Some Early Irish Evangelicals

By The Dean of Cashel

IT was in 1738 that the first hint of the Evangelical Revival came to Ireland. During that year George Whitefield arrived at Carrigaholt in the County of Clare, from a ship which had suffered from storm and tempest from the time it had left Georgia. He preached in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, where he was civilly treated by Bishop Burscough. Subsequently he also preached in the Dublin churches of St. Andrew and St. Werburgh. The rector of the latter famous and fashionable church was Dean Patrick Delany, whose words to Whitefield were always to be remembered by that young deacon of twenty-four. " I wish," said Delany, " whenever I go into a pulpit, to look upon it as the last time I shall ever preach, and the last time the people may hear me ".

Nine years later, on August 9th, 1747, John Wesley himself landed in Dublin and began his series of industrious travels along the network of Irish country roads. He is still remembered by tradition. Not long ago we saw in a country farmhouse a little room set apart as a sanctuary. The Roman Catholic owner said, " It was the good man's room. John Wesley slept here." My own grandfather was proud of the fact that Wesley had once spent a night in his family's home in Bandon.

Irish Churchmen received Wesley with varying reactions. His *Journal* records both welcomes and suspicions. Some clergy (like the Rev. Richard Lloyd of Rathcormack, in the diocese of Cloyne) received him willingly and encouraged him to preach in their churches. But from the first, he also met hostility. As early as 1748 the Rector of Kinsale had preached against Charles Wesley, describing him as "an impostor, incendiary and messenger of Satan ". There were " anti-Swaddler " riots in Cork in 1749. But in Bandon a country clergyman rode twelve miles to meet John Wesley, and they two " simply endeavoured to strengthen each other's hands in God ". Another rector in the same town averred that " it was all Jesuitism at the bottom ". That oddest of prelates, Hervey the " Earl Bishop " of Derry, was kind to Wesley and earned golden opinions from him : on the other hand, Bishop Woodward of Cloyne was careful to note in his epitaph to a son that the boy had been devout but " without trace of enthusiasm ".

The new movement stirred up violent passions both of hatred and of affection. Thus fantastically high feeling was aroused against the Rev. Edward Smyth, curate of Ballyculter, who in 1777 was tried in the courts. Part of the charge against him was that he had associated with " people called Swaddlers ", and that he had prayed and preached with them in the open air. " Your petitioners are really persuaded that the said Mr. Smyth is either a real enthusiast or something worse." On the other hand, the Honourable Walter Shirley, Rector of Loughrea,

threw in his lot with Wesley, becoming one of the chaplains of his niece, the Countess of Huntingdon.[1]

By the end of the eighteenth century the movement which had been begun by the early Methodists, had influenced a widely dispersed group of Irish clergy, so that Evangelical principles were becoming a potent force within the Church. In Trinity College an influential personality was the Rev. John Walker, a Fellow-tutor, who was to leave his mark on several notable young men before he unhappily seceded from the Church. Among his pupils was the Rev. B. W. Mathias, of whom more must later be written. Perhaps the best-known evangelical pioneer among the country clergy was the Rev. Thomas Tighe, of the parish of Drumgooland and Drumballybroney, in the diocese of Dromore. He was a friend of the sympathetic Bishop Percy (of the " *Reliques* "), who had been his bishop from 1782 to 1811. Tighe's rural ministry extended from far back in the eighteenth century until well into the nineteenth. His epitaph says that, " during a resident incumbency of more than forty-three years " he " discharged the duties of the pastoral office with zeal unabating, diligence unwearied and love unfeigned ". The memoir of his curate, B. W. Mathias, records some fragments about him. " Mr. Tighe was not only remarkable for humility, he was also a very cheerful and happy man ; and there was an air of sanctity about him that kept the most thoughtless and profane in awe. . . . ' Swear in that man's presence ! ' said a youngster notable for profanity. ' No, I defy anyone to do that '." Tighe's preaching, pastoral visitation and generous philanthropy had one remarkable result in 1798—his parish was a peaceful oasis from which, thanks to his personal influence, not one inhabitant joined in the rebellion that year. Among those whom he influenced was Patrick Brontë, son of a local farmer, whom Tighe made a parish schoolmaster and later sent to Cambridge, to Simeon's St. John's—Tighe's own college. With his curate, B. W. Mathias, about 1798 Tighe started probably the first clerical union of the era in Ireland. The procedure has been recorded. The meeting began with a reading of the Ordination Service. Then the members would "consult on the best manner of performing the sacred duties in which they had engaged—and read the Scriptures with prayer for a blessing on the means used ". At this first meeting a sermon was read by B. W. Mathias. The clerical society was quite a feature of the Irish evangelical movement. We hear of it in Elphin a little later, under Bishop Power Le Poer Trench, as in Ossory, where the bishop inclined to the opinion that it was a " hotbed of dissent ". This Ossory group was a kind of Irish version of the Clapham Sect.

