

Extract from ‘Mary MacKillop – an Extraordinary Australian’ pages 359-360, by Paul Gardner SJ, Postulator of the Cause. Rewritten with permission.

...Mary wrote to her mother about the kindness of the people who surrounded her in Sydney, like Dean Kenny. ‘Just fancy,’ she wrote, ‘the dear old Father proposes giving up his house to us and retiring into an old cottage on the grounds.’ There is not a word about Adelaide. The Sisters are toiling along happily and their schools are doing well. Not only are they in great demand around Sydney and in Armidale, but pressing appeals are coming from New Zealand too. The Bishop of Auckland is using every inducement to make her go over and see for herself what is to be done. In Sydney, Archbishop Moran is very kind and encouraging, and Dr Cani, now Bishop of Rockhampton, is no longer the Dr Cani of 1870. “He made for us at once when he arrive on Sunday,” she wrote in February 1885, and they chatted over many things:

He reminded me that I was “Mary of the Cross” and asked need I wonder. Dear Mamma, Dr Cani is a saint – he put fresh heart into me. I think he will come out and stay a night at the Dean’s (who told me to invite him) and thus say Mass for us in the morning.

Mary’s favourite uncle, her mother’s brother Donald MacDonald, has a series of strokes and was taken by his wife Eliza to Sydney in 1884. Mary kept her brother Donald informed of what was happening. At one stage Uncle Donald had lost his memory and ‘only knew those who were about him and al long as they were in his sight...he had not ides of anything relating to his soul... he had not thought about us, not even his absent children no more than of we had never been.’ Mary encouraged them to bring him over to Sydney. There, she said:

To our great joy he knew us all, and when a little later he was speaking to me, he began to cry saying he did not know what had come over him, that he could not say his prayers, that he forgot everything. Next day he attended Mass with the greatest devotion and has been getting better ever since. His affection for me is most touching.

Now that Uncle Donald lived in Sydney, Mary was able to keep her mother up to date with news about him. He and Eliza were now in a little cottage with a lovely view, quite close the Mary’s convent, and he was quite delighted. When he finally dies on 8 July 1887, Father Woods, sensitive to the significance of the occasion for the MacKillop family, broke his silence to write Mary an extraordinary tribute to her beloved uncle; “ A kind husband and a good son, with certainly the kindest heart I have ever met in my intercourse with the world.”

Meanwhile, on 20 September 1885, the younger Donald had been ordained priest in Wales. The Father Provincial was waiting on his knees for a blessing while the newly ordained penned his first blessing to his dear ones in Australia. He wrote to Mary; "You have your long-cherished wish. I am a Priest of the Society of Jesus. What a fine cry you will have over this!" "I can scarcely realize the joyful news," Mary told Annie, "May God be praised for it all." They were all looking forward to attending his Masses in Australia.

Flora was never to see her priest son. In the March of the following year she set out for Sydney to help with the bazaar, but she never arrive. On May 30 her ship, the *Lyeemoon*, was wrecked not far off the coast at Green Cape, near Eden in southern New South Wales with the loss of sixty lives. Flora was one of the victims. When Mary heard the news, she went to the Oratory and spent two hours on her knees. She wrote to Annie on June 1:

My Dearest Annie, God help us all. The hand of God is heavy upon us, but His Holy Will must be done. Oh Annie I had so yearned to see her again and all the Sisters were planning to make her visit a bright and happy one. Poor, dear, long-suffering Mamma

Her letter to Donald on 17 June 1886 is a beautiful document, full of humanity, faith, and sensitive love:

My dearest brother, How can I write. You must ere this have heard from Adelaide of our sad, our terrible loss. Everything was too bewildering at first, then the efforts to recover the dear remains, the funeral, and then came the reaction. Between all, you, for whom my heart ached, have been seemingly neglected by me. But don't think so, dear Donald. Our darling unselfish Mother true to her character to the last, has gone to receive her well-earned reward. I cannot now attempt to describe the dismay with which I heard the sad news. It was too terrible to be true, but its truth was too soon proved. Fortunately, John was here, and he went down. He found the dear remains awaiting him. Hers was the only body picked up by the pilot boat, and the only body found anywhere without being injured by either the rocks or the sharks. The scapular she had so loved was on her neck. How it remained on seems miraculous and is, I believe. John says she looked as if she were asleep.

Archbishop Goold, who had been bishop in Melbourne since 1848, died a week after Mamma, and for Mary MacKillop these two deaths would have been an occasion to relive her earliest memories. They would have reminded her vividly that the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal. Of her family of ten, now only she and Annie and Donald survived