs of woe, the windows and the pillars being draped in black while above the sanctuary hung mourning escutcheons. The service was fixed to begin at 11 o'clock and some time before that hour the church was crowded by a large congregation, the majority of whom were dressed in black. The gallery was occupied by a specially selected orchestra and the choir of the Cathedral considerably augmented from the other churches of the city and led by Mr R McHardy. Shortly after 11 o'clock the ceremony was commenced by a procession from a side chapel near the main doorway to the sanctuary of those who were chiefly to lead the service. To the solemn strain of the Death March in 'Saul' the congregation meanwhile standing, the Rev J Donlevy, who acted as Master of Ceremonies, led the way, followed by the Rev J Griffin, Kelso, cross bearer and two acolytes, accompanied by thirty boys dressed in soutane and surplice, who are accustomed to serve Mass in the Pro-Cathedral. Thereafter came a number of young schoolgirls and several young lady members of the various confraternities in Edinburgh and Leith all dressed in white and carrying banners draped in mourning. Next walked about 120 of the clergy, representing different parts of Scotland. The rear of the procession was brought up by the Bishops of Galloway, Aberdeen, Dunkeld and the Archbishop of Glasgow, the last mentioned being attended by two train bearers and followed by the boys of the Guild of St Joseph attached to the Pro-Cathedral. On arriving at the sanctuary, the ladies filed to the sides and occupied the passages, while the clergy took up a position on each side of the

catafalque, which, containing the coffin, was placed in front of the altar. Immediately after the processionists had got into position Requiem Mass was commenced, and the music at the hands of the orchestra was given with much solemnity and expression. The celebrant of the Mass was the Most Rev Archbishop Eyre, assisted by the Very Rev Monsignor Smith DD VG; the Rev Michael Turner of Davidson's Mains the nephew of the deceased and the Rev JJ O'Carroll of Leith. The deacons at the Throne were the Rev E Whyte, Lauriston and the Rev E.J Hannan St Patrick's Cowgate.

After an impressive service extending over an hour and a half, the very Rev Monsignor Smith ascended the pulpit and made a brief but touching reference to the late Archbishop. Taking for his text *Job ch xxx v31*: "My harp is tuned to mourning and my organ into the voice of those that weep". Dr Smith said that the commingling of joy and sorrow in human life was of common occurrence and called for no special notice, but seldom was it brought before them so touchingly in the person of the venerable and most lovable man whose remains were confined upon that bier. His (Dr Smith's) heart had been strung in gladness and many an instrument of music was ready to give voice on the festive day of the jubilee, because Archbishop Strain had completed, to his own infinite credit and the benefit of others, the fiftieth year of his priesthood. Fond as the Archbishop was of sweet or stirring strains, on Sunday night, though he still laboured under the paralysis, which had struck him down in Rome, , and suffered, in addition, from loss of appetite, the Archbishop begged earnestly to be assisted down to the side chapel in order that he might hear without observation the rehearsal of the Mass that was preparing his jubilee festival. He listened with delight, and as his mind was not harassed by an unwanted anxiety – not even by the thought of an answer to the short address that were to be presented to him, because he (Dr Smith) himself had undertaken to be his spokesman – there was every reason to hope that nothing would occur to mark the happiness of the occasion. Next morning however after a sleepless night, he still complained of the loss of appetite. The doctor made his usual visit in the forenoon and was not particularly alarmed but a little before 3 o'clock a sudden shock came on. Summoned at once, he (Dr Smith) was able with the assistance of his colleague, to administer to him the last sacrament and while they continued to recite the prayers for the dying he gently dropped away about the very time when the decoration of the church was about finished for the celebration of his jubilee. In society at large and in the Church on earth they had to lament the loss of one who, during a long period of life, was an honour to their Church. Society had to mourn the loss of one who in every relation of life who in every relation of life was affectionately cherished by a large circle of friends whether Protestant or Catholic. The geniality of his disposition, his warmth of heart, his depth of sympathy, his strength and simplicity of character ingratiated him with all, while the peculiar knack he had of delivering little happy speeches on festive occasions, combined with a fund of racy anecdote, made him the favourite of every company, who always enjoyed his kindly smile. But it was the Church who had most cause to mourn his loss. All his life, he was a most devoted servant to her; during the 50 years of his priesthood no blot ever stained the whiteness of his priest's robe, and those years were spent in doing everything for the glory of God and the good of his neighbours. Accordingly, it was no wonder that he was promoted from one office to another until he rose to the very highest in Scotland. It was while in Rome transacting the heavy business belonging to that office that he was seized with the first attack of that illness which had ended fatally. He was not however at Rome without receiving the extraordinary mark of the esteem and affection which Leo XIII had for him/ His Holiness in order to do the late Archbishop honour, on the 9th June, the 50th anniversary of the latter's priesthood, sent his own attendants with the order to convey him most tenderly to the audience chamber, and there, after a long and confidential interchange of ideas, he received the Pope's special blessing, both for himself and for his flock. But if the Church on earth had cause to mourn his departure, the Church beyond the grave was rejoicing at his arrival. What was their loss was the gain of the Church beyond the grave and the jubilee triumph, which was to have been celebrated here, was kept more joyfully there. His soul had now left his mortal body and appeared before its Judge – a Judge to whom he was devoted with all his mind. It might be in the strictness of examination which he had to undergo there might still be found something which he had to undergo there might still be found something before he could receive true admission into that place where nothing – no matter how little it might be – if defiled, could possibly enter. If he was still to suffer, he looked to those whom he loved so much on earth, in order that by their prayers and good works, they might do their best to assist him to arrive at the happiness which he must soon enjoy if he did not do so really now. The Church would, and had been doing, her part, and he (Dr Smith) had to ask its members to do theirs.