During 1805 Mathias moved on to become chaplain of the Bethesda Chapel, Dublin, vacant by the unhappy secession of Walker. (Another kindred spirit of the era to leave the Establishment was Thomas Kelly, the hymn writer.) It was a difficult beginning. Walker's action threatened the loyalty of the congregation to the Church of Ireland, and Mathias was determined to remain within the Church and the

[1] This is a romantic story which begins showing him as a careless hunting parson scurrying through service while his pack of hounds waits outside, and which ends with him as the author of *Sweet the moments rich in blessing.*

Establishment. He held to his principles and built up a large and devout congregation. Some years later he opened the "Carysfort Chapel", an episcopal church at the seaside resort of Blackrock, near Dublin.

During 1806 a significant meeting was held in the Bethesda Chapel, when eleven people occupied the governesses' pew to form a Bible Society. This, the beginning of the Hibernian Bible Society, was very largely inspired by Mathias, in conjunction with the Rev. Robert Shaw of Kilkenny (a grand-uncle of George Bernard Shaw). Shaw had been active for some years in collecting Bibles in England during his holidays and in distributing them locally; Mathias had printed and distributed the life of St. Peter made up of extracts from Holy Scripture.

Missionary work and scriptural dissemination were two of the particular activities of the Evangelicals of the period. In 1814 the Hibernian Church Missionary Society was formed, and the names of those who took part in the inaugural meeting at the Rotunda in Dublin form something like a roll of the leading Irish Evangelicals, clerical and lay. Here were the Revs. B. W. Mathias, Robert Daly (later Bishop of Cashel), W. Atthill, James Dunn of Delgany, Robert Shaw; here also were Major Sirr (who had arrested Lord Edward Fitzgerald), the Rt. Hon. David La Touche, the banker of a great Huguenot family, Arthur and Benjamin Guinness, and many other notable churchmen. The meeting was marathon and enthusiastic, comprising twenty-two speeches and lasting some three hours.

The religious revival of the days of Queen Anne had pushed forward two Evangelistic activities: overseas missionary work (of which Berkeley's mission to the New World, under the auspices of S.P.G., was a notable example), and also home missionary work through Bible reading, of which the effort to spread the Irish Bible undertaken by Parson Richardson of Belturbet, was a fine instance. Then came a rather dim, though by no means quite dead, era of latitudinarianism. Through it there did run a vein of old-fashioned Churchmanship, which emerged to the surface in the nineteenth century teaching of Knox and Jebb. The Irish Evangelicals of the beginning of the nineteenth century were also loyal Churchmen. (We shall see later the startling number of communicants at St. Mary's, Kilkenny, when the Evangelical, Peter Roe, was rector there.) And, as we have indicated, foreign missionary zeal and home missionary work, largely through Bible dissemination, became now the virtual preserve of the Evangelicals. An address, "*To the whole People of Ireland*," issued in 1810 by the lately founded Hibernian Bible Society sets out their ideals.

"*The sacred Scriptures are an invaluable gift of God to the human race, and the greatest treasure man can bestow on his brother. When duly attended to, they infallibly produce the best effects; enlightening the mind, improving the heart, and regulating the life. . . . It is the duty of man to study this sacred book for himself: it is his duty also to put it into the hands of others.*"

One remarkable development in the West of Ireland was the move-

ment into the Church of many of the Roman Catholics. The story is well told in D'Arcy Sirr's massive memoir of Power Trench, the last Archbishop of Tuam. He was a strong Evangelical, and he was supported by a team of remarkable pioneering clergy. One who is still remembered is the Rev. Charles Seymour, rector from 1820 of some of the wildest areas of seabound mountain : a man of iron physique, simple saintliness, a fine native speaker of Irish, and a wonderful walking evangelist.

It may be interesting to list briefly some of the best known Evangelicals in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century. We have mentioned Thomas Tighe and B. W. Mathias—both strong Churchmen as well as being Evangelical leaders. There were also among the first leaders Joseph Stopford (Archbishop King's lecturer in Trinity College, Dublin, in 1807) ; John Quarry ; Peter Roe (whose tutor Stopford had been) ; Henry Maturin. Of these the late Bishop Patten wrote, " The simple faith and goodness of these Evangelical leaders is the lasting heritage of the Church of Ireland ". A less expected, but no less ardent tribute was paid by Froude. " More beautiful characters than those of my Irish Evangelical friends, I had never seen, and never will see." Their earliest years were ones of suspicion and of some hostility. With the coming of Archbishop William Magee to Dublin, in 1822, the Evangelicals of the day received much more sympathy with their work.

