

THE WONDERFUL DEAN.

ANECDOTES OF SWIFT.

BY P. M. CROFTS-MOLLAN.

PEOPLE are so accustomed to think of Dean Swift as Dean of St. Patrick's, and founder of Swift's Hospital, and therefore as almost a part of Dublin itself, that they rarely give a thought to the interesting fact of his connection with Ulster.

Visitors who are permitted by the kindness of the proprietor of Loughry, Co. Tyrone, to walk through his desmesne, are, at the very gate lodge, brought into contact with the shadow of the personality of "The Dean," as he was designated almost all over Ireland.

"You will like to be looking at Dean Swift's summer house?" said the polite gatekeeper, as she smilingly admitted us. "He used to spend hours in it whenever he stayed up at the 'Big House.'"

Accordingly, when we had passed by the pretty gurgling river, with its bright miniature waterfalls, which runs beside the avenue, we were courteously conducted to the little pavilion, in which stood the chair he sat on, and the table at which he wrote—a quiet spot, with a lovely view, suited to the meditative proclivities of such a great thinker.

Possibly his thoughts were not always in tune with the quietness of his surroundings, though he greatly longed, at that time, to cast his lot in Ulster, to which province in his early manhood many indications seemed to have pointed the way. For at this time his great friend, Sir William Temple, with whom he had lived in his early days (a relative of his mother's), made interest for him with Lord Capel, then Viceroy of Ireland, who presented him with the Prebendary of Kilroot, in the diocese of Connor, which was worth £100 a year.

But Sir William seems to have speedily repented of his intercession, for he missed his young friend's companionship so much that he urged him to resign his prebend in favour of another person, and to return to England, promising him that he would exert himself to obtain for him preferment there.

He was barely twenty-nine at this period, and not long in holy orders.

CONGREGATION OF ONE.

After Sir William Temple's death (he had failed to redeem his promise) Swift returned to Ireland as private secretary to the Earl of Berkeley, an appointment of which he was soon deprived through the treachery of another of the Earl's attendants, named Bush, who intimated to him that such a post ought not properly to be filled by a gentleman in holy orders.

Lord Berkeley consequently made some lame excuse for depriving him of it, but by way of mollifying the blow, gave him the

livings of Laracor and Rathbeggan, in the County Meath, the first of these livings being worth £200 a year, and the second £60 a year. Both of these he held until he was made Dean of St. Patrick's.

On his appointment to these parishes he made an announcement that he would hold services every Wednesday and Friday—and it was at Laracor that the amusing incident occurred of his having no congregation for a Wednesday service, except himself and his sexton.

He waited for some time, but no one came, so he began prayers with—

“Dearly beloved Roger, the Scripture moveth you and me in sundry places,” and then he proceeded regularly through the whole service!

The next step towards Ulster is told in Lord Orrery's lively style in his letters to his son. As he knew the Dean personally, his letters may be considered in the main correct. He tells him that a strict residence at Laracor was not in the least suitable to Dr. Swift's disposition; and that he was making perpetual excursions to all parts of England. Unfortunately his rambling proclivity occasioned him, at this time, considerable loss. The rich Deanery of Derry became vacant just before his appointment to Laracor, and was intended for him by Lord Berkeley. But Dr. King, then Bishop of Derry, interposed, entreating that some grave and elderly divine, rather than so young a man, should receive the emolument. Dr. Swift was at this time thirty-two years of age.

“I have no objection to Dr. Swift,” wrote the Bishop. “I know him to be a sprightly, ingenious young man; but instead of residing, I daresay he will be eternally flying backwards and forwards to London; and, therefore, I entreat that he may be provided for in some other place.”

“Swift,” continues Lord Orrery, “was accordingly set aside on account of his youth; but, as if his stars had destined him to a parallel revenge, he lived to see the Bishop of Derry set aside on account of age.

“TOO OLD TO RISE.”

That prelate had been for many years Archbishop of Dublin, and had been long celebrated alike for his wit and learning, when Dr. Lindsay, the Primate of Ireland, died. Upon his death Archbishop King immediately made claim to the primacy, as a preferment to which he had a right from his station in the See of Dublin, as well as from his acknowledged character in the Church. Neither of these reasons prevailed. He was looked upon as far too “advanced in years” to be removed.

The reason alleged was as mortifying as the refusal itself, but the Archbishop had no opportunity of showing his resentment, except to the new Primate—Dr. Bolter—whom he received in his own house, in his dining parlour, without rising from his chair, and to whom he made an apology by saying with his usual stream of wit:

“ My Lord, I am certain your grace will forgive me, because you know I am too old to rise ! ”

The Deanery of Derry would have been very acceptable to Dr. Swift, as his friend Dr. Delany received the Deanery of Down ; but a greater disappointment was in store for a man of his highly strung temperament.

Queen Anne had promised him a bishopric in England, and when one fell vacant, she proceeded to redeem her promise. But a joint application was at once made against him to Her Majesty by Dr. Sharpe, Archbishop of York, and by a “ great lady ” (we can easily guess her name, the Duchess of Marlborough), who swayed the Queen completely, both of whom represented him as a person who was not a Christian !

Anne upon such assurance gave away the bishopric, contrary to her first intentions.

Swift kept himself, indeed, within some tolerable bounds when he spoke of the Queen, but his indignation knew no limits when he mentioned the Archbishop of York, or the “ lady.” Nor did it console him that the Archbishop subsequently said he regretted what he had done. Indeed we can imagine his feelings !

WOOD'S HALFPENCE AGITATION.

