

Hugh Taylor, a carthusian Lay brother

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The Catholic Truth Society has just published a short life of Dom Maurice Chauncy and Brother Hugh Taylor, from the pen of Dom Lawrence Hendriks, of the same order. Hugh Taylor was a Conversus, or professed lay brother, distinguished by his virtues and by the evident efficacy of his prayers; He entered the London Charterhouse in 1518.

Under the able direction of Prior Tynbygh, the holy Irishman who formed the Carthusian Martyrs to monastic life and led them to heroic virtue, Brother Hugh made rapid progress in the way of perfection, and was favoured with many special graces. It is recorded that he was so pleasing to God that his prayers were well-nigh always effectual. He was wont, moreover, to give advice, in all humility, to those who sought his aid ; and his advice was always good, for he consulted our Lord in earnest prayer before speaking.

Blessed John Houghton the Protomartyr of King Henry's persecution, may be counted amongst those who had profited by this good lay brother's prayers and counsels. When John Houghton was the Father Sacristan of the Charterhouse, he was desirous of reverently consuming, during his Mass, a sacred particle which had been rejected by a monk who was sick of the plague ; feeling however a great repugnance and fearing contagion, he thought he would ask Brother Hugh to beseech our Lord to manifest His will. The brother had already been favoured with several revelations and all the monks knew that he was a man of God, and obtained almost all that he demanded. John Houghton then, always remarkable for his humility, had recourse to the lay brother. Hugh, with his wonted simplicity, accepted the proposal, and with most earnest devotion he begged our dear Lord to make known His good pleasure. Hugh's prayer was heard. Rapt in ecstasy during the "Great

Watch" at dead of night, he saw a procession of angels in white raiment, each bearing a lighted candle in his hand. Entering the sacristy, they went straight to the place in which the Sacristan had concealed the sacred particle. They bowed down in deepest adoration, opened the pyx, and after remaining some moments in contemplation of their Lord hidden in the Sacrament of His love to men, they vanished away. When morning came, Brother Hugh asked the Sacristan if he had not placed the sacred particle he spoke of in that place. The answer being in the affirmative, Hugh told the story of his vision, and the Sacristan, fully assured by this grace, consumed the particle during his Mass; "neither," says Chauncy, "did he fear death, for he received the Author of life, not sickness, for he received Him Who healeth all our infirmities; nor did he any longer feel repugnance, for he tasted in spirit that the Lord is sweet." Seculars were also in the habit of confiding their doubts and difficulties to Brother Hugh. One day, for instance, a young man, unable to decide whether to embrace the religious state or to marry, laid his case before him. The brother, after recommending the matter to God, told him to get married; " for " said he, the will of God is that you should be both a husband and a monk." Accordingly he married, and then begged his bride to give him leave to enter a monastery. She refused, and he abandoned the project. At length, having become the father of a family, he forgot all about his attraction to the religious state. Some years elapsed, and the wife reminded her husband of his former aspirations, saying that she now wished to be a nun. Brother Hugh's prediction presented itself to his memory, and he consented to the proposal. Having provided for the education of his children with a relative, the pious couple separated, the husband becoming a Carthusian monk at the Charterhouse of Sheen, near Richmond, and the wife a Bridgettine nun at Syon, near Isleworth. Hugh Taylor's charity was not only for the good and pious. This large-hearted lay brother was sometimes of use to those who were unworthy of his kindness. There was, unfortunately, a bad monk in the London Charterhouse whose name was Thomas Salter. Claucy's work on the Martyrs, the archives of the Order, and the State papers of England all bear witness against him. Not content with rendering himself guilty of quitting the enclosure without leave on three occasions, he was noted for

detractation and slander. He was always ready to speak and to write evil of his brethren, his Order, and his Prior. His letters, in which he attacks his rule, that he did not choose to observe, and his Superior, Blessed John Houghton, whom he could not appreciate, are still extant. It is, moreover, to be feared that he once laid violent hands upon the holy Prior. Even this wretched man found a friend in need in Brother Hugh Taylor, for it appears that, divine grace having at length abandoned Thomas Salter, the devils were permitted to vex and beat him ; and had they not been put to flight by the charitable and earnest prayers of a lay brother, they would probably have killed him. It is believed on good authority that this pious lay brother was none other than Hugh Taylor. Hugh Taylor was a true contemplative, but—as is generally the case—he was quite able to apply himself to active work. When he was well advanced in years and ripe for heaven he still held the office of Procurator, for as long as Brother Hugh lived Father Chauncy would never have another. The Procurator should be a cloister monk, but the exception to the general rule which was made in Brother Hugh's case did not offend or displease anybody: "he was so charitable to all men." It is recorded that good Brother Hugh was favoured with many Divine visions. He lived, so to speak, on familiar terms with our Blessed Lord; but he never sought in these favours an excuse for idleness, nor a pretext for refusing to render himself useful to all. The Ephemerides Carthusienses tell us that one day, after promising to help another lay brother with some work at a certain hour; Brother Hugh applied himself to mental prayer. Our Lord appeared, and held sweet conversation with His faithful servant. At length the hour for work came, and the apparition continued. What was Brother Hugh to do? Was not so signal a favour enough to excuse him from the fulfillment of his promise? The holy man did not reason thus, but begging his Divine Guest to excuse him, he hastened to the workshop. When the work was completed, Hugh returned to his cell, where he found the heavenly apparition still present, and had the consolation of hearing these words: "Hugh, the duty that thou hast just performed has pleased Me more than anything thou hast done hitherto, for thou hast renounced the enjoyment of My sensible presence in order to aid thy brother." Father Suertis mentions another remarkable

vision with which Hugh Taylor was favoured. "He told me once," says Suertis, "our Saviour, in a vision, called him; saying, 'Hugh, dost thou love Me?' 'Yea Blessed Lord,' said he, 'I love Thee with all my heart.' Then our Lord in the figure of His humanity reached him His foot, which he reverently kissed. Ask of Me,' said our Blessed Lord, 'what thou wilt, and thou shalt have it.' 'I will ask nothing but what pleases Thee, Blessed Lord,' said Hugh. Then our Lord said, 'I promise thee I will do more for thee than for any mortal man in the world now living.' And so, suddenly he was gone." Nobody knows what this promise was. Suertis thought it might be the preservation of a remnant of the English Carthusians ; and had not that remnant ceased to exist towards the close of the 18th century, we should be inclined to think so too. It would indeed be very interesting if the present Carthusians of England could claim to be descended through Maurice Chauncy from the Martyrs of the London Charterhouse. But it is not so. That line ended with Father Francis Williams, who died in 1797. Perhaps it might seem rash to hope that the promise made to Brother Hugh will be realized in the foundation of the thirty-three British Charterhouses. A great many vocations, both to the cloister and to the state of the lay brothers, would be required before that could be accomplished. Having suffered exile, poverty, and many hardships and contradictions for his fidelity to the Catholic religion and to his holy vocation, Hugh Taylor died on September 30, 1575. The obituary of the General Chapter held at the Grande Chartreuse in the following spring, contains the word of commendation, which is so rare in the Order that those who receive it may almost be considered to have been judged worthy of canonization—" who lived fifty-seven years in the Order in a praiseworthy manner (laudabiliter)."