Some time ago we visited in Cambridge the flight of stairs in Gibbs Buildings which led to the rooms of Charles Simeon. As an undergraduate of King's, Simeon had first realized the meaning of the Atonement through a reading of Bishop Thomas Wilson on the Lord's Supper. (That, in itself, is an Evangelical link with the Church of Ireland, for Wilson had been educated in Trinity College, Dublin, and had been ordained deacon in Kildare Cathedral.) Thomas Tighe had been of Simeon's university, and there Tighe sent Patrick Brontë to be educated. The father of the Brontë sisters was of the Irish Evangelical tradition, and of Simeon's tradition: so, too, was the Rev. William Atthill, educated at St. John's, Cambridge. Of both of these some details must be given.

The most interesting thing about Brontë that can be said here in a very short space is to give his opinion about Evangelical preaching. It is found in that curiosity of literature, his novel, *Albion and Flora*. Here he says, " Now I do believe that no preaching is good, or calculated to profit, except that which is truly apostolical ; I mean that, which for its doctrine and style, comes nearest to the sermons of Christ and His disciples. Let the minister hold up Christ and he will draw all men after him. Let him preach the doctrines of the Gospel faithfully and plainly, and his church will be crowded." And he must preach with a simplicity " not inaccessible to the poorest and most illiterate hearer ".

Prebendary Atthill of Maheraculmony, a fellow of Gonville and Caius, came to Ireland in 1798 as the twenty-four year old chaplain to his uncle, Bishop Porter of Clogher. His name seems to have appeared in few histories. But it was often seen on the roll of committees

of the Evangelical societies, and very many years afterwards Primate Beresford could look back and confidently name William Atthill as the best preacher he had ever heard.

Fortunately his son, a Master of Dublin's Rotunda Hospital, wrote an almost forgotten memoir of him. This gives a charmingly intimate picture of the life work of a rural Evangelical clergyman during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. He was a scholar, insisting as an examining chaplain on a disconcertingly adequate level of learning in ordination candidates. . . . He visited on horseback every house of every denomination in his fourteen mile long parish. . . . He doctored the people so efficiently that they refused to transfer themselves to the later appointed dispensary doctor. . . . He inaugurated a monthly Communion service. . . . He established three secular and three Sunday schools in his parish, and built two extra churches at its remotest corners. . . . He saw that all his parishioners in this new parish of his were rounded up and baptized. . . . He imported a new iron plough from Dublin and weaned his people from primitive methods of agriculture and wooden ploughs. . . . He coerced the Grand Jury to build decent roads. . . . His household was patriarchal—he had ten children and a staff to match—and his home and glebe set a pattern of godly and civilized living to his whole parish. . . . Famous as a preacher, he was difficult to entice away from his home ground, where he preached three or four magnificent extempore sermons a week. . . . Like Swift, he organized, ticketed and relieved his parish poor. . . . But a hasty collection of snippets cannot do him justice. We recommend his son's book as a vivid and charming full-scale study to anyone who can borrow this rarity of Evangelical Churchmanship.

Another book at least as valuable is Samuel Madden's 1842 *Memoir* of the Rev. Peter Roe, leader of the Ossory group to which we have referred. He was minister of St. Mary's, in the Cathedral city of Kilkenny, from 1805 until his death in 1841, and there he created a religious revolution. Fortunately his diaries are extensive and have been printed. Incidentally they note that in 1805 he visited John Newton, Wilberforce, and the widow of Fletcher of Madeley—all very significant pilgrimages. There is so much in those diaries that it would be waste of space to try to put it into any kind of literary form—here again a bald catalogue must do.

He began the practice of open-air preaching at funerals. . . . He started prison services at the request of the convicts, who " were sensibly affected by truths they had never heard before ". . . . He instructed the Charter School boys in singing. . . . He made it his rule to visit at least two or three sick people daily, and to visit regularly all other parishioners. . . . He distributed devotional reading. . . . He listed his parishioners for his visiting book. . . . He preached daily during Easter and Whit weeks. . . . He expounded the second lesson daily at those services, and he preached on all Holy Days, drawing " a number which astonished every person ". . . . At times he was to be found visiting at six in the morning : his normal time for rising was five a.m. . . . Every Wednesday and Friday he gave two hours to catechizing. . . . He began cottage meetings at six in the

evening on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. . . . On Christmas Day, 1801, there were four hundred and thirty communicants at St. Mary's—a contrast with St. Paul's Cathedral, London, just then, which is recorded to have been almost deserted. . . .