Immediately after the sermon, the usual ablutions were given in succession by Rev's Dean Turner, Dumfries; Father Mcmanus, Jedburgh; Monsignor Smith, the Bishop of Dumfries, the Bishop of Dunkeld, the Bishop of Aberdeen and the Archbishop of Glasgow. Thereafter the coffin was removed from the catafalque and laid in the vault situated at the epistle side of the sanctuary. Surmounting the coffin previous to its removal was the jewelled mitre, placed on a velvet cushion, the crosier and a gold chalice and paten. At the foot of the coffin was placed the processional cross. The archbishop was buried in his full canonicals. The pall bearers were Monsignor Smith, Archbishop Eyre, Bishop MacDonald, Bishop Rigg, Bishop McLaughlin, Father Turner, Father Hannan and Father Donlevy. On the coffin being the lowered the "*Benedictus*" hymn was sung by the clergy with solemn effect.

The coffin bore the following inscription: -

JOANNES STRAIN
Archi-episcopus Scti Andreæ et Edinburgi,
Scotiæ Metropolitanus.
Natus die 8 Dec, 1810.
Obiit die 2 Julii, 1883.
RIP

The obsequies concluded, the processionists retired much in the same order in which they entered the cathedral, the girls as they passed the vault, strewing the coffin with flowers. The funeral arrangements were conducted by Mr Peter Moir, 10 St James' Place.

On Sunday forenoon intimation was given in the Church of the sacred Heart in Lauriston Street, that Mass for the repose of the soul of the late Archbishop would be said on Tuesday morning following and that all Masses on the Friday morning (today) would be said for the same object. The Rev Father E Whyte, SJ, Rector, who preached, recalled the last occasion on which the Archbishop pontificated in that church. Between him and them, he said, there was a most particular relationship. The Church always spoke of a Bishop, with reference to his people, as a father with reference to his children, or pastor with reference to his flock. Dr Strain therefor by his very position, had been to them a spiritual father and they bore to him the position of spiritual children. One obligation incumbent upon them in that capacity, was to carry out the wishes as perfectly as they could. The first of these looking to his obligations, which were so serious, and to the responsibilities of his position, which were so very great, would doubtless be that they should pray, particularly during this month, for the repose of the soul of their father, who had gone before them. Another wish of the late Archbishop must have been, seeing the deep interest that he took in religion in Scotland, that they should pray and pray fervently that the work of the Catholic Church in Scotland might go on with equal, or even more vigour after his death than it had done during his lifetime. He had commenced a most important work. He was the first head of the restored hierarchy in Scotland and being put into such a position, his great wish was that work should continue and prosper to the end. It was also in the spirit of the Church that, on the death of a Bishop, they should all pray with earnestness and fervour that grace and strength might be given to him who should be appointed to succeed in so important an office to prosecute this work and to advance in every way the cause of Catholicity in Scotland.

Photo of the painting of Archbishop Strain and details for this page are taken from '*Life and Labours of John Menzies Strain*' by Canon Michael Turner and published by Aberdeen University press 1922.