The death of the Queen was a terrible blow to him. It dashed all his hopes of preferment in England, and he returned to his Deanery of St. Patrick's (to which he had been appointed in 1713), to devote himself henceforth to the interests of his countrymen.

The woollen trade of the North had been almost ruined by selfish legislation against Irish trade, which King William had striven nobly to avert by encouraging the manufacture of linen. Swift took up his pen and wrote “ In a proposal for the universal use of Irish manufactures in clothes, and furnishing of houses, etc., ” utterly renouncing everything wearable that comes from England. This tract was written in the year 1720.

Then came his tracts on William Wood's coinage of farthings and halfpence. Copper money had become so scarce in Ireland that some establishments were endeavouring to pass pieces of tin, to be redeemed later on.

Wood, who was described as a hardwareman, and a bankrupt, was nevertheless able to prevail on the Imperial Government to grant him a patent to coin £108,000 of these small monies, to pass current in the kingdom for a period of fourteen years. But his coins were so debased that a shilling of them would only have been worth one penny, while his own profits would have been enormous. Seeing this, the Dean wrote his letters to the people, warning them under no compulsion to accept such spurious money. His action on the subject caused him to become the idol of the populace, who celebrated his praises with portraits of himself, and songs and ballads composed in his honour. In this debased coinage the clergy and the army were to be paid.

There is in the dining-room at Howth Castle, Co. Dublin, the seat of the late Earl of Howth, a splendid picture of the Dean, life-size, in his robes. It was painted by Beridon in 1733. He holds in his hand a paper, on which is written—

“The Drapier’s Fourth Letter to the Whole People of Ireland.”

Wood sprawls, naked, at his feet, clutching his patent for the coinage of this copper money, a quantity of which lies scattered about him. This picture the Howth family have never permitted to be copied.

The outcome of The Drapier’s Letters was that neither Wood nor his coinage gained a footing in Ireland, and he was obliged to surrender his patent.

LASHING A BISHOP.

Dean Swift was a man of commanding appearance, robust and masculine, and his figure erect.

Lord Orrery says of him—

“He was earnest and dignified in conducting the services of the Church, and particularly so in his administration of the Holy Communion. He was a thorough despiser of hypocrisy under any shape or form, and cleanly in his person and habits, almost amounting to superstition.”

To such a man an announcement by a newly appointed Bishop of Meath—lately translated from Bangor in Wales—was inexpressibly offensive.

The Bishop recommended to the clergy of Meath the use of “numms,” which were pieces of white linen, fastened so as to hide soiled shirts! This fired the indignation of Swift to the utmost.

At the next Synod he fell upon the Bishop with terrible severity.

“What!” he cried, “do you think you have gotten among your Welsh clergy. I would have you know,” he continued, stripping up his cassock from his arms, and tearing open the breast of his waistcoat, “that you have gotten into a diocese of gentlemen, who abhor dirt, and filth, and nastiness.”

And thus he went on, lashing the Bishop, and making him writhe under his sarcasms. Yet in spite of his cleanliness, his gown was sometimes very rusty, though his deportment was such as to impress all his acquaintances with his dignity.

MADE A COUNTESS SING.

The following incident is told by his personal friend Mrs. Pilkington, in her Memoirs, as related to her by himself.

The last time he was in London he went to dine with the Earl of Burlington, who was then but newly married. The Earl being willing, ’tis supposed, to have some diversion, did not introduce him to his lady, nor mention his name. After dinner, said the Dean:

“Lady Burlington, I hear you can sing; sing me a song.”

The lady looked on this unceremonious manner of asking a

favour with distaste, and positively refused him. He said she should sing, or he would make her.

"Why, madam, I suppose you take me for one of your poor English hedge parsons. Sing when I bid you."

As the Earl did nothing but laugh at this freedom, the lady was so vexed that she burst into tears, and retired.

His first compliment to her when he saw her again was:

"Pray, madam, are you as proud and as ill-natured now as when I saw you last?"

To which she answered with great good humour:

"No, Mr. Dean; I'll sing for you if you please."

From this time he conceived a great esteem for her. But who that knew him would take offence at his bluntness?

Mrs. Pilkington's husband was a clergyman, and much in favour with the Dean, who often praised his sermons: he was a perpetual friend of merit and learning, and utterly incapable of envy; for in true, genuine wit he could fear no rival.

But he could preach a very pointed and successful sermon himself, as was exemplified by a charity sermon which he once preached in St. Patrick's. He gave out the text—"He that giveth to the poor, lendeth to the Lord."

This he solemnly repeated three times, then looking over the congregation, he exclaimed:

"Now, my friends, if you like the security, down with the dust!"

And there never was such a collection taken up.

Ladies laid their jewellery on the plate, and the men emptied their pockets.

In *The Old Testament Lessons of the New Lectionary* (S.P.C.K., 3s. 6d. net), Canon Storr issues a series of Sermon Outlines which appeared in the *Church of England Newspaper* during the year 1924. Canon Storr's position as a preacher and a scholar is sufficient guarantee of the character of his treatment of each subject. Those who can make use of outlines will find them valuable as indicating main lines of thought, while for others they will suggest suitable topics from the Sunday portions. Each outline is very brief, but the central theme is clearly indicated. Yet we doubt if it is necessary in connection with sermon outlines to indicate that the defect of the older Evangelicalism was its excessive individualism, and that religion was then a matter of saving one's own soul. The greater fact is that souls were saved through the instrumentality of the older Evangelicalism, and the reality and depth of their religious experience made up for many defects. We wish the same intensity of personal relationship to Christ characterized the whole Church to-day.