A few personal details of Peter Roe : His income as assistant curate of St. Mary's was £60 per year, until seven years after ordination he succeeded to the perpetual curacy of that church. Much of this stipend he gave to charity and to the distribution of tracts and books. He breakfasted early on bread and milk, and if he dined at home, it was on bread and cheese and a glass of ale.

Two interesting documents deserve to be quoted in full, each a kind of miniature treatise on pastoral theology as seen by an Evangelical leader. The first dates from his assistant curacy days in 1803, the second from old age just before his death in 1841.

The first, listing his week's duties, is as follows :

" *Sunday*—lecture, 8 a.m. ; catechize, 10 ; 11.30, service ; vestry ; general hospital ; 6 p.m., evening service. *Monday*—8, M.G. meeting ; 10, asylum ; 12, vestry ; 1 p.m., blankets ; 3-4, private in vestry. *Tuesday*—Factory, school, gaols. *Wednesday*—Gaols ; 11, church ; 12, catechism M.L's; 1 p.m., poor school; 3-4, private in vestry; 5.30, lecture. *Thursday*—Factory ; Charter school ; poor house ; lecture for the men. *Friday*—10, gaols ; 11, church ; 12-2, catechize in church ; 5.30, lecture. *Saturday*—Spend as much of it at home as possible ; practice for singing at one o'clock."

The second document runs: " Read a little every day of the Greek Testament. Visit at least two sick people every day. Beware of procrastination. Mark on Sunday those who are absent and speak to them on Monday. Every night before tea write the day's observations: *Whom did you* intend *to visit*? *Whom* did *you visit*? *What prevented you*? "

They raised a monument to him in St. Mary's which very properly says, " In his public ministration with eloquent fervour kindled by his love for the souls of his fellow creatures did he preach Jesus Christ and Him crucified as the sinner's only hope. While in his parochial visitation and private life he was a Living Epistle of the Doctrines that he taught, for he was a good man and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith and through his ministry much people were added unto the Lord."

Something even better can be found. As a revealing epitaph, showing the mature outlook of the old clergyman, we consider the advice to his curate extraordinarily satisfying. These pastoral instructions were written during his illness. It is a very personal document.

ADVICE TO A YOUNG CLERGYMAN

" *Avoid*—Politics and newspapers, so that your mind may not be occupied by them. Controversy on Popery and Dissent. Gossip and foolish talking. Tedious and unprofitable visits. Talking about your duty. Let the doing of it speak for itself.

" *Cultivate*—Regular study. Regular visiting both of the sick and the well—especially of the former. Regular catechizing. Regularity

and despatch in parochial duties. Regularity in commencing public services. Punctuality in fulfilling engagements. Friendly intercourse with your parishioners. A devotional spirit and manner in reading the Church service—but in simplicity and without affectation. In short—Pray the prayers.

" *Promote*—Bible Classes, and a spirit of religious enquiry amongst the young, and especially young men. Enquiry into the evidences of the Christian religion. A sound acquaintance with the Constitution, the Formularies, the Articles and the Homilies of the Church of England. The circulation of tracts. The committing of the Scriptures and well-selected hymns to memory. Psalmody. The cause of the Church Missionary Society in particular ; also of the various other valuable societies already established."

With these notes we must leave Peter Roe. Incidentally, he formed a branch of the Hibernian C.M.S. among the troops of the barracks in Kilkenny. His biographer tells of a soldier on bivouac round the camp fire after a battle in the Peninsular war saying, " We could be happy now if only we had old Peter Roe here to preach to us ".

The Nature of Worship

By The Rev. D. B. Knox, B.A., M.Th., Ph.D., A.L.C.D.

WHAT is the chief end of man ? A generally accepted answer is " to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever ". But how is God glorified ? The Scriptures answer that man glorifies God by trusting Him and living by His promises : Call upon me in the day of trouble ; I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me " (Ps. l. 15). " Looking unto the promise of God Abraham wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God " (Rom. iv. 20).

Absolute faith and trust in God is the true worship and honouring of God. This is clear from a consideration of the character of God. For our concept of God's character controls the worship we offer Him and our worship reflects our concept of His character. For example, the action of the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel reflected clearly their concept of their deity. Christian worship should reflect the Christian concept of God. The most distinctive feature of the doctrine of God in the New Testament is the stress laid on the righteous love of God, and it was this aspect of God's character that was once more made the centre of worship in Reformation times.

Medieval doctrine and worship obscured the love of God. Purgatory was the anticipated lot after death, while life here was made miserable by the belief that God was pleased by asceticism, self-torture and painful " good works ". That God was a cruel tyrant was, in Tyndale's judgment, the opinion of the common people of his time,